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## **DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

### **From the "Roman de Tristan en prose" to Malory's "Tale of Sir Tristram" a comparison of two worlds**

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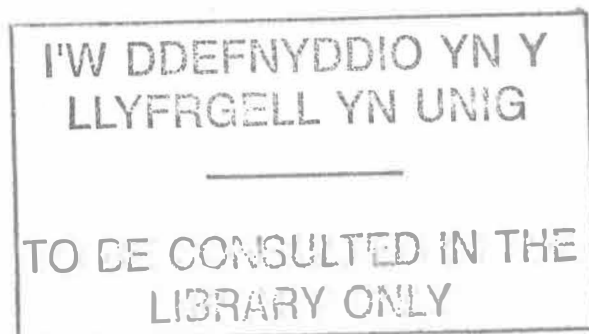
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From the Roman de Tristan en prose to Malory's "Tale of Sir Tristram:" A  
Comparison of Two Worlds.

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Ph. D.

University of Wales, Bangor, 2002



## Summary

Malory's source for his "Tale of Sir Tristram" is the thirteenth-century anonymous French prose Tristan. The first part of this thesis examines the social and physical world of the Old French text, by judging the reactions of the reader to its human beings, its martial, courtly and religious values, and its dissenting voices. It comes across as a fictional world, and in this it strongly resembles the wish-fulfilment universe of romance, yet it is strangely familiar to its audience and asks questions, especially regarding knightly rules and values, for which it does not systematically provide answers. This is for the most part due to the integration of the story of Tristan into the Quest for the Holy Grail, where the ideals of the former conflict with the values of the latter. In the light of this investigation, Malory's "Sir Tristram" appears to be more straightforward. The English author's characters are depicted with quasi-Manichean simplicity, and the inconsistencies between the martial world of adventure and the religious chivalry are greatly reduced by the fact that Tristram does not take part in the Holy Quest. The second part of the thesis compares the physical and social worlds of the Old French text and Malory, and their differing ways of treating the themes of martial, courtly and religious issues. Malory's text is only a sixth of the length of his French source, and his method of encapsulating the essence of the original is highly significant. Although both texts are based on a story of impossible love, neither makes this the subject of prime importance. These are not tales of romance in the tradition of Chrétien de Troyes, for heroes die, love and chivalry conflict without resolution, and both authors question the excesses of the rules of chivalry. Both versions are deeply concerned with the ideals of knighthood, without either becoming a systematic treatise offering answers to every question it raises.

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No student of the prose Tristan and Malory's works can ignore the invaluable help provided by Renée Curtis' and Philippe Ménard's editions of the prose Tristan, and the formidable contribution of Eugène Vinaver and Peter Field in the shape of Malory's Works. Without these editions, and in particular that of the prose Tristan, the study of these texts would have proved much more complex and certainly much longer.

My gratitude also goes to the funding bodies which kindly helped me to pursue my studies: the Arts and Humanities Research Board, the British Federation for Women Graduates, and the Frank W. Bradbrook Memorial Fund of the English Department of the University of Wales Bangor; to Peter Field, whose invaluable support and advice provided far more than one could ever expect from a supervisor; to my mother, who read all my drafts in all their forms, and whose criticism and encouragement were indispensable. Finally I want to thank Sacha and above all my family for their understanding and support.

## General Introduction

Le Roman de Tristan en prose was composed between 1215 and 1235,<sup>1</sup> and became one of the most popular works in the Middle Ages; its text survives in over 80 known manuscripts and fragments.<sup>2</sup> The prose Tristan authors shift the interest in the amorous love intrigue and the doctrine of courtly behaviour of the original story to the adventurous mode of living of knights-errant, turning an ancient tragic tale of love into an up-to-date thirteenth-century chivalric romance with a large cast and all the paraphernalia of the Arthurian legend. It is the first great Arthurian prose romance after the Vulgate Cycle, to which it implicitly proposes itself as a sequel, and the first to arthurianise the story of Tristan and Iseut.

The original authors of the prose Tristan are not known with certainty. All the complete manuscripts of the text begin with an identical prologue in which the author, Luce del Gat, presents the subject-matter of his story. Renée Curtis admits some doubt as to the true existence of such a knight as Luce del Gat living in Salisbury, as he claims. It is conceivable that he chose to write under a pseudonym,<sup>3</sup> but another name, Hélié de Boron, possibly also a nom de plume, appears in the epilogue, though not in all the manuscripts. Moreover, manuscript B. N. fr. 756 says that the prose Tristan is by both authors.<sup>4</sup> Emmanuèle Baumgartner postulates, following Eugène Vinaver, that there are two versions of the prose Tristan, one written by Luce, around 1225-1235, now lost, and the other by Hélié during the second half of the thirteenth century. She

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<sup>1</sup> Renée Curtis, introduction, Le Roman de Tristan en prose, ed. Renée Curtis (München: Max Hueber Verlag, 1963) 8. Vinaver postulates the dates 1225 to 1230 in his Études sur le Tristan en prose (Paris: Champion, 1925) 23.

<sup>2</sup> P. J. C. Field, "The French Prose Tristan: A Note on Some Manuscripts, a List of Printed Texts, and Two Correlations with Malory's Morte Darthur," BBIAS 41 (1989): 269.

<sup>3</sup> Renée Curtis, introduction, 1: 11-12.

<sup>4</sup> Emmanuèle Baumgartner, Le Tristan en prose: Essai d'interprétation d'un roman médiéval (Genève: Droz, 1975) 92.

suggests that what we have today is the work of two men, Luce and Hélié.<sup>5</sup> Although one cannot attribute the prose Tristan to any named collective authorship, one can be reasonably sure that it is the work of more than one author. This work has nevertheless been written in a fairly consistent style developed by earlier prose romancers, which allows us to consider it as a whole. Unless otherwise stated, all references to the prose Tristan are to Renée Curtis's edition in three volumes and Philippe Ménard's edition in nine volumes.<sup>6</sup>

The prose Tristan considerably influenced European culture from the thirteenth century well up to the Renaissance, despite the fact that nowadays it is the least-known version of the Tristan legend. Two hundred years after its composition, in the last quarter of the fifteenth century, Sir Thomas Malory used it as the source of the fifth tale of his Morte Darthur, "The Tale of Sir Tristram de Lyones,"<sup>7</sup> and this reworking constitutes, in literary terms, the most important derived version of the prose Tristan. Before Vinaver's studies, these two texts had received very little critical attention, and even after 1925, when Vinaver wrote his ground-breaking work dedicated entirely to the prose Tristan and to its specific characteristics, it remained relatively unknown, and was considered a pale imitation of the prose Lancelot and a degenerate reworking of the verse legend of Tristan and Isolde. Since then, and especially with Baumgartner's analysis of the prose Tristan in 1975 and Vinaver's editions of Malory's Works, much work has been done on the relationship between the prose Tristan manuscripts, on Malory's Morte in general, and on the search for Malory's source manuscripts

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<sup>5</sup> Baumgartner, Essai 33.

<sup>6</sup> Le Roman de Tristan en prose, ed. Renée L. Curtis, 3 vols. (München: Max Hueber Verlag, 1963; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976; Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1985) and Le Roman de Tristan en prose, ed. Philippe Ménard, 9 vols. (Genève: Droz, 1987-97). References to these volumes will now be made in the following format: for Curtis's volumes we will use CI, CII and CIII, and for Ménard's volumes MI, MII, etc. References to this primary text will be parenthetical when referring to a single quotation, and will be by volume, paragraph and line number.

<sup>7</sup> Sir Thomas Malory, Works, ed. Eugène Vinaver, rev. P. J. C. Field, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990). Hereafter referred to as Works.

(Vinaver and Baumgartner in particular postulate the use of three exemplars<sup>8</sup>) and academic interest in both works has increased steadily over the last four decades,<sup>9</sup> although only Vinaver has spent significant time on comparing the two.<sup>10</sup>

I do not intend to explore authorial presentation, as Elspeth Kennedy so expertly does in her account of the discrepancies in the Prose Lancelot, but rather aim to describe the world in which the events of romance take place.<sup>11</sup> The prose Tristan and Malory's "Tristram" present many similarities partly because the latter is a reworking of the former. In both works, the life of the knight-errant dominates the text, and the fictional worlds are filled with knightly adventures, quests and tournaments. The characters in both works express idealistic sentiments about the world they inhabit, and the respective narrators emphasise various aspects of these worlds. However, the two texts are the product of different periods, the source is six times longer than its reworking, and the prose Tristan stands as a work on its own while the "Tristram" belongs to the Morte Darthur. I therefore intend to compare the impact on the reader of the worlds in which the prose Tristan and the "Tristram" characters evolve, the physical and social background to their lives, the rules which regulate the various aspects of their lives, their relationship with love and religion, and the way certain characters comment on their society, although considering the length of both works, it would seem presumptuous to propose an exhaustive study of the two worlds.

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<sup>8</sup> Works and Essai.

<sup>9</sup> See my Bibliography.

<sup>10</sup> Eugène Vinaver, Le roman de Tristan et Yseut dans l'œuvre de Thomas Malory (Paris: Champion, 1925).

<sup>11</sup> Elspeth Kennedy, "Who Is to Be Believed? Conflicting Presentations of Events in the Lancelot-Grail Cycle," The Medieval Opus. 169-80.

## Chapter One: Physical and Social Reality in the Tristan en prose

### I. A past different from the present

The world of the Tristan en prose is not what present-day readers have been accustomed to by two hundred years of the developing tradition of the novel, where a fictional reality is created for them through a large number of sensory and social details, typically using a setting in a world similar to that of its reader. The prose Tristan, however, distances itself in a number of ways from the world of its initial audience. The first half of this chapter will explore the ways in which the world of the text is detached from the world of the original listeners. First, the time at which the story takes place is different to that of the first audience, and secondly, as if to emphasise the remoteness, the authors use character names that would have sounded unfamiliar to the prose Tristan's audience, some of them from classical, even Greek legends.

#### A. Time of action

The prose Tristan authors create a time-divide between the world of the audience and the world of the text by reminding the listeners that the action takes place at a time well before that of the composition of the text. The first pages take the readers back to the time of Jesus Christ:

Après la passion Nostre Seignor Jesu Crist, par cui mort et par cui travail nos fumes osté de la prison tenebreuse et de la mort pardurable, Joseph d'Abarematie, qui avoit esté son deciple feel e leal, vint puis en la Grant Bretaigne par le commandement de Nostre Seignor a tout grant partie de son linaige; et par son preeschement fu tornee grant partie de la gent de cele terre a la loi crestiene. Joseph Abaremathie avoit un sien serorge qui estoit apelez Bron.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> CI.1.1-2.1.

It is from this very Bron, brother-in-law of Joseph of Arimathea, that Tristan is directly descended. The readers are subsequently taken through five further generations, before coming to a point in the story where the narrator is rather vague about how many generations separate Candace's son, great-great-grandson of Bron from Meliadus, Tristan's father:

Et tant alerent d'oïr en oïr li roi de Cornoaille que uns rois vint avant qui fu apelez Felix. . . . Li rois qui fu apelez Felix ot deus filz et quatre filles. Li uns des fils fu apelez Mars en batesme. . . . Li rois Felix morut . . . mes . . . il fist coroner son fil Marc dou reaume de Cornoaille. . . . Quant il fu coronez en tel maniere, il fist tant que li rois de Leonois . . . prist a feme une de ses serours, l'ainznee, qui estoit apelee Elyabel; et li rois estoit apelez Meliadus (CI.222.1).

It would be hard to work out how many generations exist between Candace and Meliadus, but, calculating from the above quotation, there are certainly no more than two hundred years between Bron and Candace, and at the most two hundred years between Candace and Tristan, which situates the action around four hundred years after the Crucifixion. The immediate effect of this is to distance the time of the audience from the time of the fiction. Moreover, the emphasis on the action taking place in the fifth century is supported by the fact that Apollo, son of Sador and Chelinde, is conveyed to the coronation of Clodovex, the successor of Marovex.<sup>13</sup> To medieval historians, Mérovée was king of the Franks until the mid-fifth century, which fits in with the dates cited above for Tristan.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, the authors mention the Saxon invasions which also correspond to approximately the same period. The action is dated even more precisely at the Pentecost celebrations, when letters appear on the "Siege Perilleus:"

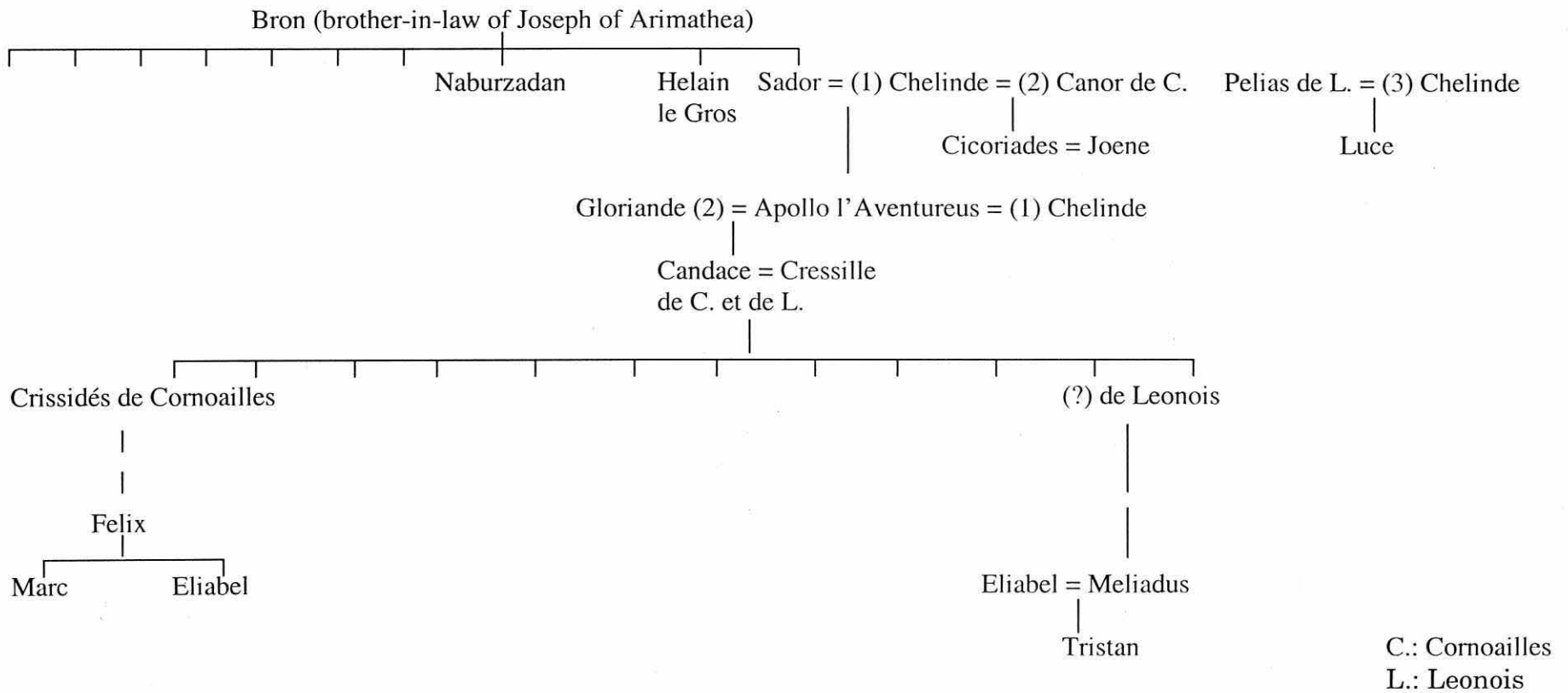
*.CCCC. ans et .LIIII. a acomplis après la passion Jhesu Crist, et au jour de la Pentecouste doit cil sieges trouver son maistre.*<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> CI.205.2 and CI.50.8 for Clodovex succeeding to Marovex.

<sup>14</sup> E. J. Mickel, "Tristan's Ancestry in the *Tristan en prose*," *Romania* 109 (1988): 77-78.

<sup>15</sup> Ménard's italics. MVI.93.38.

## Tristan's Genealogy<sup>19</sup>



<sup>19</sup> For this genealogy see CI. Introduction 37.

Chivalric customs are antiquated.<sup>20</sup>

Car a celui tans estoit coustume que nus ne portoit escu d'un taint  
seulement s'il n'estoit noviaus cevaliers.<sup>21</sup>

Customs in the kingdom of Gales are different:

a cel tans estoient gens desesperées et si sans foi par tout le royaume de  
Gales que se li fix trovast le pere gisant en son lit pour acoison de  
maladie, il le traist hors de son lit et l'oceïst esranment, car a vieuté et a  
repreuce li fust avenu et tenu se ses peres u ses freres moreüst en son lit  
(MVIII.49.30).

Names of castles and cities are no longer what they were: in those days there was a  
castle called "Hansac" (CII.560.3), a city named "Loviglai" (MV.130.8), and Joseph of  
Arimathea

vint en une chité qui estoit a celui tant apelee Cleocide, et ore est apelee  
Galles (MIX.124.21).

The reputation of the beauty of the Queen of Orkney belongs to a different age:

Lamorat de Gales . . . s'aloit plaignant pour les amours la roïne d'Orcanie,  
ki bien estoit a celui tans une des beles dames du monde.<sup>22</sup>

Women are not the only subject of admiration at the time:

Et sacent tout que a celui tans ne peüst on trouver en tout le monde un  
ceval de tantes bontés com estoit Passebrueil (MII.185.20).

Likewise, the thirteenth-century listeners are reminded that the presence of wine in  
Great Britain is only a recent acquisition in all circles of society. It may be noted that  
this suggests a courtly audience that itself was used to wine:

Il trouva que c'estoit vins li plus fors et li miudres qu'il onques beüst, si se  
merveilla mout dont il pooit estre venus, car a celui tans n'avoit point de  
vin en la Grant Bretaingne, se n'estoit en trop riches lieux, ains buvoient  
communaument cervoises et autres boires qu'il faisoient (MVIII.61.5).

Thus the Tristan world is similar enough to that of the listeners to be appreciated, but  
remains distanced in time.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> See also Emmanuèle Baumgartner's chapter on "Us et coutumes," La harpe et l'épée (Paris: S.E.D.E.S., 1990) 79-88.

<sup>21</sup> MVI.133.17. See also MII.16.9; MII.119.30; MIII.128.33; MV.64.1.



This effect is further emphasised by the use of toponymic references to introduce an effect of temporal distance, of a past preceding the action. Florence Plet places the toponyms of the Tristan into temporal categories represented by various places names thus: the “Bois Hercules” (CI.143.8) refers back to an “Antiquité gréco-romaine,” and the “Vergoigne Uter” (MI.131.1), for instance, reminds the audience of a legendary “temps pré-arthurien.” This particular example includes an etiological narrative explaining how the castle came to be called “Vergoingne,” whereas this is originally a spatial reference, for it is where Kahedin and Keu, in the present Arthurian times, seek abode for the night (MI.130.17). Thus the present carries marks from the past, and creates the illusion of a temporal depth. The past of the narrative re-emerges through the naming of certain places: this past can be recent, as is the case with “Vergoigne Uter,” or it can be remote, as exemplified by the reference to Boorth de Gaunes killing a giant, for which occasion the “Abeïe de Gaunes” is constructed (MI.84.12). The naming of places thus provides the audience with a sense of depth and of distance.<sup>24</sup>

Moreover, knightly aristocrats are almost the only actors of the prose Tristan, a fact hardly surprising to Georges Duby, who notes that an important class of literature in the vernacular was written down, probably to entertain the French aristocracy, which by the thirteenth century had become a homogeneous group who wished to uphold the knightly ideal, its ethic and the virtues of valour and loyalty.<sup>25</sup> This tendency to idealise influences other ways in which this world is imagined: there are few practical considerations such as money, as, for instance, when Tristan and Iseut decide to move into a house of La Sage Demoiselle:

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<sup>22</sup> MIV.15.4. See also MV.38.21.

<sup>23</sup> On this subject see Emmanuèle Baumgartner, “Compiler / Accomplir,” Nouvelles recherches sur le Tristan en prose (Genève: Slatkine, 1990) 33-49.

<sup>24</sup> I am indebted to Florence Plet for kindly allowing me to refer to her “La carte du temps: les entrelacs de l’espace, du temps et du récit dans le Tristan en prose,” which she presented at the Colloque Arthurien International, Le Monde et l’Autre Monde, Rennes, France, 8-9 March 2001.

Quant il furent leanz venu, il descendent, et troevent la meson tant bele et tant riche et tant delitable que ce resembloit fairie. “Ma dame,” ce dit Tristanz, “que vos semble de cest manoir?”—“Sire,” fait ele, “il est biax! Tant m’i plect l’estre et tant m’enbelist que je ne m’en quier remuer tant com li demorers vos plera.”—“Et ill i fera bon demorer, car vez ci les fontaines bones et fresches, et nos avrons de la venoison chascun jor. Les autres choses qui nos feudront nos ira querre Gorvenal a un chastel qui est pres de ci.”<sup>26</sup>

There are other details which the Tristan ignores: there is no illness due to old age except the very occasional indisposition required by some turn in the story, no long hours judging in (let alone preparing for) baronial courts, and tournaments never have to be called off because of lack of support, or heavy rain. Similarly, the readers hear nothing of the social tensions such as the crises between lords and peasants which took place in France from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries,<sup>27</sup> or of the economic stress imposed on aristocratic families by the costliness of the arms needed for the dubbing of a new knight.<sup>28</sup> What Auerbach says of Chrétien’s Yvain is also largely true of the prose Tristan:

Nothing is said about all the practical conditions and circumstances necessary to render the existence of such a castle in absolute solitude both possible and compatible with ordinary experience. Such idealization takes us very far from the imitation of reality. In the courtly romance the functional, the historically real aspects of class are passed over. Though it offers a great many culturally significant details concerning the customs of social intercourse and external social forms and conventions in general, we can get no penetrating view of contemporary reality from it, even in respect to the knightly class. Where it depicts reality, it depicts merely the colorful surface, and where it is not superficial, it has other subjects and other ends than contemporary reality. Yet it does contain class ethics which as such claimed and indeed attained acceptance and validity in this real and earthly world.<sup>29</sup>

The authors, through several means, achieve an effect of distance in time, space and social customs. This, according to P. J. C. Field, is one of the reasons for which the

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<sup>25</sup> Georges Duby, The Chivalrous Society, trans. Cynthia Postan (London: Edward Arnold, 1977) 181.

<sup>26</sup> CII.552.13.

<sup>27</sup> Jacques Le Goff, La civilisation de l’Occident médiéval (Paris: Arthaud, 1967) 369.

<sup>28</sup> Duby, The Chivalrous Society 183.

<sup>29</sup> Erich Auerbach, Mimesis, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1968) 136.

prose Tristan, and indeed, Malory's "Tristram," as will become apparent, can be qualified as romances:

Where the novel gives us the world of the probable, the world reported by physical science and individual psychological experience, romance gives us worlds of the possible, sometimes worlds only capable of existing in the imagination.<sup>30</sup>

The Tristan world might be one of complete wish-fulfilment for the knightly, and therefore noble class,<sup>31</sup> were it not for the tragic end of the leading aristocratic characters, who are admired by both narrator and audience.

Despite being set in the days of King Arthur, the outlook of the action is essentially that of the high Middle Ages, underlining the inconsistent historical perspective of the prose Tristan. Muriel Whitaker says of Malory's Morte Darthur that:

the ethos of his historical vision is that of the high middle ages, evoked not only by political allusions to establishing the succession, the voice of the commons, the role of the Archbishop of Canterbury, trial by combat but also by reference to architecture, costumes, arms and armour.<sup>32</sup>

Although there are some differences between the two texts which will be examined in the second part of this thesis, much of what Whitaker writes about the Morte's historical perspective is also true of the Tristan. It was established that the Grail Quest begins 454 years after the Passion of Our Lord.<sup>33</sup> The questers, however, come across monasteries of white monks (Cistercians) throughout the Grail landscape, even though their order was founded only in 1098.<sup>34</sup> The Tristan narrator, having described Saint Augustin's conversion of the king of Leonois, admits he cannot provide further details

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<sup>30</sup> P. J. C. Field, "Sir Thomas Malory's Le Morte Darthur," The Arthur of the English, ed. W. R. J. Barron (Cardiff: U of Wales P, 1999) 244.

<sup>31</sup> For the historical evidence of the gradual assimilation between the nobility and the knightly class, see Duby, The Chivalrous Society 78ff., 95ff., 174ff.

<sup>32</sup> Muriel Whitaker, Arthur's Kingdom of Adventure: The World of Malory's Morte Darthur (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1984) 105.

<sup>33</sup> See above.

of the conversion because “l’arcevesque de Contorbriere le me devea . . .” (CI.171.10). The Archbishop, who was presumably meant to be contemporary, but forbade the narrator to tell the story of the conversion, is a historical figure, albeit from some 150 years later than the supposed beginning of the Quest. He is, however, much nearer to the fifth century than to the time of composition of the text, and further highlights the inconsistent historical perspective of the prose Tristan. What Field says of the Morte is also true of the Tristan:

We wrong Malory’s story if we force the inconsistencies between these widely separated and (in every case but one) implicit dates into prominence. The Morte Darthur is in every sense big enough for a passage implying a particular date or period to have nearly all its effect in its immediate context. It need not have much effect on the book as a whole.<sup>35</sup>

Among the common practices of the high Middle Ages, and whose popularity is mirrored in the prose Tristan, are the judicial duels, or trials by combat, which will be examined in Chapter Three.<sup>36</sup> Likewise, there is a profusion of tournaments in the text, although these were not developed until the middle of the eleventh century.<sup>37</sup>

Descriptions of castles and towers similarly refer to the architecture of the high Middle Ages, with fortified strongholds, moats, and portcullises, as we will see below.<sup>38</sup> Nor is clothing an indicator of a “consistent historical perspective:” the “robe d’escarlate qui estoit fourree mout ricement” (MVI.66.38) worn by a knight is “typically thirteenth-century.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> MVI.116.4 (“blance abeïe”); MIX.22.4 (“et estoient cil de laiens d’ordre blance”); MIX.90.2 (“abeïe de freres blans”); See also P. J. C. Field, “Time and Elaine of Astolat,” Studies in Malory, ed. James W. Spisak (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan U, 1985) 232.

<sup>35</sup> Field, “Time” 233.

<sup>36</sup> See MIV.90.45; MV.110.4; MV.122.16; MVII.73.46; MVII.194.34; MVIII.109.10; MIX.93.30.

<sup>37</sup> Field, “Time” 232, citing Noël Denholm-Young, Collected Papers (Cardiff: U of Wales P, 1969) 95-98.

<sup>38</sup> CIII.749.12; MIX.40.6. The text also mentions the presence of a “mangonnell” in MIII.226.27, which is a stone-throwing device. See also MVII.6.3 (“mote”) and MII.98.1, MIII.166.14; MIII.199.1.

<sup>39</sup> Whitaker 105.

The reader's attention is drawn to one last example, in which a custom which in actual fact appears to have been frequently applied in thirteenth-century tournaments is apparently deliberately backdated:

a celui tans estoient les prisons des tournoiemens teles que cil ki pris estoit ne portoit puis armes en tout le tournoiemement, se ce n'estoit par le congié de celui ki pris l'avoit, ne autre raienchon il n'em paiioit.<sup>40</sup>

The French historian Marc Bloch, after whom Jacques Le Goff said that "on ne peut plus parler de ce temps [the Middle Ages] comme on le faisait avant lui,"<sup>41</sup> shows that in tournaments, "the victor frequently took possession of the equipment and horses of the vanquished and sometimes even of his person, releasing him only on payment of a ransom. . . ."<sup>42</sup> The aristocratic knightly audience would have been familiar with this custom, and this passage testifies to the fact that the times pointed to in the Tristan vary greatly: inconsistent references to the fifth century and to the high Middle Ages set the tale in a time which must have sounded both familiar and strange to a thirteenth-century audience.

#### B. Use of names

The use of unfamiliar names also distances the audience from the narrative. The great majority of the several hundred names used in the prose Tristan belong to the Arthurian repertoire: Marc, Tristan, Iseut, Artus, Guenièvre, Yvain, Gauvain, and so on. The reader would have found them familiar, and they would also have confirmed the fictional quality of the text and its pastness. Many names come from the Bible, although the majority of these represent biblical characters rather than newly-created actors for the text. The prose Tristan also features pagan gods such as Saturn, Venus, Diana, Mars, and Jupiter. Moreover, the authors make use of historical figures, such as

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<sup>40</sup> MV.195.21.

<sup>41</sup> Jacques Le Goff, La civilisation de l'Occident medieval (Paris: Arthaud, 1967) 15.

<sup>42</sup> Marc Bloch, Feudal Society, trans. L. A. Manyon (London: Routledge, 1961) 305.

St Denis (CI.102.7), St Rémi (CI.50.10; 205.6), Titus (MVIII.209.29) or “Charlemainne” (MIX.44.40; 45.33), who are used to represent the historical figures who appear in the narrative. It is worth noting, however, that there are only two groups of names that would have sounded familiar to the audience in two ways. The first group comprises such names as Abel, Augustin, Charlemainne, Chaÿm, Elyes, Enoc, Eve, Felix, Jonas, Judas, Moÿsès,<sup>43</sup> Pilate, Rémi, Pharaon, Siméon, for instance. A Christian audience would have been acquainted with them, despite the fact that these names would not have been used for people at the time, as would have been the names in the second group, like Adam, Alain, Daniel, David, Denis, Joseph, Marc, Marie, and this is only a small proportion of the 488 names that occur in the whole of the text.<sup>44</sup>

~~Marc is probably the only name that would have been used at the time of the listeners.~~

For a thirteenth-century audience, the names of classical origin would not have been household names, and would probably have sounded exotic, thus further contributing to the idealisation of the Tristan world. Names such as Palamede, Achilles li Grex, Dialetes and Anchises have a foreign ring to them, yet they are not all used to represent a familiar legendary character. While Achilles (CII.539.19) is used to represent the mythological character, as is Dedalus (MV.54.43), Anchises, who is Eneas’s father in Virgil’s story, is a relative of Bohort in the prose Tristan. He is killed by a giant and avenged by his kinsman.<sup>45</sup> The name Palamede is certainly of Greek origin, but is also given to a well-known Arthurian character. Dialetes, who seems to appear in the prose Tristan only, is a giant who is opposed to Christianity, and although

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<sup>43</sup> See Elspeth Kennedy, “Pourquoi Moÿse? Comment les romans en prose essaient de racheter le Moÿse qu’on trouve dans le Joseph de Robert de Boron,” Cahiers de recherches médiévales XIII<sup>e</sup>-XV<sup>e</sup>s. 5 (1998): 33-42.

<sup>44</sup> There are 346 named characters and 42 biblical, mythical and historical characters. These numbers are imprecise because of the many names which are identical but which can represent different people. See “Index des noms propres” in R. L. Curtis’ and Philippe Ménard’s editions.

<sup>45</sup> MI.82-83. See also G. D. West, An Index of Proper Names in French Arthurian Prose Romances, (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1978) 17.

West does not mention that the name has a Greek origin, it certainly has a Greek ending, and would therefore also have sounded classical to the thirteenth-century French audience. All these names, though they are few in comparison with the bulk of familiar Arthurian names, contribute to create a world that is both remote from that of its listeners and idealised. Indeed, with Latin being the language of the Bible and religious teaching, Virgil, Geoffrey of Monmouth, and university teaching, the knowledge of Greek names called on an unusual degree of learning, and their use therefore emphasises this unfamiliarity.

### C. Use of Greek mythology

The prose Tristan uses not only Greek names, but also Greek mythology with the borrowing of the Oedipus myth, which becomes the story of Apollo l'Aventureus, thus contributing to create an otherworldly atmosphere. According to Joël H. Grisward, "*Apollo l'Aventureus* est, à notre connaissance, le seul personnage humain de la littérature médiévale à porter ce nom divin. Or, on se souvient que c'est précisément *Apollon* qui avait prédit à Laïos une progéniture maléfique."<sup>46</sup> In the first instance, then, the name of Apollo seems to be the authors' choice, possibly influenced by the name of the god who predicted Laïos' death at the hands of his son. But this is only a minor similarity to which Grisward draws attention between the thirteenth-century chivalric story of Apollo in the prose Tristan and its original, the Oedipus myth. Grisward explains that the presence of the prelude to the prose Tristan corresponds to what Vinaver called "the habit of expanding biographical romances by adding the lives of the hero's ancestors."<sup>47</sup> It tells the story of Sador, nephew to Joseph of Arimathea,

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<sup>46</sup> Joël H. Grisward, "Un schème narratif du Tristan en prose: le mythe d'Édipe," Mélanges de langue et de littérature médiévales offerts à Pierre le Gentil (Paris: S.E.D.E.S., 1973) 335, n. 24 (Grisward's italics).

<sup>47</sup> Eugène Vinaver, "The Prose Tristan," Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages, ed. R.S. Loomis (Oxford: OUP, 1959) 340.

who finds himself separated from his wife Chelinde following a storm. Although already carrying her first husband's child, she marries Canor, who learns in a dream that the child she is about to give birth to will eventually kill him, so he abandons the new-born baby in the forest, under the eyes of Madule and Nicoraut, who rescue the infant and bring him up as their own, calling him Apollo l'Aventureus. When Apollo turns fifteen, he is knighted by Canor, to whom Nicoraut reveals the truth and is murdered for his pains. Apollo discovers the truth and in searching for his true parents chances upon a giant who poses him a riddle, which he solves. He slays the giant, thus liberating Luce and his father Pelias, whom he then follows to Leonois. One morning, Sador, who has been fatally wounded by Canor, meets Apollo in the wood, and attacks him because he is wearing Canor's arms. In an act of defence, Apollo kills his own father. He then slays Canor, thus avenging the death of his friend Luce. He is crowned king of Leonois, and unwittingly chooses Chelinde, his own mother, as his wife.

Par cest conte que vos avés oï, poés vos entendre que li fils ocist son pere,  
e après la mort de son pere prist il sa mere a moillier (CI.158.20).

They continue thus until Saint Augustin reveals the truth to the couple. Chelinde decides to have Saint Augustin burned at the stake, but the fire burns out, and she herself is struck by lightning and burnt alive. Apollo is visited by a dream and is converted (CI.4-171).

This shores up Grisward's hypothesis that "*toute l'existence du héros jusqu'à sa conversion . . . [n'est] qu'un décalque fidèle et complet de la légende thébaine, qu'Apollo . . . [n'est] qu'un Œdipe travesti.*"<sup>48</sup> The "riddle-proposing giant"<sup>49</sup> is the equivalent of the Oedipian Sphinx, for they both set riddles, both terrorise their

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<sup>48</sup> Grisward 332.

<sup>49</sup> J. D. Bruce, "A Boccaccio Analogue in the Old French Prose Tristan," Romanic Review 1 (1910): 391.



country, are both physically terrifying, and most importantly, fulfil the same narrative function: the giant represents, like the Sphinx, “une épreuve de qualification royale, un test probatoire ouvrant l'accès au trône de Leonois.”<sup>50</sup> The Hellenic female demon has apparently been transformed into a creature more familiar to a medieval audience.

This equivalence is only one of the many which link the Oedipus story and Apollo's, for

chacune des étapes qui marquent la vie d'Apollo l'Aventureus, chacun des degrés qui ponctuent l'accès de celui-ci à la royauté: le songe prémonitoire, le nouveau-né maléfique, l'exposition, l'éducation par des étrangers, la victoire sur l'ogre-questionneur, le meurtre du père, l'acquisition de la royauté, l'union avec la mère, la révélation du double crime, la punition de la mère-épouse, ne se désigne que comme un pur transfert du mythe oedipien. . . . En quête d'ancêtres pour son Tristan, l'auteur, trouvant dans la légende d'Œdipe un destin héroïque particulièrement exemplaire, a donc imaginé tout simplement de transposer en biographie romanesque ce qui, originellement, constituait un schéma mythique.<sup>51</sup>

Grisward suggests that the two main transformations of the original myth in the prose Tristan are not carried out by its authors, but are very possibly due to the influence of the Roman de Thèbes, from which our authors might have borrowed their version of the mythical legend, which also includes both these variants concerning the Sphinx and the patricide. Indeed, in the Roman de Thèbes, the Sphinx is no longer a female demon, but a male monster, who asks Edyppus a “devinaille,” and whose sanction, once the enigma has been resolved, is decapitation, whereas the Sphinx commits suicide. The second transformation concerns the place of the patricide. In all the Oedipian traditions, Laios is murdered at a crossroads. Interestingly, both in the Roman de Thèbes and in the prose Tristan, the father is killed near a temple on the day of a religious festival.<sup>52</sup> Grisward concludes that in all probability the authors of the

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<sup>50</sup> Grisward 334-35.

<sup>51</sup> Grisward 335.

<sup>52</sup> Grisward 338.

prose Tristan transposed the Greek myth into its chivalric equivalent, using an intermediate version of the “roman antique.”<sup>53</sup>

Likewise, the pattern of the questing beast is drawn in part from the mythological Chimaera. The prose Tristan describes this creature as:

une beste la plus diverse et la plus merueilleuse dont il onques oïssent parler, car cele beste avoit tot droitement piez ce cerf, cuisses et queue de lion, cors de liepart; et issoit de li uns glatissemenz si granz com s'ele eüst dedenz li dusqu'a vint brachez toz glatisanz (CIII.790.15).

This beast bears some resemblance to the Chimaera of the Iliad:

But then, once he received that fatal message / sent from his own daughter's husband, first / he ordered Bellephoron to kill the Chimaera- / grim monster sprung of the gods, nothing human, all lion in front, all snake behind, all goat between, / terrible, blasting lethal fire at every breath!<sup>54</sup>

Although the composition of the two creatures varies, they are both divided into three parts belonging to different animals, of which the lion is common to both, and both descriptions end with what comes out of their mouth: the “beste glatissant,” as its name explains, utters a kind of bark, where the Chimaera breathes fire. It seems likely that the reference to the “beste glatissant” is not a direct allusion to the Greek Chimaera. Rather the “beste” is being used as raw material to conjure up a strange beast. Because the similarities between the mythological beast and the questing beast are not so strong as those uniting Oedipus and Apollo, it might be suggested that the creation of the questing beast is possibly based on the memory, or a second-hand account of the classical Chimaera. However, it clearly adds yet further to the effect of strangeness and unfamiliarity in the Tristan world.

Interestingly, an influential predecessor of the Tristan authors, Chrétien de Troyes, also made use of literary models, and it has been argued that his raw material

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<sup>53</sup> Grisward 339.

<sup>54</sup> Homer, The Iliad, trans. Robert Fagles (Bath: The Bath P, 1990) 6: lines 210-15.

was not folklore but Virgil, Cicero and Wace.<sup>55</sup> According to Peter Kardon, the character of Lunete owes her creation to Anna, Dido's sister in The Aeneid; the origin of the episode in Yvain of the ring that renders its wearers invisible if they turn the bezel of the ring towards their palm can be found in the story of "The Ring of Gyges" in Cicero's De Officiis; the episode of the fountain has its origins in the Navigatio Sancti Brendani and Wace's Roman de Rou.<sup>56</sup> Thus although the authors of the prose Tristan have transformed the myth in such a way as to make it appear more familiar to a thirteenth-century chivalric audience, the mythical resonances, as well as Apollo's very name, contribute to the idealisation of the text, and make it part of the world of romance, a world that has similarities to that of the audience, but also striking differences. It is difficult to ascertain how many of the original audience would have known of the Oedipus myth; but even if a good many of them did, it would still have been relatively unfamiliar, concerning a character who was strange.

The figure of the giant, an altogether otherworldly being, who is introduced into this myth, also helps to distance the listener from this fictional text. The romance features a few giants,<sup>57</sup> a detail which makes the world in which the chivalric characters evolve one that is not entirely that of the audience.

## II. The physical world of the prose Tristan

It was observed above that the world of the prose Tristan is to some extent distanced from that of the original audience. This environment is characterised in a way perhaps unsatisfactory to the reader accustomed to the novel, but nevertheless punctuated by short descriptions that provide some sense of the physical and natural world in which the characters evolve. Because description cannot always be distinct from narrative, it

<sup>55</sup> Peter Kardon, Arthurnet 9 June 1999.

<sup>56</sup> Kardon, Arthurnet 9 June 1999.

<sup>57</sup> CI.98.5; CI.102.3; CII.450.13; CII.455.28; MI.82.13; MI.177.35.

is important to define what it means in the prose Tristan. To begin with, it is not what twentieth-century readers call description, where one can visualise the particular features of a face, or perfectly imagine somebody's clothing; description in the Tristan is rather a narrative passage that does not primarily advance the action. Such sentences provide a sense of the physical world of nature, where what one sees most frequently are landmarks such as fountains and forests, which, as we will see, are "either accessory or preparatory to an adventure" or to an action in the text.<sup>58</sup> In this landscape, castles are the most important buildings, so they will be examined after the other buildings, namely ordinary dwellings and churches. This landscape is the backcloth against which the mainly aristocratic characters live out their lives, and engage in leisurely activities.

#### A. Natural landmarks

Descriptions of sensory details of nature can fulfil several functions: they are in turn causal, atmospheric, and suspense-creating. They are atmospheric when they can provide a place for the reader to witness the knight living the chivalric life: fountains, for instance, are places for knights to rest and drink at:

il trouva a l'entree d'une prairie une mout bele fontaine, qui sourdoit entre deus grans arbres. Mesire Tristrans descendi lors k'il ot trouvee la fontaine, et pense k'il se reposera illuec une piece du jour et bevera de la fontaine et se rafreskira, et puis se metra a la voie. . . . Et quant il a grant pieche pensé, mas et dolans de grant maniere, il s'endort com chil ki auques estoit lassés et traveilliés (MII.93.5).

In this instance, the readers have something of a picture to visualise: there are two trees, not one, not twenty, for instance, even if the precise number makes no difference to what follows. It provides the audience with a little bit of background, though this is tantalisingly limited for the modern reader.

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<sup>58</sup> Auberbach 136.

Because knights spend time at fountains, they are likely to meet there.

Fountains, which are usually “mout bele et mout delitable” and “mout clere,”<sup>59</sup> thus become accessory to knightly encounters, whether with other knights, or damsels bearing messages, for example. Physical details about the fountains are therefore descriptive.

Unlike fountains, rivers are generally an obstacle, although they are also causal: they are accordingly described in a more negative, but equally unchanging way. Lancelot is warned by some squires not to enter the river because “el est trop parfonde et trop roide, et les rives sont mout ennuieuses” (CIII.715.15). Palamede comes to an equally uninviting “riviere dont les rives estoient assés hautes et l’aigue estoit durement parfonde.”<sup>60</sup> Here too it is clear that the river is described mainly because it is the reason for the knights to avoid this obstacle.

Forests seem to receive yet more attention, although most terms derive from a stock repertoire, such as “delitable,” “grant” and “bele.”<sup>61</sup> Descriptions of forests contribute to the narration, but they also have an atmospheric function, for as Whitaker points out, they offer not only “the opportunity for questing and jousting but also [the] . . . atmosphere of mystery and fear.”<sup>62</sup> The description of the “Forest dou Morroiz” contributes to the action because it explains why the quest for Tristan is so lengthy:

se la Forest dou Morroiz fust petite, il n’i eüssent mie tant demoré por monseignor Tristan querre, mes ele avoit bien de lonc cinc granz jornees et trois de lé (CIII.886.28).

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<sup>59</sup> CII.790.10; MV.284.15. See also CI.144.15; CII.493.6; CII.526.4; CIII.693.7; CIII.783.11; MI.161.21; MII.116.8; MIII.49.11; MIII.212.20; MIV.10.35; MIV.107.3; MV.41.3; MV.136.2; MVI.22.3; MVII.43.15.

<sup>60</sup> MII.195.27. See also CIII.690.5, CIII.697.12; MI.130.19; MIII.94.16; MIV.31.7; MV.86.24.

<sup>61</sup> MIX.54.4; CI.79.1; CII.549.25; CIII.781.20; MVIII.167.8.

<sup>62</sup> Whitaker 55.

Conjuring up a mysterious atmosphere, however, is also clearly part of the stock descriptions of forests:

Pres de cele cité . . . avoit une forest grant et merveilleuse et enciene  
durement qui bien duroit dis jornees de lonc par devers Gaule, et une de lé  
(CI.79.1).

The adjectives “grant” and “enciene” emphasise a feeling of the unknown, created by the epithet “merveilleuse,” and the sheer size of the forest is enough in itself to arouse anticipation of some adventure. In this case, it precedes the apparition of the riddle-proposing giant. Likewise, a group of sailors tells Tristan and Kahedin that the “Forest d’Arvances”

est tant grant et tant desvoiable que nus n’i avendroit jamés s’il n’i avoit  
par maintes foiz esté, ou se aventure ne l’i aporloit (CIII.781.20).

Curtis defines the adjective “desvoiable” as “où il est difficile de ne pas s’égarer.”<sup>63</sup>

This excites the curiosity of the characters and suggests to the listener the unknown world of unexpected events. Forests usually create a situation for adventure, the chief occupation of questing knights. The reader “is not expected to organise the moors and marshes, rivers, valleys, woods and plains into a complete landscape,”<sup>64</sup> but to recognise these descriptions as requisites of adventure. Moreover, it is not an entirely imaginary landscape that the narrator is sketching in: “Il est la réalité physique de l’Occident médiéval,” says Le Goff, and so the mere suggestion of a forest, or a castle, as will become apparent, is sufficient for the audience to conjure up a visual image of the landscape.<sup>65</sup>

Whitaker also points up the connection between the description of a forest and the apparition of preternatural beings:

vez ci la Forest d’Arvances ou Merlins gist qui la Demoisele dou Lac mist  
en terre et l’ocist par assez vil achoison et traïson (CIII.781.9).

<sup>63</sup> “desvoiable,” CIII.Glossary.

<sup>64</sup> Whitaker 54.

<sup>65</sup> Le Goff, *Civilisation* 169.

Descriptions of forests are usually provided not, as modern readers would expect, to enable them to visualise the landscape, but to allow them to expect an atmospheric world of adventures, quests and jousts, sometimes complemented by elements of the preternatural world.

Not all descriptions in the prose Tristan are “specifically created and designed to give the knight opportunity to prove himself.”<sup>66</sup> Others are more visually explicit, creating a specific physical reality for the Tristan world:

l’Ille Delitable . . . estoit sans doute la plus delitable ille, de tant com ele duroit, ki fust u roiaume de Logres, si conme de pres, de rivieres, de forés, de vergiers, de fontainnes et de tous autres deduis. . . .<sup>67</sup>

Although the image of the island is not complete, the readers are nevertheless given some hints from which their imaginations can build up a coherent image.

Some passages even describe the weather, though this usually serves a definite purpose in the plot. When Pelias is about to attempt to murder King Canor, the night is hot, “si come entor la Pentecoste” (CI.37.1), which explains why Canor is standing at the window enjoying the fresh air at that particular moment. His position is strategic, for when Pelias, who ardently desires to possess Canor’s wife Chelinde, sees his rival at the window on his own, he realises this is the best time to try to kill him. The supplementary detail about the weather has the function, therefore, of placing Canor in a position where Pelias can most easily strike him with his sword.

The following passage shows how a description of the weather, unusual because it is more telling than most, emphasises the calm atmosphere before Tristan and Iseut drink the love potion:

Li tens est biax, et li ers purs, et la mer sanz ire est sanz torment, et li venz bons tot a lor devise, qui les fait partir de terre tout maintenant que les

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<sup>66</sup> Auerbach 136.

<sup>67</sup> MV.117.26. See also CIII.731.20; MI.27.3.

voiles sont tendues. Et cil de la nef sont baut et lié, et se joent et devisent (CI.444.2).

The next extract is rather shorter, but has a real psychological impact:

Il estoit encore bien matin, et nonporquant li solaux estoit ja levez biaux, si clers et si luissanz que toz li mondes en estoit ja esclarcis (CIII.930.26).

This description increases the suspense leading up respectively to the drinking of the love potion and to Iseut's suicide attempt, which Marc is about to witness. The tranquillity and beauty expressed here<sup>68</sup> are all the more telling in the light of Iseut's inner turmoil. The prelude to her suicide attempt is long and drawn out, as she prepares for her final hour. After she has dressed in her best robes,

ele comença adonc a regarder tot entor lui, et voit le temps si bel et si cler et si durement net, et le soleill luisant; et d'autre part ot les oissellons qui chantent parmi le gardin lor divers chanz et aloient lor joie faisant par laiencz (CIII.932.9).

The narrator provides a surprising amount of sensory detail through Iseut's personal perception of the natural phenomena that surround her, thus creating not only a physical setting for the scene, but also a psychological reality. Again, like the descriptions of forests, the sensory detail provided in the preceding passages creates an atmospheric rather than a visual tableau.

## B. Dwellings

In addition to natural landmarks, this landscape includes man-made buildings, which enjoy a certain amount of description. These dwellings, both secular and religious, are described in much the same way as are the castles, with stock phrases such as “fors et bele,” “bele et rice,” being used both for towers and abbeys.<sup>69</sup> The seemingly insignificant abodes such as “recet,” “repaire,” or “abitacle” are sometimes accorded less attention than other types of house, but there is no definite pattern to this, and they

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<sup>68</sup> See also CIII.930.13.



are at times described in much the same way as any other habitation.<sup>70</sup> The reader has no visual knowledge of the dwelling, when Tristan “a tant chevauchié qu’il est venuz au recet de la dame,” for instance.<sup>71</sup>

Short and standardised though they may be, most of the descriptions are gratuitous in that they do not forward the action, unlike the function of the dwelling, which provides a place of rest for the knight in action, who has ridden all day and needs a place to sleep:

quant vint entour eure de tierche, il deschendi chiés un vavasseur ki avoit un mout bel rechet tres desus le cemin. Illuec descendi li rois March et menga, et s’i reposa une pieche du jour. . . .<sup>72</sup>

This passage clearly demonstrates the stock use of the quality “mout bel,” as well as its redundancy as regards the plot. Indeed, in this representative case the authors portray chivalric life in the way a novel would, for Marc is not said to meet anybody in the “rechet:” he simply rests there and later in the day, he “se mist au chemin” (MIV.18.11).

These dwellings also serve a function as healing places for wounded knights:

Et de tant lor avint il bien qu’il troverent une tor bele et riche, qui estoit faite auques novelement et avoit entor mout bel porpris et mout riche. . . . Li chevaliers demande erranment si avoit ame leanz qui seüst riens de plaies. Et une demoisele respont: “Sire, oïl. Ceanz a une dame qui set medeciner.”—“Ha! por Dieu,” fait li chevaliers, “faites la me venir, car mout grant mestier ai de secors” (CII.661.14).

Although the short description of the dwelling may add nothing to the plot, it does reveal the social standing of the castle’s owner. Not only is the “tor” clearly in aristocratic hands, but the knight-errant can also rest and be healed from his wounds, showing how questing knights are received in a conventionally hospitable way.

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<sup>69</sup> MII.39.39; MV.88.2. See also CI.97.5; CII.552.13; MII.78.4; MIII.166.12; MIV.70.2; MV.87.16; MVII.133.14.

<sup>70</sup> MII.39.11; MIII.166.12; MIV.18.9; MIV.70.2; MIX.60.10.

<sup>71</sup> CI.367.2. See also CI.25.18; CI.28.4; CI.44.4; CI.81.1; CI.129.2; MIII.218.30.

Everyone involved in the scene has a part to play and plays it in accordance with the recognised customs of the world of chivalric romance. It is this, rather than sensory detail, that the narrative emphasises for the reader.

The following description features not only the natural landscape surrounding the “tours,” but also the material of which the “perron” is made:

ce estoit une turs bele et rice, close de murs et de fossés tout entour a la reonde, si fors et si merveilleuse que on ne le peüst mie legierement prendre. . . . Devant la porte de la tour, qui grans estoit et fors et bele, avoit un grant perron de marbre; delés cel perron tout droit avoit un arbre grant et mout bel et merueilleusement carcié de grans branches et de fuelles (MII.39.39).

Marble is significant because it is the best stone possible, for the basic materials used for thirteenth-century building were wood and stone, the latter being the more noble and resistant of the two.<sup>73</sup> Although this passage provides an exceptional amount of sensory detail, it is not causal. Thus the fictional world of the Tristan provides some sense of what it looks like, although it reveals and its audience expected much less than their modern counterpart.

An interesting comparison can be made with another aristocratic French prose text which deals with knightly adventures in exotic locations, written at about the same period as the prose Tristan. Although Villehardouin’s Conquête de Constantinople is non-fictional prose, it nevertheless manifests the same interest in the material of a building: “il avoit une colonne en Costaninoble en mi la ville auques, qui ere une des plus haltes et des mielz ovrees de marbre qui onques fust veüe d’oil. . . .”<sup>74</sup> An important difference between these two accounts is that the information provided in our fictional romance is more gratuitous than that given in the historical text. The

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<sup>72</sup> MIV.18.8. For dwellings as places of rest see also MI.48.33; MII.39.8; MII.52.4; MIV.47.15; MV.88.1.

<sup>73</sup> Le Goff, Civilisation 262.

<sup>74</sup> Geoffroy de Villehardouin, La Conquête de Constantinople, ed. Edmond Faral, 2 vols. (Paris: Société d’édition Les Belles Lettres, 1938) 2: 307.1-4.

“perron” does not seem to reappear for any meaningful reason in the prose Tristan, whereas the emperor Morchufles is thrown to his death from the top of this column, thus underlining the need for the reader to know how high it is. The fact that it is made out of marble is also relevant to the plot, for the narrator goes on to say that on this column

avoit ymages de maintes manieres ovrees el marbre; et entre celes ymages si en avoit une qui ere laboree en forme d’emperor, et cele si chaît contreval. Car de lonc tens ere profeticié qu’i avroit un emperor en Costantinoble qui devoit estre gistez aval cele columpne. . . .<sup>75</sup>

Religious dwellings, such as hermitages and abbeys, enjoy the same amount of description as secular habitations,<sup>76</sup> but fulfil, at least in the pre-Grail section of the Tristan, the same hospitable functions of rest, refuge, and healing:<sup>77</sup>

pres de ci a un hermitage auques bel et auques rice. Li rois Artus i fist jadis faire une maison bele et noble pour herbergier les cevaliers errans.<sup>78</sup>

Hermitages are also places for sustenance, for in them knights and hermits “mengierent du pain et burent cervoise qui en l’ermitage estoit.”<sup>79</sup> Moreover, having been thrown overboard from a boat, Sador meets a hermit and discovers from the latter how he survives:

Quant fains me prent et volenté me vient de mangier, je preig des herbes crues, teles com je les truis en la roche, si les manju. Et sachiez que viande que je onques eüsse a Sarraz ne me plut autretant com ceste fait, ne tant ne me fu profitable (CI.30.10).

This frugal meal enjoys some description, whereas most repasts in the text are hardly mentioned. This could be an indication of a narrative urge other than the strictly narrative drive to follow a story through to the end. This description to some extent records the unusual that is worthy of attention simply because it is not usual, whether it

<sup>75</sup> La Conquête de Constantinople 2: 308.2-7.

<sup>76</sup> See CII.601.9; MI.81.22; MI.87.7.

<sup>77</sup> For hermitages as places of healing, see MVI.69.30.

<sup>78</sup> MVI.7.24. See also CII.491.1; CIII.782.1; MI.86.1; MI.170.43-171.3.

<sup>79</sup> MVIII.81.2. See also CIII.782.4.

be a meal so poor that a human being can barely survive on it or a fully-fledged miracle announced by angels with trumpets. In any case, it certainly calls attention to a frugality to which an aristocratic audience would not have been accustomed.

A few descriptions in the prose Tristan do not fit the pattern mentioned above.

The following passage is spoken not by the narrator, but by Tristan himself, who wishes Iseut to live with him at the “Saige Demoisele,” and it is interesting to note that the most evocative element in the description is Tristan’s sensory perception of the place. It is none the less as inspiring for the reader as it is for Iseut, and it would seem that the readers are encouraged to imagine this world:

Nous sommes en une forest qui est la plus bele et la plus envoisee et la plus delitable dou monde, et plus plenteureuse de bestes sauvages que forest que je saiche, et dure mout longuement. Et en ceste forest pres d’une roche . . . a une maison tant cointe et tant bele et tant bien aesiee de fontaines et de vergiers que se vos leanz estiez orandroit, ce vos sembleroit uns paradis terrestres tant est delitables li leus.<sup>80</sup>

More exceptionally, one reads of “mesonetes qui estoient petites et povres.”<sup>81</sup>

Although this description is not causal, it reflects a wider social reality, and it is doubtless a detail to which an aristocratic audience would have been sensitive. This world indeed contains other levels of society:

Un jor . . . avint que encontre Noel, que tuit gentil home doevent cort tenir, li rois Mars manda par tote Cornoaille a povres chevaliers et a riches qu’il n’i remeigne ne un ne autre qu’il ne viegne a cort . . . (CI.374.1).

One will notice that not all knights are “riches,” in fact some are indeed quite “povres,” reflecting a social reality in thirteenth-century France,

despite the common characteristics of their military calling and their mode of life, the group of nobles . . . was never in any sense a society of equals. Profound differences of wealth and power, and consequently of prestige, established a hierarchy between them. . . .<sup>82</sup>

<sup>80</sup> CII.550.18. See also CI.97.5; MIII.166.14; MVII.133.14.

<sup>81</sup> CI.44.3. See also CIII.901.2.

<sup>82</sup> Bloch, Feudal Society 332.

Similarly, “li povre com li riche, li conte et li baron, li chevalier et li bourgeois et li vilain” all attend the “feste en l’ille Saint Sanson.”<sup>83</sup> The occupations of these lower levels of the social hierarchy are also evoked: “A l’endemain auques matin, quant li vilain et li laboureur se commencierent a espandre par les cans por labourer. . . .”<sup>84</sup> The reader thus has a more balanced idea of the population of the world of the prose Tristan, although it must be noted that these references are very few in number, reflecting the relative interest of the Tristan world in such people. The Tristan remains ultimately a world of aristocrats, and as Auerbach says, “those outside this class cannot appear except as accessories.”<sup>85</sup> Such is the case for the “pastours” who carry Kahedin’s corpse to King Hoël (MI.164.21) or those whom Tristan stays with in the forest during his period of insanity (MI.184.1).

### C. Castles

The most important buildings in this landscape are castles, which is appropriate to the dominant social class of the text and of the audience. The approximate physical location of these castles seems to be important to the narrator, who makes sure that the reader has some idea of which kingdom they are in, although this notion is extremely vague by modern standards. By far the most important court is Arthur’s, situated in the city of Camaaloth, in the kingdom of Logres. Whether one is coming from “Petite Bretagne” or from “Cornouailles,” Logres can be reached only by sea.<sup>86</sup> The second most important castle is situated in Tintagel, in “Cornouailles,” but some of the action also takes place in Hoël’s “Petite Bretagne” and in Anguin’s “Irlande.” The descriptive technique for the castles is fairly simple, for it is cursory and makes use of phrases from a stock repertoire: “mout forz et mout bons,” “forz et riches et bien seanz

<sup>83</sup> MIII.66.4, 13. See also MIV.242.10; MV.6.10; MV.107.3.

<sup>84</sup> MIV.189.1. See also MV.107.3; MV.132.17.

<sup>85</sup> Auerbach 139.

de totes choses,” and so on.<sup>87</sup> Even Tintagel, Marc’s castle in which much of the action is played out, is described in similar terms, for it is “un chastel fort et bien seant qui seoit sor la marine.”<sup>88</sup> It must be added, however, that mentioning the proximity of the sea to Marc’s castle can be strategic in a world where sieges are the commonest form of warfare. In Chrétien de Troyes’ Yvain, the hero and his lion arrive at a castle whose description is somewhat more complete and where visualising it is not such a challenge:

S’ont tant erré qu’i viennent pres  
 D’un fort chastel a .i. baron  
 Qui clox estoit tout en viron  
 De mur espés et fort et haut.  
 Li chastiaus ne cremoit assaut  
 De mangonnel ne de perriere,  
 Qu’il estoit fors de grant maniere.<sup>89</sup>

These details are nevertheless provided for the same reason: it is a strategic stronghold.

In the prose Tristan, the authors do not provide further details: events are more important than descriptions, and it usually suffices to know that the castle, even Joyeuse Garde, is adorned with the features it is supposed to possess:

cil castiaus estoit biaux et riches et fors durement et aaisiés de toutes les  
 coses que boins castiaus devoit avoir en soi . . . (MV.1.24).

This does not mean to say that the description is not evocative, for one needs few details to evoke a picture in one’s imagination. The same amount of knowledge is assumed by the narrator when a knighting ceremony is related:

Cele nuit fu Galaad servis au miex que li frere porent, et au matin fist le  
 vallet cevalier, si comme a cel tans estoit acoustumé.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>86</sup> CIII.781.1 and MII.9.12.

<sup>87</sup> See respectively CI.36.9; CI.310.7; CII.450.2; CIII.775.1, and also MI.130.21; MII.34.1; MIII.19.8; MIII.48.17; CIII.690.5; MI.23.8; MI.73.4; MII.56.42; MIII.14.4; MIV.190.38; MIV.199.22; MV.3.24; MV.106.10; MVI.33.49; MVI.157.31; MVII.6.3; MVIII.167.13.

<sup>88</sup> CI.354.10. See also Louveserp’s description MV.1.24.

<sup>89</sup> Chrétien de Troyes, Yvain ou le chevalier au lion, Romans, ed. Michel Zink (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1994) lines 3768-74.

<sup>90</sup> MVI.123.1. There will be a more detailed discussion of the knighting ceremony in Chapter Three.

The castles all seem to be of one mould, and because of their “riche” nature, (in Old French, “riche” means powerful)<sup>91</sup> to be worthy of being owned only by the wealthiest section of the population. It is a testimony to the extent to which the prose Tristan is written for aristocrats that it should not need to spell out what adornments a castle is meant to have.<sup>92</sup>

The above descriptions are strikingly similar to several passages in Villehardouin’s Conquête de Constantinople. When Constantinople is set alight, “si furent mult dolent et mult en orent grant pitié, cum il virent ces haltes yglises et ces palais riches fondre et abaissier. . . .” Closer still to the language of the prose Tristan is this extract: “Ensi chevaucha li marchis arriere trosque a un chastel qui li Dimos ere appelez, mult bel et mult fort et mult riche.”<sup>93</sup> These similarities between a fictional romance and a non-fictional account of an historical event emphasise the relatively small amount of sensory reality expected by thirteenth-century readers. Another interesting but altogether different comparison can be made with the wealth of detail provided in the alliterative Arthurian romance Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, where the image of a castle is particularly striking:

Chalkwhyht chymnees þer ches he unnoȝe  
 Vpon bastel rouez, þat blenked ful quyte;  
 So mony pynakle payntet watz poudred ayquere,  
 Among þe castel carnelez clambred so þik,  
 þat pared out of papure purely hit semed.<sup>94</sup>

This stands out in strong contrast to the succinct descriptions of the Tristan, whose world manifestly attaches more importance to what is accessory to adventure and action.

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<sup>91</sup> Dictionnaire de l’ancienne langue Française, ed. Frédéric Godefroy (Paris: Bouillon, 1892), s. v., defines “richece” as *puissance, force*. A. J. Greimas defines “riche” as *considérable, puissant, fort, redoutable*, in his Dictionnaire de l’Ancien Français (Paris: Larousse, 1969).

<sup>92</sup> The reader is also expected to know what the castle looks like in MV.106.10.

<sup>93</sup> La Conquête de Constantinople 2: 203.8-11; 279.9-11.

The Tristan authors could, however, have given even less detail than they do, for the readers do at least get a sense of how rich, or how imposing a castle is. Indeed, the reader is told that the Castel Felon “mestraoit toute la tere environ bien une journee de toutes pars” (MIX.39.2), a detail not strictly necessary for the plot, despite the fact that it explains why it is so well defended:

Li castiaus seoit en une montaingne si haute et si fort que cil dedens  
n’eüssent garde de tout le monde, pour qu’il se vausissent tenir et eüssent  
viande (MIX.39.22).

Also, the narrator mentions a metal portcullis in order to show how the knights are trapped, and the impossibility of escape:

tantost com il furent laiens entré, on laissa d’amont chaoir une porte  
couleice de fer, et fist si grant noise au chaoir conme se tous li castiaus fust  
fondus.<sup>95</sup>

Likewise, a servant opens a “petit guichet” to speak to Tristan, who is looking for somewhere to sleep (MIII.167.6). It would seem, then, that it is usually the physical facts most relevant to the action that are mentioned. Similarly, it is because of the natural situation of Louveserp castle that a tournament is arranged to take place on the land surrounding it:

il fera crier un tournoiement devant un castel que on apeloit Louveserp,  
mout bel et mout rice et em plainne tere, et estoit sour la riviere de  
Hombre, et estoit cil castiaus pres de la Joieuse Garde a demie journee  
(MV.3.23).

Sometimes, though, the natural surroundings of castles do not contribute to the narrative, but simply serve to provide visual information to the reader. The “Chastiax de Plor” is, like every other castle, “mout fort et mout bien seanz,” but the reader is also aware that it “seoit en une ysle assez granz, et estoit encloz de totes parz de mer parfonde. Et assez pres de cele isle avoit assez d’autres isles beles et delitables et

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<sup>94</sup> Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, ed. J. R. R. Tolkien and E. V. Gordon, rev. Norman Davis (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967) lines 798-802.

<sup>95</sup> MIX.40.4. See also MI.46.15.



plaines de toz biens” (CII.450.2). In this case, although there is less detail than a modern reader might expect, the Tristan authors provide details that are not absolutely necessary to the narrative. Interestingly, this is also the case in Villehardouin’s Conquête de Constantinople, when the narrator describes the city of Constantinople itself:

Or poez savoir que mult esgarderent Costantinople cil qui onques mais ne l’avoient veüe; que il ne pooient mie cuidier que si riche ville peüst estre en tot le monde, cum il virent ces halz murs et ces riches tours, dont ele ere close tot entor a la reonde, et ces riches palais, et ces haltes yglises, dont il i avoit tant que nuls nel poïst croire se il ne le veïst a l’oil, et le lonc et le lé de la ville, que de totes les autres ere souveraine.<sup>96</sup>

This description, however, is more functional than the corresponding passages in the prose Tristan. Indeed, parts of Constantinople are later destroyed by fire, and this beauty before which men trembled is laid to waste. This passage, moreover, avoids description by saying “dont il i avoit tant que nuls nel poïst croire se il ne le veïst a l’oil.”<sup>97</sup> There is a very similar occurrence in the prose Tristan:

Et estoit chil castiaus trop bien assis et pres de bois et de rivieres, et estoit cil castiaus u plus biau lieu et u plus gentil que nus hom veïst onques a jor de sa vie . . . (MVII.68.14).

The readers are aware that the situation of the castle is beautiful, but get little sensory or visual information about this wonderful place.

The Grail castle in Corbenic is a category in itself, for it “is a place of mystery, and to some extent, of inconsistency.”<sup>98</sup> There are numerous allusions to its appearance, surroundings, and to what it protects, the Grail. The first description of the castle “evokes the image of a real medieval town.”<sup>99</sup>

Lanselos . . . vint par aventure sour le pont de Corbenyc et il le passa maintenant. Et . . . il vint a la maistre rue. . . . Lors cevauce toutes voies

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<sup>96</sup> La Conquête de Constantinople 128.1-9.

<sup>97</sup> La Conquête de Constantinople 128.7-8.

<sup>98</sup> Whitaker 89.

<sup>99</sup> Whitaker 89.

tant qu'il aprobe de la maistre tour, si le prise mout Lancelos, car ce est la plus bele et la plus rice que il onques veïst de son grant.<sup>100</sup>

The bridge, the main street, and the beautiful castle tower all contribute to the image, quite distinct from the progress of the narrative, of a traditional town in the high Middle Ages.<sup>101</sup> Moreover, when Lancelot wakes up in the room where the Grail has healed him from his madness, “li jours aparut biaus et clers par mi les fenestres verrines dont il i avoit assés. . . .” Through these glass windows one sees the garden: “Lors vont a l’uis del palais et l’uevrent et entrent ens et virent Lancelot qui iert apoiés a une des fenestres et regardoit encore el garding.”<sup>102</sup> These gratuitous items of information help to build a rich and peaceful image of Corbenic and its surroundings.

This picture is expanded in Lancelot’s last visit to the castle, for it is here that we discover the ultimate function of Corbenic as the house of the Holy Grail. The description of the interior is unusually detailed, and sacramental objects surrounding the Grail, as well as visual experiences, are the focus of the narrator’s attention:

Lancelos . . . vit devant lui une cambre u il avoit mout grant clarté, si tourne cele part pour veoir qu’il pora laiens trouver. Quant il fu entrés dedens, il ne trouva riens, fors deus cierges qui ardoient en la cambre. Il vint outre, de cambre en cambre, tant qu’il vint a l’entree de la cambre u li Sains Graaus estoit. Il ot laiens si grant clarté com s’il fust miedis. Il regarde la cambre et le voit si bele et si rice qu’il ne vit onques cose qui tant li pleüst. Enmi la cambre estoit la table d’argent et li Sains Vaissiaus, couvers mout ricement . . . (MIX.109.1).

The brightly burning candles and the shining silver stimulate one’s visual senses, just as the description in the next passage appeals to the reader’s senses of hearing and of smell:

Si oient pluseurs vois qui cantoient mout doucement, ne il n’est nus estrumens, ne harpe ne rote ne viele ne melodie ne gigue ne champenelles, ne nus estrumens qui sambler li peüst, que tous ne fust riens a oiir envers ches cans que cele vois cantoient. . . . Et lors li fu avis qu’il fu vraiment em Paradis. Et si vous di vraiment que, se toutes les espisces et les

<sup>100</sup> MVI.30.3. See also MIX.119.27.

<sup>101</sup> For another depiction of a medieval town, see MII.52.4.

<sup>102</sup> MVI.72.1, 18.

odours del monde fuissent amassé ensamble, que tout ne fust riens envers cele odour de cele cambre (MIX.122.2).

The narrator's attempt to describe the sound of the music, apart from providing the reader with a list of medieval instruments, stimulates the listener's sense of hearing, and the sweet odours solicit the olfactory senses. This amount of particularity is unusual for the authors of the prose Tristan, and may be due to this passage having been taken over wholesale from another romance, the post-Vulgate Queste.<sup>103</sup> Nevertheless, the authors of the prose Tristan adapted it to their romance, even though the whole text thereby became somewhat inconsistent. Essentially, then, "Corbenic exists to enshrine the Grail and to permit observances appropriate to it,"<sup>104</sup> and receives more attention than other castles, which in the prose Tristan provide the scene for the noble characters to live the leisurely life, as will now become apparent.

### III. The social world of the prose Tristan

#### A. The basics

The prose Tristan castles are the scene for their inhabitants, mainly the privileged class, to live out their lives. Fundamentally, they are places in which the court enjoy food, sleep, and civilised pastimes. Meals are described in very general terms:

les tables furent mises tout maintenant, car li mengiers estoit tous apareillés et n'atendoit on fors que la venue du signeur. Quant il furent assis as tables, saciés k'il furent bien servi. Li sires de laiens servi du premier mes, et puis s'asist a mengier avoec Dynadant . . . (MV.88.11).

The reader is not aware of what the "mes" consists of, but rather of the social customs involved in a host-to-guest relationship. This is notable in other such passages:

quant les tables furent mises a chelui soir, car bien estoit tans de mengier, li rois le fait mengier avoec lui et a s'esquiele meïsmes pour moustrer lui greigneur samblant d'amour et d'onour (MIII.92.26).

<sup>103</sup> Philippe Ménard, introduction, Le Roman de Tristan en prose 9: 34.

<sup>104</sup> Whitaker 90.

The emphasis is on the social aspects rather than on the gastronomic elements of the repast, and providing a meal for a guest is to bestow an honour upon him or her.

Generally speaking, references to meals are factual and brief; it is when and where they are taken, or with whom, that is of interest.<sup>105</sup>

Castles are places in which the court lives, and therefore sleeps. Beds are prepared for the guests by squires:

li esquier estoient laiens, ki faisoient les lis de lour signeurs, car il en estoit bien tans pour ce k'il estoit auques tart et grant piece de la nuit estoit ja alee.<sup>106</sup>

Most of the references to sleeping arrangements are functional, either because they show the respect of the host to his guest, or because they have a strategic function.

The night before the knights set off on the Grail Quest, Arthur invites Galaad to use his own bed, clearly a mark of great honour:

li rois prist Galaad et l'en mena en sa cambre et le fist coucier en son lit meïsmes u il seut jesir, pour hounour et pour hautece de lui.<sup>107</sup>

The sleeping arrangements in the next passage are strategic, for they allow Guenièvre to discover Lancelot sleeping in her rival's bed, and therefore to banish him from court:

La cambre u la roïne gisoit estoit a merveilles grans, si que la fille le roi Pellés i gisoit entre li et ses damoiseles a une part, et la roïne meïsmes d'autre part. Et cele nuit avoit osté la roïne ses damoiseles d'entour li, qu'eles ne s'aperceüssent de la venue Lanselot. Ce fu après mie nuit que Lanselos se conmencha a plaindre tout en dormant, si conme il avient maintes fois que gens se plaignent en dormant. Et la roïne, qui ne dormoit pas, l'oï tout maintenant . . . (MVI.51.1).

This extract also shows how little privacy, according to modern expectations, people in castles enjoyed.<sup>108</sup> Guenièvre's ladies-in-waiting usually sleep in the same room as her, and she has to order them out in order to get some privacy with her lover.

<sup>105</sup> See MII.102.4; MII.135.16; MV.255.1.

<sup>106</sup> MII.61.9. See also MIX.66.68.

<sup>107</sup> MVI.110.37. See also MIII.93.23.

Helayne does not seem to mind her hostess being in the bed next to her while she is with Lancelot. Iseut similarly lacks privacy by current standards:

Et quant ele vit Brangain venir et Tristan après . . . si les lesse venir avant;  
et ele avoit ja pieça la chambre voidiee qu'il n'i avoit dame ne  
demoiselle . . . (CII.541.8).

Clearly, even when Iseut thinks she has successfully hidden Tristan, he is discovered by Bessille. Likewise, it is considered private when Iseut is just with Brangain and another handmaid: "Celui jour après disner se seoit la roïne Yseut en sa cambre mout priveement ne n'avoit avoec li fors Brangien tant seulement et une autre damoisele" (MI.153.3).

#### B. Entertainment

Castles are also places for the aristocracy to enjoy their leisure. On occasion the reader will witness a character playing "eschés,"<sup>109</sup> or simply sitting on "une keutepointe de cendal" (MVI.39.22) or "samit" (MVII.166.4) or "sour un drap de soie bel et riche"<sup>110</sup> to "parler et a soulagier ensamble."<sup>111</sup> Since both "cendal" and "samit" are materials of woven silk, their presence serves to remind the audience of the distinctive wealth enjoyed by most of the characters. Listening to music constitutes another castle pastime, whether in private or in public. Iseut is privately entertained by a harp player in her chamber. She asks him to play:

"Or t'asié ici devant moi, si pren ceste harpe et l'acorde a ta volenté selonc le cant de tes vers." Quant li harperres entent le comandement de sa dame . . . si le commence a atemper selonc ce k'il savoit k'il couvenoit au cant k'il voloit dire. Et quant il l'a bien atempree, il commence son cant . . . (MI.153.27).

<sup>108</sup> See also MII.13.26; MII.103.1.

<sup>109</sup> CI.263.3. See also CII.521.1; CII.609.29.

<sup>110</sup> MIII.168.8. See also MV.105.9.

<sup>111</sup> MVII.166.4. See also CIII.723.11.

This reflects the practice of real life in which the aristocracy enjoyed the pleasures of recitals in their gatherings.<sup>112</sup> When William Marshal was on his deathbed and unable to sing himself, one of his last wishes was to hear his daughters sing.<sup>113</sup>

Listening to music is also a public entertainment for the court. During the celebrations of victory against the Saxons at Tintagel, Marc recognises that the harp player who has just arrived at court is from Logres, and says to him:

“Je voi bien que tu es harperes, harpe nous au mieus que tu sés. . . .” Lors prent sa harpe tout maintenant et le commence a acorder les cordes desus a cele desous, com chil ki bien le savoit faire, car trop en estoit outrement boins maistres. Et quant il les ot bien acordees, cil de laiens se comenchent tout a taire por oïr k’il vaura dire (MIV.243.15).

This scene demonstrates the importance of entertainment at court. Castle gardens are the scene for women to enjoy making music together: “Si commencierent a juer et a caroler et a canter li une et li autre par mi le gardin ausi conme damoiseles font maintes fois” (MVI.71.7). Moreover, one can deduce that the courtiers are well accustomed to listening to music, as shown by the audience falling silent between the tuning up of the harp and the beginning of the performance. Moreover, the court is poised to listen to both the melody and the words. The picture of the tuning technique is equally eloquent, quite unlike some other descriptions in the text, thus demonstrating the importance the narrator attaches to the aristocratic way of life.

Descriptions of clothing also feature in the castle setting; while they are a little less succinct than descriptions of meals, they give the audience only a vague idea of their visual and sensory qualities. Brun le Noir, otherwise referred to as the “vallez a la Cote Mautailleie,” comes to Arthur’s court to ask him to knight him:

Li vallez estoit bien tailliez et chauciez a la guise de sa terre, mes de totes robes il n’avoit que sa chemise et sa cote, qui estoit de un vert samit ovree

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<sup>112</sup> Bloch, *Feudal Society* 308.

<sup>113</sup> Sidney Painter, *William Marshal: Knight-Errant, Baron and Regent of England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1933) 286.

a or. Mes ele estoit si detailliee et detranchiee que a poines en i avoit il la moitié de tele come ele avoit esté premierement (CII.637.4).

The knight's nickname actually refers to his apparel, and the description of his clothing, although it explains his name, is more detailed than it need be for the sake of the narrative. The narrator might be content not to dwell too long on this type of information, but he does give the reader a sufficient amount to show that although the coat is badly torn, it is made of green silk woven with gold, an external sign of wealth which attracts the eye of Arthur, and which provides Brun with a passport to the court.

Other clothing descriptions demonstrate the importance placed on dress as a visible sign of wealth. The audience is told that "Yselt se departi d'Yrlande si bien garnie de robe et de biax joiax et de biax deduiz que bien paroit qu'ele venist de riche leu."<sup>114</sup> Likewise, one is aware of "mainz biax chevaliers vestuz de dras de soie et apareilliez cointement" (CI.418.11). Slightly more detailed are the following descriptions: "il faisoit chaut a merveilles, si que Tristanz n'avoit vestu que une cote de soie legiere, et Yselt estoit vestue d'un vert samit" (CII.445.3). The lightness of the protagonists' clothes gives the reader a sensory experience of the warmth of the air. Likewise, the following extract, because it is unusual, stresses the favourable impression the knight makes upon his onlookers with the richness of the white ermine: "Lors fait le cevalier tout desarmer et remest en une cote de cendal vermeil qu'i portoit sour ses espaulles, et par dedens estoit fourrés d'une blanche hermine."<sup>115</sup> Again, Villehardouin's Conquête de Constantinople provides a good comparison. At the crowning of Alexis IV on 1 August 1203,

La troverent l'emperor Sursac, si richement vestu, et l'empererix sa fame de joste lui, qui ere mult bele dame, suer le roi de Ongrie. Des autres hauz

<sup>114</sup> CI.443.3. See also MI.88.1; MV.225.13.

<sup>115</sup> MVI.101.27. See also MV.169.3; MVI.39.15; MVI.66.37; MVII.126.30; MIX.62.2.

homes et des haltes dames i avoit tant que on n'i pooit son pié torner, si richement acesmees que eles ne pooient plus.<sup>116</sup>

The fact that the “dame” is the sister of the Hungarian king is gratuitous information, even if it is not physical. There is an equal amount (or lack) of detail in the prose Tristan, when, at a particular “feste,” every lady is “apareillie et achesmee au miex qu’eles onques pueent. Li rois March s’en vient a la feste, sa couroune d’or en son chief, vestus de robe roiall si richement que ce est une merveille du veoir.”<sup>117</sup> Marc is wearing rich and royal robes, yet the colour and even the material are details left to the reader’s imagination, as they are in Villehardouin’s chronicle. This again can be contrasted with the exhaustive description of Gawain’s (and even his horse’s) apparel in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight:

Dubbed in a dublet of a dere tars,  
 And syþen a crafty capados, closed aloft,  
 þat wyth a bryȝt blaunner was bounden withinne.  
 þenne set þay þe sabatounz vpon þe segge fotez,  
 His legez lapped in stel with luflych greuez,  
 With polaynez piched þerto, policed ful clene,  
 Aboute his knez knaged wyth knotez of golde. . . .<sup>118</sup>

This passage shows how little interest the text of the Tristan displays for details that are not accessory to showing a knight living his knightly life.

### C. Hunting

Castles are places from which the knights go hunting, and the terms are, like those describing castles, from a relatively small and fixed repertoire: “A l’endemain quant il ajorne, li rois Mars s’en vet chacier a grant compaignie de barons et de chevaliers.”<sup>119</sup>

This reflects the reality of medieval times when, as Bloch shows, hunting was one of the main pastimes of the aristocracy, although it was not merely a sport, but a

<sup>116</sup> La Conquête de Constantinople 185.5-11.

<sup>117</sup> MIII.67.3. See also MIII.9.22; MIII.91.15.

<sup>118</sup> Sir Gawain and the Green Knight lines 571-77.

<sup>119</sup> CIII.881.1. See also CI.86.8; CI.257.1; MI.183.2; MIII.49.1; MIV.164.14; MV.8.4.



necessity, as there were still wild beasts, and much venison was consumed because the cattle could be inadequately fed, considerations not provided in our romance.<sup>120</sup>

Although the narrator does not elaborate on the hunts, he does on one occasion mention what women do while the men go hunting:

Celui jour orent il sans doute boine aventure de cachier et demourerent en la forest dusc'après eure de nonne, k'il n'entendirent point au mengier pour le grant deduit k'il avoient de la cache ki mout leur plaisoit a maintenir. Après eure de nonne, quant il conmenchierent a laissier la cache, il s'en retournerent, sain et haitié et joious durement, et disoient entr'aus que piecha mais n'avoient eüe une plus bele journee de cachier que cheste lour avoit hui esté (MIII.94.7).

It is not usually necessary for the audience to know that the hunters skip a meal, but here they are clearly too busy enjoying themselves to pay attention to their stomachs, a point the narrator stresses in his description.

Whilst their husbands and companions are hunting, the women simply seem to enjoy the pleasures of the forest. As Chelinde's maid tells Sador: "nos somes a la roïne Chelinde de Cornoaille, qui ci vendra ja mangier après le deduit et l'esbatement de la forest." Likewise, while Marc is hunting in Norholt, "La roïne Yselt a grant compaignie de dames et de demoiseles fu alee après por soi esbatre par le comandement dou roi Marc."<sup>121</sup> Tristan's sojourn with Iseut at Joyeuse Garde provides the fullest account of how a noble knight passes the hours:

Onques mais a nul jor de sa vie il n'ot si boin tans, si plaisant ne si delitable com il a orendroit, ce li est avis, car il va tous les jours en cache, ore a bracés, ore as levriers. Il a tout le deduit du bois, et il est si boins cachierres et si boins maistres de la cace que on ne trovast pas a celui point som pareil en tout le roiaume de Logres. Le jour est tout adés en la forest et se deduit et se soulage; au soir, quant il doit anuitier, il repaire vers son ostel et trueve illuec madame Yseut, ki mout est lie et joieuse de grant maniere totes les fois qu'ele le voit (MV.8.4).

Here again, the description centres around the activities of a leisurely aristocratic knight, hence the relative amount of detail. It may be somewhat limited for a modern

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<sup>120</sup> Bloch, *Feudal Society* 303.

reader, but it is sufficient for an upper-class audience to know how Tristan occupies his days.

#### D. Castles as refuges

Castles are, like other types of dwellings, refuges for healing. Tristan is welcomed to Anguin's palace in Ireland, where Iseut heals his wounds:

Li rois . . . comande a cex de leanz qu'il aillent querre la aval un chevalier deshetié qui gist en la nacele, et l'aportent en une chambre, et le metent leanz por reposer. . . . Et li rois mande maintenant por Yselt, sa fille. Et quant el est venue, il li prie que prengne garde del chevalier estrange, qui trop est deshetiez, et tant en face qu'il en garisse tost (CI.313.1).

Corbenic is the best example of this type:

Si trouva assés celui jour qui assés maus li fist, et tant qu'il ne pot mais souffrir l'anui qu'il li faisoient, ains lour tourna le dos et s'enfui jusques a la maistre forteresce du castel, si entra dedens, comme cil qui ne trouva qui l'entree li deveast, car mout estoient li sergant courtois et deboinaire durement (MVI.70.15).

Though Lancelot does not know it, Corbenic is a place to seek refuge in, not only from physical wounds, but ultimately, from madness, for it is there that he is restored to sanity. This realistic depiction of town life must have allowed the original audience to feel a certain proximity to this fictional world, a world different to theirs in many ways, but also strangely similar.

It has been said that:

Description is related to narration in literature much as decoration is related to structure in architecture; it is impossible entirely to separate one from the other. There is little description which does not add to narrative, and few words in the baldest narration which have no pictorial content.

In the prose Tristan as in Malory's Morte, as will become apparent,

Most of what we see, hear, and so forth in the story comes from sentences which function primarily by forwarding the action.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> CI.87.7 and CII.493.2.

<sup>122</sup> P. J. C. Field, Romance and Chronicle: A Study of Malory's Prose Style (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1971) 83.

In keeping with the importance of chivalric life in the prose Tristan, the authors provide little sense of the physical world which is not as aesthetically coherent as that portrayed by Chrétien's Yvain, for instance. The prose Tristan is nevertheless largely coherent as a narrative of action and as a portrayal of leisurely aristocratic life. The amount of visualisation is functional, and it is as much as an upper-class thirteenth-century audience would need for this kind of narrative. Details are not so scarce as to lead one to believe that nothing is found in the narrative "which is not either accessory or preparatory to an adventure,"<sup>123</sup> but the few details one does have contribute to the action and help to depict the mores and ideals of feudal knighthood, with people holding sparrow-hawks,<sup>124</sup> knights being welcomed and provided with comfortable clothes,<sup>125</sup> the provision of supper and a bed, all of which belong to the courtly behaviour and customs of the aristocratic class, without the worries of feudal rivalry, neighbourly disputes, administrative or financial problems that went with that life. These elements of simplification and idealisation might lead one to believe that this world is one of wish-fulfilment for the aristocratic listeners of the prose Tristan, but, as we will see, many die unjustly and painfully, making the world of this text one of problems relating to the knightly life.

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<sup>123</sup> Auerbach 136.

<sup>124</sup> MVI.77.25; MVII.120.12; MIX.39.6.

<sup>125</sup> MVI.101.27 and see above.

## Chapter Two: The Humans Beings of the Tristan en prose

Having examined the physical and social reality of the world of the prose Tristan, I shall now take a closer look at the humans who inhabit this world. The list of characters, named and unnamed, which one can establish from the “Index des noms propres” in R. L. Curtis’s and Philippe Ménard’s editions is phenomenal: 534 named and anonymous characters are mentioned as part of the action, which testifies to the extensive cast of the Tristan.<sup>126</sup> It includes 188 unnamed characters, without counting groups of people whose numbers are not provided, so as to emphasise their nature as groups: these form the background to the action, allowing the aristocratic class to live in a world which nevertheless admits the existence of other social classes. The named characters, about 346 in all, have very unequal roles, and most of them are reduced to the functional state of accompanying one of the more major characters for a moment in the narrative, before dropping out of the story as easily as they entered it. Because the anonymous characters appear to be more straightforward, it seems logical to begin by examining representative examples of them, looking at the way they are used and described by the narrator.

### I. Nameless people

#### A. Groups of people

There are two categories of unnamed characters, the first containing groups of people, the second comprising unnamed individuals, such as knights, damsels and squires.

Some groups of people are identified by their belonging to a given religion or their national or regional origins, in which case they are referred to in the plural. There are

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<sup>126</sup> This number is approximate because there are many characters with identical names which makes it difficult to distinguish between them.

also groups of people doing the same work, such as sailors or shepherds; finally there are groups of knights, ladies or damsels who act together.

### 1. People from the same region, country or religion

The group of people most often mentioned are the “chevaliers de Cornouaille.” They have a poor reputation that follows them throughout the prose *Tristan*, which makes all knights of Cornouailles “mauvés,” “coart” and “vils.”<sup>127</sup> The story bears out these negative opinions not only through the individual character of Marc,<sup>128</sup> but also through the people of Cornouailles as a group. On one occasion, Marc is unable to find a volunteer to take up the jousting challenge offered by an anonymous knight, and he is rightly put out, “pour ce que ja li avoit esté raconté par plusieurs fois que trop durement s’aloient gabant li chevalier estrange de cieus de Cornuaille quant il se departoient de la maison le roi Marc sans joustre trouver.”<sup>129</sup> At one point, the reputation of the people of Cornouailles is re-established by Lancelot, who, wanting to honour Tristan’s prowess and bravery, decides to carry the Cornish shield, which Arthur’s court also agree to do for a time. Thus the knights of Cornouailles “ne furent onques puis si durement gabé ne escarni com il estoient devant, et tout ce avint pour l’amour de monsigneur Tristan” (MII.59.17). It is not long before they are once again the target of the most unpleasant remarks: being a knight from Cornouailles means that one cannot have “bonté ne valour ne courtoisie ne nul bien que cevaliers ait.” They are all “loing de toute hounour!” (MII.61.50)

The “Cornualois” also appear as a nation, and they react as a people at the news of Tristan’s prowess in killing the giant Taulas de la Montagne: “Mout tinrent sans faille li Cornualois grant parlement de ceste aventure” (MI.182.14). Later the

<sup>127</sup> CI.383.3; CI.386.12. See also MII.16.45; MII.18.66; MIII.69.22.

<sup>128</sup> See for instance MIV.52.10; MIV.62.1; MIX.20.38.

<sup>129</sup> MIII.69.19. See also MIV.191.10.

“Cornualois” are condemned as a group by the narrator for their ingratitude towards Tristan:

Il ne lour souvient des ore mais du servage dont il les delivra. Il ont bien mis monsigneur Tristran de tout ariere dos, autretant lour caut mais de sa mort com de sa vie (MIII.67.26).

Apart from these two examples, the audience does not see the Cornish people acting or thinking as a nation. Nor does one often hear of the Bretons, mentioned in connection with a lay they make in honour of Tristan (CII.616.28).

The Saxons also enjoy some attention as a group. They are first introduced when Helyant, “uns grans prinches de Saysoigne,” tries to invade Cornouailles while Tristan is not there to defend it (MIV.187.14). They are always referred to in the plural: only their leader is individualised. The Saxons are forced to surrender when Tristan defeats Helyant (MIV.233-240). Much later in the text, they reappear, this time invading Arthur’s kingdom of Logres on the advice of King Marc (MIX.1.39). At this point, the Saxons are very close to victory, but this is eventually thwarted by the arrival of Galaad, who defeats the enemy single-handed.

The pagans, classified both by region and by religion, are also mentioned as an entity. At the start of the text they occupy Cornouailles, which is thus associated with paganism, as is the kingdom of Leonois. When Sador, a Christian, arrives in Cornouailles, “il fu mout dolenz de ceste novele, por ce qu’il savoit bien que il n’i avoit se paiens non.”<sup>130</sup> It is not long before Saint Augustin arrives, when Cornouailles is “tornee . . . a la loi crestiene” (CI.180.1). At the same time as Cornouailles and Leonois are converted, “fu Illande [Ireland] convertie a la loi Nostre Seignor par Joseph d’Abaremathie, que Nostres Sires avoit envoieé en la Grant Bretagne por la terre convertir et puepler de bones genz . . .” (CI.180.6). Despite this country-wide

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<sup>130</sup> CI.49.13; CI.165.7.

conversion, the pagans reappear in the episode of the Castel Felon, which is inhabited by “sarradins.” Indeed, when Galaad, Hector and Meraugis “trespassoient de rue en rue, il oïrent partout parler sarrazzinois.” Galaad quite clearly shows he considers the pagans as an alien people: “Par foi . . . cist ne sont mie de nos gens” (MIX.40.12).

This attitude reflects what in actual fact might have been the reaction of a thirteenth-century Christian audience, for, as Le Goff explains,

La tendance de la Chrétienté à la clôture apparaît bien dans son comportement avec les païens. . . . Les conciles du XII<sup>e</sup> et du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle rappellent l’interdiction pour les chrétiens de servir comme esclaves ou domestiques les Juifs et les Sarrazins.<sup>131</sup>

Later, when the tower of the Castel Felon is miraculously destroyed, Arthur tries to rebuild it several times, but in vain: each time the construction nears completion, it is destroyed by supernatural forces. When the pagans hear of this, they all decide to convert to Christianity:

Quant il virent la merveille de la tour, cil qui mescreans estoient crurent en la foi de Sainte Eglise et se firent baaptisier, et dirent que voirement avoit Nostres Sires espadue sa vengeance et que bien devoit estre apelés Sires del monde Cil ki teus merveilles savoit faire (MIX.43.27).

The only other religious or racial group mentioned in the prose Tristan is the Jews, but they are only ever mentioned as having crucified Jesus.<sup>132</sup>

## 2. People with the same occupation

Although the Tristan treats mainly of the life of a single class, it does occasionally feature other social groups, such as sailors, fishermen, or shepherds, when these are accessory to the knightly cast. The “marinier” work as a group, sailing boats for knights. They are not seen individually, but as an entity, as when, having been swept against a rock, they all cry out together in a chorus for help (CII.584.4). When only one sailor survives out of the group, though, he is necessarily set apart from the rest.

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<sup>131</sup> Le Goff, Civilisation 196.

He and Lamorat are saved by another group acting together, the “pescheor.” These too are accessory to the actions of knights, and all go together to help the survivors of the sinking boat: “Et por eus secorre en aucune maniere s’il poissent, il saillirent erramment en lor nacele et comencerent a nagier au plus forment qu’il porent cele part ou il avoient oï le cri” (CII.584.12). Together, they bury the sailor who does not survive his rescue; together, with one voice, they ask Lamorat how he feels, and explain to a squire how they delivered Lamorat; together, they go fishing, return home at the end of the day and take their evening meal.<sup>133</sup> Apart from providing something of an insight into the life of the fishermen—for the narrator explains that when the accident occurred, they were fishing, “come cil qui estoient acostumé de sostenir lor vies de ce qu’il prenoient en mer” (CII.584.8)—the references to these fishermen are notable for showing them acting as one. Thus although this episode gives a minimum of information about the lives of these people, it is really there to provide what Auerbach calls “a colorful setting for the life of the knight.”<sup>134</sup>

Shepherds are another group defined by the same occupation. Here, however, one shepherd, “ki plus estoit emparlés que li autre” (MII.39.10), stands out against a group of shepherds, “li un viel et li autre jovene” (MII.39.5), to answer the question Tristan has put to them. He is an exception, though, as on a later occasion, another group of “pastours” speak as one when questioned by Persidés (MII.192.40). Their main function in the text, as is the case for these groups lower down on the social scale, is to provide questing knights with directions in the forest. They are also seen tormenting Tristan when he is out of his senses in the forest: they give him bread, but “il li vendoient mout cierement aucune fois, car il l’aloient batant et ferant si asprement que mout estoit grant merveille comment il le souffroit” (MI.168.16). They are later

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<sup>132</sup> CI.159.16; MIX.123.1.



referred to by the narrator as “niche et fol, si conme vilain de bois doivent estre” (MI.169.35). This underlines the attitude of the narrator, and presumably of the thirteenth-century aristocratic listener, towards the shepherds, and by extension the lower social classes as a whole. It is, moreover, representative of much literature of knightly inspiration “to see only a uniform population of ‘rustics’ or ‘villeins,’” whereas in fact, “this vast multitude was deeply divided by various social distinctions,” a reality which does not feature in our text.<sup>135</sup> Finally, the passage points up the narrator’s method of generalising about groups that are not aristocratic as opposed to providing a set of characteristics for an individual.

### 3. Groups of knights

Groups of knights acting together also make an appearance in the prose Tristan. They are mentioned as factions in tournaments, as are “li cevalier de Norgales” at the tournament of the “castel as Puceles” (MII.124.22), or the knights of the “lingnage le roi Ban” at the tournament of “Louveserp” (MV.210.6). These factions act as a cohesive group and the knights among them are not individualised as are the heroes of the text. Groups of knights also appear in the forest, laying ambush to an adversary, or escorting their lord. Lancelot finds himself ambushed by “.XII. cevaliers de Norgales” but succeeds in killing four and unhorsing the rest.<sup>136</sup> Marc is accompanied by six of his knights in the forest who “s’estoient mis avoec lui pour lui garder et garandir a lour pooir . . .” (MIX.24.6). If addressed, they answer with one voice. They belong to the décor, but are nevertheless necessary, for they provide an idea of what it is knights do in the world of the prose Tristan. There is a sense that these factions of knights fulfil several roles which are, again, accessory to the actions of the knightly protagonists:

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<sup>133</sup> CII.585.14; CII.585.17; CII.604.11; CII.588.1.

<sup>134</sup> Auerbach 132.

<sup>135</sup> Bloch, Feudal Society 352.

they are there to underline the prowess of one knight who is usually their adversary, or they act as retainers to a lord; and in either case the individuality of the single knight is set off by the number making up the group.

The hierarchy is also composed of the “seignor de Cornoaille,” who are normally treated as an entity. Their interventions provide some insight into the administrative life of a court, but their function is usually accessory to the action. They intercede in favour of Iseut, whose adultery with Tristan has been uncovered, contrasting with Marc who wants to have the lovers burned alive, although his barons find this method too “cruelle” (CII.545.12). Instead they propose that Iseut be sent to a leper colony (CII.545.14). As for Tristan, they have to agree with Marc’s decision to have him burned at the stake, despite their collective feelings:

por ce qu’il voient que li rois le veus; et si en i avoit a grant planté qui mieuz vosissent que l’en pardonast a Tristan celi mesfait que il moreüst, car bien sevent que Cornoaille est plus honoree par li que par toz ces qui i sont (CII.545.20).

Despite being treated as a group, the barons usually disagree with Marc, having at heart the good of the country and its reputation. They may speak with one voice, in what a modern reader might consider an unnatural way, but this is sufficient for the purpose they serve, which is manifestly to characterise Marc as a king whose personal jealousy comes before the good of his kingdom.<sup>137</sup> This depiction of the barons is consistent throughout the prose Tristan, for when Cornouailles is invaded by the Saxons, it is they who advise Marc to call back Tristan. Marc needs some persuading, but in the end accepts their justifications as being right for the sake of Cornouailles (MIV.191.26). Again, they speak all with one sensible voice, and not only play a role in the action but also point up Marc’s “orgueil.” The presence of these barons reflects

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<sup>136</sup> MII.115.16. See also MIX.14.7; MIX.30.6; MIX.98.14.

the real thirteenth-century hierarchy in which one could distinguish various degrees of dignity, starting with the vavasour at the lower end of the scale (a section of the population which features in the prose Tristan, as we will see), and finishing with the baron when no further step separated him from the king or territorial prince to whom he paid homage directly.<sup>138</sup>

#### 4. Spectators

Spectators in groups belong to the tournament scene, which is an important part of the leisured knightly life in the prose Tristan, and they contribute to the action, for it is frequently through their eyes that the battles are described and commented upon:

li autre chevalier ki armes ne portoient pas, ains estoient avoec les dames as fenestres des loges et avoient le soir devant veü son escu et coment il l'avoit bien fait, voient son escu venir, il conmenchierent tout a dire a haute vois: "Veés chi venir le boin cevalier!" (MII.148.37)

It is often through the collective voice of the spectators that admiration for a particular knight is expressed.

#### 5. Groups of women

Other groups include the ladies who drink from the magical horn supposed to determine whether a woman is loyal to her husband: "Totes celes qui leanz estoient, qui bien estoient cent ou plus, s'essaierent totes au cor, mes il n'en it ot que quatre qui boire i poïssent sanz espandre le vin sor eles" (CII.531.6). Unlike the other groups examined above, these women are denied speech as a group, and Marc is quick to generalise: he says of those who fail the test that they are "deleax et mauveses, et devoient estre destruites par droit . . ." (CII.531.10). It is difficult to tell what the original audience would have made of this episode, but it is likely that it would have

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<sup>137</sup> This, according to Edward D. Kennedy, is the salient mark of the tyrant, "who lives for his bonum privatum instead of the bonum commune." See his "Malory's King Mark and King Arthur," Medieval Studies 37 (1975): 199.

<sup>138</sup> Bloch, Feudal Society 333.

shared the more sensible view taken by the barons: they love their wives too much, and contradict their king: “sire, vos feroiz destruire ce que vos voudroiz, mes que que vos facez de la roïne qui vostre est, nos retendrons nos moilliers” (CII.531.14). This is the more natural reaction, which would be understood as readily by a modern audience as by a thirteenth-century one. Moreover, if the reader has no other guidance, surely it is possible to say first that the authors would hardly have expected their readers to agree with Marc when he himself disagreed with all the other characters in an episode, and secondly, that the enormous success of the book suggests the authors estimated their readers’ tastes rightly.

Galaad delivers two hundred damsels at the Castel Felon, “c’on faisoit ouvrer d’or et de soie, et en i avoit de mout gentiex et de haut langage” (MIX.42.3). They act as one (MIX.43.6), as do the twelve damsels delivered by Galaad from Corbenic. As their penitence comes to an end, they appear before Galaad “si povrement vestues que c’estoit merveille, et plouroient mout tenrement . . .” (MIX.121.10). They have no individuality, even as a group: they are there as proof of yet one more of the miracles Galaad accomplishes. In Chrétien’s Yvain, the analogous passage depicting the workroom of the three hundred women in the “Chastel de Pesme Avanture”<sup>139</sup> is richer and more coloured, giving the world of Yvain a more realistic flavour:

Del fil d’or et de soie ovroient  
 Chascune au mix qu’ele savoit.  
 Mes tel poverté y avoit  
 Que delïees es deschaintes  
 En y ot de poverté maintes;  
 Et les mameles et les keutes  
 Paroient par leur cotes routes,  
 Et les chemises as cols sales.  
 Les cols grellles et les vis pales  
 De fain et des mesaise avoient.<sup>140</sup>

<sup>139</sup> Chrétien de Troyes, Yvain line 5107.

