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# Lancelot and Tristan: The Desire to Transcend the Real

by

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## Introduction: Defining the Romance of Adultery

The advent of romance in Northern France and England in the late 12th century marks a major advancement for the medieval European secular literary tradition. Not only does it inaugurate new modes of storytelling and new models of heroism, it also marks a change in focus towards psychology and interiority. This newfound interest in the workings of the human mind caused romance to become more relatable and more and in some ways, more realistic than its predecessors. Initially I wondered, given my modern conceptions of medieval society as a violent place lacking in sentiment and brimming with religious zeal, how such an emotionally and psychologically charged genre could have been conceived in a primitive time such as this. However, this was my own fault as a modern reader. Preconditioned by my culture's representations of the past, I had believed a fictional representation of medieval society to be true. Studying medieval literature has proven to me that the medieval mind, and by association its collective imagination, was in fact very much like our own is today. If we take this to be true, then 12th century fictions represent humankind's innermost desires in the same way as modern cultural expressions represent our own fears and longings.[1] In many cases these desires have remained constant, as human nature cannot have evolved so much over the course of eight hundred years to change, for example our erotic desire, or our fear of death.

What strikes me about the romance genre is the recurrence and glorification of adultery in many of its formative texts. The queen and her exemplary knight dynamic

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[1] Rider, Jeff, "The Other Worlds of Romance," p. 129

in these love affairs gives added complexity to this already curious theme, as their lovers' of vows inherently conflicted with their other sets of oaths. There was a basic model for stories dealing with adultery; despite this, each author treats the subject differently, creating a variety of interpretations of the theme. This makes it difficult for the critic to broach this subject with the hopes of finding a single universal truth about medieval society and adultery. However, since adultery was condemned in the 12th century then its prominence in these texts could indicate a hidden desire amongst 12th century Europeans' imagination. Though on the surface level, these romances deal with sexual desire, I do not believe that this is the hidden longing that these authors truly wanted to express, as the authors of romances were largely well-educated members of the clergy. If they were simply about expressing sexual desire, interpreting romances of adultery would be too easy, and designating them as subversive to Christian morality and political authority would be the obvious interpretative response. However, this is not the case, and though these texts can be seen as subversive, they have also shown to comply with certain ideas, and elements of medieval society. Thus if adultery with a queen is so central to these foundational texts, then what role does it play in romance and what does it signify about the medieval imagination?

In order to unravel this complex theme's significance, I will begin in this chapter by discussing what the genre of romance is, so as to in turn be able to define the subgenre of the romance of adultery. Secondly, I will examine the *Tristan* legend, which I believe to have been the formative text for other authors who composed their own romances of adultery. The multiplicity of texts dealing differently with Tristan

and Iseut's tragic story proves its immense popularity. Also evident, is the fact that there was no one model for the story, but many variations. Despite this fact, the Tristan stories do all follow a similar model, the conventions of which other authors were doubtless aware of. Therefore these romancers referred to the *Tristan* legend when writing their own romances of adultery, creating a network of intertextual similarities and differences. Thus, a lively debate exists within the subgenre of the romance of adultery, where the differences in each author's representation of his adulterous heroes are what engender each text's meaning. In order to arrive at this meaning, I will examine the *Tristan* texts' multitude of contradictions, firstly in its criticism, secondly in the lovers' identity, and thirdly through the depictions of geography and love in the romance. Finally, I intend to examine Chrétien de Troyes' *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*, so as to compare it with the *Tristan* legend, in order to discover more fully what the implications of adultery within these romances are, and if there is any continuity in the treatment of this theme.

Adultery in romance allows for the theme of love, and even more importantly, the theme of conflict between the story's heroes and the world in which they live. If the theme of love in romance is an idealized concept, then this is a part of the hidden desire that these texts represent. In addition to this, the world in which the lovers live, and with which they struggle to keep their love, is often a fictional representation of the realities of medieval aristocratic society. Therefore these imagined places, like the court, have been shown to reflect actual issues that interested and involved romance's aristocratic audience. Thus, this conflict between the lovers and their society can be seen as symbolic of the clash between humanity's imagined ideals with the realities

of life. These two concepts are inherently opposed, but the desire to equate them, in other words to realize one's fantasy, is at the heart of my understanding of the romance of adultery. Therefore, I believe that romancers are, through the desire to equate the real with the ideal, commenting on the act of authorship itself. Fiction is able to harmoniously combine these two contradictory concepts of real and ideal into one harmonious whole, thereby succeeding where the adulterous lovers could not. This provides modern readers with insight into one of medieval society's greatest longings, and by association, greatest fears. This was on one hand, the desire to realize such fantastical extremes of love and passion as we find in romance, but this also shows us an implicit fear of the inability for man to transcend our harsh and banal realities of 12th century society and civilization.

In order to better understand how the various texts that we refer to as romances, and more specifically texts that we will designate as romances of adultery, relate to one another, besides the obvious chronological and geographical similarities between their creations, we should begin by examining more closely the conventions of romance as a genre. In addition to this, it would be helpful to establish an outline of what is, as Peggy McCracken calls it, and as I will refer to it throughout this paper, the romance of adultery, which I believe can be defined as a individual subgenre of romance. These specifications of the conventions of content and form in the genre of romance will allow us greater insight into the process of how one wrote and structured a romance, as well as highlight how the different authors position themselves amongst the various ideological, moral and societal debates that are at play within the genre. Let us begin with the question of what exactly is a romance?

The term romance in and of itself denotes a text that is written in the vernacular; this means in a romance language such as French, rather than Latin, the language that dominated literature up until this point. The use of French meant that all of courtly society could understand romances, because its members did not necessarily speak Latin. This meant that romance could be read aloud and understood by all, and would therefore be able to reach a larger secular audience who, simply based on its language, would have known that the text was intended for their enjoyment. This shift is essential to romance's conception as a genre. The use of the vernacular was a relatively new practice in the early 12th century, and it suggests a clear break with past literary traditions as well as a new acceptance of French as an appropriate language for secular subjects. Therefore, it is evident that these texts were clearly designated for a specific part of society.

The members of courtly society would also have felt a certain degree of pride in their language's newfound uses in literature, similarly to the way that clerks felt pride in their knowledge and use of Latin. Thus, courtly society was attempting to define its new identity, which was undergoing serious changes at the time, due to a variety of reasons I will discuss later on, by creating (or more likely commissioning) its own forms of art. This was similar to the way that the clergy would have identified themselves by being able to speak and write in Latin, along with having knowledge of the theological questions of the day. Thus, the court was seeking to create its own secular literature that applied to their lives and their society, and to do this they understandably used the language in which they were all fluent: French. This created a clear distinction in terms of content as well as language between courtly secular

culture and ecclesiastical culture, and set the stage for new literary genres that addressed different concerns. Thus, romance is a genre that was meant for the court, and that therefore was designed to all at once express the fantasies, the insecurities, and debates present in courtly society, through the medium of fiction.