<sup>140</sup> Yvain line 5192.

This vivid picture no doubt sets off Yvain as the long-awaited deliverer of such suffering, but it also conjures up a more visually complete image than what is provided by the authors of the prose Tristan, which enjoys the amount of description necessary for the reader to imagine the scene and to show Galaad up as the saviour.

To modern readers, the most unexpected feature of the treatment of groups of characters is undoubtedly the chorus speech. Beyond the artificiality of this mode of expression, groups speaking collectively have another impact on the readers. This technique may indeed re-create the thirteenth-century view of the varying importance of these different groups relative to the people they are talking to: the entities that speak chorally are generally socially inferior to the individual they are addressing. This works even at the level of King Arthur's court, where "li preudomme de la maison le roi Artu" express themselves collectively to King Arthur (MIII.273.12). A similar distinction on "considérations hiérarchiques" in the Tristan has been made by Christine Ferlampin, who shows that in the case of a dialogue between a group and an individual, if the individual is socially or morally above the group, the group expresses itself collectively to the individual.<sup>141</sup> Thus Lancelot's squires speak to their master chorally, and the shepherds address Marc in the same way.<sup>142</sup> When the individual is not superior, a member of the group comes forward and speaks individually. Thus when Tristan is mad, and therefore devoid of signs of moral or social superiority over the shepherds, one of them detaches himself from the group and speaks to Tristan on an individual basis (MI.179.10).

Groups speaking collectively, or "conmunament" (MI.30.44), will strike the modern readers as artificial, accustomed as they are to novels imitating real speech, and to a naturalistic presentation of characters describing psychological differences

between them, thus emphasising their individuality.<sup>143</sup> This is not to say that the thirteenth-century authors were not aware of them. The impulse, however, behind choral speaking, is to represent a group of people expressing itself in a unified way. Just as castles are usually all of one mould in the prose Tristan, so also is it with groups of people. The reactions of groups in a real-life situation are presented in the same formalised way as the soliloquy was formalised in Renaissance theatre. Moreover, the Tristan appears to devote more interest to representing what links rather than divides these people, highlighting the fact that this world is one where belonging is important. This reflects the real desire for homogeneity of the thirteenth-century French knightly class, who, to this intent, attached an enormous importance to lineage, an issue which will be addressed in Chapter Three. This applies not only to social groups and nationalities in the Tristan, but also to the knightly class, which is referred to as an order (MVI.122.5), or ordo.<sup>144</sup> From this relative lack of individuality it is possible to see in our romance a representation of a variety of actions belonging to a variety of groups for the contemplation of the readers, as will become apparent in the next chapter.

#### B. Unnamed individuals

Knights, damsels, ladies, squires, and hermits are the unnamed individuals who appear in the prose Tristan. Despite being anonymous, they do enjoy a little more individuality than the groups examined above. Their roles are extremely important in the narrative: typically they act as threads weaving between the more important characters of the text, thus functioning primarily as plot devices.

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<sup>141</sup> Christine Ferlampin, "Les dialogues dans le Tristan en prose," Nouvelles recherches sur le Tristan en prose, ed. Jean Dufournet (Genève: Slatkine, 1990) 97-98.

<sup>142</sup> MI.7.13; MI.185.9.

<sup>143</sup> For other groups speaking chorally, see also MI.149.4; MI.29.4; MI.30.44; MI.30.7; MI.31.1; MI.36.1.

## 1. Knights

Though unnamed knights do not enjoy the privilege of individuality through name, they are more individualised than knights in groups. They fulfil various functions in the text and, like damsels, provide hospitality and act as messengers and informers. They are accessory to the action and also provide opportunities for the heroes to show their prowess and enter into discussions about topics of importance to chivalry in the prose Tristan, allowing the heroes to air their views on these subjects, which also gives the narrator another opportunity to show the knightly way of life.

As a general rule, knights are given more description than are damsels, perhaps because of their higher social position. Hospitable knights are often aged and retired:

Li chevaliers estoit saiges durement, et estoit vieuz hom, et estoit a merveilles envoisiez selonc le grant aaige qu'il avoit. Et avoit esté bons chevaliers preuz et hardiz tant com il avoit eü pooir de porter armes, mes ores por ce que veillece le tenoit en son dongier avoit il lessié mout d'envoiseüre encontre la costume de jovente.<sup>145</sup>

Anonymous knights are also devices, like damsels, to warn and inform. Thus it is a knight who informs Persidés and Tristan of Lancelot's prowess; an elderly knight warns Tristan, whom he mistakes for Lancelot, that thirty-two knights are waiting in ambush; another knight is sent as a messenger to the two serfs who have killed their lord; and yet another, because he does not care much for his king, Marc, denounces him for having poisoned Galaad's companion.<sup>146</sup> The purely functional knight is not described in so much detail as is the hospitable knight, and this may be because his social function as informer is not as important as that of providing hospitality, which,

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<sup>144</sup> Bloch, *Feudal Society* 314.

<sup>145</sup> CIII.693.8. See also MII.189.2; MII.96.13; MII.52.10; MV.88.5.

<sup>146</sup> MII.115.1; MII.27.23; MV.120.9; MIX.26.37. See also MI.181; MII.80.43; MV.108.11; MIX.15.40; MIX.139.6; MIX.142.10.

as we saw, bestows honour on the guests and is of great social importance to the world of the Tristan.<sup>147</sup>

Anonymous knights also create situations in which the prowess of the heroes can be demonstrated, and as such, they can be considered both as plot devices and as a means by which the knightly way of life may be put before the reader. This happens in tournaments as well as in the general questing area of the forest. The fact that Lancelot's prowess at the "Pucelles" tournament is reported by an anonymous knight to Arthur emphasises the picture of a tournament having several scenes, and the narrator seizes on this device to give the impression of many simultaneous events in the tournament. It also of course reinforces the reader's belief that Lancelot is one of the most accomplished knights in the world.<sup>148</sup> Anonymous knights also challenge the heroes to jousts, which the latter often win, enabling them to accumulate victories and to reinforce their reputation.<sup>149</sup> Similarly, these nameless knights engage in conversations with the heroes, who are thus able to air their views on subjects of importance to chivalrous life, such as the value of jousting (MIX.55.1). These debates, incidentally not always provoked by anonymous knights, are part of the semi-didactic character of the text, as will become apparent in Chapter Three.

## 2. Damsels

Damsels make up another very important group both in number and in incidence on the plot. They are characterised not, as are the named characters, by their nature, but by their functions, underlining once again the purpose of description in the Tristan. Their chief occupation is to run errands, both verbal and written. A "damoisele" is conventionally introduced by her physical appearance: "il encontra une damoisele

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<sup>147</sup> See Chapter One.

<sup>148</sup> MII.173.27. See also MII.110; MII.153.17.

<sup>149</sup> See MV.92.5-93.36; MVI.43.1.



mout bele et mout avenans, et cevauçoit en la compaignie d'un viel cevalier et d'un esquier seulement."<sup>150</sup> The vocabulary used to describe the damsel's appearance might be conventional, but it does mean that she catches, in this instance, Tristan's eye. The kind of horse a damsel is riding, or how fast she seems to have ridden, is sometimes more important than her physical looks. One damsel "fu venue si grant oire que bien le pooit on veoir, car ses cevas estoit encore tous tressuans" (MVI.92.3). Another is pictured arriving on a "palefroi blanc, et venoit vers aus grant aleüre" (MVI.105.3). A damsel's bearing can also be an indicator of her nature as a messenger:

il encontra une damoisele toute seule a ceval et sambloit qu'ele eüst besoing. Engennés, qui bien connoist, quant il le voit, que ce estoit damoisele messagiere . . . li vient a l'encontre. . . .<sup>151</sup>

Finally, she may simply be introduced by the nature of her relationship with the person she is going to act as messenger for: "se aucuns me demandoit a qui la demoisele estoit et que ele queroit, je diroie qu'ele estoit a Tristan et que ele aloit que:ant Lancelot dou Lac,"<sup>152</sup> underlining her function in relation to the knightly class.

After the customary exchange of courtesies, the damsel explains her errand. In one instance, a "damoisele" tells Tristan that she has been sent by King Arthur to ask Tristan to help him at a tournament. Unfortunately, Tristan is unable to accede to Arthur's request, and the damsel ends up being "mout durement courechie de ce qu'ele n'avoit autrement faite sa besoigne" (MII.148.35). Obviously she appreciates the nature of her mission and is upset that she has not succeeded in fulfilling it. This is an individualising touch, although one strongly related to her function as messenger. It might also be gratifying for a thirteenth-century aristocratic audience to hear that some staff are actually scrupulous about their work and faithful to their masters.

<sup>150</sup> MII.148.9. For damsels introduced by their physical appearance, see also MVI.114.1; MIX.57.1.

<sup>151</sup> MVII.103.14. See also CII.643.8.

<sup>152</sup> CI.I.686.5. See also CIII.738.2; MI.134.34.

Damsels usually bear oral messages, but they can also carry letters. In this case, they generally remain with the receiver until they can return to their employer with an answer. This waiting period can vary from one night (CIII.689.21), to three days (CII.573.10), or even ten days (MIV.168.2). This task belongs to the function of the “*damoisele mesaigiere*” and is therefore part of her characterisation and describes what is expected of her.

A damsel may also be sent by her employer to act as a spy. Because detective work is not straightforward, and because it at times involves conflicting loyalties, it is an occupation in which damsels reveal a little more character. A damsel sent by Palamede to spy on Tristan shows her loyalty to the former by persevering in looking for Tristan after she realises he is not dead. She also has sympathy for her victim’s plight, despite her ultimate desire to fulfil her function as a spy:

Et lors en ot ele assez greignor pitié qu’ele n’avoit eü devant, car donc cuida ele bien por voir qu’il deüst tot maintenant morir, ne ele ne se voloit de li partir devant ce qu’ele veüst apertement a quel fin il venroit de ceste chose, si qu’ele en seüst la verité conter a Palamedes.<sup>153</sup>

Another damsel is put in a difficult situation by Andret, who wants her to spread the lie that Tristan is dead in order to inherit his lands. Because she “*povre estoit et grant volenté avoit de mieuz avoir qu’ele n’avoit,*” she accepts the proposal (CIII.925.6). These slightly more difficult tasks afford the listener greater insight into the minds of a few of these “*damoiseles.*”

Damsels are sometimes little more than human signposts for the knight-errant. One conveniently indicates to Brun le Noir the way to escape from the “*Castel Orgueillieux.*”<sup>154</sup> Another one shows Tristan where Arthur is being kept by an enchantress in the forest of Arvances (CIII.817.5), while a third one informs Galaad

<sup>153</sup> CIII.866.15. For other spying damsels see MI.151.14; MII.79-140; MII.197.16.

<sup>154</sup> CIII.675.10, 676.13.

that the “conte Bedouin” is at home (MIX.93.10). As well as directing knights towards their destination, damsels also inform them of certain interesting facts. A “pucele” reveals to Palamede that his anonymous adversary is actually Tristan (MII.138.20), and another informs Engennés that Bréhus is holding Galaad captive (MVII.103.18). These damsels also warn the heroes of possible perils, which they usually confront anyway in order to demonstrate their prowess and win glory:

il encontrerent une damoisele mout bele, qui portoit un esprevier sus son poing. . . . Quant ele encontra les trois cevaliers, ele lor dist: “Signeur, retournés, car vous alés si folement que vous n’em poés partir sans honte, se vous avant alés!”<sup>155</sup>

What is important in this damsel’s appearance is her relation not only to the castle, but also to the aristocracy, the sparrow-hawk being a mark of wealth and status. Damsels are not always so forthcoming with their information, and it sometimes has to be forced out of them, as when Morgain’s damsel is obliged to tell Bliobéris that thirty-two knights are lying in ambush waiting for Lancelot: “Ne m’ochiés, car ce seroit trop grant vilonnie . . . mais laissiés moi vivre, et je vous dirai ce que vous me demandés!” (MII.24.1)

Damsels can act as staff in castles, entertaining the guests for instance, thus providing a small insight into the aristocratic life.<sup>156</sup> Bréhus’s “damoisele” sings and plays the harp to Tristan.<sup>157</sup> The narrator describes another damsel who refuses to reveal Tristan’s name to her master because she knows he will be killed if his identity is discovered (MVIII.88), and the resulting inner turmoil about lying to her lord, which provides the reader with an unusual stroke of characterisation:

Si en devient mout durement pensive et mout esbahie, et maintenant li ciet u cuer et dist a soi meïsmes qu’ele ne set qu’ele doie faire en ceste aventure; car, se ele fait connoistre monsieur Tristran, il est et mors et maubaillis. . . . A son signeur ne mentira ele mie volentiers, quar, se il

<sup>155</sup> MIX.39.5. For other sparrow-hawks see MVI.77.26; MVII.120.11.

<sup>156</sup> MVII.120.11; MIX.114.21.

<sup>157</sup> MIX.60.33. See also MVIII.169.1.

peüst apercevoir que ele li deüst menchoigne de ce que il li demande, il le metroit a mort . . . (MVII.88.35).

The dilemma of the damsel is clearly depicted, thus endowing her with a good deal more individuality than most of the anonymous characters in the text, providing the thirteenth-century aristocratic audience with the example of a damsel who fears her master's wrath.

Damsels deal directly with knights, either when they fall victim to the latter, or when the latter fall in love with them, this sentiment not always being mutual. Bréhus creates the most victims, who are therefore in the position of being rescued by gallant knights, who thus honour their obligation to help damsels in distress. The function of these damsels is accessory to showing knights in action, and didactic because the knights are either committing crimes which are condemned, or carrying out their protective role which is admired. Tristan and Gauvain meet a damsel who

venoit criant et braiant et faisant doel si merueilleus et si fort que nus ne le veüst adonc ki ne tenist a grant merueille le grant doeil qu'ele aloit menant . . . (MII.89.16).

This is her only characterised moment, and her function is ultimately to allow Gauvain to challenge the evil Bréhus to a fight to defend a damsel. Another victim of Bréhus's persecution is seen screaming for help, but is also physically described, for she "avoit tant de biauté come damoisele peüst avoir" (MIX.57.3). One may note, as in the depictions of castles, that the description avoids precise details, but that it is sufficient in this type of narrative, where what a knight does in a particular situation is more important than the colour of the damsel's dress.

A damsel's anonymity need not prevent knights from succumbing to her charms, and Dinadan is no exception. He tells Tristan: "Onques mais ne le vi sans faille, et si l'aim je de tout mon cuer!" (MV.136.42) The complete lack of characterisation of the damsel reveals her function in the text: she is a mere plot device. She provides the

opportunity for Dinadan, who has until then vowed he would never get involved with a woman, to show he is, after all, like other knights; and because of her, two brothers, Dinadan and Brun le Noir, meet up after a long period of separation. As a general rule, damsels are, as Whitaker comments, “young, fair, and forgettable.” They “appear less as characters than as images facilitating the knight-errant’s search for adventure.”<sup>158</sup>

One damsel who does not fit into any of the above categories is the “*demoisele mesdisanz*.” First of all, her appearance is described: “*La demoisele portoit a son col un escu tot vert sanz entreseigne fors tant solement que el milieu avoit une men tote blanche qui tenoit une espee nue*” (CII.643.3).<sup>159</sup> She immediately assumes a haughty attitude towards Keu simply because his name is unknown to her, although she shows respect towards those she believes deserving, like King Arthur and later Lancelot, when she realises who he is. When it is clear that the recently knighted Brun is the only candidate to help her on the “*aventure*,” she fires a string of insults which does not stop until she is proved wrong about his prowess. In the meantime, she is the only character who is persistently discourteous to knights who are unknown to her, and as such, her function is not only to provide Brun with his first “*aventure*,” but also to test his patience and courtesy, and to create humorous situations. She enjoys much more characterisation than the other damsels, for the narrator even describes her disdain of the dwarf whom she so rudely insults, and the comic picture created would certainly have appealed to the thirteenth-century aristocratic audience for whom “the other strata

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<sup>158</sup> Whitaker 60.

<sup>159</sup> Pictures or “*enseignes*” on shields are often described (MI.176.2; MIII.1.5; MVI.142.9), serving to identify a knight (MI.129.36; MII.60.47; MII.74.5; MVI.8.51). Sometimes there are no “*entreseignes*” (MIV.97.20; MVI.19.9), or the shield can be covered up (MII.103.23; MII.121.21; MII.122.7; MIII.221.9), signifying that the knight wants to conceal his identity, a common situation and often a pretext for jousting in the prose *Tristan*, as we will see in Chapter Three.

of contemporary society . . . [are] sometimes colorful but more usually comic or grotesque.”<sup>160</sup>

La demoisele est tant iriee quant ele entent ceste parole qu’ele ne set qu’ele doit respondre. A po qu’ele ne cort sus au nen por li prendre par les chevex; mes ele le lesse por le chevalier qu’ele redoute durement” (CII.659.6).

Her rudeness is condemned in turn by a lady who offers her hospitality, by Mordret, and by Lancelot. Her final repentance for having insulted Lancelot is reported indirectly by the narrator:

Ele se test sanz dire nul mot dou monde, et pense mout durement, et mout es dolente et correchie de ce qu’ele a parlé en tel maniere encontre si bon chevalier. Or s’en repent mout durement, mes ce est a tart, ce li est avis (CIII.747.2).

Although she is not named, the “damoisele mesdisanz” is no mere plot device: she has a character as well as a function in the text. Moreover, because she is not forgettable, like so many other damsels, she stands out from the rest, and the reader automatically sees her as somebody out of the ordinary.

There are other unnamed characters whose roles are not without effect on the daily life of the knight-errant, their description being succinct but sufficient for their purpose in relation to the knightly class. Anonymous hermits provide hospitality to questing knights, and sometimes act as informers too. The hermits are unvaryingly poor, and they always lead a religious life. Indeed, the food they provide is never more than “pain et eve, car autre chose n’avoit” (CIII.782.3). Most hermits are “mout preudome durement”<sup>161</sup> and “de sainte vie” (MVI.84.19), but in the Grail section they also explain religious experiences and visions, and hear confessions.

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<sup>160</sup> Auerbach 132.

<sup>161</sup> MI.170.44. See also MVI.69.31; MVI.84.18; MVI.101.10; MVIII.20.1; MVIII.123.45.

### 3. Vavasours, squires, ladies, dwarfs

The vavasours, or “vassals of vassals” (vassus vassorum) are most often hospitable to the knightly characters in the Tristan, and reflect thirteenth-century class distinctions within the nobility.<sup>162</sup> On one occasion, however, a knight speaks of his father being only a “povres vavassour qui n’ot mie granment en cest monde” (CIII.724.25), signifying that his son had to acquire what he now possesses through his own means: “je ai par ma chevalerie conquestee tote la terre que je tieg” (CIII.724.23). Life outside the realm of fiction was not much different: Bloch cites, among others, examples of knights depicted in various charters of a Provençal cartulary whose sole fief was a peasant tenement, and vavasours of this type had an extremely modest fortune and a needy life given up to adventure.<sup>163</sup>

Other anonymous characters include squires acting as messengers and informers,<sup>164</sup> and generally providing company to their masters.<sup>165</sup> Some are aspiring knights, as is the son of Frolle, who asks Galaad to knight him (MIX.28.6), and this situation is certainly representative of a thirteenth-century reality, for Bloch sees the title of “squire” as “the traditional title of the noble youth in the service of his elders.”<sup>166</sup>

Anonymous ladies are also hospitable to knights, and are not characterised by the narrator.<sup>167</sup> Dwarfs are not as common as in other romances, and are not gifted with any preternatural powers as they often are elsewhere. The “demoisele mesdisanz,” however, accuses a “nen” of being “li plus lez et li plus chetis et li plus contrefez” of

<sup>162</sup> MIII.183.10; MVI.147.60. See also MVI.128.58 for a reference to vavasours as inhabitants of the area.

<sup>163</sup> Bloch, Feudal Society 332.

<sup>164</sup> See MI.133.7; MII.173.43; MII.109.7; MV.14.2; MIX.97.20.

<sup>165</sup> See MII.80.6; MII.54.26-28; MII.72.46-47; MII.104.1-4.

<sup>166</sup> Bloch, Feudal Society 326.

<sup>167</sup> CIII.751.20; MIX.11.40; MIX.92.7.

all the creatures of the world.<sup>168</sup> He does not belong to the aristocratic class, thus providing a realistic touch to the idealised world of the Tristan, but his grotesque attributes make it clear that he is only a small part of the colourful backdrop to the main actions of the knights.

The anonymous characters appear both in groups and as individuals, and constitute not only the background of the text but also the links between the main characters. Despite the fact that they form an indistinguishable mass, they are indispensable to the rich tapestry which composes the prose Tristan, and allow the world of the text to be populated not only by the aristocracy. Their actions themselves are worth imitating, and whether these people are like real people or not—just as whether the landscape is naturalistic or not—their deeds are sufficiently varied to be interesting, and although they do not enjoy much description, the information the thirteenth-century aristocratic audience have of them is enough in this type of narrative where the focus is on the life of the knightly class.

## II. Named characters

There are numerous named characters who have their origins in Arthurian romances prior to the prose Tristan, and whose adventures have little or no effect on the main action. These characters keep company with the more major knights, but they also sometimes have adventures of their own: the reader thus meets Meleagant lamenting his love for Guenièvre (CIII.797.4), Keu who is always ready to pick a fight,<sup>169</sup> Brandelis, Tor, Hector, Baudemagu, Agravain, Mordret and Dinas among others. Ségurade, for instance, is the victim of Marc's, Tristan's and Bliobéris's adulterous interest in his wife, and in the end "n'osa revenir a cort quant il se vit ensi honi par un

<sup>168</sup> CII.659.11. See also MVI.76.23.

<sup>169</sup> MI.122.6; MII.67.49, etc.



chevalier. . . .”<sup>170</sup> Likewise, Brun le Noir, also known as the “Chevalier a la Cote Maltaillie,” also enjoys a few chapters devoted to his adventures, which have little bearing on the main action, but whose interest lies in the depiction of representative knightly adventures. His adventures may be interspersed with those of other knights, but they span several volumes of the Tristan. Brun enters the story as easily as he leaves it, when Lancelot takes over the adventure of the “Destrois de Sorelois.”<sup>171</sup>

The prose Tristan is essentially the tragedy of three persons involving Tristan, Iseut, and Marc, despite the fact that the original love story is forced apart to make room for a wealth of chivalric adventures and the inclusion of a Grail story, plus a shortened version of the Mort Artu. Around these protagonists orbit allies and enemies: Andret, Lancelot, Guenièvre, Arthur, Galaad, Brangain and Gouvernal, who participate, at one moment or another, in the main action, i. e. Tristan and Iseut’s love affair, and Tristan’s chivalric career. They are indispensable because, according to Baumgartner, they situate

dans le temps et l’espace l’histoire des amants de Cornouailles. Ils représentent d’autre part les modèles que, tant sur le plan chevaleresque que sentimental, Tristan et Iseut se doivent d’égaliser, voire de surpasser. Ils constituent enfin l’étalon grâce auquel le lecteur pourra mesurer à sa juste valeur la prouesse et la renommée de Tristan, la beauté et le rayonnement spirituel d’Iseut, et, par contraste, l’abjection de Marc.<sup>172</sup>

I will examine the characters who contribute substantially to the plot, following loosely Rosemary Morris’s order of treatment of King Arthur.<sup>173</sup> Where applicable, I will consider their ancestry, conception and birth, childhood, accession to their present position, relationships, personal attributes, and death.

<sup>170</sup> CI.377.10. See CI.368-79 for the passage devoted to Ségurade.

<sup>171</sup> For Brun’s adventures see CII.643-MI.58.

<sup>172</sup> Baumgartner, Essai 233.

<sup>173</sup> Rosemary Morris, The Character of King Arthur in Medieval Literature (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1982). Hereafter referred to as Morris.

### A. Ancestry

Tristan's ancestry can be traced back to Bron, brother-in-law of Joseph of Arimathea. This creates a direct link with the Grail context, which makes up the latter third of the prose *Tristan*, for it is traditionally Joseph of Arimathea who recovered in a vessel (the Grail) the blood from Christ's wounds. It is a mark of medieval times to connect Tristan with Biblical history: "Nennius and Geoffrey [of Monmouth] themselves had established chronological correspondences with biblical history."<sup>174</sup> Marc enjoys much the same ancestry as Tristan, for he is Tristan's mother's brother, and therefore also a direct descendent of Bron.<sup>175</sup> It is possible to see in the ancestry provided for these characters a foreboding of what is to come: Marc is descended from a lineage of damned kings, with Cicoriades being killed by his own wife, and with his own father, King Felix, assassinated by his own people, to name but two. However, it might be reading a little too far into the text to establish that Marc's character is explained by the "hérédité chargée" from which Baumgartner says he suffers.<sup>176</sup>

Lancelot's ancestry is given to him in detail by an "ermite," as an explanation of one of Lancelot's visions, in which he sees a man, accompanied by seven kings and two knights (MVIII.88-90). The seven kings represent Ban, Lancelot's father; Lancelos, Ban's father; Joanans, Lancelos's father; Ysayes, Joanans's father; Elayn le Gros, Ysayes's father; Nasciens, Elayn's father; and Varpus, Nascien's father. Varpus is Celidoine's son, himself son of Nascien, brother-in-law of Mordrain, who was converted to Christianity forty-two years after Christ's Passion. The text is clear on the relationship between these men, for it is said of them that "non pas k'il fuissent tout frere et fil, ains sont descendu li uns de l'autre par droite engendreüre" (MVIII.88.30). Once again, Lancelot (and by extension Galaad), a major character in the text, is linked

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<sup>174</sup> Morris 19.

back to Biblical times through his ancestry. Galaad's mother is also of royal extraction, for she is the daughter of Pelles, king of the "Tere Foraine."

### B. Conception and birth

The narrator provides details of the birth of Tristan and of the conception of Galaad. Tristan's parents appear to wait some time before Eliabel, Tristan's mother, conceives: "Si estoient endui mout dolent de ce que Diex ne lor envoioit hoir. . . . Grant piece furent ensemble ençois que la roïne engroissast" (CI.223.6). They conceive their child in love (CI.223.5), a detail not provided about Marc's or Galaad's parents, for instance. Out hunting one day, King Meliadus falls under the enchantment of a "demoisele." She detains him so long that Eliabel goes in search of him, only to be informed by Merlin that she will never recover him. Heartbroken, she falls to the ground and yields to the pains of labour, which are described in some detail: "Lors comence a crier a haute voiz, et a reclamer Dieu et Sainte Marie. Si est tant engoissee et tant destroete qu'ele cuide bien morir. . . . Celi jor et tote la nuit traveilla la dame."<sup>177</sup> This unusual amount of description is appropriate to the birth of the hero of the text. Before Eliabel dies in childbirth, she has time to name her child: "de moi triste et de tristece seras apelez Tristans" (CI.229.12). The narrator insists heavily on the symbolic value of these tragic circumstances and of Eliabel's last words.

Despite being one of the major characters, Marc does not appear as a child, except when the origin of his name is provided: "Li uns des filz fu apelez Mars en batesme, por ce que au mardi fu nez et ou mois de marz" (CI.222.5). A generation further down the line, the relationship between Marc and his own son, Meraugis de Portlesguez, also eludes details.

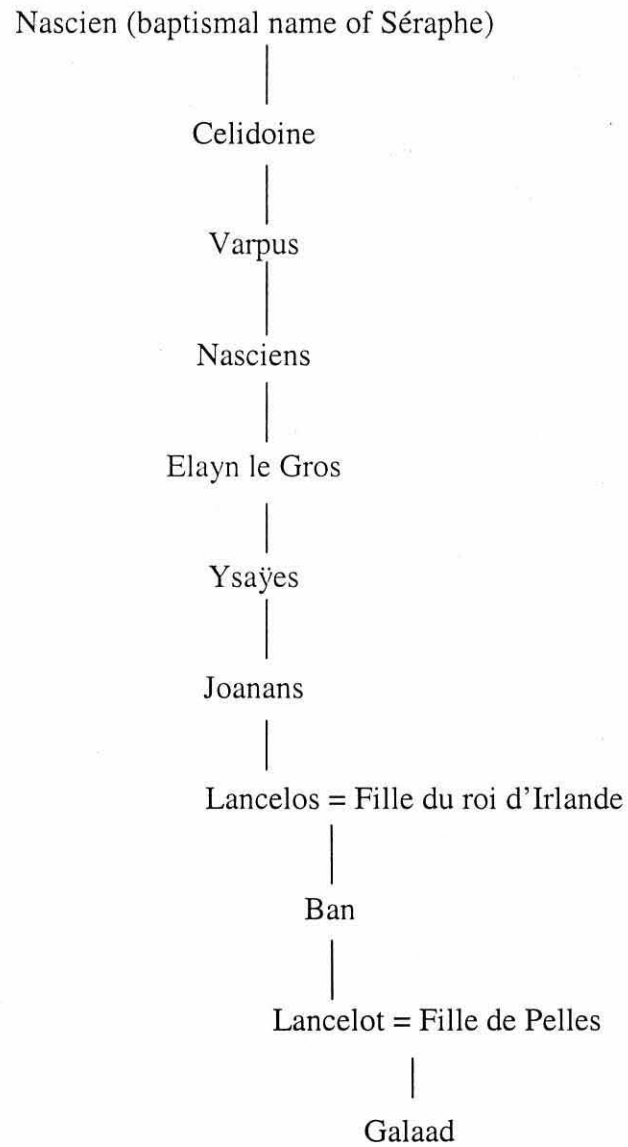
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<sup>175</sup> For Tristan's and Marc's ancestry see genealogical tree in Chapter One.

<sup>176</sup> Baumgartner, *Essai* 224.

<sup>177</sup> CI.228.10-229.2.

## Lancelot's and Galaad's Genealogy



The reader is aware that this child is the fruit of Marc's incestuous relationship with his niece (CI.178.17), and although this fact is only mentioned once in passing, it only blackens Marc further in the eyes of the audience, as will be confirmed by the examination of his relationships.

The narrator carefully records Galaad's conception, but not his birth, as if the whole event were seen through Lancelot's eyes. Galaad is conceived during the first night that Lancelot spends with Helaynne, victim of a "boivre," and believing his partner is Guenièvre. According to the narrator, Galaad is the result of Lancelot's having known Helaynne "em pecié et en avoutire et contre Sainte Eglise." This sin, however, appears to be redeemed, because God

lour donna tel fruit a engenner et a concevoir que, par la flour de virginité qui illuec fu corrompue et violee, fu illuec conceüe une autre flour, de qui bien et de qui douçour maintes teres furent peües et rasasiees.<sup>178</sup>

When Bohort later discovers the truth about Galaad's ancestry, he is "plus liés que onques mais ne fu pour nule cose qui li avenist . . ." (MVI.40.41). This reinforces the narrator's attitude towards this conception: although Galaad is the fruit of an adulterous, non-consenting relationship, God can still bring good out of evil. Much as the narrator dwells on Galaad's conception, his birth is passed over in silence, and the reader moves immediately to his early infancy.

### C. Childhood

The "enfance" to receive the most detailed account in the prose Tristan is, naturally, that of the hero. Step by step, the audience follows his superficially realistic physical and moral development. He is born at the time of his mother's death, so that he is in

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<sup>178</sup> MVI.35.22. This echoes the conception of Hêlain le Blanc by Bohort and the daughter of King Brangoire in Lancelot: Roman en prose du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, ed. A. Micha, 9 vols. (Genève: Droz, 1978) 2: 197.24.

effect baptised by Eliabel's handmaid (CI.237.2). Tristan is suckled by a "norrice" (CI.239.8), but is brought up almost single-handedly by Gouvernal, a young man "tant biax et tant preuz et tant gentis de mout de choses," to whom Merlin has ordered Meliadus to entrust the child.<sup>179</sup> When he is seven years old, his father Meliadus marries Hoël's daughter (CI.244.3). Tristan's beauty is already greatly admired by all, which exacerbates the fury of his "marrastre" against him.<sup>180</sup> She plots his death, but instead of killing him, through the inadvertence of a handmaid she fatally poisons her own son. By the time he is eight, Tristan has acquired the "grace de chascun" (CI.245.2); his step-mother again tries to kill him, but the plot is discovered. Tristan's natural generosity becomes apparent when he begs his father not to condemn the woman to death (CI.256.1).

Under Gouvernal's tutorship, Tristan learns to fulfil the expectations of the knightly upper class, thus appealing to a thirteenth-century aristocratic audience: he learns to hunt, and his guardian makes sure that he "aprist maniere de bois et de chacier. Et il l'avoit ensi vestu a la maniere del bois" (CI.257.5). Later, the time he spends at the court of Faramon in Gaule at the age of twelve, and the four years he spends anonymously at King Marc's court allow him to pursue his education as a gentleman and future knight. Gouvernal sees in the court of Gaule the opportunity for Tristan to learn how to "servir et a cortoyer, et coment houz hom et gentils hom se doit maintenir" (CI.261.8). This stay is also the occasion for Bélise, the king's daughter, to fall desperately in love with Tristan. When Gouvernal informs his pupil of this, the latter's reaction is proof of his prudence and maturity: "il se merveille d'ou toz li sens li vient qu'il dit, car ses aages ne le devoit pas a ce mener, car encores n'avoit il mie treize anz" (CI.271.10).

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<sup>179</sup> CI.234.7; 238.17.

His surprisingly mature moral qualities, underlined by the narrator, are mirrored by his outward appearance, which will always be the subject of frequent comment by all. His manner is extremely pleasing and noble, and Le Morholt confirms “qu’il soit de haut linaige, car il ressemble bien gentil home. Diex le face preudome, car a biauté n’a il mie failli . . .” (CI.267.10). Tristan also has the ability to master himself in the face of provocation, as when Bélise throws herself into his arms, and “li saut au devant, et le comence a acoler et a baisier et ieux et bouche” (CI.273.7). Tristan realises the gravity of the situation, and refuses her favours (CI.273.12). He is finally knighted by his uncle in order to defend Cornouailles against Le Morholt.

The narrator does not dwell on Galaad’s childhood in much detail. Having witnessed his conception, the readers next hear of Galaad when he is ten months old, and “estoit tant biaux durement que en nule maniere ne pooit estre plus biaux . . .” (MVI.40.16). His mother later speaks of him as being “grans, conme cil qui bien puet avoir .X. ans” (MVI.79.37). At the age of twelve, he is “tans biaux et tant preus et tant sages conme nus de son eage peüst estre,” and is encouraged by an “hermite” to “recevoir l’ordre de cevalerie.”<sup>181</sup> These moral and physical qualities are those appreciated by the knightly class and therefore worth describing, although they do not contribute to the action for the moment. This is the systematic way in which the authors of the prose Tristan make use of description. It is not as adequate as “a piece of twentieth-century impressionism,”<sup>182</sup> but it is sufficient in this type of narrative where the knightly life is of prime importance.

Despite his father’s absence during his upbringing, Galaad’s mother has taken care of him, followed by an “abeesse,” who weeps bitterly when she loses him to knighthood. At this point, he is still an “enfant,” despite being “si bien tallié de tous

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<sup>180</sup> CI.24.7; 250.9.

membres que a painnes trovast on son pareil el monde” (MVI.92.45). Throughout his childhood, Galaad proves to be above the norm in every area of mental and physical accomplishment, attributes mirrored by his later achievements as a Christian knight, a topic that will be examined in Chapter Five.<sup>183</sup>

Iseut’s childhood is not related at all, and the reader first meets her when she is barely fourteen years old, when her beauty and skills are described at length. She is:

la plus bele pucele qui a celi tens fust ou monde, et une des plus saiges.  
Cele savoit de cirurgie et de medecines a merveilles, et conoissoit la force  
et le poir de totes les herbes (CI.310.11).

The fact that her father places Tristan’s health in her hands shows his trust in her abilities and maturity. Moreover, unlike B elise who loses all reason over Tristan, she “n’i entent granment, com pucele vergoigneuse et gardee durement; cele ne l’aime ne ne het” (CI.347.5). Her reason and good education prevail when she says, in answer to Brangain’s question, that if she had to choose between Tristan and Palamede, she would like the best knight most, unlike Brangain, who has clearly made up her mind about Tristan: “Ele l’amoit merveilleusement, mes descovrir ne li osoit” (CI.332.5).

#### D. Relationships

Unlike narrators from the nineteenth century to the present, medieval writers do not normally spend time painting the moral and physical portraits of their characters. The Tristan narrator rarely analyses his characters in his own person, so the reader needs to infer characteristics mainly from dialogue, action and what emerges from the characters’ relationships. This section will examine the characters’ dealings with, where applicable, their parents, other members of their families, their marital and extra-marital partners, and their vassals or lords.

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<sup>181</sup> MVI.84.16, 24.

<sup>182</sup> Field, Romance and Chronicle 83.



## 1. Parent and child

Tristan's relationships with his father and step-mother during his early childhood are lightly sketched in. As was discussed above, his step-mother detests him because he, not her new-born son, is to inherit Meliadus's land. Her resentment is such that she develops "si grant ire et si grant haine qu'ele dit qu'ele veust mieuz morir et estre honie qu'ele ne le face a dolor morir" (CI.250.10). Not only does she desire his death: she also wants it to be "a dolor." Tristan's feelings are not related, but by saving her from certain execution, he confirms his mild and forgiving attitude as well as his intelligence. He indeed profits from the importance attached to a vow<sup>184</sup> to get his father to grant him a boon without knowing what it is, and then asks him to release his step-mother. His father is so surprised that "il ne cuide mie que li enfes oit ce dit de son sens, enz cuide bien que l'en li oit conseillié . . ." (CI.256.6). The narrator comments on Meliadus's love for his son: he "ne se delitoit en riens tant com il faisoit en li, ne tant n'amoit ne soi ne autre com il faisoit l'enfant" (CI.251.17). Meliadus tells him as much: "tu iés la chose ou monde que je plus aim" (CI.255.7). Father and son also spend time together, "priveement," on their own (CI.252.17). This makes Meliadus's murder, at the hands of the count Norholt's men, at which "Tristanz pleure," more tragic, and marks the end of Tristan's relationship both with Meliadus and with his step-mother (CI.258.6).

Iseut's relationship with her parents is hardly dwelt upon. As was observed above, Anguin, Iseut's father, has total confidence in her medicinal powers (CI.313.6). Later, when Tristan asks for Iseut's hand on his uncle's behalf, Anguin has his daughter's feelings as well as her interests at heart. It would clearly be a better match for her socially to marry a king than to marry an exceptionally good knight. Anguin,

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<sup>183</sup> Also seen at the age of fifteen is Perceval (MVI.55.12), although the description of the adolescent is

however, would rather she married Tristan: “por ce la vos otroi je mout debonerement a ce que vos la preignoiz a moillier, se il vos plest.” Nevertheless, Tristan is so “tenuz au roi Marc” that he agrees to the match with King Marc (CI.438.17, 18). When the King finally informs his daughter of his decision to marry her to Marc, “li rois la prent par la main destre,” testifying to a close bond between father and daughter (CI.439.5). This closeness is reinforced by the picture of both parents weeping as they wave goodbye to their daughter (CI.443.5). Iseut, however, shows no sign of being upset (CI.444.5), and this, far from being an imaginative lapse, realistically depicts a moment in which tearful parents bid farewell to a hopeful and excited child who is looking forward to a new life. The “general lack of sustenance for the visual imagination” which Field sees in Malory’s narrative<sup>185</sup> and which is also a feature, although to a lesser extent, of the *Tristan*, gives this image particular strength. It should not be forgotten, either, that Iseut’s mother is instrumental in her daughter’s life, for she provides Brangain and Gouvernal with the love-potion in the first place. Although this is of course a necessary plot device inherited from the ancient Tristan legend, the queen’s reasons for giving the servants the potion can be seen as a mother’s desire that her daughter be happy in her marriage: “Maintenant que li rois en avra beü et ma fille après, il s’entreaimeront si merueilleusement que nus dou monde ne porroit metre descorde ne corroz entre ax deus” (CI.443.13).

Like Iseut’s relationship to her parents, Galaad’s to his mother is not described at length. At ten months old, although in the maternal home, he is seen on the knees of “un chevalier mout viel durement” (MIX.40.13). Later, his mother shows pride in her ten-year-old son (MIX.79.35), and when he leaves to enter the order of knighthood,

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but a fleeting impression and not part of a progressive development.

<sup>184</sup> The importance of a promise will be examined in Chapter Three.

<sup>185</sup> *Romance and Chronicle* 98.

she kisses him (MIX.84.8). In a subsequent scene, however, he refuses this physical contact:

Et quant la mere le voit, si saut sus et le vaut acoler et baisier. Mais il nel suefre mie, ains dist: “Dame, pour Dieu merci, ne me touciés mie, que je ne vauroie en nule maniere que feme me touchast, pour ce que je doi porter le Saint Vaissel!” Et ele dist: “Puis qu’il ne vous plaist, et je l’otroi!” (MIX.125.4)

Her affection is evident, but is restrained by her respect for his feelings and beliefs.

Galaad’s relationship with his father Lancelot is somewhat more complicated because it is not clear in the text where Lancelot discovers his paternity. The audience knows that Galaad is born before Lancelot retires to the “Castel Bliaut,” accompanied by Helaynne, and it is clear that the child lives with his parents in the castle. This implies that Lancelot knows the child is his son. A damsel informs Perceval about the inhabitants of Bliaut:

il i maint la plus bele damoisele du monde ne que je onques veïsse, et est estraitte de haut langage; et se i a un enfant et un cevalier . . . (MVI.77.33).

However, when Lancelot is summoned to knight Galaad, the reader is unable to tell whether Lancelot knows that the young man is Helaynne’s child or not, despite his admiration of Galaad:

si le voit garni de toutes biautés si merueilleusement qu’il ne quide mie qu’il veïst onques de son aage si bele fourme d’ome. Et pour la simplece qu’il voit en lui, i espoire il tant de bien qu’i li plaist mout qu’i le face cevalier (MVI.92.53).

Although Lancelot is apparently unaware that Galaad is his offspring, it seems to be common knowledge to certain knights, to Guenièvre, and later to all.<sup>186</sup> Galaad too appears to know of his father’s identity, although he is embarrassed to talk about him when prompted by Guenièvre:

“Cil qui vous engendra a non Lanselos du Lac. . . . Pour coi il ne me semble pas que vous le deüssiés celer a moi ni a autre. . . .”—“Dame,” fait il, “puis

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<sup>186</sup> MVI.103.9; MVI.106.4.

que vous le savés bien, pour coi le vous diroi je? Assés le sara on en cest païs” (MVI.110.28).

When Lancelot and Galaad meet for the last time, they obviously know each other: “li peres reconnut le fil et li fiex le pere” (MIX.88.2). As they separate, “Lors conmencha li uns et li autres a plorer tenrement,” demonstrating mutual affection and respect (MIX.91.19).

The relationship between Marc and his son Meraugis is conspicuous by its strangeness. The only explicit reference to contact between father and son occurs at the very beginning of the prose Tristan, and is extremely ambiguous:

devant cele fontaine meïsmes perdié puis li rois Mars Maraugis, son fil, qu’il avoit eü de sa niece, si petite creature qu’il n’avoit pas encore set jorz entiers (CI.178.17).

Baumgartner highlights the ambiguity of the verb “perdié,” which she understands as either to lose (“perd”) or to hang (“pend”).<sup>187</sup> Even the happier of these two outcomes is horrid: Marc loses his son aged only seven days at a fountain, a baby whom he has begotten on his niece. Luckily, Meraugis survives this abandonment, and becomes a knight of the Round Table. It is in this quality that he is mentioned several times in the text,<sup>188</sup> although only once is his ancestry referred to, for he is

uns des boins cevaliers errans du monde, et saciés qu’il estoit fiex de car au roi March . . . (MVII.186.34).

Strangely, the reader is told to refer to the “livre de monsigneur Tristran” to discover “conment il fu fiex le roi Marc” (MVII.187.36), a small inconsistency among many in the prose Tristan. It nevertheless remains that Marc has a natural son by his niece with whom he loses contact by apparently abandoning him at the Fontaine au Lion, and this reflects no better on his character than does his relationship, as will become apparent, with his brother.

<sup>187</sup> Emmanuèle Baumgartner, “Arthur et les chevaliers envoisiez,” Romania 105 (1984): 323 note 2.

<sup>188</sup> MV.184.10; MVI.112.51; MIX.37.4.

## 2. Other family relationships

Marc's relationship to his sibling says a lot about himself. At the beginning of his reign, his younger brother Pernehan, "bons chevaliers et hardiz" (CI.240.2), criticises Marc for not facing up bravely to the Irish demands for their "treü," of not doing "come rois," and of not being "digne de porter corone" (CI.241.21). So cowardly is Marc that not only does he let one of his sisters, "qui estoit encores pucele," go away "en servaige," but he also murders Pernehan "en treison." Apart from being a heinous crime in itself, this fratricide is committed in a particularly deceitful and cruel way:

li rois fist semblant qu'il voloit boire, si descendi; et Pernehan fist autretel.  
Li rois but, et quant il ot beü . . . si met la main a l'espee, et li cort sus sanz  
desfier, et li done parmi le chief; et la ou il li crioit merci, l'ocist  
(CI.243.4).

Marc breaks several rules of chivalric courtesy: he does not challenge his brother to a fight, and he turns a deaf ear to his pleas for mercy. This is Marc's first action as king, and as the narrator reinforces the cruel and cowardly characteristics of his personality (CI.243.9), the reader is bound to condemn him.

Marc's relationship to his nephew Andret is more complex. Andret, interestingly, is the son of the sister whom Marc allowed to be taken away as part of the "treü." Whether he feels indebted towards his nephew on this matter is uncertain, and has little bearing on the development of the plot, probably being a question asked only by a modern audience. Uncle and nephew nevertheless establish a special relationship, and Andret becomes Marc's right-hand man, especially for those decisions concerning Tristan. Andret openly voices what Marc dare not say, and sometimes exploits Marc's changing moods towards Tristan: he encourages him to commit acts he later regrets, not least the cowardly murder of Tristan (MIX.84.5). Although their relationship is not described in detail, it is clear that their common hatred of Tristan is the underlining motivation. Marc relies on Andret, "qui a li parole

plus seurement que nul autre chevalier de Cornoaille” (CIII.845.1), for precise information on Tristan’s whereabouts (CIII.893.16), and even implicitly allows him in turn to imprison Iseut, to hand her over to a leper colony, and to make her believe that Tristan is dead. Marc’s trust in Andret is demonstrated when, having decided to leave “cheleement et en tapinage” for Logres, he entrusts his kingdom to his nephew by getting his people to swear allegiance to him (MIV.5.4).

Andret knows his uncle well, and is therefore in tune with his wavering feelings towards Tristan, so that he knows where the limits stand: even when he has the opportunity to kill Tristan himself, he refrains from doing so because “Li rois l’a bien defendu” (CII.543.9). Marc’s inconsistent attitude towards Tristan allows Andret to go ahead and capture his cousin, but it is Andret who gets the blame when Marc feels remorse: “Mout se demente li rois Mars et mout maudit Audret et toz cez qui onques li avoient doné conseil de faire prendre son neveu . . .” (CII.545.37). Of the two characters, Andret is at least consistent. Marc, in his cowardice, cannot accept responsibility for something he has agreed to have carried out by Andret. The king even refuses to listen to the prophetic threats Andret makes about Tristan. Thus when Marc recognises Tristan after his period of madness, Andret advises Marc to kill him: “maus vous en venra, et encore venra l’eure que vous vauriés avoir creü mon conseil” (MII.1.42). The final piece of advice Andret gives him seals Tristan’s fate with a poisoned sword, and Andret obtains his life’s desire.

The audience is led to see these two characters as villains. They belong to the cast of evil-doers in the Tristan, as Chapter Six will demonstrate. The reader is reminded that Andret is “trop malicieus,” and that he hates Tristan.<sup>189</sup> When he and his henchmen capture Tristan, they are qualified as “li felon traïtor, li deleal”

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<sup>189</sup> MIX.1.36; CII.543.18.

(CII.543.21). The same adjectives are used incessantly to describe Marc, and are certainly consistent with the portrait provided by his relationships (CI.142.17).

Marc's attitude towards his other nephew, Tristan, reveals what Fanni Bogdanow calls "the two faces" of King Marc, for his feelings towards him oscillate dramatically.<sup>190</sup> Before Tristan even comes to his court, Marc's hatred has been kindled by the prophecy made by a dwarf about Tristan, then still a little boy: "il te fera encores penser, triste et dolent. Et par ses oeuvres te reclamera tu encores roi povre et chetif" (CI.260.3). Marc's answer is important, for it marks the shape of things to come:

Si grant mal com tu me devises ne m'avendra ja par li, car je l'en desavancerai; avant le feroie je ocirre que je ne fusse asseür de li (CI.260.6).

It also shows how merciless he is in the face of a threat, just as he was with his brother Pernehan. Following Tristan's victory over Le Morholt, Marc wounds Tristan in a fight over a woman they both desire, and later, true to his cowardly self, he fears his nephew's revenge: "il a trop grant paor, car il cuide bien que Tristanz li veille trop grant mal."<sup>191</sup> He even sends Tristan to Ireland to fetch Iseut, for no other reason than to deliver him to his deadly enemies (CI.398.2).

After his marriage, when Marc's suspicions about his wife's infidelity are raised, he continually seeks to ban or to capture Tristan, not, as one would expect, because of his relationship with Iseut, but because he fears for his own life. Marc shows real jealousy when his life is not in danger, the consequences of which are radical: he puts to death a companion of Neroneus' who had vowed to go "en Cornuaille pour la roïne Yseut baisier" (MI.24.27). When Tristan is in Cornouailles under the surveillance of

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<sup>190</sup> Fanni Bogdanow, "Theme and Character: The Two Faces of King Mark," Actes du Quatorzième Congrès International Arthurien, Rennes, 16-21 août 1984, vol 1 (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 1984) 97.

<sup>191</sup> CI.373.27. For Marc's fear of Tristan, see also CII.483.7.

Andret, he is not such a threat as when he joins the Round Table, which means he can count on the backing of Arthur and his knights. It is indeed at this point that Marc plots Tristan's death by going to Logres "en tapinage" (MIV.5.4).

Marc's attitude, however, is not always consistent, and he respects the exceptionally good knight in Tristan, just as Tristan arguably respects the king in Marc. Thus when Marc has condemned Tristan to the pyre for being taken "en flagrant délit" with Iseut, he begins to feel remorse and, unable to bear the sight of Tristan being taken away, shuts himself away in his room:

quant li rois Mars en voit ensi aler Tristan . . . il se fiert en sa chambre et s'emferme leanz, et fait le greignor duel del monde, et dit a soi meesmes que ores est il li plus mauvés rois qui onques portast corone quant il en tel maniere fait morir son neveu qui de bonté de chevalerie avoit passé toz cez qui onques entrassent en Cornouaille.<sup>192</sup>

He is also genuinely upset when he hears Andret's false reports of Tristan's death (CIII.927.3). This attitude will again prevail once he has made the final stroke, killing Tristan. At first, he is overjoyed because with Tristan dead he need no longer fear for his own life: "se mesire Tristrans estoit mors, il ne trouveroit jamais home en Cornuaille qui contre lui s'osast drechier" (MIX.77.4). He soon realises the enormity of his action and is sorely afflicted: "adont se conmencha a repentir de celui fait et dist que de ceste mort venroit encore grans max" (MIX.77.36). He wishes he had never listened to Andret (MIX.77.37), and selfishly fears for his own reputation and authority:

Tous li mondes le honnira et blasmera, et si home meïsmes, qui pour monsigneur Tristran le doutoient, or le douteront mains des ore mais (MIX.77.40).

When Tristan asks to see his uncle, the latter admits through his tears:

Ha, las, conme j'ai mal fait, qui mon cier neveu ai ochis, le meilleur chevalier du monde! Je ai tout cevalerie honnie! (MIX.78.11)

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<sup>192</sup> CII.545.31. See also CII.545.1.



This double image of Marc is found throughout the prose Tristan. In his attempts to repent, Marc always remembers that he is not only harming his nephew, and family ties are important, but also an exceptionally good knight, thus bringing dishonour on the whole of the institution of chivalry. Yet he has reasons to hate his nephew, not least because the latter is the lover of Iseut. His main motivation is his suspicion that Tristan might either take over his kingdom, or, worse, kill him. As with his brother Pernehan, Marc needs to fear in order to hate. His apprehension is unfounded, however, as not once, even when given the opportunity, does Tristan attempt to kill his uncle.

Marc is thoroughly dislikeable, and although the reader can gauge but little of Tristan's feelings towards him, it is enough to excuse any absence of guilt on Tristan's part. Tristan sees through his uncle very early on in their relationship, for he is perfectly aware of the reason behind the second trip to Ireland.<sup>193</sup> Despite this knowledge, his allegiance to and love for Marc is all-important to him: in the boat that takes Tristan and Iseut to Cornouailles,

Tristanz ne pense mes a mal; s'il aime Yselt et tient chiere, c'est por l'amor de son oncle, vers cui il ne feroit vilenie en nule maniere dou monde tant com il fust en tel corage ou il est orandroit (CI.444.6).

Even after he has drunk the potion, Tristan still feels he owes it to his "covenant" (CII.481.8) and to Marc to bring Iseut to him.

Although Tristan is aware of his uncle's resentment, he nevertheless respects his kingship. There is a notion in the prose Tristan of the special importance of a king, though this is not specifically expressed by Tristan himself. Lancelot says of Marc:

je ne di pas que je l'ocesisse, car je ne l'ochirroie pas volentiers pour ce que rois est, mais je vous proumet loiaument que je le feroie tant qu'il l'en souvenroit tout son aage après!<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> See above and CI.398.2.

<sup>194</sup> MIII.146.36. See also MIII.111.7; MIII.112.1.

It is possible that this sentiment may motivate Tristan's restraint in not killing his uncle, even when given the opportunity. When Marc comes upon the lovers, intending to kill Tristan, the latter defends himself, but instead of slaying his uncle, he hits him with the flat of the sword and says:

Rois Mars, or t'ocirroe je bien se je voloie et se je regardoie a ta mauvestié. Mes non ferai, car je n'i gaaigeroie ne pris ne los (CII.514.48).

When Marc banishes Tristan from Cornouailles, the latter recognises his uncle's power of life and death over him, and agrees to leave, never to return (MI.189.17).

Despite his mild and forgiving attitude in most situations, Tristan also has his pride. When he is called back to Cornouailles to defend it against the enemy, he forces Marc to beg him before he accepts to fight against Helyant the Saxon (MIV.229.8). Previous enmities evaporate when Marc's life is in danger, and, driven by the possibility of glory, Tristan saves his uncle from death (MIV.221.12). Tristan may have too generous a heart, expecting his rival to have as much: he may be being shown as naïve for going back with Marc after the latter has vowed to Arthur that he will not attempt to hurt Tristan in any way. The narrator points out that Marc is untrustworthy:

Ensi jure li rois March devant le roi Artu, mais malement s'em parjura puis, car il ne demoura mie granment de tans quant il fist prendre monsieur Tristran et metre em prison . . . (MIV.134.45).

Just as Marc expects Tristan to kill him, Tristan expects Marc to be generous: they each endow the other with their own feelings. When Tristan is on his deathbed, his forgiving character is again underlined: he bears Marc less of a grudge than he does against Andret: "Je ne li sai pas si mauvais gré de ma mort com je fait a Audret" (MIX.78.4).

Tristan's relationship with his cousin Andret is more clear-cut. At first, Tristan is willing to help him out when he finds him "malmené," for "il amoit Audret de

greignor amor que Audret ne fesoit li” (CI.382.5). This does not last long, and they soon take a thorough dislike to each other. Unlike his uncle who needs to fear in order to hate, Andret consistently tries to persuade his uncle to kill Tristan at the first opportunity. He is the first to notice Tristan’s adulterous relationship with Iseut: “Audrez, qui mout haoit Tristan, s’estoit ja pris garde de li plusors foiz, et tant qu’il s’estoit bien aperceüz que entr’eus deus avoit fole amor . . .” (CII.514.2). This gives him an extra pretext to dislike his cousin, of whom he already had “si grant envie” (CI.378.17). It is he who catches them “en flagrant délit” with the help of Bessille, and it is he who lays the “fauz bien tranchanz” around Iseut’s bed to catch the lovers (CII.532.2). He advises his uncle to kill Tristan when he has fallen into their hands because of his temporary insanity, and prophesies that Marc will come to harm if he does not kill Tristan, but Marc’s hatred of Tristan is not as tenacious as Andret’s. Because Andret knows that Tristan cannot live without Iseut, all he need do is wait patiently for the moment to arise, when, finally, he persuades Marc to kill his nephew. Once the deed is done, and Tristan’s agony is over, “Il n’i a nul qui ne soit dolans et iriés, fors seulement Audret: a celui n’em poise mie” (MIX.84.48).

### 3. Husband and wife

Marital relationships reveal a lot about Marc and Iseut that is not apparent in other circumstances. As in the verse romances, Marc loves Iseut passionately, and this is characteristic of the romance: not only is this love a legacy of the original legend, it must also have been a feature which lacked in most thirteenth-century aristocratic marriages, for the noble’s marriage was often a business transaction.<sup>195</sup> This love begins with physical attraction:

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<sup>195</sup> Bloch, *Feudal Society* 308.

Li rois Mars, qui tant la vit bele qu'il n'avoit onques veüe sa per, est si eschaufez de s'amor qu'il voit bien qu'il ne se porroit pas longuement consirrer de li (CII.484.1).

He develops an unalterable love for her, even when he knows of her infidelity:

mout est dolenz et tristes, car bien voit tot apertement que mesure Tristanz a esté avec la roïne Yselt, et c'est la chose qui l'ocist et qui le fait vif enragier, car trop amoit la roïne de grant amor.<sup>196</sup>

He rapidly repents sending her to a leper-colony: "Mout se demente li rois

Mars . . . car encores vausist il mieuz qu'il eüst la roïne Yselt qui li mesel"

(CII.545.37). He cares more about her honour than about his: "il amoit la roïne de si grant amor qu'il ne se poïst acorder en nule maniere por fait ne por parole que l'en li deïst qu'il la meïst a honte ne a desonor" (CIII.880.16).

The reader is sometimes aware of a caring and understanding husband, who knows his wife well. He saves Iseut from committing suicide when she believes Tristan to be dead by jumping out of a window and running to snatch the sword from her hands. Instead of rebuking her, he says calmly:

Retornez en vos chambres et pensez de faire autre fait que de vostre cors metre a mort, car ce n'apartient pas a roïne.<sup>197</sup>

Marc, however, sees what he loves as a possession: "il amoit madame Yseut de si tres grant amour k'il ne savoit mie tres bien lequel il amoit mieus a perdre, u madame Yseut u toute sa tere" (MIV.3.22). He has no qualms about using force to gain control over her again at Joyeuse Garde:

Li rois . . . le [Iseut] prist a force, la meïsmes u ele se gisoit en sa cambre o grant compaignie de dames et de damoiseles (MIX.2.34).

When he finally has her at his side again, he asks for no other riches but her.<sup>198</sup>

As for Iseut's feelings towards Marc, they are almost as imperceptible to the reader as they are to her husband. She tries very hard, at the beginning of their

<sup>196</sup> CIII.844.43. See also CIII.920.4; MIX.1.5.

<sup>197</sup> CIII.933.29. See also CII.569.7.

marriage, to hide her secret passion from him, both because she wants to protect

Tristan and because she is afraid of Marc:

Celi [Tristan] aime ele de tot son cuer, celi ne porroit ele lessier, a celi est toz ses pensers; et coment qu'ele face joie au roi Marc et en son lit et defors, ele nel fait fors por dotance qu'ele a de li qu'il ne s'aperçoève de l'amor qu'ele a a Tristan (CII.486.19).

She tries to persuade Marc through careful argument that his suspicions are unfounded.

After her unsuccessful kidnapping by Palamede, she uses the excuse that Tristan has not taken her away to Leonois to prove to Marc that nothing is going on between them (CII.516.24). Later, when she hears from Brangain that Tristan has lost his senses, she still attempts to hide her despair from Marc:

Ele estoit sanz faille assez saige dame de son aage, et por ce se set ele si bien covrir et celer quant ele voit sor li venir le roi Marc qui ne se pot apercevoir s'ele estoit dolente et correciee (CIII.880.9).

She even plots (in vain) Brangain's murder so that her secret might remain untold (CII.487.4). She is afraid of scandal, and thus refuses several times the more pleasant prospect of running away with Tristan:

Mes se nos nos en aliens orandroit ensi com vos l'avez devisié, lors seroit nostre folie conëüe apertement, et vos en seriez apelez traïtor vostre oncle, et je en seroie clamee roïne fole et deleal (CII.512.12).

Similarly, she refuses to leave with her lover after he has hit Marc with his sword (CII.515.3), and only after some hesitation does she accept to live with Tristan in the house of the Sage Demoiselle (CII.550.30). Incidentally, Tristan is also sensitive to reputation in sexual matters, and when he is welcomed to the Round Table, he speaks freely of his chivalric exploits but omits any mention of Iseut (MIII.274.7).

Once Marc has captured Iseut from Joyeuse Garde and taken her back to Tintagel, she no longer tries to conceal her feelings from her husband:

Li cuers est en grant dolour et en tristrece. Bien le puet apercevoir li rois March car il n'est gaires heure que la roïne Yseut ne pleure, ne ce n'est mie

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<sup>198</sup> MIX.50.23. See also MIX.50.44.

de faintise mais de cuer; dont il est merueille qu'ele puet tant plourer et tant jeter larmes conme ele rent, car sans faille la viande est avant moullie qu'ele le menjuce ne mete em bouche. . . . Et quant li rois March voit chaoir les lermes, souvent en a males paroles et mal samblant et male ciere.<sup>199</sup>

The vivid image of her food being drenched by her tears before it reaches her mouth stands out, first because it is not, to our knowledge, a stock phrase to describe unhappiness, and also because the pictorial content of the scene is enhanced, convincingly evoking the state to which Iseut is finally reduced.

It is difficult to generalise from the little information the reader is given about married couples in the prose Tristan. Outside the prologue, there are three married couples who demand particular examination: King Anguin of Ireland and his wife, Ségurade and his wife, and Arthur and Guenièvre. Two of these husbands, Ségurade and Arthur, are married to unfaithful wives. King Anguin listens to the hysterical screams of his wife, and calms her by promising to avenge her brother's death. This couple is also seen as loving and united, both desiring their daughter's happiness.<sup>200</sup> Ségurade is shown to be deeply in love with his wife, and profoundly upset when he discovers her infidelity (CI.370.1), and again when she is taken away by Bliobéris (CI.377.10). Guenièvre, unlike Iseut, is shown to care for the welfare of her husband, and when he is wounded in battle, she "faisoit si grant doel et se dementoit si durement que nus nel porroit dire" (MIX.5.57).

Arthur is not shown to be willingly unfaithful in the prose Tristan: there is no Camille or False Guenièvre here to detract him from the right path. He does fall, however, under the magical charm of an enchantress:

Et quant ele m'ot mené en sa chambre, ele me mist en mon duet un anelet par si grant force que tant com je l'eüsse sor moi, je ne poïsse amer ne dame ne demoisele fors li solement, ne penser a riens dou monde granment

<sup>199</sup> MIX.50.29. See also CII.569.1.

<sup>200</sup> CI.436.2; CI.443.5.

fors a li. Ensi m'ot la demoisele enchanté que je remés del tout a li et obliai la roïne Genevre et totes les autres dames por li . . . (CIII.823.14).

What he says here is ambiguous, and it is difficult to tell whether “totes les autres dames” simply represent the ladies who belong to his court, or ladies he has shown interest in. The narrator does not underline this ambiguity. When the ring is finally wrenched from his finger by a damsel, Arthur realises he was forced to love her by enchantment (CIII.824.18).

The ambiguity mentioned above re-surfaces when Arthur tells Iseut that her beauty is above that of any other, omitting to mention his wife (MV.260.7). One should not over-interpret this passage, but it might have suggested even to a thirteenth-century audience a love that was faithful but not passionate, contrasting with Tristan and Iseut's.

#### 4. Lover and mistress

Because of the legend they were recounting, the authors were more or less bound to make Tristan and Iseut's relationship an important feature of their text. The interest lies in the way they do this by multiplying the periods of time the couple spend together away from Tintagel, focusing the description of their relationship both on their daily life as an adulterous couple and on their more insecure feelings about their relationship when they are apart. The passion proper begins when they drink the potion. Before that, Tristan falls in love with Iseut in a spirit of adolescent male rivalry:

Tristanz avoit mout avant regardee Yselt, et mout li plaisoit, mes son cuer n'i avoit pas mis dusqu'a l'amer granment. Et neporquant, puis qu'il vit que Palamedes i entendoit si merveilleusement qu'il dit ou il morra ou il l'avra, Tristanz redit a soi meïsmes que ja Palamedes por pooir qu'il ait ne l'avra. . . . Ensi entra en orguel et en bobant Tristanz por les amors ma dame Yselt (CI.329.2).

Moreover, between his first visit to Ireland and the second, he has a fleeting love affair with Ségurade's wife, testifying to his lack of commitment to Iseut at that point. The "philtre" changes everything and has irreversible effects:

Ha! Diex, quel boivre! Com il lor fu puis anious! Or ont beü; or sont entré  
 en la riote qui jamés ne faudra tant com il aient l'ame el cors . . .  
 (CII.445.14).

The narrator intervenes in person to commiserate with the couple and to warn the reader of what is to come. From then on, their life will alternate between periods of union and separation. The first period they spend together as a couple takes place before Iseut's marriage to Marc. On their way to Cornouailles a storm forces the couple to land on the "Isle del Jaiant," where, after defeating the lord of the Castel del Plor, Tristan and Iseut remain prisoners as lord and lady "trois mois entiers" (CII.474.15). After the marriage, they are able to spend a few days together in the Forêt du Morois after Tristan has delivered Iseut from Palamede. They stay several months in the house of the Sage Demoiselle, and two years in Joyeuse Garde before the Pentecost of the Grail. During these periods, they live as a married couple. At the Roche de la Sage Demoiselle:

Tot son deduit et tote s'entente est aus bestes prendre et ocirre. Et quant il  
 a fait sa prise, il s'en revient a la roïne Yselt qui grant joie fait de sa venue.  
 Ensi se deduist et esbat Tristan. . . . Le chacier de la forest et le deduit de  
 madame Yselt est tote sa vie.<sup>201</sup>

At Joyeuse Garde:

Le jour est tout adés en la forest et se deduit et se soulage; au soir, quant il  
 doit anuitier, il repaire vers son ostel et trueve illuec madame Yseut, ki  
 mout est lie et joieuse de grant maniere totes les fois qu'ele le voit  
 (MV.8.10).

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<sup>201</sup> CII.553.26. See also CII.512.2.



The lovers live off hunting and love, and their life is so idyllic that they forget all about the exterior threats to their relationship: “or ont il tans de joie avoir, or ne doutent il le roi March ne nul autre home du monde.”<sup>202</sup>

These periods of happiness intersperse longer periods of separation during which the lovers suffer, despite the all-powerful love potion, fears of betrayal and abandonment. When Tristan finds Iseut’s letter of “faus reconfort” to Kahedin, he “cuida tot vraiment que la roïne l’eüst lessié por Kehedin et qu’ele amast Kehedin de tot son cuer” (CIII.836.8). Likewise, Iseut several times believes herself abandoned by Tristan, not least when she hears of his marriage to Iseut aux Blanches Mains:

Ha! Brangain, avez oï de Tristan que tant amoie, qui en tel maniere m’a traïe? Ha! Tristanz! Tristanz! ou preïstes vos le cuer de cele treïr en tel maniere qui plus vos amoit que soi meesmes? (CII.570.10)

On this occasion, as when Tristan has been in Logres for too long, and after the first year of the Quest, she sends a messenger to look for him, unmindful of its effect on the outside world (CII.582.15). In the end, these crises turn out to be unfounded. After Tristan’s wedding to Iseut aux Blanches Mains, the narrator is at pains to show that Tristan finds it physically and mentally impossible to consummate his marriage, so strong is the power of Iseut la Blonde over him:

Tristanz se cocha delez Yselt qui tant est bele durement que s’il l’en prent envie ce n’est mie mout grant merveille. . . . Mes quant il li sovient de Yselt de Cornoaille, il n’a pas cuer de tochie a ceste. Granz est la bataille des deus Yselz. Ceste Yselt li est devant, et l’autre en Cornoaille qui de tot ce ne set nul mot . . . (CII.568.8).

Moreover, Tristan is easily roused to jealousy throughout the prose *Tristan*, as is demonstrated by his dealings with Palamede,<sup>203</sup> Kahedin,

Il art toz de duel et d’ire. A po qu’il n’enraige de maltalent. Il pense; et quant il a grant piece pensé a ceste chose, il ne set quel conseil il i doit metre fors tant qu’il dit a soi meïsmes qu’il ocirra Kehedin qui les amors de madame Yseut li a tolues (CIII.836.10).

<sup>202</sup> MV.8.15. See also CII.553.31.

<sup>203</sup> CII.510-512; MIII.206.11; MVI.25.1-130.

Hélie (MVI.138.40), and Brun le Noir (MVII.233.1). This may seem inconsistent with the fact that Tristan does not appear to be jealous of King Marc, and seems content to share Iseut with him. Unless somehow in the ordinary rules of courtly love, husbands do not count, it would seem that the relationship of the three characters is outside ordinary rules.<sup>204</sup>

The passionate love which unites Tristan and Iseut never burns out, as is demonstrated by Tristan's ecstasy before his mistress when she accompanies him to Louveserp:

Tristrans, ki de s'amour afole, quant il le [Iseut] voit si bele riens de toutes coses et qu'ele cevauce si noblement, il en est si durement liés k'il ne quiert autre paradis (MV.274.12).

Never will their passion be stronger than in their death, as we will see below.

Outside the Prologue, other adulterous couples are either unhappy or the subject of entertainment. The legendary Lancelot-Guenièvre relationship is not the focus of the Tristan, naturally, but the reader does hear from them indirectly. Marc writes an insulting letter to Guenièvre, accusing her of being a "Roïne de mauvais affaire" (MIV.181.2). The reader has been led, throughout the prose Tristan, to disbelieve everything Marc says and does, so his attitude might not reflect that expected of the audience. However, asked if he belongs to the house of King Arthur, a knight answers that he would not want to because

chis osteus ne porroit estre tant hounérés com vous me dites, au mains tant com la roïne Genievre y fust, ki set faire les grans courtoisies la u nous savom bien! (MIII.230.18)

The reader is led to trust this knight, for not only does he appear to have a valid reason for condemning the Queen (MIII.231.6), he is also "si grant et si bien fait de tous

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<sup>204</sup> Other husbands that do not count include Ségurade in CI.376.1, and the unnamed husband of the lady Espinogre loves in MVI.4.

membres k'il dist a soi meïsmes tout plainnement k'il ne puet estre en nule maniere du monde que chis chevaliers ne soit de valour et de pris" (MIII.232.2).

In the Grail section, Lancelot himself is condemned for the immoral life he has led at Guenièvre's side (MVI.35.10). Moreover, Lancelot, unlike Tristan, is twice shown to be unfaithful, albeit under the power of a potion the first time, and under deceit the second. Although Guenièvre would have been more upset by his first infidelity "se la coupe en eüst esté siue" (MVI.103.60), on discovering Lancelot's second infidelity, her reaction is tragically realistic:

Ha, leres, traîtres, qui en mon lit et en ma cambre et devant moi avés fait vostre ribaudie, fuiés de ci et gardés que jamais ne veigniés en lieu u je soie! (MVI.51.22)

There is little sympathy for her plight. She is reproached by several people for banning Lancelot from her presence,<sup>205</sup> and the narrator seems to ask the reader to agree with this view. Guenièvre's feelings towards the situation and her accusation of "ribaudie," a term which Ménard and Greimas both define as "débauche,"<sup>206</sup> are very much the kind of thing that a jealous person would say. Moreover, there is no textual evidence to indicate that Guenièvre is aware of the trickery, whereas she is fully informed about the role of magic in the first infidelity, allowing for greater tolerance towards Lancelot on that occasion (MVI.103.60). Guenièvre, however, has had years of faithful love from Lancelot, the only occasion when his actions are unfaithful being when he has been overpowered by magic and by trickery. Her reaction can therefore arguably be seen as extreme. She might indeed be reproached for not guessing that, in view of Lancelot's constant past fidelity, this present situation had to be the result of trickery. This being the case, banishing an exceptional knight from her presence and

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<sup>205</sup> MVI.52.5; MVI.64.6.

<sup>206</sup> See MVI.Glossary, and "ribauderie," *Dictionnaire de l'ancien Français*, 1999 ed.

therefore from court<sup>207</sup>—without listening to an explanation or remembering that Lancelot was not responsible for his actions because he was not free, being under the effect of magic and deception—may be seen as unbecoming of such a lady as Queen Guenièvre.

The story of Dinas and his “amie” becomes a subject of entertainment to Keu and Gaheriet, despite the suffering it causes Dinas. When he learns that his “amie” has eloped with another knight, he warns them he at least wants his dogs back: “Li braquet sont mien sans doutanche et, pour ce se je vous laissai la dame par le couvenent que vous trovastes entre nous deus, ne vous laissai je mie les braqués” (MIII.132.12). This argument over the guardianship of the dogs is certainly for the amusement of the audience. Because her new lover refuses to fight Dinas over the dogs, she forsakes him and asks Dinas to take her back. Before such fickleness, the latter refuses. They then both agree that whoever the dogs go to when called shall be their owner. In the end, the dogs “laissent la dame pour ce que Dynas lour avoit fait plus de bien que la dame n’eüst” (MIII.136.3). Dinas’s conclusion to the episode reflects his attitude towards fickle women:

miex vaut la nature des chiens, et est plus gentiex et plus franche, plus loiaus et plus enterine, que la nature des femes, ki sont mauvaises  
(MIII.136.10).

Thus the joy in which Tristan and Iseut live most of the time, or at least to which they always return, is not characteristic of the narrator’s depictions of other extramarital relationships, testifying again to the unique bond that unites them.

### 5. Master and servant

Another important relationship which reveals yet more aspects of the protagonists’ personalities is that entertained between lord and vassal or master and servant, this

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<sup>207</sup> And this is a world where, as we will see in Chapter Three, knights who uphold chivalry are highly

relating mainly to Tristan and Gouvernal, and Iseut and Brangain. Gouvernal is the young man Merlin wants Meliadus to entrust his small boy to; he is “mout saiges et mout preuz; et estoit dou reaume de Gaule, et de haut linage” (CI.234.4). The man whom Tristan calls “mestre” (CI.389.5) is able to teach him “escremie,” to show him how to “chacier,” to play “eschés,” and to “chevauchier.”<sup>208</sup> Gouvernal’s love for his “norreçon” is unfailing (CI.248.12). Indeed, he “tant amoit Tristan qu’il n’amoit autant riens dou monde,” and often calls him his “filz.”<sup>209</sup> This love and respect are reciprocal, as Tristan declares to Marc: “se je muir, je doig ma terre a Gorvenal” (CI.309.6). Twice Gouvernal saves Tristan’s life, the first time when he realises that his step-mother is plotting his death (CI.261.1), and a second time when he senses the court of Gaule could become a threat (CI.280.10). He also warns Tristan against fighting Le Morholt, but faced with the wisdom with which Tristan justifies his decision, Gouvernal can only accept:

Se je de ceste enprise fais resort, ja puis n’oiez de moi esperance. Mes ce me reconforte que mes peres fu uns des meilleurs chevaliers dou monde; et puis qu’il fu si bons chevaliers, le sanc se prevera en moi (CI.291.10).

In utter devotion, Gouvernal blames himself when Tristan, having committed adultery with Ségurade’s wife, is wounded by the jealous husband: “de ceste mescheance devroit l’en plus le blasme torner sor moi que sor vos, car je me deüsse prendre garde de vos” (CI.371.21). He is happy for Tristan when he marries Iseut aux Blanches Mains, “car il cuide bien certainement que ceste Yselt li face l’autre oblier, et cuide que Tristanz ait a li jeü charnelement” (CII.568.26).

As the story develops, however, Gouvernal’s role diminishes, and he becomes in effect a simple companion to Tristan wherever he goes. He does not appear to go to Logres with the lovers, and just before the Pentecost of the Grail, the reader learns that

Tristan has “donné sa tere a Gouvernal son maistre, et li avoit donnee a feme une soie cousine germainne, si que Gouvernaus estoit rois et cele roïne” (MVI.28.69).

Just as Gouvernal is important to the action and to Tristan, Brangain’s role is also notable in many ways. The first description of Brangain sets her out as “une demoisele pucele et gentil feme qui mout estoit apercevanz, non mie por ce qu’ele fust de grant aaige, mes mout estoit saige” (CI.330.5). Unlike Iseut, who is oblivious to Tristan’s and Palamede’s attentions, Brangain notices that “il amoient Yselt de tot lor cuer, et por ce s’entreheoient il mortelment por li” (CI.330.8). Her relationship with Iseut is clearly a close one, for she can allow herself to disclose her knowledge “tot en riant” and Iseut confides her feelings in her (CI.330.12). Brangain, although she will never reveal her secret, “amoit merveilleusement” Tristan, and discretely provides him with arms to fight at the tournament proclaimed by the Roi des Cent Chevaliers (CI.332.5). Finally, it is she who is chosen to accompany Iseut as her handmaid to Cornouailles.

As they are about to embark for Cornouailles, the destinies of all four characters, Tristan, Iseut, Brangain and Gouvernal converge, for it is the servants who are instructed on the nature of the potion Iseut’s mother is trusting them with, making sure they both know that “Je ai fait le boivre por as deus; gardez bien que autres n’en boive” (CI.443.7). Both Brangain and Gouvernal are implicated in administering the couple the potion by mistake:

Tristanz, qui auques avoit chaut, demande a boire Gorvenal et Brangain.  
Et il lor avint qu’il troverent le boire amorox dont il ne se prenoient garde,  
car leanz avoit plusors vesselemez d’argent, par quoi il furent deceü a cele  
foiz. Gorvenal prent le vessel ne nel regarde mie, et Brangain prent la cope  
d’or et s’en vet devant Tristan. Gorvenal verse et Brangain li done . . .  
(CII.445.5).

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<sup>208</sup> CI.257.5; CI.263.3.

<sup>209</sup> CI.291.1; CI.280.10.

They soon realise the enormity of what they have done: “Mout sont correlié et dolent Gorvenal et Brangain. . . . Il en plorent endui et demoinent grant duel et merveillous . . .” (CII.447.17). It is only natural, therefore, that they should want to repair their mistake, and Gouvernal suggests substituting Brangain for Iseut on the nuptial night. Brangain agrees without further ado: “Je sui preste que je le face, puis que autrement ne puet estre” (CII.484.29). From then on, Iseut and Brangain share a secret which Iseut fears, at one point, Brangain will reveal, for “li rois Mars se deduisoit trop volentiers a Brangain” (CII.487.6). She orders her death but immediately regrets her act (CII.489.16). When she finds out that Brangain has not been slain, she is “plus liee qu’ele ne sieut” (CII.494.1) and welcomes her handmaid with open arms.

Brangain always supports Iseut. It is she who warns the couple of the ambush in the garden (CII.536.3), and who helps introduce Tristan, dressed up as a woman, into Iseut’s quarters.<sup>210</sup> She is always with Iseut in her hour of need (MII.8.24), and suffers Iseut’s rebukes with humility.<sup>211</sup> Her role, like that of Gouvernal, dwindles towards the middle of the text, and although she is always the woman “en qui la roïne Yseut se fioit de toutes choses,” her role is no longer as important (MIII.62.9). Brangain and Gouvernal show Tristan and Iseut in situations of despair, through which they help them. As the story develops, however, they dwindle into an accepted part of Tristan’s and Iseut’s lives; they are to be relied on, but are seldom spoken of.

#### E. Personal and physical characteristics

It has been said that the “‘novelistic’ analysis and development of character was little practised in the Middle Ages.”<sup>212</sup> The characters, as is the case for much of medieval

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<sup>210</sup> CII.540.22-541.11.

<sup>211</sup> CIII.879.4. See also CIII.879.3.

<sup>212</sup> Morris 119.

romance, reveal themselves through words and action. In the prose Tristan, however, there is a certain degree of description, if not as realistic as a modern reader would expect. Marc, Iseut and Tristan possess distinguishing physical and moral features which manifest themselves independently from their relationships, but which, one will note, feature in the text because they are useful. This is also the case in the Morte Darthur, where one knows, for instance, that Lancelot has a wound on his cheek because that is how a hermit recognises him.<sup>213</sup>

### 1. Marc

While Tristan's and Iseut's attributes place them more than any other character in a consistently positive light, Marc's morality condemns him to the position of villain of the piece, and it is only his love for his wife that sometimes redeems him. Marc is a tall, strong man, and his physical strength is often underlined: "Li rois estoit plains de grant forche et grans chevaliers durement."<sup>214</sup> This information is not gratuitous: it is thanks to his strength that he kills Bertolay, who refused to help him eliminate Tristan, with one fell swoop, taking his adversary by surprise. Because it is necessary for the narrative, it is not a piece of pure description.

Despite his strength, which is a valuable quality in the world of knighthood,<sup>215</sup> several derogatory adjectives are repeatedly used to refer to him: "fel" or "felon" (treacherous), "anieus" (unpleasant), "cruel," "traïtres," "mauvais," "desloiaus," and "couart." The narrator informs the reader of these traits, at the risk of redundancy, since the action has already implied as much:

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<sup>213</sup> Works 1075.36.

<sup>214</sup> MIV.8.1. See also MIV.27.5.

<sup>215</sup> See Chapter Three.



Il li moustre mout greigneur samblant d'amour et li fait mout plus bele  
ciere que ses cuers ne pense. Li samblans k'il fait par dehors est mout  
divers et mout estranges a ce que li cuers vait pensant.<sup>216</sup>

Similarly, a group of shepherds, not recognising Marc, tell him: "li rois est anieus et fel  
et traitres et desloiaus" (MI.185.31). Moreover, he is struck with "paour" in situations  
where one would expect courage, and despite his physical strength, he often flees from  
danger:

Quant li rois March entent cheste parole, pour ce k'il quide tout  
chertainement que che soit Lancelos du Lac ki ensi le vait manechant, il  
n'a pas en soi tant de cuer ne tant de hardement k'il l'atende, ains . . . s'en  
vait adonc si grant oirre com il puet. . . .<sup>217</sup>

When he does fight, and defeats his opponent, he gloats arrogantly:

Li rois March chevauche . . . liés et joians assés plus k'il n'estoit devant  
pour icheste boine aventure ki orendroit li est avenue. Or li est li cuers  
creüs u ventre plus que au double (MIII.80.15).

The information given about Marc is relatively meagre by modern standards, yet it  
suffices for the action. The fact that he has almost no redeeming features serves to  
exculpate, to a certain extent, the adulterous relationship of Tristan and Iseut.

## 2. Iseut

Iseut's attributes make her the heroine, as much as Marc's make him the villain. She is  
not only strikingly beautiful, as in the original legend, but also knows better than any  
one the power of medicinal herbs. This ability is referred to only twice in the text after  
the first episode, and both times it is mentioned for strategic reasons. It is only through  
her knowledge that she is able to heal Tristan's wounds (CI.314.1), and when she later  
asks Brangain to go "en cele forest et me coilliez de ces herbes que je vos ai  
devisiees," it is actually a device to have her killed (CII.487.28). Similarly, much later  
in the romance, Iseut offers to alleviate Dinadan's shoulder pains if he agrees to be her

<sup>216</sup> MIII.92.17. See also MIII.95.30; CI.396.1; MIV.28.30; MIX.25.18.

<sup>217</sup> MIV.62.1. See also CIII.901.22; MII.11.18; MIV.52.10; MIV.54.12; MIV.55.21; MIX.20.38.

champion (MV.57.41). This knowledge of herbs distinguishes her when she first encounters Tristan. As her father tells him:

vos troverroiz garison de vostre plaie, se vos jamés en devez garir, car je ai une fille qui de ce set a mon escient plus que home ne feme qui soit en cest reaume . . . (CI.312.20).

Only after this is her beauty commented upon, and from then on throughout the Tristan. Both the narrator and the characters are unanimous in their admiration of her looks. Her introduction into the text underlines this quality:

ele estoit tant bele dame outreement de totes les biautez que dame pooit avoir en soi que a poines poïst l'en trover si bele dame en tot le monde (CIII.920.1).

Arthur even tells her directly:

tout cil ki vous ont veüe dient merveilles de vostre biauté: cascuns vous loe et prise et cascuns vous tient a la plus bele dame de tout cest monde. . . . Si m'en tieng, se Diex me consaut, a boin eüré et di bien tout apertement que vous passés de biauté toutes les dames de cest monde."<sup>218</sup>

Although the text repeatedly refers to Iseut's beauty, the only visual information the reader has is the fact that she is blonde, and this is only because the attribute features in her name, "Yselt la Bloie." Stock expressions are used to refer to her comeliness: the Queen of Orcanie is also "une des plus beles dames du monde" (MIV.15.6) and Guenièvre "dame des dames, et la biauté de totes les biautez" (CIII.803.18); what distinguishes Iseut is the amount of superlatives used one after the other: "il n'a maintenant en tout cest monde nule si bele dame de toutes biautés com est la roïne Yseut. A sa biauté voirement ne se porroit prendre nule biautés de nule autre dame" (MI.88.9). It is by repetition and not variation that the narrator underlines her beauty.

### 3. Tristan

Tristan's qualities, also inherited from the original legend, set him apart from the very beginning. His good looks are noticed very early on, and follow him from adolescence

right through to his death. The fact that he is universally recognised as highly handsome is proved by the range of people commenting on his appearance: knights,

“De sa biauté,” fait Lamoraz, “ne fait a parler, que je vos di qu’il est toz li plus biax chevaliers que vos onques veïssiez. . . .”<sup>219</sup>

squires,

Tot maintenant que li vallez le vit, il dist a soi meïsmes cist est li mieuz tailliez et li mieuz faiz de membres qu’il veïst pieça mes.<sup>220</sup>

damsels,

Et selonc ce qu’ele cuide, il ne li est pas avis que des que Diex fist premierement home, qu’il feïst un si bel chevalier com est cesti.<sup>221</sup>

and the narrator,

quant mesire Tristrans estoit armés, il estoit si tres biaux hom que on ne peüst pas a celui tans trouver en tout le monde un plus bel home de lui (MII.2.23).

Although he is always referred to as strikingly elegant, the narrator does not provide a visual description of his attributes. Exceptionally, the reader is told that “Il n’avoit en lui que reprendre, fors de ce seulement k’il avoit les caveus petis, ensi con li bregier l’avoient tondu a la fontaine” (MII.78.11). Although this appears to be a fault and not a quality, it is at least an instance in which one can visualise a part of his anatomy, just as one knows that Iseut is blonde. Here again, Tristan’s handsomeness characterises him because it is referred to repeatedly.

Tristan is also wise, for he learns to be philosophical when he is in trouble, as when faced with Bélise’s declaration of love (CI.271.10). This is noted both by the narrator and by other characters. Thus Le Morholt admits: “Por le sens que je cuit en toi ne te vodroie je pas metre a mort que je poïsse, car encor porras estre preudom”

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<sup>218</sup> MV.260.10. See also MV.53.19; MV.68.19; MV.291.20.

<sup>219</sup> CIII.800.39. See also MII.60.4; MIII.183.22.

<sup>220</sup> CII.604.8. See also CII.611.11.

<sup>221</sup> CIII.861.27. See also CIII.818.1.

(CI.299.15). The narrator mentions that he is “saiges,”<sup>222</sup> wisdom being a quality which the knightly world appreciates.

Another distinguishing feature is that he is a successful hunter, and although this is a pastime he does not often have the chance to practise, it is something he greatly enjoys and in which he excels:

Onques mais a nul jor de sa vie il n’ot si boin tans . . . car il va tous les jours en cache, ore a bracsés, ore as levriers. Il a tout le deduit du bois, et il est si boins cachierres et si boins maistres de la cace que on ne trovast pas a celui point som pareil en tout le roiaume de Logres (MV.8.4).

This would have appealed to a thirteenth-century aristocratic audience, for whom hunting was a common activity, which makes it important for the narrator to underline this detail.

As in the legend, he is also an accomplished musician. He both sings and plays the harp, and his “lais” often describe the pain of love, but can also celebrate a victory, as does the *Lai de Victoire* (MVII.167.40). The narrator systematically comments on the hero’s musical abilities:

il comença a soner la harpe si doucement que nus ne l’oïst adonc qui bien ne deïst que plus douce melodie ne poïst l’en oïr. . . . Quant il avoit son lai finé de dit et de chant en tel maniere com je vos ai devisié, si bel, si doucement que nus ne l’en poïst blasmer, il se test tout maintenant. . . .<sup>223</sup>

Not only does he play the harp beautifully, he also composes verses extempore: “Ensi vait pensant a sa dame mesire Tristrans, et en cel penser trueve vers auques delitables a oïr, et le chant trouva il autresi” (MVI.158.63).

Description as readers know it today has no place in the prose *Tristan*. Other medieval stories provide many more opportunities for visualisation than does our text.

<sup>222</sup> CII.595.1. See also CI.286.5; CI.286.13.

<sup>223</sup> CIII.870.20-871.3. See also MVII.172.1; MIX.66.1. Tatiana Fotitch and Ruth Steiner have edited both the lyrics and the musical notation of the seventeen *lais* appearing in the Vienna manuscript Codex Vindobonensis 2542. This manuscript is unique not only because its *lais* all appear with their music, but also because the syllables are aligned with their notes. See *Les Lais du Roman de Tristan en prose d’après le manuscrit de Vienne 2542*, ed. Fotitch and Steiner (München: Fink, 1974).

The description of the Pardoner in the Prologue to Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, for instance, is famous for its humour, but is also a good example of the possibility for medieval physical detail:

This Pardoner hadde heer as yelow as wex,  
 But smothe it heeng as dooth a strike of flex;  
 By ounces henge his lokkes that he hadde,  
 And therwith he his shuldres overspradde;  
 But thynne it lay, by colpons oon and oon;  
 But hood, for jolitee, wered he noon,  
 For it was trussed up in his walet.<sup>224</sup>

The depiction of the Pardoner's hair alone takes up seven lines, and the visual detail is striking. There is nothing like this in the Tristan, where physical minutiae are less important than the depiction of the knightly way of life, and the behaviour of the chivalric class in given situations. It suffices to know that Marc is big, strong, and bad, that Iseut is one of the most beautiful women of her time and that Tristan is extremely handsome, plays the harp, is wise and knows how to hunt. Such are the premises for the tale of knighthood which the prose Tristan really constitutes.

#### F. Death and aftermath

As this study began with the protagonists' birth and childhood, so it must end with the accounts of their deaths. Just as the lovers' lives were to be forever entwined, so are their deaths.

Marc kills Tristan with "un glaive envenimé que Morgain li ot baillié" (MIX.76.5), a result of her revenge for Tristan killing her lover Huneson. Tristan's death is therefore as much Morgain's vengeance as Marc's triumph, a detail which casts a darker light on the event.

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<sup>224</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, "General Prologue," The Riverside Chaucer, ed. Larry D. Benson (Oxford: OUP, 1987) lines 675-81.

During Tristan's agony and death, the reader notes the total lack of reference to God, which is unusual for a medieval text.<sup>225</sup> Tristan's last words are entirely focused on the past. While Palamede, who has converted to Christianity (MIX.118.13), invokes "Jhesucrist, peres de pitié" (MIX.132.61) to take pity on him, Tristan thinks exclusively of past deeds (MIX.80.7). His relentless agony, which should have given him the time to repent, serves only to emphasise his indifference towards redemption.

The only future Tristan speaks of is that which he hopes to spend eternally with Iseut: "Des ore ne me caut quant je muire, puis que je ai madame Yseut ore avec moi!" (MIX.83.12) The picture painted by the narrator is vividly graphic:

Lors estraint la roïne contre son pis de tant de force com il avoit, si qu'il li fist le cuer partir, et il meïsmes morut en cel point, si que bras a bras et bouce a bouce morurent li doi amant et demourerent en tel maniere embracié, tant que cil de laiens quidoient qu'il fussent em pasmisons, quant il virent apertement qu'il estoient mort andoi et que recouvrier n'i estoit; et mort sont ambedoi, et par amour, sans autre confort (MIX.83.14).

Love is all that transcends death, a love not condemned and adulterous, but a love whose illicit aspects seem to the characters and the narrator alike to be irrelevant: "Bien ont moustré apertement que l'amour dont il s'entramoient n'ert pas a gas. Tant com li siecles duerra sera parlé de cheste mort" (MIX.84.61). Even Marc recognises its power, and although he is at first gleeful at the prospective death of Tristan, just as Andret was, he soon joins the mourners, and becomes so "dolans c'a poi qu'il ne moroit" (MIX.85.3). Because the lovers "s'entramerent tant en lour vie, les fist li rois metre ensamble, qu'il fuissent en lor mort aiesié ausi com il furent en lour vie" (MIX.85.10). This death puts an end to the main conflict of the text which opposes Marc and Tristan.

Tristan's death obviously has repercussions in Tintagel, but one must not forget he was also a knight of the Round Table, and his death is therefore keenly felt by his

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<sup>225</sup> For the religious implications of this scene, see Chapter Five.

companions and friends in Logres. When the news reaches Camelot, the court goes into mourning, and

li roy Artu en fist ung grant lay, qui fut appellé Lay Royal, et monseignour Lancelot en fist ung autre, et mains autres cevaliers en firent autresi. Mesmement la roïne Genieuvre en fist ung et si saichez que chascun jour qu'ilz faisoient le dueil de monseignour Tristran, y estoient les laiz recordez (MIX.141.19).

Tristan's death is thus lamented throughout the knightly world, and it is by one of the occupations in which he delighted and excelled most during his lifetime that his memory is celebrated.

Galaad's death is in keeping with his chaste and Christian life:

Et lors . . . se met a jenous. Si n'i ot gaires demouré que il cai as dens sour le pavement, car l'ame li estoit ja du cors partie, et l'emporterent li angle, faisant joie et beneissant Nostre Signeur (MIX.137.45).

This description provides a stark contrast with Tristan's godless death. The implications of this will be examined more fully in Chapter Five.

The text ends, ironically, with Gauvain admitting to his murders:

j'en ai ochis par ma main .XXXIII., non mie pour ce que je fusse mieudres cevaliers que uns autres, mais pour ce que la mesceance se torna plus vers moi que devers nus autres de mes compaignons (MIX.143.32).

Arthur is left to preside over an almost empty court in which the villains, Marc, Andret, and Gauvain, survive, apparently all invincible. There is only one reference to the later death of Marc, but it is never actually described:

En celui val . . . furent mis chil de Saissoigne et emprisonné, k'il n'en issirent onques puis tant com li rois March vesqui. Mais après la mort le roi March, en issirent il . . . (MIV.241.33).

The deaths of Tristan, Iseut, and Galaad confirm the characteristics which transpire from their relationships, actions and words. They reflect fairly consistently their interests during their lifetime: Tristan lived for love and chivalry and Galaad found his fulfilment in celestial chivalry.

This chapter set out to examine the actors of the prose Tristan. The way they are presented is indicative not only of their importance in the text, but also of their social class. The lesser characters of lower social standard thus appear as accessories to the action and to the knightly class, and often speak as a group. Damsels and knights contribute to the lives of knights and ladies, and form part of the background of this aristocratic world. Some attention is paid to the characterisation of the protagonists, but there is little possibility for visualisation. The characters do not, however, live only through speech, as has been said of those of the Morte Darthur.<sup>226</sup> Tristan, Marc and Galaad would not be mistaken for each other, for instance, for what particularises them also differentiates them, and while many a woman is “bele,” Iseut is more beautiful again. This relative lack of pictorial description and interventions revealing personality makes for a consistent narrative, where the reader’s attention is concentrated on what is of importance: the events of the narrative, and what they tell the reader about the chivalric way of life, the mores and customs, to which we will now turn.

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<sup>226</sup> Vida D. Scudder, Le Morte Darthur of Sir Thomas Malory: A Study of the Book and Its Sources (London: J. M. Dent, 1921) 393.



### Chapter Three: Martial Knighthood

Despite the fact that the three-personed tragedy at the heart of the prose Tristan naturally directs the action, the text devotes most of its space not, as one might expect, to the love between Tristan and Iseut, but to the chivalric way of life. Indeed, “the prose author was concerned rather with fitting Tristan’s love for Iseut into the story of Tristan’s knightly career,”<sup>227</sup> and by extension, into that of the knightly occupations of the protagonists of the prose Tristan. Anne Berthelot adds that

les aventures spécifiques des héros, Tristan, Yseut, et Marc, sont noyées dans une masse énorme d’autres récits, qui appartiennent à l’inépuisable fonds commun des contes de chevalerie, et qui s’organisent en un tout plus ou moins structuré. . . : ce que l’on appelle le Tristan en prose n’est pour ainsi dire que marginalement consacré aux amants de Cornouailles.<sup>228</sup>

The prose Tristan devotes considerable space to jousts, tournaments and quests, providing a very extensive description of this heroic world of questing chivalry. It celebrates its most famous heroes, Tristan, Lancelot, and Palamede, to name but three.

Berthelot sees this movement from the Tristan poems to the monumental prose work depicting the adventures of the knights of the Round Table, many Arthurian episodes, scores of secondary narratives, and hundreds of minor characters, inevitably culminating in the Quest for the Holy Grail, as the product of a common tendency in the thirteenth century. This development corresponds not only to the passage from verse to prose, but also to the transformation of a story into, on the one hand,

une chronique, porteuse d’une charge de véridicité analogue à celle des chroniques latines, d’autre part une “somme,” une encyclopédie prenant en compte les moindres détails apparemment secondaires de l’univers arthurien dont il s’agit de faire le portrait fidèle et exhaustif.<sup>229</sup>

<sup>227</sup> Alan Fedrick, “The Account of Tristan’s Birth and Childhood,” Romania 89 (1968): 353.

<sup>228</sup> Anne Berthelot, “Le Tristan en prose: Normalisation d’un mythe,” Tristan-Tristrant: Mélanges en l’honneur de Danielle Buschinger à l’occasion de son 60<sup>e</sup> anniversaire, ed. André Crépin and Wolfgang Spiewok (Greifswald: Reineke, 1996) 37.

<sup>229</sup> Berthelot, “Normalisation” 38.

This explains our findings in Chapters One and Two, where the physical and social world, as well as the particular characteristics of the protagonists, are secondary only to the portrait of the chivalric world presented in the prose Tristan. One must be wary, however, of seeing this romance purely as a manual of chivalry, like, for instance, Etienne de Fougères' Livre des Manières or Robert de Blois' Enseignement des Princes. It does, as will become apparent, provide the general rules by which the protagonists live, but it does not, like Ramón Lull's thirteenth-century Libre del Orde de Cauayleria, make up a "compendious mediaeval treatise on the obligations of knighthood."<sup>230</sup> Most importantly, the prose Tristan does not present a comprehensive picture of all aspects of chivalric life: the social and judicial realities of medieval knightly life are hardly ever reflected, and this is precisely what distinguishes the romance from the manual.

On the other hand, it is possible to draw from the prose Tristan the rules of chivalry that apply to this romance. One leading historian has said that

Chivalry cannot be divorced from the martial world of the mounted warrior: it cannot be divorced from aristocracy, because knights commonly were men of high lineage: and from the middle of the twelfth century on it very frequently carries ethical or religious overtones.<sup>231</sup>

Much the same can be said of chivalry in the prose Tristan although, as in real life, it eludes definition. A way of treating the problem of chivalry in romance is by considering it as a syndrome, as "a group of concurrent symptoms (of a disease)," and as "a characteristic combination of opinions, emotions, behaviour, etc."<sup>232</sup> Not every symptom need be present in each case, nor would the presence of one of them on its own justify presuming the existence of the syndrome. The space devoted to this way of life makes the Tristan not a manual of chivalry, but a tale of knighthood, and this

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<sup>230</sup> Alfred Byles, preface, The Book of the Ordre of Chyualry, by Ramón Lull, trans. William Caxton (Oxford: OUP, 1926) vii.

<sup>231</sup> Maurice Keen, Chivalry (New Haven: Yale UP, 1984) 2.

chapter will therefore examine the chivalric occupations of the protagonists and their attitudes. There are three important spheres of knightly life in the prose Tristan: martial chivalry, courtly chivalry, and finally religious chivalry.<sup>233</sup>

### I. Training for knighthood

The knights are the real protagonists of the prose Tristan. The young men aspiring to knighthood have to train for this life, although this system is only lightly sketched in by the narrator. The audience witnesses knighting ceremonies, and although the full ritual in the Middle Ages could at times be elaborately religious, as Lull testifies,<sup>234</sup> most of the Tristan's dubbing scenes are described rather more briefly.

Although the youth theme in our text is not as developed as it is in Chrétien de Troyes's Perceval, the reader catches a glimpse of what knightly education involves through the unusually detailed episode of Tristan's upbringing. While Tristan is still an infant, Merlin advises Meliadus to appoint Gouvernal as Tristan's tutor (CI.238.18), and the child's knightly training begins in earnest around his eighth birthday. Gouvernal ensures that when Meliadus goes hunting, the young Tristan is included in the party, and he even sees that the "mout petiz" child (CI.257.4) is dressed appropriately:

Gorvenal l'i menoit ensi por ce qu'il a prist maniere de bois et de chacier.  
Et il l'avoit tout vestu a la maniere del bois (CI.257.5).

Later on, when Gouvernal decides that it is too dangerous for Tristan to live with his murderous step-mother, he sees Faramon's court in Gaule as the perfect opportunity for Tristan to learn how to "servir et a cortioier, et coment houz hom et gentils hom se doit maintenir" (CI.261.8). It appears from the amount of detail that training for knighthood is an important part of the knight's life, and it is certainly a feature with

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<sup>232</sup> "Syndrome," The Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1990 ed.