Chrétien de Troyes, at the beginning of his romance *Cligès*, explicitly refers to this pride in France and its language when he states,

> "Grece ot de chevalerie
> Le premier los et de clergive,
> Puis vint la chevalerie a Rome
> Et la clergie et la somme,
> Qui or est en France venue."[2]

> "In Greece
> Knighthood and learning ranked
> Above all other things.
> Ancient learning, like knighthood,
> Passed from Greece to Rome,
> And has reappeared, now,
> In France."[3]

Thus, Chrétien claims a long heritage of glory for France both in terms of its renown and in terms of its learning. However, he is not simply praising France as a kingdom, but instead is referencing its literary achievements in the vernacular (that by association are his own achievements), which have inaugurated a new era of French cultural preeminence throughout the western world whose present glory equal to that of the Roman and Greek literary traditions. Thus, through this claim, Chrétien has given his new style, the genre of romance, authority due to its being the next step in a larger tradition that stretches all the way back to the Greek and Latin epic. He gives

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[2] Chrétien de Troyes, *Cligès*, ed. Charles Méla, (Paris: Livre du Poche, 1994), vv. 31-35.
[3] Chrétien de Troyes, *Cligès*, ed. and trans by Burton Raffel, (New Haven: Yale UP 1997), vv. 30-36.

his text authority through this claim of inheritance. Thus, Chretien makes a startling claim for his day: that the French language, and the literature written in it, are and can be just as worthy of praise as Greek and Roman literature was. This claim would have been startling at a time when writing in the vernacular was relatively new due to the church's control of literary education. It is evident therefore that courtly romance's use of French was essential to the genre's conception, as it acts to define romance through opposition with the past prominent genres, which were largely in Latin.

However, this designation of Romance as simply a text in the vernacular is far too broad and shallow. For example, troubadour poetry and *Le Chanson de Roland*, a chanson de geste, were both written in the vernacular before Chretien de Troyes wrote *Cligès*, and even before the first romance were written. Thus, romance must indicate something more than simply the language in which it was written, if other works were written in the vernacular that were not called romances. Chrétien was not the first to try to make French into a literary language. In fact, others were attempting the same thing in different ways. Thus, Chretien was surely influenced by more recent literary traditions than those that he claims he follows. Rather than being influenced solely by classical literature, like he says, Chretien was obviously very aware of other literary traditions in France that flourished during his life and the century before, like the chanson de geste and troubadour poetry. If we are to attempt to confidently define romance, we will therefore have to look firstly at its differences in relation to the other genres circulating at the time, and secondly at the similarities between romances themselves, which will constitute its content and form.

The fact that the different authors do all follow similar paths in constructing their romances, using for example a similar cast of characters and questioning the same aspects of courtly society, proves that these authors did have a sense of genre. However, as Simon Gaunt observes, the way that the authors refer to romances both as "romans" and "contes" interchangeably acts as proof that the genre of romance was an unstable one, just like the terminology used to designate it.[4] This instability can also be seen in the various ways that romances question courtly society. This is the major difference between romance and its predecessors, for romance questions society while the other genres like chanson de geste, or *Roland*, and histories, or Geoffrey of Monmouth's *The History of the King's of Britain,* seek to glorify it. Another significant difference is the importance given to the concept of "courtly love." This concept was also an unstable one. This ambiguity is what causes so much debate around romances. Therefore, while many authors write about marriage and adultery, each one provides us with a different set of conclusions on the subject. For example, the *Roman d'Eneas* takes a conservative view towards marriage, allowing marriage to provide the heroic Aeneas with his true and perfected identity at the end of the romance. On the other hand, Béroul's *Tristan and Iseut* is far more subversive: it questions and undermines the institutions of marriage and courtly society. The other authors seem to position themselves between these two extremes, where the variety of different conclusions concerning adultery is startling, ranging from praise, to confusion, to complete rejection.

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[4] Simon Gaunt, "Romance and Other Genres," The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance, ed. by Roberta L. Kreuger, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), 45.

Though romance, as a genre, causes one to expect a certain degree of cohesion between texts, instead it has been shown to be an unstable genre in its beginnings in more ways than simply the terminology the authors used to designate it. Its readers are left with a variety of conflicting opinions, serving to prove that "the array of perspectives in romance no doubt mirrors the array of perspectives of its public."[5] Thus, romance is representative of courtly society, however not in the way in which some scholars have claimed. Rather than being factual evidence of social practices concerning love and knighthood in medieval courts, as some scholars in the past have argued, we can instead be sure that these stories reflect, as Sarah Kay argues, "the imagination and fantasies of the court."[6] Thus, though we cannot use these texts as historical evidence of courtly society, we can draw from them insight into medieval society's psychology. It is due to this that these texts today remain interesting and significant pieces of evidence, providing us with an otherwise inaccessible view into courtly society that would otherwise have been lost.

Romance was a new genre that emerged around the mid 12th century, largely influenced by the older genres of the troubadour love lyric, the chanson de geste, historical (though often mainly fictive) texts, hagiography, and contemporary theological texts. All of these genres were intended for similar intellectual audiences, and were sometimes even bound together in compilations of manuscripts regardless of genre.[7] Therefore, we can be sure that the public that heard them performed would have recognized the similarities, and more importantly the differences, between these

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[5] Ibid, 47-48.
[6] Sarah Kay, "Courts, Clerks, and Courtly Love," The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance, ed. Roberta L. Kreuger, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP 2000) 83.
[7] Gaunt, "Romance and other Genres" 49.

genres. It is because of these influences that Michel Zink calls romance "a secondary genre," or why I will refer to it as a hybrid genre.[8] Therefore, differences with past traditions hold a prominent place in our thinking about the formation of Romance because genre, like identity, is primarily defined in opposition to its peers. These literary influences were therefore essential to Romance's development, as they set the tone for the conventions of the genre.