<sup>233</sup> See Chapter Four for courtly chivalry and Chapter Five for religious chivalry.

which the authors pad out the original three-personed tragedy, thus creating a coherent depiction of knightly life, from infancy to death. All goes according to Gouvenal's plan, and by the age of twelve, the precocious Tristan excels at chess, fencing and riding:

Il sot des eschés et des tables que nus ne l'en pooit aprendre un sol point.  
De l'escremie fu il si mestres en po de tens qu'il ne pooit trover en nule  
maniere son per. De bel chevauchier et de sagement faire ce que il faisoit  
ne se pooit nus jovenciax aparegier a li.<sup>235</sup>

This fictional version of Tristan's training reflects the reality of medieval life, where training for knighthood usually began at seven, when the young boy would be entrusted to the service of a neighbouring lord, a relative or close friend, or perhaps the king if the child was lucky, to learn the profession of arms.<sup>236</sup> Here, in pursuit of chivalric honours, the boy took up his office as a page. He was taught to serve his lord and lady at table, to ride, and to accompany his lord on various excursions. Although he was educated in hawking and hunting, he did not necessarily learn to read and write, because more important things awaited him. He would be trained in fencing and in the art of javelin throwing, and he thus developed his physical strength to support heavy equipment while controlling a horse. At the age of fourteen, the page was usually promoted to the higher position of squire. He continued his training, and if he had served his lord well, the squire was eligible to receive the honour of knighthood. That this level of detail is not attained in our text is one of the factors that shows that it is less a manual of chivalry than a romance.

Chrétien's romance Perceval deals with the topic of chivalric training in an altogether different way. Although more detailed, the account of Perceval's education

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<sup>234</sup> Lull 67-75.

<sup>235</sup> CI.263.3. Renée Curtis defines "tables" as a "jeu qui se joue sur un tableau avec des jetons." See CI.Glossary.

is done in such a way as to provoke laughter, for Perceval is naïve to the point of not recognising a lance when he sees one. One day, Perceval chances upon five armed knights, and his conversation with one of them begins his knightly education:

“Biaus sire chiers,  
 Vos qui avez non chevaliers,  
 Que est ice que vos tenez?” . . .  
 –“Jo te dirai: ce est ma lance.”<sup>237</sup>

This pattern of naïve question and answer is repeated for the “escuz” and the “haubert,” all this while the knight is trying to find out from Perceval where the damsels he is looking for have disappeared to, adding a comic dimension to an otherwise didactic passage. Gormenant de Goort later takes on the responsibility of Perceval’s proper training, and the narrator provides a level of detail not attained in the

Tristan:

Si l’aprant et si li ensaigne  
 Comant en doit son escu prandre.  
 Un petit lo vait avent prandre  
 Tant qu’au col do cheval lo joint  
 Et met la lence ou fautre et point  
 Lo cheval. . . .<sup>238</sup>

If training concerning other characters is mentioned in the Tristan, it is usually in passing, as when the narrator describes Gauvain’s ability to fight, for he “mout savoit de l’escremie . . . conme cil qui bien en estoit usagés d’enfance” (MVII.186.6).

Tristan’s education, however, is exemplary, and the knight he becomes sets a standard which is usually beyond the reach of his peers.

The next stage in the development of knights in the prose Tristan is the dubbing ceremony, which welcomes the knight into what the Grail section calls the “haute

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<sup>236</sup> For more information on this subject see “Knighthood,” Dictionary of Medieval Knighthood and Chivalry, 1986-88 ed.; Keen, Chivalry; and Richard Barber, The Reign of Chivalry (New York: St Martin’s P, 1980).

<sup>237</sup> Chrétien de Troyes, Le Conte du Graal ou Le Roman de Perceval, Romans, ed. Michel Zink (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1994) lines 183-191.

<sup>238</sup> Perceval lines 1386-391.

ordre de cevalerie” (MVI.122.5), and of which there are several examples of varying detail in our romance.<sup>239</sup> The common denominator between the fourteen references to knighting ceremonies is the presence of the knight-to-be and of his patron, be it another knight, his lord, or a king. The age of the candidate, the time of day, the place, the prerequisites (what the patron needs to know before he confers the knighthood upon the aspiring knight), the number and nature of the rituals associated with the act of dubbing are as varied as are the number of ceremonies. Half the knightings are directly linked to the Church, and there are as many of these inside as outside the Grail section. Although no one ceremony can be entirely representative of all the others, it may be useful to examine two in detail: Tristan’s dubbing ceremony, both because he is the protagonist and because his knighting is representative of the ceremonies outside the Grail section, and Helyant le Blanc’s dubbing, because it is by far the fullest account of this ritual in the text.

Tristan requests Marc to knight him for the specific reason of qualifying him to defend Cornouailles against Le Morholt. This reflects contemporary reality, where the eve of a battle was often the occasion for conferring knighthood.<sup>240</sup> Tristan’s ceremony is brief, but does include an overnight vigil prior to the knighting:

Cele nuit veilla Tristanz en une eglise de Nostre Dame, et a l’endemain entor ore de prime le fist chevalier li rois Mars . . . (CI.292.25).

A small “feste” only follows, despite the fact that Marc would have wished for something more elaborate had it not been for the pressing circumstances of fighting Le Morholt (CI.292.17). Tristan is between sixteen and seventeen years of age, apparently the average knighting age in the prose *Tristan*, which is accurate historically

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<sup>239</sup> The reference to knighthood as an order is closely connected with the influence of the Church in the Middle Ages; see Bloch, *Feudal Society* 314.

<sup>240</sup> Keen, *Chivalry* 79.

speaking, for candidates were as a rule scarcely more than boys.<sup>241</sup> Brun le Noir is nineteen, Perceval is between fifteen and sixteen, and Galaad is possibly a little younger.<sup>242</sup> The time of day of the ceremony is “entor ore de prime,” i. e. six o'clock in the morning, and this appears to be quite common throughout the Tristan (MVI.93.1), although in some circumstances the timing is no more precise than “bien matin,”<sup>243</sup> and sometimes it is simply “a l'endemain” of the vigil.<sup>244</sup> The rituals characterising some of the later dubbing ceremonies, such as the fitting of the spurs, the girding with the sword, the accolade and the Mass, are not specified in Tristan's accession to knighthood, and belong, as a general rule, to the knighting ceremonies of the Grail section,<sup>245</sup> although the narrator refers briefly to the giving of “armes” when Tristan knights his own squire (CI.324.3). Tristan's knighting is a means to a specific end, for he is the only candidate in a position to defend Cornouailles against Le Morholt. Not only does he fulfil the physical conditions, but he is also “filz de roi,” and Le Morholt has made it clear that he “n'enterroit pas en champ por ceste querele se ce ne fust encontre home qui fust d'ausi haut linaige com il est, car hontes li sembleroit” (CI.294.11). The importance of lineage will be examined more closely below as one of the requirements of knighthood, but in Tristan's and Brun's knightings at least, this issue is evidently of prime importance.<sup>246</sup>

Helyant le Blanc, Bohort's presumably illegitimate son (MVI.80.47), comes to Arthur's court on his father's request, and Arthur rapidly decides to knight the squire

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<sup>241</sup> Bloch, Feudal Society 312.

<sup>242</sup> See CI.286.12 for Tristan, CII.637.2 for Brun, MVI.55.14 for Perceval, and MVI.84.15, 37 for Galaad. There is an inconsistency over Perceval, who is knighted twice, once in MIV.142.1 and a second time in MVI.59.13.

<sup>243</sup> MIX.101.2. See also MVI.123.1.

<sup>244</sup> MIV.141.27; MVI.59.13.

<sup>245</sup> The Grail-Lancelot-Mort Artu section may be taken to begin in MVI.29 when a hermit announces the imminent coming of the Grail to Arthur.

<sup>246</sup> For Brun le Noir and lineage, see CII.637.27. It is not important, though, as a qualification for Tristan to become a knight but for Le Morholt being willing to fight him once he has been knighted.

“diemence au matin” (MVI.81.54).<sup>247</sup> Neither father nor son has asked Arthur to knight Helyant, although it is common in the prose *Tristan* for prospective knights to ask a particular lord or knight to dub them. One squire, having first chosen Gauvain as patron, changes his mind and requests the favour from Tristan (CI.320.17).

The description of the hours leading up to Helyant’s knighting, and of the ceremony itself, is tripartite: 1) from the preparation for the vigil to the morning after; 2) the admonition; 3) the Mass, during which the audience witnesses the fitting of the spurs, the girding of the sword and the neck blow.

Quant vint au samedi au soir, Helians fu baingniés trop ricement et a grant joie et a grant honeur fu bien aparelliés. Et quant vint au soir, il fu menés au moustier Saint Estevene pour proier Damedieu et la siue Mere Beneoite, que Dex li laissast parfurnir sa cevalerie en tel maniere que il fesist honneur a Damedieu et au roi Artu et au roiaume de Logres. Et quant il ot esté em proieres toute la nuit dusc’au matin, il s’en ala pour coucier dusques au jour, que il fu biaus et clers. Et adonques se leverent trestout li cevalier et alerent au palais le roi (MVI.82.1).

Interestingly, seven out of the fourteen references to knighting ceremonies include a vigil, three outside the Grail section, and four inside it.<sup>248</sup> Helyant’s vigil is very detailed: the reader knows the location (the “moustier”)<sup>249</sup> as well as the specific subjects of Helyant’s prayers. The location of the vigil is not always the “moustier;” in the cases of Tristan, Brun, Perceval and Meliem, it is simply an “eglyse,” whether “la mestre yglise de Kamaalot” or “Cardoeil.”<sup>250</sup>

The following section of the ceremony takes place before the Mass, in the “moustier,” where Arthur admonishes Helyant to respect the obligations of knighthood, which will be studied more closely below:

<sup>247</sup> Helyant’s knighting is based on the analogous scene in the prose *Lancelot*, ed. Micha, 6: 243. The implications of this episode are discussed at the end of Chapter Five.

<sup>248</sup> See Knighting Ceremonies Table 3.

<sup>249</sup> “1. Couvent, monastère. 2. Eglise en général,” in “mostier,” *Dictionnaire de l’Ancien Français*, 1999 ed.

<sup>250</sup> See Knighting Ceremonies Table 3.



li rois . . . fait venir les sains et fait jurer Helian qu'il sera fiex et sergans de Sainte Eglyse et, se nus li veut faire tort, il li aidera a son pooir. Et se feme desconseillie a mestier d'aide, il li aidera a son pooir et le secourra. "Et se nule pucele ne nus cevaliers desconseilliés ne nus hom a mestier de conseil, vous le conseilлерés a vostre pooir, si essaucerés cevalerie et destruirés les robeours et les maufaiteurs, vous serés courtois et larges et deboinaires a desconseilliés, vous serés sages et dirés verité en toutes coses, vous ne ferés vilenie a nul hom ne a nule feme, se ce n'estoit a droit. Vous amerés Damedieu de tout vostre pooir et moi, qui cevalier vous fas, si me tenrés pour vostre signeur des ore en avant, et je vous tenrai pour mon cevalier a tous jours mais" (MVI.82.17).

It is important to note the religious and charitable aspects of Arthur's advice, and although they are not characteristic of the admonitions in the Grail section, they present strong similarities with the admonition given to Arthur by the "arcevesques" of Logres in the French prose Merlin, where Arthur has to swear to "Dieu et ma dame sainte Marie et a touz sainz et a toutes saintes Sainte Eglise" to protect the weak and maintain justice.<sup>251</sup> Helyant is to be, above all, "sergans de Sainte Eglyse," quite unlike Meliem or Samaliel, who are simply warned to safeguard their lineage, and to ensure that "cevalerie soit en vous bien emploiee."<sup>252</sup> Helyant's next duty is to help anyone who needs "conseil," be it a damsel, a woman, a man or a knight. He is also exhorted to protect society from "robeours et les maufaiteurs," to be courteous and generous to those in need, to be wise and to tell the truth, to wrong nobody, and finally to honour God and Arthur, the latter as the one who has knighted him. Many knights in the prose Tristan strive to honour most of these obligations, although this is the only point where they are set out so didactically.

The final part of the knighting ceremony is the actual conferring of knighthood, through the bestowing of weapons, clearly a ritualistic ceremonial with a definite sequence:

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<sup>251</sup> Robert de Boron, Merlin: Roman du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, ed. A. Micha (Genève: Droz, 1979) 289.

<sup>252</sup> MVI.123.6; MIX.101.9.

Et quant ce vint a dire l'Epistre, li rois Baudemagu caucha a Helian un des  
esperons et Lionniaus li caucha l'autre. Et quant ce vint a lire  
L'Evangille, li rois Artus li chaint l'espee et li donna la colee et li dist que  
Diex le feïst preudome. Et ensi demourerent el moustier tant que la messe  
fu cantee de cief en cief (MVI.82.33).

It is not the patron who fits the spurs, but two other important knights witnessing the ceremony; Galaad's spurs are fitted by Lyonnell and Bohort. The girding of the sword and the neck blow, however, are the responsibility of the patron, Arthur in Helyant's case and Lancelot in Galaad's. The description of Helyant's dubbing ceremony is exceptionally precise for the reader knows exactly at what stage these actions take place. The spurs are fitted when the Epistle is said, and the sword is girded and the neck blow given at the reading of the Gospel. All this happens during Mass, which is not uncommon for Tristan knightings (the ceremonies of Perceval, Galaad and Samaliel all take place during Mass). Finally, as is sometimes the case in the Tristan, the day ends with a celebration around a meal.<sup>253</sup> The precision with which this ceremony is related indicates what interests the authors most and presumably their audience. It must also be noted that, unusual as this elaborately detailed scene is in the prose Tristan, it was also thus in the thirteenth century, for the accessory practices like the purifying bath and the vigil do not, in the first instance, appear to have been introduced before the twelfth century, or ever to have been, according to Bloch, anything but exceptional.<sup>254</sup> This vital passage into knighthood nevertheless belongs to the life of a knight, and as such needs to be related in some detail. It is clearly of more interest to describe this ceremony than to provide the minutiae of a character's looks or thoughts, which certainly brings the text closer to being a manual to the life of a knight. Moreover, the attitude of the thirteenth-century aristocracy towards the dubbing ceremony can be observed in historical evidence, which shows that the apogee

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<sup>253</sup> See Knighting Ceremonies Table 5.

of a young noble's life is the moment when he is admitted into knighthood, and this episode, whose further implications will be examined in Chapter Five, clearly reflects this reality.

## II. Code of chivalry

In the Morte, Malory gives a practical summary of knightly values in the formal oath of the Round Table.<sup>255</sup> In the prose Tristan, only three knights take an oath at their dubbing ceremony, or at least agree to abide by the rules set out by their patron.<sup>256</sup>

Because, in the fictional prose Tristan as in reality,<sup>257</sup> this type of oath is often linked to the religious element of the ceremony, it will be examined in more detail in Chapter Five. One cannot, from these vows alone, establish the code of chivalry which is in fact best represented by the whole of the Tristan. It is nevertheless possible to list what the Grail section sees as important from these admonitions, the text of which is set out in Table Five below. Arthur tells Helyant to serve the Church, assist those in need, to exact justice on thieves and wrongdoers, to be courteous and generous, to tell the truth, and not to hurt anyone unless it is justified (MVI.82.17). Meliem and Samaliel are exhorted told to honour their lineage through their knighthood.<sup>258</sup> From these vows it is possible to distinguish the physical and moral qualities expected of the knight and the customs he is to respect, as we will see.

The code of knightly values set out in these three admonitions is best reflected by the way in which other characters and the narrator praise the particular physical and moral qualities of certain knights. In a letter addressed to Tristan, Lancelot admires the latter for possessing the following virtues:

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<sup>254</sup> Bloch, Feudal Society 316.

<sup>255</sup> Works 120.15-27. See on this subject Dorsey Armstrong, "Gender and the Chivalric Community: The Pentecostal Oath in Malory's 'Tale of King Arthur,'" BBIAS 51 (1999): 293-312.

<sup>256</sup> MVI.82.17; MVI.123.6; MIX.101.9.

<sup>257</sup> Bloch, Feudal Society 317.

Au meilleur chevalier qui or soit ou monde, qui de sens et d'afaitement, d'enseignement, de cortoisie et de franchise, de gentillesce, de bonté, de valor, de bel parler et de mieuz respondre, de hautesce, de linaige et de biauté qui a home agreee quant orguieux ne li est voisins, qui de totes les bones graces que chevaliers porroit avoir passe toz les autres . . . (CIII.691.3).

In a missive sent to Lancelot, Tristan adds to this list three more vital qualities:

“hardement, proesce,” and “force” (CIII.688.3). Other attributes such as loyalty, generosity and modesty also appear to be important to the knightly world both by the condemnation of their antonyms (loyalty, for instance, is upheld through the condemnation of disloyalty) and by their appraisal throughout the text. In order to examine these virtues, it is necessary to divide them into three categories, physical, moral, and social (the latter category will be covered in Chapter Four).

The physical qualities include:

“biauté” (beauty)

“force” (strength)

The moral qualities are:

“proesce,” “hardement,” “bonté” (valour, bravery, courage, fortitude)<sup>259</sup>

“hautesce,” “linaige” (lineage; noble descent)<sup>260</sup>

“sens” (common sense, reason, wisdom)<sup>261</sup>

“loiaument”<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> MVI.123.6; MIX.101.9.

<sup>259</sup> “vaillance,” CIII.Glossary.

<sup>260</sup> “race, famille,” CIII.Glossary.

<sup>261</sup> “bon sens, sagesse,” CIII.Glossary.

<sup>262</sup> “sincèrement, en toute bonne foi,” MIII.Glossary.

Knighting Ceremonies Table 1

	Vocabulary	Age of knight-to-be	Place of knighting	Date or time of knighting	Patron
<b>Tristan</b>	“le fist chevalier” CI.292.26	between 16 and 17 CI.286.12	possibly in the church CI.292.25	“entor ore de prime” CI.292.26	“li rois Mars” CI.292.26
<b>Tristan’s squire</b>	“faire chevalier” CI.324.3				“Tristanz” CI.324.2
<b>Nabon’s son (intention only)</b>	“faire chevalier” CII.589.6				“Nabon le Noir” CII.589.3
<b>Brun le Noir</b>	“faire chevalier” CII.642.35	19 years old CII.637.2	possibly in Arthur’s court CII.642.39	“a l’endemain” of the vigil CII.642.39	“li rois Artus” CII.642.39
<b>Néroneus</b>	“fesistes . . . cevalier” MI.14.31		“Chastel Vermeil” MI.14.42		“Lanselos du Lac” MI.14.2
<b>Dinadan</b>	“fait . . . cevalier” MII.14.19				“le roi Artu” MII.14.18
<b>Perceval (1)</b>	“fist . . . cevalier” MIV.142.1		possibly in the church MIV.142.7	“a l’endemain” of the vigil MIV.142.1	“li rois Artus” MIV.142.1

Knighting Ceremonies Table 1 (continued)

	Vocabulary	Age of knight-to-be	Place of knighting	Date or time of knighting	Patron
<b>Perceval (2)</b>	“fist . . . cevalier” MVI.59.14	15 years old MVI.55.14	possibly in the church MVI.59.14	“a l’endemain” of the vigil MVI.59.14	“li rois [Arthur]” MVI.59.14
<b>Pelles’s cousin</b>	“fait . . . chevalier” MVI.70.34			“un jour après Pasques” MVI.70.33	“li rois Pelles” MVI.70.33
<b>Helyant le Blanc</b>	“li chaint l’espee” MVI.93.3		in the “moustier” MVI.82.33	“diemence au matin” MVI.81.54	“li rois Artus” MVI.82.36
<b>Galaad</b>	“fist cevalier” MVI.93.3	sometime after 13 years old MVI.84.15	possibly in the “moustier” MVI.93.1	“a eure de prime” MVI.93.2	“Lanselos” MVI.93.4
<b>Meliem</b>	“fist cevalier” MVI.123.2		possibly in the “eglyse” MVI.122.3	“au matin” MVI.123.2	“Galaad” MVI.123.1
<b>Helyes</b>	“fait cevalier” MVII.128.19				“li rois Artus” MVII.128.18
<b>Samaliel</b>	“fist . . . chevalier” · MIX.101.4		in an “hermitage” MIX.101.2	“bien matin” MIX.101.2	“Galaad” MIX.101.4

**Knighting Ceremonies Table 2**

	<b>Prerequisites</b>
<b>Tristan</b>	Marc tells Tristan: “mout iestes biax, et mout avez bien deservi par vostre proesce et par vostre servise que chevalier vos face” CI.292.14
<b>Brun le Noir</b>	Arthur asks Brun: “di moi aucune chose de ton linaige, et lors par aventure te feré chevalier et par aventure non” CII.637.33
<b>Perceval (1)</b>	Agloval tells Arthur: “mes freres . . . est si jentieus hom . . . car li rois Pellynor, ki nostres peres fu, fu li plus gentieus hom ki fust a chelui tans u monde” MIV.141.10
<b>Perceval (2)</b>	Arthur is told who Perceval is, and finds him “biaus,” and Agloval adds “li enfes . . . est mes freres, si le vous ai amené pour faire cevalier, car je quit qu’il sera preudom” MVI.59.3, 6
<b>Helyant le Blanc</b>	All Arthur needs to know is that Helyant is Bors’s son and Brangoire’s nephew MVI.81.50
<b>Galaad</b>	Lancelot agrees to knight Galaad because he sees in him “toutes biautés,” “bele fourme d’ome,” and “simplece” MVI.92.53
<b>Meliem</b>	“Galaad regarde le vallet qui si fort pleure, si li em prent mout grant pitié, et pour che li otroie sa volenté” MVI.121.9
<b>Samaliel</b>	Samaliel tells Galaad: “je sui bien d’aage et de si grant parenté que par gentillece ne devroit il pas remanoir” MIX.95.17

Knighting Ceremonies Table 3

	Ritual: bath	Ritual: giving of clothes	Ritual: vigil	Ritual: Mass
<b>Tristan</b>			“Cele nuit veilla Tristanz en une eglise de Nostre Dame” CI.292.25	
<b>Brun le Noir</b>			“li vallez alast veillier a la mestre yglise de Kamaalot” CII.642.34	
<b>Perceval (1)</b>			“Dont conmande a Kex le senescal k’il le fache apareiller et veiller” MIV.141.27	“Quant li rois ot messe oïe” MIV.142.7
<b>Perceval (2)</b>			“Cele nuit veilla Percevaus en la plus maistre eglise de Cardoeil” MVI.59.13	
<b>Pelles’s cousin</b>		“pour l’ounour de lui ot il a pluseurs homes donnees robes” MVI.70.33		
<b>Helyant le Blanc</b>	“Helains fu baigniés trop ricement” MVI.82.1		“Et quant il ot esté em proieres toute la nuit dusc’au matin” MVI.82.3	“ensi demourerent el moustier tant que la messe fu cantee de cief en cief” MVI.82.38
<b>Galaad</b>			“Cele nuit demoura laiens Lanselos et fist toute nuit veillier le vallet u moustier” MVI.93.1	“Li rois estoit alés au moustier pour oïr la grant messe” MVI.93.17
<b>Meliem</b>			“Galaad dist au vallet qu’i le couvenra anuit veillier a l’eglyse” MVI.122.2	
<b>Samaliel</b>				“vint la bien matin et puis pria au preudome qu’il chantast messe” MIX.101.2



Knighting Ceremonies Table 4

	Ritual: fitting of the spurs	Ritual: girding of the sword	Ritual: neck blow	Collective dubbing
<b>Tristan's squire</b>		“Et quant il li ot doné chevalerie et armes” CI.324.3		
<b>Néroneus</b>		“estes vous ciex . . . a qui je donnai les armes meismes que je portoie?” MI.14.45		
<b>Dinadan</b>				“Et nous ki estiom laiens bien dusques a .XXII. cevaliers tous noviaus” MII.15.2
<b>Helyant le Blanc</b>	“li rois Baudemagu caucha a Helian un des esperons et Lionniaus li caucha l'autre.” MVI.82.34	“Et quant ce vint a lire l'Evangille, li rois Artus li chaint l'espee” MVI.82.35	“li rois Artus . . . li donna la colee” MVI.82.36	
<b>Galaad</b>	“Lyonnell li caucha un des esperons et Boors l'autre.” MVI.93.3	“Aprés li chaint Lanelos l'espee” MVI.93.4	“et li donna la colee” MVI.93.4	
<b>Meliem</b>	“Et quant i li ot fait tout çou qu'il devoit” MVI.123.3			
<b>Samaliel</b>	“Et quant Galaad li ot fait ce que a lui appartenoit a chevalier” MIX.101.8			

Knighting Ceremonies Table 5

	Ritual: admonition	Post-dubbing celebration
<b>Tristan</b>		“La ou il fesoient la feste” CI.293.1
<b>Brun le Noir</b>		“il menoient par leanz la joie et la feste dou novel chevalier, et il seoient a disner” CII.643.1
<b>Perceval (1)</b>		“Quant les tables furent mises . . . s’il furent ricement servi ce ne fait pas a demander” MIV.142.10
<b>Perceval (2)</b>		“Et quant il fu eure de dingner, li rois vint el palais pour mengier” MVI.59.14
<b>Helyant le Blanc</b>	“li rois . . . fait venir les sains et fait jurer Helian qu’il sera fiex et sergans de Sainte Eglyse et, se nus li veut faire tort, i li aidera a son pooir. Et se feme desconseillie a mestier d’aïde, il li aidera a son pooir et le secourra. ‘Et se nule pucele ne nus cevaliers desconseilliés ne nus hom a mestier de conseil, vous le conseillerés a vostre pooir, si essaucerés cevalerie et destruirés les robeours et les maufauteurs, vous serés courtois et larges et deboinaires a desconseillés, vous serés sages et dirés verité en toutes choses, vous ne ferés vilenie a nule home ne a nule feme, se ce n’estoit a droit” MVI.82.17	“Et lors s’asissent as tables et mengierent a grant joie et a grant soulas” MVI.82.44
<b>Meliem</b>	“des que vous estes cevaliers et que vous estes estrais de si haute lingnie conme de roi, or gardés que cevalerie soit en vous bien emploïie, que l’onor de vostre lignage soit sauve” MVI.123.6	
<b>Samaliel</b>	“Samaliel, or es tu chevaliers. Garde que tu soies preudom, que la hautece de ton lignage i ait honor!” MIX.101.9	

“gentillesce,” “franchise” (nobility, generosity)<sup>263</sup>

lack of “orgoeil,”<sup>264</sup>

The social skills are:

“enseignement,” “afaitement” (education)<sup>265</sup>

“bel parler et . . . mieuz respondre” (the ability to express oneself in a courteous manner)

“cortoisie” (courtesy)

#### A. Physical

It was established in Chapter Two that Tristan’s looks are one of his distinguishing features. Although his outward appearance receives the most sustained admiration in the prose Tristan, other knights, such as Dinadan, Lancelot, Perceval and Palamede, also attract positive comments on their physique. Thus although this is not an indispensable feature, it nevertheless adds to a knight’s honour, as is demonstrated by the numerous comments, both by female and male characters, as well as by the narrator himself, on a knight’s “biauté,” “corsage” (stature)<sup>266</sup> and on the fact that some are particularly “bien tailliés.”<sup>267</sup> Tristan is not alone in enjoying a great number of compliments from all types of people.<sup>268</sup> Dinadan is admired by no less a lady than Queen Iseut, who is struck by the fact that “il estoit mout biaux cevaliers et mout bien tailliés du grant dont il estoit” (MV.53.8). Likewise, a damsel believes Lancelot to be

<sup>263</sup> “noblesse, générosité,” CIII.Glossary.

<sup>264</sup> “présomption, arrogance,” MIII.Glossary.

<sup>265</sup> “éducation,” CIII.Glossary.

<sup>266</sup> “volume du corps (en particulier du buste), stature,” MII.Glossary.

<sup>267</sup> “proportionné,” MII.Glossary. Stature is admired not only in works of imagination, but also in the chronicles. See Bloch, Feudal Society 294.

<sup>268</sup> MVII.88.29; MII.138.10. See also Chapter Two; MI.96.18; MII.21.37; MII.164.19.

“bien fais et si bien tailliés de toutes choses” (MIII.168.15), while the inhabitants of a city admire Palamede’s physique.<sup>269</sup>

Narratorial comments also help stress the importance of physical appearance: the narrator thus draws attention to Lancelot’s beautiful hair (MVI.51.38). This detail is rendered more poignant because it is used to reinforce the drama of Lancelot pulling his hair out after Guenièvre has banished him from court. One will note, however, that the reader is unaware of the colour of this beautiful hair.

The narrator also finds Galaad’s and Perceval’s appearances pleasant to behold,<sup>270</sup> as well as that of the Chevalier à la Housse Vermeille, for “a painnes peüst on trouver miex formé el roiaume de Logres a chelui tans” (MVII.229.50). The narrator even comments on the elegance of Tristan’s bearing:

sour tout ce avoit il un petit capelet de fer en sa teste mout cointement  
couvert d’un samit vert. . . .<sup>271</sup>

Ménard defines “cointement” as “élégamment,”<sup>272</sup> so that it is not only the build of a knight that catches the eye, but also the refinement of his style.

A pleasing appearance is not all, for a knight undoubtedly needs to possess “force,” or strength, for mere survival, although this is nothing without the corresponding moral qualities which will put this strength to good use: courage and bravery. The importance of strength is underlined both by the action and by the characters, and the following passage demonstrates how Lancelot’s might and energy impress his opponents:

il conoissent bien aus cos qu’il vont recevant de li qu’il est preudons et  
bons chevaliers et de grant force et de grant pooir, et li plus vistes et li plus  
hardiz qu’il onques veïssent entr’ex venir . . . (CIII.733.20).

<sup>269</sup> MV.120.3. See also MIV.198.30; MV.81.25.

<sup>270</sup> MVI.92.43; MVI.55.12.

<sup>271</sup> MVI.23.23. See also MII.121.17; MVII.7.7.

<sup>272</sup> MVI.Glossary.

His strength and rapidity are vital to Lancelot's survival here, since he is fighting single-handed against four knights. In this passage just as in others upholding the same ability,<sup>273</sup> strength goes hand in hand with the knight being "preudons" and "hardiz," in the case of Lancelot, and where Tristan uses "la force des braz," he is also complimented on his "proesce" by his opponent.<sup>274</sup> The comments of other characters on a knight's courage underline the importance of this quality, without which strength would not be put to good use.

### B. Moral

The wealth of terms used to describe hardiness testifies to the importance of this notion in the prose Tristan. It is referred to by the following nouns and adjectives:

"hardement," "chevalerie," "bonté," "valor," "vaillans" and "prouesce." In fiction as in reality, to call a nobleman a "preudome," a man of prowess, was to pay him the highest compliment known to the Middle Ages.<sup>275</sup> More often than not, it is the Tristan characters who comment on these aspects of another knight in one of two ways: they either promote these qualities directly, or they condemn their antonyms: thus "coardise" is condemned, as is a knight who does not possess a "cuer de cevalier."<sup>276</sup>

Arthur advises Helyant to cherish hardiness and bravery, and not to fall victim to "couardise et faintise" (MVI.83.17). Throughout the prose Tristan, knights are admired for being brave. The people of the Destrois de Sorelois elect Plenorius as their lord because of his "bone chevalerie,"<sup>277</sup> which Ménard defines as "bravoure

<sup>273</sup> See MI.10.7; MI.12.11; MV.125.18; MV.237.4; MV.239.1.

<sup>274</sup> See Tristan's combat against Blanor CI.422.16-426.12.

<sup>275</sup> Sidney Painter, French Chivalry (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1940) 29.

<sup>276</sup> CII.640.24; MII.165.4.

<sup>277</sup> CIII.776.12.

chevaleresque.”<sup>278</sup> Likewise, Kahedin comments on Tristan’s “prouece” (MI.96.18), and on the fact that Palamede is “preus.”<sup>279</sup> Some characters also condemn the opposite: thus Brun le Noir is astonished at the knights’ cowardice when faced with a fierce lion, although he is not surprised that the women are afraid:

Des dames ne tient il pas a grant merveille, car femes sont espoentees de petit; mes des chevaliers qu’il voit foïr se merveille il mout durement qu’il ne font nul semblant d’ax defendre.<sup>280</sup>

The narrator also expresses his admiration for knights who possess bravery and hardiness, and condemns those who do not. The narratorial voice introduces Galehondins and Erec as being “boins cevaliers, preus et vaillans” on two separate occasions, using exactly the same turn of phrase,<sup>281</sup> and mentions that in facing up to the lion, Brun le Noir “ne fait mie semblant de coardise.”<sup>282</sup> He even explains that being an “hardis cevaliers” is one of the reasons why Yvain could be considered one of the best knights of his time.<sup>283</sup> The repetition of stock phrases which litter the text, such as “grans cevalier et preus et fors et de grant pooir,”<sup>284</sup> testifies to “the chronicler’s urge to press on with the story,”<sup>285</sup> where this is all the reader needs to know in order to evaluate a knight. It is of prime importance to the action and to the essence of a knight and is therefore mentioned almost every time a character is introduced.

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<sup>278</sup> MII.Glossary.

<sup>279</sup> MI.104.35. See also MII.164.10; MIV.93.24.

<sup>280</sup> CII.640.24. See also MII.194.13; MII.28.48; MII.165.4; MIII.72.21; MIII.204.30; MIV.153.15; MV.4.15; MV.25.20; MV.65.36; MVI.87.85; MVI.26.59; MVII.7.37; MVIII.3.16.

<sup>281</sup> MV.154.9; MVII.42.7.

<sup>282</sup> CIII.641.2. See also MIV.31.30.

<sup>283</sup> MIII.58.6. See also MIII.84.5; MIII.96.6; MV.17.6; MIX.5.14.

<sup>284</sup> MII.99.4 (Persidés).

<sup>285</sup> Field, *Romance and Chronicle* 85.

The narrator sometimes makes a point of relating the inner thoughts of a knight reproaching himself for harbouring “couardise” and “mauvestié.”<sup>286</sup> Dinadan considers that:

s'il laissoit ochirre le roi March, puis k'il est mis en sa compaignie, il feroit trop grant recreandise et trop grant mauvestié.<sup>287</sup>

By quoting the characters' direct admiration of bravery or accusations of cowardice, by his own praise of courage, and by relating some of the characters' inner thoughts on these subjects, the narrator successfully creates a sense of admiration for the values expressed by such words as “hardement” and “prouesce.”

Prowess and strength are intricately linked to lineage, making the latter a further vital prerequisite for belonging to the world of knighthood, although there are some exceptions, as will become apparent. Historical evidence shows that between 1130 and about 1230, an important development took place: the right to be made a knight became almost a hereditary privilege.<sup>288</sup> As early as 1140, Roger II of Sicily decreed that only the descendants of knights be admitted to knighthood.<sup>289</sup> In 1231, Frederick II declared that in both his Sicilian and German domains, “No one shall acquire the standing of a knight who is not of knightly family unless by grace of our special licence.”<sup>290</sup> He was followed in 1234 by King James I of Aragon and in 1294 by Count Charles of Provence.<sup>291</sup> The name was effectively hereditary, as was the land, which encouraged the sentiment of belonging to a lineage. Knighthood thus became a

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<sup>286</sup> “acte de lâcheté,” MII.Glossary.

<sup>287</sup> MIV.40.7. See also MV.18.21; MV.162.33.

<sup>288</sup> Bloch, *Feudal Society* 320.

<sup>289</sup> Bloch, *Feudal Society* 321.

<sup>290</sup> Richard Barber, *The Knight and Chivalry* (London: Longman, 1970) 17, citing Eberhard F. Otto, “Von der Abschliessung des Ritterstandes,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 162 (1940): 19-39.

<sup>291</sup> Bloch, *Feudal Society* 321.

society of heirs, whose mental attitude was one of dynastic feeling where one's ancestors were venerated.<sup>292</sup>

This attitude is reflected in our text: Galaad, for instance, is deeply admired by Arthur for being “gentiex hom et de si haut lignage.”<sup>293</sup> Brun le Noir and Samaliel both see their lineage as a valid reason for being granted the status of knight.<sup>294</sup> The generally accepted view on this subject in the Tristan, and indeed one which would have appealed to an aristocratic audience, is that if one is descended from a well-born family, and one's ancestors were brave knights, then it should automatically follow that one inherits these knightly qualities. Thus it is assumed that Galaad must “par droit passer de cevalerie tous chiaus du siecle” (MVI.110.17):

quant il est de toutes pars estrais de si haut lignage et de si noble comme cil est du lignage le roi Ban de Benuÿc et du lignage le roi Mehaingnié, et avoec tout çou est fiex de si boin cevalier comme est mesire Lancelot du Lac, ce seroit la greigneur merveille du monde se il n'est mieudres cevaliers que autres (MVI.106.6).

Likewise, Tristan feels that because his father was one of the best knights in the world, “le sanc se prevera en moi.”<sup>295</sup> The exception proves the rule, however, for although Fergus's father is a “vilain,” the narrator is adamant Fergus is still an excellent knight, because his mother is well-born:

Ferguz . . . avoit esté estraiz de par son pere de vilains, mes de par sa mere estoit il de gentil linaige, et estoit sanz dote bons chevaliers de son cors et biaux et joenes hons . . . (CII.515.14).

Palamede is even more unusual because despite the fact that he is not nobly born,<sup>296</sup> he is of a stature comparable to that of Tristan and Lancelot. He firmly believes that he does not belong with the likes of Lancelot because of his lineage:

<sup>292</sup> Duby, The Chivalrous Society 87, 174.

<sup>293</sup> MVI.101.25. See also MVI.155.10. Philippe Ménard defines “gentiex” as “noble.”

<sup>294</sup> CII.637.28; MIX.95.18.

<sup>295</sup> CI.291.12. See also MVI.107.14.

<sup>296</sup> Malory's Palomides, on the other hand, is the “sunne and ayre unto kynge Asclabor” (769.28).



Je sui uns povres cevaliers de petite cevalerie, jou ne sui pas estrais de rois  
 comme vous estes. Onques n'ot en moi jentillece, se d'aventure ne me vint.  
 Je sui tous estrais de vilains et vous de rois. Vous devés estre courtois et  
 afaitiés, car Nature vous semont que vous le soiés, voelliés u non; mais je,  
 qui sui nés de vilains, que puis je faire? Se je fais bien, c'est vertus et  
 miracles et contre nature . . . (MVII.144.4).

Despite the fact that the whole passage concerns Palamede's embarrassment on receiving compliments from Lancelot on his knightly prowess, it is clear that this belief is firmly anchored in the knightly ethos of the prose Tristan.

Physical strength goes hand in hand with bravery and lineage, as was observed above, but it is more effective if it is applied with reason and measure. A passage upholding the great physical power of Palamede's opponent mentions it in conjunction with his adversary's "sens" and "mesurance," and Palamede is so struck by the effectiveness of this strategy that "il meïsmes i prent essample et bien dist a soi meïsmes que ci n'a mestier desmesure" (MV.125.20). This trait of character is highly valued both by the characters and by the narrator. As was established in Chapter Two, Tristan is known to be "saiges," or reasonable.<sup>297</sup> Other characters demonstrate this quality, which usually refers either to a fighting tactic, or to a reaction in the face of adversity. Plenorius tells Lancelot he could have won his battle against the latter through "sens" and "amesure,"<sup>298</sup> which corresponds to what Plenorius's father said of his son earlier:

ce est uns jovenes cevaliers et non mie si sages ne si amesurés com  
 mestiers li seroit.<sup>299</sup>

"Sagesse" expresses not only reason, but also the memory of it, in the form of experience. The Irish king comments on the prowess of the Chevalier aux Armes Vermeilles:

<sup>297</sup> See Chapter Two, and CI.299.15; CII.595.1.

<sup>298</sup> CIII.767.53. "bon sens, sagesse et mesure," CIII.Glossary.

<sup>299</sup> MI.1.23. "expérimenté" and "pondéré," MI.Glossary.

je sai tout certainement qu'il est trop preus et trop poissans; trop est sages de son mestier.<sup>300</sup>

During the battle opposing Tristan and Helyant le Saxon, the narrator comments:

Sagement se vont asaillir et mout sagement le conmenchent.<sup>301</sup>

Thus both the characters and the narrator admire the use of reason and experience in fighting tactics.

The narrator especially intervenes to uphold a character who succeeds in keeping calm in the face of provocation, a notion also expressed by such terms as “amesurés” and “sages.” Faced with Dinadan’s mocking,

Palamidés, qui assés estoit sages et amesurés, ne se courece point (MV.141.32).

Likewise, Galaad is admired for suffering Gauvain’s insults “comme cil qui plus est paisibles et amesurés que nus autres cevaliers.”<sup>302</sup> Characters also express their belief in this quality, as does Tristan who gently rebukes Dinadan:

je quidoie que vous fuissies uns sages cevaliers et amesurés durement, mais or voi je bien tout plainnement, se Dieus me saut, que vous estes drois faus naïs! (MV.36.27)

Tristan’s use of the epithet “faus” (mad) in opposition to “sages et amesurés” shows how important this knightly quality is felt to be, both on its own, and in conjunction with strength and bravery when used as a fighting tactic.

Loyalty is particularly admired in the sense of trustworthiness or the importance of honouring a promise. The knight’s place in feudal society meant that in reality, loyalty was of paramount importance:

As feudal society was preserved from complete anarchy only by the mutual contracts between lords and vassals, it was essential that the noblemen

<sup>300</sup> MV.219.30. See also MI.64.14; MV.183.11.

<sup>301</sup> MIV.235.8. “de façon avisée, experte,” MIV.Glossary.

<sup>302</sup> MIX.32.22. See also MVII.122.27; MVII.8.48. See also MII.189.2; MIII.206.5; MIII.207.1; MV.49.42.

observe these contracts faithfully. Hence loyalty, general trustworthiness, joined prowess to form the two basic chivalric virtues.<sup>303</sup>

In the Tristan, numerous terms express both these concepts, as well as their antonyms, which are used in order to be condemned. “Leal” (loyal), “creanter” (to promise), “avoir en couvenent” (to promise), “couvenens tenir” (to honour one’s commitments) are opposed to “traïson,” “déléauté,” and “faillir de couvenent.” Promises are made on many occasions, demonstrating their importance in chivalric life.<sup>304</sup> Both characters and narrator comment on loyalty, at times didactically, underlining the manual-like aspect of the prose Tristan. Tristan tells the Chevalier Vermeil:

tort et desloiautés fait d’un preudome mauvais, et nous, qui cevalier sommes, le devons savoir et croire (MVII.164.19).

Likewise, Kahedin speaks to Hoël:

a ce que vous faillissiés de creant a nul cevalier du monde, tant fust vostres anemis morteus, ne m’acorderai je en nule maniere. Meïsmement vous estes rois, si ne devés pas fausser de vostre couvenent, pour que vous le puissiés amender.<sup>305</sup>

The following extract demonstrates the value of a promise: under pressure from

Gaheriet, Marc agrees to the following:

“je te creant conme rois que jamais, a nul jour de ma vie, desloiauté ne ferai encontre chevalier errant!”—“Le me creantes tu loiaument conme cevaliers?” fait Gaheriés.—“Oil, certes. . . .”—“Et je t’en claim dont quite,” fait Gaheriés, “que je ne te ferai plus mal a ceste fois. Mais tant voeil je que tu loiaument me creantes, avant que tu de moi te partes, que pour cose que je t’aie chi faite, que tu ne rendras a moi mauvais guerredon en Cornuaille, ne a Kex autresi, ne a autre chevalier errant.”—“Chertes,” fait li rois, “ce vous creant je loiaument, sour quanque je tieng de Dieu et de cevalerie.”<sup>306</sup>

<sup>303</sup> Painter, French Chivalry 30.

<sup>304</sup> See CIII.697.27; MI.145.33; MIII.44.17; MIII.186.3; MIII.217.23; MIII.102.5; MV.17.38; MV.58.8; MV.174.21; MVI.56.6; MVI.75.69; MVII.214.22; MVIII.161.3; MIX.14.20. Knights expect not only other knights to be trustworthy, but also women, and the converse is also true. See MIII.174.27; MIII.172.30; MV.105.14.

<sup>305</sup> MI.145.33. See also MIII.117.5.

<sup>306</sup> MIII.114.15. For a passage with an equal emphasis on the concept of promise see MIII.217.15.

In the space of nine lines, nine terms refer repetitively to the concept of promise; in this case, it is understandable that Gaheriet is worried that Marc will not keep his covenant, for he well knows that the latter is untrustworthy, having already warned Keu against Marc's "traïson" (MIII.99.35).

The narrator intervenes to underline Erec's trustworthiness in a didactic way:

Cil ne feïst mie legierement couardise, et si avoit en lui une grant grasce que mout d'autres cevaliers n'avoient mie, car il ne mentist ja de cose k'il eüst en couvenent; mieus vausist morir.<sup>307</sup>

The statement is categorical: Erec would rather die than lie. Similarly, when the narrator relates the episode where Arthur persuades Marc to forgive Tristan, the reader is made aware of what is right in the knightly world:

Ensi le jure li rois March devant le roi Artu, mais malement s'em parjura puis, car il ne demoura mie granment de tans quant il fist prendre monsigneur Tristran et metre em prison . . . (MIV.134.45).

Trustworthiness is a moral quality which knights need to possess, and for which they are clearly respected both by the other characters and by the narrator; it is not, however, unlike the other virtues mentioned above, one that is used particularly in the context of fighting, but rather in the context of everyday social dealings. So too are generosity ("franchise," "deboinaïreté") and modesty (without "orgueil," "beubant," or "sourquidance"). Tristan admires Lancelot, "qui de . . . chevalerie, de franchise" has "tot le monde passé."<sup>308</sup> The narrator also shows the results of Dinadan's "franchise," for his host

fist mout grant hounour a Dynadant et li dist tout plainnement que pour chestui serviche et pour cheste bonté k'il avoit faite a la damoisele par sa courtoisie et par sa franchise li feroit il tout l'ounour et tout le serviche que il porroit . . . (MIII.164.5).

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<sup>307</sup> MV.17.7. See MII.100.21.

<sup>308</sup> CII.688.3. See also CI.206.10; MI.38.8; MI.14.12; MII.4.37; MII.185.10; MIII.111.48; MIII.146.9; MIII.157.15; MVI.6.41; MVI.20.6; MVI.38.9; MVII.54.25; MVII.183.14; MVIII.176.10; MIX.19.22.

Modesty is also valued, generally through the condemnation of its antonyms, “orgueil,” “beubant,” and “sourquidance.” Arthur himself admits to having been humiliated by his own lack of modesty, since his desire to find out Iseut’s identity at all costs led him to display arrogance, as a result of which he is unhorsed by Tristan. His moral of the episode is:

voirement est che verités que d’orgueil ne puet venir fors mal et honte, ne nus ne vait orgoel demenant k’il de son orgueil meïsmes ne chiee.<sup>309</sup>

The narrator comments on Brun le Noir’s admirable attitude in the face of the repeated insults of the demoiselle médisante, for he listens to these “simplement sanz response d’orguel ne de bobant” (CIII.695.15). Similarly, the narratorial voice is audibly didactic in condemning Marc’s attitude after he has unhorsed Yvain:

Chestui fait et ceste aventure ont mis son cuer en grant orgueil et em beubant si grant k’il en emprendra si haut fait k’il s’en tenra pour fol en la fin. . . .<sup>310</sup>

Ladies as well as knights admire such qualities as trustworthiness, generosity and modesty. This extends the sphere of these virtues to the realm of courtly chivalry, to which also belong the more explicitly social skills of courtesy, education, and the ability to express oneself, which Lancelot admires in Tristan, as expressed in his letter mentioned above (CI.691.3).<sup>311</sup>

This section has studied the physical and moral qualities required of knights in the prose Tristan, but this has been possible only because of the emphasis laid on them by the narrator. His description of people is rarely physical, unless it relates to the particular strength or stature of a knight, prerequisites for being an accomplished warrior. Being a good knight, however, does not only depend on strength, but on how it is used and to what purpose, which is why the descriptions of characters so often

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<sup>309</sup> MIII.197.20. See also CI.316.4; CIII.806.30; CIII.908.67; MII.48.6; MII.176.22; MIII.206.20; MIII.256.15; MIV.216.7; MV.203.18; MVI.25.36; MVI.137.94; MVII.32.39; MVIII.23.10.

<sup>310</sup> MIII.80.6. See also CI.329.10; MV.126.17; MV.149.10; MVII.73.7.

include a moral or emotive epithet. A knight is hardly ever introduced without being admired for being one or several of the following: “bien fais,” “preudons,” “hardiz,” “vaillans,” “gentiex,” “amesuré,” or “sages,” or without being condemned for being the converse. As in Malory, the characters “cannot be separated from the response . . . [they] build into them,”<sup>312</sup> which underlines the authors’ interest in chivalry, and in particular in those upholding it.

### C. Knightly customs

Knights also need to respect certain knightly customs. According to Tristan, the role of knight is the following:

li cevalier errant vont toutes voies cerquant . . . aventures pour ce que il, a lour pooir et selonc raison, doivent desfendre les febles envers les fors et maintenir loiauté u que il viengnent. Et s’il truevent que on fache outrage a cevalier ne a dame ne a damoisele, et il le pueent amender, il le doivent amender tout maintenant (MIII.202.20).

An unceasing search for adventure, the defence of the weak and maintaining justice are aims common to the prose Tristan and to other chivalric romances. In order for these ideals to be respected, knights have to encounter numerous situations in which other lesser rules come into effect, rules common either to the whole of knight-errantry, or simply applicable to knights of Logres, knights of the Round Table, or to knights of Cornouailles. These lesser rules need to be examined before proceeding to the three aims common to all knights.

#### 1. Jousting customs

These chivalric rules apply to several areas of daily errant life, for they concern jousting, social relations between knights, and the Round Table. An important rule which applies to all knights-errant of Logres stipulates that a knight must never refuse

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<sup>311</sup> See Chapter Four.

<sup>312</sup> Field, Romance and Chronicle 86.

the opportunity to joust. This is naturally one of the most important causes of jousts, and one which is criticised by some dissenting voices.<sup>313</sup> On two separate occasions, Tristan explains didactically to Gouvernal and to a damsel, that the first thing knights-errant do when they meet is joust.<sup>314</sup> The narrator intervenes to inform the audience that:

(pour ce que la coustume des cevaliers errans estoit tele que, quant il ne s'entreconnoissoient, k'il s'entrapeloient de joustoute tout maintenant k'il s'entrencontroient, et, se il autrement le feïssent, il leur estoit atourné a couardise et a mauvaistié a celui tans) . . . (MII.16.11).

The code of martial courtesy, however, also stipulates that one should not force a knight to joust if he does not want to: Lancelot tells Tristan he cannot compel him to fight "par raison de cevalerie" (MV.229.18). Andret even tells Keu: "selonc les coustumes de Cornuaille . . . ne m'en poés vous faire forche de jouter" (MIII.85.14). Despite this, to take every opportunity to joust seems to be a rule which the prose authors consider particularly important, and therefore worth emphasising both through the medium of the characters and through narratorial interventions.

Another rule specifies that a knight carrying two swords invites two knights to challenge him:

Nus cevaliers . . . ne doit porter .II. espees s'il n'est trop boins cevaliers, car .II. cevaliers le pueent asaillir en tous lex ensamble, et sans blasme.<sup>315</sup>

Similarly, the audience learns that

la costume de la Grant Bretaigne estoit adonc tele que l'en ne dreçoit onques escuz devant paveillons se ce ne fussent chevalier aventureus qui les i feïssent metre por eus esprover encontre toz ceus qui sor eus venroient (CI.403.4).

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<sup>313</sup> See Chapter Six.

<sup>314</sup> MII.136.37. For Tristan's didactic advice see CI.389.6. See also CIII.783.20; CIII.798.16; CIII.825.21; MI.77.4; MII.4.13; MII.17.1; MIII.47.8; MIII.241.27; MIV.18.27; MV.64.1; MVII.7.39.

<sup>315</sup> MIX.103.30. See also CI.322.9.

Joust-provoking rules also include the obligation to avenge either the dishonour or the death of a friend or kinsman. According to Lancelot and to many other knights in the prose Tristan,

Miex veut il estre abatus, se autrement ne puet estre, et faire som pooir de la honte le roi vengier que laisser cestui fait ensi.<sup>316</sup>

Revenge can imply the death of the offender, or it can be undertaken in the intention of “honnir dou cors.”<sup>317</sup> It is frequently the case, however, that one of the text’s heroes has caused the death of a beloved father, son or brother.<sup>318</sup> Thus the prowess of the offender often dissuades ambitious revenge enterprises, and a “si bon chevalier” (CI.428.9) will normally benefit from preferential treatment. Even if he is guilty of killing another knight, he must not be put to death, for it would be “la greigneur cruauté et la greigneur recreandise et felonnie de cuer,”<sup>319</sup> because it is through him that the standards of chivalry are maintained. Baumgartner convincingly comments:

Le respect scrupuleux et sans bornes qu’éprouvent à tout le moins les âmes nobles pour celui par qui se maintient chevalerie les amène enfin à absoudre sans réserves les faits et gestes du héros, aussi discutables soient-ils sur le plan moral.<sup>320</sup>

Very often in these cases of mercy, not only would it be wrong to kill a specific knight if he is a good one,<sup>321</sup> but also because it would be a crime against the institution of chivalry: Daras refrains from putting Tristan to death because “chevalerie en seroit ja trop abaissie.”<sup>322</sup> Marc in fact admits as much at the end of the story (MIX.78.11). The narrator adds that killing a good knight is all the more of a loss to knighthood if this knight is young:

<sup>316</sup> MV.227.31. See also CIII.814.26; MI.7.7; MIII.25.23; MIV.36.18; MV.90.17; MV.101.29; MVIII.4.21; MIX.70.7.

<sup>317</sup> MIII.24.15; MIII.137.7; MIV.245.43; MVI.16.6.

<sup>318</sup> For instance, Le Morholt, Anguin’s brother-in-law, is killed in combat by Tristan (CI.303.1); Galahot’s parents are killed by Tristan (CII.464.40-465.20); Daras’s two sons are presumably killed by Tristan in a tournament (MIII.44.13); and Samaliel’s father has been killed by Arthur (MIX.106.15).

<sup>319</sup> MII.71.33. See also CII.610.3; MII.164.45; MIV.7.43; MIV.144.5; MVII.217.14.

<sup>320</sup> Baumgartner, Essai 179.

<sup>321</sup> See CI.77.6; CI.352.18; CI.428.9; CII.4.1.6; CII.610.3; MIV.241.14; MV.74.24.



se Lamorat eüst vescu droit aage de chevalier, bien eüst ataint de bonté de cevalerie u passé par aventure tous les preudommes ki au tans le roi Artu portoient armes, mais il morut assés plus tost que besoins ne fust a cevalerie; et au jour k'il morut, il n'avoit encore d'aage compli que .XXVI. ans et deus mois.<sup>323</sup>

Cutting down a potential good knight is as bad as killing one whose aptitude has already been proven. Thus the respect for knights who maintain the standards of chivalry can outweigh the very important revenge culture. On the other hand, it is acceptable to fell knights who are “desloial et felon” for the sake of justice, as will become apparent.<sup>324</sup>

Once the knights have engaged in the joust, they have to respect its rules: as the narrator explains to the audience, the stronger knight must allow the weaker one to rest without assaulting him:

bien estoit a us et a coustume a celui tans, en toutes les regions u chevalier errant repairoient, que après le premier assaut laissoit bien li plus fors chevaliers reposer le plus feble . . . (MIII.128.34).

Similarly, Lancelot allows Plenorius to catch his breath:

il le soeffre bien, et veust qu'il recoevre force et alene, s'il le puet faire; et ceste cortoisie sanz faille faisoient volentiers li uns a l'autre des chevaliers erranz.<sup>325</sup>

This knightly code includes rules which offer some protection to the disadvantaged. Tristan thus forbids the Sires de la Broce to attack his enemy, because

puis que vous estes armés et il est desarmés, vous nel devés toucier que vous ne soiiés honnis et deshounerés. Se vous estes cevaliers errans, vos savés bien que je ne vous di de ce fors verité.<sup>326</sup>

Bréhus cunningly uses this argument to wriggle out of jousting, to the annoyance but also with the agreement of his opponent (MVII.192.23).

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<sup>322</sup> MIII.156.31. See also MIV.158.7; MIX.78.11; MIX.106.39.

<sup>323</sup> MIV.124.33. See also MIV.133.16; MVI.18.22.

<sup>324</sup> MVIII.216.29. See the section below on knights maintaining justice.

<sup>325</sup> CIII.767.10. See also MI.13.1; MI.65.12.

<sup>326</sup> MVII.137.19. See also MIV.145.4; MVI.25.57; MVII.112.27; MVII.137.27; MVII.192.23.

The world of the prose Tristan considers attacking a sleeping knight to be a “felonnie”<sup>327</sup> and “la greignor mauvestié dou monde et la greignor traïson” (CII.556.20). Likewise, it is a “vilenie” (CII.620.2), “felonnie et grant desloiauté”<sup>328</sup> and an “outrage” for a knight on horseback to attack a knight who is on foot, for, as Bréhus is told, “Vous faites ce que cevaliers ne devoit faire.”<sup>329</sup> To attack a knight “sanz le defier,” as Marc does to his brother Pernehan (CI.243.7), or to challenge a knight who is tired from previous exertions, both amount to “treïson.” Lancelot has no choice but to attack two knights defending a bridge, because he needs to pursue his route, but he regrets having to do so, “car il estoient si mal apareillié de la jornee dedevant.” After he has defeated them, Lancelot admits “Je ai fait mal quant je mis onques men a cez deus chevaliers” (CIII.763.30). These customs are well-known throughout the prose Tristan, but there are others which are referred to only very seldom. Gauvain tells Hector that such is the custom of Logres that:

Force ne me poés vous ci faire de ceste bataille, car puis que vous estes sains et je navrés, vous ne poés tant haster chestui apel que je n’en aie respit jusques a .XL. jours. Et lors sans faille seroit terme d’apeler . . . (MIX.37.58).

Gauvain uses this custom to escape the revenge Hector and Meraugis want to take on Gauvain’s disloyal slaying of Erec. Although he is “assés dolant de ceste aventure” (MIX.38.26), Hector has to agree to respect this rule.

In addition, it is outrageous for a host providing hospitality, or for a knight from the outside, to attack a knight who is within the confines of a dwelling: Tristan cannot pursue or attack Bliobéris: “puis qu’il . . . sont entré en ce chastel, je ne sai pas bien que je en puisse faire, car se je l’asailloie leanz, ce seroit vilenie.”<sup>330</sup> Similarly, both the narrator and Tristan consider that nine knights against one “estoit la plus mal

<sup>327</sup> MVII.208.22. See also CI.64.20.

<sup>328</sup> MV.21.14. See also MV.21.40.

<sup>329</sup> MIV.152.15. See also MV.21.34.

partie” (MIII.199.10), and the disadvantage of the single knight prompts Tristan to intervene:

Nus ne verroit ichestui fait k’il nel deüst vous atourner a la plus grant mauvaistié et a la plus grant recreandise du monde.<sup>331</sup>

In addition, a knight should not attack or kill a squire, so Palamede spares Gouvernal:

se tu fusses chevaliers, tu le comparasses dou cors! Mes por ce que tu iés escuiers te claim je quite. . . .<sup>332</sup>

These rules, the list of which is not exhaustive but representative, contribute to the smooth functioning of the chivalric world, although they are not always respected, giving rise to many a conflict in the prose Tristan.

## 2. Knightly social customs

Knightly rules do not only concern jousts, but also social exchanges demanding courtesy. It is, for instance, courteous to allow a knight to remain anonymous if he so desires (MII.167.32), and Tristan firmly believes in this right, as he prefers to joust against King Arthur than to reveal his name (MIII.195.39). Not knowing an opponent’s name can cause a great deal of anguish to the vanquished party, simply because the latter will not know on whom to exact vengeance (MIV.75.16). The correct behaviour is adopted by Gaheriet, who, when Tristan refuses to disclose his name,

lesse atant la parole; puis que li chevaliers se veust celer, ce ne seroit mie cortoisie se il plus de son estre li demandoit (CI.318.15).

Gaheriet even believes it is the custom to keep one’s identity hidden, and defends Tristan’s desire for incognito by explaining to Guenièvre that “ceste coutume est bien la coustume des tres boins cevaliers.”<sup>333</sup>

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<sup>330</sup> CI.388.10. See also MV.89.10; MV.91.6; MV.93.9.

<sup>331</sup> MIII.202.9. See also CII.618.19; MVI.68.7.

<sup>332</sup> CII.508.24. However, squires do get killed without overt condemnation from the narrator, as when Agloval’s squire is murdered by one of Agloval’s enemies. Revenge is prompt, and while the body of the squire is buried, that of the enemy is disposed of in a “fosse.” See MVI.58.33.

### 3. Round Table custom

Round Table knights are under the strictest obligation not to fight among themselves, which often conflicts with other customs they might have to observe. The Round Table custom prevents Lamorat from fighting Gauvain who has unlawfully got hold of a damsel who “*crie et bret come feme forsenee.*”<sup>334</sup> As a result, Gauvain gets away with obtaining a damsel whom Lamorat has rightfully fought for. Similarly, although Lancelot has vowed to always “*vengier . . . la honte de monseignor le roi Artus et de ma dame la roïne Genevre*” (CIII.808.20), he agrees not to attack Lamorat, who has admitted to preferring the Queen of Orcanie, for as Bliobéris says to him, “*Vos ne vos poez combatre encontre monseignor Lamorat que vos ne vos mesfaciez trop durement a ce que vos iestes endui compaignon de la Table Reonde.*”<sup>335</sup> These examples show that it is worse not to honour the custom of the Round Table. It is possible that the audience, faced with the conflict between these customs, may have been made sensitive to the difficulties of chivalric life, or even, arguably, to the internal contradictions of the system. The listeners would certainly have seen in this passage a striking and poignant situation, in the first case at least, and would have sustained resentment against Gauvain, who seems once again to have got away with not respecting the code of chivalry.<sup>336</sup> To this list one might add miscellaneous customs such as separating at cross-roads. Tristan, Palamede and Dinadan all take different routes at the “*crois,*” for as Tristan says, “*se nous volom faire conme chevalier errant, nous nous departirom chi et prendra cascuns de nous sa voie.*”<sup>337</sup> Another custom, perhaps unique to the prose *Tristan*, stipulates that if a knight from Cornouailles hits

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<sup>333</sup> MII.209.42. The difference in spelling exists in Ménard’s edition.

<sup>334</sup> CII.626.17. See also CIII.795.19.

<sup>335</sup> CIII.808.5. See also CIII.795.19; MIII.74.7; MV.44.35; MVII.24.79; MVII.69.3; MVII.182.6; MVIII.142.14.

<sup>336</sup> See Chapter Six.

<sup>337</sup> MIII.158.16. See also MI.26.6; MIII.4.5.

the “écu” of a “preudome,” the latter must discard his shield and find another one to joust with, or dishonour will befall them through the knights of Cornwall’s “caitiveté de lour cuers” (MII.18.66).

#### 4. Most important customs

In order to find themselves in the situations in which the above-mentioned customs apply, knights first have to seek adventure, this being one of the three pillars of the knight-errant’s life:

li cevalier errant vont toutes voies cerquant par le roiaume de Logres et par estranges contrees aventures . . . .

He must also

desfendre les febles envers les fors,

and

maintenir loiauté u que il viengnent . . . (MIII.202.20).

The search for adventure, the defence of the weak, and maintenance of justice wherever they go are what knights-errant are supposed to live for. As their name indicates, however, they are defined by their very questing. It is therefore important to turn to the nature of the quests undertaken by the Tristan knights.

The reader is aware of two types of quest: specific quests (search for another knight, search for a specific “aventure” they have been told about, for instance) and quests for adventure in its vaguest sense: “ce qui doit arriver, événement” and “ce qui peut arriver.”<sup>338</sup> Seeking for adventure not only gives knights the opportunity to defend the weak and to maintain justice, but also, as will become apparent, to try their strength against other knights by jousting.

The most common of the specific quests are those undertaken to find another person, usually a knight, and more rarely, a lady. A knight can go in quest of another

knight for a variety of reasons. He may want to take revenge, as is the case for Brun le Noir, who wears his father's tattered coat "dusqu'a tant que je aie vengié la mort mon pere de celi qui l'ocist" (CII.639.20). Knights will also search for a companion if the latter is reported missing. Brandelis and Keu thus go to Sorelois to deliver Carados from prison (CIII.723.42), and Tristan vows to search for Arthur in the Forêt d'Arvances:

Se je por poine et por travail sofrir cuidasse jamés le roi delivrer de ceste forest, je ne m'en pastisse devant que delivré l'eüsse (CIII.788.25).

Similarly, when Lancelot hears Tristan has disappeared after being wounded, he decides to seek him for the conventional duration of "un an et un jour, tant com cevaliers errans doit maintenir sa queste."<sup>339</sup> According to Lancelot, knights even have to respect a certain length of time for questing, although this is not emphasised in the rest of the text.

Dinadan, on the other hand, does not go to Cornouailles to look for Tristan for any other reason than "pour espourver par moi meïsmes se vous estiés si boins cevaliers com on aloit disant" (MII.14.10). One can engage in quests on an individual basis, or in a group, as when twenty-two knights "errèrent tant amont et aval" to look for Lancelot who has gone mad after being banished by Guenièvre (MVI.54.46). Marc is the only king and knight to go on a quest for Tristan (with the intent of killing him) "chelement et en tapinage" (MIV.5.4), for quests are often vowed in public, as are those undertaken by Néroneus' companions (CIII.725.15).

Searches for a lady are less frequent, but do occasionally figure in the prose Tristan, as when Tristan goes on a quest for Iseut after she had been captured by Palamede (CII.506.1), or when Palamede vows privately to search for Iseut: "ja mais

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<sup>338</sup> "aventure," *Dictionnaire de l'Ancien Français*, 1999 ed.

<sup>339</sup> MII.207.38. For other such quests see also MIII.46.5; MIII.198.9; MIII.219.1; MIII.265.5; MIV.78.1.

ne finera de cerquier madame Yseut devant k'il l'ara trouvee et k'il sara u ele demeure et u ele est . . ." (MV.30.3).

Intermediaries can present themselves, most often at the court to propose the adventure to whoever might volunteer to undertake it. The demoiselle médisante thus comes to King Arthur's court, bearing an "escu tot vert" (CII.643.4) which a dying knight has sent with this message:

s'il i a nul si hardi de faire hardement de chevalerie et de mener aventure bele et plesant a fin, et de conquerre honor et pris, si preigne cest escu que je envoi a la cort le roi Artus et puis veigne dusques aus destroiz de Sorelois par devers Norgales . . . (CII.644.29).

Because no one takes up the challenge, Brun le Noir puts himself forward (CII.645.4).

This request highlights several objectives of quests: the satisfaction of "mener aventure . . . a fin," the use of one's "proesce," and most importantly, the gain of "honor et pris." On another occasion, it is a "nacele" containing the body of the Roi de la Cité Vermeille, and a letter exhorting whoever can avenge his murder to do so, which entice Palamede into accepting the "aventure" (MV.84.12). As Tristan tells him, "ceste vengeance vous tournera a grant hounour se vous bien le menés a fin" (MV.85.20). Quests therefore seem to be as much a search for honour as a search for a person.

A knight goes on a quest to "esprouver" himself, to prove his valour by combat.<sup>340</sup> This is a conspicuous feature of the unspecific quests, whereby a knight leaves a sedentary position "por querre aventures de chevalerie, si com il avoit costume" (CII.575.1). This search for adventure is one which the knights leave up to the very indeterminate nature of "aventures:" "ce qui peut arriver."<sup>341</sup> The Tristan

<sup>340</sup> MVII.Glossary.

<sup>341</sup> "aventure," Dictionnaire de l'Ancien Français, 1999 ed.

authors put an interesting gloss on the word “aventureus” through the reaction of some squires when Palamede has narrowly escaped drowning:

Et quant il voient clerement que chil est . . . a tere sece, il dient apertement que voirement est il chevaliers aventureus, que autre cose seulement fors aventure ne l’a delivré d’illuec endroit a cestui point (MVII.11.4).

Not only does one note the apparent absence of God in saving Palamede,<sup>342</sup> but also the meaning the squires attach to “aventureus:” to them it qualifies somebody who exposes himself to danger, and to whom fortune, or luck, can be favourable.

Knights therefore do not follow an itinerary they have mapped out for themselves; they leave it up to the adventures to guide them, as Tristan tells Persidés:

des cevaliers errans est tele la maniere que chil ki droitement voeulent adventures cerquier, k’il ne quierent onques droit cemin, ains vont tout adés ensi com aventure les mainne (MII.102.10).

Moreover, if knights find themselves in a kingdom or a forest which has the reputation of being “aventureus,” they are all the more keen to explore it in search of adventures.

When Kahedin and Tristan hear they have landed in the Forest d’Arvances, Kahedin suggests that he and Tristan explore it:

Or prenons nos armes—ausi ne les portames nos pieça—si nos metons dedenz entre moi et vos, et verrons se la forest est si aventureuse com l’en vet disant.<sup>343</sup>

What attracts knights-errant is the idea of proving one’s strength and prowess in the uncertainty of adventure. As Ménard comments,

l’aventure fascine l’homme parce qu’elle est une rencontre aléatoire, chargée de mystère et de dangers, qui oblige à risquer sa vie et à se dépasser soi-même. Il y entre le goût du risque, le frisson délicieux de s’exposer au péril, mais aussi l’impérieux besoin d’acquérir la gloire.<sup>344</sup>

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<sup>342</sup> See Chapter Five.

<sup>343</sup> CIII.781.26. See also MIII.95.5.

<sup>344</sup> Philippe Ménard, “Le chevalier errant dans la littérature arthurienne: Recherches sur les raisons du départ et de l’errance,” *Voyage, quête, pèlerinage dans la littérature et la civilisation médiévales*, Sénéfiance 2 (Paris: Champion, 1976) 299.



Knights joust during these quests, and the winning knight gains “los:” reputation and prestige.<sup>345</sup> As Palamede says to Tristan,

Se tu adonc me pues outrer, tu conquerras et los et pris asés plus que tu ne quides par aventure.<sup>346</sup>

Thus, Ménard continues, “le grand but de la vie errante, c’est bien la recherche de l’honneur.”<sup>347</sup> One does not acquire honour only by defeating an enemy: one can add to one’s reputation if one is defeated by a knight of “pris.” Plenorius admits to

Lancelot:

a grant hounour nous tournera, e non a deshounour, que si boins cevaliers com vous estes est venus au desus de nous. Hontes nous fust et vergoigne grant, se uns autres cevaliers ki ne fust de vostre renommee nous eüst ensi desconfis com vous avés . . . (MI.72.32).

In the search for adventures, it is not so much the aim of winning as the aim of gaining honour which attracts knights, although of course one normally adds more to one’s reputation by defeating an enemy than by being defeated, except in situations where each combatant seeks to declare the other winner. In the outcome of the battle opposing Tristan and Lancelot at the “perron Merlin,” “Ensi se vont entreproiiant que li uns prende l’espee de l’autre” (MIII.258.12). This is clearly an honourable action, to the extent that the scene concludes without the designation of a winner.

If the knight seeks honour, he must not refuse an adventure if he hears of one; indeed, he must positively enquire about adventures he can undertake. Thus Tristan questions his host: “savés vous ore en cest païs nule estrange aventure ne nule estrange cevalerie?” (MVI.157.62) On another occasion, Tristan is asked whether he knows “nules autres nouveles en cest païs?”<sup>348</sup> It is not knightly to refuse an adventure, however perilous it is, so when Yvain shows some hesitation, “l’aventure est perilleuse

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<sup>345</sup> See MII.Glossary and MIII.Glossary.

<sup>346</sup> MIII.207.34. For “los” as reputation see MIII.224.26; MIII.230.12; MV.157.24; MVI.87.68; MIX.3.43.

<sup>347</sup> Ménard, “Le chevalier” 299.

et anuieuse: qui le peüst eskiver sainnement bon fust, car cis giex n'est mie bien partis d'un cevalier contre .X.," Tristan immediately corrects him: "il n'est pas cevaliers qui refuse aventure" (MVII.154.16). Adventure is the very essence of life for knights-errant, and they would not want to exchange their life for anything, even given the opportunity of a financially stable sedentary life. Thus Ségurade accepts the lordship of the Pays de Servage on one condition only:

vos savez bien que je sui uns chevaliers erranz et qui ai costume a porter armes. . . . Se vos me faites remenoir ensi com vos l'avez proposé, quant je i avrai demoré a ma volenté, je retorrai ou reaume de Logres . . . por cerchier aventures. . . .<sup>349</sup>

Lancelot categorically refuses lordship over the Destrois de Sorelois:

il n'a maintenant en tout chest païs nule tere que je pour moi vausisse tenir. Je suis cevaliers errans ne pour nule aventure du monde je ne remanroie ne chi ni aillours.<sup>350</sup>

Adventures are the defining feature of knights-errant who are referred to by their occupation, "chevalier aventureux,"<sup>351</sup> both by the characters and by the narrator. Knights are also defined by their surroundings, as these specifically contribute to the pursuit of adventures and quests. The attitude of certain hosts shows how questing knights arouse much sympathy from those who are hospitable to them. The reader often hears of knights being received

en une grant sale par tere, bele et cointe, ki estoit faite proprement pour les chevaliers errans recevoir que aventure aportoit en cele maison.<sup>352</sup>

<sup>348</sup> MVII.153.27. See also MVIII.149.19.

<sup>349</sup> CII.614.28. Palamede similarly refuses lordship of the Cité Vermeille in MV.129.9.

<sup>350</sup> MI.75.14. For echoes of this constant desire of knights-errant not to alienate their freedom of movement by giving in to the attractions of marriage and power, see Yvain's refusal to accept the daughter of the lord of Pesme Aventure and his land in Chrétien de Troyes, *Yvain* 5695-766, and Bohort's refusal to marry the daughter of King Brangoire de Gorre in *Lancelot*, ed. Micha, 2: 188.3.

<sup>351</sup> Ménard defines this as "qui cherche les aventures," MVII.Glossary. See MI.5.4; MIII.22.25; MIII.57.20; MIII.68.18; MIII.80.5; MIV.33.27; MIV.61.8; MVI.20.10; MVI.61.11; MVI.127.15; MVII.11.6.

<sup>352</sup> MI.86.2. See also CIII.690.8; CIII.789.11; MII.42.1; MII.99.20; MII.204.15; MIII.62.10; MIII.168.1; MV.87.21; MVI.7.25; MVI.116.5; MVIII.37.7; MIX.17.20; MIX.22.4.

The narrator leaves a lot to the reader's imagination, but the essential detail is that this house is honoured to receive knights-errant.

In return for the honour conferred on the knight, the latter has obligations towards society at large, and particularly towards the weak and oppressed. It is on quests that the knight finds the opportunity to “desfendre les febles envers les fors” and to “maintenir loiauté.” Depending on the nature of the abuse, the redresser of wrongs will undertake the appropriate defence of the oppressed. When the abuse is physical, the defence is matched to the abuse, so the knight will defend the oppressed by jousting against the oppressor. If, however, the abuse comes within the realm of illegality, then the knight will become the champion of the wronged individual by challenging the oppressor or his or her champion to a judicial combat.

It has been noted that if knights “truevent que on fache outrage a cevalier ne a dame ne a damoisele, et il le pueent amender, il le doivent amender tout maintenant” (MIII.202.19). Damsels are very often, because of their social position and their physical inferiority in the prose *Tristan*, victims of physical oppression. Knights therefore make it their aim to defend them, knowing that to kill a woman is a most reprehensible act. Although, constrained by custom, Tristan has to behead La Belle Géante, his reluctance to do so is manifest: “Jamés nus preudons ne me devroit honorer, car ceste chose n’apartient a nul chevalier.”<sup>353</sup> In contrast, Bréhus is strongly condemned for his consistently unknighly behaviour towards women.<sup>354</sup> Knights often come to the rescue of damsels in distress, whose screams have alerted them, as when Palamede rescues Brangain who has been tied up and left in the woods.<sup>355</sup>

<sup>353</sup> CII.464.22. See also CIII.822.4; MII.95.37.

<sup>354</sup> CI.417.7; MII.90.6; MIII.5.15; MIII.7.23; MIX.58.5. See Chapter Six for Bréhus's character.

<sup>355</sup> CII.490.8. See also CIII.793.10; MIII.6.7; MIX.57.6 and MII.23.17 where Bliobéris even forces a damsel to tell him why she is crying in order to help her.

Knighly customs sometimes conflict, but when Galaad is presented with the choice between jousting and helping a damsel, there is no hesitation:

je ne le refus mie pour doute que j' aie de vous, ne mais j'avoie talent d'aler  
la u je ai oï une damoisele crier que je la jouste voloie refuser pour  
secourre cele qui est entreprise (MVIII.2.10).

Similarly, Lambeguet would rather die than refrain from rescuing Iseut who has been captured by Palamede (CII.499.14).

Damsels are not alone in needing help. Lamorat intervenes without hesitation when he sees one knight struggling against four others: “Mauves chevalier seroit qui porroit sofrir que quatre chevalier meïssent un chevalier a mort, s’il ne li aidoit por tant qu’il le poïst faire.”<sup>356</sup> Similarly, the reader is told by the man who has been helped by Brun le Noir, “c’est li chevaliers qui jadis me delivra de la mort . . . ; ce que je sui vis, est premierement par Dieu, et puis par lui après” (MVII.166.30).

Intervening on the spot is not the only way to be a “redresseur de torts.”

According to knights, “faire droiture” signifies maintaining justice through judicial battles. Tristan writes to Iseut explaining why he cannot come to see her immediately,

As veuves dames, malmenees contre raison et contre droit, as puceles  
desiretees a tort et a pecié doivent cevaliers aidier a tous besoins et laisser  
tous autres fais pour celui, car pour autre cose ne fumes nous fait chevalier,  
fors que pour maintenir les droitures de cest monde en tel maniere que li  
fort ne feïssent tort as febles ne desraison (MVII.39.62).

Through the judicial battle, knights put their “cors en la bataille” (MVII.163.41) for the sole sake of justice. The legal combat consists of a duel between two knights fighting “en champ per a per,”<sup>357</sup> in a public combat, as equals, to defend the just cause of the party for whose benefit they are acting. There are nine directly related judicial duels in the prose *Tristan* for which various champions fight for different causes. In the first one, Pelias is to defend himself and Leonois against Sador’s accusation that the former

<sup>356</sup> CII.618.19. See also MIII.202.9; MVI.68.7.

<sup>357</sup> MIII.157.10. See also MIV.184.14.

detains Canor prisoner and that he has taken the initiative of attacking Cornouailles “en traïson” (CI.53.5). In the second one, Tristan represents the whole of Cornouailles against Le Morholt who is championing Ireland, to determine whether Cornouailles should pay tribute to Ireland (CI.300.1). In the third, Tristan defends King Anguin against Blanor, who is accusing Anguin of “traïson” for allowing a knight of Ban’s lineage to be killed whilst in receipt of Anguin’s hospitality (CI.409.20). In the fourth one (MIV.88.28), Marc defends himself against Armans, champion to the sisters of Bertolay, whom Marc killed in “traïson” (MIV.10.6). In the fifth, Tristan champions Cornouailles against Helyant le Saxon to determine which of the two powers wins the war (MIV.233.1). In the sixth, Palamede fights against the two serfs who have killed their lord, the Roi de la Cité Vermeille, and usurped his authority (MV.122.1). In the seventh, Tristan champions a damsel who has been disinherited by her elder sister, who is defended by Palamede, and the latter is there to prove that the younger damsel has poisoned her father (MVII.73.46). In the eighth, Brun le Noir defends the knight unjustly accused of murdering a knight of the lineage of Ban, whose honour is championed by Lancelot (MVII.194.34). Finally, in the ninth, Bohort defends a lady whose sister, championed by Priadan, is threatening to disinherit her (MVIII.109.1). Thus Armans, Palamede, Tristan, Brun le Noir and Bohort are knights who undertake to “conseiller” the oppressed.

In all but the fourth duel, there are preliminaries to the combat in which each party exposes their reasons for undertaking the fight.<sup>358</sup> In four of the duels the judgement is determined by the victory of one champion over the other: thus when Sador wins the duel against Pelias, he obliges the latter to confess to having retained Canor as prisoner and of having attacked Cornouailles unlawfully (CI.58.12). Le

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<sup>358</sup> See CI.419.6; MV.122.2; MVII.73.26; MVII.200.7; MVIII.108.20.

Morholt admits defeat by leaving on his boat, thus marking the end of the payment of the tribute to Ireland (CI.303.1). Palamede triumphs over the two serfs, the death of the Roi de la Cité Vermeille is avenged (MV.127.20), and when Bohort defeats Priadan, the younger sister recovers her land: “Si avint ensi par la prouesce Boorth que la jovene dame revint en l’iretage u li rois Armans l’avoit mise” (MVIII.110.8). In the case of Tristan versus Blanor, Tristan spares his opponent because of his prowess, and appeals to King Carados to stop the combat and to re-establish peace between Ireland and Ban’s lineage, as Blanor has admitted defeat. After conferring with “cez de l’ostel le roi Artus,” Carados decides on a peaceful outcome (CI.430.1).<sup>359</sup> When Tristan fights Palamede, the combat goes on for so long that King Galehondins finds himself obliged to put a stop to the duel (MVII.80.12). Similarly, in the case of Brun le Noir against Lancelot, the real culprit confesses to his crime, and is thus put into the hands of the judges: “Lors fist prendre le cevalier et metre en boine garde jusques a tant que li juge eüssent donné jugement” (MVII.208.24). In the last two cases, it is not the victory of one knight over another which determines the judicial outcome, but the ruling of a king or of judges.

The judicial duel fought out between Marc and Armans is unique both in its outcome and in its implications. When Marc unlawfully kills Bertolay because the latter refuses to help him slay Tristan, Bertolay’s sisters “le [Marc] firent arester, et disoient qu’ele l’apeloient de traïson et qu’eles l’en feroient prouver par Armant” (MIV.10.5). Marc kills Armans in the duel, an event which the narrator deplors:

Armans se combatist pour loiale querele et pour droituriere, car bien estoit verités que li rois March avoit ochis Bertholais, et mauvaïsement, si fu Armans vaincus de chele bataille (MIV.88.31).

The narrator blames this inconsistency on the fact that he swore no oath beforehand:

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<sup>359</sup> Tristan also grants mercy to Helyant le Saxon for his prowess MIV.241.17.

par coi li sairement des batailles furent adonc mis avant premierement, ki encore sont maintenant. Ne devant ce n'estoient sairement fait de nule bataille, s'il ne leur plaisoit (MIV.88.37).

Arthur ends up as the legal judge of the situation: the sisters are acquitted, and engraved on Armans' tombstone is "la felonnie le roi March et comment li chevaliers avoit esté mors pour Dieu et por droit" (MIV.90.57). However, the ultimate judge of the situation is Marc's strength. This episode shows that the law of the strongest prevails, and that this society does indeed depend on good knights using their superior strength properly. It also shows Armans' readiness to fight for the cause of justice, like all the knights cited in the above cases.<sup>360</sup>

### III. Jousting

Perceval says, "Jousters si est maintes fois cevalerie d'aventure" (MV.19.10), and the reverse is also true, for on their adventures, what knights do most is joust.

#### A. Reasons for jousting

Jousting has two principal functions which contribute to the good running of knightly society, and therefore to that of society at large. First, it allows perpetual training ("usance d'armes")<sup>361</sup> for more serious combats such as wars and judicial battles, at a relatively lower risk.<sup>362</sup> Secondly, it permits the establishment of a hierarchy amongst knights. As Keu points out to Kahedin:

quidiés vous . . . que u roiaume de Logres eüst tant de boins cevaliers com il i a, se ceste coustume n'i fust maintenue, ensi conme ele est. S'il n'eüssent si grant usance d'armes com il ont cascun jour, il fuissent par aventure autretel cevalier com sont orendroit cil de Cornuaille, dont li .X. ne valent mie un preudome. La grant usanche k'il ont des armes les fait hardis et preus, ensi com vous veés (MI.123.5).

<sup>360</sup> For the repercussions of this episode on the place of religion in the *Tristan* see Chapter Five.

<sup>361</sup> MI.123.8.

<sup>362</sup> Jousts are occasionally fatal (MVII.148.31).

Jousting allows society to distinguish the good from the bad (MI.123.12) and to honour every knight for his true value:

se ceste esprueve ne fust, nous nous tenissom tout en un point et boin et mauvais: li hardi ne fuissent non plus hounéré com sont li couart; non plus ne fust orendroit honnerés mesire Lanelos du Lac que li pires cevaliers de la Table Reonde, ne mesire Tristrans, li boins cevaliers, ki teus est voirement que de sa proeche vait on parlant par tot le monde (MI.123.14).

Thus the justifications for jousting convince even the most cynical of observers, for Kahedin can only agree: “tant m’avés dit a ceste fois que je lo vostre coustume durement et di tout apertement sans faille qu’ele fait bien a prisier” (MI.123.33).

## B. Causes of jousts

Jousting occupies a privileged position in the lives of the prose Tristan knights.

Because jousts are, to a modern reader, tedious by their repetitiousness, little would be gained by listing these encounters. Nevertheless, they constitute “eloquent psychological documents,” because they clearly afforded much pleasure to their audience in literature of imagination as well as in the chronicles.<sup>363</sup> Causes for jousts are numerous: they can be provoked by the obligations of knighthood seen above, such as protecting damsels in distress or disadvantaged knights. They are also caused by competition such as revenge, rivalry between lineages, and defending the honour of an admired lady. Finally, they are the result of specific joust-provoking customs, as we will see.

### 1. Rivalries

The desire for revenge often results in a joust. Because there are several reasons for revenge—simple personal dishonour or that of a friend, treason, or death—there are also different aims in jousting. Some revenge-jousts start because the offended knight wants to prove his prowess and do no more than humiliate the offender, but others are



undertaken with the clear intent to kill, or to “honnir dou cors.”<sup>364</sup> The chivalric code sees it as a point of honour to take revenge “en guise de cevalier” (MII.168.5), and to refuse exposes one to criticisms of “mauvestié.”<sup>365</sup> The sheer number of revenge-jousts draws the audience’s attention to this vindictive system as an important part of the chivalric code.

To be defeated in a joust is humiliating, not only for the vanquished party, but also for his companions if any. The vocabulary (“outrages,” “deshonour,” “honte”) describing the humiliation experienced on being unhorsed<sup>366</sup> shows that this defeat is not taken lightly. Taking revenge for a previous defeat, whether one’s own, or that of a companion, constitutes the most common type of revenge-joust. Gauvain’s reaction to Bliobéris’s defeat is typical:

Quant mesire Gavains voit Blyoblerys gesir a la tere en tel maniere k’il ne se remue non plus que s’il fust mors, s’il est dolans et courechies, che ne fait pas a demander. . . . Et . . . il set bien que, selonc la coustume des chevaliers errans et pour la raison de la Table Reonde, doit il faire tout sompoir de vengier la honte de son ami, donc se tourne vers le chevalier et li crie tant com il puet a haute vois: “Sire cevaliers, gardés vous de moi!” (MIII.226.1)

Gauvain’s feelings denote the humiliation he experiences at his companion’s defeat. Other passages illustrating analogous situations certainly mention that the knight in a position to avenge his companion would be dishonoured if he failed to do so (CIII.814.26), but they say nothing of an explicit custom. Revenge-jousts, however, are so numerous in the prose *Tristan* that it is impossible not to take this code as implicit within the chivalric world.<sup>367</sup>

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<sup>363</sup> Bloch, *Feudal Society* 294.

<sup>364</sup> MIII.24.15; MIII.137.7; MIV.245.43; MVI.16.6.

<sup>365</sup> CIII.814.28. “lâcheté” and “méchanceté,” CIII.Glossary.

<sup>366</sup> MII.109.10; MII.108.42; MV.227.27.

<sup>367</sup> See also MIII.25.23; MIII.28.11; MIII.34.28; MIV.65.26; MV.227.27; MVIII.4.21; MIX.70.5.

As mentioned above, personal defeat also demands revenge. Palamede, who has just been unhorsed by Lamorat, “vengeroit volentiers cheste honte se il pooit.”<sup>368</sup>

Again, the defeated knight would feel dishonoured if he did not at least try to take revenge for the shame caused him: thus the “Cevaliers as Armes d’Argent” warns his opponent:

vous ne vous poés escaper de moi sans bataille; se je ne fas tout le pooir de vengier la honte que vous m’avés faite, ne me tenés a chevalier!  
(MVII.14.22)

Similarly, presented with the opportunity of avenging the dishonour Gaheriet inflicted upon him by unhorsing him in a tournament a month before, Palamede “si dist a soi meïsmes que, se il puet en nule maniere, il vengera la honte que cil li fist.”<sup>369</sup>

The above-mentioned jousts are undertaken with the specific aim of humiliating the offender, and to prove one’s superiority over him, but some are initiated with the intent to maim or kill. Avenging the death of a friend or kinsman is a point of honour to the Tristan knights. Whether the death is accidental or not, its revenge “cherche autant à réparer la perte humaine que l’intégrité de l’honneur familial, lignager, chevaleresque.”<sup>370</sup> The vocabulary used to describe the gratuitous murder of a knight of Joyeuse Garde shows that it dishonours those who witness it: “Grans damages nous est avenues a cest point!” (MV.42.12) Tristan loses no time in lamentations over the death of the friend with whom he often rode, but reacts swiftly: “Si m’aportés un escu et un glaive. Mout me pesera durement se je nes fas repentir de l’outrage k’il nous ont ore fait!” (MV.42.33) His revenge is quick, for he soon finds the culprits and wounds them badly, without killing them. Similarly, Hélié wastes no time in mourning his father’s death at the hands of Tristan, but immediately sets out in search of the latter:

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<sup>368</sup> MIV.109.4. See also MVII.112.1; CII.503.16.

<sup>369</sup> MVI.144.48. See also CI.373.11, 19; MII.162.49; MII.174.14; MV.93.1; MVII.15.1; MVII.112.1.

<sup>370</sup> Marie-Luce Chênerie, “Vengeance et chevalerie dans le Tristan en prose,” Romania 113 (1992-95): 200.

por ce que je vausisse vengier sa mort ausi conme fiex doit vengier som pere, me parti je de Saisoigne bien a .II. ans. . . . Et quant je t'ai trouvé entre mes mains, il est mestiers que je venge la mort de mon pere (MVI.141.15).

Hélie's intent is to kill, as the adverb "mortelment" demonstrates (MVI.141.84). The rapidity of the initial reaction is reminiscent of Beowulf's in the face of Aeschere's death, which Hrothgar sorely laments. Beowulf tells his lord:

Ne sorga, snotor guma! Selre bið æghwæm  
 þæt he his freond wrece þonne he fela murne.<sup>371</sup>  
 (Wise sir, do not grieve. It is always better  
 to avenge dear ones than to indulge in mourning.)<sup>372</sup>

This reaction is clearly one inherent in warrior societies, but the reason for taking revenge is more complex for the Tristan's knightly class, for there is more at stake than just the loss of a good warrior. It is the loss also of a knight who upholds the very values of chivalry that triggers these revenge-jousts.<sup>373</sup>

Jousts are also the result of rivalry between lineages or between groups of knights belonging to different courts. Le Goff shows that historically speaking, kinship is "une communauté de sang composée des 'parents' et des 'amis charnels,' c'est-à-dire probablement des parents par alliance," and "la solidarité du lignage se manifeste surtout dans les vengeances privées."<sup>374</sup> The rivalry between the sons of Loth d'Orcanie and of Pellynor de Lystenois, culminating in Lamorat's murder are a good fictional example of this medieval reality.<sup>375</sup> Similarly, the ".V. cousin de la

<sup>371</sup> Beowulf, ed. George Jack (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994) lines 1384-85.

<sup>372</sup> Beowulf, trans. Seamus Heaney (London: Faber, 1999) 46.

<sup>373</sup> For other revenge-jousts provoked by death, see MIV.39.1; MV.93.17; MVIII.156.34. Ségurade wounds Tristan for his relationship with the former's wife (CI.371.1) and Argan fights Uterpendragon (MI.135.27) to avenge his humiliation on discovering his wife's infidelity, thus making adultery another reason for revenge-jousts, although this is not widespread in the prose Tristan.

<sup>374</sup> Le Goff, Civilisation 349.

<sup>375</sup> Rivalry between the lineages: MIV.124.5. Lamorat's death: MIV.124.36.

Deserte” attack Bliobéris and Galaad, both of the lineage of Ban, because, Senelas tells his cousins, the “parenté le roi Ban . . . abaisseroit, et li nostres accroistroit.”<sup>376</sup>

Knights will also joust to defend the honour of a lady who has been insulted. Before the fight between Lamorat and Meleagant, for instance, the narrator puts particular emphasis on the fact that both knights disagree on who the most beautiful lady is. Lamorat says “de totes les dames qui au reaume de Logres apartienent me semble plus bele dame la roïne d’Orcanie” (CIII.803.11). Meleagant answers that Guenièvre is “la biauté de totes les biautez” (CIII.803.18). Each is so outraged that the other could thus insult the woman he loves, that they immediately begin to fight (CIII.804.1). The narrator emphasises the different feelings of the knights, details which are obviously important and worth relating: they explain the vehemence of the fight, and also show what knights have at heart in the Tristan. Both feel that “nule si grant honor ne me poïst avenir por chose del monde com de combatre moi por la plus haute dame del monde et por la plus bele” (CIII.803.54). Through jousting, therefore, knights find honour in defending that of the lady they admire, and love, as will become apparent in Chapter Four, is an important sphere of chivalric life.

## 2. Joust-provoking customs

Rivalries cause a great number of jousts, but so do “coustumes” whose very nature is joust-provoking. The “coustume des cevaliers errans” is the most widely-respected. It consists, as Tristan explains didactically to a damsel, in taking every opportunity to joust against other knights-errant:

des cevaliers errans est tele la coustume que lour premier acointement  
doivent venir par caus de lance et d’espee (MII.136.38).

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<sup>376</sup> MVIII.171.6. See also MVIII.150.25. There are also ancient personal hates which trigger jousts, such as between Lucan le Bouteiller and Danain (MIII.23.24); Palamede and Gauvain (MIX.131.1); Bréhus and Gauvain (MVII.185.1); Tristan and Palamede (MIII.217.17).

However frivolous it may seem to a modern reader, this is the custom that is normally upheld by the most highly-respected knights in the prose Tristan, and therefore one that rules their everyday life.<sup>377</sup> A respectable knight cannot refuse, or he will be considered as “mauvais et a failli de cuer” (MI.77.6), and the narrator is at pains both to explain the custom and to justify its reasons.<sup>378</sup> Hector and Tristan consider the simple fact that they have arrived in Norgales enough of a reason to joust:

la premiere jouste qui est el roiaume de Norgales qui nous est presentee, ne refuserom nous mie par mon conseil, ains essaierom comment il sevent ferir de lance et lour moustrerom, se Dieu plaist, que meilleur sont li cevalier aventureus que cil du roiaume de Norgales!<sup>379</sup>

Their victory seems to justify their reason for jousting in the first place.

This curious custom seems a far cry from the knights' collective obligations towards the weak and the oppressed. Despite the fact that this kind of jousting is consistently presented as worthy, the knights in the prose Tristan do not always joust for a noble cause. Their motivations are sometimes frivolous: knights seem often to be driven to fight for the sake of fighting, or in pursuit of what looks like mere vain glory. The readers perceive an ambiguous attitude towards this gratuitous search for glory, for in some instances, they are led to question the validity of the joust, either through the reluctance of the challenged knight to fight, or by the defeat of the knight who has provoked the joust in the first place, although neither of these instances is systematic.<sup>380</sup>

In addition to these rather uncertain criticisms, there are occasions on which the most highly-respected knights feel justified in refusing a joust, even at the risk of going against the all-important “coustume des cevaliers errans.” Lancelot refuses to fight Keu because he feels the pretext is gratuitous:

<sup>377</sup> See CIII.825.21; MII.17.1; MII.20.15; MIII.47.8; MIV.18.27; MIV.97.24; MV.64.1; MVIII.11.6.

<sup>378</sup> MII.16.11. See also CIII.798.16.

<sup>379</sup> MIX.69.30. See also MII.4.13; MIII.84.1; MIII.243.14; MVII.99.23; MVII.134.24.

“Pour coi,” fait Kex, “le refusés vous?”—“Pour ce,” fait Lanselos, “k’il ne me plaist. Encontre vous ne encontre autre chevalier ne jouterai je pas a forche s’il ne me plaist, se entre nous deus n’avoit mortel querele” (MIII.143.7).

Tristan also refuses a joust because he wants to save his strength for an upcoming fight with Palamede (MIII.241.23).

To imply that some jousts, no matter how few, are futile seems to undermine what the great majority of knights in the prose Tristan believe is their duty. This implication is developed in the more direct criticisms of Dinadan and Kahedin, whose comments the audience seems to be expected to take with a pinch of salt. The ambivalent undermining of the “coustume des cevaliers errans” that we have been considering here, however, seems to be something to be taken seriously, as we will see when we come to examine the ideas involved more fully. The audience might not perceive them as implied criticisms undermining the principles of chivalry, but rather as a search for a more viable ideal.

The above-mentioned custom remains the most popular reason for jousting. The tradition of jousting for a woman who is riding with another knight is respected in the prose Tristan, but it is described more precisely in Chrétien de Troyes’s Chevalier de la charrette:

Les costumes et les franchises  
 Estoient tex a cel termine  
 Que dameisele ne meschine,  
 Se chevaliers la trovast sole,  
 Ne plus qu’il se tranchast la gole  
 Ne feïst se tote enor non,  
 S’estre volsist de boen renon,  
 Et, s’il l’esforçast, a toz jorz  
 An fust honiz an totes corz.  
 Mes se ele conduit eüst,  
 Uns autres, se tant li pleüst  
 Qu’a celui bataille an feïst  
 Et par armes la conqueïst,

<sup>380</sup> See for instance MVIII.165.6-11 and Chapter Six.

Sa volenté an poïst faire  
Sanz honte et sanz blasme retraire.<sup>381</sup>

In our text, King Arthur follows this rule to the letter and, not recognising Tristan, challenges him to a joust in order to win over the lady under Tristan's "conduit," who happens to be Iseut:

u vous me dirés ki la dame est u je le prendrai a la maniere et a la guise que cevaliers doit prendre dame u roiaume de Logres, quant il le trueve en conduit de cevaliers errans (MV.155.16).

Tristan does not question the validity of this pretext, but is angered by Arthur's words (MV.155.19). Similarly, Keu challenges a knight leading a damsel to a joust:

Se li cevaliers ki vous conduit ne vous veut desfendre et combatre soi encontre moi, je vous enmenrai, bien le sace il, car ensi le conmande la coustume du roiaume de Logres et des cevaliers errans (MI.127.4).

This custom appears to be widely accepted and practised throughout the prose Tristan,<sup>382</sup> and there are few clues as to its impact on the original audience. The authors possibly hint at its injustice, and of course, the custom is also strongly condemned by Kahedin.<sup>383</sup> However, women in the Tristan generally prefer to be accompanied: thus the demoiselle médisante, although dissatisfied with the companion she starts out with, does want one of Arthur's knights to escort her on her long journey (CII.644.2). One often meets a damsels riding willingly accompanied (MII.148.11). Since damsels riding alone are sometimes frightened and seek protection,<sup>384</sup> it is doubtful whether this custom is being condemned at all. Its abuse, however, might be the reason for the dissenting voices on this subject.<sup>385</sup>

<sup>381</sup> Chrétien de Troyes, Le chevalier de la charrette, ed. Charles Méla (Paris: Poche, 1993) lines 1302-16.

<sup>382</sup> See CII.625.31; CII.669.7; CII.496.19; CIII.703.19; MVII.128.34.

<sup>383</sup> See Chapter Six and MI.126.47; MVI.11.10.

<sup>384</sup> MVI.105.3; MIX.57.1.

<sup>385</sup> See Chapter Six.

Bridge customs, which consist of forbidding a knight to cross a bridge unless he jousts against its guardian, are common in our text.<sup>386</sup> In the kingdom of Logres, this is, as Dinadan knows, “les coustumes de tous les pons de chelui païs” (MIV.34.3). There is clearly a code of conduct understood and respected by all knights, and sometimes the joust is even announced by the sounding of a horn:

il escote et ot soner desus le pont un cor mout hautement, et sona cil cors en une tor qui estoit fermee a l’entree dou pont (CIII.752.5).

Even without the horn, the practice is unquestioned: when Lancelot sees three knights “au pié dou pont, il reconoist mentenant que ce sont cil encontre qui il se doit combatre . . .” (CIII.770.3). The absurdity of the custom is apparent to the modern reader when Kahedin ends up having to fight with his own father, Hoël, who is the unwilling guardian of the bridge Kahedin wishes to cross. Although they both realise they narrowly missed killing each other, neither of them criticises the custom (MI.145.8). It is difficult to establish whether the event speaks for itself, or to gauge the impact it would have had on the original audience. The following example, however, shows that, as with the custom of the “cevaliers errans,” one can sometimes refuse the joust. Dinadan feels he needs to preserve his strength for later:

“D’une autre fois ne di je mie, se aventure m’acondusoit ceste part, que je bien ne m’asaiasse d’une joustte encontre vous, mais a cheste fois nel ferai je mie, car il ne me plaist.”—“Et je vous en claim donc quite,” fait li chevaliers, “car force ne vous en ferai je mie encontre vostre volenté” (MIV.34.6).

The guardian’s courteous reaction would undoubtedly have been appreciated by a thirteenth-century audience.