The first major influence on romance came from the troubadour poets. They inaugurated many of the ideas surrounding "courtly love," which informed the way that later romancers depicted love. Troubadour poetry was a recently invented style of verse, often focusing on love, that arose in the south of France in the early 12th century before making its way to Northern France. Gaston Paris named their conception of love, which equated love with desire, "courtly love" in the late 19th century.[9] The troubadours openly discussed sexuality in an explicit way that questioned medieval society's structure and its religious morality. Thus, these poets, among other things, envisioned fanciful "courts of love," which were imagined counterparts to the real life courts. Courtly love for the troubadours was often envisioned as being, to use the Jaufré Rudel's terminology, from afar. Thus, Rudel writes in *Lanquan li jorn son lonc en Mai*,

"Indeed I'll know the lord is true
Who lets me see this love from afar,
But for every blessing that comes my way
I feel two blows, she's so far away.
I wish I could go as  a pilgrim

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[8] Michel Zink, Medieval French Literature: An Introduction, trans. Jeff Rider (Binghamton N.Y.: Pegasus Paperbooks, 1995) 50.
[9] Kay, "Courts, Clerks, and Courtly Love," Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance 83.

And see my staff and cloak
Reflected in her eyes."[10]

Here we can see clearly that the love imagined by Rudel is so powerful that it can persist despite separation. This love causes the poet pain and obsession. He idolizes his lover, likening her to a relic that he wishes to visit as a pilgrim. These aspects of "courtly love," its inherent suffering and the spiritualization of the erotic, remain common motifs in romance.

In Bernart de Ventadorn's poetry, we find other aspects of "courtly love." Bernart de Ventadorn has more in common with the authors central to this thesis, because he wrote in the second half of the twelfth century, lived in Northern France, and was associated with both the Capetian and Angevin dynasties. In fact, it was even rumored that he had an affair with the countess Eleanor of Aquitaine, though this is certainly rumor, and is merely representational of both Bernart and Eleanor's reputations as lovers, and serves as possible evident that Eleanor was his patroness before her marriage with Henry II.[11] Bernart writes, in *Chantars no pot gaire valer*

"They blame love out of ignorance,
Foolish people, but they don't hurt love,
For love cannot just fall away
Unless it is common love.
That is not real love; that kind
Has only the name and the look,
And does not love if it cannot take."[12]

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[10] Jaufré Rudel, *Lanquan li jorn son lonc en Mai*, from Troubadour Poems from the South of France, trans. and ed. William D. Paden and Frances Freeman Paden (Chester, U.K.: D.S. Brewer, 2007) vv. 29-35.
[11] Uc de Saint Circ (?), *Vida of Bernart de Ventadorn*, Troubadour Poems from the South of France, trans. and ed. William D. Paden and Frances Freeman Paden (Chester, U.K.: D.S. Brewer, 2007) 184.
[12] Bernart de Ventadorn, *Chantars no pot gaire valer*, Troubadour Poems from the South of France, trans. and ed. William D. Paden and Frances Freeman Paden (Chester, U.K.: D.S. Brewer, 2007) 74, vv. 15-21.

This describes an ideal of love that is both pure and eternal. He also compares this "courtly love," which is eternal and all-powerful, to a base form of love that he calls "common love," which he explains, "started with women who love for pay," or with prostitutes.[13] Thus, we have two concepts of love at hand here, where one is good and the other bad, one noble and the other vulgar, one emotional and the other physical. For Bernart de Ventadorn, constancy in love is deemed noble even if the love is adulterous, while promiscuity is attacked. However, he says that noble love is also being attacked by an unnamed "they," who do not understand the difference between the courtly and the common, equating bodily sexual desire with ennobling emotional love. This "they" is similar to the archetypal character of the "Lausinger" who appears repeatedly throughout romance, notably in the form of the barons from *Tristan and Isolde*.

Another important aspect of Bernart's poetry is the way that, in love, the woman holds the position of power over the man, making her both a love-object and a sovereign in love. Thus, love commands the poet, as well as is a metaphor for his devotion to his lady, who is often referred to as a *Domna* in troubadour poetry. "The reins pull me so hard towards love," Bernart writes, metaphorically making himself into a dumb beast that his lady, or his love, guides.[14] He, in another poem, refers to himself as "imprisoned by love, in a cell, while she keeps the key," thus making the

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[13] Ibid, vv. 24.
[14] Bernart de Ventadorn, *Non es meravelha s'eu chan*. Troubadour Poems from the South of France, trans. and ed. William D. Paden and Frances Freeman Paden (Chester, U.K.: D.S. Brewer, 2007) vv. 7.

implications of the lady as lord and master over her lover a certainty.[15] Significantly, this theme is reflected in Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*, where Lancelot is shown to succeed through his role as Guinevere's vassal.

However, not all troubadours presented love in this positive light. Poets like Marcabru and Cercamon wrote poetry that imitated the style of the love poets, but that preached an entirely different message. For example, Simon Gaunt stated that Marcabru is a moralizing author who was in support of the ecclesiastical concept of marriage as opposed to an adulterous, "courtly" model.[16]. Marcabru believed that love should result in a marriage that was exogamous, indissoluble, and consensual.[17] Therefore, he involves himself in the marriage debate through his poetry. He sides with the Church and opposed the lay model of marriage (endogamous, family control over marriage partner, and finite through repudiation), as well as other troubadours' conceptions of love that glorified things like adultery and philandering.[18] While Marcabru is defending the Church's views on love, others were supporting a variety of different views, ranging from celebrating the secular version of marriage to creating a hybrid form of love that existed between these two opposing ideals: for example love as adulterous yet consensual and eternal. Thus, "the 'courtly' model of love is finally at odds with both establishment views of marriage, the lay and the

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[15] Ibid, vv. 21-22.
[16] Simon Gaunt, "Marginal Men, Marcabru and Orthodoxy: The Early Troubadours and Adultery". Medium Aevum, vol. 59. 1990: 63.
[17] Ibid, 57.
[18] Ibid, 65, 68.

ecclesiastical."[19] This troubadour conception of "courtly love," and the marriage debate that influenced it, continues on in romance, setting conventions for the genre.

In turn, Ovid's *The Art of Love* and *Remedy of Love* had influenced troubadour love poetry by preparing a basic model for the rules in the fictional game of love. Medieval readers took The *Art of Love* seriously, and this along with troubadour poetry, influenced the best-known treatise on love from the medieval period: *The Art of Courtly Love*, by Andreas Capellanus. *The Art of Courtly Love* was written in Northern France between 1186 and 1196, and is therefore contemporary to the romances that will be the focus of this paper. [20] In it, Capellanus gives two sides of the debate that existed between the church and the troubadours. For example, Andreas describes love as being "derived from sight," and that, "love is suffering."[21] These ideas he seems to take from both Ovid and the troubadours. However, unlike Ovid, he stresses constancy in love over than promiscuity. In his treatise, like in the Ventadorn poem, he describes love as a "rein," and he makes the woman out to be the lord in the relationship.[22] However, despite the way that Capellanus states in the first part of his treatise that love should only exist outside of marriage, he ends with a religious and misogynist message, undoing what he had said before. This however, did not stop romancers from using the first half of his treatise.

Therefore, it is evident that the troubadours' biggest gift to romance authors was an idealized model of courtly love, which had its roots in antiquity, but which

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[19] Ibid, 68.
[20] John F Benton, "The Court of Champagne as a Literary Center" Speculum, 36:4 Oct. 1961: 579.
[21] Andreas Capellanus, The Art of Courtly Love. trans. John Jay Parry (New York: Columbia U.P. 1960) 28.
[22] Ibid, 29.

shows us how conceptions about love were being reformatted and recreated in the 12th century. This new concept of love was specific to the medieval aristocracy, debating concepts that were important and pertinent to medieval society during its formative period. Romancers however did not subscribe to any one model of love, but instead used it as an amorphous concept that could be constantly redefined. For example, they also were influenced by hagiography and theological texts, as can be seen through the way Chrétien, for example, treats the act of lovemaking as a mystical experience.

This aspect of romance was influenced by Bernard de Clairvaux's mysticism, as he thoroughly sexualizes his relation with God, even referring to "the union between God and man" as a mystical marriage where Bernard is the bride and Christ is the Bridegroom.[23] In his sermons, Bernard often speaks of kissing Christ. He writes, "It satisfies the Bride to receive the Bridegroom's kiss, although it is not a kiss from the mouth… [instead] it is appropriate to think of the Holy Spirit as the kiss." Bernard's sermons on the *Song of Songs* were widely read and influential for secular authors as well as ecclesiastical ones. Thus, romancers took a similar, yet essentially different path by spiritualizing the erotic, instead of eroticizing the spiritual. Because of this inversion, the eroticism also marks the conflict between romance ideology and hagiography for Lancelot is also a saint in the religion of love rather than in the true religion."[24] While drawing on orthodox Christian sources, romance has changed them, making a subversive religion of love that recreates the all-powerful love of God

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[23] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermons on The Song of Songs*, in Bernard de Clairvaux: Selected Works, trans. by G. R. Evans. (San Francisco: Harper Collins P, 1987) 99.
[24] Gaunt, "Romance and Other Genres," The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance, 52-53.

that Bernard described. Bernard would be furious. It is evident that romance references these other genres that would be familiar to its audience, yet it also questions their values and replaces them with its own morality: one where love of a woman, rather than love of God, became the central goal of its heroes.

Equally important in romance's conception was the Chanson de Geste. This genre was the grandchild of the classical epic, and thus the genre was heroic, grand, and supposedly historical. These stories often dealt with war and battle, whose purpose was to form the hero's identity. Romance in turn took on many of the chanson de geste's conventions. This can be seen in the way that both genres often employ a similar cast of courtly characters, and the quest for masculine identity remains central to both. However, once again romance differs greatly from its predecessors.

In a Chanson de Geste, the hero receives his identity through external acts viewed favorably by his community, and thus glory in war becomes the most important aspect in the formation of a hero's knightly identity.[25] For example, in the *Chanson de Roland*, Roland is able to achieve his final identity only through heroic death in battle. In the battle at Roncevalles, Roland willingly chooses to sacrifice himself, preferring to meet the Saracen horde in a mismatched battle only to be overrun by his enemies, killing them all and dying himself. When he dies, he is immediately taken to heaven by a group of saints and angels: the ultimate glorification of identity for the crusading Christian warrior. The anonymous author, who calls himself Turoldus, recounts Roland's heroic death saying,

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[25] Kay, "Courts, Clerks, and Courtly Love," Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance 52.

> "Desuz lui met s'espee e l'olifan;
> Turnat sa teste vers la paiene gent.
> Pur ço l'at fait que il voelt veirement
> Que Carles diet e trestute sa gent,
> Li gentilz quens, qu'il fut mort cunquerant.
> Cleimet sa culpe e menut e suvent;
> Pur ses pecchez Due en puroffrid lo guant."
>
> ("He places his sword and Oliphant beneath him;
> Toward the Pagan host he turned his head,
> Because it was his earnest wish that
> Charles and all his men should say
> That he, the noble count, had died victoriously.
> He confesses his sins over and over again;
> For his sins he proffered his glove to god.")[26]

It becomes evident that his identity is ultra-masculine, and formed through the combination of prowess on the battlefield, loyalty to the emperor, and faith in God. Roland achieves perfection in this moment because he embodies the crusader and saintly ideal of the martyr. Through this, along with refusal to call for help, he mimics Christ, and because of it, he enjoys unmatched fame, as well as salvation. Thus, Roland is shown to achieve a perfect form of knightly identity. Romancers were aware of this type of hero, but again chose to differentiate themselves.

In romance, on the other hand, heroes achieve perfection differently, or they are shown unable of such a feat. They realize their knightly identity in different ways than through battle and piety, and in romance being the hero does not mean that one is flawless. This is evident in the way that, as Chrétien proves to us in *Le Conte du Graal*, Perceval can be the best knight in the world in terms of fighting, but he still fails on his quest due to his lacking of spiritual virtue. This is because as chivalry, which was the knightly code of conduct, becomes more debated and complex, it

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[26] Anonymous, La Chanson de Roland, trans. Glyn Burgess (London: Penguin Books, 1990) vv. 2359- 2365.

began to apply to things like love and hospitality rather than simply to war. Thus, while borrowing from the content of the Chanson de Geste, Romance simultaneously took a sharp turn away from its tracks, thereby again claiming the authority of past texts, while at the same time denying and opposing their ideologies. This newfound focus on love taken from the troubadours began to constitute the formation of knightly identity in romance. However, despite love's importance in this hybrid genre, war and piety become incorporated into the practice of "courtly love," making it evident that Romance still drew strongly on Chanson de Geste.

This important change made in romance proves how concepts from the troubadours, as well as from the jongleurs of the chanson de Gestes were combined and assimilated to form a new genre that was therefore both genres and neither: a hybrid. Thus, romance took what it needed from these genres, before finally distancing itself from them. These differences and innovations would have been evident to the medieval audience, who would have been aware of all three genres and their conventions. Thus, romance was essentially different and new, despite its apparent similarities with these past genres.