There are also individual joust-provoking customs, established by one person for a specific reason, and for a particular place. Tristan and Dinadan have to accomplish the “couvenence” if they want to spend the night in an “ostel:”

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<sup>386</sup> CIII.698.13; CIII.763.1; CIII.811.2; MIV.32.5; MIV.45.15; MVII.9.35; MVII.13.17; MVII.17.5.



se cascuns de vous deus puet le sien cevalier abatre, vous serés herbergié tout maintenant; mais se vous estes abatu, autre ostel poés adonc querre, car çaiens ne metrés vous le pié! (MII.39.77)

Tristan and Dinadan defeat their adversaries, but the next day they have to defend themselves against two more knights who wish to spend the night there, once more allowing the “couvenence” to be the pretext to joust.

Likewise, Lancelot, having retired to the “Ille de Joie,” lets it be known “a tous ciaux qui sont et pres et loing qu’i ne fauna ja de bataille a cevalier qui en l’ille viengne, u soit a prime u soit a nonne” (MVI.77.47). This is obviously a very popular challenge among knights-errant, because “si i sont passés plus de .II.M. . . .” (MVI.77.50). Another knight has established the custom of the “Tour del Pin Reont,” where he has hung his “escu” to a tree:

Se vous l’escu volés abatre, a la mellee estes venus et vous asaurra li sires de la tour, et vengera l’outrage de son escu (MVII.147.19).

This type of joust is reminiscent of that encountered by Chrétien de Troyes’ Calogrenant, and later by Yvain in the eponymous romance where, although the custom and its consequences are more elaborate and more marvellous, the principle is the same: if a knight pours water on the “perron,” he will have to confront the defender of the fountain in a joust.<sup>387</sup> As in the prose *Tristan*, if the knight is victorious over the defender of the custom, it adds to his reputation, for he has succeeded where many others have failed. This, as we will see, is the main justification for jousting.

### C. Phases in jousts

The phases of the jousts respect fairly strict rules. Once the challenge, or “défi” to the joust is pronounced, unhorsing one’s adversary is often enough to end the matter. A typical example of the length, violence and consequences of such a short joust is when the Chevalier à l’Écu Noir unhorses Lamorat:

Quant Lamoraz voit qu'a joster li covient, . . . besse il le glaive et lesse corre au chevalier au ferir des esperons. Et li chevaliers, qui li venoit si grant erre . . . le fiert si engoiseusement qu'il li fait une mout grant plaie enmi le piz, et porte a terre lui et son cheval tout en un mont; et fu Lamoraz mout decassez de celi cheoir et dou fes des armes qui auques l'ont grevé, et dou cheval qui li fu cheoiz sor le cors. Et li chevaliers qui ensi l'ot abatu, quant il le voit a terre, il nel regarde plus, enz s'en vet outre, le glaive bessié qui encores estoit toz entiers (CIII.798.16).

The narrator uses imagery to describe the adversary (“com se la foudre la chaçast”).

Lamoraz is wounded in the chest and by the weight of his horse falling on him. The adversary leaves the scene with his own “glaive” intact. This detailed description of an otherwise inconsequential joust shows how important it is to knightly life, and although the precise appearance of the knights is not related, the readers are aware of every detail of the joust in the factual way a chronicle would recount it. These stock phrases which recur incessantly in joust descriptions testify to the fact that the authors did not “develop those special potentialities of language which written communication encourages and rewards,”<sup>388</sup> underlining the probably oral delivery of this romance.

Unhorsing an adversary means hitting him with the “glaive,” or lance, which can be fatal, as when Palamede hits the Chevalier de la Tour:

Li chevaliers de la tour, qui de grant force estoit et de grant renon et tans cevaliers avoit abatus, est ochis de cel encontre. Il ot la teste esquarteree et li parti l'ame du cors.<sup>389</sup>

After a knight has been unhorsed, there are several options. In some instances the stronger knight considers the joust finished, and rides away.<sup>390</sup> On the other hand, the opponents may engage in the “mêlée,” or “bataille,” and in the art of “escremie.”

There are various options within the rules of jousting, depending on the strength,

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<sup>387</sup> Chrétien de Troyes, *Yvain* lines 368-540.

<sup>388</sup> Field, *Romance and Chronicle* 85.

<sup>389</sup> MVII.148.31. See also MIII.180.18.

<sup>390</sup> See also CIII.791.25; CIII.795.1; CIII.811.3; CIII.814.31; CIII.825.24; MI.79.1; MI.128.1; MII.4.11; MV.18.28; MVIII.132.1.

experience, disposition and identity of the combatants. The diagram below gives a summary of the possible alternatives in the combat, as well as its different phases.

Another good example for its descriptive qualities, as well as its ability to highlight what is at stake for the knights is the combat between Kahedin and his father Hoël, each participant ignoring the other's identity:

Quant il sont au joster venu, Kahedins, ki son pere ne reconnoist de riens, hurte ceval des esperons par desus le pont, ki grans estoit et larges, et li rois Hoël, ki son fil ne reconnoist point, refait tout autretel. Il s'entrefierent par grant force si durement que li glaive volent ambedoi em pieches, et de tant lour avint il bien que li hauberc les garandirent a cel encontre. Il s'entrehurtent des cors et des visages et des escus de toutes leur forces si durement k'il s'entrabatent a la tere si felenessement k'il est bien avis a cascun d'aus k'il ait de cel caoir la canole du col rompue et debrisie (MI.141.28).

Compared to the amount of descriptive detail provided for the landscape,<sup>391</sup> the reader is faced here with such a wealth of information that this is surely what is of interest in the prose Tristan. The reader is aware of the positions of the adversaries, their strategy and their initial wounds. The violence is portrayed effectively: the adversaries feel as if they have broken their collar bones, and the lances fly into pieces. This means that the knights have gone straight for each other, and their lances have encountered each other face on, causing them simply to shatter. This detail shows not only the accuracy of the charge, but also that of the narrator in recording this event: in this way, the world of jousting comes to life for the listener. Moreover, the impact is so hard that both knights unhorse each other in the same charge. This happens in jousts opposing men of equally exceptional strength,<sup>392</sup> but when one knight unhorses the other without falling off himself, the men are considered of differing abilities: "il s'entrefierent de toute lour force, que li plus febles ala a tere . . ." (MVI.161.68).

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<sup>391</sup> See Chapter One.

<sup>392</sup> See also Belinant and Lamorat CII.630.13; Brun le Noir and Plenorius CIII.756.9; Argan and Uterpendragon MI.135.16; Tristan and Lancelot MIII.248.26.

The next phase, as depicted in the diagram, separates the joust from the main battle:

Li cheval tourment en fuies, li uns cha et li autres la, et li chevalier, ki estoient assés debrisié du dur caoir k'il avoient pris, gurent une grant piece a tere, si estourdi malement et estonné k'il ne sevent s'il est u nuis u jours, et bien lour est avis apertement que tous li mondes aille crollant et tournoiant. . . . Toutes voies a cief de piece, quant il revienent en lour memoire et il ont lour vertu recouvré, li uns conmenche l'autre a regarder par mout grant ire et, sans ce k'il ne s'entredient nul mot du monde, il metent les mains as espees et s'entrecourent sus mout ireement (MI.141.39).

The narrator often provides a wider picture of the joust, which includes the horses, who in this case escape from the scene.<sup>393</sup> Sometimes, the horse itself falls on the body of its horseman, exacerbating the violence of the fall: Tristan and Lancelot “s’entrefierent si angoisseusement k’il se portent a la tere, les chevaus sour les cors.”<sup>394</sup> Once the knights have fallen, the narrator depicts their perception evocatively and accurately: the adversaries are shocked by their fall, and they perceive that the world is whirling round them; they do not know whether it is night or day. This stunning effect is quite common in the descriptions of other jousts, although this one is more detailed, because it evokes the knights’ view of events, not that of the narrator.<sup>395</sup> The description is more than simply factual and therefore stands out in its vividness. The narration of this joust heightens the excitement for the audience who feels involved in the main occupation of the Tristan knights.

Without exchanging a word, the two knights tacitly agree to carry on with the sword fight on foot. The transition from joust to battle is not always so clear-cut, for both knights do not systematically want to continue, although obviously, when the intent is to slay one’s adversary, then the continuation of the fight is taken as read.<sup>396</sup>

<sup>393</sup> See also CIII.756.13.

<sup>394</sup> MIII.248.26. See also CIII.752.22; CIII.756.10.

<sup>395</sup> For stunned knights see also MIII.249.13.

<sup>396</sup> For jousts with intent to kill see CII.632.3; CII.635.4; CIII.753.16; MI.135.32; MVII.187.25.

When the intent is not to kill, however, but simply involves “grant rancune,”<sup>397</sup> or “mout grant ire” (MI.141.50), then one of the knights may have to be persuaded to continue.<sup>398</sup> The next phase is the actual battle:

Atant commence la mellee du pere et du fil desus le pont, si pesme et si crueuse et si durement felenesse que nus nes veïst adont si entreferir l’un sour l’autre qui bien ne desist apertment que voirement estoient il mortel anemi a celui point. . . . Li rois Hoël, ki boins cevaliers estoit a merveilles et hardis et preus de son eage et tant savoit de l’escremie que a painnes en quidast il trouver son maistre, pour ce k’il connoist certainement que de grant force et de grant pooir est li cevaliers encontre qui il se combat, vistes et aspres a merveilles, pour ce se garde il, tant com il puet, de lui asaillir et de jeter ses caus en vain (MI.142.1).

In this passage the reader is aware of the violence of the battle through such stock epithets as “pesme,” “crueuse” and “felenesse.”<sup>399</sup> The narrator brings to the attention of the reader not only the strength of the adversaries, but also the wise way in which they use it. Thus Hoël “se garde . . . de lui asaillir et de jeter ses caus en vain” (MI.142.12), whereas Kahedin “vait sour son pere jetant menu et souvent uns caus si grans et si pesans que li rois Hoël . . . en est tous esbahis” (MI.142.22). The narrator indulges in this type of detail in almost every battle description, emphasising such attributes as “force,” “pooir,” “sages,” “hardis,” and “preus.” The violence of the combat is reflected in the knights’ wounds and the destruction inflicted on their weapons and armour:<sup>400</sup>

Il n’i a mais riens de faintise, car, quant li uns a esprouvé l’autre une grant pieche et il voient que cestui fait ne se puet par pais departir, il reconnencent l’escremie cruele et dure et felenesse; et a lour armes apert bien, a lour escus et a lour haubers k’il sont desrout et desmaillié sour bras, sour espaulles et sour hanques. . . . Et sans doute li uns et li autres avoit ja assés perdu de sanc, et a lour espees le peüssiés veoir tant clerement, ki estoient taintes et vermeilles de lour sanc (MI.142.33).

<sup>397</sup> CIII.757.23. See also MIII.250.3.

<sup>398</sup> MIV.24.7. See also CIII.784.28.

<sup>399</sup> See also CII.634.2; CIII.753.2; CIII.757.2; CIII.763.14; MIII.249.25; MIV.27.12.

<sup>400</sup> See also CIII.785.10.

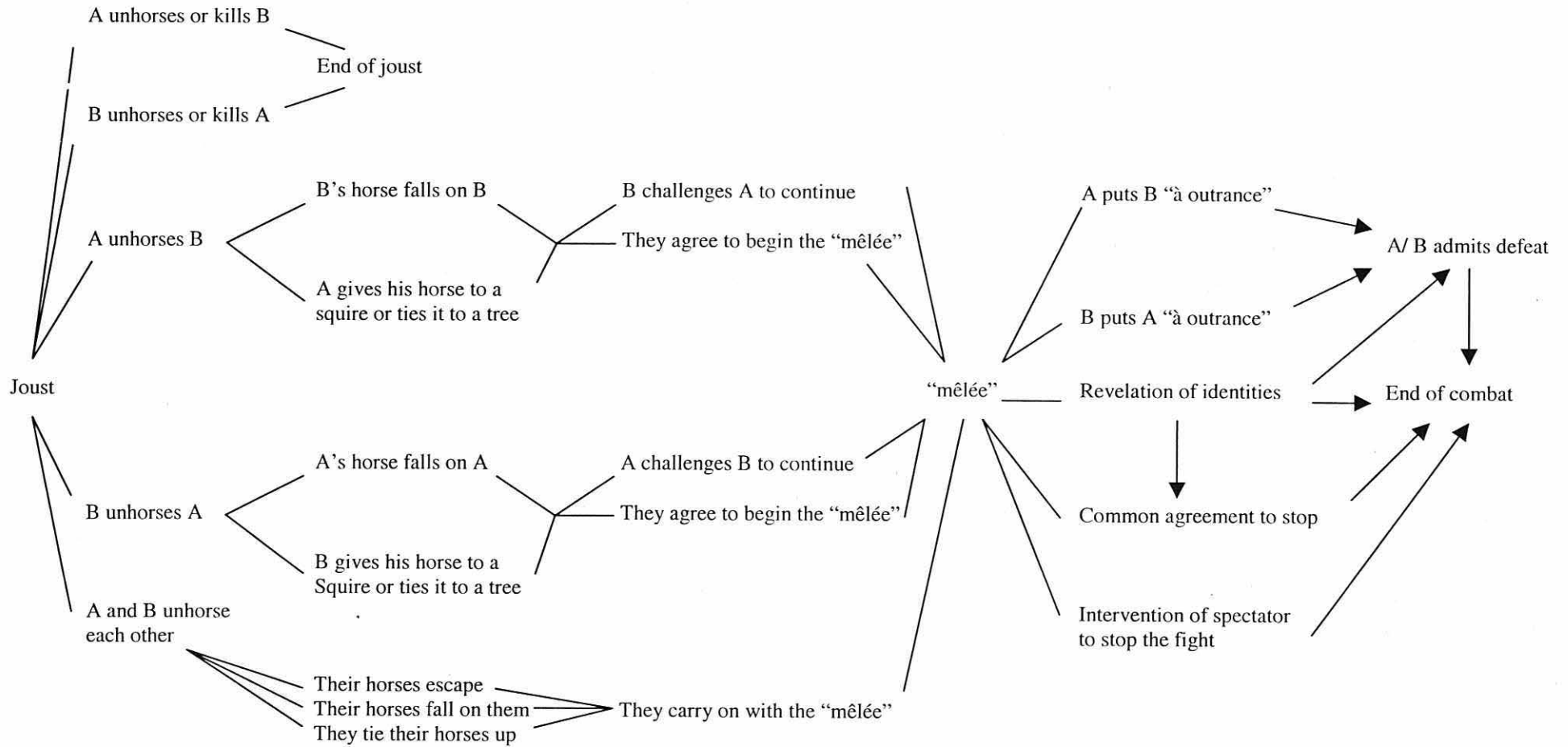
References to “plaies petites et granz”<sup>401</sup> and to the loss of blood are common to most battle scenes in the Tristan.<sup>402</sup> Blood loss is a visual proof of the violence of the combat, but it is also a cause of weakness, which often decides the end of the battle. The narrator paints an evocative picture in the battle opposing Palamede and his brother Sephar: “les espees ambesdeus sont esvermeillies de lour sanc. Et ce voient il tout clerement au rai de la lune qui luisoit” (MVI.13.17).

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<sup>401</sup> CIII.753.45. See also CIII.759.14; MI.135.38; MIII.249.28; MIII.254.20; MVI.164.4; MVII.187.26.

<sup>402</sup> See also CIII.759.14; MIII.250.7; MIV.27.24; MVI.13.20.

### Phases of jousts



It is striking that the moonlight enables the reader to distinguish the colour (vermeil: “bright red”). This relatively naturalistic account is convincing and would certainly have struck a thirteenth-century audience and their narrator, who presumably delighted in the immediate details of chivalric life.

After the first “asaut,” the exhausted knights take a rest, often the opportunity for each opponent to reflect on the strength of his adversary:

Kahedins se retrait ariere, autresi com avoit fait li rois. Tant a son pere regardé en ceste bataille et son aler et son venir et comment il set asalir et couvrir soi et comment il set sagement recevoir les caus et sagement donner quant besoins en vient. Kahedins, ki tout ce avoit veü, dist bien a soi meïsmes tout apertement . . . k’il a plus apris en ceste bataille k’il n’avoit onques mais en toute sa vie et k’il en quidoit miex valoir tout son eage de ce k’il avoit apris (MI.143.13).<sup>403</sup>

Kahedin also reflects on how much he has learnt, corroborating Keu’s theory mentioned above that jousting constitutes excellent training for knights. This reflection on the adversary’s strength is mutual.<sup>404</sup> The next passage, which consists of compliments addressed to the opponent, is a result of this period of inner reflection, and is common in joust descriptions:<sup>405</sup>

De vous ne di je mie sans faille, si voirement m’aït Diex, que vous ne soiïés uns des boins cevaliers du monde: a moi apert tout clerement vostre bonté (MI.144.6).

Such admiration for a rival mirrors the desire to discover his identity. At this point, depending on who the adversaries are, divulging this information can have several consequences: either the knights discover they do not want to be fighting each other, as would be the case for members of the same family (Kahedin and Hoël, Palamede and Sephar),<sup>406</sup> or for members of the Round Table (Tristan and Galaad);<sup>407</sup> or the

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<sup>403</sup> For similar thoughts see Lamorat reflecting on Belinant: “Il se disoit bient tot apertement a soi meïsmes que cil estoit le mieudres chevaliers qu’il onques veïst . . .” (CII.631.11). See also CIII.758.6; CIII.785.29; MVI.13.19-21.

<sup>404</sup> See Hoël’s thoughts MI.143.22.

<sup>405</sup> See for instance CIII.758.38; CIII.786 1; MIII.255.10-256.13.

<sup>406</sup> MVI.14.14.



opponents find out that they are sworn enemies, and thus decide to carry on with the battle.<sup>408</sup> In this case, it can end only with the exhaustion of the enemies, or when one of them has the advantage, and therefore the power to kill his adversary. At that point, if the knight who is at a disadvantage wants to escape with his life, he will pronounce himself “outré,” or defeated, because of “lasseté” and “travail.”<sup>409</sup> This is the last resort for a knight as it is obviously humiliating to admit defeat. Only in the case where he has been beaten by one of the best knights in the world can defeat be honourable (CIII.787.13). If the opponents are actually friends, or members of the same family, then the meeting can be rather emotional, and normally swiftly ends the battle:

il parole tout em plourant et dist: “Kahedins, biaux fiex, que ferom nous? Je sui li rois Hoël, tes peres, ki estoie venus en la Grant Bretaingne pour toi trouver. Or t’ai trouvé, non pas en tel maniere com peres doit trouver fil, ains t’ai trouvé en cestui point comme le plus mortel anemi que je onques mais trouvaïsse, car petit s’en faut que tu ne m’as mort!” (MI.145.5)

Quant Kahedins entent cest plait, il en est a mervelles liés. Dont jete maintenant son escu par tere et s’espee autresi; et, de si haut com il estoit, il se laisse esranment caoir as piés de son pere et dist: “Ha, sire, pour Dieu merci! Pardonnés moi ce que je ai mise main en vous, car Diex le set et vous meïsmes le savés bien que ce fu par mesconnissance” (MI.145.13).

Battles are not only stopped because knights discover they belong to the same family or chivalric order. Lamorat stops fighting with King Marc because it would be wrong to hurt such a “preudom” (MIV.28.1). Similarly, Meraugis intervenes to prevent Bréhus from killing Gauvain because “ce seroit trop grant vilonnie et trop grans damages, se si preudom conme est mesire Gavains se moroit par vous” (MVII.190.11). Meraugis takes part in the outcome of the battle as a result of his reflections, which the narrator has taken care to relate.<sup>410</sup> This leads us to another type of battle, one for

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<sup>407</sup> MVI.165.25.

<sup>408</sup> See for instance Tristan and Lamorat CIII.785.28.

<sup>409</sup> CIII.754.4-6. See also CII.634.26 (Belinant faints with exhaustion); CIII.773.18.

<sup>410</sup> For spectators at jousts see also CIII.760.1; MVI.163.5; MVI.164.11; MVII.187.2.

which an audience is indispensable: the tournament. Another link between joust and tournament, but which the tournament exacerbates, is the search for honour. When Tristan fights with Galaad in a tournament, he is conscious that his honour is at stake:

Il a tant fait . . . qu'il est renomés par le monde, et se il pert ci sa renommee, ce sera damages et vergoigne. Por ce dist il qu'il veut moustrer qui mesure Tristrans est, qui ne faut au besoing (MVI.162.40).

This feature of the combat is, as we will see, an important component of the tournament.

#### IV. Tournaments

Tournaments are a pure search for honour and reputation through the display of prowess. The prose *Tristan* features seven tournaments: the tournament of the "Chastel des Landes," that organised by the "rois des Cent Chevaliers," the tournament "devant le Castel as Puceles," the tournament of "Roche Dure," the tournament of "Louveserp," the tournament of "l'isle Saint Sanson," and the "tornoisement merveilleus."<sup>411</sup> An eighth tournament is referred to in passing as that which "li rois des Cent Chevaliers emprist encontre le rois d'Yrlande" (MIV.17.14). The instigator of the tournament, his reason for organising it, the details of the preparations, the rules, the phases of the tournaments, the interludes, and the outcomes of the tournaments are subjects that the narrator enjoys focusing on. P. E. Bennett has commented that:

the tournament, while marking a break in the immediate action, does not remove the reader altogether from the underlying themes and motifs of the book, since it is a distillation of that life of adventures which is at the heart of the existence of Arthur's knights.<sup>412</sup>

Indeed, strength, bravery, prowess, and the search of honour are glorified throughout the tournaments, another indication of the delight a thirteenth-century aristocratic audience would have taken in hearing of the immediate details of chivalric life.

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<sup>411</sup> CI.324; CI.333; MII.119; MIII.187; MV.187; MVII.218; MVIII.134.

<sup>412</sup> P. E. Bennett, "The Tournaments in the *Prose Tristan*," *Romanische Forschungen* 87 (1975): 336.

Tournaments are usually organised by a king, and are open to any number of knights, but the reason for arranging them can sometimes be very personal. The Irish King organises the tournament of the “Chastel des Landes” in order to find a husband for the damsel inhabiting the “Chastel,” and “cil dou tournoient qui mieuz le feroit avroit la demoisele por moillier” (CI.316.11). Similarly, in order to take revenge for the defeat of his faction, the “rois des Cent Chevaliers” organises a tournament “a dis jorz” (CI.325.31). Under the pretext of rousing his knights from their inactivity, which has made them “mauvais” (MV.4.12), Arthur plans Louveserp to see Tristan and Iseut,<sup>413</sup> which is why he chooses a location situated only half a day’s ride from Joyeuse Garde, where the lovers are residing (MV.3.26).

Together with decisions on the location of the tournament comes the mapping out of the sides that will confront each other. For the “Pucelles” tournament,

Li rois Karados Briesbras a empris cest tournoient encontre le roi de Norgales. Li rois de Norgales sans faille avra mout grant gent en s’aide, car li Rois des Cent Cevaliers et li rois d’Escosce et cil de la Marce aideront tout au roi de Norgales, pour che que parent sont. Li rois Karados n’ara mie granment de gens, fors que de chiaus ki repairent en la maison le roi Artu.<sup>414</sup>

Beside the decisions on teams, tournaments necessitate a great deal of organisation. For three of the important tournaments, the narrator describes more or less at length the “apareillement” of the tournament. Thus Tristan makes several trips from Joyeuse Garde to witness the preparations at Louveserp, and sees

illuec loges de fust que li rois Artus i avoit faites drecier pour les dames et pour les damoiseles ki l’asamblee venront veoir. Si peüst on ja veoir desus la riviere du Hombre que tres que paveillons que fueillies que loges galesces plus de .V.C., si que tous li Hombres en estoit enavirounés (MV.79.2).

Later,

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<sup>413</sup> MV.6.19. The tournament of Roche Dure is organised for the same reason.

en la prairie de Louveserp peüssiés adonc veoir plus de mil esquiers ki faisoient l'apareillement de lour signeurs ki au tournoient devoient venir.<sup>415</sup>

Once the preparations are complete, the eve of the tournament is given up to the “vespres” for young knights to try their strength against each other and sometimes against more seasoned knights. The “nouviaus cevaliers” are identifiable by the fact that their weapons are smaller than those carried by experienced knights (MV.178.17). Thus Hector and Lancelot prepare to “veoir les vespres et le conmençaille des jovenes bacelers” before the “Pucelles” tournament (MII.118.38), and the kings attend the “vespres” of Louveserp “pour savoir li quel des nouviaus cevaliers le feroient mieus et li quel sevent plus des armes et li quel sont de plus grant pooir” (MV.177.26). The narrator underlines the aim of the “vespres:” they are an initiation to the use of arms in the public arena, and their presence emphasises the importance of gaining honour.<sup>416</sup>

The tournament proper begins the next day, and can last a varying number of days. The longest is Louveserp, which lasts three days; the “Château des Pucelles” lasts “une vespree et deus jours entiers” (MIII.51.32), and Roche Dure lasts the one day after the “vespres” (MIII.189 ff.). It is interesting to note that although the concept of time in the *Tristan* is generally vague, with jumps of several months between some episodes, there are numerous indications of the passage of time in the Louveserp tournament. It is significant that it is also a crucial stage in Tristan’s accession to glory as one of the best knights in the world. Like chroniclers, the authors describe precisely the duration of each phase, and it is possible, as Denis Lalande has shown, to follow

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<sup>414</sup> MII.67.21. For teams at Chastel des Landes see CI.324; Roi des Cent Chevaliers CI.333; Roche Dure MIII.174.7; Louveserp MV.4.31; Isle Saint Sanson MVII.219-220; tournoi merueilleux MVIII.134.17.

<sup>415</sup> MV.131.12. For preparations of Pucelles see MII.119.26, and for Roche Dure, see MIII.187.6.

<sup>416</sup> For the “vespres” of Roche Dure see MIII.188.1.

the action day by day.<sup>417</sup> The description of this tournament is equally detailed in tracing the different phases of a day. First the public take their seats:

Quant la roïne Yseut est as loges venue, u les dames devoient estre pour le tournoïement veoir, mesire Tristrans descent et li autre compaignon autresi, et mainnent la roïne amont et ses damoiseles (MV.187.34).

In the “Pucelles” tournament, the opponents then wait near their banner:

li lignages le roi Ban . . . avoient deffendu que nus ne se mesist en lour baniere, s’il n’estoit proprement de lour lignage; et il avoient adonc lour baniere baillie a monsigneur Blyoberys de Gaunes, ki celui jour le porta assés bien (MII.140.46).

They wait until

l’eure et li tans . . . que li cors fu sonnés trois fois es loges (ne devant lors que li cors fust sonnés n’osoit nus cevaliers les joustes encommencier) . . . (MV.231.1).

From that moment the first teams confront each other in a series of individual and parallel jousts, and as soon as the first knights are unhorsed, others come either to help them get back on to the saddle or to prevent them from doing so. Very soon the “mêlée” becomes generalised, and the narrator succeeds in creating this impression of chaos by depicting the clamour coming from all parts of the field:

Li cris i est fors et si grans et la noise si merveilleuse et li fereïs des espees si fors que on n’i oïst Dieu tonnant (MII.146.50).

Although this is a stock sentence, it succeeds in conveying the sense of confusion perceived by the audience of the tournament and by the listeners.<sup>418</sup> During the battle, knights strike (“ferir”) and charge (“poindre”). The ultimate aim is to cause the “desconfiture” of the opposing faction.

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<sup>417</sup> Denis Lalande and Thierry Delcourt, introduction, *Le Roman de Tristan en prose*, ed. Philippe Ménard, 5: 44-7.

<sup>418</sup> See also MII.1124.1; MII.124.80; MII.125.24; MV.197.1; MV.199.1; MV.211.24; MV.207.19; MV.208.1, etc.

During his descriptions of the various tournaments, the narrator isolates particular combats and individual strategies. Thus when Tristan's lance is shattered by Arthur,

il est tout maintenant recordés et ramenbrans k'il doit faire; et s'afice sour les arçons et s'embronce sour le roi et se hurte en lui du pis et du cors et du visage et de lui tout si durement que li rois vuide les archons ambesdeus . . . (MII.178.1).

The detail of this blow is characteristic of the way the narrator concentrates on the specific and spectacular moments of individual encounters.<sup>419</sup> On one occasion he bypasses the description of the tournament to avoid boring his audience:

pour ce que trop seroit grans anuis et grans alonges de conter mot a mot tous les fais que mesire Tristrans fist a chest tournoiemment ne vous en voeil je pas ore granment deviser, anchois m'en passerai briement a cheste fois . . . (MIII.187.20).

He frees up space for what he implies is important: the battle between Tristan and Lancelot at the Perron Merlin (MIII.187.25). Individual combats opposing the best knights in the world, even outside the tournament, apparently retain the greatest attention of the narrator, and presumably also of his original audience.

Another important feature of the tournament is the public, for whom the "loges" are erected. All along the tournament, the narrator passes back and forth from the scene in the field to the reaction in the "loges," including the audience's comments as another point of view of the fighting. The following passage is representative of the audience's reaction:

Et li cevalier ki as fenestres des loges estoient ne armes ne portoient pas, ains aloient regardant les uns cevaliers et les autres, conmenchierent a dire, "Certes, tout vaint et tout passe nostre cevaliers a l'escu noir! Il gaignera sans faille le pris de ceste journee!" . . . Et autresi dient les dames ki le fait de monsieur Tristran regardoient. . . . Et li hyraut, ki par le tournoiemment aloient regardant et musant les miudres cevaliers pour connoistre a qui il peüssent donner le los et le pris de cele journee, . . . se

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<sup>419</sup> For details of individual battles see also MII.149.30; MV.191.27; MV.197.5; MV.198.19; MV.203.19; MV.207.1.

vont adonc escriant: “Tout vaint nostre cevaliers a l’escu noir!”  
(MII.152.25)

The spectators comprise knights who are not bearing arms, ladies and damsels, and the heralds on the field deciding to whom the “pris” should go, thus providing the reader with several vantage points from which to view the battle in a realistic way.<sup>420</sup>

The narrator takes care to emphasise the social importance of the audience. This reflects the development of the tournament in the feudal age: because it had evolved into a type of mock battle at which prizes were generally offered, and was confined to mounted combatants equipped with knightly arms, it consisted in a distinctive class entertainment, which, according to Bloch, the nobility found more exciting than any other.<sup>421</sup> The prose *Tristan* narrator draws attention to the high rank of those who attend tournaments, and the audience is normally composed not only of one or more kings,<sup>422</sup> but also of “toutes les dames de haut pris, roïnes, ducoises et contesses. . . .”<sup>423</sup> Persidés comments on the effect these have:

Tant ara ici de biauté et de la joie de cest monde k’il n’est orendroit, a mon escient, u siecle nus si mauvais cevaliers ne si couars, pour ce k’il veïst la grant biauté ki ci sera, ki ne fust tant preus et tant hardis com cevaliers deveroit estre . . . (MII.120.12).

The beauty of Iseut in particular increases Palamede’s strength at Louveserp: “Il n’est onques si traveilliés ne tant n’est au desous, s’il regarde madame Yseut, k’il ne rechoive tout maintenant force et pooir . . .” (MV.235.6). The link between love and prowess will be examined in Chapter Four, but it is clear from these examples that the nature of the audience is important to the participants.

During the tournament, the combatants sometimes withdraw momentarily from the “mêlée” to rest and to comment on the blows inflicted by their companions or

<sup>420</sup> For audience comments see also MII.127.14; MII.130.3; MII.132.24; MII.180.7; MIII.189.1; MV.190.26; MV.191.1; MV.195.10; MV.204.1.

<sup>421</sup> Bloch, *Feudal Society* 304.

<sup>422</sup> See for instance MII.127.14; MII.132.24; MV.190.26

adversaries, as do Arthur and Lancelot when they discuss Tristan's demonstration of strength.<sup>424</sup> Knights may retire in order to change armour and thus remain anonymous, as does Tristan, who during the Louveserp tournament changes into "unes armes noires conme carbon et rices durement et toutes faites a sa mesure" (MV.243.1). Palamede follows suit, and exchanges his with those of a wounded knight, arms "ki boines estoient et estoient toutes sourargentees trop cointement" (MV.244.27). A knight is even allowed to change sides during the course of the tournament. When Arthur reproaches Tristan for fighting against him, Tristan reminds Arthur of the difference between war and tournament:

se je port armes encontre vostre partie, je nel fas fors que pour soulas, car tout ensi le font cevalier errant. Bien savés k'il se tournent or cha, or la, pour qu'il soient as assemblees, mais non pas as morteus batailles (MV.263.22).

He later promises Arthur that he will rejoin the latter's camp after "eure de nonne" on the last day (MV.265.23).

At the end of the day, the winner of the "pris" is designated by the heralds,<sup>425</sup> and all the parties make their way towards their lodgings, sometimes "navré, feru et maumené et defoulé et debatu" (MV.192.7), to commiserate or to celebrate, and to look to their wounds. A typical evening is the one related during the "Pucelles" tournament. First Arthur comforts his knights and encourages them for the next day:

Li rois les vait reconfortant mout durement et dist que aseür soient il k'il vaincront demain l'asamblee . . . (MII.157.38).

After they have been encouraged by his words (MII.158.1), the knights talk of what has taken place, and plan the following day (MII.158.8). Likewise, on the eve of the last day of the Louveserp tournament, Arthur boosts his troops' morale: "Demain iert li daerrains jours du tournoiement. Il est mestiers que cascuns de nos compaignons face

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<sup>423</sup> MII.119.35. See also MII.119.35; MV.14.25; MV.151.32; MV.187.18.

<sup>424</sup> MV.240.15. See also MV.200.6.



demain merveilles d'armes" (MV.264.24). Celebrations finally mark the end of the Louveserp tournament:

Mesire Tristrans estoit repairiés du tournoiement entre lui et sa compaignie a mout grant joie et a mout grant baudour. Et mout estoit liés et joians, car toute avoit vaincue l'assamblee au los de tous (MV.287.4).

The aftermath of tournaments depends largely on the degree of violence attained.

Tristan has to leave the "Pucelles" tournament prematurely because he has been wounded by Lancelot, and a knight offers him the use of his "fortereche" to convalesce in (MII.189.20). Luckily, "Quant il ont monsigneur Tristran desferré entre Gouvrenal et Dynadant et il ont sa plaie cerkie, il connoissent chertainnement que la plaie n'est mie morteus. . . ." <sup>426</sup> Others are less fortunate, as one knight "avoit perdu le brac senestre, et pour ce avoit il laissié a porter armes . . ." (MVII.126.20). Tournaments can also be "morteus bataille" (MV.195.4): one man loses six sons, "et les avoit tous perdus en un seul jour en un tournoiement" (MII.116.14), and Daras is informed after the "Pucelles" tournament that his "doi fil ainsnés son ochis en cest tournoiement" (MIII.42.8). The narrator draws attention to Daras' bereavement: "ains chiet a tere tous envers du grant doeil ki au cuer li prent et gist illuec tous grant pieche en pasmison" (MIII.42.11). This would presumably have touched the original audience, although no condemnation of the violence is implied by the text, or any clerical figure who might represent the religious ideals of the time.

The Church had indeed always maintained a tough stance against tournaments. In 1130, Pope Innocent II prohibited them at the Council of Clermont, "preaching that crusades were a better means of employing knightly exuberance than these wantonly fatal affairs." <sup>427</sup> Knights who died in a tournament were permitted the last sacrament

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<sup>425</sup> See MII.152.45; MII.154.8; MV.212.35.

<sup>426</sup> MII.188.1. For other descriptions of wounds see CI.325.24; MII.123.23; MII.126.35; MII.179.22; MV.220.24.

<sup>427</sup> Barber, *The Knight and Chivalry* 155.

and extreme unction, but not a Church burial. They could also be excommunicated. This attitude towards the tournament remained constant, as edict followed edict condemning the sport. Tournaments certainly were a dangerous pastime: important political figures who died in them included Leopold VI of Austria in 1194, three successive earls of Salisbury in the early thirteenth century, and William of Marshal's protégé in 1186.<sup>428</sup> The fact that the practice could not be eradicated despite the legislation by lay and ecclesiastical authorities, shows that it satisfied a deeply-felt need.

In a somewhat idealised way, our text reflects the delight tournaments procure with no mention of the interference of the Church, and certainly no reference to knights being deprived of a Christian burial. Daras's sons are put "en tere" (MIII.44.34), but whether it is a Christian ceremony is not specified, although one may assume it is unless otherwise stated. Moreover, whereas in reality, the horse and armour lost as penalty for defeat was usually redeemed by a cash payment, ransoms are seldom referred to in the Tristan.<sup>429</sup> This meant that a knight could make a lucrative profession out of his skill in combat. The fact that this element is not represented in the prose Tristan fits in with the general picture where money is not an object.

The prose Tristan depicts violence in a more realistic fashion: it is commonplace in tournaments, and readily accepted by the participants. When Gauvain tells Arthur that the "Pucelles" tournament was "aspre," and that all the knights who took part in it bear "enseignes en mi le front toutes apertes," King Arthur "s'en rist trop durement" (MII.210.17), showing he sees violence as part of the tournament.<sup>430</sup> The two most

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<sup>428</sup> Barber 185-6.

<sup>429</sup> MV.195.21. Painter, French Chivalry 49.

<sup>430</sup> For more information on the tournament of Louveserp see Denis Lalande and Thierry Delcourt, introduction, Le Roman de Tristan en prose 5: 55-60.

deadly tournaments are the “Pucelles” tournament and Louveserp. In both, the narrator comments on the casualties quite openly. The first one is bad enough:

ce n'est mie tournoiemens ne asamblee d'amistié, anchois est bien guerre morteus, car vous peüssiés veoir en la place maint cevalier mort . . . (MII.148.4).

The narrator makes a distinction between war and tournament, whereby the latter should be friendly (“amistié”) and the former lethal (“morteus”). Louveserp, however, is deadly:

Mar virent onques cele journee, car il i muerent espessement. Ce n'est mie tournoiemens ne assamblee de deduit. . . . Onques, puis que li rois Artus porta premierement couronne, n'ot u roiaume de Logres tournoiement u il morust tant de preudommes com il morront en cestui. . . .<sup>431</sup>

The tournament is again compared to a war, because of the number of casualties, which, as we will see, is the main differentiating factor between the two.<sup>432</sup>

## V. War

There are three important defensive wars in the prose *Tristan*: the first one happens early on in Tristan's career, when Hoël of Petite Bretagne is attacked by the troops of the Conte Agrippe. The second one features Cornouailles under siege from the “Saisnes,” and the third shows Logres at the mercy of Marc and his allies, the “Saisnes.” In each of these wars the aggressors, Agrippe, Helyant and Marc, are beaten through the organisation, strength and prowess of one knight, Tristan in the first two and Galaad in the third. This reinforces the importance laid on the knight in the prose *Tristan*. It also mirrors what happens in tournaments, whereby one knight is conspicuous through his “bonté” and earns the “pris” of the event. Wars strongly

<sup>431</sup> MV.238.28. For more references to violence and the semantic field of death see MII.142.33; MII.147.10; MII.148.5; MII.190.33.

<sup>432</sup> Nevertheless, one must note the argument that “Le tournoi est rarement mortel; si le texte revient plusieurs fois sur les *morts* et les *méhaignié*, il faut prendre *mort* dans le sens affaibli de “mis en état critique,” et *méhaignié* dans le sens général de “blessé;” si le tournoi est comparé à “une guerre mortelle,” il faut sans doute comprendre une “guerre privée,” où la haine et l'acharnement de la vengeance peuvent entraîner la mort.” MII.Introduction 45.

resemble tournaments in the prose Tristan, and these similarities need to be explored before investigating the wars' more distinctive features.

First of all, in wars as in tournaments, personal and collective honour are at stake, for knights are afraid of being "honni" (MII.174.13) and of incurring "deshonour" and "vieutanche."<sup>433</sup> Similarly, when a knight fights well, he earns "grant los" and "grant pris" in both types of fighting.<sup>434</sup> Secondly, the way in which the narrator describes the battles, both in general terms and by concentrating on particular fights, resembles the technique used for tournaments. The impression of chaos is created by identical clauses:

A l'assembler que les premieres batalles firent, adonc peüssiés veoir lances  
brisier et chevaliers caoir a tere. . . . Grans est li cris et la noise de l'une  
partie et de l'autre.<sup>435</sup>

It is only the "batalles," or divisions, that reveal the fact that the narrator is referring to a war.

The differences between wars and tournaments are more numerous than the similarities, and are the defining features of wars in the prose Tristan. The most striking element is the number of casualties. During Louveserp, the narrator observes that "la tere est pres que toute couverte des abatus" (MV.281.27), and exclaims: "Ce n'est pas tournoiemens, anchois est bien morteus bataille!" (MV.195.3); but more knights die in war than in tournaments in the prose Tristan. Here again, the narrator provides a general picture of dead knights and homes in on individual knights being slain: Tristan thus kills Alquins single-handed in Petite Bretagne.<sup>436</sup> More frequently, the narrator emphasises the multitude of anonymous deaths, and this for the following reasons: relating a war is as much a celebration of a single knight's prowess as an

<sup>433</sup> MIV.196.48. See also MIV.210.8; MIV.212.23; MIV.216.21.

<sup>434</sup> For wars see MIV.199.9 and for tournaments see MII.157.7; MV.213.35.

<sup>435</sup> MIV.195.4. See also CII.565.36; MIV.195.16; MIV.218.5; MIX.5.11.

<sup>436</sup> CII.565.9. See also MIV.195.10.

assessment of the ferocity of the battle. Thus the narrator clearly admires Helyant le Saxon:

il le conmencha a faire si bien et si merueilleusement que nus de ses anemis nel voit qu'il n'en deviengne espoentés outre mesure. Et sachiés chertainnement que de sa main ochist il bien cel jour .X. chevaliers, sans les autres k'il navra.<sup>437</sup>

At the same time, the tone of certain comments on the number of dead is less distinctly laudatory. Indeed, in the last war of the prose Tristan, the narrator explains:

La desconfiture i fu si grans et l'ocision que onques el roiaume de Logres ne vit on greigneur, car sans faille bien i morurent celui jour .XXX.M. homes et plus.<sup>438</sup>

The war of Petite Bretagne is also deadly (CII.565.21), and in the last war, Arthur witnesses "ses homes a tel destrece qu'il moroient en la place a dolour et a martire . . ." (MIX.5.1). These descriptions are no doubt an expression of sorrow, although one will recall that no real hero loses his life in battle, and that what remains at the end of the war is the single knight who has succeeded in liberating his adoptive country.

The pain suffered during war is proportionate to the casualties. Whereas in the tournament of Louveserp, the women are simply "courecies," in the war between the Saxons and Cornouailles,

La peüssiés veoir mainte bele dame deskiree son vis depechier et son front, et soi clamer "lasse et caitive!" et pasmer souvent menu (MIV.197.3).

Their state reflects the higher number of fatalities occasioned by the war.

The narrator also portrays collective pain more than when depicting tournaments. Although the sentences are generally from a stock repertoire ("Grans fu li-li deus et li dementeïs merueilleus")<sup>439</sup> their repetitiveness emphasises loss as part of the experience of war.

<sup>437</sup> MIV.196.7. See also CII.565.14; CII.565.27; CII.565.30; MIV.210.5; MIV.221.3; MIX.18.1.

<sup>438</sup> MIX.18.44. See also MIX.18.29.

<sup>439</sup> MIV.224.1. See also MIV.196.57; MIV.197.1; MIV.200.8; MIV.205.7; MIV.224.1.

The organisation of troops differs in war. The preparation of sides before tournaments is certainly described, but not to the degree of planning necessitated by wars, where the narrator underlines the strategy adopted by each side. On a simple level, Agrippe

pensa qu'il asegeroit la cité; et ot ses homes atiriez par dis batailles, et pooient bien estre entor cinc cenz homes a armes (CII.563.2).

The reader knows his plan, the number of troops involved in the attack, and even the number of men. On a more complicated level, King Marc takes advice from his barons on the strategy to adopt (MIV.191.9). They recommend he recall Tristan to Cornouailles, because he “set de guerre et de mellee plus que tout chil ki en Cornuaille sont” (MIV.191.14). Tristan in turn decides on the tactics:

Tristrans, ki bien voit . . . k'il avoit plus de gent que li Saisnes n'avoient, ordene six batailles, les quatre boines et fors et les autres deus furent mains carcies de gent. Les quatre iron t ferir de plain et tout ordeneement les unes après les autres, et les autres deus iron t ferir a la traverse . . . (MIV.216.41).

Tristan comes across as an able strategist, whose actions save Cornouailles from demise.

In sum, wars are deadly; they function and are won through strategy, although ultimately the power of one single knight makes the knight the hero of war, not the king. The role of the latter is not negligible, especially in wars, which is another distinguishing feature. Indeed, whereas in tournaments kings such as Hoël, Marc and Arthur are usually spectators,<sup>440</sup> they actively take part in wars, thus protecting their people. In the final war, Arthur is portrayed as a defender of his knights, “iriés et desirrans de vengier ses homes, qu'il veoit morir devant lui.”<sup>441</sup>

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<sup>440</sup> See for instance MIII.189.1; MV.190.26. The exception is Arthur, who fights in the tournaments of the Château des Pucelles MII.178.1.

<sup>441</sup> MIX.5.7. For Hoël see CII.562.8; for Marc see MIV.196.1; MIV.220.6; for Arthur see MIX.4.23.

## VI. The role of the king

Wars seem to reverse the roles: the knight, not the king, saves the country or region from defeat. In the Anglo-Saxon poem Beowulf, the eponymous hero takes the defence of his kingdom in his own hands, and goes down himself to the dragon's den to save his people, to whom he owes protection. In the prose Tristan, the knight becomes the substitute for the king, as in the first part of Beowulf. This is epitomised by Tristan, whose actions in favour of Cornouailles save the region from many potential defeats and humiliations. When King Marc banishes him from Cornouailles, Tristan reminds him and his people of what they owe him: the deliverance from serfdom to "Yrlande" through his single combat against Le Morholt, the deliverance from "le roi de Norgales . . . ki estoit par force entrés en Cornuaille pour vengier la mort de son fil" (MII.5.30), and the defence of Marc against the "Roi des Cent Cevaliers" (MII.6.1). He recapitulates by saying:

En la premerainne bonté ostai je Cornuaille de servage; en cascune des autres deus vous delivrai je de la mort (MII.6.57).

Thus Tristan is claiming to have the responsibility of defending Cornouailles, and his protest against his banishment is vindicated when Marc has to recall him to defend Cornouailles against the Saxons. Hoël's and Arthur's roles are similarly overshadowed by Tristan and Galaad. It is indeed said of the latter that the victory is down to him (MIX.20.7).

This inversion of roles stems from an attitude to kings which pervades the prose Tristan, for it is not for kings to put their bodies at risk if their knights can do so in their stead. The following passage shows just how clear the distinction between king and knight is when it comes to fighting:

se li rois Artus fust uns povres cevaliers errans, bien fust de haute renommee; mais pour ce que rois estoit et si grans sires com Diex l'avoit

fait, ne li laissoient si home porter armes, et pour ce disoient . . . que  
c'estoit ausi com damages de cevalerie k'il avoit esté rois. . . .<sup>442</sup>

Arthur is one of the “mieudres” knights “du monde,” but because of his God-given position as king, his men will not allow him to bear arms. His royalty is knighthood's loss. Similarly, Marc is told: “il n'apartient pas a si haut homme com vous estes k'il mete son cors en esprueve encontre un cevalier errant.”<sup>443</sup>

Despite this, Arthur fights against Marc and the Saxons in the last war, for he feels that “des ore mais nel devoit on mie tenir a roi, s'il nes secouroit a son pooir” (MIX.5.4). Arthur should not risk being killed in some casual skirmish, but when the great battle comes the King should be part of it. His love for his knights, manifest in the above quotation, is already clear when they leave on the Quest:

la grant amour que j'ai tous jours en aus eüe me fait dire ceste parole. Ce  
n'est mie merveille se jou en sui coureciés de lour departement, car onques  
rois terriens n'ot autant de boins cevaliers ne de preudomes a sa table . . .  
(MVI.108.36).

This love is reciprocal, as is shown by the knights' reaction when they see their king wounded in war:

Quant li home le roi Artu voient lour signeur a tere, il furent si dolant qu'il  
mirent tout en aventure. Lors peüssiés veoir boins cevaliers et hardis.  
Adont moustrent il qu'il amoient lour signeur de cuer que, quant il gesoit  
a tere, si enferés cruelment qu'il ne se pooit drecier, se mirent il par mi tous  
leur anemis et vinrent a force jusc'a lui et le monterent et menerent en la  
cité . . . (MIX.5.29).

This love for one's king is accompanied by the honour due to such a high lord, honour manifested towards Marc by Gaheriet (MIII.50.31), and towards Arthur by Tristan, when the former visits him in his “paveillon:” Tristan “keurt prendre le roi et s'umelie mout vers lui et li dist: ‘Ha! sire, que vous soiés ore li tres bien venus!’” (MV.259.3)

<sup>442</sup> MII.175.20. See also CI.364.18.

<sup>443</sup> MIII.73.3. Incidentally, Arthur's knights also tell him not to accompany them on an errand in How Culhwch Won Olwen, The Mabinogion, trans. Jeffrey Gantz (London: Penguin, 1976) 163.



Arthur has earned this respect in many ways, and is referred to as “li mieudres prinches du monde” and as “li plus jentiex hom du monde,”<sup>444</sup> and he himself says in a letter that

Je sui li rois Artus ki seut  
A tous aidier en lour venue (MIV.171.28).

These attributes refer not to a fighting knight, but to a prince who has the courtesy and the power to intervene in favour of the weak and oppressed. This is corroborated by Brun le Noir’s reasons for being knighted by Arthur:

car l’en va disant tot plenment que tu mentiens les orfelins et les veves en lor droitures. Tu mentiens le foible contre le fort; tu faiz la droiture revenir et le tort remenoir. Tu faiz plessier les orgueilleous et les felons (CII.637.22).

Arthur also maintains justice, notably by witnessing the judicial battle between Marc and Armans. Ultimately, as we saw, the judgement is not in his hands because the prowess of Marc determines the outcome. However, when Arthur discovers the truth, he rules that Marc should be imprisoned (MIV.90.46). He makes sure that Armans’ death is denounced as unlawful by having Marc’s felony engraved on Armans’ tomb (MIV.90.56). Finally, Arthur modifies the law concerning judicial battles, “par coi li sairement des batailles furent adonc mis avant premierement, ki encore sont maintenant” (MIV.88.37).

No other king in the prose *Tristan* commands as much respect as Arthur. In contrast, Marc never receives more than occasional shows of consideration, notably from Gaheriet, who “s’umelie mout vers lui et dist k’il est a son comandement de toutes les choses que cevaliers porroit faire pour si grant signeur com estoit li rois March” (MIII.50.31). More frequently, however, Marc provokes contempt, and is presented as all that a king, and indeed a knight, should not be.<sup>445</sup> Protected by well-

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<sup>444</sup> MIV.141.9. See also MIV.163.1; MIV.168.23.

<sup>445</sup> See Chapter Six.

guarded anonymity, he hears Lamorat's opinion that he, the "failli roi de Cornuaille," is the "pieur houme du monde."<sup>446</sup>

Marc also lies about his identity (MIV.37.8), and flees before Dagueuet believing he is Lancelot (MIV.62.3). He is disobeyed by his vassals (MIV.7.57) and mistrusted by his squires (CI.364.4), and his final humiliation comes with the "Lai Voir Disant," where Dinadan accuses him of being a "mauvais roi," "dolans, viex et chaitif," "vieu de gent, fiente et ordure," and "deshounour, vergoingne et laidure."<sup>447</sup> Moreover, his notorious slaying of Bertolay (MIV.8.9), and his fiendish poisoning of Fairan and Galaad (MIX.25.18) show him up as the antithesis of a king. In addition, the hypocritical courtesy he demonstrates toward Keu in order to trap him at the Lac Aventureux points up the difference between him and Arthur:

Kex quide tout chertainnement que cheste grant hounour que li rois March li fait faire en son ostel, k'il le fache d'amour vraie sans fauseté, ensi com li rois Artus faisoit souventes fois as povres chevaliers estranges que aventure aportoit en son ostel . . . (MIII.92.29).

The narrator clearly states that Marc's hospitality is feigned, unlike Arthur's genuine welcome to poor knights. Marc therefore inspires contempt in the narrator both as a knight and a king, and is thus shown up as unworthy in every respect.

This diminishes the role of the king in the prose *Tristan*, and whereas there are fairly clear sets of rules for knights, the kings do not seem to be held to such an explicit code. Seeing that they are knights as well as kings, however, they are held to the same moral obligations of protecting the weak. They are also admired for their physical strength and their ability to fight, although their need to be at court normally prevents them from actually going out on quests and accomplishing all that a knight can do

<sup>446</sup> MIV.16.26. See also MI.185.30.

<sup>447</sup> MIV.244.5, 13, 21, 22.

when every day can bring a new adventure. The kings in the prose Tristan have prestige, but the real actors are the knights.

This examination of martial chivalry has shown the knightly life to be at the heart of the prose Tristan. The semi-didactic way in which the knightly rules are set out corresponds to a trend in the thirteenth century followed not only by such treatises as Etienne de Fougères' Livre des Manières and Robert de Blois' Enseignement des Princes in which the precepts of correct behaviour were set out for the instruction of the noble knights, but also, according to Duby, to "the romance with a realistic intention."<sup>448</sup> This appears to be the case of the prose Tristan although, however didactically the rules are at times presented, they are not set out in a sufficiently structured and systematic fashion to justify characterising the prose Tristan as a manual of chivalry. In addition, our text does not always offer straightforward answers to dilemmas offered by various situations. The didactic passages are sometimes balanced by ambiguous episodes that leave the reader at a loss as to whether a certain custom is to be condemned or condoned. A treatise would set rules out clearly; the prose Tristan does not always do this. The authors have drawn a picture of knightly habits, rules and regulations within the framework of a romance, which is why the text is not concerned with providing details about all of the social and judicial realities of medieval aristocratic life. As was observed in Chapter Two, certain aspects (or certain social categories) of that life have been omitted. We may perhaps say that the prose Tristan is a story that recounts, in a detail unmatched by other spheres of chivalric life or by the physical appearance of the places they frequent, the adventures of both the more illustrious and the less successful knights, the unwritten moral and physical rules

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<sup>448</sup> Duby, The Chivalrous Society 181-82.

they follow, and the life they therefore lead on a daily basis, for the benefit of a knightly aristocratic audience. In short, it is a tale of knighthood.

## Chapter Four: Courtly chivalry

Although the Tristan authors focus mainly on the martial aspects of chivalric life, they do pay attention to the knights' interaction with people and subjects other than jousting and questing. One must remember that the Tristan is originally a three-personed tragedy involving not only a knight, Tristan, but also a king, Marc, and a lady, Iseut, with the result that the court and love belong to the spheres of knightly life. The court, a term deriving from the Old French "court," is at the origin of the terms "courtois" and "courtoisie."<sup>449</sup> It was in the assemblies which were formed round the principal barons and the kings that certain laws of conduct evolved from about the year 1100.<sup>450</sup> Thus "courtoisie" in the prose Tristan can be taken to be linked to life at court, which is why it will be understood as "conduite ou qualité digne d'un homme de cour,"<sup>451</sup> and more specifically as

raffinement des moeurs, . . . politesse, belles manières, respect des bienséances. . . .<sup>452</sup>

Several of these qualities are admired in the prose Tristan. Frappier also includes in his definition of "courtoisie" the "soins empressés auprès des dames qui dans les cours donnent le ton des relations sociales."<sup>453</sup> This area of courtly chivalry is also a concern for the prose Tristan authors, albeit a relatively minor one compared with the martial mores,<sup>454</sup> and includes amorous relationships with ladies, the consequences of which are clear for Lancelot:

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<sup>449</sup> "courtois," Le nouveau Petit Robert, 1994 ed.

<sup>450</sup> Bloch, Feudal Society 305.

<sup>451</sup> Jean Frappier, "Vues sur les conceptions courtoises dans les littératures d'oc et d'oïl au XII<sup>e</sup> siècle," Cahiers de civilisation médiévale 2 (1959): 137.

<sup>452</sup> Frappier 135.

<sup>453</sup> Frappier 135.

<sup>454</sup> The way some of these qualities are presented leads Jean Larmat to conclude that the Tristan en prose is a manual of courtesy. See Jean Larmat, "Le Roman de Tristan en prose: Manuel de courtoisie," Der Altfranzösische Prosaroman: Funktion, Funktionswandel und Ideologie am Beispiel des Roman de Tristan en prose, Kolloquium Würzburg 1977 (München: Fink, 1979) 46-67.

nus hom peüst a grant cose venir pour nule aventure du monde s'il n'amoit par amours.<sup>455</sup>

## I. Social arts and graces

### A. Politeness

“Refinement of the laws of combat,” which Auerbach considers as a form of “corteisie” between knights in a martial situation, was examined above.<sup>456</sup> The prose Tristan knights can also be courteous in their social encounters. They must possess “bones graces” (CIII.688.6), “politesse” and “belles manières,” and must be able to engage in courteous social intercourse.<sup>457</sup> Thus Palamede speaks amiably to the “rois d’Yrlande,” who is himself “garnis de sens et de courtoisie” (MV.286.11). This display of politeness also appears in salutes and greetings between knights, between knights and kings (CII.528.8), and, as will become apparent, knights and ladies.

The reader witnesses knightly courtesy in situations of hospitality:

Kahedins fu en la maison le rois Artus receüs tant bel et si cointement et si bel apelés de tous et de toutes k’il dist bien tout apertement a soi meïsmes que voirement n’a il u monde nule si cointe gent com en la maison le roi Artu.<sup>458</sup>

This passage points up several facts concerning courtly life: Arthur’s court is the exemplar of courteous behaviour, where Kahedin is “bel apelés” by all.<sup>459</sup> He comes to the conclusion that nowhere “u monde” are there such “cointe gent” (courteous, polite people) as in Arthur’s court.<sup>460</sup> The courtly atmosphere is created by “tous et . . . toutes,” signifying that women as well as men have polite manners. Ladies are admired for possessing this quality, and Iseut is often praised for being “cointe,” and

<sup>455</sup> MIII.261.9. See also CIII.691.210.

<sup>456</sup> Auerbach, *Mimesis* 134.

<sup>457</sup> See Auerbach 134.

<sup>458</sup> MI.91.6. See also MIII.116.13; MVII.108.23 for more situations of courteous hospitality.

<sup>459</sup> “aimablement salué, bien traité,” MI.Glossary.

<sup>460</sup> For Arthur as a model of courteous behaviour, see also MI.95.20.

“gracieuse.”<sup>461</sup> This adjective is defined as “agréable, aimable, pourvu de qualités,”<sup>462</sup> and can also be applied to knights. Iseut thus considers that Tristan is “si grascieus qu’il passe tous autres prudomes de toutes les grasces du monde,”<sup>463</sup> demonstrating that while the quality can exist in other “prudomes,” in her eyes, Tristan is the shining example of graciousness.

Knights and kings are expected to be polite to ladies. They need to be presentable when in company of a lady, as the Chevalier Vermeil is rightly reminded before meeting Iseut:

Faites vous laver le vol et le vis, si venrés plus cortoisement, en tel maniere comme cevaliers doit venir devant si haute dame comme madame est.<sup>464</sup>

The knight must also address the lady courteously. Arthur exemplifies this behaviour when he meets Iseut, admires her looks and praises Tristan’s prowess:

tout cil ki vous ont veüe dient merveilles de vostre biauté: cascuns vous loe et prise et cascuns vous tient a la plus bele dame de tout cest monde. . . .  
Et vous . . . avés en vostre comandement le meilleur cevalier du monde et le plus bel! (MV.260.10)

Her reaction implies that courtesy in the mouth of a man such as Arthur is only right, but nevertheless appreciated:

Vous parlés si courtoisement com il couvient au meilleur home du monde que vous estes (MV.260.25).

As mentioned above, ladies return this courtesy and Iseut and Guenièvre are admired for possessing good manners and behaving with due decorum.<sup>465</sup>

Even the exceptions to common respectful attitudes towards women show the importance of courtesy. Two knights decide to discuss the respective beauties of Iseut and the Queen of Orcanie in Iseut’s very presence, a gesture which angers the latter:

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<sup>461</sup> MV.291.21; MV.69.6.

<sup>462</sup> MI.Glossary.

<sup>463</sup> MVII.40.12. See also CIII.885.9.

<sup>464</sup> MVII.229.42. See also CIII.884.3.

“vos n’iestes mie trop cortois qui devant moi meesmes me desprisiez” (CII.521.24).

Iseut also finds it discourteous of Gauvain to have intruded on her, in utter defiance of the knights guarding the entrance to her quarters:

vous ne feïstes mie trop grant courtoisie quant vous sour le desfens des  
chevaliers qui me gardoient vous meïstes jusques devant moi  
(MVII.50.35).

Some acts which a modern reader would consider discourteous, however, go unremarked, such as when Dinadan speaks of women’s fickleness to Iseut’s face:

cuers de feme est tout ausi com la venvole: or aimme, or het, or pleure, or  
cante (MV.55.10).

Iseut does not condemn Dinadan for his ideas. Similarly, the narrator relates how Dinas was abandoned by his mistress who has found another paramour. Because she hesitates over which knight to choose, she is cast aside by both men. Dinas’s reaction becomes the subject of much amusement to his friends, but the narrator concludes:

Droitement avint a la dame selonc ce qu’ele avoit le cuer muable, car bien  
fu ses affaires mués em poi de tans (MIII.138.19).

Even if the idea of courtesy towards ladies is not defined by the prose Tristan quite as the modern reader would define it, it is clear that it is highly commendable in the romance.

Other skills are admired in knightly society, and although they are not required of a knight as a general rule, Tristan is unique in being gifted with so many of them. As has been pointed out, Tristan knows all about “eschés” and “tables” (CI.263.3), and Chapter Two highlighted his abilities as a hunter (MV.8.8).

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<sup>465</sup> Greimas defines “cointement” as “manière gracieuse, façon courtoise” in his Dictionnaire de l’Ancien Français, 1999 ed. See MV.291.20; MII.203.9.



## B. Musical skills

Tristan is of course a skilled musician, and one notices that the only other characters capable of playing the harp are professional “harperres,” damsels, and Iseut.<sup>466</sup> This puts Tristan above the common knight in the range of his abilities. Tristan is such a good harpist that a damsel recognises him “au harper” (MVII.173.5), and the “douce melodie” (CIII.870.21) which he produces charms both his audience and the narrator.<sup>467</sup> His singing skills are also highly praised: “Il cantoit tant bel et si doucement plus que nus autres.”<sup>468</sup> Hélié also “cantoit trop bien, d’une fort vois bien acordant” (MVI.135.38), and Palamede is even more notable:

Palamidés cantoit trop bien et trop envoiement, et ce est une cose que mout est couvenable a cevalier d’arme (MVI.23.38).

Not only does Palamede sing well, but this quality is perfectly in accordance with his knightly nature. Musical talent, although not widespread in the prose *Tristan*, is nevertheless linked to prowess in the martial arena. A group of knights listening to the anonymous Tristan playing the harp “dient bien qu’il ne puet estre qu’il ne soit preudom et vaillans” (MVII.173.6). Tristan remains the one to whom all are compared and he is considered as the ultimate judge of the musical production in the prose

Tristan:

Cascuns cevaliers qui trouvoit lai u chant u rotruenge l’envoioit a monsieur Tristran, qui trop merueilleusement s’i delitoit (MVI.23.47).

It appears that the descriptions of the social refinements are an important feature of this tale of knighthood. It was certainly so in thirteenth-century France: knights themselves had become literary men, and it is significant that the genre to which they devoted

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<sup>466</sup> For professional harpists see MI.154.1; MI.157.29; MIV.185.2; for damsels see MVII.169.1; MIX.64.47; for Iseut see CIII.932.18. The only other knight who plays the harp is the one who commits suicide in Arthur’s court at Pentecost (MVI.98.24), despite which he is compared with Tristan, whom none can surpass.

<sup>467</sup> See also MVII.173.14.

<sup>468</sup> MVII.172.2. See also CIII.871.1; MVI.23.49; MVI.158.63; MIX.66.1.

themselves almost exclusively up to then was lyric poetry. One of the most powerful princes in Europe, William IX of Aquitaine, who died in 1127, is one of the earliest troubadours known to us. All ranks of knighthood soon came to be represented by the Provençal singers and their Northern counterparts. The short lyric pieces they composed were perfectly suited to the recitals given in aristocratic gatherings.<sup>469</sup> The place of music in the prose *Tristan* thus reflects a thirteenth-century aristocratic sensitivity, and the enjoyment procured by such a distraction would doubtless have appealed to the original audience.<sup>470</sup>

### C. Education and writing skills

Lancelot compliments Tristan on his degree of “afaitement” and “enseignement” (CIII.691.4). The education of a knight such as Tristan includes the acquisition of skills such as reading and writing, skills possessed by the knights in the *Tristan* who read or write letters—Arthur, Tristan, Lancelot, Marc, Bliobéris (MIV.167.19), the king of the Cité Vermeille (MV.84)—but it is not systematically displayed by those who compose songs in the oral tradition. Thus although Palamede composes “D’amours viennent li dous penser” (MVI.24), he cannot read the letter written by the Roi de la Cité Vermeille, and has to ask Tristan to read it for him:

“Lisiés, sire, ki miex savés lire de moi.” Et saciés que, tout fust Palamidés paiens, si avoit il apries letres latines entre crestiens puis k’il vint u roiaume de Logres, mais ce fu en s’enfance, car bien saciés que Palamidés n’avoit mie plus de .X. ans quant ses peres l’amena u roiaume de Logres . . . (MV.84.4).

Palamede did learn to read at the age of ten when he arrived in Logres, but as the narrator says, it was in his childhood, and he feels he would not remember enough of

<sup>469</sup> Bloch, *Feudal Society* 307.

<sup>470</sup> Gottfried von Strassburg’s life work *Tristan* is particularly noteworthy for the author’s informative remarks on music and its courtly practice.

what he learned to understand the letter. Iseut and Guenièvre are also admired for their degree of “enseignement,” displayed by their ability to compose letters.<sup>471</sup>

The composition of songs is also a talent admired by the Tristan world. Some knights compose prose and rhymed letters, and even “lais,” which impress the listener as well as the narrator. There are twenty-nine pieces of non-narratorial origin which are directly related in the prose Tristan: fifteen letters and fourteen songs.<sup>472</sup> Eleven of the letters are composed by knights, four by ladies; eight of the fifteen letters are in prose, and seven are in verse. The remaining fourteen pieces are songs composed mainly by knights, Tristan being the most prolific of all. These products of creative writing are generally witnessed by an audience, be it a group of people, an individual, or the narrator himself. Through the comments made on these compositions it is possible to infer the qualities admired in the composer, talents which are not the sole prerogative of knights.<sup>473</sup>

Despite the number of letters in the prose Tristan, the text does not begin to resemble an epistolary novel, because most of the letters contribute nothing to the action, which is why, in a romance where action prevails over description, it is all the more interesting that the authors highlight this mode of expression. Tristan’s and Lancelot’s exchange of prose letters is in essence an exercise in the expression of courtesy, which is therefore to be considered as an important facet of chivalric life. A courteous letter usually opens with a complimentary salute to the addressee:

A vous Tristran, biaux dous amis, / En qui Nostres Sires a mis / Toute  
terriene bonté / Et ki tout avés sourmonté / Le monde de chevalerie, / Ki  
par vostre cors est flourie / Et montee em pris et en los, / Li fieus le roi

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<sup>471</sup> MII.203.9; MV.68.19-25; CII.572; CII.581.

<sup>472</sup> See Appendix, Section A.

<sup>473</sup> The subtlety of Iseut’s word ; is also admired (MVII.1.11). For courteous salutes between ladies see CII.572.5; CII.581.1.

Ban, Lanselos, / Ki vostre est sour tout chiaus du monde / Vous salue pour  
cascune onde / Ki'st en la mer, plus de mil fois. . . .<sup>474</sup>

The content of the letters is variable, but usually treats of love. The reactions of the narrator and of the addressees show how important a skill writing is. Lancelot enjoys “les biaux diz et le biau parler de monseignor Tristan et les moz bien assis . . .” (CIII.689.3). Arthur admires Tristan’s concision in writing (MIV.164.3), and Bliobéris finds Tristan’s letters testify to his courtesy (MIV.167.19). Tristan in turn praises Lancelot’s subtlety (MIV.170.6), and the narrator points out that Arthur’s words are “plaisans.”<sup>475</sup> Writing well is the fruit of many an effort, as the narrator explains realistically: “mout mist mesire Lanceloz grant poine et grant entente a bien faire et a bien dire . . .” (CIII.692.5).

By highlighting the social qualities required of knights, the authors paint a more complete image of knightly life, part of which is spent in courtly situations. It is noteworthy that despite the fact that manuals of chivalry such as Lull’s emphasise the utilitarian function of the knight in society, they also underline the need for the knight to be “wel enseygned” and

to be attempryd . . . in etynge / in drynkynge / In wordes and dyspensys  
as well as

to speke nobly and curtoisly.<sup>476</sup>

The authors of the Tristan emphasise, as we have seen, the courteous style of the letters, but their contents, generally concerned with amorous relationships, present the reader with another dimension of this courtly romance: the nature of love in the prose Tristan.

<sup>474</sup> MIV.169.1. For other courteous salutes in letters see CIII.688.3; CIII.691.1; MIV.163.1; MIV.171.1.

<sup>475</sup> MIV.170.23. See also MIV.172.3.

<sup>476</sup> Lull 108.15; 113.6.

## II. The knight and love

Although some of the songs composed celebrate the memory of a martial event—Tristan’s “Lay de Victoire” celebrates his success at Louveserp (MVII.168)—many of the songs and some of the letters are dedicated to a beloved lady or knight, to “Amors,” or at least to the subject of love. Because these lyric insertions, although sometimes detached from the action by their format (lays), but more often by the fact that they do not contribute to the action, proceed directly from the emotions felt by the characters, they actively participate in the depiction of love in the text. Composing and interpreting songs can be the mark of profound love. Thus Iseut is proclaimed “fontaine sour toutes les dames” for her ability to “trouver boins dis” and for being able to sing them “si bien et si envoisement” (MVII.1.13). Similarly, a damsel tells Tristan that she cannot sing love songs because she has not yet experienced that feeling: “pucele sui, qui encor ne sai que sont Amours” (MVII.167.17). The main function of lays is to voice an authentic expression of one’s love.

The nature of love in the prose Tristan is not straightforward, although it appears at first that the situations and themes reflect those of fin’amors, expounded by the romance authors and lay composers of twelfth-century Northern France.<sup>477</sup> Through the lays, the monologues and the dialogues of the prose Tristan, it becomes clear that themes dear to the courtly topos, such as the suffering occasioned by love, or the submission of the lover to the mistress in feudal terms, are at the centre of the concept of love in our text. The link between love and prowess, generally upheld by the courtly poetry of Northern France,<sup>478</sup> is frequently underlined in the Tristan. The reader is aware, however, of a note of pessimism not normally expressed by the courtly

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<sup>477</sup> As opposed to the troubadours of the “littérature d’oc,” which Frappier describes so well in his “Vues” 135-56.

<sup>478</sup> Frappier, “Vues” 145.

writers, which distinguishes the picture of love in our text from the concepts of fin'amors.

In order to understand the nature of love in the Tristan, this section will begin by analysing the onset of love. It will then study its manifestations, both physical and mental. Finally, this study will compare love in the prose Tristan with the fin'amors topos.

#### A. The origins of love

The importance of the physical beauty of Tristan and Iseut was noted in Chapter Two, and it is one of their respective determining features. Beauty becomes all-important in the prose Tristan because it almost systematically provokes the onset of love.

Naburzadan, Canor and Apollo l'Aventureus are fascinated by Chelinde's beauty, which immediately causes them to fall in love with her.<sup>479</sup> For the same reasons, Meliadus is drawn to Eliabel (CI.223.4), Marc and Tristan to Ségurade's wife (CI.356.4; CI.357.6), Marc and Kahedin to Iseut (CII.484.1; CIII.832.17; MI.89.1), Uterpendragon to Diagenne (MI.131.6), Espinogre to the "fille le roi de Gales" (MV.38.22), and Dinadan and Gaheriet to an unnamed damsel (MV.136.42; MV.137.1). The power of beauty is exemplified by Palamede's experience:

Ele estoit tant bele et tant avenanz de totes choses que Palamedes . . . en estoit tot esbahiz, et bien dit en son cuer que ce est la plus bele chose que il onques veïst. Si li chiet ou cuer, et tant li plest et atalente qu'il n'est riens ou monde qu'il ne feïst por li avoir . . . (CI.328.11).

Handome men also fascinate women. Bélise of Gaule (CI.264.3), Ségurade's wife (CI.357.9) and Iseut aux Blanches Mains (CII.561.17) all fall under Tristan's charm because he is "tant bel" (CI.357.9). Likewise, Dinas's "amie" leaves him for another knight:

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<sup>479</sup> CI.7.7; CI.19.1; CI.158.4.

Ele ne regardoit pas a la boine chevalerie de Dynas, mais a la biauté que li cevaliers avoit . . . et pour ce l'amoit la dame (MIII.123.16).

The determining factor for Sador marrying Chelinde is her lineage (CI.7.1), but in the prose Tristan physical beauty is generally responsible for the onset of love.<sup>480</sup>

The case is more complex for Tristan and Iseut, and reflects, as we shall see, on the relation between the prose Tristan and the concept of fin'amors. In what Frappier calls the “version commune” of the Tristan legend found in the poems by Eilhart von Oberg and by Bérout, “il n'est pas d'autre cause à l'amour de Tristan et d'Iseut que le ‘vin herbé’” or love potion.<sup>481</sup> In the prose Tristan, despite the indubitable power of the love potion (CII.445.14), Tristan's love for Iseut has already begun, and Iseut's beauty is one of the deciding factors. Although at first, “Tristanz avoit mout avant regardee Yseut, . . . son cuer n'i avoit pas mis dusqu'a l'amer granment” (CI.329.2), it is seeing Palamede's genuine love for Iseut that provokes Tristan to fall “en orguel et en bobant . . . por les amors ma dame Yselt” (CI.329.10). Palamede thus becomes the “destorbement et encombrement de s'amor” (CI.329.12). Once Tristan has returned to Cornouailles, he rapidly forgets Iseut, as his clearly un-courtly relationship with Ségurade's new wife confirms: “Il met Yselt arrieres dos et oblie dou tout por ceste . . .” (CI.357.17). It will need a second trip to Ireland to rekindle Tristan's feelings for her:

Et quant il voit qu'il a assez . . . sejoiné avec la bele Yselt qui tot li fist son cuer changier, car sa biauté, d'ou toz li mondes parloit et d'ou plusor avoient envie, le met sovent en diverses pensees, car une foiz dit il a soi meïsmes que miauz vient que il pregne Yselt por soi que ce qu'il la livre a son oncle, car c'est la plus bele demoisele dou monde et la plus desiree, et qu'il aime de tot son cuer . . . (CI.437.6).

<sup>480</sup> See also Renée Curtis, Tristan Studies (München: Fink, 1969) 22: “In fact beauty is for Tristan (and no doubt for the author) the main, if not the sole reason for falling in love.”

<sup>481</sup> Jean Frappier, “Structure et sens du Tristan: Version commune, version courtoise,” Cahiers de civilisation médiévale 6 (1963): 268.

The seed of the love between Tristan and Iseut is sown, although for the moment, there are no indications to its reciprocity. When Tristan first goes to Ireland, Iseut is portrayed as a young girl who does not even notice that Palamede and Tristan are fighting for her, for “onques n’avoit baé a amors, ne n’i baoit” (CI.330.3). Even when she is informed of this rivalry she admits: “de ce m’est ores mout a po” (CI.330.11).

This theory of the time at which love begins is corroborated by Iseut’s “Lai Mortel,” in which she remembers the onset of love between herself and Tristan:

Puis le fait de Palamidés  
 Vos asaia Seguradés.  
 La vos haioit roys March adés.  
 Nos nos entr’amasmes après (CIII.932.XV).

By “le fait Palamidés” Iseut means the “tournoiement” in “Yrlande” (CIII.932.XIV). The event to which she refers when she mentions Ségurade is presumably Tristan’s infatuation with Ségurade’s wife, after which, of course, Tristan returns to Ireland only to fall in love with Iseut. The verb “entr’amasmes” suggests a degree of reciprocity. The reader is uncertain about the precise time at which the love becomes mutual, but Iseut confirms by her lay that she places her falling in love with Tristan at the time of or just after his second visit to Ireland.

The power of the love potion, however, is indubitable, and it suggests that the real cause for the complete reciprocity of this love is the “boire amorox.”<sup>482</sup> Its effect is instantaneous: no sooner have the couple drunk it than

Lor cuer lor change et si lor mue. . . . Or en sont si eschaufé qu’il ne porroit remenoir por tot le monde que Tristanz n’amast Yselt et Yselt Tristan (CII.445.19-446.4).

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<sup>482</sup> CII.445.6. Vinaver says that in the prose *Tristan*, “the love potion is relegated to the background,” and that it “has practically no effect on the events of the story, since Tristan and Iseut love each other before drinking the potion. . . .” in “The Love Potion in the Primitive *Tristan* Romance,” *Medieval Studies presented to Gertrude Shoepferle Loomis* (Paris: Champion, 1927): 82.



The origins of love in the case of Tristan and Iseut are multiple: Tristan takes his time, but finally does fall in love with Iseut thanks to her beauty, and this love is intensified and rendered mutual by the love potion.

## B. The manifestation of love

The arrival of love, as shown above, is generally a fairly sudden occurrence. Let us now examine the way this love, and in most cases, passion, is experienced.

### 1. Joy

For many lovers in the Tristan, there are two sides to loving: intense happiness and deep suffering. When the narrator describes feelings of love, he pictures a lover in a state of great exaltation, whether the feeling is physical, mental or both. Because it is the beauty of the admired one which captivates the imagination of the lover, most often it is a physical feeling which is the first manifestation of love. Marc's physical desire is the most blatant, as verb "eschaufez" testifies (CII.484.2).<sup>483</sup> Physical desire leads to love, which is expressed as passionate and all-consuming:

Quant Yselt regarde bien Tristan, il li est bien avis qu'ele voie tot le monde. . . . Ele ne demande autre deduit n'autre paradis. Tout autretel dit Tristanz . . . .<sup>484</sup>

Paradise is where Tristan believes himself to be when he is in Iseut's presence

(MV.274.12), but he is not alone. In Marc's case, Iseut is

ses confors, c'est ses delis, c'est sa joie et ses soulas. Autre riquece il ne demande fors Yseut: cele li est joie, cele li est vie et santé et confort en toutes choses. . . . Il l'aimme si de tout son cuer qu'il n'aimme Dieu ne home ne or ne argent autretent, ne tere ne roiaume.<sup>485</sup>

Love in the prose Tristan is often obsessive, but it can also be described realistically and sensitively, as when Tristan and Iseut meet after a long separation:

<sup>483</sup> See also CII.561.17; MI.89.1; MVI.21.40.

<sup>484</sup> CII.474.7. For "paradis" see also CIII.932.XXI.

<sup>485</sup> MIX.50.24-27; 44-46. See also CIII.880.16; CIII.920.4; MI.86.24; MI.137.1; MIV.3.22; MV.132.1; MV.163.14; MIX.1.5.

Quant la roïne le vit, ele . . . ne puet aler avant ne ariere de la grant joie qu'ele a, ains dist basset conme cele qui a painnes pooit parler: "Sire, bien soiiés vous venus!" (MVII.228.2).

This more muted but none the less heartfelt expression of feeling is rare in the Tristan. Generally speaking, when lovers are together and their love is requited, especially in the case of Tristan and Iseut, the expression of love is one of intense joy and passion.

## 2. Suffering

Unhappiness in love can have several causes in the prose Tristan: separation, rivalry in love and lack of reciprocity. Separation, a necessary part of love in our text, is extremely distressing for both parties. When Tristan misses Iseut in Petite Bretagne, he "chiet de son cheval a tere et se pasme" (CII.567.6). Similarly, he loses the will to live when Iseut is imprisoned by Marc: "Mout se demente Tristanz et mout s'eire a soi meesmes et maudit l'eure qu'il fu nez. Il pert le boivre et le mengier."<sup>486</sup> This dichotomy in Tristan's reactions is underlined by the narrator: "De la [Iseut] vient sa joie et son duel" (CII.616.32). Iseut is similarly afflicted by her lover's absence: "A poi qu'ele n'estoit morte . . ." (MVII.37.24). Lancelot's and Guenièvre's pain is also manifest when they are about to be separated: "il ot tant grant doeil du courous de sa dame la roïne que nus n'em peüst plus coureciés estre en nule maniere" (MVI.113.15). Suffering through separation is thus part of the lovers' lot in the prose Tristan.

Jealousy is another distressing factor, and appears to be an unavoidable part of loving; Palamede, Tristan, Marc, Argan, to name but a few, all suffer through jealousy.<sup>487</sup> Huneson's reaction to Morgain's increasing interest in Tristan is typical:

quant il vit que Morgain regardoit si ententieusement monsigneur Tristran, il en fu dolans a merveilles, pour ce que il vit qu'ele le regardoit si visaument et k'il estoit si biaux chevaliers (MIII.169.3).

<sup>486</sup> CII.538.38. See also MVII.25.12.

<sup>487</sup> CIII.844.44 (Marc); CIII.880.13 (Marc); CIII.836.10 (Tristan); MI.133.17 (Argan).

Huneson's emotions are realistic: he is afraid that Morgain will leave him for Tristan. This passage also emphasises the importance of beauty: Tristan's good looks are one of the main reasons for Huneson's fear.

Love causes distress through separation and jealousy, but nothing is more hurtful than indifference or rejection. Palamede and Kahedin often find their hopes thwarted, or their feelings rejected. Kahedin expresses this keen disappointment in his last "lai:"

Esperanche oi de vous avoir, / Mais or voi que ne fu savoir. . . . / Dame,  
atant connois ma folie: / La mort me tient . . . (MI.163.41).

In a monologue, Palamede expresses the same despair at Iseut's indifference:

Je aim de tot mon cuer si vraiment sanz teche de fauseté. . . . Et je, las,  
n'en ai guerredon ne solement une promesse (CIII.903.18).

### C. The prose Tristan and fin'amors: similarities

The dichotomy of pain and suffering as the double manifestation of love is an important feature of fin'amors. According to Frappier, fin'amors "est une religion de l'amour, avec des adorations, des extases, des scrupules, des repentirs, des examens de conscience, une ascèse, des joies et des tourments."<sup>488</sup> Much of this is true of the prose Tristan. The precepts of fin'amors are also manifest in the setting and in the themes of most of the poetry and of the monologues and dialogues.

#### 1. Setting

Tristan and Iseut's adulterous relationship places them immediately within the vision of such works as Ovid's Ars amandi and Andreas Capellanus' De amore. Moreover, the long periods of separation to which Tristan and Iseut are constrained coincide "avec une situation 'classique' de la fin'amor et entraîne en conséquence l'emploi de

<sup>488</sup> Frappier, "Structure" 265. See also Theodore Silverstein, "Guenevere, or the Uses of Courtly Love," The Meaning of Courtly Love, ed. F. X. Newman (Albany, NY: Suny P, 1968) 82.

sa terminologie.”<sup>489</sup> The fin’amors terminology appears both in the lyric insertions and in the monologues of languishing knights, the setting of which we will now examine. In the prose Tristan, the characters invariably compose or perform their songs or monologues in natural locations, around fountains<sup>490</sup> or trees,<sup>491</sup> generally situated in the forest often qualified as “auques espee.”<sup>492</sup> Exceptionally, the declamation takes place in a “chapele” (CIII.796.14) or a “vielle maison” (MVIII.137.24). The narrator generally describes the natural place of repose for knights-errant, which gives way to the emotional expression of their feelings.<sup>493</sup> This natural location is, as Maureen Boulton explains, “a narrative equivalent of the ‘nature introduction’ of so many courtly lyrics.”<sup>494</sup> Nature as an inspiration for the composition of lays or for thoughts about a loved one seems to be an important detail for the narrator, who stresses this with regard to Iseut’s mortal lay,<sup>495</sup> the lamentation of the Chevalier aux Armes d’Argent (MVII.29.18), and especially Tristan’s “vers auques delitables:”

Cele matinee fu li tans clers et biaux et li airs fu sans nublece, et li pré sont carcié de flours, et cil arbre sont foillu et vert, et cil oiseillon s’en esbaudissent par ces forés et vont cantant lour divers cans, qui assés sont delitable a oïr. Et ce est droitement a l’entree de may. . . . Mesire Tristrans, qui voit le tans si bel et si verdoiant et lé flours de diverses couleurs qui aperent cha et la, et ot le delitable chant des oisiaus . . . commence a penser erranment. Et cele qu’il ne vit ja a maint jour, il desirre qu’il le voie prochainement . . . (MVI.158.40).

The reader’s attention is directed towards the coming of spring and all its trappings that set Tristan pondering the passing of time, and therefore the months which have gone by since he last saw his Queen.

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<sup>489</sup> Frappier, “Vues” 143.

<sup>490</sup> MVI.23.1; MVII.29.18; MIV.12.4; MVI.135.35; CIII.903.1; CIII.865.5; CIII.870.4; MI.99.39; MI.162.2; MIX.65.7.

<sup>491</sup> CIII.930.30; MIV.80.33.

<sup>492</sup> CIII.852.3; MVI.158.47.

<sup>493</sup> Throughout the Tristan the fountain is, according to Emmanuèle Baumgartner, “avec prédilection le lieu de la méditation amoureuse,” in La harpe et l’épée (Paris: S.E.D.E.S., 1990) 76.

<sup>494</sup> Maureen Boulton, “Tristan and his Doubles as Singers of Lais: Love and Music in the Prose Roman de Tristan,” Shifts and Transpositions in Medieval Narrative: A Festschrift for Dr Elspeth Kennedy, ed. Karen Pratt (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1994) 68.

It is not only the location, but also the themes of these pieces which link love in the Tristan with the fin'amors tradition. The format of the poems, Ménard reminds us, often octosyllabic couplets, may not resemble that of the songs composed by the “troubadours” and “trouvères,”<sup>496</sup> but the monologues are definitely reminiscent of Ovid, and therefore of the courtly tradition as exemplified by Chrétien’s Yvain.<sup>497</sup> The themes expounded in the poems and in the monologues of the Tristan recall the writings of the “trouvères” with their suffering, their loyalty to their lady, the personification of Amour, the celebration of their lady’s attributes, and the link between love and chivalry.

## 2. Suffering

Frappier explains the relation between Ovid and the exponents of the courtly topos:

Ovid’s

imitateurs courtois . . . retiennent de préférence certains préceptes de l’Ars amatoria en les marquant d’un sentiment nouveau. Il faut tout faire pour la femme aimée ou désirée, l’amant doit avoir l’air de mourir pour son amie, l’amour doit rester secret à cause des mauvaises langues, la souffrance ajoute un attrait, une sorte de piment à l’amour, déclare Ovide en passant. Simples indications, traits presque frivoles que reprennent les tenants de l’amour courtois en leur attribuant la fermeté d’une règle et la gravité d’un idéal.<sup>498</sup>

This description of the inheritance of the Ovidian culture fits almost exactly what is expressed in the Tristan; what figures less in our text is the idea of secrecy, for all lovers freely give voice to their secrets. Suffering, or what Chrétien calls “angousses” and “dolours,”<sup>499</sup> is the first manifestation of love expressed in the poetry and in the monologues. The semantic field related to suffering is extensive but unchanging:

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<sup>495</sup> CIII.931.16. For a quotation of this passage see Chapter One.

<sup>496</sup> Philippe Ménard, “Les pièces lyriques du Tristan en prose,” De Chrétien de Troyes au Tristan en prose: Études sur les romans de la Table Ronde (Genève: Droz, 1999) 145.

<sup>497</sup> Yvain lines 1432 ff.

<sup>498</sup> Frappier, “Vues” 149-50.

<sup>499</sup> Yvain line 14.

Lamorat speaks of his “dolour,” “mesaaise” and “martire,”<sup>500</sup> and Palamede mentions his “travail,” “torment,” “painne” and “malaise” (MIV.81.5). Palamede’s face is marked by torment:

ves com j’ai le vis taint / De la dolour qui si m’ataint . . . (MVI.24.41).

This physical manifestation of pain is assimilated in the Tristan as in courtly poetry, to an illness, the “maladie . . . d’amors” (CIII.688.42). The concept of love as a wound or as a disease is a traditional motif which the “trouvères” also inherited from Ovid’s love rhetoric.<sup>501</sup> In the prose Tristan, love is a “plaie” for Lamorat (MIV.13.21), and Palamede feels he has been “poigniés dusques u cuer” (MIV.81.10). Tristan is “navrez,”<sup>502</sup> while Palamede is “deshetiez” and “mout malades” (CIII.903.2). They are therefore in need of “garison” (CIII.904.31), of “medecine” (MIV.81.10) and of a “mires” (CIII.691.197). Suffering through love highlights a dichotomy which is illustrated in Lamorat’s lay: love is both the cause and the remedy of this suffering.

Amours, je gis de double plaie: / L’une m’ochist, l’autre me plaie, / L’une m’estraint, l’autre me ploie . . . (MIV.13.21).

The typically courtly theme of dying of love is found in the letters and monologues of the prose Tristan. The expressions linking love and death are numerous, even outside the three mortal lays sung by Tristan, Iseut and Kahedin. Lamorat sees himself as “morant d’amours” (MIV.13.5), Palamede says that “Yseut m’a mort” (MVI.22.17), and Hélié declares that if he does not have the person he calls his “amie,” he will surely die (MVI.136.31). Love and death are linked even more closely in the mortal lays, as Iseut famously declares:

<sup>500</sup> MIV.14.6. For “dolour,” see also CIII.870.XIX; CIII.903.16; MIV.81.5; MVI.24.41; MVI.99.21.

<sup>501</sup> See Roger Dragonetti, La technique poétique des trouvères dans la chanson courtoise (Bruges: De Tempel, 1960) 102. For more on this particular aspect of love see Mary Frances Wack, Lovesickness in the Middle Ages: The “Viaticum” and Its Commentaries (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1990).

<sup>502</sup> CIII.688.31; M1.163.85.

Mort et amor me font finer. . . .<sup>503</sup>

Kahedin's lay uses the two terms in conjunction throughout his mortal lay, providing an excellent example of this double semantic field: the first stanza of this poem particularly emphasises the relation between love and death as its four rhymes ("mort," "mort," "mort," and "amort") return incessantly to the subject. Despite the fact that the word takes on a different meaning each time it occurs, it always relates to the fact that he is dying for love. The assonance produced by "morant" (line 1) and "morsel" (line 2) reinforces that in line 4 ("ardours d'amours"), thus directly connecting love with death. All the stanzas in the poem, bar four, contain the verb "mourir,"<sup>504</sup> the noun "mort,"<sup>505</sup> or some synonym or periphrase such as "mortel port" (line 20), "jour du Juïse" (line 29), "sous lame" (line 35), "morteus coses" (line 48), or "mortel confort" (line 84).

Kahedin actually carries out what he expounds in his song, which marks a difference between the picture of love in the prose *Tristan* and the courtly topos, as we will see. The other mortal lays resemble Kahedin's in their juxtaposition of love and death, although they are closer to courtly poetry because they are only words, not actions.<sup>506</sup> Iseut's use of the two terms and their derivatives is coupled with the even more traditional image of the lover being consumed by flames:

Mourir me fait d'amor la flame, / Si fort m'engoisse et si m'enflame / Qu'el  
me destruisit le cors et l'ame, / Avant mes jorz me met soz lame.<sup>507</sup>

<sup>503</sup> CIII.870.VIII. See also CIII.870.X; XIII; XIV.

<sup>504</sup> Lines 12, 17, 23, 39, 105, 115, 125, 131.

<sup>505</sup> Lines 1, 2, 3, 4, 16, 18, 24, 25, 46, 52, 53, 80, 81, 92, 116, 117, 135, 137, 139. See also "morteument" line 58; "ocire" line 64; "ochist" line 90.

<sup>506</sup> Ultimately, though, Tristan and Iseut do die of love, but more indirectly than does Kahedin.

<sup>507</sup> CIII.932.XXVI. Frappier reminds us that the flame imagery is also present in Ovid, where "l'amour est comparable à une flamme qui embrase une bûche. . . ." in "Vues" 150. For more fire imagery see MIV.13.41; MIV.14.37; MIV.14.46.

### 3. Loyalty

The use of feudal vocabulary, what C. S. Lewis refers to as the “‘feudalization’ of love,”<sup>508</sup> more significantly links the poetry and expressions of love in the prose Tristan and the themes of the courtly topos. Treating the loved one as a lord was entirely characteristic of feudal society, reflecting the culture of the time.<sup>509</sup> The prose Tristan closely follows the traditions of representing the courtly relationship between the admirer and the lady as one of vassal and lord, for every lover declares himself to be his mistress’s “servant,”<sup>510</sup> her “sers,”<sup>511</sup> her “hom liges,”<sup>512</sup> and even her “chose” (MVI.24.33). Tristan neatly sums up this relationship in a letter to Iseut:

je, mesire Tristrans, vostres cevaliers, vostres hom liges et vostres sers,  
vous salu conme ma dame . . . (MVII.39.13).

This feudal loyalty strongly resembles the poetic language of the trouvères,<sup>513</sup> and the knight depicts himself to the lady as a “loial serjant,”<sup>514</sup> who also complains that he receives little recompense (“guerredon;”<sup>515</sup> “dure desserte”<sup>516</sup>) for his “leal servise.”<sup>517</sup> This service is perceived as hard labour (“grant travail et . . . grant painne”<sup>518</sup>) by the lover.<sup>519</sup> The feudal semantic field is rendered complete by the notion of payment with such terms as “achate” and “soldre” (to pay).<sup>520</sup> The lover therefore expresses feelings of injustice, again a courtly motif, but as it would not be courteous to accuse the lady directly, the lover instead accuses the personified figure of love, Amour. Kahedin

<sup>508</sup> C. S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition (Oxford: OUP, 1977) 11.

<sup>509</sup> Bloch, Feudal Society 309.

<sup>510</sup> CIII.904.23. See also MIV.14.13.

<sup>511</sup> MI.100.28; MI.154.13; MVI.24.9; MVI.24.33; MVII.39.13.

<sup>512</sup> MI.100.28; MVII.39.13.

<sup>513</sup> For feudal vocabulary in courtly poetry see Dragonetti, La technique poétique 61ff.

<sup>514</sup> CIII.904.9. See also CIII.905.34; CIII.691.116; MVI.22.23.

<sup>515</sup> CIII.852.8. See also CIII.691.120; MIV.81.24; MVI.99.5.

<sup>516</sup> MVI.99.24.

<sup>517</sup> CIII.691.120. See also “loiaument” MI.100.16; MI.154.15; MVI.24.1; MVII.31.13.

<sup>518</sup> MIV.12.25. See also MI.154.3; CIII.691.116.

<sup>519</sup> CIII.691.120; CIII.870.IV; CIII.904.23; CIII.904.50; CIII.905.32; MI.100.16; MI.100.28; MI.163.89; MIV.13.17; MVI.24.29.

<sup>520</sup> MIV.12.28 and C.II.904.77.



expresses this transition in his mortal lay. At first, he wants to accuse Iseut of causing him pain:

Dame, complaindre me voloie / De vous, pour qui je me doloie  
(MI.163.49).

On reflection, however, he decides otherwise:

Mais or connois que mal feroie, / Se de ma mort vous apeloie (MI.163.51).

He thus levels his accusations at “Amours,” as all the lovers in the prose Tristan will do.

#### 4. Amour

Also of Ovidian influence, and an “antique usage de la poésie courtoise,”<sup>521</sup> the personification of Amour features prominently in the laments and poems of the Tristan lovers. Amour is invariably represented as a feminine power,<sup>522</sup> as is traditionally the case in courtly poetry, which can at times lead to confusion as the syntactical ambiguity between the “Dame” and “Amours” makes it difficult to tell to which feminine person the lover is referring, an ambiguity also found in “trouvère” poetry.<sup>523</sup> Thus although Hélie has invoked Amour throughout his lay, his last stanza is particularly ambiguous in its use of “amie,” which can refer both to Amour and to Iseut:

“Amour, je me doi mout loer  
De vous, que ne me doi voer  
A autre dieu ne conmander  
Qu’a vous, qui m’avés fait loer.

Autre dieu jou ne demant mie,  
Se vous non qui estes m’amie.  
Se jou ne vous ai, jou morrai.”  
Et ensi definoit son lay (MVI.136.25).

<sup>521</sup> Ménard, “Les pièces lyriques” 145.

<sup>522</sup> CII.581.25; MIII.260.14; MVI.22.27; MVI.137.79; MVII.31.13.

<sup>523</sup> See Marie-Noëlle Toury, “Morant d’amours: Amour et mort dans le tome I du Tristan en prose,” Nouvelles recherches sur le Tristan en prose, ed. Jean Dufournet (Genève: Slatkine, 1990) 185.

These two stanzas also reveal that Amour is elevated to the status of a “dieu,” a feature of troubadour poetry which Frappier calls the “religion de l’amour.”<sup>524</sup> This deification of Amour is readily accepted by the lovers in the *Tristan*: Kahedin refers to her as “li Diex d’Amours” (MI.163.27), and Iseut puts her faith in her:

Amors ou ge oi m’esperance, / Ma seürté et ma fiance, / Com en Dieu n’ai  
autre creance.<sup>525</sup>

Amour as a feminine quasi-deity is frequently the target of many an accusation and complaint, but is also addressed on grounds of mercy or forgiveness.

First of all, Amour assumes, like the lady, the position of “seigneur.”<sup>526</sup> Both male and female lovers serve this lord like vassals. Iseut speaks to Guenièvre of

amors ou je avoie tot mis, et cuer et cors et esperance et tot mon servise  
entierement, plus assez que en Dieu ne en home . . . (CII.572.22).

Lamorat also declares himself to be Amour’s “plante” (MIV.13.41), using a nature metaphor characteristic of “trouvère” songs.<sup>527</sup> Returning to the more common idea of serfdom, Hélie, in his monologue, makes this “seigneur” a lord above mortal lords:

pour ce que . . . vous soiiés la sus u ciel, dame de la sus et dame du tans, et  
avés signourie la sus et chi aval entre nous, vous ten ge mes .II. mains vers  
vous et vous aour comme ma dame, en tel guise et en tel maniere comme  
sers doit aourer son seigneur (MVI.137.9).

Despite this pseudo-deification of Amour, Guenièvre sees this power as all-human, and therefore subject to human whims:

puis qu’amors est chose humene, et des choses humenes est ausi com de la  
roe de la Fortune qui l’ome moine a sa volenté, ore desus, ores dejus, or en  
joie, en or corroz; et por ce dient li plusor que amors est humene chose,  
qu’ele est muable ausi come li venez.<sup>528</sup>

Amour nevertheless remains

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<sup>524</sup> Frappier, “Vues” 151.

<sup>525</sup> CIII.932.XX. See also CIII.691.92; MIV.81.12; MVI.137.9; MVII.168.24.

<sup>526</sup> See also CIII.691.116; MI.163.89; MIV.14.13.

<sup>527</sup> Dragonetti 122.

<sup>528</sup> CII.581.25. For love as “muable et chanjable” see also CIII.905.56 and as the “roe de Fortune” see CIII.904.7.

li sires muables qui tient une grant piece son sergent en grant beneürté, et après quant il se porpense, soit reson ou desreson, il le trebuche de si haut si bas (CII.581.39).

This fickleness which Guenièvre highlights is one of the reasons why disappointed lovers so often accuse Amour of treason, which is another link between love in the prose *Tristan* and the traditional courtly motifs, because the courtly song also uses a set of terms relating to the concepts of the promise and treason.<sup>529</sup> Despite the promises allegedly made by Amour to such lovers as Palamede, Meleagant or Lamorat,<sup>530</sup> the lovers find that Amour has not kept her covenant, and accuse her of being a “desloial cose et traïteresse” (MVII.31.57), full of “fausses covenances,” “fausses promesses” (CIII.796.25), “desloiauté,” “enging,” “menchoignes” (MVII.31.13), “tricherie” (MIV.81.69), and of having “trahi”<sup>531</sup> her serf. Lamorat denounces Amour’s fickleness,<sup>532</sup> and Palamede likens her to the serpent in the Garden of Eden:

Amours est ausi conme li serpens qui proumist a nostre premier pere que, se il mengoit de la pome, il seroit ausi conme Diex; et crut à la fausse proumesse, si s’en trouva mort et honni (MVII.31.45).

This is because, in view of the loyal and consistent service accomplished by the lover, the recompense is small: the knight who plays for Arthur at Pentecost even calls it “mortel guerredon” (MVI.99.5).

Faced with what they feel is a gross injustice (Palamede says he is living “en martire”<sup>533</sup>), the lovers implore Amour for her pity and mercy, also a courtly tradition.<sup>534</sup> Lamorat thus begs Amour:

Amours, pour che vous vois priiant, / Souspirant, priiant, repriiant, / Merchi criant et recriant / Que vous ne m’alés ochiant (MIV.13.49).

<sup>529</sup> Dragonetti 92.

<sup>530</sup> CIII.904.3; CIII.796.25; MIV.13.13.

<sup>531</sup> MI.163.57; MIV.81.45; MVII.31.13.

<sup>532</sup> MIV.13.13. See also MIV.81.24; MVI.24.9.

<sup>533</sup> CIII.904.23. See also Palamedes’s lines: “Amours, car je vous aim et serf / De cuer, plus que nul autre serf, / Ne onques jour ne vous messerf, / Donnés moi plus que ne desserf” (MVI.24.29).

<sup>534</sup> See Ménard, “Les pièces lyriques” 145.

Kahedin similarly asks for Amour's "pitié" and "merchi" (MI.154.9, 13). For Palamede, this request for mercy is actually a transition between accusing Amour and finally recognising her positive power over his prowess, a theme dear to the courtly poetry of Northern France in particular.<sup>535</sup>

### 5. Love and chivalry

Present not only in the poetry of the prose Tristan, but also in the monologues, dialogues and narratorial insertions, the link between love and prowess is heavily emphasised in our text. It had become a conventional theme by the mid-thirteenth century, having been widely used from the second half of the twelfth century by the poets of the "langue d'oïl."<sup>536</sup> Love induces prowess and vice-versa. Bélise's love for Tristan is reinforced because he is the "Flor et bobant et renomée de chevalerie" (CI.283.6). Similarly, Palamede believes that his prowess will make Iseut prefer him to Tristan:

si verrons li quiex de nos deus doit avoir par sa chevalerie l'amor de  
demoisele Yselt.<sup>537</sup>

Most knights agree on the principle that being in love positively influences one's prowess. King Marc confirms:

cil qui n'aiment par amours en ont mains de pooir et mains de force et  
mains de valeur (MIV.85.26).

Palamede speaks of his own experience at length in one of his monologues:

se je montai en haute hounour aucune fois, se je conquestai pris ne los, et  
se je vainqui assamblee et se je fui doutés en tournoïement, se-on me tint a  
cevalier, ce fu par la force d'Amours . . . (MVII.32.17).

This fact is even verified by Dinadan at Louveserp, who recognises Iseut's power: "ele donne a Palamidés plus de force que Diex ne l'en eüst donnée."<sup>538</sup> She even has an

<sup>535</sup> See Frappier, "Vues" 145.

<sup>536</sup> For a more detailed study on this question see Frappier, "Vues."

<sup>537</sup> CI.336.8. See also CI.393.14; CII.566.3; MIV.2.1.

“escu” made for Tristan as a token of her love for him, and as the latter explains to Dinadan,

li escus vait ausi com doublant ma force; li escus, quant je le sent sour moi,  
m'est ausi com uns aguillons et uns esmouvements de proueece faire  
(MII.30.31).

As a proof of her love, Iseut has an object made which will increase her lover's prowess, and the very existence of this “escu” proves the strong belief placed on the positive influence of love on courage.

A lady's beauty also influences knights to display their courage, and is celebrated in the knights' songs and poems, as was traditionally the case in courtly poetry.

#### 6. Celebration of the lady's beauty

Present in the Tristan monologues and poems is also the traditional inability of the lovers to find words that would do justice to their lady's beauty. Kahedin declares to an absent Iseut:

Dames . . . ki tant estes bele voirement que de vostre biauté ne porroit nule  
langhe morteus dire la somme. . . .<sup>539</sup>

In an equally conventional manner, the lovers use imagery derived from nature and light. Thus both for Kahedin and Palamede, who use the same phrase at different times in the text, Iseut is “estoile et jame.”<sup>540</sup> Palamede says of Iseut that she is “clartés et lumiere plus clere que n'est l'estoile jornal, et qui est mireors du monde” (MVII.32.49), and he recognises her social qualities, which benefit all who surround her:

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<sup>538</sup> MV.205.19. For more references to love influencing prowess, see CI.337.12; CIII.691.210; MI.163.11; MV.33.29; MV.35.20; MVI.3.14; MVI.4.37; MVII.212.35; MVII.220.1, and so on.

<sup>539</sup> MI.100.39. This technique thus avoids describing Iseut, and it is also used to describe a castle: see MVII.68.13 and commentary in Chapter One.

<sup>540</sup> MI.163.33 for Kahedin and MVI.24.53 for Palamede.

Estandart de fine amour, tant bele et gracieuse et tant courtoise que tous li mondes amende de vostre vie et est enluminés de vostre biauté!  
(MVIII.138.35)

Along the same lines, Tristan compliments her in his letter on being

la rose et le lis et le biauté de cest monde, qui de valeur et de loiauté et de sens et de courtoisie n'avés pareille en tout cest siecle . . . (MVII.39.10).

One notes not only the conventional imagery describing Iseut's beauty, but also the loyalty, wisdom and courtesy for which she is admired.<sup>541</sup>

So far we have established the resemblance between the representation of love through the monologues, dialogues and lays in the prose Tristan and the concepts and imagery of traditional courtly poetry. The expression of love, however, sometimes departs from the courtly way. In answer to Kahedin's first lay, Iseut sends him "Folie n'est pas vasselage!" (MI.158) According to Toury, never in traditional courtly poetry does the lady answer: it is only through the poet's voice that the listener may hear of the behaviour of the lady, not from her directly.<sup>542</sup> Similarly, whereas the traditional fin lover must always be optimistic,<sup>543</sup> Kahedin totally lacks hope and confidence.<sup>544</sup> It must be stressed, therefore, that the representation of love through the lyric insertions does not fully match the way love is actually experienced, nor do its effects in reality.

#### D. The prose Tristan and fin'amors: differences

##### 1. Tristan and Iseut

It was concluded above that on his second visit to Ireland, Tristan genuinely falls in love with Iseut, and that this love is intensified and rendered mutual by the love potion.

According to Frappier,

<sup>541</sup> For more traditional images and compliments to ladies in monologues and poems see CIII.797.8; MI.163.9; MI.163.33; MIV.81.76; MVI.159.1.

<sup>542</sup> Toury, "Morant d'amours" 185.

<sup>543</sup> See Ménard, "Les pièces lyriques" 145-46.

<sup>544</sup> See in particular Kahedin's mortal lay, MI.163.

Plus qu'une obéissance à un code, la *fine amor* exigeait un élan du cœur allié à des raisons d'aimer. . . . De cette conception découlaient trois tendances caractéristiques: l'amour est pour une part volonté, élection, choix des élus et des élues; il est lié à la valeur des amants, à leur mérite; sentiment lucide et raisonné, il est à l'opposé d'un abandon à la fatalité. . . .<sup>545</sup>

The love between Tristan and Iseut is not entirely an "amour fatal;" nor can it be totally an "amour courtois" because of the sheer power of the potion.<sup>546</sup> If the concept of all-powerful love is in accordance with the principles of *fin'amors*, the idea of the love potion causing the lovers to happily commit the "vilenie" (CI.444.7) which they would not have dreamed of doing before drinking the potion contravenes the idea of love being the "choix" of the lovers.

The almost marital life the lovers lead at Joyeuse Garde is a far cry from the secrecy and the forbidden nature of *fin'amors*. Moreover, this is a point where love and chivalry conflict, where the respect of the former is to the detriment of the latter and vice-versa.

## 2. The effects of love

Love affects the life and behaviour of the lover in the Tristan in ways which depart from the courtly precepts. It can interfere with the chivalric career of a knight, it can make a knight behave in an unchivalrous manner, and more seriously, it causes such suffering that the knight is detached from the world of chivalry, and can even kill, as Kahedin's case will show.

Tristan is the chief example of how love and chivalry conflict, as he cannot be in two places at once. When he is with Iseut, he abandons the questing life and enjoys quasi-conjugal happiness (MV.8.1). There are several instances in the text where both situations mutually exclude each other. Lamorat reprimands Tristan for being unable

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<sup>545</sup> Frappier, "Structure" 265.

<sup>546</sup> Expressions used by Frappier, "Structure" 265.

to stay in Logres “en la compaignie des chevaliers de la Table Reonde” because he wants to visit Iseut in Cornouailles (CIII.829.26). On the other hand, he is reproached by Iseut’s damsel for putting his chivalric priorities above Iseut:

il est grans damages de vous que vous perdés ensi le vostre tans et que  
vous errés a tel travail par le roiaume de Logres! (MII.94.26)

Moreover, in the past, Tristan has always had to decline from fighting against Taulas de la Montagne because Iseut “li avoit tout adés desfendu” (MI.177.25), thus creating a situation whereby because of his love, he cannot defend the people whom the giant is oppressing. His madness, however, allows him to transgress this “conmandement,” prove his supremacy over Taulas, and fulfil his obligation as a knight. When Marc hears of the death of the giant, he brings the still insane hero back to court, where he is finally restored to his former self. His return to the court and to chivalry, his transgression of the commands of his mistress, and not, as in Chrétien’s Yvain, the lady’s love, allow Tristan to regain his sanity.<sup>547</sup>

Chrétien’s Yvain also explores this division between love and chivalry, particularly when Yvain is given leave by Laudine to spend no more than a year on questing, a period of time which he overruns. When Yvain finally remembers his broken promise, a messenger arrives with an accusation which will cause Yvain’s temporary madness:

Yvain, mout fus or oublians,  
Qu’il ne te puet resouvenir  
Que tu deüsses revenir  
A ma damë au bout de l’an. . . .<sup>548</sup>

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<sup>547</sup> For a detailed study of Tristan’s madness, see Philippe Ménard, “Tristan et les bergers,” Nouvelles recherches sur le Tristan en prose (Genève: Slatkine, 1990) 149-71; Huguette Legros, “La ‘Folie Tristan’ dans le Tristan en prose: Aboutissement de traditions antérieures et réécriture,” Miscellanea Mediaevalia: Mélanges offerts à Philippe Ménard, vol. 2, ed. J. Claude Faucon et al. (Paris: Champion, 1998) 869-78.

<sup>548</sup> Yvain line 2746.



Because Yvain refused to be called a “jealous” husband, and because he did not want to belong to “chix . . . / Qui pour lor femmes valent mains,” he joined Gauvain for the tournaments and neglected his love.<sup>549</sup> Although Chrétien highlights the possibility of love and chivalry conflicting, Yvain’s story implies that the two can be compatible, for in the end Yvain wins his lady back and carries on being a knight worthy of respect. The two seem irreconcilable, however, in the prose Tristan, and Iseut shows she is aware of this problem by inciting Tristan to go to Camelot for Pentecost instead of remaining with her:

se vous, amis, qui estes li mieudres de tous, n’estiés avoec les autres, il vous tenroient a mauvais et diroient tout plainnement que vous seriés recreans de bien faire pour les amours madame Yseut. Il diroient que vous ariés laissie toute cevalerie pour moi, vous en seriés ahontés et je en seroie deshouneree . . . (MVI.86.43).

Iseut demonstrates that the incompatibility between love and errantry is a deep-rooted social problem. In order that neither Iseut nor Tristan come under fire of Camelot’s accusations, Tristan should leave Iseut and join the Quest. Arthur indeed remarks on Tristan’s absence:

Yseut, . . . vostre biauté fait cestui jor grant honte en mon ostel, car ele nous taut la compaignie du plus esprouvé cevalier du monde!  
(MVI.102.23)

When Tristan finally joins the Quest, he neglects Iseut for a whole year:

pour bien parfurnir le serement de la Queste que il avoit juree a tout l’an, vous di je qu’il ne tourna tout celui an en la Joieuse Garde . . .  
(MVI.133.34).

Tristan also fails to return to Iseut at the appointed time because he has promised to help a disinherited damsel:

mout li est contre cuer qu’il ne puet a li retourner; avis est qu’il fust rices, mais quand il ne puet pour le couvenent qu’il a a la damoisele, a souffrir l’en estuet, voelle u ne volle.<sup>550</sup>

<sup>549</sup> Yvain lines 2502; 2484.

<sup>550</sup> MVII.6.11. See also MVII.39.59.

Tristan and Iseut had already debated the dichotomy between love and chivalry at the “Saige Demoisele,” when Iseut said:

se nos en ceste forest demoriens en tel maniere com vos devisiez, ne vos est il avis que nos avriens perdu tot le monde? Nos ne verriens ne dame ne chevalier ne gent ne envoieüre; nos avriens le monde perdu, et li mondes nos (CII.550.32).

She realises that in secluding herself with Tristan she forsakes her social life, Tristan sees no “chevalier,” and the chivalric world loses them, pointing up the practical incompatibility of love and chivalry. As Baumgartner puts it, “la société fonctionne comme opposant à l’amour.”<sup>551</sup>

Love also makes knights adopt unchivalrous attitudes. Hélié is soliloquizing about Amour granting him prowess and recognition (MVI.133.79) when two knights come to water their horses near him, and his attitude towards them is so excessive that instead of being offended by Hélié’s insolence, the knights laugh at it (MVI.134.38). When he persists in refusing the knights access to the fountain, challenges them to fight and wounds them badly, the situation is no longer risible. The authors do not say whether one should admire or condemn this conceited attitude of the knight in love, although it is plainly not the customary knightly one: love has thus made him do something unchivalrous.<sup>552</sup> Again, when Kahedin finally understands that Iseut will not have him, he is no longer tempted by the high aspirations of chivalry; his passion indeed isolates him from the rest of chivalric society.

This leads us to examine the more important incompatibility which exists between love and happiness, for in the prose Tristan, apart from a few moments of bliss, most lovers suffer. The prose Tristan concludes with a cruel vision of love,

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<sup>551</sup> Emmanuèle Baumgartner, “Du Tristan de Bérout au Roman de Tristan en prose: Étude comparée de l’idéologie et de l’écriture romanesques à partir de l’épisode de la Forêt du Morois,” Der Altfranzösische Prosaroman 14.

<sup>552</sup> See also MVII.128 for another example of how lovers can provoke one of Arthur’s knights to act violently.

where the death of the lovers echoes that of many others. Bélise of Gaule commits suicide when she realises that Tristan does not love her (CI.283.24); Kahedin lets himself die when he understands that his love for Iseut will never be requited (MI.164.7); Iseut herself attempts to take her own life when she believes Tristan to be dead.<sup>553</sup> Even when lovers do not die directly through love, they suffer greatly throughout their life, as do Palamede or Marc, or go mad, like Tristan and Lancelot.<sup>554</sup>

### 3. The case of Kahedin

Kahedin in particular denounces love as a destructive force. He deserves particular attention as one of the more original creations of the prose authors. In the twelfth-century Tristan texts his role and characterisation are limited.<sup>555</sup> In the prose Tristan, Kahedin still occupies relatively little space, but his friendship with Tristan, his love for Iseut and his tragic death make him an important character. Moreover, even if he features in only three volumes, the constant allusions to the fate he has suffered show his importance in the prose Tristan.<sup>556</sup>

Kahedin falls victim to an all-consuming passion as soon as he meets Iseut:

maintenant qu'il la vit l'ama il si durement et si merueilleusement qu'il n'en pot puis son cuer oster devant la mort (CIII.832.18).

Witnessing Iseut's preferential treatment of Tristan, Kahedin falls ill:

Il est mes si afobloiez et si enpiriez de totes choses, si megres, si pales, si vains que il dit bien a soi meïsmes que des ores mes ne porroit il plus endurer . . . (CIII.833.35).

He writes to Iseut announcing that he will die if she does not answer favourably (CIII.834.7). She sends him a letter of "faus reconfort" and tells him to get better in

<sup>553</sup> CIII.933.15. One may add the cases of Sador and Chelinde, Canor, Pelias, Gloriande, Eliabel (CI), Iseut aux Blanches Mains (MI.149.16), Huneson (MIII.182.20), Lamorat and the Queen of Orcanie (MIV.145.40), Cilisés (MVII.223.17), Lancelot (MVI.51.47) and Guenièvre (MVI.51.21).

<sup>554</sup> MI.168; MVI.49.

<sup>555</sup> See Philippe Ménard, "Le personnage de Kahédin et la passion amoureuse dans le Tristan en prose," De Chrétien de Troyes au Tristan en prose 149.

<sup>556</sup> See MII.84.5; MV.34.1; MV.54.31; MVI.25.51; MVII.223.15.

order to enjoy his love, a piece of advice which Kahedin promptly obeys (CIII.834.15). When Tristan finds Iseut's letter, he believes he has been betrayed, and departs. Iseut obliges Kahedin to leave Cornouailles if he cares for his life (CIII.894.34). Some time later, and by chance, Kahedin catches sight of Iseut again at Marc's jubilee at the Abbey of Gaunes. Until then he had decided to forget her (MI.86.37), but as soon as he sees her,

li cuers li escaufe tous et esprent, tous li talens li mue et cange (MI.89.3).

The narrator continues:

Il avoit orendroit dit devant ceste aventure que jamais n'amerait madame Yseut. . . . Or s'en desdit tout plainnement et dist k'il ne puisse jamais tant vivre k'il mete son cuer en autre dame que en madame Yseut (MI.89.9).

This interior monologue in indirect free speech is presented in vivid terms and shows not only the suddenness of love, but also the disillusioned acceptance of death. Kahedin's affliction quickly becomes extreme (MI.89.32), and he is completely alienated by his unrequited love, unlike Palamede and Tristan, who despite their unhappiness, strive to achieve chivalric honour. Even when Tristan loses his sanity, he still accomplishes actions which link him to the social world he has thus not quite abandoned: not only does he kill Taulas the giant, thus saving a knight in a dangerous position as well as the inhabitants of Cornouailles (MI.178), but he also avenges the shepherds ill-treated by Daguinet (MI.170). In fact his period of insanity allows him to carry out his chivalric duties.

Death becomes the only logical outcome to Kahedin's situation. In his lay, death is assimilated to suffering, according to the courtly conventions (MI.154.3, 14); but in his mortal lay, he looks forward to his "douche mort" (MI.163.1). Death becomes idealised: it is "une mort embasmee," and "souef odourant" (MI.163.24, 25). This sublimation of death becomes its justification. Before his death, Kahedin knows no

happiness, thus proving that in his case at least love can be uniformly destructive, and the conclusion to his life is tragic in his words:

a grant dolour et a grant destrece morut Kahedins pour s'amour  
(MI.164.6).

This is what remains of a knight who once was a "chevalier mout preu de son cors et mout hardi et grant et fort et legier" (CII.562.1). His slow decline has nothing grand about it:

En tel guise . . . langui bien Kahedins .II. mois entiers pour les amours de  
madame Yseut, k'il ne faisoit onques s'empirier non de jour en jour  
(MI.161.1).

All the lovers speak at one moment or another of dying of love, but Kahedin's case is far removed from these courtly conventions: he acts out what most of the others only speak of. He is the proof of the dangers of passion, and these images of failure and suffering, where love is depicted as the source of unhappiness and of destruction, take the reader a long way from the courtly conventions.<sup>557</sup>

Stock phrases not only uphold certain martial values, but also value certain social graces, and describe many of the feelings relating to love. This does not make for a very realistic depiction of chivalric life. One must remember, however, that things may not be as straightforward as they first seem, for certain customs seem to be tentatively questioned and knights find themselves in problematic situations where a choice has to be made. Some courtly conventions are also undermined, so that in the end, there seems to be no satisfactory cohabitation between the pursuit of both love and errantry. The world of the prose *Tristan* cannot, therefore, be one of wish fulfilment: good knights get killed by bad ones who survive, such as Bréhus, Gauvain and Marc, and passionate love often excludes chivalric prowess. Despite the absence

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<sup>557</sup> For more on the character of Kahedin see Marie-Noëlle Toury, "De Kaherdin à Kahédin: L'invention d'une personnalité," *Et c'est la fin pour quoy sommes ensemble: Hommage à Jean Dufournet*, 3 vols. (Paris: Champion, 1993) 3: 1401-09.

of financial considerations and the almost exclusive presence of aristocrats, the Tristan world is not that much easier to live in than the real world of the thirteenth-century audience. The prose Tristan is not, in this sense, a conventional courtly romance.

Finally, although the Tristan essentially reproduces the conventional love triangle of the husband, the wife and the lover, whoever opens the text at random will have more chance of reading about a joust, or the adventures of Palamede, Dinadan, or Brun le Noir, than about the lovers of Cornouailles. And as Berthelot comments,

l'intégration de la Cornouaille dans le royaume de Logres, et de la légende tristanienne dans la matière proprement arthurienne, se traduit par un déplacement de l'intérêt, de la relation entre les individus aux relations entre les membres d'une société chevaleresque et courtoise.<sup>558</sup>

The integration of the Tristan legend into the Arthurian world shifts the interest from the love triangle to a world composed mainly of knights acting out their social and chivalric lives. The use of King Arthur and his court also introduces another dimension to the prose Tristan, which manifests itself in the conception of Galaad, and which comprises the Quest for the Holy Grail in which Tristan tentatively participates, a subject to which this study will now turn.

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<sup>558</sup> Anne Berthelot, Le roman courtois: Une introduction (Paris: Nathan, 1998) 112.

## Chapter Five: Religious Chivalry

The third important area of chivalric life in the prose Tristan is religious chivalry. From the announcement of the Pentecost of the Grail onwards, the Tristan authors borrow substantial parts of the Queste del Saint Graal and of the prose Lancelot, giving the Holy Quest an important proportion of the prose Tristan as a whole.<sup>559</sup> The incorporation of the Queste, an exemplary piece of religious asceticism, into the Tristan text, which focuses on earthly chivalric life, doubtless corresponds to the compilers' desire to bring together the entire Arthurian matter, which was presumably so well-known that it would have been hard to leave it out. The obvious result of this compilation is the confrontation of two different secular and religious worlds, where the tension between the two risks undermining what each represents.

A recent study of the Queste del Saint Graal points out that its manuscript tradition "does not allow us the luxury of separating this text from the rest of the cycle . . . nor does isolation of the tales accurately reflect medieval practice."<sup>560</sup> In only four of the forty-three manuscripts in which the Queste is preserved does it appear alone. In all the others, the Queste is found either with one or more of the prose Lancelot, the Mort Artu or the Estoire. Baumgartner adds that the Queste was not perceived or read as an isolated tale in the Middle Ages.<sup>561</sup> Jane Burns similarly remarks that the groupings mentioned above "suggest that a variety of possible readings were built into the highly flexible narrative structure of the long and rambling Vulgate tales and that textual boundaries as we know them actually varied from one

<sup>559</sup> References to this text will use La Queste del Saint Graal, ed. Albert Pauphilet (Paris: Champion, 1967), hereafter referred to as Queste by page and line number.

<sup>560</sup> Kathryn Marie Talarico, "Romancing the Grail: Fiction and Theology in the Queste del Saint Graal," Arthurian Literature and Christianity: Notes from the Twentieth Century, ed. Peter Meister (New York: Garland, 1999) 32.

reading / performance to the next.”<sup>562</sup> This evidence suggests that the ideological divide which modern readers perceive as uncomfortable might not have been thus understood by thirteenth-century audiences. These might indeed have listened to both the ascetic text and the story with familiar Arthurian topoi without perceiving a divide as modern readers do. With this in mind, the fact that the prose Tristan and the Queste are conflated into one text by the prose authors should not come as a surprise.

Nevertheless, although what we see as an incoherence might not have been perceived as acutely by a thirteenth-century audience, it is still true that two ideologies cohabit in the same text.

The prologue to the Tristan clearly reveals the intentions of the narrator:

ce seroit une chose que volentiers orroient povre et riche, puisqu’il eüssent volenté d’escouter beles aventures et plesanz, qui avindrent sanz doutance en la Grant Bretaigne au tens le roi Artus et devant, ensi come l’estoire vraie del Saint Graal nos raconte et tesmoigne. . . .

Mes tele est ma volanté et mon proposement, que je . . . ferai asavoir ce que li latins devise de l’estoire de Tristan, qui fu li plus soveriens chevaliers qui onques fust ou reame de la Grant Bretaigne, et devant le roi Artus et après, fors solement li tres bons chevaliers Lancelot dou Lac. Et li latins meïsmes de l’estoire del Saint Graal devise apertement que au tens le roi Artus ne furent que troi bon chevalier qui tres bien feïssent a prisier de chevalerie: Galaaz, Lanceloz, Tristan (CI.Prologue.4).

In a book recounting “beles aventures et plesanz,” Luce de Gast sets out to tell the story of Tristan, paragon of knighthood and lover of Iseut, within the context of the “estoire vraie del Saint Graal,” thus juxtaposing the worlds of secular chivalry (“chevalerie terrienne”) and religious chivalry (“chevalerie celestielle”) from the outset. At the same time, by introducing Galaad as one of the three best knights in the world “qui tres bien feïssent a prisier de chevalerie,” the narrator immediately anchors

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<sup>561</sup> Emmanuèle Baumgartner, L’arbre et le pain: Essai sur la Queste del Saint Graal (Paris: S.E.D.E.S., 1981) 11-12.

<sup>562</sup> E. J. Burns, introduction, Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation, ed. Norris Lacy, 5 vols. (New York: Garland, 1993-96) 1: xx.



the emblem of “chevalerie celestielle” in a more secular context. The closing lines of the text confirm this intention:

Icy faut l'estoire de monseigneur Tristan et del Saint Graal, si parfaicte que nul n'y savroit que y mettre (MIX.143.55).

It is therefore the deliberate choice of the authors to make the Holy Quest an intrinsic part of Tristan's life. By setting Tristan's adventures in the context of the Grail story and by demystifying Galaad's role, the authors produce interesting but complex, and even unresolved effects. The Quest is reproduced almost in its entirety, but despite the fact that the religious values do effectively appear to change after the Pentecost, its focus seems to have been modified. As the period around the Pentecost marks not only a turning point in the action, but also the inclusion of non-Tristan material, it seems appropriate to study the sections before and after the Pentecost separately.

## I. The place of religion outside the Grail section

### A. The importance of God

When Brun le Noir first sets out to accompany the demoiselle médisante, he is sharply rebuked by her and told he will be of no use in this difficult enterprise because he is a new knight. He answers that in good time,

S'il plest a Dieu, je metré bien a fin ceste besoigne (CII.652.21).

She replies disbelievingly:

Se Diex voloit, vos le menriez a fin; ausi devendriez vos beste, se Diex voloit! (CII.652.23).

This passage demonstrates the typically ambivalent attitude of the demoiselle médisante towards the presence and power of God: divine intervention undoubtedly exists, but whether it will actually be exerted here and now is another question. This

makes it difficult to see the prose Tristan as “résolument d’inspiration laïque.”<sup>563</sup>

Religion may not be one of the main considerations of the Tristan characters, but it would be an oversight to forget that the text begins with the conversion of Great Britain to Christianity, and that the Prologue is merely the first of many passages in the prose Tristan to contain clear references to a Christian culture.

### 1. The Prologue

Tristan’s genealogy (see Chapter Two) shows how the narrator links Sador’s ancestry back to the brother-in-law of Joseph of Arimathea, Bron, thus providing his first character with a firm Christian background (CI.2.1). Similarly, Chelinde has to be baptised in order to marry Sador (CI.7.4), and when Canor, the pagan king of Cornouailles, tries to make her renounce her Christian faith,

ce ne pooit estre, car ele estoit si parfaite en creance, et si tornee a la loi dou vrai crucefi, que ele vosist ausi tost recevoir la mort, come degerpir la loi crestiene (CI.19.7).

At this time, however, “de crestiens avoit encores po ou monde a celi tens.”<sup>564</sup> It is not until the arrival of Saint Augustin that Great Britain becomes firmly anchored in the Christian religion.

Before then, St Denis rids Cornouailles of its man-eating giants:

si pria adonc a Nostre Seignor qu’il ne sofrist des ores mes qu’il avenist en cele terre si grant delealté com de char humaine que manjast l’autre (CI.102.9).

This triumph of Christianity over such unnatural beings is mirrored by the victory of Apollo over the “riddle-proposing giant,” who has not only killed his mother and eaten her (CI.108.14) and committed fratricide (CI.110.25), but has also eaten his daughter after having raped her (CI.101.1). Because Apollo repents having married his own mother, and then adopts the Christian faith, his victory over the giant signifies, in

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<sup>563</sup> Baumgartner, Essai 199.

Baumgartner's words, "non seulement l'apparition de la civilisation mais le triomphe de la loi chrétienne. . . ." <sup>565</sup> It also proves the importance attributed to the victory of Christianity over otherworldly beings.

Saint Augustin needs to perform several miracles before people recognise the presence of a Christian God. When Augustin goes down on his knees, the man whom he prays for is resuscitated, and Apollo qualifies this action as one of the "merveilles que li Dieus as crestiens mostre en la Grant Bretagne." <sup>566</sup> When Augustin informs Apollo that Chelinde is his mother, the latter demands Augustin's death at the stake, but he is miraculously saved from the flames, while Chelinde is struck by "devine vengeance" in the form of lightning (CI.168.7). The narrator then describes the conversion of Leonois and Cornouailles by Saint Augustin <sup>567</sup> and of Ireland by Joseph of Arimathea (CI.180.6), but apologises for being unable to dwell on this episode as much as it deserves because his book is one of "deduit e de cortoisie" and is therefore not the place, so he has been told by "l'arcevesque de Contorbier" (CI.171.10), to describe "la senefiance des ancienes estoires qui a la devinite appartient . . ." (CI.171.4). This apology further reveals the narrator as someone with an interest in Christianity.

The Prologue also contains two religious prophecies, a type of prophecy that does not reappear in the prose *Tristan* until just before the Pentecost of the Grail, so their presence here is significant. <sup>568</sup> Joseph of Arimathea himself makes the first one in the opening lines of the *Tristan*, when he grants Helain le Gros the duty of guarding

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<sup>564</sup> CI.91.7. Apollo indeed marries Chelinde "selonc la costume de la gent paiene" (CI.158.16).

<sup>565</sup> Emmanuèle Baumgartner, "Géants et chevaliers," *The Spirit of the Court*, ed. Glyn S. Burgess and Robert A. Taylor (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1985) 12.

<sup>566</sup> CI.159.19. See also CI.175.4, where a "philosophes" miraculously resists poisoning (whereas a "serjant" dies), and attributes the miracle to God. This is an interesting parallel outside the Grail section to a very similar event within it where Galaad is miraculously saved from Marc's poison, whereas Fairan succumbs to the same "venin." See MIX.26. See also Mark 16:18 and Luke 10:19.

<sup>567</sup> CI.171.15; CI.180.1.

the Holy Grail until the coming of “cil a cui tu lesseras la garde . . .” (CI.2.20). Later on, Saint Augustin’s prescience astounds Apollo (CI.170.6), and leads to his subsequent conversion, demonstrating the power attributed to Saint Augustin and to the coming of Christianity.

The main story before the Grail section also contains what Colette-Anne Van Coolput calls a “substrat religieux,”<sup>569</sup> and though religion may not be an issue, it is part of the fabric of knightly life.

## 2. The importance of God in chivalric life

Frequent activities such as praying, hearing Mass, knighting ceremonies and judicial battles help to make religion part of the world of the prose Tristan. The Christian background of the knightly world is visible through such expressions as “Diex!,” “Si m’aît Dix,” “Diex aïe,” “pour Diu,” “se Diex vous saut,” “se Diex vous doinst boine aventure,” “en non Dieu,” “se Diex me consaut,” “Diex me gart,” “Pleüst a Dieu,” “Par Sainte Crois” or “Sainte Marie.”<sup>570</sup> On leave-taking, knights frequently commend each other to God.<sup>571</sup> Before his fight against Plenorius, Brun le Noir tells the demoiselle médisante that he will do his best to defeat his opponent, although “en l’aventure de Diu vait tout!” (MI.54.12) Moreover, apocryphal stories or quotations crop up in everyday conversation: the demoiselle médisante likens the court of King Arthur to the

meson Dieu ou ot jadis des bons angles et des mauvés. Li mauvés furent gité dou ciel et mis en essil pardurablement, et li bon remestrent en la meson de joie . . . (CIII.702.22).

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<sup>568</sup> Mordred does mention the coming of “li bons chevaliers” (CIII.678.40), but only to excuse himself from putting an end to the adventures of the Chastel Orgueilleux.

<sup>569</sup> E. g. Colette-Anne Van Coolput, Aventures querant et le sens du monde: Aspects de la réception productive des premiers romans du Graal cycliques dans le Tristan en prose (Louvain: Leuven UP, 1986) 89.

<sup>570</sup> MIII.189.21; MIII.232.15; MIII.269.15; MIII.168.5; MIII.62.19; MI.92.3; MI.122.19; MI.121.33; CII.513.34; MIV.19.47; MI.83.9. See also CI.415.13; CII.465.23; CIII.729.10; MI.30.12; MI.54.13; MII.20.42; MII.95.28; MIII.29.2; MIII.223.9; MIV.92.31; MV.116.50; MVI.61.16; MVII.238.16; MVIII.132.20; MIX.38.42.

<sup>571</sup> CIII.829.31; MI.26.28; MIII.89.33.

Similarly, Tristan quotes Ecclesiastes 3:8 to convince Palamede to agree to a reconciliation:

Cascune cose vait par tans et cascade cose a sa raison. Il est uns tans de guerre et uns autres est de pais (MIII.152.13).

If the linguistic habits of the characters reveal a Christian background, the custom of invoking God in conjunction with a more secular power, such as “aventure” or “fortune,” seems to suggest that God alone might be unable to bring something about. However, this may simply represent accurately the speech of a people who see “fortune” and “aventure” as the mere appearance of what God operates. Thus Palamede surmises, in an expression common in the *Tristan*, that “Se Diex et Fortune me voloit aidier,” he should be able to defeat Tristan.<sup>572</sup> Ségurade similarly puts his faith both in Tristan and in God to deliver the people from the Pays de Servage:

je ai paor et dotance que jamés ne soiens delivré. . . . Et non serons nos, sanz dotance, se Diex proprement ne nos en delivre par sa vertu. Et neporquant je cuit bien que se Tristanz poïst armes avoir que encor nos porroit il delivrer. . . .<sup>573</sup>

In Ségurade’s mind, God’s power should make it possible for Tristan to bear arms.

More overtly religious habits such as praying or hearing Mass also underline a Christian way of life, without making an issue of it. Knights make the sign of the cross when they are faced with something which astonishes them,<sup>574</sup> and they do not only give thanks to God, but also pray to him to have mercy on them, as when Brunor has been fatally wounded by Tristan: “Pere des cielz, aiez merci de m’ame.”<sup>575</sup> Tristan reproaches God when he is forced to leave Cornouailles: he “maudist Dieu, et tout le monde, ki tel fortune et tel mesqueance li avoit donnee en sa vie.”<sup>576</sup> When Tristan’s

<sup>572</sup> MVI.27.18. See also CII.508.33; CIII.781.26; MIII.218.18; MIII.257.8; MVI.5.12, etc.

<sup>573</sup> CII.597.35. A knight also tells his daughter that God and Brun le Noir delivered him from death (MVII.166.29).

<sup>574</sup> MIII.95.31; MIV.22.1.

<sup>575</sup> CII.463.41. See also CII.488.22.

<sup>576</sup> MII.10.60. See also MIII.29.9.

life is preserved despite his seemingly fatal jump into the sea, his companions “beneïssent nostre seignor quant il sauvement l’a delivré de ceste aventure.”<sup>577</sup>

Similarly, Tristan thanks “Nostre Seignor” for having granted him victory over Le Morholt (CI.305.5).<sup>578</sup>

Knights are sometimes said to hear Mass before they set off on their day’s adventures:

A l’endemain auques matin, . . . après ce que mesire Tristrans ot la messe oïe, il fait ses compaignons armer et lui autresi.<sup>579</sup>

This fact is mentioned in passing, which supports Van Coolput’s observation that in the pre-Grail section, “la religion est essentiellement un fait de civilisation, non un sentiment vécu.”<sup>580</sup>

The Tristan characters also frequent churches to pray for specific events, as do the people of Cornouailles, who

furent tote nuit en prieres et en oraison que Diex lor sauvast Tristan, et qu’il li donast force et pooir qu’il ostast le reaume de Cornoaille de servaige (CI.298.2).

Religious buildings can house a celebration: Marc thus uses an “abeïe” to celebrate his coronation (MI.87.3). Knighting ceremonies are often associated with an “eglise,” where the future knight keeps a ritual vigil prior to the actual dubbing ceremony.<sup>581</sup>

The judicial duel also highlights the belief in the more active power of God and the sheer presence of these duels (there are four in the pre-Grail section), regardless of their outcome, shows the deeply-rooted belief in an immanent justice.<sup>582</sup>

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<sup>577</sup> CII.548.30. See also CI.30.1-3; CII.548.15; CII.592.13; CII.547.38.

<sup>578</sup> See also CI.298.26.

<sup>579</sup> MV.153.2. See also CI.391.1; CII.618.5; MIII.2.3-5; MIV.178.11; MVI.56.41; MVI.63.4.

<sup>580</sup> Coolput 115.

<sup>581</sup> CI.292.25; CII.642.34; MIV.141.27. For more details on knighting ceremonies see Chapter Three.

<sup>582</sup> CI.53.5; CI.409.20; MIV.88.28; MV.122.1. See also the section on the most important customs above.

The presence of hermits and nuns is symptomatic of the underlying religious culture of the Tristan world, despite the fact that the main function of these characters in the section before the Pentecost of the Grail is purely utilitarian. Le Goff comments that in reality, hermits represented the “modèle,” the “véritable réalisateur aux yeux de la masse laïque de l’idéal solitaire, manifestation la plus élevée de l’idéal chrétien.”<sup>583</sup> Before the Grail, though they testify to a religious undercurrent and are highly respected, the narrator pays more attention to the hospitality they provide than to their Christianity. Brangain finds refuge in an “abaïe de nonains” and Tristan and Kahedin are fed by an “hermite qui lor dona pain et eve. . . .”<sup>584</sup> Similarly, in his madness, Tristan is fed by a “preudom,” who is incidentally seen

dehors son hermitage et aloit disant ses orisons devant sa maisonnete.<sup>585</sup>

The narrator even explains that one hermit was previously a knight, but decided to leave “le siecle,”<sup>586</sup> underlining the strong link between knight-errantry and religion, which is also manifest in the way hermitages are always open to questing knights. Thus typically, two knights arrive at an abbey “ki estoit faite proprement pour les chevaliers errans recevoir que aventure aportoit en cele maison.”<sup>587</sup> This link is sometimes even one of patronage:

li frere de laiens estoient bien acoustumé de herbergier cevaliers errans et mout les houneroient de tout lour pooir, pour ce que grans biens et grans aumosnes venoient souvent en la maison par les chevaliers (MI.147.40).

The narrator includes characters who do not all belong to the dominant aristocratic class, thus providing a good account of those encountered by knights on their travels. In the pre-Grail section, the main function of these religious people is to provide

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<sup>583</sup> Le Goff, Civilisation 237.

<sup>584</sup> CII.491.2; CIII.782.4.

<sup>585</sup> MI.171.9. See also MVI.7.37.

<sup>586</sup> MII.166.10. See also MI.86.9. See Malory, Works 1077-78.

<sup>587</sup> MI.86.3. See also CII.491.2; MVI.7.25; MII.116.10; MII.188.30.

material requirements for knights-errant. It is only inside the Grail section that we find them beginning to fulfil a spiritual role, as will become apparent.<sup>588</sup>

Given this context, Palamede's lack of Christian faith deserves further examination. The reader knows this in no way undermines his chivalric reputation, but when the narrator introduces Palamede, he often comments that he is a pagan, a "Sarradins."<sup>589</sup> Similarly, the narrator explains that Palamede has chosen not to embrace Christianity, unlike his brothers, who for this reason have forsaken his company (MVI.9.13). The fact that he is a good knight compensates for his lack of Christian faith:

Tristrans ne Lanselos ne l'avoient onques laissié pour la haute cevalerie  
qu'il savoient en lui, ains se tenoient a bien paiié quant il le pooient aucune  
fois avoir (MVI.9.18).

This does not prevent Tristan from deploring Palamede's paganism, all the more so because he is a good knight:

Com il est hardis et seürs et com il est emprendans en tous besoins! Com je  
tiens a grant damage k'il n'est de la nostre loi! (MV.163.5)

Although a Saracen, Palamede sometimes invokes God or divine providence. After killing the lord of a castle, he tells his brother Sephar "Se Diex a ordené que je muire de cest fais, ici morrai, et s'il veult, j'en escaperai" (MVI.17.18). While this could be a mere figure of speech, when he laments Tristan's victory at the "Pucelles" tournament, he demonstrates a surprising belief in God:

Vrais Diex, . . . esperitables conseillieres de tous les desconseilliés, ki des  
le conmenchement du monde donnas a houe sens et discrecion de  
connoistre le bien du mal, et deviser l'une cose de l'autre par veüe d'ex et  
maintes fois par les ex du cuer, Sire, ki n'oublies chiaus ki t'apelent, pour  
coi vais tu oubliant moi, ki t'apele de nuit et de jour?<sup>590</sup>

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<sup>588</sup> For more on hermits in Arthurian romance, see A. J. Kennedy, "The Hermit's Role in French Arthurian Romance (c.1170-1530)," *Romania* 95 (1974): 54-83.

<sup>589</sup> CI.284.18; CI.327.17; MII.21.35; MIII.53.18; MV.84.4; MVI.13.61.

<sup>590</sup> MII.163.4. See also MVII.31.45.



This might be based on the idea that pagans have a real knowledge of God, as expounded for instance by Saint Paul,<sup>591</sup> but it makes Palamede's final conversion to Christianity, as a result of these not infrequent appeals to God, less of a surprise.

There is a definite religious culture in the world of the prose Tristan, and knightly life is punctuated by remarks and actions that link it to Christianity. Nevertheless, God's power is very rarely manifest, and some events suggest that the world of the prose Tristan is governed by forces that are not directly or obviously influenced by the Christian God.

#### B. Secular influences

When Brunor, the "seigneur des Lointaines Iles," is about to die at the hands of Tristan, he recites a Christian prayer for his soul (CII.463.40). Another death, that of Kahedin, and the near death of Tristan, however, paint a different picture of the Christian outlook of dying knights. In medieval romances it would have been normal, in one's dying moments, to repent and confess. Not to be reconciled with God before dying would have been seen as a direct path to Hell. Kahedin's death, however, could hardly be more secular. He does not mention God, Paradise or Hell, apart from the brief comment on the Last Judgement in his lai (MI.163.29). His last thoughts are for Iseut (MI.164.4). Moreover, his death strongly resembles suicide, an act considered impious by the Church, for it signifies a final and irrevocable rejection of the divine mercy of God. It was considered such a sin that people who had committed suicide were not granted a Christian burial; Kahedin's essentially pagan death is therefore very surprising.<sup>592</sup>

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<sup>591</sup> Romans 2.14.

<sup>592</sup> As we will see in the section on the secularisation of the Grail section, Esclabor le Méconnu, Palamede's father, knowingly commits suicide (MIX.134.47).

This prefigures Tristan's equally godless death as well as his two near deaths prior to that, one outside the Grail section, which will be examined now, and one after he has joined the Holy Quest.<sup>593</sup> On the first occasion, when Tristan learns he can no longer visit his lady because she is in prison, he falls seriously ill. King Marc visits him, and sheds tears when realises his nephew will die (CII.539.4). Tristan speaks of a kind of life after death associated with the Round Table, which is where he wants his body taken to (CII.539.30):

puis que je n'i puis aler a la vie, je i vel aler après ma mort. Li  
compaignon de la Table Reonde qui tant ont oï parler de moi, quant il  
verront presentement mon cors, il ne puet estre qu'il ne li facent honor, et  
qu'il nel metent en aucun siege honorable (CII.539.32).

His thoughts also turn towards his glorious past, as when he says to himself:

Onques un sol jor n'eüs bien fors celi jor solement que tu oceïs le Morholt  
d'Irlande (CII.539.41).

At no point does he show any sign of repentance, nor is there a single religious reference. This scene is strikingly similar, as we shall see, to both his other near-death experience and to his real death, showing that his values do not change throughout the text. When Tristan has been wounded with a poisoned arrow, and returns to find that Marc has taken Iseut away, he admits:

s'il ne me devoit estre torné a mauvestié, je meesmes m'ocirroie de  
m'espee . . . (CII.557.15).

Here again, he is less concerned by God than by his reputation, demonstrating how, even in a text that has a religious background, the hero need not place God at the centre of his concerns.

We examined the secular implications of the judicial duel which Marc wins above,<sup>594</sup> but this victory of evil over good also has a religious meaning. Judicial battles were designed to allow God to prove the innocent right and the guilty wrong,

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<sup>593</sup> CII.539.30 and MVII.96.29.

but in the case of Marc against Armans, which incidentally takes place in the very middle of the text (MIV.88), God's justice seems to have been absent. An innocent victim is killed, Marc at first gets away scot-free, and the two sisters who originally accused Marc of treason, are "jugies a ardoir" (MIV.89.20). Together with Tristan's revelation of certain facts, it is Marc's arrogance in refusing to reveal his identity which encourages Lancelot and Arthur finally to force Marc to admit to his crime. Arthur's astonishment is manifest: "je ne peüsse croire en nule maniere du monde ne quidier que li drois ne vainquist tousjours" (MIV.90.48). The damsels are saved from the stake at the last minute, but the fact remains that Bertolay and Armans have been killed unjustly, and no burial "en la maistre eglise de Londres" will bring Armans back (MIV.90.56). Although Arthur blames this discrepancy on the fact that there was no "sairement" before the battle (MIV.88.37), it is hard for the reader to ignore God's apparent silence. This is not the only place in the prose Tristan where the judicial single combat does not work out according to the rules of the judgement of God, revealing that the episode concerning Marc might be symptomatic of a certain unease with the whole process. In the case of Lancelot against Brun le Noir, it is also not the victory of one knight over the other that determines the outcome, but the fact that a witness arrives and reveals a third party as the culprit (MVII.194.34).

### C. Supernatural and preternatural

The term supernatural refers to happenings which are not only out of the ordinary but clearly brought about by God. Where there is nothing to suggest divine intervention, the reader is left with the impression that the forces operating are preternatural. Just as we examined the impact of religious prophecies in the Prologue, so we must now turn to the prophetic theme in the rest of the text, where the prophecies are unevenly

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<sup>594</sup> See Chapter Three.

distributed: most of them are situated in the sections concerning Tristan's youth. Interestingly, most of the prophecies are made by marginal characters with mythical rather than overtly religious attributes. The epitaph which Morgain has inscribed on Huneson's tomb,<sup>595</sup> prophesying the death of Tristan by the very sword with which he kills Huneson may not be truly prophetic, but more of a threat which Morgain attempts to carry out herself without the aid of any type of magic, preternatural, or direct influence of God. That would reduce the traditional "fée" to a passionate woman who simply tries her utmost to avenge her lover, through the agency of King Marc. As soon as she has decided on her plan, she dispatches her damsel to ask Tristan for his "glaiue," which he gladly yields, dismissing the threat as "fable" and "menchoigne" (MIII.186.11).

Although she foretells an event which actually only turns out to be a threat which she carries out, Morgain is a marginal character, just like Merlin, who predicts that Eliabel will never see her husband again, prophesies Tristan's future glory, and is qualified as a "saiges" and a "prophete" with no explicit reference to religious powers.<sup>596</sup> Unlike Saint Augustin, he is not seen as a "prodome" (CI.165.11). More significantly, a "devinerresse" prophesies that the heirs of the count Norholt will be killed by Meliadus or one of his lineage; a "nens" predicts Tristan's future glory; a "fol" foretells both the slaying of Le Morholt by Tristan and the death of a damsel; and the Lady of the Lake, "qui a merveilles savoit d'enchantemenz" sends Guenièvre a shield whose two halves will unite when the two lovers it represents have lain together "charnelement."<sup>597</sup> There is nothing in the text to suggest that these characters are

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<sup>595</sup> "Tristran, ki ocheis Huneson ki chi desous gist, saches bien tout chertainnement que sa mors ne fu pas si cruele com la toie mort sera, car tu morras de double mort a grant angousse et a grant martire, et mout aras desiré la mort avant que tu l'aies. Et . . . tu morras de chele meïsmes lanche dont tu l'ochesis, vraiment le saches tu" (MIII.182.20).

<sup>596</sup> CI.226.9 and CI.238.10. See CI.227.6; CI.236.16 and CI.238.4 for Merlin's prophecies.

<sup>597</sup> CI.257.23; CI.260; CI.268.2; CI.269.5; CI.411-412.

God's agents. When Lancelot discovers the prophecy whereby only "le sanc de cele demoisele" who must be "virge tot son aage" will heal the Lady of the castle (CII.575.25), he sees no religious meaning to the "aventure," and remarks:

il ne puet estre . . . qu'en ceste chose n'oit grant senefiance, et que de ceste aventure n'aviegne une grant merveille (CII.575.27).

Although Lancelot recognises the unusual nature of this "aventure," he does not imply that it is the doing of God. Even the prophetic inscription on the Fontaine Brahaigne about the "troi bon chevalier, . . . Galaaz, Lanceloz, Tristanz" refers not to their religious but to their knightly qualities, as Merlin explains:

Ce seront . . . li troi meillor chevalier dou monde, et seront de si tres haute bonté d'armes que toz li monz parlera d'eus . . . (CI.236.14).

Mordret does mention the coming of the "bon chevalier," but only in connection with the customs of the Chastel Orgueilleux, thus omitting the religious dimension of Galaad's arrival.

The text tends to favour prophecies of a preternatural origin: generally speaking, neither the character who utters the prophecy, nor its meaning, is explicitly religious, even in some cases in the Grail section. When Baudemagu reminds Arthur of the prophecy of the Roi Mehaingnié concerning the downfall of the Arthurian world, Arthur's reaction suggests he does not recognise the working of God behind these forebodings:

nous ne devons pas croire les paroles du Roi Mehaingnié, ensi comme nous devons croire les paroles de Merlin, car li uns fu adés trouvés voir disant en toutes paroles et li autres ne sot qu'il dist (MVI.91.12).

This mirrors the attitude of the Tristan authors towards magic in general, which is greatly reduced in our text compared to other medieval romances. There are magical objects (the marvellous shield, the love potion, the horn and the ring<sup>598</sup>) in the pre-Grail section, but nothing suggests that the characters see in them the workings of God.

The shield, the love potion and the “cor d’ivoire” are qualified as “merveilleus,”<sup>598</sup> and the “anelet” has “enchanté” Arthur (CIII.823.18). There is no suggestion in all this of an active God, although we know from the Prologue that he is none the less present.

In sum, the world of the prose Tristan implies that the teachings of Christianity are true, but despite that religion is rarely the driving force in a knight’s daily life. The presence of churches and religious buildings, as well as representatives of the Christian religion, blend into the background of the Tristan world, as do the religious customs adopted by knights. Outside the Prologue, prophecies are made by otherworldly characters, and objects from the domain of the merveilleux appear in the story, but neither character nor object is normally seen as religious, either by the narrator, or by the Tristan characters. This is the background from which the eminently religious story of the Grail emerges.

## II. The place of religion in the Grail section

Love and chivalry are still very much at the heart of the Tristan world when Palamede flees into the forest, having been unable to triumph over Tristan at Louveserp.

Suddenly, the Pentecost of the Grail is announced, which precedes the Quest, an event which will play a decisive role in Tristan’s future:

par cele queste perdi il madame Yseut et li rois March le recouvra  
(MVI.28.82).

Religion begins to play a decidedly more important part in the lives of the knights-errant, until and especially after the Pentecost of the Grail, which is represented as a religious experience.

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<sup>598</sup> CI.412.6; CII.484.12; CII.526.6; CIII.829.15.

<sup>599</sup> CI.412.6; CI.443.9; CII.526.20.

### A. The Pentecost of the Grail

The events leading up to and belonging to the Pentecost of the Grail are overtly religious, and therefore inconsistent with the view of the Tristan given previously. The announcement of the Pentecost by an “hermites de sainte loy” (MVI.29.8), marks the transition from the Tristan material to the usages of the prose Lancelot. Later, from the Pentecost onwards, the Queste is woven into the Tristan mixing values both hitherto unmentioned and already upheld. This dichotomy is visible at first in the Pentecost of the Grail itself, which, according to Baumgartner, is “le lieu de toutes les dissonances et de toutes les rencontres.”<sup>600</sup>

#### 1. An eminently religious experience

The adventure of the “Siege Perilleus” and the apparition of the Holy Vessel are two occurrences that the characters see as supernatural, because they visibly attribute them to God. In a passage taken from the prose Lancelot, the narrator describes the “Siege Perilleus” as being where “cevaliers ne s'estoit onques assis qui de celui siege se levast onques se mors non u mehaingniés” (MVI.29.24). So when Galaad arrives and finds the words “Çou est li sieges Galaad,” he takes his seat:

Quant cil de laiens virent le cevalier seoir u siege que tant preudome avoient redoté et u tant de grans aventures estoient avenues, si n'i a celui qui n'en ait grant merveille, car il voient celui un jovene home, si ne sevent dont tele grasse li puisse estre venue, se seulement non de la volenté Nostre Seigneur” (MVI.101.55).

Although this passage is taken verbatim from the Queste, it has been made part of the prose Tristan.<sup>601</sup> The characters attribute these events to God, as the words “grasse” and “volenté Nostre Seigneur” testify, which marks a difference of attitude, for in the pre-Grail section, characters do not usually connect such occurrences with a

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<sup>600</sup> Emmanuèle Baumgartner, “La préparation à la Queste del Saint Graal dans le Tristan en prose,” Conjunctures: Medieval Studies in Honour of Douglas Kelly, ed. Keith Busby and Norris J. Lacy (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994) 10.

supernatural force. Although they use the same word “merveille,” they realise this event can only be the working of God. Tristan sees the “Siège Périlleux” adventure as:

grant merveille et dist que ce ne fu mie volenté de cevalerie, ains fu la volenté de Nostre Signeur (MVI.106.19).

This passage is original to the Tristan, as Tristan the character does not appear in the Queste. The hero significantly mentions “cevalerie” and “Nostre Signeur” as forces that are distinct from each other. Although Tristan had wanted to make an impression at the Pentecost celebrations, driven by love and chivalry, he now appears to recognise the workings of God in Galaad’s ability to sit on the perilous seat.<sup>602</sup> As we will see, however, this does not signify a real change in Tristan’s attitude.

The apparition of the Holy Grail is an event which all present recognise as supernatural, and the spelling variations apart, the text is identical to that of the eminently religious Queste.<sup>603</sup> First of all, the assembly sit down to eat, and at that same moment they hear a crack of thunder. Then a ray of sun shines down, so powerful that it illuminates the whole of the hall, and the assembly are suddenly struck dumb. The Grail then makes its entrance, covered in a silk cloth, gliding through the air. It places food before each guest, and leaves once everybody has been served. When the people regain their speech, they immediately “rendent grasces a Nostre Signeur . . . pour ce que si grant hounour lour avoit faite, qui les avoit raemplis de la grasce du Saint Vaissel” (MVI.107.52).

After Gauvain has vowed to enter the Holy Quest, a “preudom viex, vestus de robe de religion” appears (MVI.109.42), emphasising the religious aspect of the Quest by explaining that no woman should accompany the questers, that they must all be “confés,” and that “nus en si haut service ne doit entrer devant qu’il soit netoiiés et

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<sup>601</sup> Queste 8.32.

<sup>602</sup> “Je voeul venir entr’aus si soudainement qu’il en soient merveillant tout et esbahi. Je voeul venir a cele feste comme cevaliers aventureus” (MVI.86.73).



espurgiés de toutes vilonnies et de tous morteus peciés” (MVI.109.50). This “preudom” sent by Nascien the Hermit underlines the fundamental need for chastity of the questing knights. He also highlights the fact that this Quest, unlike many undertaken by knights in the past, “n’est mie des terriennes oeuvres . . .” (MVI.109.52). Finally, he warns that only one knight “entre les autres cevaliers terriens” will be allowed to see the “aventures du Saint Graal” (MVI.109.56), thus reminding the knights of the religious aim of the Quest and that they are now playing a game with different rules.

## 2. The demystification of the Pentecost of the Grail

Despite the apparent change of values put forward during the Pentecost, this event is demystified and brought down from the ethereal sphere it occupies in the Queste to the earthly sphere of courtly life. The warnings of the “preudome” that the rules of questing chivalry have changed radically are in stark contrast to the secular attitude adopted during the Pentecost celebrations, which betray the mundane preoccupations both of the narrator and of the characters. The event, qualified as “feste et passefeste” (MVI.89.20) and “rice assamblee” (MVI.90.22), brings together the best of Arthurian society represented by male prowess and feminine beauty:

assés i peüssiés veoir houneur et pris et cevalerie et hautece et gloire de tous, car bien saciés que a cele feste furent .XII. roi, qui tout i porterent couronne et qui tout tenoient tere du roi Artu. . . . Illuec peüst on bien veoir la biauté des dames et le buebant. A cele feste vint sans faille tous li orgex et toute la flour de cevalerie terrienne.<sup>604</sup>

Guenièvre is celebrated by the narrator as

la plus vaillant dame du monde et la plus sage et la plus courtoise. Tant a en soi pris et valor que bien devroit estre dame de toutes les dames qui sont ens u monde (MVI.91.65).

Arthur’s attributes as a great king are emphasised:

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<sup>603</sup> Queste 15.4.

Li rois s'en ist hors de sa cambre, sa couroune d'or en son chief, vestus des dras roiaus u il avoit esté sacrés. Il fait devant lui porter s'espee et son septre et li autre roi vont après lui, cascuns sa couroune d'or en sa teste, et vont doi et doi, li uns d'encoste l'autre (MVI.94.4).

The earthly splendour of this description reflects the values of the Arthurian world, which, although presented during the Pentecost of the Grail, do not differ from those upheld before the Grail section.

These values are reinforced by the much-regretted absence of Tristan.

Baudemagu points out:

se mesire Tristrans fust ore chaiens, toute cevalerie i fust, et se la roïne de Cornuaille i fust, toute biauté i fust (MVI.91.34).

Beauty and prowess are the central preoccupations of the assembly. The nostalgia for the great Louveserp tournament, symbol of the culmination of secular chivalry, reinforces the worldly atmosphere of the “feste” (MVI.91.24). Baudemagu also remarks, despite Galaad’s arrival, that the Round Table is incomplete without Tristan (MVI.102.15), nor does it have “toute sa raison” (MVI.102.16). Nowhere is Tristan’s membership of the Round Table more stressed than here, and even after the arrival of Galaad, things are not as they should be without Tristan. This diverts the overt religious implications of the celebrations towards more mundane and chivalric preoccupations. It epitomises the double movement between the secular values hitherto upheld by the Arthurian world and the new religious values that are introduced when the Pentecost is announced. We know that the original *Queste* might not always have been read alone, but in this case the clear transformation of the tone emphasises the dichotomy between both sets of values. Moreover, the episode of the bleeding sword, which does not figure in the *Queste*, and which prompts Arthur to urge Gauvain not to go on the Quest (MVI.114.39), is finally dismissed by the king’s knights as an

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<sup>604</sup> MVI.90.3. See also MVI.89.5; MVI.89.17; MVI.90.33; MVI.94.3.

“encantemens” (MVI.114.46). While this passage may have been inserted to blacken Gauvain further, it shows that despite the deeply religious implications of this Quest, magical occurrences can still be dismissed as preternatural rather than supernatural.

## B. Religious chivalry

Despite its secularisation, the Pentecost of the Grail is preceded by a series of religious adventures and is immediately followed by Galaad’s mystical experiences, underlining the strong religious aspect of the Grail section.

### 1. The religious adventures leading up to the Pentecost of the Grail

The reader has been prepared for the transition from seemingly secular values to spiritual preoccupations by a number of religious episodes carried over from the prose Lancelot, most of which are closely linked to the Grail.

The announcement by an “ermite de sainte loy” (MVI.29.8) of the coming of the Grail at Pentecost at Arthur’s court comes at the peak of Tristan’s reputation (“Tout parloient de monsieur Tristran et se vont taisant de tous autres”<sup>605</sup>) and of his quasi-marital love-life at Joyeuse Garde. Following this announcement, Lancelot’s adventures at Corbenic include a vision of “un encensier d’or” (MVI.32.4), where the palace is filled with all the “boines odours du monde” and where the tables are laid with the best of foods (MVI.32.5, 27). Despite being overwhelmed by this experience,<sup>606</sup> Lancelot is nevertheless overjoyed at the thought of spending a night in the company of Guenièvre (MVI.33.21).

The narrator considers Galaad’s conception to be “em pecié et en avoutire et contre Sainte Eglise” (MVI.35.16), whereas he has not dismissed other such

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<sup>605</sup> MVI.28.31.

<sup>606</sup> See MVI.32.23; 33.7.

relationships in this way before.<sup>607</sup> As was established in Chapter Two, the narrator attributes Galaad's conception, through Brisanne's powers, to the workings of God, who gives Lancelot and Helayne "tel fruit a engenner et a concevoir que, par la flour de virginité qui illuec fu corrompue et violee, fu illuec conceüe une autre flour . . ." (MVI.35.22). Whatever the outcome, this episode is set in an overtly religious context, and although it cannot be asserted that the authors endorse this attitude originally belonging to the prose Lancelot,<sup>608</sup> it appears in the Tristan story and it must therefore be taken as part of the text.

This religious preoccupation is further visible in Bohort's visit to Corbenic, his adventures in the Palais Aventureux and his partial vision of the Holy Grail (MVI.37), Perceval's dubbing and the episode of the damsel who never lies (MVI.59), the adventures of Perceval and Hector and their recovery through the Grail (MVI.64), and finally Lancelot's recovery from madness at Corbenic (MVI.70). These are all events which set the religious tone and thus prepare both the characters and the reader for the spiritual challenge of the Pentecost of the Grail. From a narratological point of view, they also usefully fill in the time between Galaad's conception and the Pentecost celebrations.

## 2. Galaad

The character of Galaad, who will "aciever les aventures du Saint Graal," is central to this new religious conception of chivalry, and his adventures immediately following the Pentecost reaffirm this tendency (MVI.101.22). Just as in the Vulgate Queste, he is told of his redemptive mission:<sup>609</sup>

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<sup>607</sup> Ménard defines "avoutire" as "union illicite" (MVI.Glossary), but Greimas defines it as an "acte d'adultère" or "état d'adultère," although neither party is married (Dictionnaire de l'Ancien Français, 1999 ed.).

<sup>608</sup> Lancelot, ed. Micha 4: 210.

<sup>609</sup> Queste 38.13-14, 20-21.

Cele sanblance que li Peres envoiia en tere, ce fu li fix pour delivrer le pule et nostre loi renouveler. Car . . . tout autresi vous a Nostres Sires esleüs sour tous autres cevaliers pour envoier par les estranges teres pour abatre les greveuses aventures et pour faire connoistre comment eles sont avenues; pour coi on doit vostre venue comparer a la venue Jhesu Crist de samblance, non mie de hautesce (MVI.122.30).

Furthermore, Galaad behaves piously, sleeping without a mattress,<sup>610</sup> and wearing a hair-shirt (MVIII.176.26). He also prays and hears Mass more often than other knights.<sup>611</sup>

Although, as we will see, many of Galaad's adventures are secular, he is shown to have powers which at least provoke divine intervention. When he touches a boiling fountain whose water miraculously becomes cold so that he can drink from it (MVIII.129.7), he recognises the working of the Lord, for he falls to his knees and thanks God with "orisons et ses proieres si conme boins cevaliers doit faire."<sup>612</sup> On another occasion, Galaad's sheer presence is enough to make an "encanteour," who sees Galaad as a "sains hom" (MVIII.157.10), lose all his magical powers. Moreover, Galaad thanks God<sup>613</sup> for allowing his presence on one occasion, and his hair-shirt on another, to heal two women from possession by the devil and leprosy respectively.<sup>614</sup> Later, although he cannot read the words inscribed on the "nef,"

cil Sires qui maint biau miracle et mainte bele vertu avoit faite pour lui, li moustra adont si grant amour qu'il li fist connoistre qu'eles disoient . . . (MVIII.181.24).

God works another "bel miracle" on Galaad's behalf by saving him from certain death (that in fact suffered by Fairan) at the hands of Marc (MIX.25.40). And finally, when divine lightning strikes the Chastel Felon where Galaad is spending a night, he and his

<sup>610</sup> MVIII.166.24; MVIII.169.27.

<sup>611</sup> See for instance MVI.127.6; MVI.158.9; MVI.160.10; MVIII.139.21, etc. See also when Galaad is warned by a divine "vois" that Marc has attempted to poison him and has succeeded in killing Fairan (MIX.25.46).

<sup>612</sup> MVIII.130.1. See more specifically MVIII.129.12-28.

<sup>613</sup> MVIII.176.47. See also MVIII.169.17.

<sup>614</sup> MVIII.169.4; MVIII.176.26.

companions miraculously survive, and they “s’ajenoullent et en rendent graces a Nostre Seigneur” (MIX.41.37). These examples, including the actual vision of the Holy Grail (MIX.137.9) serve to show how the world of the prose Tristan now includes open references to God performing miracles through the person of Galaad. This is something which the text, from the announcement of the Pentecost of the Grail, had been building up to, and which apparently changes the nature of the chivalric world.

### 3. Other knights

Other knights in the Tristan also come into contact with this new set of values: some are allowed a partial vision of the mysteries of the Holy Grail, some are reproached for their sinful behaviour, and some undergo conversion. Perceval is tempted by a satanic damsel but saves himself by crossing himself (MVIII.63-66), and is allowed to join Bohort and Galaad (MVIII.66.16). Bohort’s mystical experience reveals itself in the shape of two visions (MVIII.104-107): he resists the temptation of a young woman, and just as with Perceval, it is the sign of the cross which saves him (MVIII.113-117). Later, divine intervention reconciles him with his brother Lyonnell, whom he thought he had allowed to die in favour of a damsel in distress (MVIII.126.15), and he is finally exhorted by a “vois” to join Perceval and Galaad on the seashore (MVIII.126.22). He thanks God for calling him:

Peres des Ciex! Beneois et graciés soiiés vous, quant vous me deingniés apeler a vostre service! (MVIII.126.26)

Bohort and Perceval are thus aware of this celestial calling which may stand in stark contrast with Tristan’s secular adventures, but which provides, as we will see, a parallel way of life for knights.

Other knights have their inadequacies revealed by supernatural intervention. When Baudemagu sets out on the Quest, he chances upon an “escu” which he decides to carry despite Yvain’s warning that it should be carried only by the best knight in the

world. Baudemagu is punished for his arrogance (MVI.117.20), and is taken to an abbey to recover from his “plaies . . . grans et merveilleuses” (MVI.118.6) which prevent him from continuing on the Quest, although he has at least recognised his sin. Meliem is similarly chastised for wrongfully taking a gold crown (MVI.124.6). He is violently assaulted by a knight and left for dead, but is full of humility when Galaad finally finds him, demonstrating his understanding of the celestial values:

ne me laissies mie morir en ceste forest, mais portés m’ent en une abeie u  
je aie mes droitures et muire illuec conme boins cevaliers et conme boins  
crestiens (MVI.124.35).

Hector goes much further in the Quest, but is finally denied entrance to the Palais Aventureux. King Pelles explains that “c’est une demoustrance que Nostres Sires fait chaiens souvent as cevaliers qui . . . en la Queste del Saint Graal se sont mis sans aler a confession . . .” (MIX.112.9). Gauvain and Gaheriet suffer similar rebuffs, although Gauvain has already been warned twice, once by the episode of the bleeding sword (MVI.114.30) and once by the “amonnestemens” of a “preudome” that he is unworthy of taking part in this Quest (MVI.132.27). All these knights, therefore, have been informed of divine disapproval: some of them have understood but have been unable to carry on; Gauvain does not appear to understand, nor is he allowed to go further than the entrance to the Palais Aventureux.

Finally Lancelot and Palamede undergo conversion to more celestial values, and are granted at least a partial understanding of the Holy Grail. Both show how important religious ethics have become to chivalry, but in very different ways and with differing implications.

Palamede “li Sarradins” undergoes conversion not only, as does Lancelot, from secular to celestial values, but also from paganism to Christianity. This actually makes him the most honest of knights, Galaad apart, in the prose Tristan: he starts off purely

at the service of the secular world, and ends up being an entirely Christian knight, whose values do not waver until he dies a Christian death.

In most of the text, despite his Saracen origins, Palamede is an excellent knight, and his reputation sometimes rivals Tristan's. It does, however, prompt a few comments both from the narrator and from other characters.<sup>615</sup> Moreover, Palamede would even be ready to embrace Christianity if it could secure him the earthly love of Iseut (MVII.93.30). It is not until he encounters Galaad that his lack of faith becomes a real issue:

S'il fust crestiens, la siue cevalerie feïst mout a loer. Mais ce me  
desconforte et le me fait cueillir ausi conme en haine qu'il est sarrazins.<sup>616</sup>

In practical terms, this means that Galaad forbids Palamede to help defend Arthur against King Marc's invasion of Logres: "Vous n'estes mie de nostre compaignie, puis que vous n'estes crestiens!" (MIX.16.10) Despite refusing baptism once after this humiliating episode (MIX.21.41), Palamede finally does embrace Christianity, although there is no explanation as to this change of heart apart from the powers of persuasion of "li rois et la roïne et tout li baron de la court . . ." (MIX.118.4). Once he has been baptised and has joined the Round Table, he can finally ask leave to go on the Quest for the Holy Grail (MIX.118.31). He has no difficulty in finding Corbenic, but sadly for him, Galaad is soon on the premises to carry out his mission with his acolytes Perceval and later Bohort (MIX.119-126). When the reader meets Palamede again, it does not seem as if he even entered Corbenic (MIX.127.1). He is soon to fall victim to the over-zealous Lancelot, who wants to

connoistre se vous estes si boins cevaliers a l'espee con vous estes au  
glaive (MIX.129.4).

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<sup>615</sup> CI.327.17; MV.84.4; MVI.9.11; MIX.117.61.

<sup>616</sup> MVIII.137.12. See also MVIII.154.39.



Lancelot wounds Palamede seriously but not fatally, and Agrevain's and Gauvain's blows on top of the fresh wounds finally kill Palamede (MIX.131.5). When Hector and Lancelot find Palamede dying, Hector exclaims in true chivalric terms:

tant a empirie la Table Reonde et la boine cevalerie du roiaume de Logres,  
qui cest preudomme a mis a mort! (MIX.132.16)

In contrast, Palamede's thoughts are entirely Christian (MIX.132.53). More importantly, he shows in his last words that he has fully understood the new direction in which chivalry should go. Addressing "Mors," he exclaims:

Se tu demourasses et atendisses aucun poi, encor quidaisse je estre  
preudom a Dieu et au monde! (MIX.132.59)

The once frustrated lover, looking to gain Iseut and worldly renown, is now a Grail seeker. Ironically, he sees nothing of the physical Holy Grail, but he has genuinely understood the journey from secular to celestial chivalry, whereas Lancelot apparently has not.

In the Queste, Lancelot undergoes conversion through various mystical experiences, explanations by hermits and confessions, until he finally returns to "la cort le roi Artus" after having visited the tomb of Baudemagu, killed by Gauvain.<sup>617</sup> In the prose Tristan, Lancelot follows a very similar route for the greater part of the Grail section. The divine use of Lancelot to beget Galaad is an indirect cause of his banishment by Queen Guenièvre,<sup>618</sup> of his madness, and therefore of his recovery at Corbenic through the powers of the Holy Grail (MVI.72). When he hears that he has been visited and healed by the Grail,

Lanselos commence a penser mout em parfont et cline le cief envers tere de  
ceste aventure, que il ne set que il doie faire (MVI.72.51).

The conversion process seems to have begun.

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<sup>617</sup> Queste 262.14.

Despite this, Lancelot's attitude apparently remains worldly even during the Quest, as is exemplified by the joust against Celices to defend Guenièvre's honour (MVII.226). This wider context of unchanged values makes his seclusion as the "cevaliers meffais" (MVI.77.46), presumably because of the Queen's command not to return to Logres, an act pertaining to the secular chivalric ethic (MVI.73.1).

Lancelot is later confronted with mystical experiences: in a state of semi-consciousness, he witnesses the Grail healing a knight (MVIII.16), and a squire takes his horse and arms (MVIII.17.17). He hears "une vois" that reproaches him ("Lancelot, plus dur que pierre . . ." <sup>619</sup>) and ends up in a hermitage where the hermit explains these events to him. It needs all this for Lancelot to confess and repent sincerely:

je sui honnis d'une moie dame que j'ai amee lonc tans a. C'est la roïne  
Genievre, feme le roi Artu. . . . Si sai bien que pour le pecié de li s'est  
Nostres Sires coureciés a moi . . . (MVIII.23.9).

After realising he has been a "mauvais sergans et desloiax" (MVIII.25.18), Lancelot finally converts to knighthood in the service of God:

pour ce creant je a Dieu premierement et a vous après que jamais la vie que  
j'ai menee si mortelment ne tenrai, ains devenirai castes et me garderai au  
plus netement que je porrai, mais de suir cevalerie ne me porrai je  
consieurrer . . . (MVIII.26.20).

Interestingly, Lancelot says he cannot give up chivalry altogether, but promises to be a chaste knight. He continues to expiate his sins by wearing a hair-shirt (MVIII.81.17), and his behaviour becomes overtly religious (MIX.46.9). He meets his grandfather and Galaad (MIX.46.16; 48.19), is transported by the "nef" to Corbenic, where he attempts, despite advice to the contrary, to enter the Grail chamber. He is deprived of his senses for twenty-four days, representing the twenty-four years during

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<sup>618</sup> Lancelot is tricked into lying with Helayne twice: once when Helayne actually conceives Galaad (MVI.35), and again when Lancelot spends the night with her in Guenièvre's room, where the latter discovers him and banishes him (MVI.50).

which he served not God but the Devil (MIX.108-111). After this final episode, it is clear to all that Lancelot has embraced celestial chivalry.

In the prose Tristan, however, this is not the end of the story. There is a life after the Grail, based on the Mort le roi Artu, which reveals the true attitude of Lancelot towards secular and celestial chivalry. The reader is informed of the decline of the Arthurian world (the deaths of Palamede, Baudemagu, Erec and many others), and that a contributing factor to this downfall is Lancelot's continuing relationship with Guenièvre:

li parentés li roi Artu vont or disant par derriere, ne sai se çou est verité,  
que messire Lancelos tient la roïne Genievre par dejouste le roi Artu et  
qu'il gist a li . . . (MIX.142.27).

This, according to the knight, “destruira le parenté le roi Ban . . .” (MIX.142.36). In the Vulgate Queste, Lancelot's conversion is not undermined by subsequent events as it is in the prose Tristan, where, because the decline of the Arthurian world is presented in the same breath as the news of Lancelot's adulterous relationship, representative of the “mortel haine entre le roi Artu et le parenté au roi Ban” (MIX.142.31), it can be presumed that it is in some way to be condemned. Lancelot's conversion is shown in a positive light, whereas his final actions are presented as a regression and related to the cause of the downfall of the Arthurian world, underlining the change of spirit between the pre-Grail and Grail sections.

### C. The demystification of the Grail section

Despite the apparent change of attitude examined above, there is still a surprising amount of earthly chivalry in the Grail section of the prose Tristan.

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<sup>619</sup> MVIII.18.13.

### 1. Chivalric life continues

In this text, Galaad himself allows religious and secular values to cohabit, as is demonstrated by his numerous chivalrous adventures in which he proves his valour as a secular knight, standing on a par with Lancelot and Tristan. Although the Quest has clearly begun after the Pentecost of the Grail, knightly life continues just as it did before.

Galaad ensures a coherence between both secular and religious traditions in the two healings he accomplishes. In both, it was predicted that only the “vrai chevalier qui doit mener les aventures du royaume de Logres a fin” would have the power to heal these two women.<sup>620</sup> These experiences have both a mystical (as we saw above) and a human dimension: they are both a “bele aventure” and a “miracle” (MVIII.176.27).

Galaad is no longer the remote figure of the Vulgate Queste. He seems to integrate the religious and secular worlds by being the object of praise and discussion on the part of other knights, by proving his valour through jousts with Tristan and others,<sup>621</sup> and by showing his knowledge in the rules that govern the chivalric world. Palamede tells Tristan he considers Galaad to be “li miudres qui orendroit soit en cest monde” (MVI.151.50), and “li plus preudon qu’il onques trovast.”<sup>622</sup> At the same time, Galaad descends on the scale of earthly chivalry when he is seen riding by Dinadan, albeit unwittingly, in the company of Bréhus sans Pitié:

Li boins chevaliers aloit avoec le mauvais, qui adés menoit Traïson avoec lui . . . (MVI.154.50).

Dinadan unhorses Galaad, and although his audience is much amused, this episode shows Galaad up as one of the knights rather than someone above them (MVI.154.73). In response to a question, he admits, just as another knight would, that “aloie orendroit

<sup>620</sup> MVIII.168.16 and MVIII.175.17.

<sup>621</sup> In addition to fighting against Tristan, Galaad confronts Palamede (MVI.150), Dinadan (MVI.154), Sanar and Essanon and forty other knights (MVII.55-61).

aventures demandant et cerquant cest païs et autres” (MVI.166.30). Moreover, Bréhus sans Pitié imprisons him because he wants to deliver him to a count whose son Galaad has killed (MVII.64.3). He is later liberated by Engennés (MVII.105), but this episode shows how Galaad is involved, just as other knights are, in the most mundane adventures.

Galaad goes on to prove himself in the numerous jousts he fights, and notably in the ruthless combat against Tristan, the final outcome of which is undecided. Just as in other combats between adversaries of equal strength (Tristan versus Lancelot in MIII.248-258, or Yvain versus Gauvain in Chrétien’s *Yvain*), the battle is relentless and stops only through the knights’ exhaustion and revelation of respective identities (MVI.165.43). Galaad demonstrates prowess and valour which match that of Tristan and Lancelot, whereas in the *Queste* he is peerless. Following the fight, the knights exchange compliments, highlighting Galaad’s ability to excel equally well in this aspect of knightly life. He is not only sensitive to the conventions of verbal courtesy in chivalry, he also ensures that rules such as not attacking a tired knight are respected (MVII.116.22).

The compliments addressed by Galaad to Tristan following their fierce combat are reinforced by others, showing that the former approves of the latter and finds no reason to condemn his actions, despite the fact that Tristan has not modified his behaviour since he vowed to go on the Quest. As was mentioned above, Tristan clearly notes the religious tone of the Pentecost of the Grail when he acknowledges “la volenté de Nostre Seigneur” (MVI.106.20), and behaves humbly towards Galaad (MVI.106.26). Although he becomes a quester like the others, he none the less rides “couvertement par le royaume de Logres et a faire ses cevaleries, comme se il fust

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<sup>622</sup> MVIII.145.25. See also MVI.160.78; MVI.166.6; MVII.115.38.

cevaliers noviaus” (MVI.133.19). Riding in the guise of a new knight allows him more than ever to enjoy the chivalric life. The original mystical appeal of the Queste is diluted by Tristan’s numerous profane adventures.

In addition, his relationship with Iseut has not altered, nor is he condemned for it.

The letter he sends her amply demonstrates this:

bien savés comment la queste fu juree et moi poise que je onques le jurai. . . . Mais puis que il est ensi, Dieu merci, que je ai tout ce acompli a honneur de cevalerie et a sauveté de mon cors, . . . or m’en reporai je sans blasme a vous retourner . . . (MVII.39.51).

His physical love for Iseut has not changed, although the knights departing on the Quest had to be chaste, and he reassures himself that he has at least honoured “cevalerie.” He confirms his attitude by composing a lai when the beauty of nature makes him think of Iseut (MVI.159), and by his overriding jealousy at Palamede’s lamentations followed by the desire to kill him, a reaction which Galaad considers futile, which is why he waits for Palamede to leave before he wakes Tristan:

il l’avoit laissié pour ce qu’il ne voloit mie que mesire Tristrans l’oceïst devant lui pour si povre acoïson conme d’amer la roïne Yseut (MVIII.141.20).

Moreover, in a passage which prepares for his real death, Tristan turns his thoughts towards the Round Table and to Iseut, without any desire for repentance (MVII.96.29), when he is faced with death at the hands of the father whose son he has killed.

Despite this attitude, Tristan remains, for Galaad, the knight who has impressed him most:

sour tous ciaus que j’ai veüs, en doing je le pris a monsieur Tristran . . . (MVIII.180.44).

After another such compliment, the narrator adds “Ceste parole avoit ja dite maintes fois Galaad de monsieur Tristran . . .” (MVII.113.32). By including Galaad in the

secular world of Tristan, and by showing mutual admiration between these two knights, the authors seem to be searching for a balance between the two traditions.<sup>623</sup>

The narrator also demystifies the experiences surrounding the Holy Grail. When Hector is forbidden from entering Corbenic, he justifiably feels humiliated. Despite this, Hector is reassured by Lancelot that “maint preudomme” have failed:

je n'estoie mie tant dolans de ce que je n'i avoie entré conme je cremoie  
que vous le me tenissies a honte et a mauvaistié! (MIX.116.26)

What matters to Hector is not so much his unworthiness in the face of the Grail as his chivalric reputation in the eyes of Lancelot. Bohort similarly fails to see the spiritual implications of the story of Caÿphas, an adventure which he considers to be one well worth recounting at Arthur's court (MVIII.210.28).<sup>624</sup>

The narrator also excuses the knights who fail to enter Corbenic by explaining that an enchanter once cast a spell on the castle:

Tanaburs avoit en tel maniere souduit le castel que nus cevaliers estranges  
qui le queïst nel trovast . . . (MIX.108.28).

The context does not suggest the enchanter might be the particular means through which God has chosen to work out this part of His providential plan in this particular series of events.

## 2. The results of the Quest

In the prose Tristan, the Quest itself causes much unhappiness. The Queste successfully suggests that human or worldly happiness is, if not quite unimportant in itself, a poor guide to action and an insufficient end and reward for a human life, dwarfed by the greatness of God, the only ultimate satisfaction for human desire. In

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<sup>623</sup> For a detailed survey of the relationship between Tristan and the Quest, see Jean Subrenat, “Tristan sur les chemins du Graal,” Miscellanea Mediaevalia: Mélanges offerts à Philippe Ménard, ed. J. Claude Faucon et al., 2 vols. (Paris: Champion, 1998) 2: 1319-28.

<sup>624</sup> This and other examples lead Cedric Pickford to the conclusion that Bohort has become, compared with his counterpart in the Vulgate Queste, “un chevalier d'esprit surtout profane,” in “La Queste del

the Tristan, the impact of the Quest on the Arthurian world is dire indeed: it enables Marc and the Saxons to invade Logres, allows Marc to abduct Iseut and separates the lovers, and the text concludes with Gauvain's confession to his crimes and the mourning of Arthur and his entourage over the deaths of many an Arthurian knight. The event which will most sadden the court and mark the close of the romance is the death of Tristan. The real consequence, with regard to the literary implications on the action of the prose Tristan, is effectively the tragic deaths of the lovers.

It is because so many knights have deserted Arthur's court to enter the Quest that Marc and the Saxons deem it a suitable time to invade the Kingdom of Logres (MIX.1.30). Despite Galaad's victory over the enemy (MIX.14-19), Logres remains weakened: "Or puet bien dire li rois Artus que ses pooirs est tournés a noient, quant li compaignon de la Table Reonde li sont failli!" (MIX.1.30) Moreover, it is only through Galaad's strength that Logres is saved from capitulation. As Arthur's knights freely admit themselves, "uns seus cevaliers les mist tous a desconfiture, et se il ne fust, nous ne fuissions puis retourné del camp. . . . De sa main seulement quidons nous bien qu'il ait mors que navrés plus de .IIII.M. homes!" (MIX.20.7)

Moreover, the Quest is presented as the sole cause for the lovers' separation, as the narrator warns the listener earlier on in the text (MVI.28.82). Tristan blames the Quest for his inability to reach Joyeuse Garde (MVII.39.51), and Iseut similarly condemns it:

tant fist grant damage a moi . . . mesire Gavains, qui esmut la premiere parole de la male queste du Saint Graal! Se cil ne fust, encor fuissienmes nous en joie ausi comme nous estions devant et eüssions nos amis avoec nous (MVII.40.17).



Worse awaits them, for on his way to invading Logres, Marc stops off at Joyeuse Garde, where he captures his estranged wife (MIX.2.25, 36). Marc and his men then ransack the town, and few escape with their lives (MIX.2.38). When Tristan hears of this abduction, he unequivocally holds the Quest responsible:

Onques queste ne fu commencie de si male eure par moi con cele del Saint Graal! (MIX.53.22)

Without doubt, both the narrator and the characters see a direct correlation between the separation of the lovers and the Quest.

Above all, the Quest causes the death of many important characters in the text:

Arthur

savait vraiment qu'il i avoit assés mors en la Queste des compaignons de la Table Reonde, dont il maudioit la Queste . . . (MIX.3.1).

The speculation leading to the invasion of Logres was that “li compaignon de la Table Reonde estoient mort en la Queste du Saint Graal” (MIX.1.23). Whether this is, as the narrator remarks, “plus menchoignes que verité” (MIX.1.21), the fact remains that at the end of the Quest, when those at court count how many knights have died on the Quest, “si trouverent qu’il lor en falloit .LIIII. par conte, et de tous ciaux n’i avoit celui qui ne fust mort par armes” (MIX.143.15). The deaths of these anonymous knights is complemented by those of Erec (MIX.37.26), the knights of the Ban lineage (MIX.53.35) and King Baudemagu (MIX.139.17). Finally, the Quest kills Palamede, Esclabor, Galaad and the lovers.

The implications of Palamede’s death for the attitude to religious chivalry in the Grail section have already been examined. He is sorely missed by Arthur, who

en fu dolans merveilleusement et dist que pour la mort d’un seul home n’avenroit a piece, u roiaume de Logres, si grant damage com pour cestui (MIX.134.62).

In Arthur's mind, the chivalric dimension of this otherwise Christian death is never far away.

Palamede's death contrasts with his father's, which is problematic because it is unequivocally a suicide. After hearing of his son's death, Esclabor has a tomb erected and an inscription in gold letters engraved on the tomb stone. He leads his squire into a secluded spot and, having premeditated the whole scene,

il se fiert parmi le cors si durement que la pointe de l'espee en apert par  
devers l'esquine, et il giete avant son hiaume et il rechoit de son sanc . . .  
(MIX.134.47).

Although suicide was considered a very grave sin in medieval times, it is here devoid of the presence of God. This is particularly surprising in the light of the religious context of the Quest.

The dichotomy between earthly and celestial chivalry is most pronounced in the comparison of the deaths of Tristan and Galaad. Galaad's death is, predictably, entirely Christian. After having finally seen inside the Holy Grail, he steps into a new celestial world, as he says himself:

souffrés que je trespasse de ceste terrienne vie en le celestielle!  
(MIX.137.27)

His death looks forward to this new life:

l'ame li estoit ja du cors partie, et l'emporterent li angle, faisant joie et  
beneissant Nostre Seigneur (MIX.137.47).

This is in keeping with his spiritual character, and in total contrast to Tristan's death.

Marc finds Tristan playing the harp to Iseut, and stabs him "par mi là quisse" with the poisoned sword which Tristan had used to kill Huneson, Morgain's lover.<sup>625</sup> Fatally wounded, Tristan makes his way back to Dinas's castle, where he begins a painful and drawn-out month-long agony, during which he dwells on earthly regrets,

not once thinking of salvation. He spends his last day taking leave of the chivalric world, and he addresses God only to reproach Him (MIX.80.7). His last thoughts are turned towards his glorious past, and after having one last time taken leave of the companions he is to abandon, “Palamidés, courtois cevaliers” (MIX.80.56), “Dynadant, biaux dous amis” (MIX.80.62), and “mesire Lancelot” (MIX.80.67), he asks Sagremor to take his weapons to Arthur’s court. In true chivalric fashion, he sees his life as a “fiere bataille” in which he is “outrés . . . et vaincus” (MIX.80.11). His conclusion is that when the Arthurian world hears of his death,

pour moi feront maint regart pesme et l’aventure maudiront del caup que li rois me donna. Li mondes en est abaissiés et cevalerie remanra des ore mais (MIX.80.103).

Iseut’s death transforms Tristan’s regrets for his chivalric life into a triumph of love, because that is the value which transcends their death:

Lors estraint la roïne contre son pis de tant de force com il avoit, si qu’il li fist le cuer partir, et il meïsmes morut en cel point, si que bras a bras et bouce a bouce morurent li doi amant et demourerent en tel maniere embracié; . . . et mort sont ambedoi, et par amour, sans autre confort (MIX.83.14).

The values upheld in this scene are utterly opposed to those supported in Galaad’s death. Yet Tristan’s story is intrinsically linked to the Quest, and he himself highlights the resemblance between the wound inflicted by Marc and the dolorous stroke of the Grail stories: “con fu cil caus dolereux qui sus moi fu ferus!” (MIX.79.24) The legendary stroke by Balin who, wielding the Holy Lance, maims Pellean (who thus becomes the Maimed King), does not feature in the *Queste*, and is therefore absent from the prose *Tristan*.<sup>626</sup> What remains is the idea that the “Rois Mehaingnié” suffers

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<sup>625</sup> MIX.76.1. For the possible sexual significance of the location of Tristan’s wound, see Laurence Harf-Lancner’s “‘Une seule chair, un seul cœur, une seule âme:’ La mort des amants dans le *Tristan en prose*,” *Miscellanea Mediaevalia* 1: 613-28.

<sup>626</sup> Fanni Bogdanow gives a detailed study of the implications of this passage in *The Romance of the Grail: A Study of the Structure and Genesis of a Thirteenth-Century Arthurian Prose Romance* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1966).

from his own presumption by touching the sword reserved for Galaad: he is punished by being wounded “par mi les quisses,” and will only be healed by the coming of “li boins cevaliers.”<sup>627</sup> Coming from Tristan, this puts him on an equal footing with the Grail heroes, and gives Marc’s fatal blow the same meaning for the Arthurian world as that suggested by Balin. Although his destiny is linked to it, Tristan is clearly untouched by the significance of the Grail.

A complex situation therefore faces the reader at the end of the text. On the one hand there is the hero of the romance, who dies for love and for chivalry; on the other hand there is the hero of the Quest, who dies having achieved the Quest for the Holy Grail. A clue to the significance of each death may lie in the reaction of the Arthurian world and in what each knight is remembered for. When the court hears of Galaad’s death, “si en firent moult grant dueil a court. Mais toutes voies se reconfortoient au plus bel qu’il porent” (MIX.143.8). These short-lived lamentations are closely followed by the realisation of how many more knights Arthur has lost in the course of the Quest, suggesting that its real impact is earthly, a judgement surely incompatible with the Queste.

The mourning following the announcement of Tristan’s death is extensive in the respective courts of Marc and Arthur:

Grans est li deus en Cornuaille, que se li rois March fust adont mors, ne fust pas la plainte greigneur ne si grant (MIX.84.54).

The people of Cornouailles remember Tristan for being the “Flour de cevalerie,” and for the intensity and sincerity of his love: “c’est amour et passe amour que de monsieur Tristran de Loenois et de madame Yseut la roïne de Cornuaille” (MIX.84.32, 64).

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<sup>627</sup> MVI.48.16. A more detailed history of this wound is given in the Vulgate Queste 209.

When Sagremor announces to Camelot that Tristan, “le beau, le bon, le preux, le hardi, cil qui du monde avoit auques le pris et le los, est mors et allé a fin,” the full impact of his loss is felt by all (MIX.140.36). The narrator individualises the feelings felt by Lancelot, who “tout forcenoit d’ire” (MIX.141.12), and Arthur, who “ne desist autre chouse fors que la mort venist a lui hastiment” (MIX.141.9). The court thereupon adopts mourning for a whole year and many lays are composed in his honour, most notably the Lay Royal (MIX.141.15). The impact of this death is unanimously felt to be the greatest loss knighthood has suffered:

c’est domaige et dolour a tous les chevaliers du monde! (MIX.140.38)

puis que le bon Tristran estoit mort, toute cevalerie estoit alee et morte!  
(MIX.141.13)

Back in Sarras, Galaad’s death is mourned for very different reasons:

Li pules del país en fu tant dolans come nus plus, car il amoient Galaad merveilleusement, et por ce qu’il li avoient veü mener boine vie et honneste, et qu’il les avoit maintenus bel et bien a l’oneur del país  
(MIX.138.6).

The narrator celebrates each knight as representative of a different system of values.

The comparison of the physical legacy of both knights highlights more differences. When Charlemagne arrives in Britain and “oi parler du Castel Felon que Nostres Sires avoit fendu en .II. parties pour la delivrance de Galaad” (MIX.45.10), he erects a statue in honour of this knight:

Cele figure seoit ensi en la kaiiere, si ferme qu’ele ne pooit choir, se on ne l’abatist a force, et tenoit en sa main une pome d’or, en samblance et en senefiance qu’il ot esté tous li mieudres cevaliers du monde (MIX.45.25).

Galaad is thus remembered by the knightly world for his knightly virtues: the Quest is eclipsed by the chivalric system of values. Galaad’s statue, however, erected in honour of his reputation as one of the best knights in the world, is finally destroyed and forgotten:

Et demoura cele ymage en tele honneur et en tele hautece bien .CC. ans,  
 mais puis en fu ostee par les mauvais rois d'Engleterre, qui vindrent a  
 povreté et avoient . . . entrelaissié lour cevalerie (MIX.45.35).

By contrast, no destruction threatens the sepulture of Tristan and Iseut:

En mi l'eglyse estoit la tombe de ces .II. amans, si rice c'on ne trovast pas  
 a chelui tans une plus rice. Desus la tombe, ensi conme je vous ai dit, au  
 pié de la sepulture, avoit .II. ymages droites de coivre entregietees, et  
 estoient ces ymages aussi grans conme home. . . . Et saciés c'on ne peüst  
 pas a celui tans trouver el monde .II. ymages si bien faites (MIX.85.35).

In the introduction, Galaad, Lancelot and Tristan were put forward as the three best knights in the world. At the end of the text, Galaad's body lies in the "Palais Esperitel" in Sarras, remembered by those over there only as the knight of the Holy Grail, although commemorated by his statue as "li mieudres cevaliers du monde;" Lancelot is back at court but still involved in an adulterous relationship; Tristan survives as the paragon of the lover and knight, paradoxically in a church sepulture.

This study of the place of religion in the world of the prose Tristan initially pointed up a difference of attitude towards religion between the pre-Grail and Grail sections. The use of material from the prose Lancelot and the Queste is probably an effort to include authoritative material that was presumably so well-known to the intended audience that it would have been hard for the authors to leave it out. The examination of the Grail section, however, has shown an element of demystification of the events surrounding the Grail, and a continuation of secular values through the enjoyment of knight errantry. It emerges from the Prologue that the narrator sees the Holy Quest as part of the major events "qui avindrent sanz doutance en la Grant Bretagne au tens le roi Artus" (CI.Prologue.5), and that it would be an oversight not to include it in the "estoire monseignor Tristan." The narrator views the Quest as an enjoyable adventure, and this attitude is shared by almost every knight who undertakes it, as we have seen. It is hardly surprising that Galaad's success as the achiever of the

Grail Quest is celebrated in Sarras, not in the Arthurian world. His effect on our romance is certainly not as powerful as that which emerges in the Vulgate Queste, which ends with Galaad's death and Arthur having the "aventures del Seint Graal telles come il [Boors] les avoit veues . . . mises en escrit et gardees en l'almiere de Salesbieres. . . ." <sup>628</sup> The prose Tristan continues after the death of Galaad, and Tristan remains the hero of the romance, whose world includes religion as a way of life, but presents it as a less important issue than earthly knighthood.

The continuation of the Tristan after the achievement of the Holy Grail, portraying the decadence of the Arthurian world, however, should give the reader a clue as to the way the story is moving. The text ends with the promise of more strife due to internal rivalries and to Lancelot's relationship with Guenièvre, and this might prompt the reader to question some of these secular values. This unresolved state of affairs is a logical conclusion to the amalgamation of texts which uphold courtly and chivalric values on the one hand, and ascetic and mystical values on the other. Despite these major differences, one can see that the Grail story is quite skilfully integrated into the Tristan plot: it is during the Quest, we have seen, that Marc regains hold of Iseut and threatens Logres. Moreover, the authors make various attempts to solve the discordance created by the juxtaposition of two worlds by partly demystifying the Quest to bring Galaad almost in line with other more earthly knights.

Baumgartner convincingly postulates the episode of Helyant le Blanc as the most effective resolution to this conflict. <sup>629</sup> In the prose Lancelot, the narrator describes Helyant's conception in very similar terms to that of Galaad: Bohort is tricked by a magical ring into sleeping with the daughter of King Brangoire, and the result is that the two

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<sup>628</sup> Queste 279.32.

s'entraprocherent si charnelment que les flors de la virginité sont  
 espandues entr'els: si ovra tant a cele assamblee la grace de Dieu et la  
 volenté divine que la damoisele conçut Helain le Blanc qui puis fu  
 empereres de Constantinople et passa les bones Alexandre. . . .<sup>630</sup>

By mentioning the justification for Helyant's conception, the author implies the continuity of the Arthurian world. However, Helyant's future as emperor is never taken up, in the Lancelot nor in any other text. Before the Pentecost of the Grail, the Lancelot mentions that

Elaym le Blanc . . . devoit estre chevaliers prochainement, et si fu il sanz faille de la main Boorz meismes.<sup>631</sup>

In the prose Tristan, the authors refer to Helyant's conception in passing (MVI.42.19), but transform his entry into knighthood into an elaborate and original dubbing ceremony in which Arthur himself takes the principal part.<sup>632</sup> The scene contains more religious elements than any other such event in the Tristan, for it includes a ritual bath (MVI.82.1), a vigil (MVI.82.3) and the dubbing itself is integrated into a Mass (MVI.82.38). Moreover, in the ritual admonition, King Arthur "fait jurer Helian qu'il sera fiex et sergans de Sainte Eglyse,"<sup>633</sup> in keeping with the religious slant of the Grail section, as well as with thirteenth-century practice, although this could sometimes be even more religious than in the prose Tristan. Originally, the task of arming the squire could be performed only by a knight: his father for instance, or his lord, as is the case in all the Tristan dubbings. Historically, it could also be performed by a prelate. William the Conqueror had his son dubbed by the archbishop of Canterbury. A bishop could scarcely dispense with the religious ceremonial, and it is in this way that the liturgy was allowed to permeate the whole of the dubbing ceremony. The pontifical of

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<sup>629</sup> Emmanuèle Baumgartner, "Histoire d'Helain le Blanc: du Lancelot au Tristan en prose," Et c'est la fin pour quoy sommes ensemble 1: 139-48.

<sup>630</sup> Lancelot, ed. Micha, 2: 197-98.

<sup>631</sup> Lancelot, ed. Micha, 6: 243.

<sup>632</sup> See Chapter Three.

<sup>633</sup> MVI.82.18. See Chapter Three for the tables on dubbing ceremonies.



the bishop of Mende, which was compiled about 1295, though its essential elements apparently date from the reign of Saint Louis (1226-1270), carries the consecratory role of the prelate to the ultimate limit, for he girds the sword and gives the traditional blow.<sup>634</sup>

Despite the strong Christian elements in Helyant's ceremony, including the reading of the "Epistre" and of the "Evangille" (MVI.82.33-35), only secular people are said to preside over the ceremony. Lionel, Helyant's uncle, is a knight, and Baudemagu and Arthur are both kings and knights. Although a priest must of course have said the "messe," there are no references to any ecclesiastical representatives. Moreover, the Church ceremony is followed by a knightly ceremony, where the company "mengierent a grant joie et a grant soulas" (MVI.82.44). Arthur is presented as the king who makes knights, thus reminding the reader of his secular power. He significantly insists on the direct and necessary character of the feudal relationship entertained by the king and his knight: "me tenrés pour vostre signeur des ore en avant, et je vous tenrai pour mon cevalier a tous jours mais" (MVI.82.29). This reminds the reader of the earthly nature of the relationship between lord and vassal. This is reinforced by the element of secularisation in the Pentecost celebrations, where beautiful ladies and valiant knights are assembled for a magnificent "feste," where Louveserp is discussed and Tristan's presence is missed.

We have seen in addition the numerous ways in which the Quest is linked with the demise of the Arthurian world. It is in the midst of all this that Helyant's dubbing appears to take on all its significance: Arthur carries on playing his role as "li rois des aventures"<sup>635</sup> by dubbing new knights and by reminding them of "leur éminente

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<sup>634</sup> Bloch, *Feudal Society* 315.

<sup>635</sup> MVI.94.28. This sentence does not feature in the *Queste*.

mission d'ici-bas."<sup>636</sup> Baumgartner argues that by linking this new knight with the threatened king, the Tristan authors succeed in providing a continuation for a world where "la prouesse, la beauté et la quête de joie auraient autant de pris que la Quête du Graal."<sup>637</sup> This is a powerful argument, but the last impression with which the listener is left is surely of the decline of Arthur's world, torn apart by internal strife and reduced by the death of many companions. Helyant is certainly named as one of the questers (MVI.112.38) as in the Queste (23.23), but he does not reappear again. The authors attempted to harmonise the two worlds, but the end of the text is pessimistic about the survival of the kingdom that was once the shining example of all that earthly chivalry represented, and of all that most of the Tristan celebrates.

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<sup>636</sup> Baumgartner, "Histoire d'Helain" 147.

<sup>637</sup> Baumgartner, "Histoire d'Helain" 148.

## Chapter Six: Dissenting Voices

The ultimate implication of the quest for the Holy Grail is that the harmonious society organised around the Round Table is no longer secure. Unlike Malory, who creates two episodes after the end of the quest, the Tristan authors close their tale with reports of Tristan's slaying and the deaths of Bohort's companions, while Gauvain admits to his crimes. Gauvain indeed belongs to a group of characters whose actions, rather than glorify chivalry as do most, defy the codes regulating the world of the prose Tristan.

As Fanni Bogdanow remarks,

le rédacteur du Tristan en prose répartit rigoureusement ses personnages en deux classes: les héros et les criminels.<sup>638</sup>

Bréhus sans Pitié, Marc, Morgain and Gauvain all work against Arthurian society, independently from each other, in various ways and for different reasons. Gauvain, the subject of this first section on dissenting voices, provides the link between the regulated world of Arthur's court (he is, after all, Arthur's nephew) and a world where the rules of chivalry are known but willingly transgressed.

### I. Those who defy the codes

#### A. Gauvain

In many ways, Gauvain's reputation acquired through his numerous appearances in Arthurian literature follows him through much of the beginning of the prose Tristan. Chrétien's Gauvain, "qui des chevaliers fu sires / Et qui seur tous fu renommés"<sup>639</sup> has

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<sup>638</sup> Fanni Bogdanow, "The Character of Gauvain in the Thirteenth-Century Prose Romances," Medium Aevum 27 (1958): 156. See also Baumgartner, Essai (1975) 196 ff.; Busby, "Gauvain in the Prose Tristan" (1977); Busby, Gauvain in Old French Literature (1980); Larmat, "Le personnage de Gauvain" (1980); Harf-Lancner, "Gauvain l'assassin" (1996); Quéruel, "D'un manuscrit à l'autre" (1997). See bibliography for full references.

<sup>639</sup> Yvain lines 2400-01. In La Mort le roi Artu, Gauvain is already considered responsible for the deaths of eighteen knights who had engaged in the Holy Quest, and in particular that of Baudemagu, La Mort le roi Artu, ed. Jean Frappier (Genève: Droz, 1954) §3.

maintained, in the prose Tristan and more importantly among knights who have not met him, the reputation of being “mout cortois” (CI.321.13) and of entertaining a “grant renomnee.”<sup>640</sup> He saves Tristan from Morgain, and proudly admits to him:

je sui voirement celui Gavain; et teus cevaliers com je sui, je sui vestres en toutes les manieres que cevaliers puet estre cevaliers de son ami (MII.77.22).