The Chanson de Geste, however, influenced romance in yet another important way. While I have dealt primarily with interrelation of the content of the two genres, they are also related in form. By form I mean the which Chanson de Gestes were written as oral texts. Thus, *Roland* is a written text, but it presents itself as a jongleur's oral recital. This can be seen through the oral convention of repetition in storytelling. For example, throughout *The Chanson de Roland* the narrator repeatedly refers to Charlemagne's beard in a formulaic. He says Charlemagne, "ki la barbe ad

canue," "ki ad la barbe blanche," and "ki la barbe ad flurie."[27] This type of repetition was a useful mnemonic device for jongleurs reciting tales, allowing them to return to a refrain at various times throughout the text in order to aid his memory of the story.[28] In *Roland*, the supposed orality of the text is merely a mirage, hiding the fact that the text was actually thoughtfully composed.

In romance, clerks were aware of this tradition of composing a text as though it were a story to be recited orally from memory. However, they expanded and improved upon this tradition, by doing away with the illusion of orality, and supplanting it with a new type of authorship and new authorial personas. Thus, the romancer supplants the jongleur as the teller of the tale, and this entails change. Romance still draws upon oral tradition, citing, for example, Celtic stories as a source, but they mostly use these oral sources in terms of content and not form. This means that they do not try and present their texts as oral like the author of Roland, but rather as translations of oral tradition in written form. Therefore, romancers "seem conscious of the fact that theirs is a written medium."[29] This marks a significant break from the illusory orality of the later chansons de geste that survive in manuscripts today. However, romances were still written in order to be recited, and thus they retain some vestiges of orality.

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[27] Anonymous, La Chanson de Roland. vv. 2308, 2334, 2353.
(trans. by Glynn Burgess: Charles, "with the hoary-white beard," "with the white beard," "with the hoary white [flowery] beard" – note: I believe that flurie, rather than meaning hoary-white, is more literally translated as flowery as it is closely related to the old French word fleurir, meaning to adorn with flowers. Burgess prefers to stress the repetitive aspects of the text with his translation however, rather than the literal translation.)
[28] Simon Gaunt, Retelling the Tale: an Introduction to Medieval French Literature (London: Duckworth Press, 2001) 31.
[29] Ibid, 41.

Romance's position at the midpoint between written and oral tradition is significant because, in chanson de geste, an oral tradition, the speaker and the story-teller have the same voice, and we are meant to agree with it, while in romance on the other hand, a written tradition, the author and the narrator, or story-teller, have different voices. Thus, the oral voice remains, but the illusion of orality is made evident by the inclusion of the secondary figure of the author himself. This allows us to question the narrator, because writing, "enables, one might even say encourages, critical distance and irony as the author becomes a quasi-fictional, absent figure whose words are mediated through the book."[30] Also new is the way that, rather than voicing and reflecting the communal values of courtly society by elliciting our approval like the jongleur does, the romancer "may become more powerful, a revealer of concealed, unknown truths."[31] Thus, these texts become far more complex in terms of their meaning, allowing for a rich literary tradition, where authors had more freedom with which to compose their texts. Thus, the creation of an authorial persona opposed to his narrative voice was inaugurated.

At the same time authors of history like Bede, Gildas, Wace and most of all, Geoffrey of Monmouth's, in his *The History of the Kings of Britain*, acted as another influence on the genre of romance. These histories were also informed by chanson de geste due to their shared subject matter: great feats of war. These two genres both inform each in various ways that set the stage for romance's conventions, allowing us to deem the genre of romance a hybrid.

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[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.

Geoffrey of Monmouth, for example, provided the much of the basis for the Arthurian legend, both by firmly cementing the tale in popular culture and memory, and by providing a specific framework for the geography and chronology of Arthur's life. This world soon became the backdrop for much of romance. Romancers used Monmouth's text as a source when writing Arthurian romance, for it provided the basis for the myth, and a framework within to work. Significantly, Monmouth makes it clear that his story does not have its source in Roman antiquity, which marks a clear break with the writings of many of his contemporaries who looked back to Rome for inspiration. Instead, Monmouth claims that his sources are from, "a certain very ancient book written in the British language… [and he says that] I have taken the trouble to translate the book into Latin."[32] This shift in interest and imagination from Rome to Northern Europe was followed by romancers, as they began to prefer composing stories set in Arthurian times to ones set in antiquity. This idea of a transfer of glory and wisdom from Rome to Britain has been called the *Translatio Studii*, and was used by Monmouth and repeated by Chrétien de Troyes in his prologue to Cligès, in order to give added authority and prominence to cultures that were not as old as Rome, but which were now well established and desired autonomy from Classical cultural dominance.

Rome, in medieval thought, was an imagined ideal society that represented at once prosperity, political unity, victory, glory, and honor in battle. Thus, much like a Roman emperor, Monmouth's King Arthur conquers the entire Western world, and finally, Rome itself. Through this fictional yet ultimate act of conquest, Arthur

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[32] Geoffrey Monmouth, The History of the Kings of Britain, trans. Lewis Thorpe (London: Penguin Books, 1966) 51.

recreates the unity of the Roman world and even surpasses Rome's glory, making Arthurian times into a new golden age. This aspect of his history makes his idea that Britain is the new Rome evident; it is certainly a proto-nationalist political agenda. However, though Monmouth claims Breton sources, he still translates into Latin. Thus, he only goes halfway, celebrating and creating an imaginary history with which to supplant the glorious history of Rome, but without denying Latin its preeminence as a language. Thus, romancers take this final step, proclaiming their own language equal in beauty to Latin, thereby improving on the idea of *translatio studii.*

Monmouth also opens some important themes that appear in romance such as, for example, the debate concerning the political implications of adultery. In his story, Arthur is born of an adulterous relationship, and then dies because of one, effectively ending his dynasty. Adultery appears repeatedly throughout the text, almost always with negative consequences, influencing later authors by providing a framework of how it was to be viewed, and how it has negative political consequences. Romancers however often did not always follow his formula for how adultery effects society, but they were certainly aware of his opinion. The biggest difference in their treatments of adultery is that Monmouth's story lacks all psychological depth when discussing adultery, preferring simply to describe what happened, and what were its negative consequences. Also important is the way that later authors recognized that Monmouth's supposedly historical text was fictional, and that despite this, they still used them. This is because the claim that the texts were historical, whether true or not, allowed romancers to make a more stable claim to historical authority. This authority from, and setting in the past, allowed then to reflect on contemporary

medieval society in an indirect way. The audience would have understood that fiction holds veiled truth, and that it can therefore reflect the present despite the fact that the action is supposed to be in the past. History on the other hand makes its meaning apparent. Monmouth says in his introduction: "if I had adorned my page with high-flown rhetorical figures, I should have bored my readers, for they would have been forced to spend more time in discovering the meaning of my words than in following the story."[33] Thus, for Monmouth, the narrative itself is presented as meaning. On the other hand, romance presented readers with hidden truths and enigmas, therefore creating stories with very different intentions than that of history, yet all the while being under its influence. History and hagiography therefore, though they perhaps played less important roles in the creation romance's conventions than the chanson de geste and troubadour poetry, did unmistakably influence romance in ways that are essential to our understanding of the genre.