He is also appreciated by Guenièvre, who “le rechoit mout joieusement,”<sup>641</sup> and he is privy to Arthur’s thoughts during the Louveserp tournament.<sup>642</sup> He is plainly one of Arthur’s favourites in the Pentecost of the Grail, where the narrator mentions that Arthur loves Lancelot and Gauvain “conme s’il les eüst engenrés de sa car. . . .”<sup>643</sup> These feelings are apparently reciprocal, as demonstrated by the kiss Gauvain gives his uncle (MVI.115.17) and his refusal to disobey him (MVI.95.42). More surprising in the light of what is to be revealed about his character is the reaction of certain knights when he is badly wounded by Galaad:

il en furent mout courelié li pluisour, car . . . il estoit uns des homes du monde ki plus estoit amés d’estranges gens (MVIII.135.25).

Those who have jousted with him, or who have seen him in action, however, give a contradictory impression. Tristan asks Lamorat who, between Gauvain and Gaheriet, has the “greignor renomnee.” Lamorat answers:

quant mesire Gauvens a faite sa chevalerie et il li en vient bien, il n’en cele mie le fait, enz le raconte maintenant. . . . Par ceste chose que je vos di est mesire Gauvens de grant renomnee . . . (CIII.789.30).

The narrator later confirms that Gauvain is not “si boins com il avoit la renomnee” (MV.162.2).

<sup>640</sup> MV.166.14. See also MVIII.188.16.

<sup>641</sup> MII.132.18. See also MII.208.9.

<sup>642</sup> MV.189.25; MV.190.32; MV.204.5.

<sup>643</sup> MVI.111.16. See also MV.158.11. Meraugis also thinks highly of him MVII.190.5.

This remark certainly understates the true nature of Gauvain, of which one gets a good measure from the epithets used to qualify him (“mauvais,”<sup>644</sup> “faillis,”<sup>645</sup> faus,”<sup>646</sup> “felon,”<sup>647</sup> “vilains,”<sup>648</sup> “aniëus”<sup>649</sup> and “desloiaus”<sup>650</sup>). His physical appearance is not impressive either:

d’encoste monsigneur Tristran ne resambloit mesire Gavains ausi conme noient, car trop estoit petis au resgart de lui (MII.73.17).

His unlawful actions reflect this opinion. He does not hesitate to force a damsel to accompany him, in spite of the fact that she is visibly “correciee et triste durement” (CIII.793.6), and despite Lamorat’s rebuke:

il n’est mie droiz que vos la demoisele en meignoiz puis qu’il ne li plest . . . (CIII.794.16).

Gauvain’s discourtesy towards women is highlighted by his rude attempts to discover Iseut’s identity at Louveserp, in violation of the rules of courtesy: “ce n’est mie courtoisie de demander ki la dame est encontre sa volenté meïsmement” (MV.160.18). His complete disregard for etiquette allows him to impose on Iseut at Joyeuse Garde and to insult her. Although “Il n’appartient mie a cevalier qu’i s’embate sour dame sans congié,” he forces his way through the entrance, and insults Iseut by stating that “on trouveroit plus bele u monde” and that Tristan is not that good a knight.<sup>651</sup> He reacts with “desdaing” when reproved for his behaviour, but is finally humiliated by Erec.

Gauvain frequently defies the codes regulating chivalric encounters. He transgresses the rule whereby two knights belonging to the Round Table cannot fight each other,<sup>652</sup> yet shelters behind it when it is to his advantage (MIX.37.40). In an

<sup>644</sup> MVI.130.22; MVII.180.10; MVII.181.23, etc.

<sup>645</sup> MVII.180.10, etc.

<sup>646</sup> MVI.130.22; MVII.180.10; MVII.181.23, etc.

<sup>647</sup> CI.417.11; CIII.794.32; MVII.183.15; MVII.187.13, etc.

<sup>648</sup> CIII.794.33; MVII.181.27; MVII.187.21; MVII.236.32, etc.

<sup>649</sup> MVII.181.27; MVII.237.27 etc.

<sup>650</sup> CIII.794.36; MVI.130.22; MVII.180.10; MIX.115.28, etc.

<sup>651</sup> MVII.51.5; MVII.50.25; MVII.50.54.

<sup>652</sup> CIII.794.35; MIX.130.41.

equally hypocritical manner, he does not hesitate to challenge a worn-out Brun le Noir to a joust (MVII.180.15), but he excuses himself from fighting against Hector by invoking the code that one should not attack a tired or a wounded knight, and that the latter is entitled to forty days' rest before he can be challenged to another joust (MIX.37.58-61). He also abuses his superior position when on horseback to attack Bréhus who is on foot (MVII.185.19).

It was established in Chapter Three that it is an act of felony to kill a (good) knight. Gauvain seems to have killed more knights than any other character, as is revealed not only at the end of the Quest, but also throughout the text. One of Néroneus' friends vows to avenge his brother's death at the hands of Gauvain. He states that he was a "boin cevalier preu et hardi" and that Gauvain killed him "en traïson" (MI.21.40-43). He is reproached by a hermit for killing seven brothers who were in the process of repenting their sins (MVI.131.37). The narrator warns the reader that Gauvain will slay Meraugis and Lamorat,<sup>653</sup> whose deaths are deplored by the narrator because Meraugis was a "boins cevaliers et courtois" and had Lamorat lived, "bien eüst atant de bonté de cevalerie."<sup>654</sup> Gauvain himself is forced to admit after the Quest that he has killed thirty-three knights, including Erec, Baudemagu and Palamede (MIX.143.32).<sup>655</sup>

The murder of Palamede is representative of the way Gauvain defies all the rules of chivalry. Gauvain and Agravain chance upon a wounded Palamede, and Gauvain

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<sup>653</sup> Gauvain indeed cannot understand Gaheriet's courtesy in not killing Lamorat whom he finds in bed with the Queen of Orcanie (MIV.146.11).

<sup>654</sup> MVII.193.16; MIV.124.34. See also MIV.248.1 for the confirmation of Lamorat's death.

<sup>655</sup> In other versions of the prose *Tristan*, Gauvain's killing of, among others, Lamorat and his brother Drian, Erec, Palamede and Dinadan feature at greater length. The deaths of Lamorat and Drian figure in the shorter "version I" of the *Tristan*, as well as in a fragment of the *Suite du Merlin* edited by Fanni Bogdanow under the title of *La Folie Lancelot*. That of Erec is told in the manuscript B.N. fr. 112 (*Erec, roman arthurien en prose*, ed. C. Pickford (Genève: Droz, 1959) and *La version Post-Vulgate de la Queste del saint Graal et de la Mort Artu, troisième partie du Roman du Graal*, ed. Fanni Bogdanow (Paris: S.A.T.F., 1991) vol. 2). Dinadan's death appears in the manuscript B. N. fr. 24400, which is

takes advantage of this situation: “Maintenant que mesires Gavains vit Palamidés, il le connut et vit, a ce qu’il chevauchoit auques mortelment, qu’il n’estoit mie du tout sains” (MIX.130.18). Palamede accuses the brothers of breaking the first rule which forbids Round Table knights from attacking each other (MIX.130.43). The two brothers also attack Palamede who is on his own.<sup>656</sup> They go at him fiercely and unrelentingly, and when Agravain questions the rightness of their action because Palamede is a “si boin cevalier,” Gauvain shows his real nature by thrusting his sword into his adversary’s body for the last time. Whereas “Agravains en fu dolans durement, car il prisoit Palamidés mout de cevalerie,” Gauvain is “trop liés de cele mort” (MIX.132.2-5). He shows no remorse, despite the fact that he has knowingly gone against conventions he has invoked in the past to protect himself. Gauvain belongs to the Arthurian institution, and is well acquainted with all the rules, but he repeatedly violates its code of conduct and ruthlessly destroys many of its representatives, thus incarnating the role of an anti-Arthurian agent. In reproaching him the damsel of Corbenic sums up the vision the text presents of him:

Assés avés maus fais en ceste Queste, et mains cevaliers ochis en desloiauté et en traïson! Certes, se cil de cest castel seüssent les desloiautés que vous avés faites, puis que vous partistes de court, ja de laiens ne fuissiés issus sans mort (MIX.115.28).

Gauvain’s blackened character appears to make him the anti-hero who almost systematically undermines the secular and religious values displayed by the Tristan. To a thirteenth-century audience, he is the example not to follow, and is presented as such by a somewhat didactic narrator, who reinforces his views through the use of another such knight: Bréhus.

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edited by Richard Trachsler in “Suites et fins: étude sur les clôtures du cycle arthurien,” doctoral diss. U. of Paris III, 1995, vol. 2.

<sup>656</sup> Keu informs Samaliel that unless a knight is carrying two swords, he cannot be challenged by two knights (MIX.103.30).

## B. Bréhus

Among the many knights that Gauvain detests,<sup>657</sup> Bréhus sans Pitié is the one whom he is not afraid of attacking alone. Characters and narrator alike refer to Bréhus in the most negative terms,<sup>658</sup> as “feus,”<sup>659</sup> “desloiaus,”<sup>660</sup> “traître,”<sup>661</sup> “mauvais,”<sup>662</sup> “vilains” and “anieus,”<sup>663</sup> and although he does not actually set out to destroy the Arthurian world, he does state at the end of the text that all the Round Table companions are his “anemis” (MIX.67.67). He is not seeking revenge for anything in particular, nor is he jealous. As Richard Trachsler comments:

Breüs est contre le monde arthurien parce que celui-ci représente l'ordre et parce qu'il est contre l'ordre tout court. . . .<sup>664</sup>

Bréhus is simply an anarchist: he systematically transgresses all the principles and customs of the chivalric world. Whereas one of the first rules is not to refuse a joust, Bréhus flees almost every time he is provoked.<sup>665</sup> The only reason for his success is his inside knowledge of all the paths of Logres,<sup>666</sup> his riding skills and his fast horse:

il estoit miex montés que nus de ses autres voisins, et ce le jeta par maintes fois de mortel peril u il eüst autrement esté mors, se ne fuissent li boin cheval qu'il avoit tous jours. . . .<sup>667</sup>

Whereas a knight's mission is to protect the weak, Bréhus exploits them. He attacks a knight whom he finds asleep (MVII.179.15), and does not hesitate to do the same with an unarmed knight (MV.144.4), so that Tristan will not ride unarmed for fear of being

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<sup>657</sup> Lamorat (CIII.794.24; MIV.132.1); Bliobéris (MII.131.26); Erec (MVII.49.3); Palamede (MIX.130.14).

<sup>658</sup> The character of Bréhus in the prose *Tristan* has been studied by Richard Trachsler, “Bréhus sans Pitié: portrait-robot du criminel arthurien,” *La violence dans le monde médiéval*, Sénéfiance 36 (1994): 527-42, and Baumgartner, *Essai* 197-99.

<sup>659</sup> CI.417.9; MII.89.32; MIII.5.19; MVII.179.20, etc.

<sup>660</sup> MII.89.31; MII.91.18; MIII.160.6; MV.22.39; MVII.103.33; MVII.179.9, etc.

<sup>661</sup> MII.91.18; MV.22.32; MVI.154.31, etc.

<sup>662</sup> MV.22.32; MVI.154.51; MVII.66.5, etc.

<sup>663</sup> MIV.151.14; MIV.151.15.

<sup>664</sup> Richard Trachsler, *Clôtures du cycle arthurien: Étude et textes* (Genève: Droz, 1996) 171.

<sup>665</sup> See MII.91.37; MIII.8.4; MIII.163.15; MIII.203.17; MIV.152.40; MV.15.27; MV.22.23; MVII.105.12; MVII.179.5.

<sup>666</sup> MII.91.45; MII.92.10.

<sup>667</sup> MIII.8.10. See also MI.99.16; MII.89.56; MII.92.7; MIV.150.4; MV.16.16; MV.22.31; MIX.58.3.



assaulted by Bréhus (MVI.23.24). He also attacks knights who are unfortunate enough to be on foot,<sup>668</sup> and when he cannot reach the knight, he kills the horse (MVII.185.24). Bréhus is part of a gang of nine who fight against Palamede when it is strictly forbidden for several knights to assault a single one (MIII.200.13). The characters whose inferiority he most exploits are damsels whom he pursues to kill:

Breüs sans Pitié, ki trouvé l'avoit u cemin, le cachoit pour ochire, non mie pour cose qu'ele l'eüst deservi, mais pour la grant felenie qu'il avoit en son cuer (MIII.5.17).

His reputation for doing “grant honte et grant laidure” to damsels (MIX.58.7), and especially for killing them,<sup>669</sup> is corroborated by numerous examples of this.<sup>670</sup> The narrator frequently depicts him as deliberately seeking to do wrong, seeking “u il porra trouver mal a faire, car a nule autre cose ne met il onques s'entente.”<sup>671</sup> In keeping with this attitude is Bréhus' gratuitous and unwarranted killing of several knights: he kills Daym simply “pour une parole qu'i li dist.”<sup>672</sup>

Far from being unaware of the rules that regulate the chivalric world, Bréhus knows how to exploit them to avoid situations where he might be defeated. He reminds Gauvain, who has the advantage of being on horseback, that it would be “vilonnie” to attack Bréhus, who is on foot (MVII.185.20). Similarly, he tells Brun le Noir that he cannot assault him, “je suis sans espee et vous savés bien la coustume du roiaume de Logres, que cevalier ne doit metre sa main en cevalier qui espee ne porte. . . .”<sup>673</sup> There are, oddly, some customs that Bréhus seems not to have “apris,”<sup>674</sup> and which he has to be taught, highlighting his role as an outsider, despite

<sup>668</sup> MII.91.9; MIV.151.27; MV.21.1; MV.22.5.

<sup>669</sup> MIII.7.25; MV.17.33; MV.147.23.

<sup>670</sup> MII.89.32; MIII.160.14; MIII.201.12; MIX.57.37.

<sup>671</sup> MV.147.1. See also MIII.162.17; MV.9.21.

<sup>672</sup> MVII.107.45. See also MII.89.32; MIII.160.13.

<sup>673</sup> MVII.192.23. See also MVII.184.42; MVII.191.23.

<sup>674</sup> MIV.152.17; MV.142.25.

the fact that he is so often up-to-date with the latest news.<sup>675</sup> He rides alone and does not take part in events which unite knights such as tournaments, at which, on the other hand, Gauvain is present.<sup>676</sup> Bréhus is a pariah of knightly society through his transgression of the chivalric customs, but he chooses to be so: he fears the knights of the Round Table (MVII.67.22) and actively rejects their company (MIX.67.67). Finally, the unique occasion on which he is courteous and invites Tristan and Hector to stay in one of his numerous “rechés” (MIII.201.4), stems from his fear of Tristan:

Ceste bonté que je vous ai ore faite me fist faire la doute de monsieur  
Tristan. Onques certes ne fui courtois, ne ne serai jour de ma vie . . .  
(MIX.67.50).

Bréhus’s presence is colourful and adds to the picture of knight-errantry depicted by the Tristan. He also provides occasions for the other characters to act as defenders of the true chivalric mission. Like Gauvain, he incarnates all that a knight should not be and pursues evil for evil’s sake, although none of his actions has a particular effect on the plot. The same cannot be said of King Marc.

### C. Marc

Marc’s character in the prose Tristan is blackened, just as is Gauvain’s, except that the former falls from even higher. In Chapter Two we examined Marc’s personality, which set him at a distance from law-abiding knights, the epithets used to refer to him, and his cowardice.<sup>677</sup> As Baumgartner remarks, “la Cornouailles est le lieu où sont systématiquement menacées voire détruites les valeurs chevaleresques.”<sup>678</sup> This is exemplified numerous times in our text, starting with the reputation of the knights of

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<sup>675</sup> MV.12.28; MV.142.7.

<sup>676</sup> See for instance the “Pucelles” and Louveserp tournaments, in which Gauvain appears but not Bréhus.

<sup>677</sup> See Chapter Two.

<sup>678</sup> Baumgartner, “Arthur et les chevaliers envoisiez” 322.

Cornouailles.<sup>679</sup> They are notorious for their disregard of all that is celebrated by the chivalric ideal, and the state of Cornouailles reflects adversely on the leadership of Marc, who, as king, should promote these values, as does Arthur (CII.637.23). Instead of upholding justice, Marc commits many injustices, such as when he kills his brother without challenging him or listening to his pleas for mercy, or when he disregards the rules regulating the Tristan world (CI.243.4). Moreover, because Bertolay refuses to help him kill Tristan, Marc has no scruples in slaying him in “traïson” (MIV.10.6). As we know, Marc wrongfully kills Armans, Bertolay’s champion, which prompts Arthur to institute an oath-swearing before the combat: Arthur thus accepts, through Marc, that he can no longer rely on the good faith of knights, and Marc indirectly succeeds in undermining a core Arthurian value.

Marc later attacks the Arthurian institution by sending insulting letters to Arthur (MIV.179.7) and Guenièvre (MIV.181) concerning her relationship with Lancelot. As Baumgartner notes, these letters aim to “rendre jaloux le roi Arthur et briser le lien privilégié qu’il a noué avec la chevalerie. . . .”<sup>680</sup> Whilst Guenièvre perfectly understands the meaning of her letter (MIV.182.1), Arthur fails to grasp the truth of his and believes it refers to the adulterous relationship of Hector and the wife of Carados (MIV.180.24). Marc’s attempt at destabilising the Arthurian infrastructure has thus failed, but his intention remains firm nevertheless.

At the end of the text, when he hears that Arthur’s court is virtually undefended because so many knights have perished on the Quest, Marc, who hates Arthur more than any other man in the world (MIX.1.33), invades Logres with the help of the “Saisnes.” During the siege of Camelot, he

<sup>679</sup> MIII.72.21; MIII.86.27 and see Chapter Two.

<sup>680</sup> Emmanuèle Baumgartner, “Rois et chevaliers: du Lancelot en prose au Tristan en prose,” Tristan et Iseut: Mythe européen et mondial. Actes du colloque des 10, 11 et 12 janvier 1986, ed. Danielle

empaint le roi Artu si merueilleusement qu'il l'abat a tere, et au retraire  
brisa li glaives si que li rois Artus remest tous enferés (MIX.5.26).

Galaad's presence saves Arthur from defeat, and in true anti-chivalric fashion, Marc  
"s'enfui . . . en la forest pour dotance de mort" (MIX.18.48).

Later, Marc recognises Galaad's shield in an hermitage, and decides to take  
revenge by poisoning the representative of celestial chivalry with a "venins" which he  
originally brought to Logres "pour monsieur Tristran son neveu, car il ne veoit pas  
comment il le peüst faire morir s'en traïson non . . ." (MIX.25.23). Although the  
attempted murder of Galaad might be, in Marc's mind, a personal vendetta against the  
knight who prevented him from destroying the Arthurian kingdom, it is nevertheless a  
violation of chivalric values and an attack on the entire knightly institution, as is the  
"traïson" which he knows is necessary to kill Tristan.

Marc's attitude towards knight-errantry in general and the knights of Arthur in  
particular is best represented by his dealings with Yvain, Keu and Gaheriet in  
Cornouailles. Several Round Table knights vow to search for Tristan, the anonymous  
knight who shone so brilliantly at the "Roche Dure" tournament, and Yvain, Gaheriet  
and Keu thus spend time at Marc's court. Marc's hypocrisy is revealed throughout this  
episode: it would have been expected that the king of Cornouailles entertained  
illustrious guests willingly, but Marc is insincere in his hospitality, although only the  
narrator and the reader are privy to this information:

Li samblans k'il fait par dehors est mout divers et mout estranges a ce que  
li cuers vait pensant.<sup>681</sup>

This "decevanche" (MIII.99.23) hides, just as it did in Bréhus' case, his "grant paour  
et . . . la grant doute . . ." (MIII.91.12). Marc's relationship with the lineage of Ban is  
only one of fear and hate:

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Buschinger (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1987) 28. For more on Marc see Baumgartner, *Essai* 191,  
Trachsler, *Clôtures* 171 and Vinaver, *Études* 13.

il les haoit morteument sour tous les autres chevaliers du monde . . . (MIII.91.11).

His behaviour has rendered this hatred mutual (MIII.111.25).

Marc is notorious for endeavouring to dishonour all knights-errant through his hatred of them,<sup>682</sup> an attitude which discourages such knights from even entering Cornouailles (MIII.90.10). Marc plans to attack Yvain and Keu only because he knows they are weaker than he:

on li ot conté k'il [Yvain] n'estoit pas des tres boins cevaliers de la maison le roi Artu . . . (MIII.76.2).

Et pour ce que li rois Marc set tout chertainnement que Kex li senescaus n'estoit mie si boins chevaliers de sa main com estoit mesire Yvains as Blanches Mains pense il en son cuer k'il ne fist de monsieur Yvain k'il ne fache de chestui avant k'il mais se parte de Cornuaille.<sup>683</sup>

Marc's own characteristic strength (MIII.76.9) makes the combats all the more unequal. He ambushes and unhorses Yvain and Keu, who are in turn avenged by Gaheriet. The latter vehemently reproaches Marc for his unacceptable behaviour:

tout li cevalier errant que aventure aporte en Cornuaille se vont plainnant de toi et dient que, quant il viennent entre tes mains par aucune aventure, que tu lour fais tout adés tot l'anui et tout le courous que tu lour pues faire (MIII.112.18).

dont te vient si grant felonnie que tu . . . pourcaches traïson si soutieument et si couvertement pour metre les a mort, se tu faire le pooies? (MIII.112.25)

These passages underline the nature of Marc's relationship with the knight-errant community, and highlight the deceitful way in which he pursues his anti-Arthurian strategy. As Iseut puts it,

li rois March met adés sa pensee et sa cure en faire cruauté et vilonnie as cevaliers estranges . . . (MIII.121.9).

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<sup>681</sup> MIII.92.18. See also MIII.56.8; MIII.91.7; MIII.95.33.

<sup>682</sup> MIII.59.22; MIII.60.38; 43.

<sup>683</sup> MIII.92.20. See also MIII.107.26.

Although Marc relentlessly tries to harm Tristan this is not an attempt to damage the wider Arthurian community, for it is not so much the good knight that Marc hates in Tristan, but the threat the latter poses to Marc's authority and legitimacy, and the jealousy and fear Tristan provokes.<sup>684</sup> The death of Tristan, however, although motivated by personal jealousy, shakes the Arthurian world to its roots (MIX.141.13), as we saw. Marc himself realises the implications of his action on the wider chivalric community only after he has struck Tristan: "Je ai toute cevalerie honnie!" (MIX.78.12) This last treacherous action as king in this version of the prose Tristan has consequences that reach further than he at first imagines: he rids himself, through personal revenge, of his rival, and unthinkingly deprives the world of chivalry of one of its most shining examples, thus crowning his anti-chivalric strategy. Moreover, the blackening of his character is somewhat more realistic than the complacency he shows in some of the verse versions. It is natural that he should not only try to undermine Tristan, but also those who defend him: Lancelot warns Marc not to harm Tristan (MIV.137.24) and Arthur makes him forgive Tristan publicly (MIV.134.23). His behaviour throughout the text, however, means that the impact of the adulterous relationship between Tristan and Iseut is at least extenuated in the eyes of the audience.

#### D. Morgain

Marc would have been unable to kill Tristan had it not been for the poisoned lance provided by Morgain. Throughout the text, she pursues the dishonour of the two representatives of the Arthurian élite, Lancelot and Tristan. She has personal reasons for undermining them and others belonging to Arthur's court. Her present dislike of Lancelot stems from the fact the he has refused to love her:

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<sup>684</sup> See Chapter Two and MIII.54.17; MIII.59.5; MIII.65.7.

Ele le haoit de grant haïne et si l'avoit amé jadis et encore l'amoit, mais che estoit encontre sa volenté meïsmes, pour ce qu'ele l'avoit veü si bel, et si le haoit mortelment pour ce k'il l'avoit refusee (MIII.174.19).

She tries a first time to reveal his adultery (CII.467.26); then she has the enchanted horn made specifically for Lancelot and Guenièvre (CII.526-31); she has thirty knights set to ambush him (MII.24), and she asks Tristan to wear a shield depicting the same adulterous relationship in order to humiliate the couple publicly (MIII.176).

Morgain's hatred of Lancelot extends to the knights of the Ban lineage, but she displays no hostility towards knights belonging to other lineages, and is "apareillie de servir et hounerer les chevaliers errans, mais k'il ne fussent du lignage le roi Ban . . ." (MIII.168.3). On another occasion, however, the reader is informed that her resentment extends to the whole of Arthur's court:

ele voloit grant mal a chiaus de la maison le roi Artu pour ce que par lour conseil, ce li estoit avis, avoit ele esté jete de la maison le roi Artu . . . (MIV.94.22).

She attempts to take personal revenge against people who have offended her, and who happen to be the representatives of all that is chivalrous. Her associations with Gauvain, Bréhus and Marc,<sup>685</sup> moreover, confirm this "stratégie anti-arthurienne."<sup>686</sup> It is through her acquaintance with Marc that she carries out her ultimate revenge and indirectly attacks the representative of knightly values, by providing Marc with the poisoned lance with which he delivers the fatal blow to his nephew.

Because she is a woman, Morgain does not have the same means as do Bréhus, Gauvain and Marc to defy the codes of chivalry. She nevertheless endeavours to dishonour and even kill those who devote their life to the chivalric ideal: the knights of Arthur because they advised him to banish her from court, Lancelot because he refused to love her and because he killed a knight she liked, and Tristan because he thwarted

<sup>685</sup> MII.73.14; MII.91.23; MIX.76.5.

<sup>686</sup> Trachsler, *Clôtures* 165.

her plans to ambush Lancelot and because he killed Huneson. It is ultimately she who allows Marc to put an end to Tristan's career and to bring the lovers to an atrocious death.

These four characters whose deaths, conspicuously, apart from a fleeting reference to that of Marc (MIV.241.36), are not related, all survive the downfall of the Round Table and the death of the hero. Baumgartner sums up their actions:

Avec des modalités différentes et pour des raisons différentes, tous incarnent . . . l'opposition à l'idéal chevaleresque, tous s'acharnent à perdre ceux qui ont voué leur vie et leurs forces à la défense de cet idéal.<sup>687</sup>

They do not act of one accord and each pursues different aims, but all succeed in their own way in providing a fierce opposition to the Tristan values. The text at first seems very black-and-white, with a battle being waged between those who uphold the chivalric ideal and those who defy it, but somewhere in the middle, the authors of the prose Tristan include certain voices, which, without defying the knightly customs, try to set them realistically in a human world.

## II. Those who criticise the codes

### A. Dinadan

Much has been written on this enigmatic character.<sup>688</sup> In a text which celebrates the merits of chivalry, Dinadan stands out as the one knight who openly challenges the chivalric ideal whilst benefiting from the advantageous position of knight of Arthur, and from his well-known sense of humour. In our version, Dinadan criticises the futility of certain knightly customs and the madness of love.<sup>689</sup>

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<sup>687</sup> Baumgartner, Essai 191.

<sup>688</sup> See Appendix, Section B.

<sup>689</sup> Eugène Vinaver draws the reader's attention in Études 97 to Ms. B.N. fr. 99 [fol.] 389 r a, where Dinadan also attacks religion.



Dinadan makes his first appearance when he becomes Tristan's companion, but his behaviour soon becomes disconcerting. Tristan plans to attack the thirty knights waiting in ambush for Lancelot, with the help of his new friend Dinadan, who, on discovering the number of adversaries, declines to help Tristan. Tristan interprets this refusal as "recreandise" and "faute de cuer," resorting to death threats to constrain him to fight (MII.29.19, 54). Thrown into the deep end, Dinadan actually defends himself honourably: "nus ne le veïst adonc ki pour boin cevalier ne le deüst tenir" (MII.32.63).

It is easy to mistake Dinadan's refusal for cowardice, but the narrator gives the readers clues as to the real reasons for his behaviour. Dinadan knows his limits: he would be quite happy to fight against four knights, "mais encontre .XV. ce est rage et forsenerie. . . ." Although he is an "assés boins cevaliers et hardis," Dinadan feels this enterprise "n'est mie plainne de trop grant sens."<sup>690</sup>

Dinadan's recognition of his limits leads him to refuse another combat and thereby challenge chivalric usage when, having witnessed Keu's humiliation, he prefers not to try to avenge it because, as he tells Keu's adversary,

vous estes de si grant forche que je porroie plus tost avoir honte que je vengier peüsse la honte de mon compaignon (MIII.236.15).

He knows that instead of avenging Keu, he would simply dishonour himself and Keu. Similarly, his reasonable attitude leads him to refuse the custom of Morgain's castle:

je seroie bien hors du sens et bien faus se je voloie la bataille reprendre encontre trois cevaliers (MIV.96.32).

Moreover, if he is ever unhorsed, he blames his "folie" in the first place for undertaking the joust, not his "lanche" (MIV.45.29).

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<sup>690</sup> MII.28.20, 5, 24. Dinadan also refuses for the same reason to be Iseut's champion against three knights MV.57.10. Engennés later puts forward a similar argument when he says that he is not mad enough to want to expose himself to death so directly as to help Galaad to fight against thirty knights (MVII.59.17).

Although Dinadan's interlocutors often interpret his refusals as cowardice, there are several examples to prove that he does not lack courage: he promises he will help defend Tristan against the thirty knights and lives up to his vow:

je vous aiderai a cest besoing de toute ma force et de tout mon pooir  
(MII.30.65).

Similarly, at the end of the "Pucelles" tournament, he does not hesitate to offer to fight Palamede in Tristan's stead:

Se a morir vient, miex vient il k'il muire pour le mieudre cevalier du  
monde que chil i morust . . . (MII.184.21).

Although Tristan smiles when he hears Dinadan's offer, he nevertheless recognises his friend's "franchise" and "deboinaireté," two qualities which are essential in a knight.<sup>691</sup>

Dinadan not only refuses to fight when the odds are against him, but he also declines to take part in what he sees as senseless and futile jousts. When Arthur organises some jousting and asks Dinadan whether he will join in or not, the latter answers "Ja ne voi je chi nel de mes anemis. . . . Pour coi je ne quier porter armes a chestui point" (MIV.126.12). Likewise, he deplores the absurdity of the following custom:

Ce est orendroit une coustume si conune par tout le roiaume de Logres  
que li chevalier errant ne sevent dire li un as autre fors que "Gardés vous  
de moi!" (MIV.118.27)

The fact that this attitude had some appeal to medieval audiences is shown by the author of *Escanor*, who also writes how Dinadan decries the custom which dictates that two knights are obliged to fight as soon as they notice each other, as Beate Schmolke-Hasselmann points out.<sup>692</sup> Not only do knights fight violently without reason, but they also need little to be reconciled:

<sup>691</sup> MII.184.38; 185.9. See knightly qualities in Chapter Three.

<sup>692</sup> Beate Schmolke-Hasselmann, *The Evolution of Arthurian Romance: The Verse Tradition from Chrétien to Froissart*, trans. Margaret and Roger Middleton (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998) 81.

je ne vi onques si fole gent ne si niche com sont li chevalier errant du roiaume de Logres qui pour noient se vont toute jour metant a mort et pour noient se racordent (MIV.115.18).

He certainly reproaches Tristan for his fickleness and hypocrisy towards Palamede:

Tu veus mal a Palamidés pour ce k'il t'abati orendroit. . . . Encore n'a pas granment de tans que je oï que tu desis que Palamidés estoit sans doute li mieudres cevaliers du monde. . . .

Tristan knows this to be true and ceases his complaint.<sup>693</sup>

Similarly, Dinadan has little faith in what he sees as the hypocritical reconciliation between Tristan and Palamede and believes it to be founded on reciprocal fear.<sup>694</sup> Dinadan disapproves of the habit that knights have of dissimulating their identity when this is not justified. When he finally finds Tristan after a year's searching, he rebukes him: "Li mauvais se vont repouant" (MVI.152.21). Although Tristan laughs it off, Dinadan is genuinely vexed that he was unable to find his friend because the latter had decided to ride incognito.

In spite of these criticisms, Dinadan does not denounce the chivalric ideal in itself: he deplores its excesses. According to him, a knight must avoid useless and dangerous adventures to devote himself to protecting the weak and oppressed. Dinadan, a "boins cevaliers des armes" (MIII.229.28), sees himself as a knight-errant and obeys the rules of the knightly world: "je suis uns chevaliers errans . . . ki vois querant aventures ensi com chevalier errant doivent faire" (MIV.82.9). His belief in the revenge ethic, for instance, is apparent when he witnesses Danain's humiliation:

Se je ceste honte ne venge, je voeil que on ne me tiengne jamais a nul jour pour chevalier!<sup>695</sup>

He wants to defend the oppressed Mordret who is being trampled by Bréhus's horse:

<sup>693</sup> MII.111.11, 20. See also MIV.156.12.

<sup>694</sup> MV.141.26. See also MVI.152.54; MVII.131.4.

<sup>695</sup> MIII.25.23. See also MIII.161.2. Dinadan also takes verbal revenge in the "Lai Voir Disant" (MIV.244).

tout fust il chevaliers mout amesurés, . . . chestui fait ne porroit il mie sousfrir ne que on feïst devant lui si grant vilonnie a chevalier errant que Breüs sans Pitié fait a Mordret (MIV.152.1).

On another occasion, he refuses to take advantage of the fact that he is standing up and his two adversaries are on the ground, for he “veut du tout faire a la maniere et a la guise des cevaliers errans, ensi com il avoit a coustume” (MIV.40.18). His refusal to allow Marc to be killed despite his felony (MIV.40.6) also demonstrates his adherence to the martial ethic. His defence of knights is mirrored by the protection he gives women, for he defends a damsel victim of Bréhus “pour ce que vous estes damoisele et je sui cevaliers errans.”<sup>696</sup> Far from attacking chivalry, he upholds its fundamental principles.

In addition, he honours the representatives of the Arthurian world and is appreciated by them. He has just been knighted by Arthur when he first meets Tristan, for whom he has been searching on account of his excellent reputation (MII.14.17, 33). He will always think very highly of Tristan, whom he loves and considers to be the best knight in the world,<sup>697</sup> and he goes to the “Pucelles” tournament especially to witness Tristan’s exploits (MII.107.29). He also thinks highly of Arthur’s court:

de chelui ostel viennent toutes les bontés et toutes les courtoisies ki sont (MIII.230.13).

Moreover, he considers Guenièvre to be the “fontaine et mireoir d’enseignement et de courtoisie . . .” (MII.203.10). He wants to meet Iseut because of her reputation for courtesy (MV.52.35) and is not insensitive to her beauty (MV.53.17). In many ways, he fits into the society whose excesses he deplors. Dinadan is also greatly appreciated by his fellow knights, which underlines his level of integration into this circle. Tristan

<sup>696</sup> MIII.159.23. See also MVI.155.28.

<sup>697</sup> MII.183.20; MIII.155.5; MIV.116.37; MIV.137.17.

values his company, he is received by Arthur “a grant honour et a grant feste,” and Iseut thinks much of both his physical and mental attributes.<sup>698</sup>

Dinadan is also critical of passionate love, as shown by the dialogue he has with Palamede, whose lament he overhears. Dinadan sees the suffering endured by lovers as senseless:

D’Amours ki vait si tourmentant et metant son sergant a mort me gart ore  
Dieus, et de tele amour me desfende! (MIV.82.20)

He cares only for love that can make him “rians, gais, envoisiés” (MIV.82.30) and tells Palamede he is being unreasonable:

se tu sens eüsses ne raison en toi, tu ne meüsses pas ton cors a doeil et a  
malaventure . . . (MIV.83.13).

Palamede is astounded (MIV.83.2) but recognises the force of Dinadan’s words (MIV.83.23). Dinadan also feels it is unreasonable for a knight to put himself “en aventure de mort” to impress a lady who is often indifferent, and who may give “drueries” and “joiaux” to more than one admirer (MV.54.20; 58.15).

Dinadan later expresses his views about love to Tristan in disguise:

Se Amours est de tel maniere qu’ele toille le sens a siens, donc di je bien  
que ce n’est mie amours, ains est rage de teste! (MV.33.18)

He reminds the reader of Kahedin, who “morut d’amours sans doute,” and of Tristan who became “nus et despris, tous esragiés et forsenés.”<sup>699</sup> Tristan counters his argument by underlining the fact that love enhances prowess, and as Espinogre “proves” Dinadan wrong by unhorsing him, he is thus not taken seriously on this occasion (MV.39.12).

This element of humour is virtually indistinguishable from Dinadan’s sometimes cutting remarks directed towards chivalric customs and passionate love, thus potentially damaging the strength of his criticisms. Dinadan moreover discredits the

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<sup>698</sup> MV.49.22; MIV.120.29; MV.53.8; MV.59.12.

validity of his attacks by not being as “sages” as he professes. He attempts to fight against Tristan because the latter refuses to reveal his identity (MV.36.20). He falls in love with a damsel at first sight, who happens to be his brother’s “amie” (MV.136.42). He also provokes laughter when, having flattered himself for unhorsing Galaad, he admits to his friends that he had taken advantage of the weakness of his opponent’s horse (MVI.154.75).

Dinadan actively looks for opportunities to make fun of people or situations. He is “liés” when he witnesses Tristan’s defeat by Palamede, “non mie pour haïne k’il eüst a monsieur Tristran, mais pour ocoison de lui gaber. . . .”<sup>700</sup> Dinadan plays several practical jokes on Marc, first by telling him that he has been unhorsed not by Lamorat but by Keu, a lesser knight (MIV.24-9), and then by provoking Marc into fleeing before Dagueneu whom Dinadan had identified as Lancelot (MIV.56-62).

More importantly in relation to the impact of his remarks, Dinadan seems to enjoy introducing an element of ambiguity into the seriousness of his reproaches, so that on many occasions, it is difficult to know whether the audience should take him to be sincere or not. This equivocalness leaves his criticisms open to interpretation both by the other characters and by the audience. After he has been forced to help Tristan fight against Morgain’s thirty knights, Dinadan tells his friend not to take all his criticisms seriously:

ja ai hui dites de maintes paroles dont je dis les unes par gabois et les autres a certes! (MII.30.51)

The victims of his criticisms sometimes do not know how to react, because they take him at his word where, as the narrator points out, he is actually joking. When Dinadan attacks the custom of the “rechet” to its owners’ faces, they believe him to be serious:

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<sup>699</sup> MV.34.5, 11.

<sup>700</sup> MII.108.2. See also MII.47.12; MIV.53.14.

“Li cevalier ki durement estoient tourmenté des paroles que Dynadans lour avoit dites, le prenent as paroles . . .” (MII.42.56). The narrator indicates that Dinadan is doing it only because “si ne puet il tenir sa langue k’il ne lour die pour faire rire monsigneur Tristran et soulagier . . .” (MII.42.12). Likewise, the knight to whom Dinadan directs his famous denunciation of the futility of certain jousts fails to notice that Dinadan is not entirely serious:

Quant li chevaliers ot Dynadant parler si sagement, il ne s’aperchoit mie adonc que Dynadans li die ces paroles par gas . . . (MIV.118.1).

Sometimes Dinadan’s interlocutors disagree on how to interpret his sarcasm. On one occasion, Dinadan asks why a king should not take part in jousts and adventures:

Nous nous metom es mellees et soufrom les dolours et les travaux, et vous vous en alés puis gabant quant les nouveles vous en viennent. . . . N’en semonnés ne moi ne autres, mais vous meïsmes i alés (MIV.126.16).

Arthur takes Dinadan seriously and is about to arm himself when Tristan restores order:

Sire, que volés vos faire? Se vous prendés regart as paroles de Dynadant souventes fois, par mon chief vous vous porrés bien courechier sovent . . . (MIV.126.29).

He and many more of Dinadan’s interlocutors “parviennent très vite à ‘désamorcer’ ses critiques, en les ravalant au rang des plaisanteries dépourvues de portée existentielle.”<sup>701</sup> There is therefore no way of knowing which way to take Dinadan, although in this case it would be absurd for the king to risk being wounded. Dinadan’s influence is certainly limited both by his fellow-knights and by his own respect of the knightly code.

On his death-bed, Tristan remembers Dinadan:

biaus dous amis, ici faut nostre compaignie! Or sui plus fierement gabés que gaber ne me soliés! Or ne serés mie a ma mort, mais je sai bien que encore en ferés vos mainte plainte (MIX.80.62).

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<sup>701</sup> Berthelot, “Dynadam” 38.

One wonders whether this and the humorous reactions of his friends are to be the gauge of how seriously one is to consider Dinadan's challenge to the excesses of chivalry. Tristan particularly appreciates him for his company and for his good humour, not, as one might have expected, for the pertinence of his attacks against the futility of certain customs, nor for his wisdom.

Whatever the reaction to them, however, these attacks are made, and humour may have been the only way to present them; they may therefore be the expression of a deeper unease in the text about certain chivalric practices. On one important occasion, Dinadan explains what could be seen as his philosophy of life: he is clearly speaking in earnest and his remark is taken seriously by his interlocutor, Iseut, who after Dinadan's speech, which the narrator plainly endorses, "connoist bien par ces paroles que voirement est Dynadans sages cevaliers et bien parlans" (MV.55.2):

Ki boins cevaliers est et preus si doit baer a hautes choses, mais cil ki n'est mie de haut afaire si se doit tenir as basses choses. De moi vous sai je bien tant a dire que ja par amours ne porroie a si haute cose monter con mesure Tristrans est montés u Lanselos du Lac. Mais se folie me montait en la teste par aucune aventure, je em porroie assés tost venir a ce que Kahedins en vint, . . . ki a grant dolour morut pour les amours de madame Yseut . . . (MV.54.25).

This attitude is reinforced by the presence of another critic, Kahedin, who is not a comic figure and whose arguments are pertinent and convincing.

#### B. Kahedin

Although Kahedin of Petite Bretagne is at first unaware of the customs of Logres, which allows him to express his astonishment freely, he nevertheless belongs to the chivalric élite.<sup>702</sup> When the reader first encounters him, he is twenty-four years old

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<sup>702</sup> On Kahedin see Emmanuèle Baumgartner, "Le personnage de Kahedin dans le *Tristan en prose*," *Mélanges de langue et de littérature du Moyen Age et de la Renaissance offerts à Jean Frappier* (Genève: Droz, 1970) 1: 77-82 and *Essai* 187; Ferlampin, "Dialogues" 79-121; Jacques Ribard, "Figures du chevalier errant dans le *Tristan en prose*," *Et c'est la fin* 3: 1205-16; Marie-Noëlle Toury, "De Kaherdin à Kahédin: L'invention d'une personnalité," *Et c'est la fin* 3: 1401-09.



and a “chevalier mout preu de son cors” (CII.562.1) who knows “a merveilles de gerre” (CII.562.1). He is a knight-errant and is therefore eager to take up every opportunity to seek for adventures. When he and Tristan find themselves in the “Forest d’Arvances,” it is he who says:

Or prenons nos armes . . . et verrons se la forest est si aventureuse com l’en vet disant (CIII.781.26).

He can challenge unknown knights to jousts,<sup>703</sup> and he does not react as Dinadan would on witnessing two knights who, having fought to exhaustion now “s’entrevont besier et s’entrefont si grant joie com s’il fussent frere charnel” (CIII.788.2). Like Dinadan, Kahedin admires the representatives of the Arthurian élite<sup>704</sup> and is appreciated by them, especially Tristan.<sup>705</sup> From the outset, therefore, he fits more into the chivalric mould than does Dinadan.

When Kahedin is certain of Iseut’s rejection, however, he begins questioning the validity of love and the absurdity of certain chivalric customs. He tries to forget Iseut (MI.86.37) because he sees his love as both illness and madness but his passion is soon rekindled when he sees her again (MI.89.32). For him, love does not enhance prowess; on the contrary, it dampens his interest in the glory of arms.<sup>706</sup> He dies cursing Iseut and regretting having ever fallen in love (MI.161.36).

This disillusionment is also apparent in his criticisms of certain chivalric customs. On two separate occasions, he refuses to joust against Palamede (MI.105.15) and Lancelot (MI.108.31) for Iseut, a reason which he finds absurd (MI.112.15). Pragmatism wins the day when he refuses to join Palamede to seek for adventures in Logres because

<sup>703</sup> CIII.783.20; MI.77.11.

<sup>704</sup> CII.567.1; CIII.779.3; MI.90.40; MI.96.17.

<sup>705</sup> CIII.780.3; CIII.789.4; MI.91.1.

<sup>706</sup> See the section on Kahedin in Chapter Four.

je ne voi mie si grant gaaing ne si grant preu es batailles du roiaume de Logres que je ne voel mieus avoir ma pel entiere que derompue de glaives et d'espees (MI.121.26).

He attacks the absurdity of vainglory:

li graindres los si est de ferir et d'abatre et d'ocire et de mehaignier li uns l'autre, ki ne me samble pas santé! (MI.121.32)

Echoing Dinadan, he declares:

Je n'aimme pas celui pais u li cevalier acoustumeement, quant il s'entretruevent et il se devoient saluer et conjoïr et acointier, s'entrabatent et ochient (MI.121.33).

Palamede makes no attempt to persuade him to follow him and does not argue with Kahedin, nor does he believe him to be in jest (MI.121.45).

Kahedin's altercation with Keu reveals the development of his views on jousting. Keu challenges Kahedin to a joust, but the latter sees no reason for this: "onques vostre peres ne mesfit au mien, que je sace, ne vous a moi" (MI.122.27). His criticism reaches Arthur himself, who, by upholding this custom, keeps Logres in a permanent state of war:

Ge ne sai . . . comment il i puist avoir plus mortel guerre que g'i voi, car li plus fort i vont ociant les plus febles, et si n'i a nule raison! (MI.122.22)

When Keu explains that this custom actually trains knights in the art of jousting, which in turn enables one to distinguish between the good and the bad knights, Kahedin answers:

S'il avient par aucune aventure que vous au premier caup me jetés mort a tere, quele hounour me ferés vous puis? . . . Se je sui mors, autretant me caut se vous me faites puis hounour com deshounour! (MI.124.19)

Kahedin attacks the lifestyle of knights-errant by demonstrating his refusal to live dangerously and his disdain for glory. By admitting defeat on this subject, moreover, Keu allows an important Arthurian value to crumble under the weight of Kahedin's common sense:

Je ne trovai piecha mais cevalier ki si bien se seüst desfendre par paroles  
com vous faites (MI.124.28).

Kahedin also sees the tradition which allows a damsel to be won off a knight through combat as “laide et vilainne” (MI.126.47) and he finds it absurd to fight for a lady or a damsel anyway (MI.129.24). Finally the story itself demonstrates the futility of the custom of the bridge to which Kahedin’s father Hoël, who has come to Logres to search for his son, is committed. Kahedin comes to cross the bridge and has to submit to the custom without knowing he is to fight against his own father: “quant je voi apertement k’il me couvient faire folie, je le ferai, u voelle u non” (MI.140.20). The battle is ruthless (MI.142.1), and when the exhausted adversaries reveal their identities, Kahedin is furious:

Maleois soit li rois Artus, ki si males coustumes et si vilainnes suefre au  
roiaume de Logres, car maint preudome en sont ja mort a tort et encore en  
morront! (MI.144.42)

At this point, Kahedin decides to return with his father to his native country and leaves behind him the customs he condemns.

### C. Palamede

During the Quest, Artus le Petit assaults Galaad and is promptly unhorsed. When Palamede tells him that he got what he deserved, Artus explains that as a new knight, he is looking for “los” and “pris” (MIX.8.26), a search for glory which Palamede immediately condemns as vacuous (MIX.8.28). Similarly, Eliezer challenges Galaad to a joust because the latter refuses to reveal his identity:<sup>707</sup>

U vous me dites qui vous estes, u vous vous combatrés a moi!  
(MVIII.161.44)

Having been unhorsed, Eliezer returns home and tells his father about the incident.

The latter answers:

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<sup>707</sup> This is a standard narrative item in Arthurian prose romance.

Or gardés des ore mais . . . que vous sans raison n'asailliés les cevaliers estranges, car saciés qu'il en i a des meilleurs que vous ne quidiés, et s'il n'estoient plus preudome d'autres et plus endurans, il ne poroient pas ensi aler par les estranges teres . . . (MVIII.165.6).

Eliezer agrees with his father and realises his mistake.

Palamede is later surprised that a knight whom he does not know to be Lancelot asks him to joust: "Ja ne li ai je riens mesfait!" (MIX.127.33) After the joust, however, Lancelot explains that he challenged Palamede only to see how strong he was (MIX.129.2). Palamede is outraged at the futility of the reason: "Comment . . . si ne conmenchastes la bataille pour autre cose?" (MIX.129.12) Lancelot admits his mistake and apologises (MIX.129.41). Sadly, this joust exhausts Palamede and ultimately enables Gauvain and Agravain to kill him (MIX.130). In this the text may be giving a judgement on the absurdity of jousting for no sufficient reason.<sup>708</sup>

#### D. Other characters

The prose Tristan contains scenes which show up those who, through their excesses, risk compromising the ideal to which they aspire. Tristan himself regrets having unhorsed Lucan in his hasty revenge of Dinadan's humiliation:

De tant com il a fait a Lucan le bouteillier se repent il mout durement, et s'il seüst ausi bien la verité de son afaire com il le set orendroit, ja ne li eüst riens mesfait s'il s'em peüst garder . . . (MIII.34.4).

Similarly, Lancelot regrets having wounded Tristan against his will at the end of the "Pucelles" tournament (MIII.13.19). Moreover, he refuses to fight Keu because he sees no reason for it: "entre nous deus n'avoit mortel querele" (MIII.143.10). Keu respects his decision and bears him no grudge (MIII.143.11).

Implicit condemnations of the excesses of chivalry may lie in the sequence of events and in the reactions of other characters. It is enough for Kahedin to notice a

“chevaliers aventureus” to want to challenge him (CIII.783.20). Although the knight recognises the inevitability of the joust, he nevertheless demonstrates his reluctance: “Et por ce vient il a son cheval et monte plaignant et dolosant, et faisant le greignor duel dou monde” (CIII.783.32). Kahedin is defeated, but whether this means that he was unjustified or not in seeking a joust is hard to say.

Refusals to fight generally anger the challenger. However, Palamede, who challenges Fergus because he believes he is a “chevaliers erranz qui aille querant aventures,” respects Fergus’s refusal, and “dit puis que li chevaliers refuse la joste qu’il ne l’en puet par reson esfocier.”<sup>709</sup> This reaction is considered courteous by Fergus, and by extension by the narrator, for “Fergus s’en vient a Palamedes et le salue mout bel et mout cortoisement, et Palamedes li rent son salu a la maniere et en la guise de chevalier errant” (CIII.887.25). The impact on the reader is clear: the custom of knights-errant cannot systematically justify a challenge to a joust, which implies that some of these jousts are futile.<sup>710</sup> Ménard qualifies these jousts as a “subtile perversion de l’idéal chevaleresque:”

Le chevalier errant devient un spécialiste de la joute, un maniaque du duel, un virtuose, épris de numéros plus ou moins acrobatiques et plus ou moins périlleux. Le besoin de défier et de provoquer les passants traduit peut-être une certaine ardeur belliqueuse, mais surtout la sourde envie de se mettre en avant, de l’emporter sur les autres et d’en tirer des satisfactions d’amour-propre. Pour assouvir ce mauvais penchant, il suffit habituellement de trouver un adversaire, de le désarçonner et de le réduire à sa merci.<sup>711</sup>

This very natural twentieth-century reader response might very well have been shared by the authors of the Tristan, as is revealed by the way one particular incident is

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<sup>708</sup> It is interesting to note that these examples feature in the Grail section of the Tristan, and might therefore be part of a more general questioning of the themes and attitudes of secular romance. The following examples, however, come before the Grail section.

<sup>709</sup> CIII.887.12, 23.

<sup>710</sup> Even Galaad, the best knight in the world, refuses a joust on the grounds that “il avient aucune fois que li cevalier ne sont pas aiesié de joster” (MVIII.131.9-10).

<sup>711</sup> Ménard, “Le chevalier errant” 303.

related, the absurdity of which would have had an influence on the thirteenth-century listeners. After the Louveserp tournament, Palamede meets Espinogre, who is lamenting the loss of his mistress. Taking pity on the latter's plight, Palamede promises to help him regain her. The lady is successively won four times by four different knights: the first time by her own lover (MVI.4.50), the second time by Helior (MVI.5.22), the third time by Sephar,<sup>712</sup> and the fourth time by Palamede, though he gains her only in order to hand her back to her original lover, Espinogre. All these jousts are fought in the name of this custom, but the picture of a lady changing hands four times in the space of a few days would surely have struck the original audience as absurd. Moreover, the lady's plight is highlighted by the narrator:

La dame remaint desous un arbre, dolante et iree et esplouree. Grant ire demainne et grant dolour, et maudist l'eure qu'ele fu nee, car de nouvel li est ore mesceü trop durement. La dame pleure et se demente et detort ses poins et ses dois, et fait une dolour si grant que nule autre dame ne poroit grigneur faire (MVI.11.10).

Although in other similar circumstances, the narrator omits to mention the reaction of the lady concerned, the visual detail of the woman wringing her hands is striking. This would not have failed to catch the audience's attention, especially since the outcome of the whole story is that she is rightly returned to her lover. This passage could simply be an exciting and vicarious read for the thirteenth-century audience, but it may also implicitly condemn the abuse of the custom, despite the happy outcome.

Some of these criticisms are made by those whom the reader considers to be the heroes of the text: Tristan, Lancelot, Palamede all, at one point or another find that applying the chivalric customs to the letter is excessive. Their remarks do not provoke laughter, as do those of Dinadan and to a lesser extent those of Kahedin, thus providing a clue as to the seriousness of their comments. It is difficult to ascertain the impact of

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<sup>712</sup> MVI.10.9; MVI.10.61.

Kahedin's remarks on the institution of chivalry and on the original audience. As Jacques Ribard says:

Aussi faut-il nous garder, nous les clercs d'aujourd'hui, de céder trop facilement à la séduction qu'exerce sur nous l'ironie décapante de Kahédin, car ce serait pécher gravement par anachronisme d'y lire on ne sait quelle condamnation généralisée de la prouesse chevaleresque.<sup>713</sup>

It is true that Palamede sees Kahedin's condemnations as "giu et . . . envoiseüre" (MI.113.5), and that he is exclusively remembered by the other characters as the knight who died for the love of Iseut rather than for his criticisms.<sup>714</sup> On the other hand, the potential impact of Kahedin's and Dinadan's views should not be obscured by what they are remembered for, because the occasional attacks on similar subjects by other knights support these dissenting voices.

Despite the fact that the seemingly futile jousts belong to the picture of chivalric life in the prose Tristan, certain principles which are fundamental to the definition of chivalry in our text are not so much reappraised as implicitly questioned in order to find a just measure in this world. These characters never openly attack Arthur, as do the dangerous Bréhus, Gauvain, Marc and Morgain. The last three in particular transgress many rules and are in part responsible for destabilising the Arthurian world.

Chapters Five and Six have raised questions which appear to remain unresolved. On the one hand the glorification of love and chivalric achievement which the Tristan displays for most of its length is set up against the Christian values of the Grail section; on the other, some dissenting voices criticise the abuse of some of these chivalric traditions, although they do not consistently undermine them. Dinadan, whose voice is the most influential through its originality, is not an example of heroism, but he is realistic, and sees through the vain search for glory. The fact that he is generally not

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<sup>713</sup> Jacques Ribard, "Figures du chevalier errant dans le Tristan en prose," Et c'est la fin 3:1210.

<sup>714</sup> MI.167.16. See also MII.84.5; MV.34.1; N.V.54.31; MVI.25.51; MVII.223.15; MIX.64.32.

taken seriously need not be problematic: in the Middle Ages the mad character or the court jester could be seen as inspired by an innate wisdom, “that special gift . . . for hitting the nail of truth in the head.” Indeed, John Southworth explains that in the Middle Ages,

The king’s need for truth, especially of the unpalatable kind, and the fool’s ability to communicate it in an uniquely acceptable form as humour was a crucial factor in the relations between them from which the fool derived much of his raison d’être.<sup>715</sup>

Thus when no one at the French court of Philip VI dared inform the king that most of his fleet had perished at the hands of Edward III at Sluys in 1340, it was left to an unnamed fool to break the news. Dinadan might, through his irony and humour, incarnate a role akin to that described by Southworth. Thus one may appreciate Dinadan’s irony about certain customs by considering his jokes as

the only way to explore a paradoxical or forbidden subject; and that the best and most effective joke may be something outrageous said with a straight face. . . .<sup>716</sup>

Dinadan’s jokes could be his way of expressing views which would otherwise shock this ordered society. His vision is reinforced by the intermittent criticisms of other important characters, which leads us to believe there is a search for a knightly life dedicated more to helping others than to the achievement of personal glory, something more in keeping with the teachings of Galaad.

In addition, in the light of the two previous chapters Palamede’s story takes on a new significance: he is a knight who, having chosen a high moral path and rejected that of passionate, earthly love, falls victim to Lancelot’s zeal in upholding those very

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<sup>715</sup> John Southworth, Fools and Jesters at the English Court (Stroud: Sutton, 1998) 8.

<sup>716</sup> Peter Field, introduction, Le Morte Darthur: The Seventh and Eighth Tales, by Sir Thomas Malory (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1978) 19.



values that Dinadan and Kahedin criticise.<sup>717</sup> He is sorely regretted: “tant a empirie la Table Reonde et la boine cevalerie du roiaume de Logres, qui cest preudomme a mis a mort!” (MIX.132.16) He is the one knight in the prose Tristan who willingly and knowingly endorses Christian values through baptism, and he is indirectly cut down by one of the three best knights in the world who, so the story implies, is excessive in this desire to fight at any opportunity, as he is in his continuing relationship with Guenièvre, which is said to be threatening Arthur’s court and the coherence of his entourage. The circumstances of Palamede’s death appear to strike a balance between the dichotomies highlighted above: his last words are for Lancelot, Galaad, “la court le roi Artu,” and “Jhesucrist” (MIX.132.33-61). He represents a more ascetic chivalry than does Tristan, but is not removed from the Tristan world as is Galaad. He dies a Christian amongst knights, victim of the abuse of an otherwise valid custom, having himself experienced the search for glory and the passion of love before becoming both “crestiens” and “compains de la Table Reonde” (MIX.119.21).

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<sup>717</sup> Lancelot’s attack on Palamede is of vital importance here, because the narrative implies that if Palamede had been in a position to defend himself against Gauvain and Agravain, he would have survived.

## Conclusion

The prose Tristan is a concerted effort to integrate the story of the lovers of Cornouailles into the Arthurian world as it is presented in the prose Lancelot, to which the prose Tristan was almost equal in popularity if one may judge by the number of extant manuscripts.<sup>718</sup> The result is a text whose plot is not such as we expect in twenty-first-century fiction, and modern readers have often lamented that the original tragic story of unlawful love is diluted with many episodes belonging to a romance of chivalry. That romance is less concerned with exploring a tragic story of life than with exalting knightly modes of living. In an Arthurian world, fictional yet strangely familiar to that of its thirteenth-century aristocratic audience, one hears about characters fighting in jousts, tournaments, composing courtly letters and love poems, hunting, listening to and performing music, praying, eating, and even sleeping. It would seem from this that the reader penetrates “à l’intérieur d’un monde stable, reposant sur des bases dont personne ne met en doute la solidité,”<sup>719</sup> into a world in which the vivid details from the story stay with the readers and presumably with a thirteenth-century aristocratic audience: a spring morning (MVI.158.40), the departure of the lovers for the Louveserp tournament (MV.274.2), a musical performance (MIV.243.11), blood on a sword shining in the moonlight (MIV.13.17). These details intersperse the more numerous didactic episodes which exemplify chivalric rules, stigmatise the bad knights, and simply depict the daily life of the knight-errant, with its halts at fountains, castles and hermitages, its fortuitous encounters with knights, damsels and hermits.

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<sup>718</sup> P. J. C. Field, “The French Prose Tristan” 269-87 and “Malory and the French Prose Lancelot,” Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester 75.1 (1993): 79-102.

<sup>719</sup> Vinaver, “Un chevalier errant” 677.

A sense of monotony can be produced by the repetition of scenes and motifs: castles so often “mout forz et mout bien seanz,” ladies “mout avenant” and jousts “mout felenesse;” the rare descriptions that are not stock can be vivid, but the authors waste no time on describing the physical features of their characters. What the reader is aware of, however, is the effect those features have on the other people: Tristan’s and Iseut’s attributes, for instance, affect other ladies and knights in what is sometimes an uncontrollable way. Love in particular plays an important role in the Tristan, for not only is it central to the plot: it is the subject of an ongoing debate on the relationship between love and chivalry.

In both the martial and courtly spheres of the Tristan world, however, the listener is aware of voices and situations which question the accepted ways, and the inclusion of the Queste material only reinforces this movement: the pointless death of good knights, the despair with which Kahedin dies of love, his and Dinadan’s wry humour, the fact that the lovers of Cornouailles can finally only find happiness in death, and the tensions between celestial and earthly chivalry offer a different view on the straightforward tale of chivalry which the prose Tristan first appears to present. The text closes on a shortened version of La mort le roi Artu, on the downfall therefore of the institution that upheld the values celebrated by much of the prose Tristan: the representatives of both celestial chivalry and earthly chivalry are dead; Gauvain confesses to his crimes; there is no opening towards anything new: only more strife awaits the kingdom of Logres through internal rivalries, in part fuelled by the continuing relationship between Lancelot and Guenièvre. This marks the end of the rise and fall of Tristan and of the Quest, and both take with them the values they represented.

One may understandably wonder what emerges from the prose Tristan. This study focuses on the world which the story depicts. Making complete sense of such a long and eclectic text which incorporates so many sources will certainly be difficult, perhaps impossible, partly because it raises questions to which a modern readership may be more sensitive than its original audience, which it does not fully answer. In sum, it is a tale of love and chivalry where both are threatened by abuses of the system, and where the Quest for the Holy Grail provides only part of the answer in the search for an ideal which, in the end, is only to be thwarted by the demise of the Arthurian world.

## Introduction to Malory's "The Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones"

In his preface to his edition of Sir Thomas Malory's Le Morte Darthur, William

Caxton explains that:

I have . . . enprysed to enprynte a book of the noble hystories of the sayd kyng Arthur and of certeyn of his knyghtes, after a cople unto me delyverd, whyche cople syr Thomas Malorye dyd take oute of certeyn bookes of Frensshe. . . .<sup>720</sup>

The prose Tristan is Malory's French source for his "Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones," a tale belonging to his Morte Darthur. Vinaver reconstructs the text of the prose Tristan from its best and closest representatives: sections of Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale f. fr. 103, 334, and 99, corresponding to Works 371-513, 513-619, 619-846, respectively.<sup>721</sup> Sadly, as Helen Cooper points out, it is difficult to carry out a precise source study, because "none of the numerous extant French manuscripts represents the particular form of the work known to Malory."<sup>722</sup> Cooper continues, however, that there are:

a number of changes of emphasis or phrasing that are consistent across the whole of the Book but that appear in none of the known French manuscripts, and in these instances it seems safe to speak of Malory's own invention.<sup>723</sup>

By comparing Malory's narrative with his French source one appreciates his particular emphasis and originality, although one must bear in mind that without the exact manuscript from which Malory worked, the comparison is tentative.

The long account of Tristram's adventures stands at the centre of all three major editions of the text (the Winchester Manuscript, the Caxton incunable and Vinaver's

<sup>720</sup> Works, Caxton's preface, cxlv.23.

<sup>721</sup> He also used Chantilly 646, Pierpont Morgan Library fr. 41, Leningrad fr. F. v. XV, 2, and Sommer's printed selections from British Museum Add. 5474, among others (Works 1449).

<sup>722</sup> Helen Cooper, "The Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones," A Companion to Malory, ed. Elizabeth Archibald and A. S. G. Edwards (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1996) 184. See also Thomas Rumble,

edition) and makes up over a third of the total volume (480 out of 1260 of Vinaver's pages). Its position is no indication as to the date of its composition,<sup>724</sup> but it is logical in the sequence of events. It takes place before the Quest for the Holy Grail, which, in turn, precedes Lancelot's return to court, an event which, together with Gawain's and his brothers' hostility, will partly bring about the final demise of the Arthurian court.

Eugène Vinaver made a number of comparisons between Malory's "Tristram" and its French source over a period of nearly half a century, and found that the English version is one sixth of the size of the French and that Malory removed the monologues and the lyrical passages and has also suppressed certain episodes and details. More emphatically than his French counterparts, Malory gives priority to Tristram's chivalric exploits over and above his "amours." As Terence McCarthy remarks, "Malory has little time for the mysticism and the magic, the religious doctrine and the personal sentiment, the psychological enquiry and the amorous intrigue of French romance."<sup>725</sup> Rather than reproduce the "Thirde Booke"<sup>726</sup> of the prose *Tristan*, which mixes Tristan's adventures with the Holy Quest, Malory gives his "Sir Tristram" a happy ending: Tristram and Isolde enjoy quasi-conjugal bliss at Joyous Guard, Tristram's "worship" has equalled that of Lancelot, and Palomides the Saracen is baptised, with Tristram as his godfather.

This second part of the thesis will consider Malory's "Tristram" in the light of its French source, examining, as for the prose *Tristan*, what kind of world Malory presents, whilst bearing in mind that the French text stands entirely on its own whilst

"The Tale of Tristram: Development by Analogy." *Malory's Originality: A Critical Study of Le Morte Darthur*, ed. R. M. Lumiansky (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1964) 122.

<sup>723</sup> Cooper 184.

<sup>724</sup> Malory finished composing his text in "the ninth yere of the reygne of Kyng Edward the Fourth" (1260.25), that is, between 3 March 1469 and 4 March 1470, making his text over two centuries younger than the prose *Tristan*.

<sup>725</sup> Terence McCarthy, "Malory and His Sources," *A Companion to Malory* 80.

<sup>726</sup> 845.31.

the “Tristram,” despite Eugène Vinaver, is part of a whole, of what Caxton refers to as “the noble and joyous hystorye of the grete conquerour and excellent kyng, kyng Arthur . . .” (cxlvi.21). Vinaver’s theory that the Morte is actually a collection of separate tales appears in almost everything he wrote concerning Malory since 1947.<sup>727</sup>

Important as the “Tristram” section may be, it is the tale which has received the least favourable attention from the critics. Vida Scudder saw it as a “mutilated and hybrid version” of the “indubitably finer early versions.”<sup>728</sup> Vinaver explains that:

In all essentials, . . . Malory’s Tristram is but another example of a medieval romance in which the author’s sen fails to harmonize with the matiere, and the fairest approach to it is to regard it not as an achievement, but as an experiment . . . (Works, Introduction, lxxxix).

In 1971, he referred to the “Book of Sir Tristram” as “long and monotonous.”<sup>729</sup> More recently, McCarthy wrote:

The Tristram book . . . is long, so full of inconsequence that even the central story is accorded little enthusiasm. . . .<sup>730</sup>

There has been a good deal more on the same lines.<sup>731</sup> What earlier critics may have failed to see is that this vision of the “Tristram” is somewhat anachronistic. Modern readers may have little interest in repetitive and seemingly interminable accounts of knightly adventures, but there is every reason to suppose that an upper-class fifteenth-century audience would have enjoyed these scenes, presented not with the realism of a novel, but in much the same way as in a soap opera. Let us attempt to read the “Tristram” as Caxton saw the Morte, as a book in which the readers

shalle fynde many joyous and playsaunt hystories and noble and renomd actes of humanyté, gentylnesse, and chyvalryes (Caxton’s preface, cxlvi.2).

<sup>727</sup> See his “Sir Thomas Malory,” Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages 544 and his Introduction and Commentary to Works.

<sup>728</sup> Scudder, Le Morte Darthur of Sir Thomas Malory 229, 233. See also W. H. Schofield, English Literature from the Norman Conquest to Chaucer (London: Macmillan, 1914) 211.

<sup>729</sup> Eugène Vinaver, Introduction, Works, by Thomas Malory, 2nd ed. (Oxford: OUP, 1971) viii.

<sup>730</sup> Terence McCarthy, An Introduction to Malory (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1988) 28.

<sup>731</sup> For a summary of the criticism for and against Malory’s “Tristram,” see D. Thomas Hanks, “Malory’s ‘Book of Sir Tristram:’ Focusing Le Morte Darthur,” Quondam et Futurus 3 (1993): 14-31, at 27, note 2.

Comparisons between the prose Tristan and Malory's "Tristram" have already been carried out on a variety of topics,<sup>732</sup> but Vinaver's Roman de Tristan et Iseut dans l'œuvre de Thomas Malory is the most exhaustive so far.<sup>733</sup> Malory's "Tristram" will be examined following the pattern with which the prose Tristan was explored in the first six chapters, analysing the social and physical reality, the human beings, the various aspects of chivalry and the dissenting voices, highlighting the differences between both texts and determining what kind of world Malory presents.

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<sup>732</sup> See Appendix, Section C.

<sup>733</sup> Paris: Champion, 1925. In it, Vinaver explores Malory's sources, establishes the ways Malory changes them, and underlines this author's originality in his transformation of his source material.



## Chapter Seven: The Physical and Social World of “Sir Tristram”

As with its French counterpart, the world of “Sir Tristram” would have seemed both remote and familiar to its original audience, but some of the details Malory provides allow a closer identification between the world of the audience and the fictional world of “Sir Tristram” than was the case in the French romance.

### I. A World Apart

#### A. Temporal references

Caxton distinctly places the time of the action “in tho dayes” (cxlv.33), as does Malory.<sup>734</sup> Similarly, by constantly referring to his “Frenshe booke,”<sup>735</sup> Malory distances the action of the “Tristram” from the real world of the original audience. The tense of his verbs, as in the French text, contributes to the strong sense that the events he relates are in the past. Malory underlines the passage of time between fiction and reality by providing modern place-names as well as old ones:

she cam to a castell that is called Magowns, that now is called Arundell, in Southsex.<sup>736</sup>

This particular passage not only emphasises the difference between past and present, as do Malory’s disparaging comments on the present,<sup>737</sup> but the reference to Sussex also allows the readers to feel they are in something of a recognisable world.

Unlike the French original, which provides Tristan’s genealogy back to the time of Jesus Christ, Malory only goes back as far as Tristram’s father Melyodas.<sup>738</sup> Malory

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<sup>734</sup> “that tyme” 403.25; “in tho days” 405.2; 809.31; “in kynge Arthurs dayes” 568.19; 614.17; 648.14; 742.25; 827.26.

<sup>735</sup> 384.1; 419.20; 444.26, etc.

<sup>736</sup> 635.23, not in the French source: Vinaver, Commentary. Malory also identifies Camelot with Winchester (832.17; 1065.4), and elsewhere in the *Morte*, Ascolat with Guildford (1065.28) and Joyous Gard with Alnwick or Bamborough (1257.27).

<sup>737</sup> 1119.1-1120.13.

speaks of King Arthur's grandfather Constantine (188.9) in a way that identifies him with the Constantine who proclaimed himself Roman Emperor at York in 306 AD, while the "Tristram" takes place before the Grail Quest, for which Malory provides a fifth-century date (855.12), as does the prose Tristan. As Malory situates the action of the "Tristram" during King Arthur's reign (371.10), one can infer that the events surrounding Tristram take place in the fourth and fifth centuries. A small number of inconsistencies crop up in the Morte Darthur as in the prose Tristan, such as the presence of white monks (877.3), whose order was founded in 1098, for instance. Such references, according to Field, may deserve close attention in their context, but need not have much effect on the book as a whole.<sup>739</sup>

#### B. Use of mythology

It was established above that the use of Greek mythology in the story of "Apollo l'Aventureus" helps to create an otherworldly atmosphere in the prose Tristan. Malory omits the French prologue recounting the lives of Tristan's ancestors, and this story, with its mythological overtones therefore disappears from his text. On the other hand, Malory retains the story of the questing beast, whose appearance is analogous to its French, and probably original Greek, counterparts. It

had in shap lyke a serpentis hede and a body lyke a lybard, buttocked lyke a lyon and footed lyke an harte. And in hys body there was such a noyse as hit had bene twenty couple of houndys questynge. . . .<sup>740</sup>

Even though, as in the French text, this beast may not be a direct allusion to the Greek Chimaera, it is nevertheless an otherworldly being whose presence creates a distance

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<sup>738</sup> As Thomas Rumble points out, however, if we were sure that Malory's source did not also omit the Tristram's lengthy introduction, we would be able to agree, with Vinaver, that Malory "clearly aims at some degree of simplification within the [source] material which he retains" (Works 1443). Rumble adds that the Italian Leggenda di Tristano also begins *in medias res*. See "'The Tale of Tristram: Development by Analogy'" Malory's Originality: A Critical Study of Le Morte Darthur, ed. Robert M. Lumiansky (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins P, 1964) 131-33.

<sup>739</sup> P. J. C. Field, "Time" 233.

<sup>740</sup> 484.1. See also 590.19.

between the fifteenth-century audience and the fictional world of “Sir Tristram.” This being said, there is a considerable effort on the author’s part to create for his original listeners a world which is in many ways closer to their own than is the case in the prose Tristan.

## II. The physical world of “Sir Tristram”

### A. Time patterns

Although Malory situates the “Tristram” world in the days of King Arthur,

there is very little in the story to suggest that being at a particular distance in time from us has made any systematic difference to the physical or social or intellectual detail of Malory’s world. . . . Even when, as a matter of historical fact, some feature of the world of the Morte Darthur flourished in one part of the Middle Ages and not another—tournaments, for instance, were not invented until the middle of the eleventh century—there is nothing in Malory’s presentation of that feature to bring its chronological limitations home to the reader’s mind. The result is an indefinite pastness very different from the specific pastness characteristic of historical novels.<sup>741</sup>

The events may take place in an unspecified past, but Malory punctuates his narrative with time references which anchor it to a more tangible reality. Moreover, his paratactic style “establishes a characteristic tone of flat truth which the more accomplished, fluent, and varied subordination of clauses in his French sources cannot convey.”<sup>742</sup> The precise duration of events is sometimes recorded: La Cote Mal Tayle and Plenorius fight for “two owres and more” and Morgan imprisons a lady for “fyve yere.”<sup>743</sup> Similarly, the day in the week, or the time of day, may be specified. Thus Tristram declares he will “ryde on Tewysday next commynge” (840.11), and the action can take place “erly in the mornynge, afore day” or “in the evenynge.”<sup>744</sup> Malory’s French counterpart likewise sets the action on a recognisable temporal scale. The

<sup>741</sup> Field, “Time” 232.

<sup>742</sup> Field, Romance and Chronicle 38.

<sup>743</sup> 473.10; 792.17. See also 405.10; 444.14; 496.17; 806.7.

French Lancelot hears mass early in the morning,<sup>745</sup> Iseut desires to speak to Gaheriet “entour eure de prime,”<sup>746</sup> knights ride together until “eure de tierche,”<sup>747</sup> Perceval’s lion stays with him until “nonne,”<sup>748</sup> Tristan arrives “au basset vespre” (MIII.167.1), and Mordret wonders where he will stay “anuit.”<sup>749</sup> In “Sir Tristram,” seasons are also mentioned, as when Tristram looks for Palomides “all that quarter of somer,” (784.30) although as in the prose *Tristan*, there are few indications as to which month it is.<sup>750</sup> Knightly life is punctuated by the liturgical cycle, despite the fact that, as we will see in Chapter Ten, these events are primarily chivalric occasions. Thus Plenorius and Brewne le Noyre are to be made knights “at Pentecoste nexte folowyng.”<sup>751</sup> Alexander the Orphan is knighted on “Oure Lady Day in Lente” (636.9), and the Round Table knights gather “uppon Whitsonday” (791.7), just as, in the *Tristan*, Pelles’ cousin is knighted “un jour après Pasques” (MVI.70.33) and Helyant “diemence au matin” (MVI.81.54). In these things, Malory’s text does not differ much from its French counterpart: readers have sufficient time references to allow them to identify to this fictional world. Malory does not, however, create a coherent time-scheme across the “Tristram.” This contributes to the indefiniteness which was evoked earlier about the unspecified past: it resembles the world Malory lived in because it has its Tuesdays and its feasts of Our Lady and its monastic hours, but the time references function symbolically only, not literally, and because Malory is writing mainly about

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<sup>744</sup> 711.4; 758.24. See also 524.33; 758.28.

<sup>745</sup> MIII.2.4. See also CIII.697.2; MIII.241.10

<sup>746</sup> MIII.62.3. See also CIII.683.6; MIII.78.2; MVIII.19.14; MVIII.68.14; MIX.4.8.

<sup>747</sup> MIII.158.3. See also MIX.33.43.

<sup>748</sup> MIII.22.9. See also CIII.684.1; MIII.94.9; MVII.76.60; MVIII.49.22; MIX.41.22.

<sup>749</sup> CIII.682.4. See also “vespres” CIII.682.15; CIII.811.16; MII.130.16; MIII.5.5; MIII.51.32; “anuit” MII.88.33; MII.171.16; MV.49.15; “ersoir” MIII.184.31; MIII.186.5.

<sup>750</sup> One exception is the tournament of Lonezep which is to begin on “Mayday” (683.1), while Tristram is said to hunt the hart “a lytil afore the moneth o May” (683.14). For the French, see MIV.166.12; MV.5.16.

<sup>751</sup> 476.9. See also 832.8.

the chivalric world, the realism of such details is not critical to the story. It is enough for Malory to suggest a time-scheme against which chivalric life continues its course.

#### B. Natural landmarks

As in the French, wells and fountains provide drinking spots for thirsty knights

(489.12), or places where characters fall asleep (449.20). King Mark and his men sit

aboute a welle and ete and dranke suche metys as they had, and their horsis walkynge and som tyed, and their shyldys hynge in dyverse placis about them (586.3)

This tableau of knights sitting around a water spot is atmospheric, and the very lack of detail of the well is part of this suggestive picture. Nor does the lack of information about the food prevent the scene from being evocative. Wells can allow the action to take a pause and be contemplated, and the atmosphere to be evoked, and they often prompt the narrator to link fiction and reality.

The following two examples show how wells also provide the opportunity for encounters. On one occasion, because the “weddir was hote” (the weather is very seldom mentioned in the Morte), Dagonet stops at a “fayre well” to drink, allowing him to meet Tristram (496.28). If wells are described at all, they are conventionally “fayre,”<sup>752</sup> and occasionally, their “clere watir” is “burbelynge.”<sup>753</sup> In this instance, the enticing water increases Tristram’s “courage” to drink. This leads to an encounter with another knight, so the description of this well, just as the details of the weather and the well in the first example, are accessory to knightly life.<sup>754</sup>

Finally, wells are places where the characters can express their feelings, as in the prose Tristan, although knightly laments are less frequent in “Sir Tristram.” Palomides finds Epynogrys “by a well” making the “grettyst dole that ever he herde man make”

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<sup>752</sup> 683.16; 496.27.

<sup>753</sup> 563.2. See also 683.17.

<sup>754</sup> For other encounters at wells, see 442.2; 449.20; 492.21; 528.15.

(769.10). When Brangwayne disappears, Isolde “wente hirselff unto a welle and made grete moone” (420.5). She thinks of drowning herself in a well when she has been captured by Palomides, which further demonstrates her distress (422.36). Wells are natural landmarks whose presence in the landscape is taken for granted, but they also provide opportunities to glimpse some of the social and psychological life of the “Tristram” characters.

Malory treats rivers much as the French authors do: they are either obstacles to a knight’s progress through a forest (535.36), or are simply mentioned gratuitously, as part of the sketch of a landscape: Tristram, for instance, tells Palomides to meet him “in the medowe by the river of Camelot.”<sup>755</sup> This allows the reader to visualise the scene as much and as little as in the prose Tristan.

Forests play an important part in the Malorian landscape, although their physical appearance is not dwelt upon. On three occasions only is the word “forest” preceded by an epithet: “grete” in two instances, and “fayre” in the third.<sup>756</sup> In “Sir Tristram,” moreover, only two trees are identified specifically: Tristram chances upon a knight who has tied his horse to an “oke” (481.31), and Isolde wedges a sword through a “plum-tre” in order to put an end to her days (499.13).<sup>757</sup> These references “interrupt with unusual descriptive detail a story which normally has no place for it,”<sup>758</sup> and call attention to the action, especially in the case of Isolde’s attempted suicide. This particular episode has an analogous effect on both the prose Tristan and the “Tristram” audiences, not because the detail provided is the same—one will remember that the

<sup>755</sup> 562.10. See also 427.25.

<sup>756</sup> “grete” 566.15; 588.22; “fayre” 432.23.

<sup>757</sup> In other parts of the Morte Darthur, see “laurel-tre” (87.16), “appil-tre” (256.26; 932.22), “elme” (282.14), “oke” (277.5) and “sygamoure tre” (320.30). See also Whitaker 54.

<sup>758</sup> Field, Romance and Chronicle 85.

French text mentions the fine weather and the birds singing in the trees—but precisely because there is unusual detail.<sup>759</sup>

Whitaker points out that Malory's forest has little to do with the forests of medieval England, which were chiefly of the pasture type, with a lot of commercial activity going on in them.<sup>760</sup> One notable exception also present in the French is when Tristram in his madness is taken up by some shepherds who beat him.<sup>761</sup> It would seem that Malory is not trying to provide his fifteenth-century readers with areas of identification, but on the contrary, with a forest world different in many ways from the world of the court.

Even if forests forgo description, this does not prevent them from featuring in a knight's daily life, and it is paradoxically by examining this type of detail that one discovers more about the forests themselves. Just as Malory's descriptions of people "are normally not physical but moral and emotive,"<sup>762</sup> his descriptions of events in forests allow the reader to gauge their vastness or their atmosphere.<sup>763</sup> Forests are often places of passage for the "Tristram" knights, who ride through them on their way to other destinations.<sup>764</sup> They provide the opportunity for dissimulation, and the fact that Tristram's friends ride into the forest and search for him ("three dayes and three nyghtes they wolde never take lodgyng") is an indication of its size (497.19). Similarly, when Tristram and his friends want to avoid the crowd after the tournament at the Castle of Maidens, they ride into the forest, "that no man perceyved where they wente" (527.14).

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<sup>759</sup> See CIII.930.13 and CIII.932.9.

<sup>760</sup> Whitaker 53.

<sup>761</sup> 496.20 and MI.169.1.

<sup>762</sup> Field, *Romance and Chronicle* 86.

<sup>763</sup> P. J. C. Field, "Description and Narration in Malory," *Speculum* 43 (1968): 476-77. See also Sally Firmin, "Deep and Wide: Malory's Marvelous Forest," *Sir Thomas Malory: Views and Re-views*, ed. D. Thomas Hanks, Jr. (New York: AMS P, 1992) 28.

<sup>764</sup> 560.24; 566.16; 620.26.

The forest is where knights perform knightly activities, such as hunting, as we will see below,<sup>765</sup> and go about their knightly adventures,<sup>766</sup> chancing upon other knights,<sup>767</sup> which can often lead to jousts. As Sally Firmin puts it, “Knights meet their adversaries by design on the tournament field; they meet by chance in the forest.”<sup>768</sup> Dynaunte informs King Mark of a fountain in the forest “where many adventures knyghtes mete” (400.27). Knight-errantry through the forest can also lead to quests: thus Tristram and Dynadan meet a damsel seeking for knights who might “rescow sir Launcelot” (504.35). This damsel encountered in the forest, or indeed the dwarf (819.20), facilitate the knight-errant’s search for adventure, as will become apparent in the section on human beings in “Sir Tristram.”

Malory’s characters often seek refuge in the wood to rest (720.19) and to nurse their wounds (532.10). They also go there to express their grief, as does Isolde who “walked into the foreste to put away hir thoughtes” and “made grete moone” (420.4).<sup>769</sup> Grief can sometimes be so profound that it leads knights to commit irrational acts. Palomides’ unhappiness in the forest causes him to throw his sword into a nearby fountain (528.33), while Lancelot inflicts grievous bodily harm to a passing dwarf (818.5).

Knights who have lost their sanity often end up in the forest, which symbolises a move away from civilisation. When Tristram believes he has been betrayed by Isolde, he escapes into the forest with grief, and there loses his mind: “sir Trystramys endured there an halff-yere naked, and wolde never com in towne [ne village]” (497.1). There

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<sup>765</sup> See 371.26; 422.2; 427.25; 500.31; 591.22; 780.3.

<sup>766</sup> 547.30; 562.14; 819.33.

<sup>767</sup> 485.9; 560.24; 815.12.

<sup>768</sup> Firmin 29.

<sup>769</sup> See also 422.35; 591.14; 769.13; 779.26.



is a clear opposition between the civilised world (town and village) and the uncivilised space of the forest, where Tristram roams about with no proper outer clothing.<sup>770</sup>

In addition, the boundary between natural and preternatural is transgressed in the forest: Melyodas is victim of an “enchaunement” whilst hunting (371.28), and King Arthur is tricked by Aunowre, a “sorseres” (490.20). As will become apparent in the section on the preternatural, Malory’s King Arthur is not enchanted by a magical object, as he is by the ring in the French prose *Tristan* (CIII.823.18). He is simply a victim of Aunowre, who “laboured by false meanys to have destroyed kynge Arthure and slayne hym” (490.23).

The forests in “Sir Tristram” serve several important purposes. Malory may not describe them physically, but what he “does give us is a compelling sense of the forest, a connotative perception rather than a mental picture.”<sup>771</sup> One can infer from the amount of time spent in the forest that it is deep, for instance. The woods are where knightly life is acted out, where knights encounter each other and jousts are fought. Moreover, as Andrew Lynch remarks, “The brief descriptions of terrain are scarcely present for themselves, but act as markers between one episode and the next. Knights ride through these empty spaces (mainly forests) only in order to be present at their next combat.”<sup>772</sup> Forests provide a refuge for knights to nurse their physical and psychological wounds, and for them to express themselves freely, in a way which they may find impossible in the civilised circle of the court. This is where the reader catches a glimpse of the more human side of knights. Moreover, connotations of fear and mystery are produced because the forest is home to most of the preternatural elements of the text. As in the prose *Tristan*, then, it is not so much the appearance of

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<sup>770</sup> See also Lancelot and the intensity of the wilderness he finds himself in (817.22).

<sup>771</sup> Firmin 27.

<sup>772</sup> Andrew Lynch, *Malory’s Book of Arms: The Narrative Combat in Le Morte Darthur* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997) 46.

the forest that counts, but rather what it allows the “Tristram” characters to do, feel and express.

### C. Towns, dwellings, and castles

The landscape of “Sir Tristram” alternates between the natural elements examined above, and man-built towns, bridges, and dwellings. As in the prose *Tristan*, these enjoy little description, but contribute to the action by providing places for knights to pass through, opportunities to joust, and places to rest and meet other knights. Towns and villages are often “fayre,”<sup>773</sup> sometimes “good,”<sup>774</sup> but more often they do not even have an epithet to qualify them.<sup>775</sup> The description of Corbyn, as that of the French Corbenic, would certainly have evoked a reality recognisable by fifteenth-century readers:<sup>776</sup>

there he saw the fayryste towre that ever he saw, and thereundir was a fayre lytyll towne full of people (791.24).

What is important is not what Corbyn looks like, but what it suggests: a little town, maybe more attractive than others (the superlative is not used for other towns), bustling with life. This picture of civilised society heightens the contrast with the madness witnessed in the forests.

Knights-errant also come across bridges, which because they are often guarded by knights, nearly always provide the opportunity to joust.<sup>777</sup> Seldom are these bridges described: again, stock epithets are used to suggest rather than allow a visualisation. On occasion, the narrator sometimes specifies that the bridge is made of stone (812.33), or that it is “stronge . . . lyke a fortresse” (471.28). The variety of dwellings

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<sup>773</sup> 471.28; 791.24.

<sup>774</sup> 653.20.

<sup>775</sup> 497.1; 566.18; 677.3; 677.11; 822.23.

<sup>776</sup> It is noteworthy that the “Lancelot and Elaine” episode was not composed by the prose *Tristan* authors, but incorporated wholesale from the prose *Lancelot*.

<sup>777</sup> 468.18; 488.22; 581.33; 584.2.

(houses,<sup>778</sup> hermitages,<sup>779</sup> manors,<sup>780</sup> and towers<sup>781</sup>) reflects a certain diversity in the world of “Sir Tristram,” although there are no “mesonetes” which refer to the lower classes of the population (CI.44.3). This represents the general trend which Malory seems to have adopted in relation to his French source: there are fewer details relating to the landscape, whether natural or man-made. The effect is nevertheless analogous: the reader is given a sketch of the world, sufficiently suggestive to evoke a sense of the knight’s daily life in a medieval environment.

As in the prose Tristan, castles are abundant, and serve numerous purposes. They are first and foremost places of rest and healing. They also provide the setting for all sorts of knightly adventures such as tournaments, the abolition of evil customs, preternatural and supernatural events. Not surprisingly, much of the social life of knights and ladies is played out in castles.

Malory’s descriptions of castles are even more succinct than those in the prose Tristan. They can be “olde” (371.29), “sure” (499.35), or “fayre,”<sup>782</sup> but they are mostly none of those things. If castles, or parts of them, are at all described, it is because those details are useful to the action. If Morgan’s castle is “fayre and ryche and also passynge stronge as ony was within this realme” (597.8), it is surely because it is later destroyed in a realistic siege through fire, underlining the feat of the assailants (644.17). The bay-window of a castle is mentioned because it provides a good view of the knights riding to and from the tournament (514.22), while the “yatys” and the “portecolyes” of Tintagel trap the “Syssoynes” as they try to lay siege to Mark’s castle (620.8).<sup>783</sup>

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<sup>778</sup> 426.5; 492.22; 566.1.

<sup>779</sup> 447.1; 499.26; 771.25; 822.13.

<sup>780</sup> 432.23; 536.27; 556.13; 590.14; 774.11.

<sup>781</sup> 460.10; 473.29; 490.17; 494.21; 499.21; 511.9; 560.24; 561.21; 581.33.

<sup>782</sup> 597.7; 604.1.

<sup>783</sup> See also 423.17; 426.12; 460.11; 493.21; 494.10; 732.22; 743.4; 800.25; 806.4.

Most importantly, castles generate action. First of all, they provide a hospitable place where knights rest and find refuge to heal their wounds. Knights come to castles with the hope of finding “good herberow,”<sup>784</sup> and Tristram’s wounds, for instance, are tended to in Tintagel.<sup>785</sup> Castles also host tournaments, as we will see.<sup>786</sup> In addition, castles can be haunted by evil customs, creating opportunities for chivalric exploits. Tristram puts an end to the “foule custom” (413.22) of the “Castell Plewre,” thereby proving his valour and underlining Isolde’s beauty. The custom of the “Castell Orgulus” whereby no knight may enter the castle “but other he must juste othir be presonere” (464.1) provides La Cote Mal Tayle with the opportunity to joust against “an hondred knyghtys” (464.19), his exploits later being “rehersted in kynge Arthurs courte” (465.16), thus increasing his reputation. Morgan’s custom is strongly condemned by Palomides:

this is a shamefull and a vylauce usage for a quene to use, and namely to make suche warre uppon her owne lorde that is called the floure of chevalry . . . (597.24).<sup>787</sup>

The reader’s attention is drawn to Morgan’s lack of courtesy towards Arthur and to the institution of chivalry. Similarly, heroic knights deliver others who happen to be imprisoned in castles. Lancelot fights a “noble batayle” to deliver La Cote Mal Tayle along with several other prisoners (470.3). The purpose of the occasions generated by these castles is therefore not only the demonstration of prowess, but also the discussion of courtesy.

Castles can even be the seat of justice, as when Palomides is to be tried in “a castell by the seesyde that hyght Pylownes” for killing its lord (775.22). Within their walls castles also contain prisons, as mentioned above. These seldom receive

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<sup>784</sup> 506.32. See also 412.26; 553.28; 604.11; 702.26.

<sup>785</sup> 383.27; 501.6. See also 641.27.

<sup>786</sup> Roche Dure (557.17); Castle of Maidens (580.18); Surluse (663.15); Lonzep (682.1).

<sup>787</sup> See also 507.1.

attention, but Tristram and Dynadan are imprisoned by Darras in a “stronge preson,” where Tristram falls ill. In a passage original to Malory, the narrator explains what such a prisoner endures:

a presonere may have hys helth of body, he may endure undir the mercy of God and in hope of good delyveraunce; but whan syknes towchith a presoners body, than may a presonere say all welth ys hym berauffte, and than hath he cause to wayle and wepe (540.30).

These lines have an unmistakable personal ring to them, and A. W. Pollard thought that they reflected Malory’s personal experience.<sup>788</sup> This passage may not allow the reader to visualise the prison itself, but the pain endured within it smacks of realism.

Knights can also encounter preternatural or even supernatural elements in the “Sir Tristram” castles, as in the rest of the Morte.<sup>789</sup> Alexander the Orphan falls victim to Morgan’s magic drink which makes him insensible for three days, thus enabling Morgan to keep him prisoner in her castle (643.31). The castle of Corbyn is home to a “dolerous lady that hath bene there in paynes many wyntyrs and dayes, for ever she boyleth in scaldyng watir” (791.32). Lancelot is led into her chamber, “that was as hote as ony stew,” and when he takes her by the hand he notices that she is “naked as a nedyll” (792.14). The reader learns that she has been a victim of Morgan’s “enchantement” and that she can be delivered only by “the beste knyght of the worlde” (792.19). Despite its preternatural qualities, this scene comes alive through the images provided by the narrator. Finally, the castle of Corbyn is, as in the prose Tristan, associated with the Holy Grail (793.35), while Lancelot is lured to the castle of Case by an enchanted ring and given a “kuppe of wyne” which makes him “so asoted and madde that he myght make no delay but wythoute ony let he wente to bedde” (795.9).

<sup>788</sup> Morte Darthur, ed. A. W. Pollard (London: Macmillan, 1903) 1: vi.

<sup>789</sup> See for instance the “knyght with many lyghtes aboute hym” who interrupts an intimate scene between Gareth and Lyonesse in the castle of Gryngamoure (333.24).

Readers witness knightly occupations in Malory's physical world. Malory provides fewer details of this world than do the prose Tristan authors, where almost "everything is sacrificed to the needs of action not the needs of verisimilitude."<sup>790</sup> Most of the action consists in fighting, and as Lynch remarks, "Alternations between solitude and society, exterior and interior, nature and culture, are mainly employed to occasion new fights."<sup>791</sup> A pattern of Malory's transformation of his original seems to be emerging, whereby fewer physical details are provided, whilst the opportunities for jousting remain relatively similar. Other than martial encounters, this physical world, and in particular castles, also provides the backdrop for social situations, which we will now examine.

### III. The social world of "Sir Tristram"

#### A. The basics

As in the prose Tristan, knights eat and sleep in castles. Again, the food itself is not described, but the act of providing food for one's guests is stressed, underlining the social aspect of meals. This is demonstrated, for instance, when Tristram is "well resseyved and sate at kynge Markys owne table and at hys owne messe" (545.6). The reader has no idea of what Mark and his guests are served, but the importance of the scene lies clearly in the honour bestowed upon Tristram by his uncle. This particular act of giving is so important that the person receiving the food feels grateful for it and the person providing it is equally indebted to the rules of receiving: thus a knight who has invited Tristram to dine in his castle, upon realising the latter has killed his brother, can attack Tristram only once he is outside the castle (703.2). At the same time, Tristram is loath to fight against his host because, as he says, "I have of your mete and

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<sup>790</sup> McCarthy, Introduction 104.

<sup>791</sup> Lynch 46.

drynke in my body" (703.26). Similarly, the mealtime is so important that it is impolite to disturb it, and Tristram reproveth two knights for doing just that (756.23). His own courtesy in this situation is further underlined by his politeness to the knights whom he addresses as "fayre."

Food is also a way of celebrating an event, as is the case when Lancelot returns to court after his period of madness: "there was made grete feystys, and grete joy was there amonge them" (833.5). The reader is aware of what the dish actually consists of only when this contributes to the action. Sir Galahalte's dislike of fish allows Dynadan to entertain the assembly, "that they myght nat sytte at their table" (669.26). Similarly, in a later tale, Gawain's well-known taste for fruit means that Sir Pyonell poisons an apple in the hope of killing Gawain (1049.29). Other authenticating details include the light supper consumed by Tristram and Segwarides's wife before they go off to bed "with grete joy and plesaunce" (394.22), and the "candyll-lyght" they have beside the bed (394.33). The reader is also informed that Lancelot lives off "fruyte" during his period of madness (817.25). The way drink is left around in castles can be glimpsed in Tristram's step-mother's attempt to poison him (373.20), and the readers know that people also have baths (389.16), even if they don't know what shape the bath-tub is. People in castles retire to bed to sleep,<sup>792</sup> and also to make love, so that on one occasion Tristram is said to bleed on "bothe the over-shete and the neyther-sheete, and the pylowes and the hede-shete" (394.25).<sup>793</sup> This reflection of social reality does not exist in the French, where Tristan's blood stains only "les dras" (CI.369.4). This exception apart, Malory, following the trend mentioned above, "shows us next to

<sup>792</sup> 617.25; 799.25; 805.13.

<sup>793</sup> Kayhidius also tells Mark he had fallen asleep in a window-embasure, which must have been a possibility, for Mark accepts it (494.16).

nothing of the refinements of manner or the details of daily life among his noble knights,"<sup>794</sup> like the tables being laid or the preparation of the beds for the guests.<sup>795</sup>

#### B. Leisure and Entertainment

Entertainment is almost always linked to the aristocratic setting of the castle or manor. Malory truncates his original by giving fewer details of the exact nature of the amusement, which is most often resumed by the term "good chere."<sup>796</sup> Palomydes and his brother even have "grete chere and grete joy, as ever sir Palomydes and sir Saffir had in their lyvys" (774.3). A fairly frequent type of amusement is the "knyghtly gamys" (711.31), a set of little battles organised for the entertainment of the assembled public. For instance, Plenorius treats Lancelot and La Cote to much "myry chere and good reste and many good gamys, and there were many fayre ladyis" (475.29). The presence of many fair ladies stresses the aristocratic element of the amusement.

Like their French counterparts, the "Tristram" characters play chess,<sup>797</sup> and occasionally listen to music, as when Mark and his court hear the lay composed by Dynadan: "at the mete in cam Elyas the harper amonge other mynstrels and began to harpe" (626.31). Again, Malory suggests rather than describes what the French took the time to dwell on. Malory concentrates on Mark's reaction to the accusations in the lay and the consequences of his suspicions. As we will see, the place of music in "Sir Tristram" takes on a little more importance when one examines the character of Tristram, but music as court entertainment is seldom referred to.

<sup>794</sup> Field, *Romance and Chronicle* 89.

<sup>795</sup> MV.88.11; MII.61.8.

<sup>796</sup> 507.15; 553.31; 582.17; 586.33; 604.5; 722.24; 814.11.

<sup>797</sup> 493.20; 494.12.



### C. Hunting

In comparison with other leisure activities, hunting is frequently referred to and described in some detail. For Malory, hunting is an art which is indispensable to the good education of a gentleman, as is shown by his original description of Tristram's upbringing (the phrase "as the book seyth" is used to conceal a departure from the source):

as he growed in myght and strength, he laboured in huntynge and in hawkyng—never jantylman more that ever we herde rede of. And as the booke seyth, he began good mesures of blowyng of beestes of venery and beestes of chaace and all maner of vermaynes, and all the tearmys we have yet of hawkyng and huntyng (375.15).

It is clear this is a gentlemanly occupation, corroborated by the fact that only knights and kings are seen to hunt in "Sir Tristram." Malory even goes so far as to indicate what type of animal the characters hunt: King Melyodas is a "grete chacer of dere,"<sup>798</sup> while Tristram hunts "an harte of grece" (780.4). As Field points out, the "hart of grece" was specifically a hart still fat with summer feeding, hunted in a season that ran from 24 June to 14 September.<sup>799</sup>

In the prose *Tristan*, hunting can be associated with treachery, as when, after Andret's betrayal of the lovers to Marc and Tristan's flight, the latter returns to court, to a king who "mostra a Tristan si bes semblant que nus qui la treïson ne seüst ne cuidast jamés qu'il i beast a decevement ne a deleauté envers Tristan" (CII.519.26). Marc organises a series of jousts for which "i avoit fait tendre li rois trez et paveillons," where thirty knights wait with Andret to betray Tristan (CII.250.3). Malory alters this dramatically, for Tristram returns to a court where the hunting excursion marks the festive atmosphere:

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<sup>798</sup> 371.27. See also 591.22.

<sup>799</sup> P. J. C. Field, "Hunting, Hawking, and Textual Criticism in Malory's *Morte Darthur*," *Malory: Texts and Sources* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1998) 104.

whan sir Trystrames com to the kynge he was wellcom, and no rehersall was made, and than there was game and play. And than the kynge and the quene wente an-huntynge, and sir Trystrames. So the kynge and the quene made their pavylons and their tentes in that foreste besyde a ryver, and there was dayly justyng and huntyng . . . (427.20).

The thirty knights are “ever redy . . . to juste unto all that came at that tyme” (427.26), and are not part of any larger plan of treachery. Hunting is thus shown to be a courtly activity and is dissociated from the theme of betrayal. Because hunting is above all a knightly pastime, moreover, Malory does not hesitate to provide some description, quite unlike the other occupations of which we only catch a glimpse,<sup>800</sup> which testifies to Malory’s enthusiasm for hunting, working against a more general tendency to reduce his source.<sup>801</sup>

#### D. Clothing and armour

This interest in all things aristocratic is further manifest in the descriptions of apparel. Ordinary clothing, as well as many individual pieces of armour, receives attention. Alice and Isolde each appear in a wimple, a garment which Chaucer mentions in his Canterbury Tales less than a century before Malory, and to which Douglas refers in his Aeneis in 1513, so it would have been recognised by a fifteenth-century audience as something they knew.<sup>802</sup> Lancelot encounters a knight “well apparaylede in scarlet furred with menyvere” (818.10) and the OED finds several fifteenth-century references to this fur used as lining and trimming. La Cote’s “overgarmente . . . was ryche cloth of golde” (459.6), and Alexander’s father wears a “dubled” (634.16), a close-fitting body-garment, worn by men from the fourteenth to the eighteenth centuries.<sup>803</sup> Other

<sup>800</sup> For other hunting references, see 422.2; 500.31.