It becomes apparent that romance was not born of any one dominating influence, but was instead an amalgam of the different literary trends available to the authors of the day, with specific parts chosen from each as was convenient. This hybrid genre was, over the course of a century, to evolve on its own. As romance evolved, the questions it raised were not so much reflections on the past genres, like in early romances, but they began relate other romances, causing a internal conversation within the genre. Thus just as early romance engaged in discussions with past genres, once the literary trend was well established, so romances began to engage each other. These romances of the second generation, originating sometime

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[33] Ibid.

around the 1170's will be the main focus of our discussion, as they provide modern readers with deeper insights into important aspects of medieval society that cannot be experienced elsewhere. The period that they represent was also a formative one in western thought, and it has sometimes been called a Western 'renaissance,' due to the rise of humanism and scholasticism. It is evident that the radical changes in thought that were taking place amongst medieval society's elites, both clerical and lay, are manifested in romance. Through careful reading of these texts, one can discern the tensions and debates present in medieval aristocratic society due to this formative time. We must leave exactly what these tensions were for a later discussion, and instead return to our discussion of romance as a genre, for as Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner points out, "We cannot begin to consider the genre's themes and issues without fully engaging the playful shapes of romance."[34]

In order to understand the changes referred to above, we will have to examine more closely romance's chronology. According to Michel Zink, the first romances appeared sometime between 1150 and 1170.[35] Importantly, these early romances all used antiquity as their background. Thus, early romance was confined by the obligation to transmit classical stories for medieval courtly society to enjoy. For example, the *Roman d'Eneas* is transmitting Vergil's *Aeneid*, while the Roman de Thebes is a version of Statius' *Thebaid*. One reason to explain this aspect of early romance is political, in that medieval kings were attempting to establish a cultural and

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[34] Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, "The Shape of Romance in Medieval France" The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000) 27.
[35] Zink, Medieval French Literature: An Introduction, 150.

literary link between themselves and their classical past.[36] Thus, if the kings of France could have Charlemagne to tell stories about, why could England not claim Aeneas' grandson Brutus as its founder?

There was however another reason behind this, in that the authors were trying to give themselves authority by basing their stories on classical sources. They were attempting to transmit ancient "history" to the aristocracy, as well as to celebrate their own language and achievements through comparisons with Imperial Rome and its culture. However, they did make changes, often downplaying the roles of the pagan gods, in preference for the magical and the miraculous.[37] Also, they notably they made love central to their stories. This added importance given to 'courtly love' is what set early romance its antique sources.

Soon after the genre of romance was well established, it began to change into a more free, original, and innovative genre that was less constrained by the obligation to transmit stories, and more preoccupied with the act of creating them. And so, as early romance adopted the antique world for its geography and chronology, later romances often but not explicitly, utilized the age of King Arthur as a backdrop, thus moving northwest in geography to Britain and France, and forward in time to a less distant past. This change happened sometime around the 1170's, and can be clearly seen in a comparison between Chrétien de Troyes' works with an earlier romance.[38] Thus, the historical became secondary, as romancers searched for different kind of truths. The need for new meaning came from the fact that no one believed the

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[36] Ibid, 51.
[37] Ibid, 52.
[38] Ibid, 150.

histories about King Arthur to be true, and thus, "the claim to historical truth became untenable."[39] We must look closely at Chrétien de Troyes as a key innovator in redefining romance along Arthurian terms, in order to tell what these new truths to be found in romance were.

Chrétien "did not so much invent romance as guide it firmly in a direction that it had already taken. The link between love and chivalry, the "author – character dialectic", and the play on plurality of perspectives are already present… However Chretien does innovate in that love becomes no only the source of the hero's new social identity… but also an experience that leads to spiritual progress."[40] Thus, we have an added importance given to questions about the interrelation between love, marriage, chivalry, and identity. These debates lead to the creation of novel ways of representing love and spirituality, among other things. This discussion of love as a creator of identity had already existed, but its prominence in the genre and the new ways in which this love was treated and questioned were novel. These changes bear witness to the new kinds of truths created in Arthurian romance.

However, there was also another important innovation. This was the unprecedented prominence given to human psychology, subjectivity, and interiority. This manifested itself in romance's characters and their identities, as oftentimes we hear the hero's thoughts, see from his perspective, or are given descriptions of his feelings. However, the way that the authors included themselves in their works allows us insight into the author's, or more likely the authorial persona's, mind as well as

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[39] Ibid, 53.
[40] Gaunt, "*Romance and Other Genres*" The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance 52.

that of his characters, giving an added edge to this new focus on human psychology. Authors like Chrétien de Troyes form intricate authorial personalities as the narrator, which, in the case of *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*, mirror the way that Lancelot, his hero, is described. This can be seen the way that Chrétien describes himself saying "come cil qui est suens antiers,"[41] or "for I'm completely her servant."[42] Thus, Chrétien makes an interesting parallel between his own relation of author to patron, who is Marie de Champaigne, and Lancelot's selfless relation with Guenevere, his *domna*. In both cases the man is subject entirely to his lady's will, and both must work hard to prove themselves to her. Thus, Chrétien has successfully implicated himself in his work on many different levels: acting as author, narrator, and a supposedly real representation of his protagonist.

Chrétien, and other romancers, also assumes a more personal voice as the narrator taking on, for example, humorous and ironic tones. Along with this is the incredibly important act of self-naming, which authors like Chrétien de Troyes, Marie de France, and Béroul all include in their works. This was a different for medieval authors, when works were often circulated anonymously or under false pretenses. This added importance given to authorship quickly became an important part of the genre of romance, as authors were able to add another layer of meaning to their works that compared the act of creating a romance to the act of creation of identity that exists in the romances themselves. Thus romance is a self-reflexive genre, as it

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[41] Chrétien De Troyes, *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*, ed. Charles Méla, (Paris: Livre De Poche, 1992) vv. 4.
[42] Chrétien De Troyes, *Lancelot: The Knight of the Cart*, trans. Burton Raffel (New Haven: Yale UP, 1997) v. 4.

creates important links between the author, and the narrator of the text, as well as between other romances.