<sup>801</sup> For more on hunting, see Corinne Saunders, “Malory’s Book of Huntynge: The Tristram Section of the Morte Darthur, Medium Aevum 62.2 (1993): 270-84.

<sup>802</sup> Troilus ii. 110; Prologue 151; Aeneis i. vii. 115. Despite this, Whitaker identifies the wimple as the headgear of a respectable married woman of the thirteenth century (Whitaker 106).

<sup>803</sup> OED 1991 ed.

garments such as gowns are mentioned,<sup>804</sup> while Lancelot's "robe of scarlet" means he is "arayed lyke a knyght" (823.12). The colour of garments is sometimes specified,<sup>805</sup> but usually the appearance of articles of clothing is left to the imagination of the reader. People are simply "well-beseyne,"<sup>806</sup> and Elaine is so well dressed that "there was never no lady rychelyar beseyne" (803.2). These images of wealth contrast with the "shurte" and "breke" which Lancelot ends up wearing during his period of madness (817.27), and to the intimacy suggested by the "shurte" that Lameroke and Lancelot are wearing when in company of Morgawse (612.15) and Elaine respectively (805.24). Garments are not important in themselves but in what they suggest: splendour, wealth, knightliness, poverty, and intimacy.

Malory's interest in armour is altogether different. It is more precise, as it is often referred to in the course of joust descriptions. Knights wear a "hawbirke" (chain mail shirt for which the OED finds thirteenth- to nineteenth-century references),<sup>807</sup> a "coyffe of steele" (tight fitting mail cap),<sup>808</sup> and a "helm"<sup>809</sup> which has a "ventayle,"<sup>810</sup> which appear in numerous quotations from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in the OED. The helms with "vysours"<sup>811</sup> worn by Malory's knights were used in the fifteenth century,<sup>812</sup> as were the "croupyn" (horse armour),<sup>813</sup> and the "paytrels" (breastplate of a horse) which one finds in the "Tale of Sir Gareth" (322.26). Thus although the "pictorial element in the Morte Darthur is limited both in amount and in complexity,"<sup>814</sup> the reader is provided with a fairly realistic, because contemporary,

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<sup>804</sup> 623.32; 804.29; 823.9.

<sup>805</sup> 759.3; 743.1.

<sup>806</sup> 729.8; 743.1.

<sup>807</sup> 422.30; 518.2; 625.9; 813.19.

<sup>808</sup> 382.24.

<sup>809</sup> 382.24; 422.30; 625.9; 703.31.

<sup>810</sup> 703.31.

<sup>811</sup> 382.14; 389.1; 451.22.

<sup>812</sup> "visor," OED, 1991 ed.

<sup>813</sup> 399.5.

<sup>814</sup> Field, Romance and Chronicle 83.

account of the armour used by the “Tristram” knights. This interest in the detail of armour, which reflects that of the original prose *Tristan* authors,<sup>815</sup> is linked to the fact that Malory is writing mainly about chivalric adventure, in which fighting, and therefore the material used in combat, is of prime interest.

#### E. Economic factors

Interestingly, financial considerations in Malory’s “Tristram” receive slightly more attention than in the prose *Tristan*. One has no such detail as a noble household’s expenditure, nor the financial difficulties baronial families could encounter.<sup>816</sup>

However, the aristocracy in the *Morte* is clearly a landed one, and although references to this fact are not laboured, they nevertheless provide a background to the knights’ lives. As will become apparent, the characters behave as if land were not an issue, whereas in reality, its upkeep and income would have been of great importance to its lord. In the “Tristram,” land can be inherited, or given as a present, bribe or recompense. Lancelot, for instance, swears that “for all the londys that ever my fadir leffte I wolde nat have hurt sir Trystram. . . .”<sup>817</sup> King Melyodas and his wife “departed of their londys and good up to sir Trystrames” (393.7), while King Arthur gives Neroveus “grete londis” when he is knighted (476.12). Similarly, King Harmaunce offers all his “londis” and “rentes” to the knight who avenges his death,<sup>818</sup> although Palomides refuses this responsibility, preferring to return to Lonezep for the tournament. All but the last reference are original to Malory, who seems to attach

<sup>815</sup> See for instance “chaucés” CIII.865.4; MVI.172.5; MVI.232.7; “ventaille” CIII.902.27; “chevaucheüre” CIII.744.6; MI.41.9; “heaume” CIII.785.10; “quins” MV.189.16; “hauberc” CIII.785.10; CIII.674.31; “haubergon” MVI.23.20; “manicle” MII.160.32; MV.41.7; MVII.42.23; “mailles” CIII.785.11; “fuerre” CIII.788.2; MII.150.1; MII.154.13; 177.18; MVI.36.21; MVI.48.12; MIX.80.21; “coiffe” MV.9.7; MV.81.26; MV.127.13; MVI.133.51; “boucle” MVI.76.14; “capelet” MVI.23.23; “heut” MVI.95.36; “pomel” MVI.95.12; MVII.189.36; “sambue” MVI.114.6.

<sup>816</sup> K. B. McFarlane, *The Nobility of Later Medieval England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973) 48; 83ff.

<sup>817</sup> 535.16. See also 383.33 and CI.307.10.

<sup>818</sup> 719.23. See MV.84.18.

more importance to land ownership than the French authors, even if the reality of this condition is taken very lightly.

Land becomes more of an issue when it comes to quarrels in “Sir Tristram.” As in the French, Andred tries to bring about Tristram’s downfall “bycause he wolde have had sir Trystramys londis.”<sup>819</sup> Malory’s knights also attempt to resolve land disputes through battles. Hyonjin Kim underlines the paradox between these knights acting as if they were landless, and yet accomplishing their knightly duty in organising “the system of itinerant justice to settle land-related grievances.”<sup>820</sup> During the Surluse tournament, Palomides takes up arms against Gonereyes whom a damsel accuses of withholding “all her londis” (655.15). As a recompense for his victory, she offers him “her and all her londis, and of her fadirs that sholde falle aftir hym” (664.23). Moreover, King Angwysch organises a tournament for the Lady of the Laundys, and whoever wins “sholde wedde hir and have all hir londis” (385.23). Similarly, Alice’s wealth and “grete rentys” make her a more than suitable match (645.3).

This materialistic, or simply realistic, approach towards marriage is, not surprisingly for a romance that distances itself somewhat from the courtly ethos, “flanked by the belief that the quality of affection can be quantified by some monetary scale. . . .”<sup>821</sup> We are told that there is great love between Tristram and Isolde of the White Hands, not only because the latter is “bothe goode and fayre, and a woman of noble bloode and fame,” but also “because that sir Trystrames had suche chere and ryches . . . allmoste he had forsakyn La Beale Isode” (434.27, not in source). It would appear that her wealth is a factor in his love for her. In addition, when Tristram believes Isolde loves Kayhidius, he exclaims:

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<sup>819</sup> 499.9 and CIII.925.20.

<sup>820</sup> Hyonjin Kim, *The Knight Without the Sword: A Social Landscape of Malorian Chivalry* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000) 22.

<sup>821</sup> Kim 51.

Alas! madame, the good love that I have lovyd you, and many londis and grete rychesse have I forsakyn for youre love! (493.31)

There is no mention of economic factors being the proof of his love in the French version, nor is there in the following example. Hector sees as proof of Gwenyver's attachment to Lancelot the fact that she spent "twenty thousand pounce" on searching for him (831.32). This information corroborates the narrator's emphasis that no expense was spared on this expedition (809.20). The "Tristram" is representative of the rest of the Morte in this respect at least, for Lancelot offers an annuity of a thousand pounds to Elaine of Ascolat (1089-90) to compensate for his rejection of her. The financial logic behind both these "Tristram" examples is non-existent in the more romantic world of the prose Tristan, and may be one aspect of a more naturalistic opinion of things in Malory's view.

#### F. Social classes

As in the prose Tristan, Malory's world of aristocrats occasionally features members of other social classes. It would seem that all members of society can watch a tournament: "the astatys, hyghe and lowe, and after the comynalté" witness Tristram's exploits at the Castle of Maidens (534.9), and the Lonzep audience comprises "all maner of comyn people."<sup>822</sup> One also hears of foresters, shepherds, fishermen and sailors, who all play a role in relation to the knightly characters, usually by providing them assistance, as in the French original,<sup>823</sup> but the Morte characters hardly, if ever, encounter "the traders, the peasants, the craftsmen who created the material culture in which they lived."<sup>824</sup>

<sup>822</sup> 734.30. See also 414.4; 513.22; 534.4; 668.29; 719.9.

<sup>823</sup> "foster" 423.34; 426.6; 484.24; "herdemen" 196.20; "fysshers" and "shypmen" 441.4.

<sup>824</sup> Margaret Schlauch, English Medieval Literature and Its Social Foundations (Warsaw: PWN, 1956) 299.

Malory, like the French authors, evokes churls or villains, but always in a derogatory way. In the Red City episode, the attitude towards the English “chorle” and the French “serf” is analogous, although Malory, who usually condenses the original, here labours the point:

Bien ont fait ce que serf doivent faire! (MV.111.22)

“Gyeff a chorle rule and thereby he woll nat be suffysed,” for whosomever he be that is rewled by a vylayne borne, and the lorde of the soyle be a jantylman born, that same vylayne shall destroy all the jeauntylmen aboute hym (712.23).

There is real-life precedent to this, for Charles the Good, Count of Flanders, was viciously slain by his serfs on Ash Wednesday in 1127, in the Church of St Donat at Bruges, and the narrator who reports this death reacted as follows:

Those foul dogs, full of the demon, those serfs, murdered their lord! Certainly there is no one so senseless, so stupid and obtuse, as not to sentence those traitors to the vilest and most unheard-of punishments, those serfs who by unheard-of treachery did away with their lord, the very one whom they should most have protected.<sup>825</sup>

The serfs are condemned because of their treachery. In Malory as in the prose Tristan, their social class is invoked as the reason for their abominable act, and through Sir Ebell, Malory makes the apology for gentility of birth, just as Tor turns out to be a king’s son, not a cowherd’s, which explains his good knighthood (100-101), and as Beaumaynes the kitchen knave turns out to be Gareth, born of great blood (299.30). This fundamentally aristocratic bias for heredity is also present in the prose Tristan,<sup>826</sup> but because Ebell’s reaction is an original addition of Malory’s, one might suspect that this point is one which he particularly wishes to get over to the audience. Moreover, it is a reminder of another passage original to Malory, pronounced this time not by a character, but by the narrator himself:

<sup>825</sup> The Murder of Charles the Good, ed. and trans. J. B. Ross (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1982) 94-5.

<sup>826</sup> See Chapter Three.

all jantyllmen that beryth olde armys ought of ryght to honoure sir Trystrams for the goodly tearmys that jantylmen have and use and shall do unto the Day of Dome, that thereby in a maner all men of worship may discever a jantylman frome a yoman and a yoman frome a vylayne. For he that jantyll is woll drawe hym to jantyll tacchis and to folow the noble customys of jantylmen (375.23).

This passage appears in the opening pages of “Sir Tristram,” and sets the tone for an attitude adopted throughout the book. Indeed, giants, who are also non-aristocratic outsiders, are treated in a way which might seem callous to a modern reader, but which is understandable in the light of the importance of thoroughbred gentility in the Morte. Nabon le Noir may be the lord of the Ile of Servage, but he is a “grete myghty gyaunte” who “hated all the knyghtes of kynge Arthures” (441.8). Despite his skill in jousting, he has the discourteous habit of killing his opponents’ horses (444.35). Tauleas, another giant, also half belongs to gentle society, for he enjoys the security of a “sure castell of hys owne” (499.35). When Tauleas attacks Dynaunte for no apparent reason, Tristram cuts his head off, and the region is rid of this “grymly gyaunte” (500.25). No giant in “Sir Tristram” can actually belong to the knightly class, despite enjoying aristocratic privileges, nor can a churl, villain, or any other character who is not gentle by birth. This may reflect a fear on Malory’s part of the infiltration of low-born men into his Order of Knighthood. His concern for lineage is reminiscent, as Karen Cherewatuk points out, of the claims made by Sir John Paston and his uncles, whose argument relies on notions of worshipful gentlemen and ancient heraldic arms.<sup>827</sup> These interventions, as well as the closing lines of the Morte addressed to “you all jentylmen and jentylwymmen that redeth this book” (1260.20) suggest that Malory was writing for an aristocratic audience, who would have been comforted by invectives against social climbing. The fact that members of certain professions in

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<sup>827</sup> Karen Cherewatuk, “‘Gentyl’ Audiences and ‘Grete Bookes’: Chivalric Manuals and the Morte Darthur,” Arthurian Literature 15 (1997): 206.



Malory's time, such as merchants, could enjoy as lavish a lifestyle as the nobility may also explain why Malory places so much emphasis on hereditary gentility. Edward IV himself was very well-disposed to London merchants, and even knighted one of them, Sir Thomas Cook, thus providing an alternative pattern of knighthood which Malory may not have appreciated if he witnessed it.<sup>828</sup>

Malory's physical world does not differ much from that of the prose Tristan. References to physical and man-made landmarks are most often conventional, and are useful for catching a glimpse of knightly leisurely life. In the depiction of his social world, however, Malory departs from his source, firstly by adding financial considerations to chivalric love, thereby distancing his romance from the courtly ethos, and by emphasising the importance of hereditary gentility. This last element reflected a reality with which Malory's audience would certainly have been confronted, and, along with occasional economic details, prevents the text from being entirely romance-like. It may have made the Morte sufficiently life-like to allow the audience to take pleasure in escaping with these knights who can leave all their responsibilities behind and go off questing when they please. But "Sir Tristram" is not the dream world which it is sometimes made out to be: it may be populated mainly by aristocratic knights who do not have to deal with hearing disputes and settling business in their households, there may be no problems with bad harvests, resentful tenants migrating to the towns to avoid customary service, money problems scraping dowries together for one's daughters, no plagues, no Lollards. There are nevertheless problems in Malory's artificial world, for even some knights and ladies are evil, and there is a moral variety within that class rather than between the classes: the Morte is no mere escapist wish-fulfilment dream.

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<sup>828</sup> Oddly enough, Malory was actually associated with Sir Thomas Cook in 1469, but not in

## Chapter Eight: The Human Beings in “Sir Tristram”

In the “Index of Proper Names” that Vinaver provides at the end of his three-volume edition, one finds a total of over 180 named characters in the “Tristram” alone.<sup>829</sup> This may be fewer than the 346 present in the prose *Tristan*, but considering that the “Tristram” is only a sixth of the length of the French, the cast of 180 named actors is comparatively large, whereas the number of anonymous people is considerably reduced. This chapter will examine Malory’s changes in his approach to his selection of anonymous and named characters, and the effect this has on the story and the world of the “Tristram.”

### I. Nameless People

#### A. Anonymous groups

Malory’s groups of unnamed people are similar to those found in his sources, as is the narrator’s attitude to them. The groups most frequently referred to in “Sir Tristram” are the Cornish knights of ill repute,<sup>830</sup> the Saracens who have to be conquered in war,<sup>831</sup> the Saxons,<sup>832</sup> and Mark’s duplicitous barons.<sup>833</sup> Other groups include the fishermen, the sailors and shepherds, which were mentioned above. One peculiarity of these groups, which are broadly speaking analogous to their French originals, is that Malory often makes them speak chorally. It is difficult for modern readers to respond to this, because it is a non-naturalistic representation of speech. It stands in strong contrast with the internal rivalries between barons, which are particularly emphasised

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circumstances that allow us to infer what either of them thought of the other: Anne F. Sutton, “Malory in Newgate: A New Document,” *The Library* 7<sup>th</sup> Series 1.3 (2000): 243-62.

<sup>829</sup> Vinaver and Field, *Works* 1666 ff.

<sup>830</sup> 398.25; 404.12; 488.29; 504.22; 579.35.

<sup>831</sup> 633.5; 679.35.

<sup>832</sup> 619-21; 625-6, 633.

by Malory. As he puts it, “sertayne of them [Melyodas’s barons] wolde have bene lordys of that contrey of Lyonesse” after their lord’s death (372.33), while “the moste party of the barowns made grete joy” of Melyodas’s homecoming (373.5). Similarly, when Tristram is banished from Cornwall, “many barownes brought hym unto hys shyp, that som were of hys frendis and som were of hys fooys” (503.6). Despite this, the barons twice tell Mark, “all at onys,” that Tristram ought to be sent for to defend Cornwall.<sup>834</sup>

Other “Tristram” groups speak in unison,<sup>835</sup> and this type of speech seems to correspond to the “conspicuous avoidance of naturalism”<sup>836</sup> one finds in the absence of administrative and financial responsibilities examined above. Moreover, the “Tristram” differs from the prose *Tristan* in that chorus speech is not the prerogative of the lower classes. Arthur’s court welcomes Tristram “at one voyce” (571.23), so impressing on the reader that Tristram’s valour is the subject of unanimous recognition on the part of Arthur’s court.

The knightly following of a king, prestigious knights, or even the twelve knights who help Andred catch Tristram with Isolde also speak in unison.<sup>837</sup> Malory also likes to add groups of knights to his source, such as the “fyve hondred knyghtes” against whom Lancelot jousts (444.27) or the “thirty knyghtes” whom he unhorses on another occasion (761.6).<sup>838</sup> Here again, the picture of one knight accomplishing such a feat against so many foes seems somewhat unrealistic, as does the chorus speech, but it underlines Lancelot’s prowess and increases his knightliness.<sup>839</sup>

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<sup>833</sup> 372.30; 373.5; 374.15; 376.5; 377.8; 427.2; 430.18; 502.34; 503.6; 623.8.

<sup>834</sup> 619.1; 623.9.

<sup>835</sup> 441.20; 447.31; 511.33; 711.13.

<sup>836</sup> Field, Introduction, *The Seventh and Eighth Tales* 47.

<sup>837</sup> 431.3. See also 388.28; 392.30; 394.4; 403.23; 409.15; 426.32; 427.31; 431.11; 434.15, etc.

<sup>838</sup> See also 803.3; 840.15.

<sup>839</sup> See also 388.28.

## B. Anonymous individuals

R. H. Wilson's researches have shown that the Morte cuts many anonymous characters from its sources, and that the number of nameless damsels, for instance, is reduced by half.<sup>840</sup> Malory applies several processes to reduce his anonymous cast: sometimes he provides a name for a hitherto unnamed knight, thus testifying to the importance he accords to the knightly class: the "chevalier de Cornoaille" who prevents Iseut from drowning herself (CII.502.9) becomes "sir Adherpe" in Malory's text (423.2).<sup>841</sup> Similarly, he specifies that the "demoisele estrange" whom Andred asks to spread the rumour of Tristram's death is actually "a lady that was hys paramour."<sup>842</sup> Malory sometimes removes characters entirely: thus when the French Palamede and Dinadan arrive at Morgan's castle, they are met by a "cevalier et une damoisele" who inform the knights of the customs of the castle (MIV.95.3). In Malory's version, these nameless characters no longer exist, and the English Dynadan already knows of these customs: "here is a castell that I knowe well . . ." (597.10). Malory occasionally fuses two characters into one: the anonymous "damoisele" (MII.79.21) whom Iseut sends off to search for Tristan is none other than "dame Brangwayne" in "Sir Tristram" (513.20).

The function of anonymous characters, reduced though their number may be, is nevertheless similar to that of their French counterparts. Anonymous knights allow the protagonists to show off their valour, ladies and damsels bear messages between knights, and sometimes accompany them on their adventures. To the reader, however, this world is one where the value of proper names, especially those of knights, is

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<sup>840</sup> R. H. Wilson, "Malory's Naming of Minor Characters," JEGP 42 (1943): 364-85 and his "Addenda on Malory's Minor Characters," JEGP 55 (1956): 567-87.

<sup>841</sup> See also Hewe de la Montayne and Madok de la Montayne who replace the anonymous "un autre cevalier de Norgales" (MII.110.2), and Galardonne (564.28) who replaces an unnamed knight who has been killed (MIII.219.9).

important. In the Winchester manuscript, all personal names are written in red and in a special script, for which the scribes would have had to change pens every time they came to a proper name. The distinction of proper names was therefore, according to N. R. Ker, a “matter of great consequence.”<sup>843</sup> This world is one which the readers can grasp more easily because they can put a name to an imagined face. As knights are usually named, while the unidentified tend to be of the lower ranks, name becomes “an index of power and prestige.”<sup>844</sup>

## II. Named Characters

Of the 183 named characters, 160 are knights, including kings, dukes and earls, indicating that Malory’s interest lies primarily with this section of the population. Many knights play very minor roles, and generally embody, as in the French, adversaries against whom the protagonists excel, enemies who imprison them, and messengers who guide them. Only a few in comparison contribute substantially to the plot, and it is their relationship with the protagonists which will now be examined, as well as the individual characteristics which Malory attributes to his main characters, despite the fact that, as will become apparent, in the eyes of a modern reader the Morte is “strikingly apsychological”.<sup>845</sup>

Before embarking upon Malory’s characterisation of his protagonists, and the subtle changes he has made to his source, it is important to point up some major differences between the Morte and the prose Tristan that affect the depiction of character. Although the Tristan narrator, as we saw, is far from foreshadowing the omniscient narrator of nineteenth-century novels, he fills the reader in more fully on

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<sup>842</sup> CIII.925.4; 498.34. See also the “wytty lady” (384.8) who in the standard French text is simply “une dame” (CI.306.2).

<sup>843</sup> N. R. Ker, Introduction, The Winchester Malory: A Facsimile (EETS SS 4 London: Oxford UP, 1976).

<sup>844</sup> Lynch 4.

his protagonists' ancestry and childhood than does Malory. Moreover, Malory drastically cuts the laments, thereby reducing the emotional content of the text. While he shortens the narrative content, he increases the amount of direct speech, and it is through action as well as through dialogue<sup>846</sup> that characters reveal themselves, because the narrator never analyses them in his own person.<sup>847</sup>

#### A. Ancestry, Childhood and Youth

Malory omits the long description of Tristram's and Mark's ancestry starting from the first century of our era, and the text begins *in medias res* with Tristram's birth. The suppression of Tristram's ancestors means that he is no longer linked to the Grail story through Joseph of Arimathea, who is not even mentioned in the "Tristram." The story does not begin in times of paganism, but in the more recognisable days of King Arthur. As the *incipit* states, "Here begynnyth the fyrste boke of syr Trystrams de Lyones, and who was his fadir and hys modyr, and how he was borne and fostyrd, and how he was made knyght of Kynge Marke of Cornuayle" (371.1). Malory does not make any fundamental changes to Tristram's parents, to his birth or childhood, but it is significant that the only other character in the *Morte* whose childhood is important is Arthur. Malory's description of a gentleman's education, however, is to a large extent original, despite his phrase "as the booke seyth" (375.17). As we saw, the French states only that Tristan cannot be rivalled in "eschés et des tables," in "escremie," and "bel chevauchier" (CI.263.3). Two long paragraphs are devoted to Tristram's education as a gentleman, where, among other things, he learns "the langage and nurture and dedis of armys" (375.8), "to be an harper passyng all other" (375.12), and he "laboured in huntyng and hawkyng" (375.16). It is imperative to Malory that

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<sup>845</sup> Mark Lambert, *Malory: Style and Vision* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1975) 94.

<sup>846</sup> Speech becomes so important in Malory that it is only through dialogue that the reader is informed of Lameroke's death (716.2), whereas the event is narrated in the *Tristan* (MIV.124.29).

Tristram follows the “noble customys of jantylmen” (375.29). Before that, Tristram intervenes in the dispute between his father and stepmother, and the narrator underlines that “by the meanys of yonge Trystrams he made the kynge and hir accorded” (375.1, not in source), highlighting his diplomacy, generosity and warm-heartedness. In recording Tristram’s education, Malory underlines the characteristics which in future will make him one of the best knights in the world: his strength, popularity and kindness crown the knightly and gentlemanly attributes he has acquired.

The lucidity Isolde displays in her younger days follows her throughout her life. The readers are not aware of her age when they first meet her, but they know that she is “the fayrest lady and maydyn of the worlde” (385.7) and that Tristram is entrusted into her care because, as in the French, she is a “noble surgeon” (385.3). Malory is less coy about her feelings towards Tristram than are the French authors, for whereas Iseut is too young to understand love (CI.347.5), and cannot make up her mind about whom she likes best between Tristan and Palamede, Isolde “began to have a grete fantasy unto” Tristram (385.9), mirroring his strong love for her.<sup>848</sup> This is, according to Vinaver, an attempt on Malory’s part to “restaurer quelque chose qui avait presque disparu de l’original: des scènes et des motifs psychologiques.”<sup>849</sup> The parting scene when Tristram leaves Ireland is highly emotional. Isolde exclaims, in a passage apparently original to Malory: “‘A, jantyll knyght! . . . full wo I am of thy departynge, for I saw never man that ever I ought so good wyll to,’ and therewithall she wepte hertyly” (392.6). These emotions have little to do with the French Iseut’s indifferent reaction: “Yselt n’est mie granment iriee” (CI.353.7). Malory appears to prefer a psychological motivation for love to a magical love potion, a theme which we will explore in more depth later.

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<sup>847</sup> See Field, *Romance and Chronicle* 103.

Moreover, it is Isolde, not her handmaid, as in the French, who provides Tristram with a horse for the tournament.<sup>850</sup> When Isolde's mother discovers that Tristram is the knight who killed Marhalte, Isolde fears for Tristram, "for passynge well she loved Tramtryste and full well she knew the crewelnesse of hir modir the quene" (389.32). This early lucidity concerning her mother's cruelty and the strong feelings for Tristram are absent in the French, and demonstrate Malory's desire to show not only that Isolde's love for Tristram began well before the love potion, but also to foreshadow her clear understanding about her future husband's cruel motivations in relation to Tristram and to Alexander the Orphan, as we will see.

#### B. Relationships

It would be repetitive to use the approach adopted to examine the named characters in the first part of this thesis, for Malory makes very few changes to the relationships entertained between parent and child, between siblings, between husband and wife, lover and mistress and master and servant. This section will simply set out the most important differences between the English and the French. In the French romance, young Tristan is confronted with his father's death, whereas Tristram enjoys his father's love and lands until he leaves for Ireland a second time (393.5). The French Marc commits fratricide against his brother Pernehan, who criticised him for not fulfilling his role as king. Although there is no Pernehan in the *Morte*, the fratricide motif appears in the tale of "Alexander the Orphan," where King Mark kills his brother Bodwyne. Just as in the prose *Tristan*, the brother is a popular figure,<sup>851</sup> and Mark's jealousy drives him to murder. Peculiar to Malory are the name of Mark's brother, the war against the Saracens and Bodwyne's stratagem, the particular way in which Mark

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<sup>848</sup> 385.6; 392.11. The couple also exchange rings on Tristram's departure (392.17).

<sup>849</sup> Vinaver, *Le Roman* 123.

<sup>850</sup> 386.11; CI.332.21.



kills his brother, and the fact that Bodwyne, his wife and his son are enjoying Mark's hospitality. It is with apparent pleasure that Malory points out just how felonious Mark is: he is "the falsist traytour that ever was borne," and makes "fayre semblaunte" to his brother and family.<sup>852</sup> Moreover, instead of killing his brother while he is asleep at a fountain, he strikes his brother openly "to the herte wyth a dagger, that he never aftir spake worde" (634.10), proving he feels no guilt. These aggravating factors contribute to the blackening of Mark's character, which will be examined below.

The relationship between Isolde and Brangwayne undergoes important changes: in the first place, in every version of the story but Malory's, Brangain is made at least partially responsible for the mistake of giving Tristan and Iseut the potion which was intended for Marc and Iseut.<sup>853</sup> Brangain agrees to repair her mistake by taking Iseut's place in the nuptial bed, and it is to get rid of a dangerous witness that Iseut orders her servants to murder Brangain. Because Malory omits this substitution scene, Isolde no longer has any reason to see Brangwayne as a danger, and "by the assente of two ladyes that were with the quene they ordayned for hate and envye for to distroy dame Brangwayne" (419.27). Malory clearly stipulates that "of all erthely women she [Isolde] loved hir [Brangwayne] beste and moste" (420.1). The relationship between these women is therefore more straightforward and constant, and Isolde's character is relieved of the stigma attached to her in the prose Tristan.

Filial relations also undergo some alteration: first, by removing the French Prologue, Malory cuts out the reference to Mark abandoning the son he had begotten on his niece (CI.178.17). Despite the absence of this episode, which blackened the French Marc from the outset, Malory still seems to have succeeded in creating a thoroughly unpleasant character by emphasising filial relationships more than the

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<sup>851</sup> 633.2, 20; CI.240.2.

French does. In a clause original to Malory, the story-teller emphasises Mark's neglect of his blood bond with Tristram: Mark "chaced hym oute of Cornwayle (yette was he newew unto kynge Marke . . .)" (577.2). Corroborating this evidence are references absent from Malory's source to the importance of ties of kinship: Ebell says of Harmaunce that "he was destroyed in his owne defaute; for had he cheryshed his owne bloode, he had bene a lyvis kynge."<sup>854</sup>

Secondly, whereas the French narrator does not specify whether Lancelot knows Galaad is his son before the Pentecost of the Grail, Malory makes it evident that he does, for Elaine tells him "thys same feste of Pentecoste shall youre sonne and myne, Galahad, be made knyght . . ." (832.7). Malory appears to have clarified an ambiguity that he found in his original, just as he provides names of knights where the French narrator maintained a sense of mystery.<sup>855</sup>

Finally, the relationship between Tristram and Palomides is not cultivated in such detail in the Tristan. During the French Louveserp tournament, Palamede callously attacks Tristan, and is gently rebuked by Arthur. Vinaver states that in B. N. fr. 99, Palamede assumes his own defence,<sup>856</sup> but one finds in the Vienna manuscript that Tristan does attempt to exculpate Palamede: "or ne donnés mie, s'il vous plaist, tout le blasme a Palamidés de cestui fait, car, sauve soit la vostre grasse, il . . . ne fu pas tous seus sour moi!"<sup>857</sup> In the Morte, however, Tristram graciously forgives him (758.20). This generous attitude recalls Tristram's forgiveness of his stepmother's attempt to murder him. Palomides may sometimes declare Tristram to be his mortal

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<sup>852</sup> 633.29, 32.

<sup>853</sup> See CII.445.5 and CIII.879.4.

<sup>854</sup> 711.34. See also 712.11. See the corresponding story in MV.108.29 ff.

<sup>855</sup> Vinaver, Le Roman 111. Malory also cuts out the knighting scene, which actually marks the insertion of the Queste (3.6) in the prose Tristan (MVI.93.1).

<sup>856</sup> Vinaver, Le Roman 205 and Works 1519.

<sup>857</sup> MV.261.29.

enemy,<sup>858</sup> but he is equally ready to admit his rival's pre-eminence.<sup>859</sup> Palomides' loyalty to Tristram is underlined further when, in a passage that is not in the source,<sup>860</sup> the English reader is aware that Palomides "was nat all only so dolorous for the departynge frome La Beall Isode, but he was as sorowful aparte to go frome the felyshyp of sir Trystram" (763.21).

When Tristram rides unarmed to court for the feast of Pentecost, he meets Palomides, who refuses to fight an unarmed man. When Tristram learns that this battle is all Palomides needs to fulfil his vow, he borrows some armour and both knights fight for two hours, until Palomides puts an end to the combat (844.20). Malory's "Tristram" ends with Palomides accepting baptism with Tristram as his godfather, which underlines the depth of their friendship and mutual admiration, as well as Tristram's benevolent attitude towards Palomides. There is no such battle in the source, and Palamede is not baptised or sworn into the company of the Round Table until much later, while his reconciliation with Tristan in this scene is temporary. In the Morte, this friendship appears to be permanent, for even after Tristram's death, Palomides joins Lancelot's ranks.<sup>861</sup> Finally, the baptism scene for which Vinaver finds no source<sup>862</sup> also prepares the reader for more mystical experiences which are to follow with Galahad's adventures. Malory's subtle changes thus blacken Mark's character, slightly modify Isolde's nature, and increase the reader's respect for Tristram.

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<sup>858</sup> 604.19; 763.4.

<sup>859</sup> 529.5; 592.8.

<sup>860</sup> "Palamidés . . . s'em part et s'en vait en la compaignie des deus rois" (287.47).

<sup>861</sup> 1109.2; 1170.22; 1205.15.

<sup>862</sup> Vinaver, Le Roman 219, n.2.

### C. Characterisation

It is difficult to adopt a psychological approach to Malory's characters, and it would indeed be a "critical sin," as Peter Schroeder puts it, to think of them as real persons.<sup>863</sup> Malory does not portray his protagonists in the way a modern reader might expect, for the characters reveal themselves through dialogue and action, and seldom through the narrator's gloss. Lambert states, however, that although Malory's dialogue is vivid, it is neither individually varied nor psychologically revealing,<sup>864</sup> and this is certainly true for the text as a whole. A sentence without its context will rarely allow one to identify the character who has uttered it. One older critic took this so far as to say that "With all their external reality, Malory's characters are only partially alive, for Malory had but little psychological interest in them and but little invention. Accepting his people as he found them, he did not develop them further."<sup>865</sup> It is true that from a modern point of view, there is very little psychological insight, but as will become apparent, Malory has not only transformed his characters, but he has also written dialogue that, within a specific context, reveals, along with the narrator's gloss, the emotions of the characters uttering it, showing that he did not entirely dismiss the psychological aspect. By taking this approach to the characters, I make no claims about Malory's intentions, nor do I contend that every speech and action is psychologically credible. As Felicia Ackerman puts it, however, "enough about Malory's characters is psychologically plausible to make them generally believable as coherent individuals."<sup>866</sup>

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<sup>863</sup> Peter R. Schroeder, "Hidden Depths: Dialogue and Characterisation in Chaucer and Malory," *PLMA* 98.1 (1983): 375.

<sup>864</sup> Lambert 109.

<sup>865</sup> Howard Maynardier, *The Arthur of the English Poets* (New York: Houghton, 1907) 233.

<sup>866</sup> Felicia Ackerman, "'Every Man of Worshyp:' Emotion and Characterization in Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*," *Arthuriana* 11.2 (2001): 35.

## 1. Mark

Mark's character is revealed almost entirely by his actions and the narrator's gloss, while little transpires from his dialogues. Malory presents Mark essentially as he found him in the prose *Tristan*: a treacherous, unpleasant, cruel and jealous king, whose private concerns motivate his every action, except that he is blackened even further, a subject which has received some attention from the critics.<sup>867</sup> The facts change little from the prose *Tristan* to "Sir Tristram," but Mark's words and the narrator's gloss reduce his "two faces" to just the one,<sup>868</sup> that of a straightforward villain.

In the early part of the Tale, Malory does not display Mark's treacherous nature, and even eliminates Marc's murder of his brother Pernehan. As in the French, Mark at first appreciates Tristram, and when the latter has been badly wounded by Marhalte, Mark weeps "hertely" and expresses his deep sorrow: "I wolde nat for all my londys that my newew dyed" (383.31). He is "passynge glad" when Tristram returns in good

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<sup>867</sup> Rumble, "Development by Analogy" 153; Charles Moorman, *The Book of Kyng Arthur* (Lexington: U of Kentucky P, 1965) 23; Donald Schueler, "The Tristram Section of Malory's *Morte Darthur*," *Studies in Philology* 65 (1968): 54, 60; Elizabeth T. Pochoda, *Arthurian Propaganda: Le Morte Darthur as an Historical Ideal of Life* (Chapel Hill, U of North Carolina P, 1971) 98; Edward D. Kennedy, "Malory's King Mark and King Arthur" 190-234.

<sup>868</sup> See Fanni Bogdanow, "The Two Faces of King Mark" 89-109. Interestingly, Wagner's Marke is a more sympathetic character, largely because he does not understand the relationship between Tristan and Isolde, partly because of ignorance (he knows nothing about the potion and simply cannot understand how Tristan could betray his trust, but when he is told about it, he forgives the lovers), and partly because he chooses the path of resignation. His suffering is depicted by Wagner and commands sympathy: "Mir—dies? / Dies—, Tristan, mir—? / Wohin nun Treue, / da Tristan mich betrog?" [This to me? Ah, Tristan, this? / Ah, where is loyalty / If Tristan can betray?]; "Nun, da durch solchen / Besitz mein Herz / du fühlsamer schufst, / als sonst, dem Schmerz, / dort wo am weichsten, / zart und offen, / würd' ich getroffen, / nie zu hoffen, / daß je ich könnte genesen [sic]: / warum so sehrend / Unseliger, / dort nun mich verwunden? / Dort mit der Waffe / quälendem Gift, / das Sinn' und Hirn / mir sengend versehrt [sic], / das mir dem Freund / die Treue verwehrt, / mein off'nes Herz / erfüllt mit Verdacht, / daß ich nun heimlich / in dunkler Nacht / den Freund lauschend beschleiche, / meiner Ehren Ende erreiche?" [When I was blest with this gift [Isolde], / My heart grew open and soft / To pain and smart, / There where I'm weakest / Undefended, / There I am wounded, / Have no hope left / That I will ever recover: / Oh why so deeply, / Unhappy one, / Ah why do you wound me? / There with the weapon's / Poisonous edge / That sears my brain / And scorches my soul, / Destroying faith / In friend who was true]. Richard Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde* WWV 90, ed. Isolde Vetter and Egon Voss (London: Ernst Eulenburg, 2001) 417-27. English translation taken from Richard Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde*, ed. Nicholas John, trans. Andrew Porter (London: John Calder, 1981) 76-7. I am grateful to Stewart Spencer for helping me with this reference.

health from his first trip to Ireland (393.3). Mark's true nature is finally revealed when uncle and nephew both fall in love with the wife of Segwarides, which causes "a jolesy and an unkyndenesse betwyxte kyng Marke and sir Trystrames" to arise (393.12).

Moreover, where the French narrator simply states that Marc "se test de ce qu'il pense" (CI.373.23), Malory insists on Mark's powers of dissimulation. After he has wounded his nephew, he comes

ascawnce to sir Trystrames to comforte hym as he lay syke in his bedde.  
But as longe as kynge Marke lyved he loved never aftir sir Trystramys. So  
aftir that, thoughe there were fayre speche, love was there none (396.6).

This passage implies that up until then, Mark did love his nephew, but that he now not only has darker plans in mind, but that he will also conceal them. Mark's treachery is further revealed when Mark himself, and not his barons, decides he needs a wife.<sup>869</sup>

Despite Vinaver's and Rumble's claims that the plan to kill Tristram was devised by the barons, it is clear in the French and in the English that it is Mark who devises "all the wayes that he myght to dystroy sir Trystrames, and than imagened in hymselff to sende sir Trystramys into Irelande for La Beale Isode" (403.12).<sup>870</sup> Once Tristram is back in Ireland, having championed King Angwysh, he asks for his boon, which is to bring Isolde back to be married to King Mark. The French King Anguin agrees, saying he is quite happy for Iseut to marry Tristan or Marc, who is "tant preudons et tant saiges que ma fille i sera bien emploiee" (CI.438.20). Malory's modification is slight but significant, for his Angwysh says:

if that ye lyste to wedde hir yourselff, that is me leveste; and yf ye woll  
gyff hir unto kyng Marke your uncle, that is in your choise (411.33).

It is therefore clear that Isolde's father would rather his daughter were married to Tristram. Again, the good reputation which follows the French Marc across the

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<sup>869</sup> In the prose *Tristan*, it is the barons who "parloient a li [Marc] mout estroitement de ce qu'il ne prenoit feme" (CI.397.2).

borders does not exist in Malory's world. When Tristram's dog recognises his master after his period of madness, King Mark wants to have Tristram put "to the dethe," but is persuaded by Dinas and Fergus simply to exile him (502.35). Mark's idea of capital punishment is not in the source and consequently darkens his character. Similarly, Malory has lengthened the list of heroic deeds that Tristram recalls on leaving Cornwall, and the effect on the reader is that the greater the value of Tristram to Cornwall, the worse the folly Mark displays in wanting to banish this protector.<sup>871</sup>

As in the prose Tristan, other characters highlight Mark's villainy, but Malory adds to these by having Lameroke say that the king is

the shamfullist knyght of a kynge that is now lyvyng, for he is a grete enemy to all good knyghtes. And that prevyth well, for he hath chased oute of that contrey sir Trystram that is the worshypfullyst knyght that now is lyvyng, and all knyghtes spekyth of hym worship; and for the jeleousnes of his quene he hath chaced hym oute of his contrey (580.2).

This vehement attack, original to Malory, underlines Mark's major failings: he is an enemy to the institution of knighthood, and especially to one of the best knights in the world. Later, faced with Mark's lack of courage, Dynadan, unlike his French counterpart, seriously accuses him of "cowardyse" (585.2). Mark also places his own interests over and above those of his kingdom by expelling Tristram from Cornwall out of jealousy: in other words he places his concerns as an individual above his concerns as a ruler, where he should of right do just the opposite.<sup>872</sup>

When Arthur has sent Tristram back to Cornwall after having obliged Mark to swear not to hurt him, the French Lancelot's thoughts are related by the narrator:

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<sup>870</sup> See CI.398.1, 4 and "li rois, ses oncles, savoit certainement qu'il [Tristan] n'estoit en nul leu dou monde tant haiz mortelment com il estoit en Illande . . ." (398.14).

<sup>871</sup> 503.25; MII.5.13.

<sup>872</sup> As Edward Kennedy points out, Aegidius Romanus wrote in the fifteenth century that if a king were jealous of his wife, he would be apt to become involved with his own problems and neglect those of his kingdom ("Malory's King Mark and King Arthur" 194). Elsewhere, in his "Malory and the Marriage of Edward IV," Texas Studies in Literature and Language 12 (1970): 155-62, Kennedy shows that the relationship between a king and his wife was of great concern in mid-fifteenth century England.

il pensoit que ja si tost li rois March ne le tenroit en Cornuaille k'il le feroit ochirre en aucune maniere, . . . a che k'il savoit vraiment k'il avoit tant de desloiauté u roi March k'il n'em peüst plus avoir en nul autre cevalier . . . (MIV.135.18).

The English Lancelot similarly denounces Mark's felony, but he does so out loud and publicly:

ye shall here that he shall destroy sir Trystram other put hym into preson, for he is the most cowarde and the vylaunste kynge and knyght that is now lyvyng (609.34).

The passage from narration to dialogue has the added effect that everybody, not only the reader, hears Lancelot's fears about Mark's treachery.<sup>873</sup>

Narratorial gloss original to Malory also denounces Mark's felony after Tristram has helped Cornwall against the Saxon invasion. Indeed, after Tristram has fought in single combat against Elyas, the narrator adds: "Yett for all this kynge Marke wolde have slayne sir Trystram" (626.12), implying that he should have been grateful and forgotten his personal enmity against his nephew. Moreover, he kills his brother Bodwyne whilst the latter is enjoying his hospitality, a detail peculiar to Malory's version of the story.<sup>874</sup>

Rather than relating Tristram's death directly, Malory alludes to it on three occasions. The first is actually in the middle of the "Tale of Tristram:"

this false kynge Marke slew bothe sir Trystram and sir Alysaunder falsely and felonsly (648.8).<sup>875</sup>

Later on, in "The Healing of Sir Urry:"

<sup>873</sup> Other examples of Malory's blackening of Mark's character appear when one compares the *Morte* with MS B. N. fr. 99. King Mark hopes that by sending Tristram disguised to a tournament, the latter will be mistaken for Lancelot and will therefore be attacked by Lancelot's enemies (675.1). This ploy works, for Tristram is indeed hurt (675.24). In B. N. fr. 99, [fol.] 397 v b, Tristram is hurt in the same way, but Mark has nothing to do with it. Similarly, Mark counterfeits both letters from the Pope (677.27) whereas in B. N. fr. 99, he forges the second only: the first is authentic ([fol.] 388 v b). Malory adds to his source by stressing that Mark is more willing to risk the destruction of his kingdom than forget a personal wrong, for when Percival reminds Mark of the services Tristram has done for him, Mark replies, in a sentence original to Malory: "That is trouthe, . . . but I may nat love sir Trystram, bycause he lovyth my quene" (679.20).

<sup>874</sup> *Works* 1500. See also 703.26.



that traytoure kynge slew the noble knyght sir Trystram as he sate harpyng afore hys lady, La Beall Isode, with a trenchaunte glayve . . . (1149.28).

Finally, Lancelot says to Bors who has been begging him to bring Gwenyver home to King Arthur:

by sir Trystram I may have a warnyng: for whan by meanys of trefyse sir Trystram brought agayne La Beall Isode unto kynge Marke from Joyous Garde, loke ye now what felle on the ende, how shamefully that false traytour kyng Marke slew hym. . . . Wyth a grounden glayve he threste hym in behynde to the harte . . . (1173.12).

In these extracts, the reader learns not only that Mark killed his nephew, but that he attacked him from behind, “shamefully,” as a “traytour.” Of course, the prose Tristan narrates this episode directly, but at least Marc is penitent: “Or se repent durement. Or vauroit il qu’il ne l’eüst mie fait” (MIX.77.36). Malory’s Mark does not regret his act, and his image remains that of a traitor without the redemptive “two faces” he is given in the prose Tristan.

One final original touch found in Malory’s text is the retributive slaying of Mark, whereas the French only predicts it:<sup>876</sup> “sir Bellynger revenged the deth of hys fadir, sir Alysaundir, and sir Trystram, for he slewe kynge Marke.”<sup>877</sup> Not only does Malory let his readers know that Mark’s reward for his felony and treachery is death, but he also says nothing to condemn the act of tyrannicide. In addition, the narrator mentions that “all that were with kynge Marke whych were of assente of the dethe of sir Trystram were slayne, as sir Andred and many othir” (1150.4). “This minor addition,” as Kevin Grimm remarks, “indicates the author’s deep-seated discomfort with one element of the prose Tristan: its dark view of a world that allows the good to suffer and die and

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<sup>875</sup> See also 1149.25.

<sup>876</sup> MIV.241.33. All the French manuscripts predict Marc’s death, but none recounts it, except B. N. fr. 340, which tells of Marc’s death at the hands of Paulart. In the Tavola Ritonda he dies of overeating after having been kept in a cage and intensively fed by Morhault and Lancelot for thirty-two months (see Works 1503-4).

<sup>877</sup> 1150.1.

the evil to survive.”<sup>878</sup> Malory found most of Mark’s villainy in his source, and what he added simply makes him more uniformly black than the black-and-white characterisation one finds in the prose Tristan. His world is one where crimes do not always go unpunished, which fits in with the almost Manichean picture given in the Morte, where the division between heroes and villains is more clear-cut than in the prose Tristan.<sup>879</sup>

## 2. Isolde

Isolde’s physical attributes remain unchanged in the Morte, where she is as beautiful as in the prose Tristan. When Tristram first meets her, she is “the fayrest lady and maydyn of the worlde” (385.7) and later on, Arthur admires her: “ye ar the fayryste that ever I sawe” (757.14). As in the French, the narrator does not go into the detail of her appearance.

Isolde’s personality, however, undergoes several changes with Malory. He paints Isolde’s character more uniformly white, just as Mark’s is more consistently black. As was established earlier, her relationship with Brangwayne is more straightforward, and she shows her no unkindness as she does in the prose Tristan. In one of Malory’s longest additions to the source, the famous recognition scene, Isolde displays her emotion by swooning when she realises Tristram is alive. The narrator may not directly express the strong feelings implied by this fainting fit in detail, but the action, and the warning she later addresses to Tristram, give the reader a clue as to the joy, relief and regret she might be feeling on learning that her lover is alive, but that he must leave because of Mark. Her lucidity, which was also highlighted above, is shown to be a consistent trait of hers throughout the text, for as soon as she has regained her

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<sup>878</sup> Kevin Grimm, “Fellowship and Envy: Structuring the Narrative of Malory’s ‘Tale of Sir Tristram,’” Fifteenth-Century Studies 20 (1993): 92.

<sup>879</sup> This is not always the case, as we will see when we examine the case of Lameroke.

composure after fainting, she immediately warns Tristram of her husband's intentions in a passage original to Malory:

as sone as my lorde kynge Marke do know you he woll banysh you oute of the contrey of Cornwayle, othir ellis he woll destroy you. And therefore, for Goddys sake, myne owne lorde, graunte kynge Marke hys wyll, and than draw you unto the courte off kynge Arthur . . . (502.11).

She knows her husband's felony so well that she helps Anglides and Alexander escape his murderous hands (634.21), and this addition of Malory's contributes to the portrait of Isolde as a clear-minded and helpful character. Moreover, it is she who points out to Tristram the risk he runs by going out unarmed, despite the threat of "many perelous knyghtes" and of King Mark who is "full of treson" (683.7).<sup>880</sup> Finally, only in Malory's version does Isolde decline to come to the Pentecost celebrations on account of the "laboure" it will cause Tristram (839.25). Her preoccupation for Tristram's health is realistic, and she seems to strike a balance between courtly lore and common sense.

### 3. Tristram

Malory makes few changes to Tristram's characterisation. He retains his good looks and his imposing stature, although Malory makes less of these attributes than does the French.<sup>881</sup> His musical skills are also stressed, and admired by King Arthur (571.32), although Malory suppresses all the lays so the reader has no example of what Tristram writes. The Vienna manuscript includes the music for seventeen lays, and although Malory may not have known this manuscript, the absence of music in his book is conspicuous.<sup>882</sup> The English author stresses more knightly qualities by showing Tristram up in a different light, that of one so deserving of the high order of

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<sup>880</sup> The French Iseut warns Tristan against going out unarmed on a later occasion, before he leaves for the Pentecost celebrations, for there are "u roiaume de Logres maint cevalier qui vous sont mortel anemi" (MVI.86.77).

<sup>881</sup> See 389.2 and 596.8.

<sup>882</sup> See *Les Lais*, ed. Tatiana Fotitch and Ruth Steiner.

knighthood that he cannot be blamed for his adulterous behaviour. Malory makes Tristram less reprehensible by omitting the latter's threat to kill Mark, for instance. When Mark sees the lovers sitting together in a window, he attempts to kill Tristram, who, taking the sword from him, threatens to strike the king. Tristram "smote hym fyve or six strokys flatlynge in the necke, that he made hym falle on the nose" (426.27), where the French says that Tristan "le fiert dou plat de l'espee a desouvert parmi la teste si durement que li rois vole a terre toz estanduz, et cuide bien estre feruz a mort" (CII.514.45). At this point the French Tristan threatens to kill Marc, whereas his English counterpart simply rides into the forest with his men. The omission of both references to possible death makes Tristram seem much less blameworthy.

Despite Tristram's and Isolde's reciprocal love,<sup>883</sup> Malory could hardly omit the episode in which Tristram schemes his way to the bed of a married woman, after his return from Ireland,<sup>884</sup> for it serves as the turning point in the formerly good relations between uncle and nephew. Malory creates a time lapse between Tristram's return and the idyll between him and Segwarides' wife, which somewhat minimises Tristram's obvious inconsistency:

he rode unto his fadir, kynge Melyodas, and there he had all the chere that the kynge and the quene coude make hym. . . . Than by the lysence of his fadir he returned ayen unto the courte of kynge Marke. And there he lyved longe in grete joy longe tyme, untyll at the laste there befelle a jolesy . . . betwyxte kyng Marke and sir Trystrames . . . (393.5).

The repetition of "longe" and "at the laste" denote the passage of time which constitutes what one might see as a decent interval between the tender scene of the lovers' parting and the crude reality of Tristram and Segwarides' wife having a light supper before going "to bedde with grete joy and plesaunce" (394.21).

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<sup>883</sup> 385.6; 385.9; 392.11; 392.17.

<sup>884</sup> 393.15; CI.3; 7.15.

Malory retains Tristram's position as the second best knight in the world, adding several confirmatory statements that are not in the source. Thus when Mark takes measures to have Tristram killed after the latter has been found in conversation with Isolde in a window, Dinas the Senesciall upholds Tristram as "peereles and makeles of ony Crystyn knyght, and of his myght and hardynes we know none so good a knyght but yf hit be sir Launcelot du Lake" (427.10). In the prose Tristan there is no such defence. Similarly, Malory fails to mention the animosity which certain knights feel towards the French Tristan after he has killed two of their kin: "Il avoit leanz dusqu'a trente chevaliers qui tuit apartenoient aus deus freres que Tristanz avoit ocis en la forest. Il vengassent volentiers lor mort . . ." (CII.519.29). When Tristram is exiled from Cornwall, his list of exploits is shorter but more complete than in the Tristan, for Malory adds the "fecchyng and costis of quene Isode out off Irelande," her deliverance from the "Castell Pleure," and his battles against Bleoberys for Segwarides' wife, against Blamour for King Angwysh, and against Lameroke at Mark's request.<sup>885</sup> In the "Round Table" section, Malory mentions Merlin's "perowne," where he prophesied that "in that same place sholde fyght two the beste knyghtes that ever were in kynge Arthurs dayes, and two of the beste lovers," knights who turn out to be Lancelot and Tristram (568.18). The French narrator sees Tristan arriving at the "Perron Merlin" but Merlin's prophecy is not mentioned at this point (MIII.247.6). Similarly, whereas Armans fights against Marc "pour loiale querele" (MIV.88.31), Malory's Amaunte clearly explains that he refused to "sle the noble knyght sir Trystram," underlining the admiration Tristram commands (593.7). Later Mark announces to Percival that he "may nat love sir Trystram, bycause he

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<sup>885</sup> 503.25; MII.5.13.

lovyth . . . La Beall Isode” (679.20), but Percival defends Tristram in a passage original to Malory:

Ye sholde never thynke that so noble a knyght as sir Trystram is, that he wolde do hymselff so grete vylany to holde his unclys wyff. Howbehit . . . he may love your quene synles, because she is called one of the fayryst ladyes of the worlde (679.24).

Percival first tries to persuade Mark that Tristram is incapable of such villainy, and then switches argument by intimating that Tristram would be justified in loving Isolde platonically because of her unchallenged beauty, thus demonstrating he would go to great lengths to side with a knight who is “of moste reverence in the worlde lvyng,” and whom “the noblyste knyghtes of the worlde lovyth . . .” (679.16). During the Lonezep tournament, Tristram is also the object of Lancelot’s admiration, who in the French says that he is “de grant pooir et de greigneur afaire que Palamidés” (MV.278.24), but who in the English mentions that “all that sir Trystram doth is thorow clene knyghthod” (760.2). This expression denotes the perfection Tristram has attained in Lancelot’s eyes, for he surpasses Palomides both on the physical and moral levels: Tristram’s “clene knyghthod” is opposed to Palomides’s “prevy envy,” a distinction not made in the original.<sup>886</sup> It is through all these additions, which appear to be original to Malory, that the reader becomes aware of the particular slant the author puts on the story: Tristram’s chivalric exploits, and the admiration he commands among the knights of the highest rank make him worthy of the order of chivalry in Malory’s eyes, although he is almost always overshadowed by the greatest knight of all, Lancelot.<sup>887</sup> Their parallel destinies are set out more clearly by Malory: they go through the same love madness, even to the extent of the recognition scenes,

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<sup>886</sup> For other examples of Malory’s additions concerning Tristram, see 740.30 where Tristram’s and Lancelot’s honour is enhanced; Lancelot twice predicts his victory at Lonezep (741.24; 746.20).

<sup>887</sup> For the subordination of Tristram to Lancelot see, outside the “Tristram,” 72.5; 162.5; 316.23. See also 415.31; 529.7; 784.22. On rare occasions, they are almost interchangeable as measures of greatness: 388.29; 742.23; 831.26, and these passages are without source in the French.

Tristram by the dog and Lancelot by Elaine. Moreover, the three great tournaments carefully balance out their victories: at the Castle of Maidens Tristram wins the prize on two days, although his wound prevents him from winning it on the third; at Surluse, with Gwenyver present, Lancelot and Lameroke win the prize; and at Lonezep, this time with Isolde present, Tristram and Lancelot share the prize for the third day. As Cooper says, Lancelot “provides the highest model by which any knight can be evaluated, and that Tristram is effectively his peer marks him out as extraordinary in Malory’s hierarchy of knightliness.”<sup>888</sup>

The importance Malory places on hunting as a courtly pastime has already been established, and his characterisation of Tristram as the originator of the ritual of the hunt and of the pattern of the noble huntsman stands among his most notable additions to his source, where Tristan is already successful in this field. The previous chapter cited the first passage where Malory describes how Tristram came to master the hunting skills like no other, and how all the hunting and hawking terms we now have come from him (375.15).<sup>889</sup> It is immediately followed by a paragraph, also mentioned above, in which Malory underlines the distinction between “jantylman” and the “yoman” and “vylayne,” thus emphasising the fact that hunting is an exclusively upper-class activity. A similar passage occurs much later, in the “Joyous Gard” section:

every day sir Trystram wolde go ryde an-huntynge, for he was called that tyme the chyeff chacer of the worlde and the noblyst blower of an horne of all maner of mesures. For, as bookis reporte, of sir Trystram cam all the good termys of venery and of huntynge, and all the syes and mesures of all blowyng wyth an horne; and of hym we had fyrst all the termys of hawkyng, and whyche were bestis of chace and bestis of venery, and whyche were vermyns; and all the blastis that longed to all maner of game:

<sup>888</sup> Helen Cooper, “The Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones,” *A Companion to Malory* 193.

<sup>889</sup> That Tristram is the founder of the art of venery is a notion peculiar to Malory and to another English version of the Tristan romance, *Sir Tristrem*. Vinaver points out that it also appears in some of the late medieval treatises on hunting like *The Book of St. Albans* and *The Noble Art of Venerie or Hunting*. See *Works* 1510.

fyrste to the uncoupeynge, to the sekyng, to the fyndyng, to the rechace, to the flyght, to the deth, and to strake; and many other blastis and termys, that all maner jantylmen hath cause to the worldes ende to prayse sir Trystram and to pray for his soule. Amen, sayde Sir Thomas Malleoré (682.25).

The fervent “Amen” at the end of the passage is probably, as D. C. Muecke suggests, Malory’s own comment, although others have argued it could be a scribal addition.<sup>890</sup> However this may be, this passage points to Malory’s own enthusiasm for hunting through the characterisation of one of the best knights in the world as the archetypal huntsman, knight and “jantylman,” and the present tense at the end of the passage may denote a movement into the real world of the narrator. Moreover, no other knight in the Morte is credited with such a quality. This skill is recognised by the highest earthly authority in the Morte, King Arthur, as an important attribute, in a passage also apparently original to Malory:

Wellcom, . . . for one of the beste knyghtes and the jentyllyst of the worlde and the man of moste worship. For of all maner of huntyng thou beryste the pryce, and of all mesures of blowyng thou arte the begynnyng, of all the termys of huntyng and hawkyng ye ar the begynner, of all instirmentes of musyk ye ar the beste (571.27).

Tristram is upheld as the representative of hunting, which is seen as the emblem of virtue and nobility. As Saunders points out, Malory was drawing not on his French source (although Tristan greatly enjoys hunting, he is not hailed as the founder of its lore), but on the significance of hunting in his culture:

Historically, as well as in the courtly literature of the Middle Ages, the hunt was a positive statement of nobility, an art to be studied alongside music and arms. It fulfilled a variety of purposes, offering a training for warfare, an opportunity for fellowship, and a pleasurable but challenging sport. The hunt is striking in its historical dissociation from its original purpose, that of obtaining food, and in its exclusivity as a courtly activity confined to the upper classes.<sup>891</sup>

<sup>890</sup> D. C. Muecke, “Some Notes on Vinaver’s Malory,” Modern Language Notes 70 (1955): 325-28.

<sup>891</sup> Saunders 272.



So courtly and civilised a pastime is it, that Tristram totally excludes the possibility of treachery whilst hunting, an innocence on which the far-sighted and realistic Isolde comments:

I mervayle me muche that ye remembir nat youreselff how ye be here in a straunge contrey, and here be many perelous knyghtes. . . . And that ye woll ryde thus to chace and to hunte unarmed, ye myght be sone destroyed (683.6).

Tristram's unsuspecting attitude stands in sharp contrast to the French, where Tristan himself takes the initiative not to hunt unarmed, for fear of being attacked by the felonious Bréhus (MVI.23.24).<sup>892</sup> Tristram's commitment to the "courtly propriety and innocence of the hunt and the game-playing world that it represents"<sup>893</sup> blinds him to the possibility of attack.

Malory makes three more notable additions to the "Tristram" which concern the hero of this tale. They are the descriptions of Tristram in the wilderness, the recognition scene, and of Tristram in prison, all highly emotive moments which go contrary to Malory's tendency to reduce his source. Tristram's madness is, according to Vinaver, probably Malory's "finest and most subtle contribution to the story,"<sup>894</sup> for the psychology of the character has obviously been thought out. He flees into the woods after he believes Isolde has betrayed him, but it is only after he sees Fergus that he falls unconscious for three days and that his madness begins. The French Tristan appears to be comforted by the harp-playing of a damsel, and he himself takes the harp to play his "Lai Mortel" (CIII.867ff.), but his English counterpart's insanity is aggravated by this encounter: "the more she made of hym, the more was hys payne" (495.24). The fact that she understands his grief only brings it home to him more forcibly. Later, when he fully recovers his memory and sanity, "as sone as sir

<sup>892</sup> In B. N. fr. 99 [fol.] 401 v a, the narrator says "Et sachiés qu'il n'aloit onques chacier en la forest qu'il n'y alast garni d'armes" (See Works 1510).

<sup>893</sup> Saunders 280.

Trystramys sye her [Isolde] he knew her well inowe, and than he turned away hys vysage and wepte” (501.25). He knows he cannot stay with her because of Mark, and tells her “go frome me, for much angur and daunger have I assayed for youre love” (502.20). Malory succeeds both in expressing the tragedy contained in Tristram’s fate and giving a realistic psychological interpretation of the situation.

Moreover, instead of reducing the passage of the dog’s recognition, Malory expands what he found in his source, where Tristan would never have been recognised were it not for “Hudenc son braquet, ki le reconnut tout maintenant que il le vit” (MI.188.26). Malory’s version immortalises the little dog in a vivid description:

thys lityll brachet felte a savoure of sir Trystram. He lepte uppon hym and lycked hys learys and hys earys, and than he whyned and quested, and she smelled at hys feete and at hys hondis and on all the partyes of hys body that she myght com to (501.33).

The realistic portrayal of canine antics calls attention to the respect Tristram commands, even among the animal population, as does the legendary harp-playing Orpheus. The fidelity of the English dog is more marked, for it is one thing for a dog to be faithful to its mistress; it is another for this same dog to forsake this mistress for the presence of a person for whom it was originally destined by the daughter of the King of France, so we are told by Malory.

The final passage to which the reader’s attention is called occurs when Tristram falls ill in Darras’s prison, an episode which was cited in the previous chapter (540.28). In the French prose romance, Tristan does not fall ill, and indeed tries to comfort his co-prisoner, Palamede (MIII.45.1). Here again, Malory moves into the present tense to lament the evils of sickness for a prisoner, increasing the realism of the situation. With this description, and the two incidents mentioned above, Malory goes against his usual

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<sup>894</sup> Works 1445.

tendency to “reduce the number of details which are unrelated or tenuously related to the essential knightliness of the event being described.”<sup>895</sup>

In his characterisation of Tristram, several tendencies are to be noted: first Malory simplifies his character in the same way as with Isolde and Mark. He makes him less reprehensible and embellishes his knightly valour and reputation. He removes all the lyrical passages in which the French Tristan demonstrates his abilities to compose and perform his music, qualities which are far more important in the Tristan world than that of “Sir Tristram,” thus drastically reducing the courtly colouring of the romance. At the same time, the reader finds passages such as those quoted above which testify to a real desire to make the listener identify with Tristram’s sorrows. Tristram comes across as a knight whose chivalric qualities are enhanced, whose effusiveness in love is reduced,<sup>896</sup> and whose reactions to certain tragic situations are vividly related.

Malory closes the “Book of sir Tristram” with these words:

Here endyth the secunde boke off Syr Trystram de Lyones, whyche drawyn was oute of Freynshe by sir Thomas Malleorré, knyght, as Jesu be hys helpe. Amen. But here ys no rehearsall of the thirde booke (845.27).

The third book contained, of course, the story of the death of the lovers, but Malory prefers to end his “Sir Tristram” on a note of happiness, with the lovers enjoying life united in their peaceful abode. Despite this, Malory works the murder of Tristram into his narrative at three different points. He first mentions it in the conclusion to the “Tale of Alexander the Orphelin,” then later in the final tales Seven and Eight. Malory makes no mention of the part played by Morgan in Tristram’s death as is the case in the prose Tristan, and also omits the terrible agony endured by Tristram, along with his leave-taking of the Arthurian world. Moreover, the English Isolde does not die of

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<sup>895</sup> Lambert 92.

suffocation in Tristan's last embrace, but "sownyng uppon the crosse of sir Trystram, whereof was grete pité" (1150.3).<sup>897</sup>

In the second allusion, the narrator describes the grief of the Arthurian world at this tragedy:

for whos dethe was the moste waylynge of ony knyght that ever was in kynge Arthurs dayes, for there was never none so bewayled as was sir Trystram and sir Lamerok . . . (1149.30).

Lancelot tells Bors of his reaction to the news:

whych grevyth sore me, . . . to speke of his dethe, for all the worlde may nat fynde such another knyght (1173.19).

The French makes much more of Tristan's death than does Malory: not only is more space devoted to its description, but the reaction of the Arthurian world is distilled into mourning being worn for a year by Arthur's court and the king's request for the *Lai Royal* to be composed, along with many others, in memory of this great knight (MIX.141.19). Moreover, the French Tristan's leave-taking of the world of chivalry and of Iseut emphasises the values he upheld during his life. Malory omits all such descriptions, preferring not to sully the end of his Tale with details of his death. By relegating the references to his demise to a couple of paragraphs, he makes the reader aware of a world going on well beyond the control of a narrator who knows little more than the listener. Moreover, the fact that the second allusion to Tristram's murder is a central part of the great roll-call of knights who attempt to heal Sir Urry underlines the sense of loss of those who once belonged to the fellowship but have been killed by treachery. The contrast between the note of harmony on which the "Tristram" ends and the cruel loss felt in "The Healing of Sir Urry" emphasises the larger tragic movement of the history of Arthur into which the "Tale of Sir Tristram" fits.

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<sup>896</sup> See *Works* lxxxvi, n. 5.

### Chapter Nine: Chivalry in “Sir Tristram”

Chivalry in the “Tristram” receives proportionately more attention than it does in the Tristan mainly by virtue of Malory’s relative lack of interest for love and religion. To an even greater extent than in the prose Tristan, “most of Malory is to do with men of the knightly caste fighting each other—in wars, tournaments, jousts, knight errantry, quests and private quarrels.”<sup>898</sup> This explains why, as Field remarks, “the knights’ lives are simplified by the omission of administrative responsibilities and (usually) of pressing need for money; and by the absence of peasants, lawyers and merchants. The Knight is reduced to his essence, the fighting-man. . . .”<sup>899</sup> Even then, “little is seen of campaigning conditions, or loot, or experiment with different kinds of weapons, and the mess and pain of fighting are normally played down.”<sup>900</sup> Thus Malory concentrates his efforts on presenting the reader with a picture of chivalry, dominated by values whose emphases differ slightly from those of the French romance.

In a rare narratorial intrusion, Malory insists on the fact that he himself is a knight (845.27). Moreover, in his preface, Caxton shows that he sees the Morte as a lesson-book for all. He informs the readers whom he sees as composed of “noble lordes and ladyes wyth al other estates,” that in the book

they shalle fynde many joyous and playsaunt hystoryes and noble and renommed actes of humanyté, gentylnesse, and chyvalryes. For herein may be seen noble chyvalrye, curtosye, humanyté, frendlynesse, hardynesse, love, frendshyp, cowardyse, murdre, hate, vertue, and synne. Doo after the good and leve the evyl, and it shal brynge you to good fame and renommee (cxlvi.2).

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<sup>897</sup> Both Caxton and Winchester read “crosse,” but it seems more plausible to Helen Cooper that Malory wrote “cors,” “corpse,” as in the prose Tristan (Sir Thomas Malory, Le Morte Darthur: The Winchester Manuscript (Oxford, OUP, 1998) 558). There is in neither case any mention of the suffocation.

<sup>898</sup> Lynch, Book of Arms 28.

<sup>899</sup> Field, Tales 46-7.

<sup>900</sup> Field, Tales 47.

Although one must be careful not to see Caxton's preface as an exact reflection of Malory's intentions, which are not the subject of this study in any case, it is proper and relevant to see it as a very early response to the Morte Darthur.<sup>901</sup> Caxton, who printed the book in 1485, and translated Ramón Lull's Book of the Ordre of Chyualry in 1484 and Christine de Pizan's treatment of the methods and rules of civilised war, The Book of Fayttes of Armes and of Chyualrye,<sup>902</sup> sees the Morte as a series of pleasant stories depicting situations in which the good can be distinguished from the bad.

Significantly, Lull's book was never more popular in England than during Malory's lifetime. Caxton draws attention to the fact that by following the rules expounded in the Morte, the reader will acquire a good reputation. Just as Lull's and Christine's books formulated a knightly ideal, so, according to Caxton, does the Morte. It is difficult, however, to see Malory's work purely as a manual of chivalry, for he does not pause to explain his ideals in abstract terms, but usually simply narrates actions both good and bad without comment, his admirable characters sometimes behaving reprehensibly without criticism. Nevertheless, as Field points out, "judgements made in passing, the implications of words and the way the sources are altered reveal a coherent set of preferences and aversions," which this chapter sets out to examine.<sup>903</sup>

## I. Becoming a knight

### A. Education

Knightly education is not a matter on which Malory dwells in much detail, which again suggests his book is not a manual of chivalry. As in the prose Tristan, the reader catches a glimpse of Tristram's upbringing, during which he is said to have gone to

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<sup>901</sup> The only known earlier response is to be found in Malory's own marginalia in the Winchester MS, a subject examined by Peter Field in "Malory's Own Marginalia," Medium Aevum 70 (2001): 226-39.

<sup>902</sup> Lull, Book of the Ordre of Chyualry and Christine de Pizan, The Book of Fayttes of Armes and of Chyualrye, ed. Alfred T. P. Byles (London: OUP, 1932).

France to “lerne the langage and nurture and dedis of armys” for more than seven years (375.8). This done, he takes to learning the harp and other instruments of music; this is presented as something untypical which individualises Tristram rather than as something that qualifies him as a knight, or indeed as anything that is related to knighthood. He then focuses on hunting and hawking, as was established above. By the time he is eighteen he is “stronge and bygge” and ready to enter the order of knighthood to fight Marhalte. Little is made of the youth theme, and although the reader sees Percival (610.32) and Alexander the Orphan as young squires, only the latter’s youth is referred to: his mother “Anglydes endured yerys and wyntyrs, tyll Alysaundir was bygge and stronge, and there was none so wyghty in all that contrey, that there was no man myght do no maner of maystry afore hym” (635.31). The strength and deeds of prowess which he has attained now entitle him to be made knight, as the constable Bellynger informs Anglydes (636.3).

### B. Knighting

Several interesting changes appear in the accounts of knightings in the “Tristram.” “Prerequisites” are the information needed by the patron before he agrees to dub the aspiring knight, provided either by the latter or the person making the request on his behalf.

The tables below show which details seem important to Malory, and which he has decided not to retain. We note first of all that in a text that is one sixth of the length of its original, the number of references to knighting has not been diminished proportionately, there being fourteen in the prose Tristan and ten in the “Tristram.” Secondly, much of the ritual surrounding the dubbing ceremony is left out. This is a far cry from the ordination of a knight described in Lull’s Book, which includes a

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<sup>903</sup> Field, Tales 48.

confession, the vigil, the sermon concerning the articles of faith, the fitting of the sword and spurs, the feast and the exchange of gifts.<sup>904</sup> The vigil, prominent in seven of the prose Tristan knighting ceremonies, has thus vanished in the “Tristram.” The religious aspect of the ceremony is conspicuously absent from the pages of the “Tristram,” where only Alexander’s dubbing is said to take place during Mass (636.22), against four in the French source. Moreover, the fitting of the spurs, the girding of the sword and the neck blow which appear in the prose Tristan are never mentioned in the “Tristram.”<sup>905</sup>

The information the patron needs to bestow knighthood upon the squires gives the reader a more precise idea of what this status means in the Morte. Indeed, in the prose Tristan, Tristan, Brun le Noir, Perceval, Helyant le Blanc and Samaliel receive the blessing of knighthood because they have been able to prove their good lineage.<sup>906</sup> This is also occasionally the case in the “Tristram,” where proven lineage alone is enough to persuade King Arthur to dub Percival, for instance (611.8). This decision is further validated by Percival’s later prowess and Arthur’s assertion, in “Lancelot and Elaine,” that “he muste nedys preve a good knyght, for hys fadir and hys bretherne were noble knyghtes all” (815.9). Likewise, all Arthur need know about Elyne le Blanke is that he is related to Brandegorre and to Bors (831.9). On the other hand, although Malory may see good lineage as a prerequisite to becoming a knight, he also gives knighthood a more practical application. Thus it is not enough for Tristram to be high-born, for he also has to promise to fight Marhalte in return (379.7). Similarly, even though his father was a “noble knyght” (459.17), it is La Cote’s courage in the

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<sup>904</sup> Lull 66ff.

<sup>905</sup> Exact references are given in the Knighting Ceremony Tables in Chapter Three. For other references to knighting ceremonies in the Morte, see Gawain and Tor (101.33), Lancelot (1058.23), Mellyagaunt (1122.11). Never in the Morte does Malory describe the knighting ritual, and even when he finds a more complete description in his source he does not reproduce it (379.11 compared to CI.292).

<sup>906</sup> See Knighting Ceremonies Table 2 above.



face of the ferocious lion that convinces King Arthur of his aptness for knighthood (460.27). It should also be noted that although this information is not included in the tables, it is often reasonable to assume that other elements may be in the mind of the lord who confers knighthood: aristocratic lineage, for instance, the subject of explicit questions on some occasions, does not need to be queried on others because everybody knows the answer.

The significance of these changes lies in the lack of pomp and circumstance and in the emphasis on the practicality of knighthood. The omission of ceremonies suggests that what is important is what lies ahead of these aspiring knights: they are entering a world in which they have a practical responsibility, mainly to fight, a duty which they obviously know in advance (for there are none of the admonitions which one finds in the prose Tristan).

## II. Knightly values

Despite the lack of admonition on the part of the patrons knighting squires, a code of values emerges from the pages of the “Tristram,” the emphases of which differ somewhat from those of the prose Tristan.

### A. The chivalric code of action

In the first book of the Morte, King Arthur articulates a code of conduct for the members of his knightly community:

the kynge stablysshed all the knyghtes and gaff them rychesse and londys; and charged them never to do outrage nothir mourthir, and allwayes to fle treson, and to gyff mercy unto hym that askith mercy, uppon payne of forfiture of their worship and lordship of kynge Arthure for evirmore; and allwayes to do ladyes, damesels, and jantilwomen and wydowes socour: strengthe hem in hir ryghtes, and never to enforce them, uppon payne of dethe. Also, that no man take no batayles in a wrongefull quarell for no love ne for no worldis goodis. So unto thys were all knyghtis sworne of the Table Rounde, both olde and yonge, and every yere so were they sworne at the hyghe feste of Pentecoste (120.15).

Knighting Ceremonies in Malory Table 6

Name	Age	Place / Date	Patron	Prerequisites
<b>Tristram</b>	around “eyghtene yere” (375.31)	Tintagel	Mark	“passyngly well made and bygge” (379.1); name and origin (379.3); Tristram has to promise to fight against Marhalte (379.7)
<b>Hebes</b>		“in the fylde” (387.8)	Tristram	Hebes asks Tristram: “yf hit please you of your hondis that I may be made knyght” (387.6)
<b>Nabon’s son (intention only)</b>		During a day of tourneying (444.17)	Nabon	
<b>La Cote Male Tayle</b>	“yonge man” (459.4)	Arthur’s court	Arthur	Arthur asks him his name and why he wears the torn coat (459.8, 15). La Cote informs him that he is of “good kynne” (459.10). Lameroke notes his “countenance” (459.30), and when Arthur hears of La Cote’s defeat of the lion he is confident he will “preve a noble man” (460.27)
<b>Dagonet</b>		Arthur’s court	Arthur	
<b>Percival</b>	“yonge squyer” (610.34)	“on the morne,” in “Camelott” (611.12)	Arthur	Arthur needs to know his “lygnage,” 610.35; why he wants to become a knight (611.4) and his name (611.10)
<b>Alexander</b>	“yonge man” (636.4)	“Oure Lady Day in Lente” 636.10		The constable decides it is time Alexander be knighted because he is “stronge” (636.4)
<b>Castor</b>		“feste of Candylmasse” (823.8)	Arthur	
<b>Elyne le Blanke</b>	“fyftene” (830.27)	Arthur’s court	Arthur	All Arthur needs to know is that Elyne is Bors’s son and Brandegorre’s nephew (831.9)
<b>Galahad</b>	“fyftene wynter olde” (832.9)	“feste of Pentecoste” (832.8)	Lancelot	Elaine says it is time he were knighted because he is now fifteen (832.9)

There is no such injunction in the Suite du Merlin,<sup>907</sup> the source for this part of the Morte, nor does one find anything so didactic in the prose Tristan or in the “Tristram.” Richard Barber has shown a close resemblance between this and the ceremonial for making knights of the Bath, but that is not the end of the matter.<sup>908</sup> As Vinaver cogently pointed out, the Pentecostal oath is not a unique expression of the chivalric values contained in Malory’s text: these values are repeatedly demonstrated in the actions of the knights,<sup>909</sup> both within and without the “Tristram.” This set of rules is much the same as in the Tristan, which is why we will not dwell upon it in detail.

#### B. The moral code of knights

The moral qualities which knights must possess, however, are given a different emphasis by Malory, and this is already visible in the Pentecostal oath. Indeed, if the knights fail to respect this code, they risk forfeiting their “worship and lordship of kyng Arthur for evirmore.” Here we touch upon one of the most evocative concepts in the Morte: reputation and noble idealism of mind, expressed by the word “worship.”<sup>910</sup> To this ideal must be added the special bond of fellowship, also a theme close to Malory’s heart, and the strong moral values which dominate Lancelot’s eulogy on Gareth:

he ys jantill, curteyse and ryght bownteuous, meke and mylde, and in hym ys no maner of male engynne, but playne, faythfull an trew (1089.1).

Loyalty, generosity and courtesy dictate the chivalric conduct, and although these virtues are also found in the prose Tristan, the concepts of worship and fellowship are

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<sup>907</sup> Merlin: Roman en prose du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, ed. Gaston Paris and Jacob Ulrich, 2 vols. (Paris: S.A.T.F., 1886).

<sup>908</sup> Richard Barber, “Malory’s Le Morte Darthur and Court Culture under Edward IV,” Arthurian Literature 12 (1993): 149.

<sup>909</sup> Works 1330.

<sup>910</sup> See Field’s definition of “worship,” Tales 49.

particularly stressed by Malory. Finally, in order to conform to the rules, a knight must possess courage and physical strength.

### 1. Prowess

Prowess is the first quality demanded of a knight, and Malory, like the authors of his source, gives it particular prominence. As a physical attribute, it is the only one which is accorded real importance, whereas the prose Tristan often underlines Tristan's attractive physique. Prowess is a quality often referred to by Malory as "noble," which is usually not the case in the French.<sup>911</sup> At times cited along with other qualities,<sup>912</sup> it more often stands on its own in the "Tristram," as a quality of intrinsic value.<sup>913</sup> The fighting it engenders is so important to Malory that even characters who are otherwise unworthy are still recognised as possessing prowess. Thus Helyus and Helake are both:

men of grete prouesse; howbehit that they were falsse and full of treson,  
and but poore men born, yet were they noble knyghtes of their handys  
(717.22).

This passage is the proof that prowess is not always linked to lineage. Here these two traitors are called "noble knyghtes" for their prowess alone, which is an element difficult to reconcile with Malory's apparent bias for heredity observed in the two previous chapters. It may also be an indication that the conservative chivalric system to which Malory was committed allowed that in exceptional cases members of the gentry could rise on the social scale and become knights. Interestingly, Barber suggests that Sir Thomas Malory of Newbold Revel, whom he accepts as author, "moved . . . among the lower levels of the court." He continues, "I am not arguing that he was actually a member of Edward's [IV] household, but that he was one of the

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<sup>911</sup> 396.13 (Tristram), 483.29 (Lameroke), 516.28 (Ban's lineage), 716.24 (Palomides).

<sup>912</sup> 476.19; 526.20; 701.25; 742.14; 801.31.

throng of minor gentry who came and went around the court.”<sup>914</sup> Despite the traditionalist arguments of the established aristocracy, knighthood was sometimes open to commoners, and this seems to have been more true in England than in France,<sup>915</sup> a situation possibly reflected in the passage concerning Helyus and Helake.

It is important to return this episode to its context, where the narrator deplors that Harmaunce should have trusted his serfs, and says: “Gyeff a chorle rule and thereby he woll nat be suffysed” (712.23). Malory distinguishes between the “vylayne” and the “jantylman,” showing that it was perfectly acceptable for members of the gentry to enter knighthood, although this story suggests that even though low-born men may attain a sufficient level of prowess to be knighted, they can never be worshipped as noble knights can, and thus invariably disgrace their knighthood.

## 2. Worship

Prowess leads to worship, as the following passage exemplifies. In it, Palomides laments the fact that he is no longer in the company of Tristram:

now have I loste all the worshyp that ever I wanne, for never shall befall me suche proues as I had in the felyshyp of sir Trystram (770.33).

Being Tristram’s companion enhances Palomides’ prowess, which in turn increases his worship, a concept of particular significance to Malory, and to the fifteenth century, for Knights of the Bath were themselves admonished to seek worship.<sup>916</sup> It actually plays a significant role in the relationship between Tristram and Palomides, for Tristram is often seen to be Palomides’ mentor. He indeed encourages his quasi-disciple to take on tasks which will lead him to honour, as is the case when Palomides obtains Tristram’s permission to go on the Red City quest. He also does this in the

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<sup>913</sup> 388.33; 465.4; 466.27; 472.28; 489.33; 577.7; 577.28; 585.6; 602.33; 611.16; 623.10; 661.24; 685.34; 773.30.

<sup>914</sup> Barber, “Court Culture” 134-35.

<sup>915</sup> See Beverley Kennedy, *Knighthood in the Morte Darthur* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1985) 19.

prose Tristan, but the desire for worship is more strongly emphasised in the English text, for whereas the French Palamede says simply: “puis que vous laissies ceste emprise, et je le prent sour moi se il vous plaist” (MV.83.29), Palomides expressly requires Tristram to allow him to undertake it: “ye shall se me enchyve hit worshypfully, other ellys I shall dye in this quarell” (702.5). Palomides duly achieves the quest, and is congratulated by Tristram on his return: “I am glad ye have well sped, for ye have done worshypfully” (722.9). There is no such remark in the French,<sup>917</sup> nor is there any French equivalent of the further compliments Palomides receives on his worship (728.8). In the original text, Tristan is amused by Palamede’s desire to confront the five knights who desire to see Iseut’s face (MV.155.38), but in the English, it is obviously considered as a point of honour by Tristram: “ye ar nat so fayne to have worship but I wolde as fayne encrease youre worshyp” (728.23). The French emphasis is quite different from that in the “Tristram,” where Tristram’s willingness to see another good knight do well and earn honour overrides any other motivation.

The desire for worship exemplified in the Morte reflects a late medieval current of thought borne out by contemporary treatises on knighthood which make the desire for worship the basis for a successful knightly career. In the early fifteenth century, Christine de Pizan cites the search for honour as one of the six “bonnes condicions” which a knight must fulfil: “il doivent amer et desirer honneur sur toutes choses mondaines.”<sup>918</sup> Professor Du Boulay similarly stresses the practical need for a knight to be worshipful, because in that society class-consciousness needed to be defined against the backdrop of a blurring of class divisions in the late fourteenth and early

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<sup>916</sup> James Gairdner, Three Fifteenth-Century Chronicles with Historical Memoranda by John Stowe, the Antiquary (London: Camden, 1880) 112.

<sup>917</sup> Neither in MV.134 nor in B. N. fr. 99, [fol.] 440 v a.

<sup>918</sup> Christine de Pizan, Le livre du corps de poïcie, ed. Angus J. Kennedy (Paris: Champion, 1998) 62.

fifteenth centuries.<sup>919</sup> In the Morte, it is an inherent part of knighthood to seek honour and reputation, as Percival tells his mother: “hit ys oure kynde to haunte armys and noble dedys” (810.6): knight-errantry is thus the natural obligation of noble birth.

Of equal importance is the concern of these knights that their worshipful deeds be known. Tristram promises Marhalte that he will bear his opponent’s captured shield “in all placis where I ryde on myne adventures, and in the syght of kyng Arthure and all the Rounde Table” (383.9, not in source). Similarly, when Palomides plans to fight with Tristram, he comes with “foure knyghtes . . . of kynge Arthurs courte and three sargeauntes of armys . . . for they sholde beare recorde of the batayle betwyxt sir Trystram and hym” (783.17, not in source). Witnesses to these noble deeds are so necessary that Malory adds other examples of defeated or rescued knights to “beare recorde” to the exploits of the hero of their respective adventures.<sup>920</sup>

Throughout most of the first part of the “Tristram,” the eponymous hero strives to win worship and build up his reputation, in a way which Malory renders more conspicuous. At the beginning of the tale, Tristram decides to take it upon himself to avenge his cousin Andred’s humiliation by Sagramoure and Dodynas. Governayle tries to dissuade him from this risky enterprise, but Tristram retorts: “I woll have ado with them bothe to encrece my worshyp” (398.15).<sup>921</sup> The French Tristan trusts, in the first place, that because these knights are “preudome,” they will not assail him together, and hopes, secondly, that neither “vergoigne ne honte ne m’i avendra” (CI.383.12). The objective is clearly not the same: Tristram positively wants to increase his worship while Tristan simply hopes he can at least avoid total humiliation. It may be two sides of the same coin, but it would not do for the English Tristram

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<sup>919</sup> F. R. H. Du Boulay, An Age of Ambition (London: Nelson, 1970) chapter four.

<sup>920</sup> 104.16; 175.5; 286.25.

<sup>921</sup> Marhalte also agrees to go to Cornwall to fight for Ireland to “encrece my worshyp” (376.26, not in C.I.287).

merely to escape unhumiliated. Similarly, when King Angwysch asks Tristram if he is the one who killed Marhalte, Tristram answers: “I dud the batayle for the love of myne uncle kynge Marke . . . and for to encrece myne honoure” (391.11). Angwysch understands, and agrees: “I may nat sey but ye dud as a knyght sholde . . . and to encrece your worschyp as a knyght sholde . . .” (391.17). In the French, Tristan’s justification is simply that “il covenoit que je le feisse ensinc” (CI.351.20). Whereas in the English the king recognises that Tristram’s duty as a knight is to gain honour, the French Anguin’s reasons for not killing Tristan are a matter of martial courtesy: it would be a crime to destroy such a good knight, and it would be discourteous to kill a knight enjoying one’s hospitality (CI.352.18).

Tristram’s second big victory is over Palomides at the Irish tournament, and by the time he returns to Cornwall, both battles form part of his reputation, as Bleoberys comments:

ye ar he that slewe Marhalte the knyght honde for honde in the ilonde for the trwayge of Cornwayle. Also ye overcom sir Palomydes, the good knyght, at the turnemente in Irelande . . . (401.6).

The French Bliobéris does not list Tristan’s victories in detail, but simply remarks on his prowess (CI.392). Likewise, whereas the French audience are unaware of his identity (CI.418.14), the English audience watching Tristram’s fight on behalf of King Angwysch have “muche speche . . . of hym” because of his famous past victories (408.17). Malory’s minor changes thus point up the importance he places on reputation and the search for worship. So strong is this desire for honour in the Morte that Bleoberys, after having been consulted by the judges in the same judicial battle opposing Tristram to Blamour, reiterates, in a passage original to Malory, that Tristram should “sle” Blamour “oute” rather than allow the latter to be shamed.<sup>922</sup> This attitude

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<sup>922</sup> 410.25. See CI.430.4.



reflects one adopted elsewhere in the Morte, as when in “Arthur and Accolon,” Arthur warns his adversary: “I had levir to dye with honour than to lyve with shame. And if hit were possible for me to dye an hondred tymes, I had levir to dye so oufte than yelde me to the” (144.6).

Later, Brandiles asks Tristram to reveal his identity. The French Brandiles is much honoured to discover whose company he is in, and commends Tristan to God (CIII.816.41). In the “Tristram,” however, Brandiles expresses the desire of seeing Tristram join the Round Table, an injunction to which Tristram modestly answers:

as yet I fele well that I am nat able to be of their felyship, for I was never yet of such dedys of worthynes to be in the companye of such a felyship (489.30).

His desire is finally fulfilled when he is welcomed to the Round Table by Arthur, as we saw (571.27). As in the source, Tristram’s name is written on Marhalte’s seat, but Malory adds a recapitulation of the fight against Marhalte, emphasising that Tristram’s first victory marked his ascent on the scale of worship (572.17). Just as the recognition of Tristram as a Round Table knight is one of the climaxes in the prose Tristan, so too is it in the “Tristram,” but Malory emphasises the “worship” which Tristram has attained, and the fact that Arthur mentions it at the moment of Tristram’s accession to the Round Table, echoing those numerous additions to the source where “worship” stands out as fundamental to the duty of the knight, throws a different light on what honour and reputation represent in the Morte.

### 3. Fellowship

As Mahoney remarks, chivalry in the “Tristram” is not just about “the attainment of knighthood but the pursuit of ‘worship’ gained by fighting, and the bond of fellowship

that develops among those who achieve it.”<sup>923</sup> She sees “felyshyp” as the most evocative word in the Morte, denoting “the compelling attraction between great knights, the centripetal pull which draws the great together and the less toward the great in admiration.”<sup>924</sup> Elizabeth Archibald has also remarked on the extraordinary frequency and consistency with which Malory uses the word “fellowship.”<sup>925</sup> Interestingly, out of the nearly two hundred entries for the word in the whole of the Morte which Kato cites in his Concordance,<sup>926</sup> one finds over seventy entries in the “Tristram” alone. Often the word simply means “casual or temporary companionship,” but as Archibald notes, “in Malory the senses of loyal friendship and of an organized and permanent knightly order become increasingly important. . . .”<sup>927</sup> She convincingly argues that “felyshyp” in its double sense of the bond between members of the Round Table as well as the friendship between individual knights assumes greater importance than the equivalent word “compaignie” in the French source.<sup>928</sup>

In the “Tristram,” Malory emphasises both types of fellowship: the “microcosm of many more or less permanent links between individual knights,” and “the macrocosm of the Round Table.”<sup>929</sup> For instance, when Dynadan first meets Tristram, he expressly asks the latter to give him “leve to go in hys felyshyp” (503.20, not in MII.15). Malory’s treatment of the relationship between Lancelot and Tristram, moreover, is important, because it provides a standard of exemplary knightly fellowship, in a way which is unique to Malory. The prose Tristan had already

<sup>923</sup> Dhira B. Mahoney, “Malory’s Tale of Sir Tristram: Source and Setting Reconsidered,” Medievalia et Humanistica 9 (1979): 224.

<sup>924</sup> Mahoney, “Source” 234.

<sup>925</sup> Elizabeth Archibald, “Malory’s Ideal of Fellowship,” Review of English Studies n. s. 43 (1992): 311-28.

<sup>926</sup> “felauship” (and varying spellings), in Tomomi Kato, A Concordance to the Works of Sir Thomas Malory (Tokyo: Tokyo UP, 1974).

<sup>927</sup> Archibald 312.

<sup>928</sup> Archibald 317.

established numerous comparisons between Tristan and Lancelot, but Malory shows how each of these two knights is drawn to the other by his knighthood. After his battle with Galahalte the Haute Prynce, Tristram, unlike his French counterpart (CII.481), specifically expresses his desire to see Lancelot, “and infelyshyp me with hym, for of all the knyghtes in the worlde I moste desyre his felyshyp” (418.10). This attraction which pulls Tristram and Lancelot toward each other is further underlined when, having heard about Tristram’s marriage, Lancelot speaks of “the love betwene hym and me” (435.17, Malory’s addition). When Tristram hears of Lancelot’s reproaches, he expresses deep regret: “of all knyghtes I loved moste to be in his felyshyp” (435.29). There is no such emphasis on “felyshyp” in the source, where Tristan “est tant durement esbahiz qu’il ne puet veoir ne penser en nule maniere dou monde por quoi Lanceloz li veust si grant mal . . .” (CI.579.1).

The English author also devotes more attention to the ideal of knightly fellowship epitomised by the Round Table. Brandiles invites Tristram to join the fellowship:

we be of a felyship that wolde be ryght glad of youre company, for ye ar the knyght in the worlde that the felyship of the Rounde Table desyryth moste to have the company off (489.25).

Both meanings of the word fellowship are expressed here: the knights not only invite Tristram to ride with the group, as they do in the prose *Tristan*: “nos vos feriens compaignie” (CIII.123.24), but they also ask him to join the fellowship of the Round Table, underlining the corporate aspect of “felyshyp,” of which nothing is said in the source. Tristram’s admission that he is not yet ready to join this select band draws attention to its superiority. The “Tristram” reflects the attitude towards the fellowship

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<sup>929</sup> Archibald 318.

of the Round Table which we find elsewhere in the Morte, as we know from Arthur's frequently quoted speech:

much more I am sorryar for my good knyghtes losse than for the losse of my fayre quene; for quenys I myght have inow, but such a felyship of good knyghtes shall never be togydirs in no company (1184.1, not in source).

He deplores the end of the wholeness of the Round Table, drawing attention to the importance of the concept of fellowship as a fraternity and institution in a more emphatic way than his sources. This ideal of knightly fellowship may incidentally reflect the social reality of the later Middle Ages, when orders of secular knighthood began to appear. The reasons for the rise of the chivalric orders were many, but Grimm suggests that it almost certainly reflects a late-medieval impulse to define and defend the aristocratic world against the increasing social mobility of other groups,<sup>930</sup> which corroborates the views noted above on the place of lineage in the knightly world.

Because the ideals of knightly fellowship and worship receives particular attention in Malory's text, Lameroke's death takes on all the more importance. Ménard's edition does not include this incident, so it is best to refer to MSS. B. N. fr. 99, Chantilly 646 and Pierpont Morgan 41. Malory pays more attention to Lameroke's character, and in the rival tournament organised by Arthur beside Surluse, Lameroke avenges the defeat of Gawain and his brothers for Arthur's sake. The conversation in which Arthur asks Lameroke to join the fellowship and promises to protect him from Gawain and his brethren (663.30) seems to be entirely original,<sup>931</sup> as are Lancelot's reiteration of Arthur's invitation, and Lameroke's second refusal (670.13). Lameroke's position as "the third man" is at its highest here. In the next section of the Tale, the reader is informed of his murder in a conversation:

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<sup>930</sup> Grimm, "Fellowship and Envy" 77.

he myght have lyved tyll he had bene more of ayge, an hardyer man there lyvith nat than he wolde have bene, and his name was sir Lamorak de Galys. . . . And at his departynge there mette hym sir Gawayne and his bretherne, and wyth grete payne they slewe hym felounslly, unto all good knyghtes grete damage! (688.3)

Percival laments his brother's death:

Alas, my good and noble brother, sir Lamorak, now shall we never mete!  
And I trowe in all the wyde worlde may nat a man fynde suche a knyght as  
he was of his ayge (688.15).

A similar allusion to the death of Lameroke occurs in MS. B. N. fr. 103, in a passage which also provides a parallel for the following episode, where Palomides tells

Tristram:<sup>932</sup>

whan he was gyvyn the gre be my lorde kynge Arthure, sir Gawayne and his three bretherne, sir Aggravayne, sir Gaherys and sir Mordred, sette uppon sir Lamorak in a pryvy place, and there they slew his horse. And so they faught with hym on foote more than three owrys bothe byfore hym and behynde hym, and so sir Mordrede gaff hym his dethis wounde behynde hym at his bakke . . . (699.19).

Vinaver notes that no French manuscript mentions a fight lasting three hours, nor Tristram's and Gareth's words: "hit sleyth myne harte to hyre this tale."—"And so hit dothe myne" (699.28). Lameroke's murder is again evoked when Palomides meets Hermynde in the Red City (716.2), and Percival's mother later bemoans the death of her son, which she links to that of King Pellinor, in a passage largely of Malory's invention:

my dere sonnes, thys ys a pyteuous complaynte for me off youre fadyrs dethe, conciderynge also the dethe of sir Lamorak that of knyghthod had but feaw fealowys (810.13).

This accumulation of laments for Lameroke's death, some of which are original to Malory, and the repeated condemnation of treason, reiterate the importance of fellowship and underline the significance of loyalty. This is later highlighted when we read of Lameroke's death coupled with that of Tristram, who were both "with treson

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<sup>931</sup> Vinaver, *Le Roman* 193.

slayne" (1149.33). Even after the deaths of Lameroke and Tristram, old fellowships are still powerful, as when Lancelot calls on his friends when the enmity between him and Arthur is clear:

Than there felle to them, what of Northe Walys and of Cornwayle, for sir Lamorakes sake and for sir Trystrames sake, to the numbir of a foure score knyghtes (1170.26).

The treatment of Lameroke's death is particular to Malory, and highlights the importance of fellowship and loyalty, which in turn makes treason one of the most stigmatised crimes in Malory's chivalric world.

Many of the knightly values in the "Tristram" reflect those upheld in the prose Tristan, like strength, lineage, generosity, and loyalty. The customs such as protecting the weak and upholding justice are also analogous. But Malory's knights have other priorities too, for worship and the concept of fellowship play a more important role in their world.

### III. Fighting

#### A. Judicial combat

Arthur's last charge in his Pentecostal speech is that his knights must never defend a guilty party in trial by battle (120.23). There are eight judicial duels in the "Tristram," and considering there are nine in the whole of Ménard's edition, which is six times the length, this attests to their popularity in the world of the "Tristram." Malory has not only followed his French source in describing trials by battle, possibly reflecting the times he was living in, for judicial duels were not an anachronism in Malory's lifetime, despite a diminution in their number after the Lateran Council prohibition in 1215.

J. G. Bellamy notes a resurgence in popularity in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, and explains that among the gentry and knightly classes in fifteenth-century

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<sup>932</sup> [fol.] 298<sup>r</sup>, col. 2-298<sup>v</sup>, col.1.

England, “there was still considerable adherence to the idea that to settle quarrels by the use of arms was to appeal to the judgement of God.”<sup>933</sup>

Where Malory has suppressed certain duels found in Ménard’s edition,<sup>934</sup> he has retained those which appear in mss. BN. fr. 99, Chantilly 646 and Pierpont Morgan 41, in the “Tournament of Surluse” section. He has consistently shortened every account of the judicial battles which he found, but retains all the important aspects. All the trials by battle in the “Tristram” have identical outcomes, and mostly the same implications, as the original trials, which is why this study will dwell only on those whose emphases differ.

Tristram and Marhalte’s fight is the first duel, and the only notable difference between both accounts is Tristram’s promise to parade Marhalte’s arms in front of King Arthur and the Round Table (383.8, not in source). This underlines the importance of honour, also showing that Tristram is already thinking of his association with the Round Table, betraying his lofty aims. The second duel, as in the source, opposes Tristram, who defends King Angwysch against the accusation of treason, to Blamour, championing the Ban lineage (404.28). The English and the French accounts are similar, except that Bleoberys is so intent on saving the honour of his lineage that he would let his brother die (410.25), as was noted above. Moreover, Tristram is more cautious than his French counterpart, for he wants to make sure that King Angwysch is in the right before he defends him. Indeed, he makes Angwysch “swere” that he was “never consentynge to the knyghtis deth” (407.25). This request being entirely original to Malory, it may suggest that he is applying Arthur’s rule of avoiding the defence of a guilty party in trial by battle.

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<sup>933</sup> J. G. Bellamy, Crime and Public Order in England in the Later Middle Ages (London: Routledge, 1973) 66.

<sup>934</sup> CI.53.5; MVII.73.46; MVII.194.34. The battle between Bohort and Priadan (MVIII.109.1) is to be found in Malory’s “Quest for the Holy Grail” (957-60).

There is an interesting modification in the description of the third duel which opposes King Mark and Amaunte. Not only is Amaunte still able to denounce Mark's felony before he succumbs (592.31), but where the French narrator rationalises this miscarriage of justice by explaining that Marc swore no oath beforehand (MIV.88.37), Malory prefers to leave it unexplained, in the words of the two damsels: "A, swete Jesu that knowyste all hydde thynges! Why sufferyst Thou so false a traytoure to venqueyshe and sle a trewe knyght that faught in a ryghteous quarell!" (593.11) The text may be suggesting that it is the will of God. Lull's treatise asserts that it is the knight's duty to take part in trials by battle to punish traitors and to protect one's lord, and that God will grant him victory if he fights in the right: "the trewe knyght that fyghteth for the ryght may not be surmounted."<sup>935</sup> In 1456, however, Sir Gilbert Hay composed a manuscript for William, Earl of Orkney, in which he maintained that it is presumptuous not only to think that one can win a "ryghtful" quarrel by sheer physical strength, but also to believe that one can win a "wrongefull" dispute by brute force.<sup>936</sup> This may reflect the point of view put forward above, and this more sceptical attitude means that according to Hay, presumption is a sin which God can punish by defeat, even though the presumptuous knight fights for the right.

There is no way of determining which view the "Tristram" upholds; indeed, the readers need to be aware that the Morte provides several views from which to make their choice, the battle between Arthur and Accolon being one of them. This takes place after the Pentecostal Oath. King Arthur is imprisoned by the "traytoure" Damas (138.27), who is keeping land from its rightful owner, his brother Outelake, "a good

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<sup>935</sup> Lull 52. See also 29, 32.