As I stated earlier, romancers imply that there is a disconnection between the authorial persona and the narrator. This can be seen most clearly in *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*'s epilogue, in which Chrétien states that the story's ending has not been narrated by him, but by another clerk named Godefroy de Leigni. Thus, he makes it apparent that the author is not necessarily the narrator, as the prologue would have us believe, and that therefore the text's author may even be deceiving us through his created persona as the narrator.[43] Thus, these literary innovations place a newfound importance on the act of writing and on the personality of the author, by allowing the author to play with his audience's expectations.

Another key aspect of romance, evident in the ways that romances changed over time, is the way in which romances interrelate with one another. This creates a dialogue between authors that would serve to make romance appear unstable and contradictory, when the genre is viewed as a whole. For example, as I discussed earlier, romances all deal with the theme of love, but they come to different conclusions, or no conclusion at all. However, these contradictory characteristics do not destabilize the genre, but rather serve to define it. Thus, romance is a genre where authors could take certain set themes, and deal with them in any way they liked. Thus, romance was, as Michel Zink calls it, "the freest of genres."[44] Though I have previously stated that romance was formed based on difference with other genres, it

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[43] Bruckner, "The Shape of Romance in Medieval France" The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance 15.
[44] Zink, Medieval French Literature: An Introduction 51.

was most fully defined by its own conventions, which also contain many disparities amongst themselves. While romance appears to have been formed from external influences, its full shape was formed by the internal conflicts and debates that were repeated throughout the genre's collective whole. Let us now attempt to form a more distinct definition of the genre of romance, and in turn, to define the subgenre of the romance of adultery.

Romance as a genre must therefore be seen to be both a product of external forces, or influences from other genres, as well as a result of the internal conflicts. Therefore, while romance does define itself in opposition to other genres, it also defines itself in opposition to itself. This can be clearly seen in the ways that Béroul and Thomas give us vastly different views concerning love and adultery. For example, Béroul comically celebrates the lovers' overturning of courtly society's system of values, while Thomas observes the lovers from a greater distance, often with a seemingly negative view of their sins, though he leaves ultimate judgment up to his audience. Thus, while Béroul attempts to portray Tristan and Iseult as heroic, Thomas' stance is far more obscure, asking us to discern our own truth. It becomes apparent that romance allowed its authors' a large amount of freedom to find their own way to treat familiar content, though the genre's form and themes remained constant.

This instability is also partly due to its being a "courtly" genre. This can be seen in how patrons commissioned romances with a lay aristocratic audience in mind, from authors who were not of this secular order because they were clerks. The audience, who were secular, of mixed gender, and noble, dictated romance's themes

based on what was the most enjoyable and relevant to them, while the clerks had to interpreted them. In the goal of entertainment and enlightenment, these romances must depict the fantasies of courtly society as well as indirectly reflect its realities. These fantasies attest to certain tensions within the realities courtly society, which become evident when we see how Count Philip of Flanders in 1175 violently had his wife's lover drowned in a gutter, while at about the same time, Marie de Champaigne commissioned *Le Chevalier de la* Charrette, a romance that seems to celebrate adultery.[45]Thus, we are dealing with two sets moralities: a realistic one against a fantastical one. On top of this, there is the inevitable conflict between the secular audience and the ecclesiastical authors. As Sarah Kay points out, these tensions arise in part because, "On one hand, an attempt is made to unite both groups in a common ideology… On the other hand, such an ideology [like the concept of spiritual love] also admits the incompatibility of the two groups, since the discourse of one (the clegy) is used metaphorically to endorse the sexual proclivities of the other (the laity) which, in reality, the clergy (and especially those in the major orders), were exhorted to condemn."[46] Therefore, since the authors of these texts were clerks who were of the ecclesiastical order, and their audience was the secular aristocracy, romance can be seen as the result of the interaction between these two inherently linked, yet at the same time intrinsically opposed groups. This is at the heart of many of the tensions present in romances unstable moral code, and is therefore central to understanding our confusion at the lack of cohesion within the genre.

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[45] Kay, "Courts, Clerks, and Courtly Love" The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance 82-83.
[46] Ibid, 93

In conclusion, a basic definition of romance is that it is a courtly genre that mainly focuses on questions surrounding love and masculine identity. These traits can be seen from the way that the targeted aristocratic audience is reflected and idealized by the characters and themes within the romances. Also important to the creation and definition of romance as a genres is its newfound interest in human psychology. This leads the authors to take a different, more personal stance in regards the act of writing and creating romance: an act which truly enriches the genre and creates new layers of interpretation, stemming from the interesting interplay between author, audience, and text.

However, this definition still falls short of the intricacies of the genre. Romance is also aptly defined both by the use of certain narrative conventions. Romancers composed their manuscripts by using similar structures and themes. The genre is also defined by its intrinsic instability as a genre due to the multiplicity of views and approaches concerning these conventional themes. This is explicable in part due to the tensions within the intended courtly audience itself, as well as the tensions between the clerical authors and their lay audience. The fact that two oppositional forces, one based on similarities due to generic conventions and the other on differences due to debates within courtly society, can define romance further supports this definition of romance as being inherently unstable and paradoxical. It is this instability, and the confusion that results from it, which continues to inspire interest and debate about romance, keeping us asking questions. Thus, this defining aspect of romance, manifested in the way that we cannot seem to pin down exactly what romance means or entails, is what has secured romance's place in western

thought and culture, effectively influencing people's imagination for centuries after its inception.

One of the main ways that romance has influenced western culture and imagination is through our conception of love. Of course the love described in romance is purely fictional, but one cannot deny its impact on our collective imaginations. For example, the *Tristan and Iseut* story's initial popularity has influenced hundreds, possibly even thousands, of reinterpretations. The basic plot of these stories is that firstly two lovers fall deeply in love, then their desire for each other is made impossible by external or internal boundaries that they must struggle to overcome, and finally their mutual love for one another and desire to be reunited leads to their shared noble death, or a similar form of self-destruction. An example of how this story reappears throughout the centuries in western popular culture would be to compare *Tristan and Iseut* to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, or to the film *Titanic*, both of which follow this basic model of the tragic love story. A major part of *Tristan and Iseut*'s legacy can be seen western culture's fascination with, and treatment of adultery, which has remained common in stories about passionate love affairs. However, it has been argued that *Tristan* was inspired by other sources, whether they are classical, Persian, or Celtic, and this fact is undoubtedly true, making the legend a link in a larger chain of the tragic love story. Nonetheless, due to its popularity, the Tristan legend's influence on western literature is undeniable.