<sup>936</sup> Sir Gilbert Hay, Prose Manuscript (A. D. 1456), ed. J. H. Stevenson, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1901-14) 2: 31. (Volume 2 gives the text of the manuscript's first article, the Buke of the Law of Armys, and volume 3 (The Prose Works of Sir Gilbert Hay, ed. Jonathan A. Glenn (Edinburgh: Scottish Text Society, 1993)) contains an expanded and revised version of Lull's treatise, and The Buke of the Governauce of Princis).



knyght of prouesse" (138.26). Outelake has often offered to fight for his right, "body for body" (138.35). Arthur is told that if he champions his gaoler Damas, "the falsyst knyght that lyvyth, and full of treson, and a very cowarde as ony lyvyth" (138.24), he will deliver himself and twenty other prisoners whom Damas keeps captive. The king concedes that the choice is "harde," but he would rather "fyght with a knyght than to dey in preson" (139.23). This complex situation has important implications: Arthur agrees to undertake what he himself appears to consider "a wrongfull quarell" (120.24), it being on behalf of a traitor, in order that he and twenty other knights be freed from prison. He is therefore prepared to allow Damas to continue depriving Outelake of his due. Once Arthur has won the battle, and is therefore free from prison, he carries out true justice by making Damas hand over Outelake's lands (147.19) and by inviting Outelake to be one of his knights (147.31). One might guess this was his intention, despite the fact that Malory makes no mention of it (139.23), and therefore what appears to be a wrongful quarrel is made a rightful one by Arthur's intention. The interpretative possibilities are increased by Arthur's victory because he has recovered his sword Excalibur (itself marvellous because it preserves its wearer from the loss of blood) through the agency of an enchantress, the Damsel of the Lake (144.24). This may be a supernatural or a preternatural intervention, but there is no way of knowing. Accolon certainly believes God is behind this: "I se well that God is with you" (145.10), and it may even be possible to see God using Arthur as his instrument to carry out justice all round, against Damas, for Outelake, and against Accolon, whose intention is to commit treason against his lord (146.17). There is, however, no way of knowing what the text is really saying here, and this episode, as well as that opposing King Mark and Amaunte, is left open to interpretation.

The peculiarities seen in Malory's additions to, and modifications of, the other judicial duels reflect his methods in describing jousts in general. He likes to anchor his description in a recognisable reality by providing realistic details, like the duration of the battle: the reader knows that the treason duel between Palomides and the two serfs lasts "two owres" and that Tristram grows faint after he has fought "the mowntenaunce of an owre" with Elyas.<sup>937</sup> Similarly, Malory's depiction of Tristram's wound at the end of his battle with Marhalte is typical of the attention he pays to detail: in the Tristan, the Cornish people go to fetch Tristan, "et le troevent si navré et si foible, car tant avoit perdu dou sanc qu'il ne se pooit tenir sur piez s'a paines non" (CI.304.9). He is wounded and weak because he has lost so much blood that he can hardly stand up. Malory breaks down the moment:

sir Trystrames . . . was sore wounded and sore forbledde, that he myght nat within a lytyll whyle stonde. Whan he had takyn colde he coude unnethe styrr hym of hys lymmes, and than he sette hym downe sofftely uppon a lyttil hylle and bledde faste (383.19).

Vinaver remarks that whereas in the Tristan it is owing to the cold and the loss of blood that Tristan is unable to move, Malory shows how, through loss of blood, Tristram cannot stand up, and only then does the cold stiffen his limbs, making him unable to stir (Works 1458).

Trials by battle are an important part of chivalric life in the "Tristram," for they are the most visible method of carrying out justice. They belong to the code of conduct of knights, for they are a way of keeping the peace and defending the weak against the strong, and therefore occupy a similar place in the lives of knights both in the "Tristram" and its source. The study of Malory's particular rendering of these duels shows that they reflect values to be found in the whole of the "Tristram" and indeed in the Morte: the importance of worship, the appreciation of realism, be it in the

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<sup>937</sup> 718.32; 625.12. See also 382.17

attitude of Arthur faced with a difficult decision, or in the precision of certain details, and the honest, even questioning attitude towards the assumptions about divine intervention on which trial by combat was based.

### B. Jousts

Critics' neglect of Malory's "Sir Tristram" indicates, as Lynch remarks, "the disappointment of modern readers' search for a unifying conjointure and explicit sen in the paratactic mass of Tristram episodes."<sup>938</sup> Another interesting point is that unlike Tales III and IV, for instance, which concentrate on the adventures of Lancelot and Gareth respectively and specifically, "Sir Tristram" is about the knightly adventures of many figures apart from Tristram: Palomides, Lancelot, Lameroke, La Cote and Alexander. Thus one finds "not one quest, but a plethora of quests, conversations, casual passes at arms, tournaments and rescues, overlapping and intertwining with each other. . . ."<sup>939</sup> Consequently, the "Tristram" is mainly preoccupied with descriptions of fighting, for in Malory's hands, the original prose Tristan becomes a "catalogue of chivalric exercise,"<sup>940</sup> illustrating fighting of all types, which largely constitute Lynch's "paratactic mass" of episodes. Malory's version may be six times shorter, but it is still full of battles. As Mahoney puts it, "the Tale resounds with the joy of fighting."<sup>941</sup> From judicial duels we now turn to jousts, tournaments, and war.

Malory's descriptions of jousts highlight the differences between the "Tristram" and its source already noted in the examination of the social, physical, and human aspects of the Tale. Malory's jousts are a microcosm of his overall treatment of the prose Tristan. His descriptions of jousts are generally heavily truncated, the inner thoughts of the adversaries and the exchanges of courtesies usually being the first to

<sup>938</sup> Lynch, Book of Arms 79.

<sup>939</sup> Lynch, Book of Arms 81.

<sup>940</sup> Cherewatuk, "Genty!" 215.

disappear. Malory's taste for realism is visible in the way he very often specifies the duration of the joust where the French text does not,<sup>942</sup> or uses comparisons with wild animals and thunder to demonstrate the ferocity of the fight.<sup>943</sup> Moreover, it is through the analysis of jousts and their subtle modification by Malory that the reader gets a better grasp of the values his knights uphold. By following the adventures of the large cast of characters, one's attention is drawn both to an event for its own sake, such as the elements of realism Malory adds to his jousts, and to the definitions of chivalry which emerge from it. The detailed examination of both the French and English versions of the joust opposing Tristram to Lancelot at Merlin's "perowne" represents Malory's method.

Both texts describe the extreme violence of the first encounter between these two knights. However, where the French devotes several long paragraphs to the blows the knights inflict on each other, to the state of their armour and to the colour of their swords, Malory simply states:

they strake togedyrs wyth bryght swerdys as men that were of myght, and aythir woundid othir wondirly sore, that the bloode ran oute uppon the grasse (568.32).

Malory presents a reduced but vivid picture, and in the light of the length of the French joust, Malory's takes on an almost symbolic aspect. The English author also replaces a long description of the adversaries' inner thoughts concerning their opponent (MIII.249.1-30) by a single sentence: "they fought the space of foure owres, that never one wolde speke to other" (568.35). The passage of time in the French text need not be indicated specifically, for the length of the description, which Malory in no way

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<sup>941</sup> Mahoney, "Source" 228.

<sup>942</sup> See 473.10 and CIII.756.11; 482.30 and CIII.784; 829.9 and MVI.78.47 for instance.

<sup>943</sup> thunder: 400.22; 486.22; 531.32; 553.20; bulls: 474.19; wild boars: 486.26; 526.15; 829.6; greyhound among rabbits: 525.30; hungry lion: 760.16.

reproduces, is enough to suggest it.<sup>944</sup> Here again the reader finds that where the French authors merely imply, Malory states clearly, as with the depiction of characters, who are either black or white. Malory also replaces Gouvernal's monologue on his master's prowess by a dialogue between the respective squires of the two heroes, an exchange which actually cleverly resumes what both French knights are said to be thinking, thus increasing the liveliness of the scene.<sup>945</sup> The recognition scenes are substantially the same, but the conversation concerning love at the end of the battle is suppressed (MIII.259.15), reflecting Malory's attitude towards this aspect of chivalric life.<sup>946</sup>

One of Malory's notable additions to a text he generally seeks to reduce concerns the Damsel Maledysaunte's criticism of La Cote during the Castell Orgulus episode. Mordred loses patience with her undignified attitude, and lectures her about the realities of jousting in a passage which has no counterpart in the French text. He didactically explains that young knights such as La Cote are at a disadvantage in mounted combat for they lack "usage and exercise" (466.14). As a young knight, even Lancelot "was oftyn put to the worse on horsebacke" (466.24). On the other hand, he continues, young knights have an advantage on foot, for they have more endurance, hence, "I have seyne the olde preved knyghtes rebuked and slayne by them that were but yonge begynners" (466.29). This explanation rings true both for modern readers inexperienced in jousts and presumably for fifteenth-century readers, giving jousts and indeed the entire text a lifelike touch.

Another battle which is noteworthy because its implications in Malory's hands underline the values upheld in the Tale is that which takes place between Tristram and Lameroke in the Forest Perilous. Malory applies his habitual methods of source

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<sup>944</sup> MIII.250.1-251.28, and MIII.253.1-254.22, which Malory does not translate.

reduction: he replaces an entire description of the blows (CIII.785.1-39) by a single sentence which, as usual, provides the length of the fight where the French text does not specify it: “they fought a longe batayle togydirs, nyghe two owrys” (482.30). He reduces the exchange of courtesies (CIII.786.6), and once the adversaries are aware of each other’s identity, Malory deletes Lameroke’s accusations of disloyalty (CIII.786.37), with the result that Tristram’s character is unblemished by slander. The dialogue between the English knights leads to another sourceless combat, highlighting Tristram’s need to avenge the dishonour occasioned by Lameroke’s sending the magical horn to Mark’s court (483.5). The scene may end with a reconciliation in both versions of the joust, but the implications diverge. The French Tristan tells Lamorat: “je te pris et lo . . . de chevalerie et de cortoisie sor toz les chevaliers dou monde qui joene home soient” (CIII.787.24). In the English Tale, it is prowess as much as “courtoisie” which prompts the reconciliation: “Sir Lamerak,” says Tristram, “as an overcom knyght I yelde me to you as a man of moste noble proues that I ever mette!” (483.28)

The number of jousts in the “Tristram” is large, but the pattern of source reduction which has been exposed above is reproduced in almost every battle in the “Tristram.” By cutting the length of the joust descriptions, Malory makes several changes. His jousts are often rendered livelier by their very succinctness, especially when he replaces the original passages with such details as Tristram and Nabon “trasynge and traversynge, smytynge and foynyng long withoute ony reste.”<sup>947</sup> Moreover, Malory reduces the courtly element of jousts which the French authors are fond of, reducing the fight to its purely martial form. Finally, the inner thoughts of knights concerning their opponents are shortened, thus diminishing the psychological

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<sup>945</sup> MIII.252.8 and 569.3.

aspect of the text, a tendency noted in the previous chapter. Apart from these implications, the reader will notice that the very fact that such an enormous number of these fights is preserved signifies that they are, as Lynch so rightly remarks, “not necessarily for anything, other than the pleasure of witnessing the great deeds themselves.”<sup>948</sup>

### C. Tournaments

The prose Tristan contains references to eight tournaments, that near the “Castel au Gaiant” only being mentioned in passing (MIV.17.16). Although only a sixth of the length of its source, the “Tristram” shows the importance Malory accords to these jousts by reproducing seven of these, including the passing reference to that which is held near the “Castel of Jagent” (580), and three more which feature only in a small family of manuscripts of the prose Tristan, including B. N. fr. 99, Chantilly 646, Pierpont Morgan fr. 41, and Leningrad MS. fr. F. v. XV-2.<sup>949</sup> The four texts are very close to each other; the Leningrad manuscript belongs to the fourteenth century and the other three to the second half of the fifteenth century.

The settings of the tournaments are, just like other physical details in the Morte, and mirroring the French text, sparsely created. The reader is aware of a passing reference to pavilions at the tournament at the Castle of Maidens (524.12), while the French narrator pauses to describe the set-up and to explain that the “loges” are made out of “fust” (MII.119.27). Malory’s description of the setting for Lonzep almost rivals that of the prose Tristan, where there are “.V.C.” of these “tres que paveillons

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<sup>946</sup> See Chapter Ten.

<sup>947</sup> 445.26 and CII.612.1-25. See also 323.12.

<sup>948</sup> Lynch, Book of Arms 29.

<sup>949</sup> See Valerie Anne Wilkinson, “Malory’s ‘Tournament of Surluse,’” Poetica 51 (1999): 33. The tournaments in the “Tristram” are: the tournament for the Lady of the Laundis (385); the Castle of Maidens (515); Harde Roche (557); Castel of Jagent (580); the tournament in which Alexander takes part (639); the tournament at which Tristram is wounded just before the Saxons invade (618); Surluse

que fueillies que loges galesces” (MV.79.5): “than were they ware of foure hondred tentes and pavelouns, and mervaylous grete ordynaunce” (698.4). Of the four French terms used to describe the accommodation, only the “tres” and “paveillons” are not made out of branches,<sup>950</sup> a material which could have been used to accommodate people of the lower estates, whereas in the “Tristram,” the tents and pavilions seem to be made for the wealthier classes, although there is no mention of the material used to build them.

The actual fighting descriptions are shorter than in the source, and the accent is put more on the action than on the thoughts of the adversaries. Malory sometimes removes entire passages, such as a fight between Palamede and Lancelot where the French authors describe the “envie” and the “rancune” which oppose the adversaries (MV.197.5). However, in the same passage, Malory adds a few lines detailing Tristram’s blows:

sir Trystram rode thorow the thycyste prece and smote downe knyghtes on the ryght honde and on the lyffte honde and raced of helmys, and so passed forthe unto his pavelouns and leffte sir Palomydes on foote (737.5).

The picture is vivid, underlines Tristram’s prowess, and is entirely representative of Malory’s portrayal of tournaments, and indeed battles in general.

The spectators’ commentary is, as in the prose *Tristan*, of great importance, although several small differences are to be noted. At the Castle of Maidens, both the English and French versions describe the audience’s reactions to Tristram’s deeds:

Pour ce vont criant li un et li autre par le tournoient, cil ki armes ne portoient, ausi li viel com li jovene: “Li cevaliers a l’escu noir a vaincue ceste assamblee! Tout vaint chil a l’escu noir!” (MII.180.7)

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(653); the tournament organised by Galahalte and Bagdemagus (675); the tournament organised by Arthur near Joyous Garde (681); Lonzep (698).

<sup>950</sup> MV.Glossary defines “tres” and “paveillons” as “tentes,” while “fueillies” are “cabanes, abris de branchage” and “loges galesces” are “cabanes de feuillage, huttes.”



all the felde was in a noyse, that with the wynde hit myght be harde two myle how the lordys and ladyes cryed: "The Knyght with the Blacke Shylde hath won the fylde!" (527.21)

This example shows how Malory transforms his source: he identifies the audience as members of the aristocracy, whereas the French text divides them into young and old. He retains their reaction, but describes how the wind carries the voices of the lords and ladies, adding to the vividness of the picture.

Moreover, as was established in Chapter Eight, Malory has a particular desire to make clear to the reader what may still be mysterious to the characters. Thus during the Lonzep tournament, Tristram, Palomydes, Gareth and Dynadan are all dressed in green, which makes it difficult to distinguish them. Lancelot then decides on who is to attack who, and both the French and the English passages are identical, save for the indications, between parenthesis, which Malory adds concerning the identity of each knight.

je me prent a cel cevalier qui siet sour cel gran. ceval noir. . . . Blyoberys, ki ci est, joustera a l'autre; Hestor mes freres avra le tierc et vous le quart . . . (MV.193.17).

"Sir," seyde sir Launcelot, "I woll counter wyth the grene knyght uppon the blacke horse." (That was sir Trystram). "And my cousyn sir Bleoberys shall macche the grene knyght uppon the whyght horse." (That was sir Palomydes). "And my brother sir Ector shall macche wyth the grene knyght uppon the dunne horse." (That was sir Gareth). "Than muste I," seyde kynge Arthur, "have ado with the grene knyght uppon the gresylde horse," and that was sir Dynadan (735.19).

Malory not only distinguishes the knights by their horses' different coats, but he also clearly identifies each knight.

Malory's tournaments reflect the values and themes upheld throughout the "Tristram," even within the description of the tournaments' settings. For instance, Malory's readers are informed that for the Castle of Maidens tournament, "kynge Arthur . . . was sette on hye uppon a chafflet to discern who was beste worthy of hys

dedis" (518.24), pointing up both the detail of the platform on which Arthur positions himself, and the significance of worship, which is what he is preparing to witness. Similarly, the description of the setting for Lonezep leads, both in the French and the English versions, to a comparison with previous tournaments, but while the French text mentions only the tournament of the "Castel as Puceles" as being "riche" (MV.79.15), the "Tristram" reminds the reader of the "grete . . . ordynaunce as the Castell of Maydyns," and of the "Surluce" tournament "whyche there dured seven dayes" (698.12). The significant detail here is that the characters are interested to learn who won the tournament, Tristram in the first, and Lancelot and Lameroke in the second, underlining once again the value of worship and reputation. Thus although slightly less attention is granted to the physical setting, the reputation of good knights is highlighted.

Similarly, in order to increase Tristram's worship at the Castle of Maidens and to make him even stronger than he is in the prose Tristan, Malory slightly but significantly modifies his source. The French narrator says that when Tristan sees Palamede,

jete il ansdeus les mains et aert Palamidés par les flans, et le tire a soi si fort que, voeille Palamidés u ne voeille, le jete mesure Tristrans hors des arçons et le porte entre ses bras, tout ensi armé com il estoit, plus d'une lance loing du ceval! Et quant il ne le puet plus porter, il le laist caoir a tere entre les piés des cevaux . . .(MII.178.10).

Malory writes:

Trystram avoyded hys speare, and gate hym by the nek with hys bothe hondis, and pulled hym clene oute of hys sadle, and so he bare hym afore hym the lengthe of ten spearys, and than he lete hym falle at hys adventure (531.6).

Not only is Malory's version shorter, but it also lays emphasis on various details: his picture is visually more striking because Tristram lifts his opponent from his horse by the neck, and not by the sides. He also throws Palomides not the length of one lance,

but that of ten spears; and finally, there is no mention of Tristram being unable to carry his adversary any longer (MIL.178.15): he simply lets him fall “at hys adventure.”

Both versions are vivid in their own way, but overall the skill of Tristram’s actions is enhanced.

Quality is not all that counts in tournaments: Malory seems to enjoy chronicling quantity, and the number of deeds performed helps to evaluate a knight’s prowess.

Thus in a passage original to Malory, the knights’ actions at Lonzep are recorded:

whan sir Launcelot was horsed he ded many mervaylouse dedis of armys, and so ded sir Trystram, and sir Palomydes in lyke wyse. Than sir Launcelot smote adowne wyth a speare sir Dynadan, and the kynge off Scotlonde, and the kynge of Northe Walys, and the kynge of Northumbirlonde, and the kynge of Lystenoyse. So than sir Launcelot and his felowys smote downe well-nye a fourty knyghtes (740.20).

Similarly, the fact that Lancelot “pulled downe thirty knyghtes” does not appear in the French text (MV.281), despite the confirmation on Malory’s part that he describes the action “as the booke recordyth” (761.4).

Finally, generosity is greatly valued by all in the “Tristram,” and this is conspicuous in the tournaments of the Castle of Maidens and Lonzep. In the first tournament, it is Tristan, “li cevaliers a l’escu noir” who obtains the prize. The outcome in Malory is the same, but instead of Tristram winning immediately, the English author underlines Lancelot’s generosity by letting him win the honour of the day, and then granting it to Tristram:

“Sir Launcelot hath wonne the filde thys day!” Sir Launcelot made another cry contrary, “Sir Trystram hath won the fylde. . . !” Than all the astatys and degrees, hyghe and lowe, seyde of sir Launcelot grete worship for the honoure that he ded to sir Trystram, and for the honour doynge by sir Launcelot he was at that tyme more praysed and renommed than and he had overthrowyn fyve hondred knyghtes (533.34-534.8).

The audience’s presence is vital here, for they witness Lancelot’s kindness, which increases his worship and renown. He is admired for his “jantilnes” over and above

his prowess, although it is undoubtedly his physical strength which has allowed him to attain a position where he can choose to forego the prize. This addition may be part of Malory's campaign to show Lancelot's superiority, but it also underlines the importance of generosity, fair-mindedness and above all, worship.

The Morte belongs in the context of the renewed interest in tournaments. Barber writes that between 1462 and 1467 tournaments were very much on the court agenda, and were regarded by Edward IV as the ultimate knightly pastime.<sup>951</sup> It is therefore no wonder that Malory writes the detailed accounts of tournaments, because he was doing so for a culture where such events were of immediate importance.

As in the prose Tristan, tournaments may produce casualties, but the distinction between tournaments and war is greater in Malory's text. There are fewer references to the former resembling the latter, references which are fairly frequent in the Tristan, and when there are deaths, they are distinguished from murder because they are occasioned within the context of a tournament. Such is the case when Tristram kills three of Darras' sons and grievously wounds two others. Malory replaces the father's poignant and realistic reaction to his sons' deaths with the information that he was "gretely agrieved" (552.12). Tristram clears himself by saying:

For and they had bene the nexte kyn that I have, I myght have done none othirwyse; and if I had slayne hem by treson other trechory, I had bene worthy to have dyed (552.21).

Tristram makes the point that they were not slain treacherously, but killed in open fight, and that casualties in this type of fighting are sometimes inevitable. Darras finally forgives him:

all that ye ded was by fors of knyghthode, and that was the cause I wolde nat put you to dethe. But sith ye be sir Trystram the good knyght, I pray you hartyly to be my good frynde and my sunnes (552.24).

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<sup>951</sup> Barber, "Court Culture" 143.

Moreover, the old knight releases Tristram because he knows that he acted, in Malory's words, "by fors of knyghthode" (552.25). One surprising point about this event is that earlier on, in the narration of Tristram's prowess, the reader is told only that these sons "com home all fyve well beatyn" (533.18). As Lynch rightly states, "The defeat is important to the score-line, the deaths and cripplings incidental."<sup>952</sup> In Malory's version, death is more seldom associated with tournaments than in the Tristan, and when it is, it is taken to be part of the game.

#### D. War

Death also occurs in wars, all of which Malory retains from his French source. His wars strongly resemble their French counterparts: the narrator focuses on named individual combatants in a way which ignores the impersonal mass description which one would expect. Malory homes in on the series of individual deeds performed by his named heroes,<sup>953</sup> and only sometimes is the reader allowed a more generalised view of the scene, as in the battle against the Saxons:

there was mervaylous brekyng of spearys and smytyng of swerdys, and kyllled downe many good knyghtes. . . . And thus the batayle endured longe with grete mortalyté . . . (620.1).

Death is certainly an important feature of war: "the good prynce Bodwyne with all his felyship set on the myscreantys with showtys and cryes, and slew the numbir of fourty thousand and lefft none on lyve" (633.15). The enormous casualties sustained by the non-believers is almost a detail compared to the fact that it is the "good" prince who inflicted them. It is significant that none of the "Tristram" heroes dies or is disfigured in the wars of the Tale, although this was certainly a feature in reality. Once again, honour is at stake for the knights, just as it is in tournaments. This is obvious in

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<sup>952</sup> Andrew Lynch, "'Thou woll never have done:' Ideology, Context, and Excess in Malory's War," The Social and Literary Contexts of Malory's Morte Darthur (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000) 27.

<sup>953</sup> See for instance Dynas 619.36, 620.3; 622.6, Tristram 622.9, Elyas 622.15.

a notable sentence describing the battle Tristram undertakes against Gripe on Howell's behalf:

sir Trystrames issued oute of the towne wyth suche felyshyp as he myght make, and dede suche dedys that all Bretayne spake of hym. And than at the laste by grete force he slew the erle Grype his owne hondys, and mo than an hondred knyghtes he slew that day (434.11).

This way of underlining an individual's honour reflects the way warfare was recorded in writings of the time. Nobles were certainly eager for the wealth a successful campaign could bring, but in the record of the deeds of heroes written by the herald of Sir John Chandos a century before Malory, we hear little of the plunder actually gained, and more about honour and renown. The reader finds a precise record of each deed, with long lists of participants, in a fashion which foreshadows the way Malory chronicles wars and tournaments.<sup>954</sup>

The presentation of war in the "Tristram" is generally unrealistic, however lively. Stephen Knight points out that Malory's war is:

limited . . . to mounted combat, usually between individuals, a pattern far from the mundane realities of contemporary fighting where the archer, the pikeman, the professional soldier and the tactically trained officer were crucial and where gunpowder was emerging as a force. It was certainly not realistic in the period to think of peace-keeping being conducted by single men on horses. . . .<sup>955</sup>

This, and the lack of bloodshed on the heroes' side, contribute to a fictional presentation of warfare. It is possible that Malory's audience may not have wanted a very realistic description of blood flowing, of arrows piercing armour and castles being destroyed by guns. It was honour that was important, even though it has been suggested that this very concept of honour among the aristocracy contributed to the

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<sup>954</sup> Life of the Black Prince by the Herald of Sir John Chandos, ed. Mildred K. Pope and Eleanor C. Lodge (Oxford: Clarendon, 1910).

<sup>955</sup> Stephen Knight, Arthurian Literature and Society (London: Macmillan, 1983) 126. Mordred's use of siege guns, however, is a reflection of the sieges of the time (1227.25).

violent tone of English political life in the late fifteenth-century.<sup>956</sup> Malory's text may not always be close to the truth, but it is engaging, and its few realistic details mean that the reader is not totally at a loss, and may even find a comment on fifteenth-century life.

This chapter shows how very important is the martial aspect of chivalry in the world of the "Tristram." Martial chivalry takes on even more significance in the light of the following chapter on the places of love and religion in the Tale, which are afforded little space in the lives of the "Tristram" characters. Even more so than the prose Tristan is the "Tristram" a tale of knighthood, where certain values are clearly established, and where they are often borne out by the knightly encounters, be they jousts, tournaments or even wars. It is obviously not a realistic picture of fifteenth-century knightly life, and was presumably not intended as such. Malory gives a picture of a world that in some ways, even if it harbours villainy, is more straightforward, even a model to be followed, despite Malory's use of tenses that present that world as anchored in the past. The essential actor in Malory's work is the knight, whose role is to maintain peace and justice and in the process to increase his honour.

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<sup>956</sup> Mervyn James, English Politics and the Concept of Honour 1485-1642 (Oxford: Past and Present Society, 1978).

## Chapter Ten: Courtly Chivalry, Religious Chivalry and Dissenting Voices in “Sir Tristram”

### I. Courtly chivalry

The “escape from the oppressive atmosphere of courtoisie”<sup>957</sup> which Vinaver finds in the “Tristram” is a trend the prose Tristan had already initiated before Malory. We have seen above how far the the French text distinguished itself from courtly lore. Thirteenth-century French prose romances differed from the writings of the early courtly writers, and may have attracted Malory for that reason. Moreover, if it was ever possible to see the prose Tristan as a manual of courtesy, as Jean Larmat has done,<sup>958</sup> the possibility is even more remote with Malory’s “Tristram.” The courtly skills and refinements which are exemplified by the best knights in the French prose romance are virtually ignored in the “Tristram.” The examination of this aspect of the “Tristram” gives a clearer idea of Malory’s preferences and aversions, especially concerning the place of love in chivalry.

#### A. Courtly behaviour

Courtesy in the martial context is frequently admired in the “Tristram,” as it is in the prose Tristan, so it will not be discussed at length. The reader notices, however, that Malory treats courtesy and good manners within the context of the court differently. The politeness and good education which are admired in the prose Tristan are the prerogative of the upper classes in Malory, and correspond to the “jantyll demeanys,” or gentlemanly behaviour which King Harmaunce, for instance, displayed in his day

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<sup>957</sup> Introduction, Works xxviii.

<sup>958</sup> “le Roman de Tristan en prose me semble . . . une œuvre didactique destinée à proposer aux lecteurs et aux auditeurs un modèle chevaleresque. J’y vois un manuel de courtoisie” (Larmat, “Manuel de courtoisie” 46).



(711.33). This is how Malory translates the epithet “courtois” (MV.108.30) in the corresponding passage. Whereas the French Hebal particularly mourns the “boins cevaliers, . . . sages et hardis durement” (MV.108.30), Malory’s Ebell adds to this eulogy a sentence which does not feature in Ménard’s edition: “bycause of his goodnes and jantyll demeanys we bemoone hym” (711.32). Similarly, when Dynadan returns to Arthur’s court after his dealings with King Mark, the reader is informed that “all the courte was glad of sir Dynadans commynge home, for he was jantyll, wyse, and a good knyght” (605.18). The French text mentions simply that Arthur is particularly pleased to receive him, “car assés avoit veü en lui bonté de cevalerie” (MIV.119.20). The noble birth implied by the adjective “jantyll,” and which Malory’s short additions emphasise, underlines the exclusive character of this knightly caste in the “Tristram.”

Courteous behaviour also involves ladies: Malory indeed adds a reference to polite behaviour in the altercation between King Arthur and Palomides concerning Isolde at the Lonzep tournament. In the source, Tristan is as irritated by Arthur’s curiosity as is Palamede, and orders the latter to unhorse “cel fol cevalier” (MV.227.19). In the English version, Palomides does not wait for Tristram’s permission, but promptly unhorses the king (744.1). Whereas the French Tristan asks only if Palamede has been wounded (MV.229.23), Tristram vehemently reproaches him:

ye ded youreselff grete shame, for the knyghtes came hyddir of there jantylnes to se a fayre lady, and that ys every good knyghtes parte to beholde a fayre lady . . . (745.6).

This reiterates the argument used by Percival to convince King Mark that Tristram is doing nothing wrong in admiring Isolde’s beauty, from a distance (679.24). More importantly, it is a point of knightly honour to allow another knight to fulfil his gentle desires and admire a fair lady. It is very obviously Palomides’ honour which Tristram

has at heart, for not only has he brought shame upon himself, he also failed to act “worshypfully” (745.5), and the accent is once again put on worship, even in the context of refined behaviour. Even Gwenyver sees it as a point of honour that a knight who is “curteyse and kynde and jantil hath favoure in every place” (764.30, not in MV). Good manners are important in the world of the Morte as a condition for knightly worship. The portrayal of courtesy is more about how it reflects on the knight than on the interaction between knights and ladies, whereas courtesy towards women is a component of the courtly world of the prose Tristan. Moreover, the link between courtly behaviour and noble birth is particularly stressed by the epithet “jantil,” which one finds again said of Lancelot by Bors, who reproaches Gwenyver for having banished her lover from court: he speaks of “his noblenes and curtesy, wyth hys beauté and hys jantylnes” (808.11), whereas the French Bohort simply regrets the “plus preudom” in Lancelot (MVI.53.3). In sum, Malory underlines the nobility present in courtly behaviour where the French often does not, although references to courtesy are more frequent in the prose Tristan than they are in “Sir Tristram.”

## B. Courtly skills

### 1. Musical abilities

Tristan’s musical skills are an important feature of his character, as we saw, whereas Malory makes very little of them. In the Morte, Tristram’s aptitude to play the harp and other musical instruments is associated primarily with his legendary role as the founder of the art of ventry, for the two significant passages which comment on his musical talents are to be read in their context, which is the admiration of the narrator and Arthur respectively for Tristram’s hunting skills. Thus the reader is informed that in his youth, he

lernerd to be an harper passyng all other, that there was none suche called in no contrey. And so in harpyng and on instrumentys of musyke in his youthe he applyed hym for to lerne (375.12).

This passage is to a large extent original, as is the speech of welcome uttered by Arthur, who congratulates Tristram, for “of all instirmentes of musyk ye ar the beste” (571.32). The other references to Tristram’s musical skills are English renditions of the French,<sup>959</sup> while most of the evidence concerning Tristram’s harp-playing and singing is simply omitted.<sup>960</sup> Tristram’s reputation as the beacon against which all other musicians are judged is downplayed, and the only addition which Malory appears to have made to Tristram’s relationship with music concerns the budding intimacy between him and Isolde: “Tramtryste lernerd hir to harpe and she began to have a great fantasy unto hym” (385.8). This makes for a particularly congenial image of their relationship beginning and ending in music, for not only is it through harp lessons that Isolde comes to love Tristram, but it is also to the sound of his harp playing that she witnesses his death, as in the French (1149.29). Malory’s invention of Tristram teaching Isolde to play the harp probably belongs to the changes the English author introduced to modify the beginning of the lovers’ relationship. This will be explored in more detail in the section on Malory’s conception of love.

By removing all the lays from his source, Malory has also omitted all description of their singers. Palomides, however, does benefit from some grace, for his song is “mervaylously well seyde” (780.17). Apart from having heavily truncated the whole scene, Malory has also removed an interesting reference which one finds in the corresponding passage, in which the narrator says that the ability to sing well is particularly suited to such a good knight as he.<sup>961</sup> Musical talent is obviously an important aspect of the courtly knight in the French, but Malory’s knight enjoys more

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<sup>959</sup> 384.21 and CI 311.4; 496.3 and CIII.867.6.

obviously manly activities such as hunting and hawking. There is little place for musical accomplishments, whether in private or in public.

## 2. Writing

Malory has little corresponding to the fifteen letters and fourteen songs which feature in the Vienna 2542 manuscript, on which Ménard based his edition. The English author has mercilessly removed not only all the lays, but also the contents of the letters in the direct style. What Malory proposes instead is a summary in the indirect style of the content of these letters and sometimes the lays. Moreover, whereas the French narrator clearly admires the style of these prose and poetry compositions, Malory's enthusiasm for this courtly accomplishment is seldom shown. The word "goodly" is often used to qualify letters,<sup>962</sup> and the reader is exceptionally aware that Tristram's letter to Lancelot relating to his marriage to Isolde of the White Hands is written "passyng curteysly and jantely" (467.31) and that Kayhidius writes "lettirs and baladis of the moste goodlyeste that were used in tho dayes" (493.12). Sadly, unlike the French readers, Malory's readers are never provided with an example of these courtly writings, and while Malory does occasionally mention the quality of the style, it would seem that he takes it for granted that all the important characters in this story can read and write. This almost certainly reflects the real situation, for as V. H. Galbraith notes, from the reign of Edward III onwards (r. 1327-77), "we have in surviving writings or signatures conclusive evidence that our kings were henceforward fully literate."<sup>963</sup> This was presumably also true of high-placed knights, for as McFarlane remarks,

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<sup>960</sup> For exact references see Chapter Four.

<sup>961</sup> Passage quoted in Chapter Four (MVI.23.38).

<sup>962</sup> 615.23; 615.25; 615.28; 627.13.

<sup>963</sup> V. H. Galbraith, "The Literacy of the Medieval English Kings," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 21 (1935): 205.

At least it can hardly be argued that as a class noblemen found anything incompatible in the possession of books as well as armour; both were treasured.<sup>964</sup>

The only important knight who cannot read is Palomides, as in the French text, but there again, while the Tristan narrator explains that despite having learned “letre latines” as a child, he feels unable to read properly (MV.84.4), the English Palomides simply says later that “one of the beste knyghtes of the worlde rad that same lettir to me” (714.9). The French draws attention to Palamede’s education whereas the English remains silent. One cannot say that Malory is oblivious to this courtly area of knightly life, but it certainly receives much less attention than in the prose Tristan.

### C. Love and chivalry

Love is less important in the “Tristram” than in the prose Tristan. The courtly discussions about the power of love, as well as the lays and complaints to “Amours” are virtually all suppressed, and Malory’s interests clearly lie with the martial aspect of chivalry. Love is not altogether absent from his pages, however, but it is presented in a form conspicuously different from that found in the source. It is important to examine, in the first instance, the interaction between love and chivalry, in order to grasp Malory’s conception of love, and to establish how he has expressed it.

#### 1. Interaction between love and chivalry

In an argument with Dynadan, Tristram asserts that “a knyght may never be of proues but yf he be a lovear” (689.5). Later, Isolde questions the same critic of love:

ar ye a knyght and ar no lovear? For sothe, hit is grete shame to you, wherefore ye may nat be called a good knyght by reson but yf ye make a quarell for a lady (693.29).

According to Isolde, love inspires prowess, which in turn motivates love. This is borne out by several original examples in the “Tristram,” where love clearly enhances a

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<sup>964</sup> McFarlane, The Nobility 238.

knight's prowess. In the joust which opposes Tristram to Palomides, after the latter has abducted Isolde, Malory establishes that the knights' battle is motivated by love of Isolde: "there began stronge batayle on bothe partyes, for bothe they fought for the love of one lady" (425.1). Another detail peculiar to Malory's account occurs during Tristram's fight against Elyas, the Saxon leader:

sir Trystram remembird hym of his lady, La Beale Isode, that loked uppon hym, and how he was never lykly to com in hir presence. Than he pulled up his shyld that before hyng full lowe, and than he dressed hym unto sir Elyas and gaff hym many sad strokys . . . (625.27).

Tristram's increased power is attributed to Isolde's presence, whereas in the source, he is spurred on by the idea that he is letting his fellow citizens of Cornouailles down (MIV.238.13). The English author also retains the French references to Isolde's influence on Palomides' chivalric deeds.<sup>965</sup> Malory certainly does not exclude the convention that knights should fight for a lady, nor indeed that love can enhance prowess.

Another example of how love and chivalry cohabit is provided by the marriage of La Cote and the Damsel Maledysaunte, in an episode entirely original to Malory, despite the familiar pattern:

sir Breune le Noyre wedded that damesell Maledysaunte . . . and he preved a passyng noble knyght and a myghty, and many worshipfull dedys he ded aftir in hys lyff (476.14).

His enjoyment of conjugal life in no way prevents him, unlike Alexander, from carrying out his duty and avenging his father's death (476.24).

As a pendant, there are many instances of love undermining prowess. During the Lonzep tournament, love may at first help Palomides, but unrequited love finally proves his undoing. Isolde's presence may goad him to do well, but his desire to please her is so strong that he behaves in the most unknighly way. He cuts off

Lancelot's horse's head, provoking a general outcry (739.10). Then, on the second day, he pretends to be too "wery" (746.27) to fight on Tristram's side so that he might do "mervaylous dedis of armys" on his own (747.7). In the prose *Tristan*, he is genuinely tired (MV.234.17). As in the French text, Palomides later changes armour and attacks Tristram, pretending he does not know him (755.10). The next day, Palomides begins well, but Tristram's prowess is acclaimed by all, so that when the latter proposes they go over and help Arthur's party, Palomides refuses (761.14). Unfortunately for Palomides, Arthur's party triumphs, destroying his chance to gain worship:

"Alas . . . that ever I sholde se this day! For now I have loste all the worshyp that I wan." And than sir Palomydes wente hys way waylynge, and so wythdrewe hym . . . (762.3).

This pathetic picture is further reinforced by his state of health, as he convinces Tristram to delay their duel by two weeks, "for I am megir, and have bene longe syke for the love of La Beall Isode" (782.8). This is not original to Malory, but the very fact that he has retained this reference to the physical effects of unrequited love shows he recognises its power.

Moreover, when Tristram hears about Lancelot's feats of arms while escorting Isolde to Cornwall, he considers Isolde's existence the only obstacle that prevents him from joining Lancelot: "and I had nat this messayge in hande with this fayre lady, truly I wolde never stynte or I had founde sir Launcelot" (419.14; not in source). Isolde thus appears to hinder Tristram's strong desire to join Lancelot's fellowship. In the earlier section of "King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius," love also keeps Tristram at home when he is needed during the Roman War, incurring the wrath of Lancelot: "sir

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<sup>965</sup> 737.31; 770.30; 781.15.

Trystrams at that tyme he left with kynge Marke of Cornuayle for the love of La Beale Isode, wherefore sir Launcelot was passyng wrothe” (195.8).

It is also unclear whether love is being valorised by Alexander’s behaviour, for his passion for Alice sends him into such a trance that Mordred decides to humiliate him, as in the French text:<sup>966</sup>

Alysaundir behylde his lady Alys on horsebak as she stode in hir pavylion, and than was he so enamerad uppon her that he wyst nat whether he were on horsebacke other on foote. Ryght so cam the false knyght sir Mordred and sawe sir Alysaundir was so afonned uppon his lady, and therewithall he toke hys horse by the brydyll and lad hym here and there, and had caste to have lad hym oute of that place to have shamed hym (647.4).

The closure of this episode also suggests a certain incompatibility between love and chivalric honour, for in a comic scene of role reversal, a damsel dressed as a knight comes to Alexander’s rescue by giving him “suche a buffet that hym thought the fyre flowe oute of his yghen” (647.17) to prevent him from being humiliated by Mordred. Alexander keenly feels a sense of shame: “whan sir Alysaundir understod hymselff how the false knyght wolde have shamed hym . . . than was he wroth with hymselff . . .” (647.23). He finally settles down with Alice: “they wente into their contrey of Benoy and lyved there in grete joy” (648.2). Married life deflects Alexander from the pursuit of his father’s murderer, even though he had sworn to his mother that he would avenge his death (637.8), harking back to Lancelot’s well-known words in an earlier section of the Morte:

to be a weddyd man, I thynke hit nat, for than I muste couche with hir and leve armys and turnamentis, batellys and adventures (270.29).

On the other hand, when Isolde advises Tristram to attend the Pentecostal feast, she proves the reality of her love by showing him that she values his worship, thus illustrating that love and chivalry are not always incompatible.



## 2. Malory's depiction of love

The above contradictions regarding the compatibility of love and chivalry corroborate Kim's remark that "the Malorian concept of love is ambiguous, often self-contradictory, and thus notoriously hard to define."<sup>967</sup> This presumably is partly because Malory collated several romances with differing concepts about love, and in part because he was writing not in the thirteenth century, but in the fifteenth century. It may also mean that the reader is not faced with a uniform vision of love, but rather the varying effects it can have on different individuals. Moreover, as will be shown below, it is possible to see a pattern of changes which Malory has followed in his presentation of love which, together with this less uniform vision of love, which is therefore more realistic, forms the outline of a Malorian definition of love within the context of knighthood.

It has been noted that by removing the lays, Malory has also cut out much of the traditional courtly sentiment which existed, already in a somewhat subdued form, in the prose Tristan. Whereas the French Palamede is often found soliloquising about love, trying to find justifications for his hopeless situation,<sup>968</sup> the English Palomides calls himself "but a foole" (592.8). As Vinaver points out, no courtly lover would ever call himself a fool, because even when it is unrequited, love's ennobling effect is never questioned.<sup>969</sup> Similarly, Segwarides offers his friendship to Tristram, who was once his wife's lover and consequently his mortal foe, vowing that "I woll never hate a noble knyght for a lyght lady" (442.7), a remark which, as Vinaver says, "would have made little sense in the context of a courtly romance."<sup>970</sup>

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<sup>966</sup> B. N. fr. 99, [fol.] 383<sup>v</sup>, col. 1.

<sup>967</sup> Kim, The Knight Without the Sword 25.

<sup>968</sup> MIV.81.5-105. Malory condenses this long complaint to a few lines 592.4-14, and as Vinaver points out, the courtly colouring of the corresponding passage in French is irretrievably lost.

<sup>969</sup> Works 1489.

<sup>970</sup> Works 1465.

While Malory has added these anti-courtly remarks, he has also reduced the debate about love. He removes a long discussion on the subject which takes place between Palamede and Dinadan,<sup>971</sup> and omits another long scene in which Dinadan mocks Palamede's love for Iseut.<sup>972</sup> Not only does this fundamentally change Dynadan's characterisation in the English text, as will become apparent, but it also takes the attention off a subject which, in Malory's text, is not a knight's main preoccupation.

As was noted above, the theme of suffering, which is fairly prominent in the prose Tristan through the deaths of Bélise and Kahedin, also belongs to the traditional courtly topos, and is an inheritance from Ovidian culture. This subject receives little attention from Malory, for even though Palomides once admits that he has grown weak for the love for Isolde (782.8), most of the suffering occurs off-stage. In the Tristan, Bélise falls in love with the young Tristan, but her love is unrequited. She sends him her dog and a letter in which she explains she is dying of love for him: "Amis, en joie et en leesce et en tote beneürté puissiez vos bien finer, si que vos ne sachez ja en quel dolor, en quel martire cil muert qui en defaute d'amors fine" (CI.283.29). The corresponding passage in the "Tristram" does little to lend poignancy to this scene, or to express a traditional courtly sentiment: her letters are merely "peteuous" and "whan the kynges doughter undirstoode that Trystrams wolde nat love hir, as the booke seyth, she dyed for sorou" (378.13). More importantly, the case of Kahedin examined above<sup>973</sup> is treated lightly by Malory. The numerous lays he composes in which he describes his feelings and his disillusioned acceptance of death, his slow fading away, and the picture of him dying of love, feature only indirectly in the "Tristram." His death is confirmed by Palomides (781.6), having first been forecast by the narrator: "as

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<sup>971</sup> 595.6 and MIV.82.5-94.

ye shall hyre or the booke be ended, sir Keyhydyus dyed for the love of Isode”

(493.10). Malory does not in fact relate Kayhidius’s death. That may be an accident due to some defect in his source-manuscript, but it could equally well be part of a down-playing of the courtly expression of love in the “Tristram” which is revealed by the other changes I have mentioned.

Despite the fact that the debate about love receives less attention in the “Tristram,” love itself still holds a place in the lives of the characters. Malory changes the depiction of the love between Tristram and Isolde by portraying it as the outcome of a more natural affection. He appears to have reduced the power of the love potion even further than his French counterpart, which is in keeping with his treatment of the marvellous, as will become apparent in the next section. Tristram and Isolde fall in love with each other even before they drink the potion, in a passage which is at variance with the French account, where it is through Tristan’s desire to supersede Palamede that he becomes infatuated with Iseut (CI.329.10), while the latter is said to be too young to understand love (CI.347.5):

sir Tramtryste kyste grete love to La Beale Isode, for she was at that tyme the fayrest lady and maydyn of the worlde. And there Tramtryste lerned hir to harpe, and she began to have a grete fantasy unto hym (385.6).

As is often the case in the French text, beauty motivates love. Isolde’s healing of Tristram’s wounds and Tristram’s harp lessons to Isolde “provide a nurturing atmosphere for their growing affections.”<sup>974</sup> In addition to establishing love before the potion, Malory has the lovers exchange rings in a passage unparalleled in the Tristan: “sir Trystrames gaff hir a rynge and she gaff hym another . . .” (392.17). This

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<sup>972</sup> 666.32 and Works 1507, n. 666.32.

<sup>973</sup> See Chapter Four.

<sup>974</sup> Paul Rovang, “Malory’s Treatment of the Marvelous: A Comparison with his Sources,” Fifteenth-Century Studies 21 (1994): 288.

is clearly the beginning of an important and lasting commitment.<sup>975</sup> The episode with Segwarides' wife, as in the prose Tristan, further diminishes the power of the potion.

The description of Isolde and Mark's marriage is another indication of Malory's peculiar conception of the love between Tristram and Isolde:

syr Trystrames and La Beale Isode yeode to the see and cam into  
Cornwayle. . . . And anone they were rychely wedded wyth grete nobley.  
But evir, as the Frenshe booke seyth, sir Trystrames and La Beale Isode  
loved ever togedyrs (419.17).

The unfortunate confusion on the pronoun "they," which refers to Isolde and Mark rather than Isolde and Tristram, actually acquires an impersonal character. The accent is put on the official side of the ceremony ("rychely," "wyth grete nobley"), which stands in stark contrast to the deep love which exists between Tristram and Isolde. Thus without even mentioning Mark's name, the English narrator evokes in one paragraph both Isolde's wedding and her everlasting love for Tristram. The powerful natural love Malory portrays is very different from courtly love, even in the attenuated form shown in the prose Tristan.

Malory greatly reduces the overt sexual element of the prose Tristan, as he also does elsewhere in the Morte in his account of Lancelot and Gwenyver's relationship. He also removes almost all of the stratagems which the French lovers employ to meet or escape discovery. Before the wedding, Malory suppresses the prophetic dream in which Anguin has a vision of his daughter being undressed "dusqu'a la chemise" by a treacherous Tristan (CI.441.11). The consummation on board the boat after the lovers have drunk the love potion, where Tristan "li tost le non de pucele," is no longer explicit (CII.448.13). Malory does not retain the three months which Tristan and Isolde spend in conjugal bliss, imprisoned in Brunor's castle: "Tant lor plest ceste

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<sup>975</sup> Maureen Fries claims that this detail of their plighting their troth was as valid as marriage in medieval times in "The Impotent Potion: On the Minimalization of the Love Theme in the Tristan en prose and Malory's Morte Darthur," Quondam et Futurus 1.3 (1991): 76.

prison et atalante qu'il n'en vodroient jamés issir, car puis qu'il sont ensemble, la bone vie qu'il moient nuit et jor lor fait tot le monde oblier" (CII.474.15). Marc's lecherous attitude is suppressed (CII.484.2), as are the entire substitution plot, Isolde's part in Brangain's attempted murder, and the lovers' sojourn in a knight's castle in which Tristan "se deduist avec la roïne tant come il plest."<sup>976</sup>

Malory omits all references to sexual relations until after Mark has revealed his treachery. Having been told that Tristram is speaking to Isolde at a window, the enraged king accuses his nephew of being a "false traytowre" and tries to kill him (426.12). Mark later commits treason against his wife by condemning her and ninety-five other ladies to be burned at the stake for having failed the chastity test, until Mark's barons finally force him to abandon his plans (430.18). Immediately after this episode, the reader is informed that "sir Trystrames used dayly and nyghtly to go to quene Isode evir whan he myght" (430.30). As Beverly Kennedy remarks, "the implication is clear that as a consequence of this second act of treason, neither Isolde nor Tristram any longer feels bound to be loyal to King Mark."<sup>977</sup> Malory's transformation of this depiction of love shows restraint on the part of the lovers until they no longer owe anything to Mark. This underlines once again the importance of the concept of loyalty in Malory's text.<sup>978</sup>

Moreover, Malory attempts to remove all notion of pleasure-taking between lovers when he describes how Lancelot and Elaine conceive Galahad. He emphasises the fact that their union and the birth of Galahad is something which has long since been prophesied: "the kynge knew well that sir Launcelot shulde gete a pusyll uppon his doughtir, whyche shulde be called sir Galahad" (794.4; not in source). He draws particular attention to the enchantment of which Lancelot is victim by stressing the fact

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<sup>976</sup> CII.485.34; CII.487.16; CII.512.25.

that “Brusen was one of the grettyst enchauntes that was that tyme in the worlde” (794.19; not in source).<sup>979</sup> In addition, Malory only implies the sexual act (“they lay togydir untyll underne of the morne” 795.17) where the French is explicit about it: “Et par ce en fu il si escaufés qu’il le connut ensi com Adans fist sa dame de feme” (MVI.35.13). Malory’s refusal to portray Lancelot as wanton is also visible in the way he is led by Brusen to Elaine’s bed at the beginning of the Pentecost celebrations: in the French text, he “saut sus em braies et en cemise” (MVI.50.17) while his English counterpart wears a more modest “longe gowne” (804.29). When he jumps out of bed, having realised he is not lying by the right woman, the French Lancelot has to put his shirt on (MVI.51.18) while the English Lancelot leaps out of bed “in hys shurte” (805.24). These minor details demonstrate a desire to reduce the sexual content of these scenes.

Although Malory’s presentation of love may seem contradictory, the reader need not be confused by it. His additions and what he retained of his source show varying examples of how love can affect knights, which in its way resembles reality all the more because it is not uniform. Love can inspire great feats of chivalry, but it can also destroy virtue and sanity. The picture is of a natural love, unsophisticated because not traditionally courtly in its expression, and with no hint of the tabloid-like voyeurism which Malory may have felt was present in the prose *Tristan*. Although Malory gives this area of knightly life a good deal of attention, he never suggests that it is essential for a knight to be in love. Although some of Malory’s characters may say that it is a necessity, the English author describes several good knights who are never said to be in love. Malory’s knights’ main preoccupation is with the pursuit of worship, whether they do so for a lady’s sake or not.

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<sup>977</sup> Beverly Kennedy, “Adultery in Malory’s *Morte Darthur*,” *Arthuriana* 7.4 (1997): 69.

## II. The Place of Religion in “Sir Tristram”

The treatment of Christianity in “Sir Tristram” is less contradictory than it is in the prose Tristan, because of one of the most important modifications Malory has made to his source: Tristram, the upholder of heroic virtues, does not participate in the Holy Quest. The English author returned to the Vulgate version of his source, La Queste del Saint Graal, rather than work directly from the prose Tristan version of the Quest. Tristram is thus associated with the chivalric world rather than with the religious world where in the French at least, the purely heroic values are disturbed. For Malory, therefore, there is a definite scission between chivalry with a religious background, represented by “Sir Tristram” and religious chivalry, explored to some extent in the last two sections of the “Tristram:” “Lancelot and Elaine” and the “Conclusion,” and further examined in the “Tale of the Sankgreal.” The purpose of this section is to establish the place Malory allows religion in the “Tristram” by examining its importance in the lives of the “Tristram” characters, and by studying the implications of the Grail story in the last two sections of the “Tristram.” The story of Palomides the Saracen, whose relationship with Christianity undergoes several important changes at the hands of the English author, also deserves the reader’s attention. Finally, as we will see, the study of Christianity demands an examination of the place of the “Tristram” in the larger context of the Morte itself.

### A. The religious background of Malory’s world

Malory has suppressed the introduction and the conclusion which he presumably found in his source, both of which have important religious implications. As was established above, the French narrator states in the Prologue that he plans to tell the story of

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<sup>978</sup> For the parallel treatment of Lancelot and Gwenyver’s relationship, see Kennedy, “Adultery.”

<sup>979</sup> See also 795.21 where the “enchauntemente” is only a “poisons” in French (MVI.36.7).

Tristan within the context of the Grail story, thus anchoring the heroic story of Tristan in the religious tale of the Grail. The Prologue is also the occasion for the narrator to recount the story of the conversion of Great Britain, and to provide prophecies of a religious character. By omitting this section of the prose Tristan, Malory also removes an introduction filled with Christian references, which sets the tone for the rest of the text. Similarly the omission of the Holy Quest, and especially the removal of Tristram as one of the questers, also appears to modify the religious slant of the text.

Despite these changes, Malory's characters are, like those of the prose Tristan, anchored in a Christian world. Their manner of speech and their customs demonstrate this amply, mirroring the Tristan characters, so this matter need not be dwelt upon.<sup>980</sup> Religious institutions are also represented in the Tale, as it includes references to bishops, the Pope and the liturgical cycle, and hermits also have their part to play,<sup>981</sup> as in the prose Tristan. At one point, there is even a reference to a crusade, for Mark has counterfeit letters made from the Pope,

the whyche lettyrs specyfyed that kynge Marke sholde make hym redy,  
 uppon payne of cursynge, wyth his oste to com to the Pope to helpe hym to  
 go to Jerusalem for to make warre uppon the Saresyns (677.30).

This reference also exists in the French text, although this first letter from the Pope is authentic.<sup>982</sup> It nevertheless reflects a situation in fifteenth-century England, for the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453 sent shock waves through Christendom, urging popes to incite the kings of Europe to join in new crusades. Pius II, for instance, encouraged Edward IV to join the Venetians in their war with the Turks, and although the king pleaded the war with Scotland as an excuse, he still specified in the

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<sup>980</sup> The characters use expressions such as "Oure Lady of Hevyn" (372.5); "for Goddis love" (374.29); "So God me helpe" (407.29); "Sweyte Lorde Jesu" (499.17); "by Seynte Crosse" (560.18), etc. They also go to Mass and receive Christian burial (380.34; 617.3; 634.13; 667.1; 668.28; 677.21; 774.11; 811.7; 814.12) and some even go on pilgrimages (644.26).

<sup>981</sup> 802.2 (bishop); 677.30 (Pope); 476.9; 636.9; 791.7; 832.8 (liturgical cycle); 447.3; 499.27; 771.25, etc. (hermits).



proclamation for one of his tournaments that military exercises of this sort were necessary both for the defence of the nation and to prepare for fights against the infidels.<sup>983</sup> For all the religious surroundings of the “Tristram” characters, however, Christianity is not their main preoccupation. It is simply one part of the world they inhabit. As Kim remarks, “piety is a valuable but negotiable virtue subordinate to the all-important quality of chivalry.”<sup>984</sup>

The preternatural and supernatural also appear in the world of the “Tristram,” but are significantly played down. Vinaver remarks in an essay responding to C. S. Lewis,

Malory the man was certainly not a believer in the supernatural: the simple method of collation shows how consistently he cut it down in adapting his French books.<sup>985</sup>

This is true for many events involving the preternatural, but supernatural occurrences, especially those connected with the Grail in “Lancelot and Elaine,” are significantly retained, as will become apparent.

As Rovaug notes, “in adapting the stories of Arthur into English prose, Sir Thomas Malory is generally agreed to have applied the knife most freely to the marvelous elements in his sources.”<sup>986</sup> As was mentioned above, the importance of the love potion is reduced. Malory follows the French text in that where earlier authors had used the irresistible effects of the potion to exonerate the lovers’ adultery, Malory emphasises, even more than the prose *Tristan*, the despicable nature of Mark’s character. In the episode of the Castle Plewre, Malory not only omits the fact that Brunor’s wife is a “jaiante” (CII.457.11), but also the entire story of how the giant Dialetes founded a custom to punish Christians who arrived in his island (CII.455.25),

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<sup>982</sup> B. N. fr. 99, [fol.] 398<sup>r</sup>, col. 2.

<sup>983</sup> Larry Benson, *Malory’s Morte Darthur* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1976) 193.

<sup>984</sup> Kim 19, n. 2.

<sup>985</sup> “On Art and Nature: A Letter to C. S. Lewis,” *On Art and Nature and Other Essays* (Whitstable, privately, 2000). I am extremely grateful to Mrs Elizabeth Vinaver for providing me with this collection of essays printed in honour of the hundredth anniversary of her husband’s birth (1899-1999).

thus removing the confrontation between Tristram and an alien culture of giants. Similarly, the “fayre maner” to which Tristram leads Isolde after he has delivered her from the leper-colony (432.24) was originally near the “Roche a la Saige Demoisele” (CII.550.21). The French reader is informed that the damsel had been thus named “por ce qu’ele savoit a merveilles d’enchantementz” (CII.552.7). By pruning such details as the manor’s association with an enchantress, Malory divests the scene of some of its otherworldly qualities. Finally, following in the footsteps of the French authors, Morgan le Fay is presented not as being descended from a Celtic goddess, but as an ordinary mortal who has to learn magic as an art: “Morgan le Fey . . . was put to scole in a nonnery, and ther she lerned so moche that she was a grete clerke of nygromancye” (10.9). In this case, Malory does not entirely remove the notion of magic, but he rationalises it.

Paradoxically, Malory adds the description of Brusen as a great enchantress (794.19). When Lancelot wakes up on the morning after Galahad’s conception, “anone as he had unshutte the wyndow the enchauntemente was paste” (795.21). The magic is later emphasised by Lancelot’s swearing to have “her that made thys enchauntemente uppon me” decapitated (796.13), and again when Brusen reassures Elaine by confirming that she will “throw an inchauntemente uppon hym, that he shall nat awake of an owre” so that he can be taken by force by Pelles’ men and healed (824.16). All these references stressing the intervention of a character with preternatural powers are original to Malory: in the prose *Tristan*, Brisanne, who is merely Helaynne’s governess, does no more than provide the magic drink which causes Lancelot to mistake Helaynne for Guenièvre (MVI.34.5).<sup>987</sup> Contrary to his usual method, then, Malory adds to the preternatural agency in Galahad’s procreation,

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<sup>986</sup> Rovang 279.

while the French text comments didactically on the significance of Galaad's conception as a means of grace (MVI.35.1). Thus Malory does not systematically suppress the marvellous. He is capable of heightening it when it suits his own purpose, as in this case, for Lancelot, the best knight in the world, cannot knowingly betray his beloved Gwenyver.

#### B. Religious chivalry: the implications of "Lancelot and Elaine" and the "Conclusion"

With the "Lancelot and Elaine" section, Malory introduces the religious point of view into the "Tristram," which has, up until now, proved relatively secular.<sup>988</sup> Apart from the characterisation of Brusen as an enchantress, Malory has remained faithful to the French text, his "Lancelot and Elaine" corresponding almost exactly to MVI.29 through to MVI.86. He has slightly reduced the length of his original, but his rendition is actually very close to his source.

In this section, Malory distinguishes between chivalry with a religious background, and religious chivalry. He introduces a different ethic, which is used to judge those who wish to measure up to it, and in this he was probably influenced, as Beverly Kennedy argues, by the contemporary desire of devout lay people to reconcile their religion with the world and by late medieval popular mysticism.<sup>989</sup> As in the prose *Tristan*, Lancelot is sufficiently virtuous to save the lady who suffers in boiling water as a result of Morgan's enchantment, an original addition of Malory's (792.15). He also slays the "dragon" in a nearby tomb (793.11). After Lancelot's begetting of Galahad, and especially in view of his eagerness to reach Gwenyver who is in a castle

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<sup>987</sup> See also 804.15 for Malory's addition of Brusen's use of her "crauftes."

<sup>988</sup> This episode corresponds to a section which the prose *Tristan* authors borrowed from the prose *Lancelot*. It survives in several *Tristan* manuscripts, including Vienna 2542.

<sup>989</sup> B. Kennedy, *Knighthood* 214.

five miles away (794.28), the word worship in the mouth of King Pelles takes on a thoroughly different meaning:

there com but feaw knyghtes here that goth away wyth ony worshyppe; be he never so stronge, here he may be preved. And but late ago sir Gawayne, the good knyght, gate lytyll worshyp here. For . . . here shall no knyght wyne worshyp but yf he be of worshyp hymselff and of good lyvyng, and that lovyth God and dredyth God (799.2).

The readers are introduced to another scale of values, where worship, which until now has existed in the context of worldly matters, now takes on a more spiritual meaning, for it encompasses the love and fear of God.

Malory retains Bors' mystical adventures, but modifies the emphasis of the old man's words to him by demonstrating Lancelot's inadequacy for celestial chivalry. In the prose Tristan, Lancelot is lost to the world of chivalry: "toutes les boines vertus qui estoient en lui sont mortes et deceües par flebece de rains" (MVI.46.34). Malory's Lancelot, despite failing the test of religious chivalry, is still virtuous enough for earthly chivalry:

of all worldly adventures he passyth in manhode and proues all othir, but in this spyrytuall maters he shall have many hys bettyrs (801.31).

Whereas the French Lancelot is judged solely according to the standards of spiritual chivalry, Malory's Lancelot is allowed supremacy in worldly chivalry, although he has failed to achieve holy deeds because of his "synne" (801.28). In the "Tristram" at least, Lancelot re-enters earthly chivalry, that is Arthur's court, unscathed by his spiritual failure, beckoned by Hector's words, in a passage which is not in his source:

ye muste remembir the grete worshyp and renowne that ye be off, how that ye have bene more spokyn of than any othir knyght that ys now lyvyng; for there ys none that beryth the name now but ye and sir Trystram (831.26).

The worship of which Hector speaks here is not that which the old man evokes when admonishing Bors. The difference between the two worlds is more marked in "Sir

Tristram,” which means that the knights who are worthy of earthly chivalry are not altogether discredited. This is also the case for Tristram, who does not even attempt to enter on the quest, but still remains, in the eyes of the reader, one of the best knights in the world. In the prose Tristan, the reader’s vision of Tristan is somewhat marred by the fact that the two worlds are less distinct, and because Tristan attempts and fails the spiritual adventure. This is reinforced by Malory’s omission of a passage concerning Perceval, in which the French narrator establishes a direct link between this knight’s religious virtues and his deeds of valour:

Si estoit mout acoustumés d’oïr messe et matines tous les jours et se tenoit castement et se fesoit confés cascune semaine. . . . Et en cel contemple ot fait dé plus beles cevaleries du monde, et fu de lui mout grant renomnee . . . (MVI.63.4).

Percival’s piety is evoked in the Morte, but it is not said to influence the quality of his chivalry: his prayers and his “verrey fayth,” which do not feature in Ménard’s edition (MVI.64), are rewarded by the apparition of the Holy Vessel and the healing of the two wounded knights, Percival and Hector. Whereas the French Grail arrives unasked, as it were, in the English it comes as if beckoned by Percival’s prayers:

he kneled downe and made hys prayer devoutely unto Allmyghty Jesu, for he was one of the beste knyghtes of the worlde at that tyme, in whom the verrey fayth stode moste in. Ryght so there cam by the holy vessell . . . (816.27).

It is because he is one of the best knights in the world that his religious devotion can be put to the service of a loftier ideal, not the contrary. This is further borne out by Palomides’ relationship with Christianity.

### C. The case of Palomides

The prose Tristan’s treatment of Palamede sowed the seeds for the transformation which Malory carries out on this character. Palamede’s last words show he has fully understood the new direction in which chivalry should go (MIX.132.59), and that he

has genuinely made the journey from secular to religious chivalry. He ends up embodying the good knight who loves and fears God, unlike other heroes such as Tristan or even Lancelot. Similarly, the English Palomides provides an answer, although possibly not the only answer, to the reconciliation between chivalric and religious values.

Throughout the text, as in the prose Tristan, one finds several references to the fact that Palomides is but a Saracen.<sup>990</sup> Malory is careful, however, to show that this state of affairs is temporary. Palomides is already enthused with Christian faith:

though he were nat crystynde, yet he belyved in the beste maner and was full faythefull and trew of his promyse, and well-condyssynde . . . (717.11, not in source).

He also plans, unlike his French counterpart, to embrace Christianity once his valour qualifies him:

into this londe I cam to be crystyned, and in my harte I am crystynde, and crystynde I woll be. But I have made suche a vowe that I may nat be crystynde tyll I have done seven trewe bataylis for Jesus sake, and than woll I be crystynde. And I truste that God woll take myne entente, for I meane truly.<sup>991</sup>

This is in answer to Galahalte the Haute Prynce, who is so impressed by Palomides' prowess that he urges him to be baptised. Palomides is not the only Saracen who feels he has to earn baptism through valour. It is generally agreed by Malory's characters that Priamus, in "Arthur and Lucius," also needs to be worthy of baptism through great deeds. Thus Gawain says of Priamus:

this is a good man of armys: he macched me sore this day in the mournyng, and had nat his helpe bene dethe had I founden. And now is he yolden unto God and to me, sir kyng, for to becom Crysten and on good beleve. And whan he is crystynde and in the fayth belevys, there lyvyth nat a bettir knyght nor a noblere of his hondis (241.1).

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<sup>990</sup> 425.9; 514.32; 545.18; 596.32; 717.1; 738.22; 843.1.

<sup>991</sup> 666.26. See also 717.11; 842.3.

It therefore comes as no surprise to the “Tristram” characters that Palomides should desire to earn entry into Christianity.

The episode of the last fight between Tristram and Palomides, concluding in the latter’s christening, needs to be studied in detail for it is entirely original to Malory, save for the opening single combat.<sup>992</sup> As Lynch puts it, “the sheer length of the enriched incident, stretching over six sides of the Winchester manuscript, with its preamble and long aftermath, indicates its honorific power.”<sup>993</sup> Both Palomides and Tristram speak as though the former is a lesser knight because he is not yet baptised: “there was never yet no Crystyn man that ever myght make hys boste that ever I fledde from hym” (840.24), reiterating Galahalte’s attempt to persuade him to be baptised: “and than all knyghtes woll sette the more be you” (666.23). This certainly reflects the view expounded by Sir Gilbert Hay in his rendering of Lull’s work:

And first and formast a knyght bot he be of gude faith all is for nocht yat he dois / ffor he may neuer haue othir vertewe na gude custumes / ffor but faith all is bot syn yat euer’ man dois. . . .<sup>994</sup>

Thus it is not sufficient for this Pagan knight to have had “in my harte and in my soule . . . many a day a good beleve in Jesu Cryste and hys mylde modir Mary” (842.5). To earn the honour of full status in Christian society, he has made a vow to accomplish seven battles, and Tristram is glad to provide the last one (842.9). The fight, which lasts “more than two owrys” (843.31), marks a movement from mutual anger<sup>995</sup> to trust, when Palomides finally ends the battle by begging both forgiveness and christening from Tristram, who answers courteously: “and as ye sey, so shall hyt be; and all my evyll wyll God forgyff hyt you, and I do” (845.5). Galleron and Tristram then stand as godfathers to Palomides while the latter is received into the

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<sup>992</sup> *Works* 1532.

<sup>993</sup> Lynch, *Books of Arms* 130.

<sup>994</sup> Hay, *The Buke of the Ordre of Knychthede* 39-40.

<sup>995</sup> 840.22; 844.1.

Christian faith. By this, he rejoins Tristram's fellowship and enters the Church, and both knights make their way to Camelot to join the Round Table, just in time for its completion by Galahad:

in cam sir Galahad that was son unto sir Launcelot du Lake, and sate in the Syge Perelous. And so therewythall they departed and dysceyvirde, all the knyghtys of the Rounde Table.

And than sir Trystram returned unto Joyus Garde, and sir Palomydes folowed aftir the questynge beste (845.21).

In the prose Tristan, Palamede does not receive baptism before the Pentecost celebrations, but much later on, once the Quest has already begun (MIX.118.4). He seeks the Holy Grail, but arrives too late in Corbenic (MIX.119-26). Malory's Palomides does not even attempt the Quest, and he and his godfather Tristram return to their worldly occupations, Tristram to Isolde, and Palomides to his beast. Malory marks a clear distinction between the basically secular world of the knight with Christian beliefs to which Palomides belongs, and the religious world, represented by Galahad, a territory which neither Tristram, nor even the most religious of earthly knights, Palomides, wishes to penetrate.

#### D. A note on the unity of the Morte Darthur

One element becomes clear when examining the place of religion in the "Tristram." This tale is open-ended, as suggested by the reference to the downfall of the Round Table through the Holy Grail: "whan this thyng gothe abrode the Rounde Table shall be brokyn for a season" (793.33). The narrator predicts that through the agency of the fundamentally good (the Grail), the institution of the Round Table, which until now has been upheld as invincible, will fall. It is difficult to conceive of the "Tristram" standing alone, when it contains so many references to the future. As Benson comments, "though it has been thought that the very existence of Sir Tristram



disproves the idea that Malory intended his tales to form a coherent ‘hoole book of kyng Arthur,’ the presence of the Lancelot-Elaine story shows that Sir Tristram would be incomplete without the Sancgreal and the Sancgreal would lack a beginning without Sir Tristram.<sup>996</sup>

The unity of the Morte has proved a most controversial point ever since modern Malorian studies began. Today a consensus has been reached whereby, notwithstanding Vinaver’s opinion that the eight major divisions in the Morte each correspond to a separate romance,<sup>997</sup> “Le Morte Darthur is indeed an integrated narrative in which all the parts contribute to one continuing theme, namely, the rise and fall of the Arthurian fellowship.”<sup>998</sup> My purpose here is simply to comment briefly on the place “Sir Tristram” holds within the greater work, for this is the most important single difference between the English and the French. The prose Tristan stands on its own while the “Tristram” comes after “The Tale of Sir Gareth” and before the “Sankgreal.” Critics have been concerned with the destructive effect of the Tristram material upon the structure and design of the Morte as a whole. Vinaver especially has written that “the whole of the middle portion . . . [“Sir Gareth” and “Sir Tristram”] is unrelated to any of the themes which occur before or after,”<sup>999</sup> and with good reason: the section revolves around Tristram’s adventures, and to the casual reader, as Schueler states, “this entire section must appear to be an endless digression from the main theme of the Round Table.”<sup>1000</sup>

Regarding the lack of chronological order which critics have mentioned, Field convincingly argues that the beginning of the “Tristram” is to be considered as a flashback, by the very virtue of what some may see as inconsistencies: that the first

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<sup>996</sup> Benson 129.

<sup>997</sup> Works, Introduction and Conclusion.

<sup>998</sup> Schueler, “The Tristram Section” 51.

<sup>999</sup> Vinaver, “Sir Thomas Malory,” Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages 544.

Tale tells of Tristram's arrival at Arthur's court, the second implies he is Isolde's paramour, and he competes in a tournament in the fourth.<sup>1001</sup> The beginning of the "Tristram" implies that Tristram's early adventures were concurrent with the remainder of the early tales.

The "Tristram" is also thematically linked with the rest of the Morte.<sup>1002</sup> Rumble and Schueler have underlined Malory's insistence on drawing connections between Tristram and Lancelot, and their respective situations. He repeatedly uses either knight as the chief standard of comparison for the other, as was established in Chapter Eight. Moreover, as Chapter Nine showed, the values set out in the Pentecostal oath (uttered in the first Tale), are repeatedly demonstrated within and without the "Tristram" section by Malory's knights.

Although, as Cooper notes, most of the events of the Tristram's Tale "can seem rather free-floating within the larger story of Arthur,"<sup>1003</sup> Malory has gone to some lengths to integrate references to the story of Tristram into the earlier books of the Morte, and to the following tales within the "Tristram." These narrative links are numerous, and Malory has been generous in supplying cross-references to the "Tristram" in particular. Murray Evans found a total of twenty-three narrative links binding the "Tristram" to the other tales of the Morte, most of these being significantly original to Malory.<sup>1004</sup> For instance, Malory mentions in "The Tale of King Arthur" that Taulas is the giant that "sir Trystram slewe whan he was oute of his mynde" (175.22), and in the same Tale, he predicts the death of Marhalte at the hands of

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<sup>1000</sup> Schueler 52.

<sup>1001</sup> Field, "Sir Thomas Malory's Le Morte Darthur" 236.

<sup>1002</sup> See R. M. Lumiansky, "The Question of Unity in Malory's Morte Darthur," Tulane Studies in English 5 (1955): 35-39; R. H. Wilson, "How Many Books Did Malory Write?" University of Texas Studies in English 30 (1951): 1-23; Rumble, "Development by Analogy."

<sup>1003</sup> Cooper, "The Book of Sir Tristram" 187.

<sup>1004</sup> Murray J. Evans, "Ordinatio and Narrative Links: The Impact of Malory's Tales as a 'hoole book,'" Studies in Malory, ed. James W. Spisak (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan U, 1985) 29-52.

Tristram (180.4), while Lancelot is said to be angry when Tristram refuses to participate in the Roman campaign because of his love of Isolde (195.8). Tristram takes part in the tournament of the Castle Perilous at the end of the “Tale of Sir Gareth,” before he is installed as a Knight of the Round Table (343.32), suggesting that the events of the “Tristram” run concurrently with the history of the Round Table. Incidents in the “Tristram” also refer to other Tales: thus Tristram fights at Launceor’s tomb just as Merlin earlier prophesied (568.18; 72.9), and Bors later advises Lancelot and Gwenyver to take refuge at Joyous Gard as did Tristram and Isolde (1172.34). The story of Galahad’s begetting provides a strong introduction to the Grail story, locking the fifth tale firmly into the sixth. In addition, as Cooper pertinently notes,

the two major narrative strands of the later part of the Book—Lancelot’s recovery from madness, and Palomides’ final reconciliation with Tristram and his christening—come together as all three come to court for the feast of Pentecost, the same feast at which the young Galahad arrives to start the adventures of the Grail quest.<sup>1005</sup>

Finally, as was noted in Chapter Eight, references to Tristram’s death and all that it signifies for chivalry continue well beyond his Tale. “Such detailed connections between particular events in different sections of Malory’s narrative,” Evans states, “betray a writer who sees specific links between events in his own version of the stories he retells.”<sup>1006</sup>

What will strike a reader is that with all these cross-references between Tales, many of them added by Malory, not only is it hard to believe that he did not have an overall view in the back of his mind, but it is also difficult to read the “Tristram” on its own if one wishes to understand its position, even with regard to its original. Readers often look for a beginning, a middle, and an end in what they read, but with the Morte, the “Tristram” begins before and finishes after the actual physical boundaries of the

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<sup>1005</sup> Cooper 187.

Tale. Malory refers to Tristram before it, and mentions his death well after it, so that its beginning and ending are mingled with other texts, and if one is searching for unity, one has to look further than the Tale itself to find it.

As much as these narrative links interconnect the tales, Malory's concept of the place of religion within a chivalrous society undergoes significant changes with the coming of the Grail adventures. Having taken part in the Pentecostal feast, Tristram returns to Isolde and Palomides to his questing beast, even though they have been exposed, so the reader is told, to the miracle of Galahad taking his seat at the "Syge Perelous" (845.22). As in the prose Tristan, religion belongs to the background of the world in which the characters live, and although it appears to be all but a necessity, it is rarely their main preoccupation as the case of Palomides demonstrates. Once Palomides has embraced the faith, he is enough of a knight to go back to chivalrous adventures. Neither he nor Tristram attempt and fail the mystical adventures of the Grail, as they do in the French, because their sphere of action does not go beyond the earthly adventures of chivalrous life reinforced by a belief in God.

### III. Malory's Dissenting Voices

There are dissenting voices in the prose Tristan, but no such group exists in Malory's "Tristram." The reader is faced with characters whose villainy is drawn more sharply, while the major critic of the abuse of chivalric practices, Dynadan, becomes a measured commentator, whose humour rather than irony is emphasised.

#### A. The villains

Malory blackens the villains, thus applying the same rules to these characters as he has done to the rest of his cast, and the gulf between good knights and others is exemplified throughout the Tale. Mark, Breunys and Gawain are the arch-villains of the story, most often characterised as murderers, traitors, cowards, or false knights.

##### 1. Mark

Mark, as was established above, is treated as a complete villain, with none of the redeeming features which he arguably presents in the prose Tristan. Not only is he an enemy of his nephew Tristram, as was observed earlier, but his principles are entirely antithetical to Arthurian ideals. With the assistance of two other knights, he ambushes Tristram (394.7). He dishonours his nephew by forcing him to fight against an exhausted Lameroke, and Tristram is much more reluctant to do so than his French counterpart (CII.524), underlining the affront this action constitutes towards chivalry: "ye bydde me do a thyng that is ayenste knyghthode" (428.16). Mark treacherously attacks Uwaine (547.2), Gaherys and Kay (548.24). He forges letters from the Pope (677.27). In addition, he kills Berlusse's father "traytourly and cowardly" (582.27), murders his own brother Bodwyne (634.10) and "falsely and felonsly" slays both Alexander and Tristram (648.9). He is well known as "a destroyer of all worshipfull

knyghtes,”<sup>1007</sup> and his cowardice is notorious.<sup>1008</sup> He even falls off his horse to avoid fighting Lancelot (594.10). Lameroke denounces Mark’s treacherous behaviour in a passage original to Malory by accusing him of being “the shamfullist knyght of a kyng that is now lyvyng, for he is a grete enemy to all good knyghtes . . .” (580.2), and whereas in the prose *Tristan*, Dinadan’s conversation with Marc is a series of humorous and harmless jokes (MIV.47.1), the English Dynadan levels a serious criticism at the treacherous king:

Hit is shame to you . . . that ye governe you so shamfully, for I se by you ye ar full of cowardyse, and ye ar also a murtherar, and that is the grettyst shame that ony knyght may have, for nevir had knyght murtherer worshyp, nother never shall have (585.1).

Mark thus appears as the straightforward antithesis of Arthurian values, and, as Jerome Mandel remarks, “provides a constant reminder of the chaotic world that Arthurian ideals were supposed to correct.”<sup>1009</sup>

## 2. Breunys

The long list of depredations of Sir Breunys Saunze Pit  point him up as another of Malory’s anti-knights. Like his French counterpart, he is a cowardly persecutor of women: he chases Brangwayne in order to kill her (538.10), kills one knight and chases his paramour to kill her (512.14), and slays a knight to use the man’s beloved “at hys owne wylle,” although she hates no man more than him (553.11). He kills a damsel protected by Palomides (562.25). Breunys’s misdeeds also demonstrate his total disregard for martial courtesy. He rides over Gawain “twenty tymys to have destroyed hym” (512.27), and tramples Aggravayne “fyve or six tymes” (614.12). He tricks Harry into releasing his bridle in order to ride over Bleoberys (686.15), and his

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<sup>1007</sup> 497.26; 582.32; 594.34.

<sup>1008</sup> 588.19; 592.11.

<sup>1009</sup> Jerome Mandel, “The Dark Side of Camelot: Arthurian Ideal and Medieval Practice in Malory’s *Morte Darthur*,” *Chaucer Yearbook* 2 (1995): 82.

behaviour is so notorious that Tristram will no longer go hunting unarmed (780.4). Not only is he “the moste myschevuste knyght lyvyng” (651.4) and “the falsyste knyght of the worlde” (562.17), but he is also “a grete foo unto many good knyghtes of kyng Arthures courte” (406.6).

Despite this depiction as an out-and-out villain, Thomas Hanks explains that “Breunys—with his persecution of woman and murderous use of arms—. . . represents a major element of contemporary medieval knighthood rather than an improbable villain.”<sup>1010</sup> Hanks underlines the resemblance between Breunys’s reprehensible behaviour and that of Sir Thomas Courtenay and Sir William Stonor, who in the second half of the fifteenth century both used their strength and arms to threaten or abuse women and to assault the defenceless.<sup>1011</sup> Similarly, Margaret Paston expresses her fears in a letter to her husband dated 28 February 1449, in which she denounces the villainy of Lord Moleyns’ men, who “said that if they could get their hands on me they would carry me off and keep me in the castle.”<sup>1012</sup> Such depravity on Breunys’s part would therefore not have seemed totally alien to a fifteenth-century aristocratic audience, even though it would not have prevented most members of this class from asserting most emphatically that it was totally alien to them, being a reprehensible behaviour for a gentleman.

### 3. Gawain

The nephew of King Arthur may have been counted as one of the best knights in the world in the earlier tales (131.6), but he is soon condemned by the narrator as “evir vengeable, and where he hated he wolde be avenged with murther” (360.34). Malory

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<sup>1010</sup> D. Thomas Hanks, Jr., “Malory’s Anti-Knights: Balin and Breunys,” *The Social and Literary Contexts of Malory’s Morte Darthur* 99.

<sup>1011</sup> Hanks, “Anti-Knights” 101.

<sup>1012</sup> *The Pastons: A Family in the Wars of the Roses*, ed. Richard Barber (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981) 39.

blackens his character beyond redemption by adding references to his villainy and by modifying the emphasis of certain episodes. In the prose *Tristan*, Gauvain and Lamorat chance upon a knight and his lady resting by a well (CII.625.8). Lamorat challenges the knight to a fight to defend the damsel (CII.625.33). Gauvain witnesses the scene, but just before Lamorat walks off with his new acquisition, he steps in and claims her for himself (CII.626.12). When Gauvain informs Lamorat that he is Arthur's nephew, Lamorat graciously gives in and yields up the damsel (CII.626.32). Malory modifies the episode so that Gawain appears more villainous and Lameroke more honourable. Under Lameroke's eyes, Gawain abducts the damsel while her knight is asleep. Lameroke challenges him, but Gawain answers with impunity: "What woll ye do with me? I am nevew unto kynge Arthure" (449.27). On hearing this Lameroke backs down, but the modifications Malory has made show Gawain up as more reprehensible. Moreover, because of his connections with King Arthur, he keeps the damsel, thus violating the Pentecostal oath he swore as a knight of the Round Table: "allwayes to do ladyes, damesels, and jantilwomen and wydowes socour: strengthe hem in hir ryghtes, and never to enforce them, uppon payne of dethe" (120.20). He also goes against the personal oath he swore after returning home from a quest in which he accidentally killed a woman:

Thus was sir Gawayne sworne uppon the foure Evaungelystis that he sholde never be ayenste lady ne jantillwoman but if he fyght for a lady and hys adversary fyghtith for another (109.1).

From his murder of Lameroke onwards, Gawain and his three brothers are the object of universal stigma, for they are considered to be "the grettyste distroyers and murtherars of good knyghtes that is now in the realme of Ingelonde" (691.28), a remark original to Malory's "Tristram." Gawain's brothers, Aggravayne and Gaherys, kill a knight "for none other cause but that . . . [he] seyde that sir Launcelot was bettir



knyght than sir Gawayne" (690.32). Gawain's murderous penchant takes a turn for the worse in the rest of the Morte: he and his brothers kill Pellynor "thorow outerageousnes" (905.24), and Gawain slays Uwain (944.33) and Bagdemagus (1020.7). As in the prose Tristan, then, Gawain defies the rules of the Arthurian world, and his characterisation in the "Tristram" helps to understand what he becomes in the rest of the Morte, where his villainy is ever more apparent.

Morgan is the female equivalent of the false knights in the "Tristram," just as in the original text, so she will not be dwelt upon further. Malory's depiction of anti-knights is straightforward. He makes few changes to the characters he found in the prose Tristan, his main method being merely to intensify their evil nature. The result is that their wickedness offers a better contrast to his good knights' virtue, confirming the quasi-Manichean characterisation which was observed earlier.

#### B. The commentator: Dynadan

Whereas the French Dinadan provided unorthodox views about love and chivalry, views to which his fellow characters did not always know how to react, the English Dynadan is simply a measured commentator with a well-developed sense of humour. Malory has suppressed several passages involving Dynadan, and has shortened those which he could not delete. Vinaver states that much as Malory "resented Dinadan's criticisms of chivalry he was unable to make them innocuous. Dynadan is still very much the same in Malory as he is in the French; he has fewer opportunities of 'scoffing,' but he says enough to question the wisdom of chivalry as an institution."<sup>1013</sup> Dynadan certainly is not shy in criticising the absurdities which he witnesses. However, one may note that he denounces not the institution of chivalry, but what he sees as its excesses.

Malory retains some of Dynadan's original comments, such as Palomides' fickleness towards Tristram (537.6), and he frequently refuses jousts (505; 605; 705). These refusals, however, are counterbalanced not only by the fact that Malory underlines Dynadan's chivalric prudence, but also by the numerous occasions on which he demonstrates his prowess and courage, and above all his love of good knights, which is, moreover, totally reciprocated.

Dynadan's common sense becomes apparent when, in a passage original to Malory, he tells Mark there is no shame in refusing to challenge or to decline a challenge from a vastly superior knight:

hit is ever worshyp to a knyght to refuse that thyng that he may nat attayne. Therefore your worshyp had bene mucche more to have refused hym as I ded, for I warne you playnly he is able to beate suche fyve as ye ar and I be . . . (581.24).

This maxim is characteristic of Malory's Dynadan, and introduces a note of practical realism into the text. Dynadan berates Mark for his folly in wanting to continue his battle against Lameroke after he has already taken a fall on horseback by arguing that is it not dishonourable to behave prudently when ordinary reason is brought to bear.

Dynadan's views on love are also consistently prudent. Thus when he meets, but fails to recognise Tristram, he says he has just seen a foolish knight earlier in the day:

he lay lyke a fole grennyng and wolde nat speke, and his shyld lay by hym, and his horse also stood by hym. And well I wote he was a lovear (688.33).

In answer to Tristram's question on whether or not he is a lover, Dynadan answers "Mary, fye on that crauffte!" (689.4). In a passage which Malory has greatly reduced (MV.54-55), Dynadan later responds to Isolde's puzzlement:

the joy of love is to shorte, and the sorow thereof and what cometh thereof is duras over longe (693.33).

Isolde chides him for this view, telling him of Bleoberys' fighting with three knights at once for one damsel. Dynadan's criticism is immediately converted into praise of Bleoberys (694.6). Moreover, the French Iseut then gives a helmet to Dinadan, who makes some virulent remarks about chivalric customs involving battling for fickle ladies (MV.58.13). Malory avoids these sardonic comments by having Isolde hand the helmet to Tristram (694.22).

Dynadan's humour is not subversive, especially as whatever he may say against chivalric practices (and these occasions have been reduced by Malory), he is an excellent example of knighthood himself. Malory provides many examples of his courage, such as his desire to take on Palomides to prevent him from attacking the wounded Tristram (532.21), or his promise to help the former in an adventure against Morgan: "I shall nat fayle you . . . unto my puyssaunce, uppon my lyff!" (597.32). Similarly, he would rather tackle Lancelot himself rather than allow the exhausted Tristram to be shamed (752.21). Moreover, both the narrative and spoken comment draw attention to Dynadan's good deeds. On several occasions he is referred to as a "good knyght."<sup>1014</sup> The narrator mentions that "Dynadan was a good knyght on horsebacke" (583.25) and he is also said to possess "grete force" (583.28). He shines at the Surluse tournament.<sup>1015</sup>

in cam sir Dynadan and mette with sir Geryne, a good knyght, and he threw hym downe over his horse croupen. And sir Dynadan overthrew foure knyghtes mo, and there he dede grete dedis of armys, for he was a good knyght (665.3).

His worthiness is publicly demonstrated by Isolde making him great "chyre" and offering him lodging (694.6). Tristram corroborates this by saying that he is "a noble knyght of his hondis, and the best felawe that I know, and all good knyghtis lovyth his

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<sup>1014</sup> 615.8; 665.7.

<sup>1015</sup> 653.29.

felyship" (692.26).<sup>1016</sup> This is further borne out by his reputation at King Arthur's court:

all the courte was glad of sir Dynadans commynge home, for he was jantyll, wyse, and a good knyght (605.18).

This love is reciprocal: "he hadde suche a customme that he loved every good knyght and every good knyght loved hym" (665.9). He admires good knights so much that he actively seeks them out,<sup>1017</sup> and admits that: "though I be nat of worship myself, I love all tho that bene of worship" (618.1). His relationship with good knights can also be "prevy," as is the case with Lancelot (617.28).

He finally shares the fate of many good knights, falling at the hands of Gawain's brothers, and his death is significantly linked to his love of good knights and antipathy for the bad ones. He encounters Aggravayne and Mordred, whose hatred for him is roused although he has just rescued them from the hands of Breunys. In the source text, the brothers' friend Dalan turns them against Dinadan by identifying the latter as Dalan's father's murderer (MIV.153.32). Malory adds to the brothers' motivation for disliking Dynadan his love of Lameroke the good knight:

they hated hym oute of mesure bycause of sir Lameroke. For sir Dynadan had suche a custom that he loved all good knyghtes that were valyaunte, and he hated all tho that were destroyers of good knyghtes (614.26).

Malory suppresses the French Dinadan's anti-chivalric comments (MIV.153.15), thus cutting out the humour, and this now serious scene naturally moves on to the prophecy of Dynadan's murder at the hands of Aggravayne and Mordred, whose hatred of Lancelot he had already pointed out (700.1):

in the queste of the Sankgreal, cowardly and felonsly they slew sir Dynadan, whyche was a grete damage, for he was a grete bourder and a passynge good knyght (615.5).

The French equivalent of this prophecy is instructive:

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<sup>1016</sup> See also 605.10.

Si li tourna puis a damage, car après la queste du Saint Graal, grant pieche après la mort de monsigneur Tristan, l'ochist Agrevains entre lui et Mordret assés pres de Camaaloth mout vilainnement . . . (MIV.154.21).

There is a difference of timing (during and after the Quest), and Malory omits to specify the murder takes place near Camelot. However, he emphasises the villainy of the act with two adverbs instead of one, and confirms Dynadan's main characteristics: his humour and adherence to the world of worthy chivalry.

Indeed, though Malory excises much of his irony, Dynadan is still humorous and his jests "always serve to unite the company of the good," as Lynch pertinently points out.<sup>1018</sup> He is universally recognised as "a fyne japer and lovyng unto all good knyghtes" (660.2), and his humour is closely associated with his belonging to the fellowship of reputable knights.<sup>1019</sup> He is also clever with words, as proved by the lay he composes vilifying Mark (626.25). He is so entertaining that:

Than lowghe the queene and the Haute Prynce, that they myght nat sytte at their table. . . .<sup>1020</sup>

The result is that Dynadan comes across as a thoroughly likeable character, less ambiguous than in the French, who puts his knighthood to the service of the good. He provides a spark of laughter in Arthur's court for the modern reader, and presumably also for the original audience. Even if what Dynadan says may not make a modern audience laugh, the picture of Gwenyver and Galahalte laughing so that they may no longer sit at table certainly does. His measured attitude may surprise some of the more daring characters, but he certainly does not attack chivalry as he does in the prose Tristan. His attitude to love is consistent, for Malory suppresses the comic episode of the French Dinadan falling suddenly in love with a damsel (MV.136.42), which undermines his criticisms. As Hanks puts it, "Malory condenses, deletes, and

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<sup>1017</sup> 604.22; 693.22.

<sup>1018</sup> Lynch, Book of Arms 100.

<sup>1019</sup> See also 692.26.

smoothes; his Dinadan is considerably less abrasive, considerably less sardonic, than the Dinadan he found in the French book.”<sup>1021</sup>

Malory is more reluctant than his French counterparts to undermine the institution of chivalry in the “Tristram,” despite the fact that it, or at least Arthur’s version of it, crumbles at the end of the Morte. The “Tale of Sir Tristram” is still the middle of the book, but the undoing of Arthur’s fellowship is already in the making, notably with the death of Lameroke, underlining the family feuds which in the end contribute to the destruction of the fellowship of the Round Table. It appears from this study that Malory has simplified the issues. His villains are uniformly black, which brings out the goodness of the heroes, and the one character who criticises chivalric customs does not attack them as vehemently as he does in the French text. Whereas the story of the French Kahedin casts doubt on passionate love, Malory’s Kayhidius has no such function, for, as was observed earlier, his pining for Isolde and death through love take place off-stage. Even Palomides, whose actions are not always of the most reputable because they are imputable to his envy towards Tristram, as in the French, finally gains worship in the eyes of the chivalric community by completing his good deeds with his christening. The English Dynadan is no longer the knight-errant who “cascun jour vois querant sens, ne point n’em puis a mon oes retenir” (MIV.153.23).

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<sup>1020</sup> 668.26. See also 706.3; 758.3.

<sup>1021</sup> D. Thomas Hanks, Jr., “Foil and Forecast: Dinadan in the Book of Sir Tristram,” The Arthurian Yearbook 1 (1991): 156.

### General Conclusion

The prose Tristan and Malory's "Tristram" have been considered as unfortunate reworkings of the traditional legend, by virtue of their neglect of the love intrigue and their insistence on imitating the chivalrous life of the prose Lancelot. This view not only forgets that the French Tristan enjoyed celebrity right through to the sixteenth century and that the "Tristram" is an indispensable tale in Malory's Morte, which was equally popular, but also fails to realise that both texts go further than just retelling the story of a famous love triangle. They were writing for audiences who obviously enjoyed hearing about knightly encounters, and who will have read or listened to these romances episode by episode. Such habits may have partly determined the episodic, almost soap-opera fashion in which these romances are written.

The worlds in which the characters evolve may resemble that of the respective audiences enough for them to identify situations they know, but they are presented differently by the authors. While the prose Tristan retains something of an otherworldly atmosphere (although the authors have considerably reduced the marvellous aspects of their tale), Malory anchors his text in a more recognisable reality. Amorous adventures and courtly life find themselves much reduced by Malory, but the knight is at the centre of the preoccupations of both texts. In neither text is the knightly ideal a simple matter, but Malory does not attack its excesses as vehemently as do his French counterparts through such voices as Dinadan, Kahedin and Lamorat. He rather allows questions to arise through the action, and lets the text speak for itself, with the effect that the reader is called upon to reflect on the matter without finding a specific answer in the text.

Both texts are romances, for the worlds they present generally ignore such realities as money, lawsuits, or problems with tenants. Similarly, both texts only sketch in what is basic in most novels, such as physical causality, characterisation, and time-schemes. We indeed often think of romance as the antithesis of reality, but the Tristan and to a greater extent the “Tristram,” as was observed above, greatly reduce the sense of magic and mystery. The heroes admittedly are larger than life and accomplish admirable tasks, and in that they do share with the old romances what Benson calls “a sense of the unobtainable.”<sup>1022</sup> Despite this, neither text presents a wish-fulfilment world for aristocrats. As Field states, “Heroism is frequent, but it does not guarantee life, happiness or dignity.”<sup>1023</sup> In the prose Tristan as in the “Tristram,” the knights’ practice of love does not lead to happiness, nor does the good practice of knights-errant, for bad knights survive good ones. No one knight embodies the ideal, despite the prose Tristan’s admiration for its eponymous hero and Malory’s constant valorisation of Lancelot. Both make mistakes, and Lancelot’s continuing relationship with Gwenyver is a principal cause of the feuds that destroy the Round Table. Malory’s tales reflect the real chivalry of his time, heightened and idealised but based firmly enough on reality that the gentlemen for whom Malory wrote could recognise the contours and many actual details of the chivalric life of their own day.<sup>1024</sup>

This is also true of the prose Tristan, although the realistic details provided by the French text concern different areas: less is said about money, but the narrator mentions the making of beds, while knights ride past poor houses, for instance. Both texts provide a picture of the society of knights, idealised so it is different from that of the readers, but “no easier to understand, or to live in.”<sup>1025</sup>

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<sup>1022</sup> Benson 138.

<sup>1023</sup> Field, “Sir Thomas Malory’s Le Morte Darthur” 245.

<sup>1024</sup> Benson 139.

<sup>1025</sup> Field, “Sir Thomas Malory’s Le Morte Darthur” 245.



## Appendix

### Section A

Prose letters: 1. Iseut to Guenièvre (CII.572); 2. Guenièvre to Iseut (CII.581); 3. Tristan to Lancelot (CIII.688); 4. Lancelot to Tristan (CIII.691); 5. Iseut to Tristan (CIII.778); 6. Marc to Arthur (MIV.179); 7. Tristan to Iseut (MVII.39); 8. Letter by the Roi de la Cité Vermeille denouncing his assassination (MV.84).

Rhyming letters: 1. Tristan to Arthur (MIV.163); 2. Tristan to Lancelot (MIV.165); 3. Lancelot to Tristan (MIV.169); 4. Arthur to Tristan (MIV.170); 5. Letter “en samblanche de lai” from Marc to Guenièvre (MIV.180); 6. From the knight who commits suicide to Arthur (MVI.97); 7. Iseut to Tristan (MVII.4). The substance but not the wording of two more letters is provided: 1. From Kahedin to Iseut telling her how much he loves her (CIII.834.2); 2. From Iseut to Kahedin, giving him “faus reconfort” (CIII.834.13).

Lays: 1. “Lai Mortal” by Tristan (CIII.870); 2. Iseut’s suicide song (CIII.932); 3. Kahedin’s “A vous, Amours, ains c’a nului” (MI.154); 4. Iseut’s “Folie n’est pas vasselage!” (MI.158); 5. Kahedin’s “En morant de si douche mort” (MI.163); 6. Lamorat’s “lai” (MIV.12); 7. Dinadan’s “Lai voir disant” (MIV.244); 8. Palamede’s “lai” (MVI.24); 9. “Lai” by the knight who commits suicide in Arthur’s court (MVI.99); 10. Hélie’s “lai” (MVI.136); 11. Tristan’s “chant” (MVI.159); 12. Tristan’s “Lay de Victoire” (MVII.168); 13. Tristan’s lay du “Boire Pesant” (MVII.171); 14. Tristan’s “D’amour vient mon chant et mon plour” (MIX.65). Four more lays are mentioned without their specific wording: 1. The “lais de la Franchise Tristan” composed by “Li Breton” (CII.616); 2. Tristan’s “Lai de Plor” (CIII.868); 3. Tristan’s “Deduit d’amor” (CIII.868); 4. The lay Tristan is singing as he is fatally wounded by

Marc (MIX.76). In addition, countless lays are made in honour of Tristan after his death (MIX.141.19).

There are also the pieces in rhyming octosyllabic couplets called “devinailles” at the beginning of the text: 1. Set by the “jaianz” to Sador (CI.99.9-18); 2. Set to Pelias by the giant (CI.107.4-15); 3. Set by the giant to Pelias (CI.109.2-16); 4. Set by Pelias to the giant (CI.111.9-24); 5. Set by the giant to Apollo (CI.131.21-36); 6. Set by Apollo to the giant (CI.133.2-17).

#### Section B

Vinaver, “Le caractère de Dinadan par les textes,” Études sur le Tristan en prose (1925) 91-98; Vinaver, “Un chevalier errant à la recherche du sens du monde” (1964); Marx, “Quelques observations sur la formation de la notion de chevalier errant” (1964-65); Adler, “Dinadan, inquiétant ou rassurant?” (1969); Baumgartner, Essai (1975) 182-87, 252-59; Ménard, “Le chevalier errant” (1976); Payen, “Le Tristan en prose, manuel de l’amitié: le cas de Dinadan” (1979); Berthelot, “L’inflation rhétorique dans le Tristan en prose” (1987); Berthelot, “Dynadam le chevalier non-conformiste” (1995); Chênerie, “Vengeance” (1992-95); Santucci, “La violence dans le Tristan en prose” (1994); Trachsler, Clôtures (1996) 177, 185.

#### Section C

R. H. Wilson, “Malory’s Naming of Minor Characters” (1943); R. H. Wilson, “Addenda on Malory’s Minor Characters” (1956); Rumble, “Development by Analogy” (1964); Edward Kennedy, “Malory’s King Mark and King Arthur” (1975); Whitaker, Arthur’s Kingdom of Adventure (1984); Fries, “Indiscreet Objects of Desire” (1985); Beverly Kennedy, Knighthood in the Morte Darthur (1985); Salda, “Reconsidering Vinaver’s Sources” (1991); Hanks, “Foil and Forecast” (1991); Fries,

“The Impotent Potion” (1991); Archibald, “Malory’s Ideal of Fellowship” (1992); Saunders, “Malory’s Book of Huntynge” (1993); Grimm, “Fellowship and Envy” (1993); Wimsatt, “The Idea of a Cycle” (1994); Wimsatt, “Type Conceptions of the Good Knight” (1994); Rovang, “Malory’s Treatment of the Marvelous” (1994); Mahoney, ““Ar ye a Knyght and ar no Lovear?”” (1994); Mahoney, “Source and Setting Reconsidered” (1995); Ross, “Malory’s Weeping Castle” (1995); Cooper, “The Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones” (1996); Dauby, “Le Tristram de Malory” (1996); McCarthy, “Malory and His Sources” (1996); Kim, The Knight without the Sword (2000); Schroeder, “Saying but Little” (2001); Grimm, “The Love and Envy of Sir Palomides” (2001).

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