In *Tristan*, adultery is the key factor of the romance, as acts as a catalyst, starting the action of the story, and allowing to narrative to progress until it finally is the cause of the lovers' tragic death. Thus, adultery acts, on its most basic level, as

narrative device in the story, causing the boundary between the lovers to exist, which causes the story to change and the lovers to adapt. However, adultery plays a much greater role in the *Tristan* texts, in that it also gives the them meaning, causing the audience to question marriage in terms of love, and in turn, to question love in terms of Christian morality. The theme of adultery also highlights many of the tensions within courtly society, such as the conflicting codes of feudalism and religion that are seen in *Tristan*'s referencing the marriage debate as well as in the perceived critique of medieval law. It is therefore understandable why romance adopted adultery as a theme, or why adultery remains part of our collective imagination.

Adultery is, and always will be a common fantasy. Like many artfully constructed fantasies, it challenges and subverts society's institutions and allows the audience to indulge in a dream of desire. As Flaubert has so wonderfully illustrated in Madame Bovary, the satisfaction of our desires can never truly be attained, even though we think we desire satisfaction. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen also refers to desire in this way, and in interpretation of Lacan's theories on the subject, tells us that, "desire never seeks gratification, only continual postponement; disaster attends obtainment."[47] Therefore, what lovers really want is to try to attain their desire, all the while imagining what its satisfaction would be like, without ever fulfilling it, as the reality can never be as pleasing as the fantasy. The same is the case in romances of adultery. The lovers desire each other, but often are both willingly and unwillingly separated. Thus, in romance, lovers' desires are never fully contented, and instead they prolong their suffering so as to continue living a fantasy of ideal love, proving

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[47] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Masoch/Lancelotism," The New Literary History 28.2 1997: 246.

that authors of romance were aware of the unfortunate aspects of love, due to the impossibility of truly fulfilling a fantasy. Adultery in romance highlights this ill-fated characteristic of desire, by making love between the adulterous couple unable to coexist with society, which acts as the representation of the real that rejects their ideal, and thereby gives cause for a text's tragic, or problematic, ending. This being said, it makes some sense why adultery would be a common theme in medieval romance. Its holds this place in our imagination because, according to de Rougemont, it represents society's hidden self-destructive desires, as seen in *Tristan* by the lovers' choice of the unattainable ideal, over the reality of the court.[48] While this characterization of adultery is a helpful start, in cannot explain all of the intracicies contained within this theme.

In order to do this, we will have to examine and define what is the romance of adultery. In order to do this, we must discern what is a romance of adultery, and what is not. The most basic criteria is that it is a subgenre of romance, existing within the unstable boundaries of the romance genre as previously described. Secondly, it is evident that adultery is central to the subgenre. Thus, romances about marriage, such as Chrétien de Troyes' *Erec et Enide* or *Yvain*, are not romances of adultery because they deal primarily with issues concerning marriage, and marriage rather than adultery constitutes the hero's identity in these texts. On the other hand, *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* is a romance of adultery, because of the adulterous love described in it between Guinevere and Lancelot, and because this type of love defines Lancelot's knightly identity.

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[48] Denis De Rougemont, Love in the Western World, trans. Montgomery Belgion (New York: Pantheon, 1956) 21.

In romances of adultery, there is a wealth of common themes and debates at play, causing a rich interplay between the texts that comprise the subgenre. For my essay, the texts that I will work with are the French versions of the *Tristan and Iseut* story from the twelfth century, thus those of Béroul and Thomas as well as the two *Folies* texts, and Chrétien de Troyes' *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*. The Lais of Marie de France, and the Vulgate cycle also apply, but will not be the focus of this essay, as Lancelot, Tristan, and their queens are not only the primary figures in romance connected with the act of adultery, but it seems to me that Chrétien is responding and reevaluating the Tristan tradition in his creation of Lancelot, creating interesting interrelation that deserves an in depth evaluation.

The themes and debates that recur within, and thus constitute, the subgenre of the romance of adultery surround the ideal of "courtly love," as it was preached by Andreas Capellanus and the troubadours. For them, love cannot exist within marriage, and thus it must be adulterous if it is to be true. The adultery in these texts has also been explained as being caused by a debate about marriage between the church and the aristocracy that was raging during the twelfth century. At the time, the secular version of marriage, which was defined by endogamy, the right of repudiation at will by the man, and the lack of consent due to familial control over matters pertaining to marriage, was losing its prominence and being replaced by the church model of marriage.[49] This lay model was set in place in order to ensure that the inheritance of property was passed on in a way that financially beneficial to the families involved. The church was directly opposed this type of marriage, and required that marriage be

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[49] Gaunt, "Marginal Men, Marcabru and Orthodoxy: The Early Troubadours and Adultery" Medium Aevum 57.

exogamous, indissoluble, and consensual.[50] Thus, the secular powers felt justifiably perturbed that the church would meddle in affairs as important to their society as the practice of marriage. For example, if a lord could not divorce a barren woman, he could not produce an heir and had no recourse to change this situation. Their property was, in part, what gave these lords their authority, and they fought hard to keep their rights over marriage practices. However, the church fought back, and was slowly able to impose its own model on laypeople by the pontificate of Alexander III (1159-1181), though the secular model of marriage struggled, in aristocratic circles, to stay alive for centuries to come.[51]

Thus, romancers entered into this debate, and romances of adultery like *Tristan and Iseut* have been seen to support aspects of the ecclesiastical model of marriage, despite glorifying adultery.[52] This is because the love in romances of adultery lasts forever and is consensual, proving that aspects of this new version of marriage were ultimately attractive to courtly audiences, despite their social status. Tristan consummates his relationship with Iseut before Marc does, making him, in the eyes of the Church, her real husband. The way that adultery could be supporting the Church's views on marriage creates an interesting paradox, in that the adultery initially seemed to subvert the church's moral code, because it is a sin, though it also appears to support and complement the Church's beliefs about marriage. It also brings to mind the question of Christian morality. If we view the lovers as married based on the Church's model then the lover's sinfulness is effectively negated.

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[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid, 55.
[52] Sahar Amer, "Re-Defining Marriage and Adultery in Béroul's Roman de Tristan." Romance Languages Annual XI 1999: 1

The adulterous love that exists in these romances causes other themes to recur throughout the texts as well. For example, because the love is adulterous, secrecy and trickery becomes necessary. This also reflects the realities and insecurities of court life, where privacy was scarce and gossip abounded. Thus, deception becomes a theme of these texts, and is enacted both visibly and verbally, by the characters as well as by the authors and narrators. These ruses, necessary because of the act of adultery, are meant to allow the lovers to overcome the series of boundaries set up by society that attempt to impede their love. These boundaries can be characters like the lausingiers, physical frontiers like rivers, or simply the choice to part made by the lovers themselves. Thus, the boundaries can be external and physical, or internal and imagined. Nonetheless, they are there and they provide the story with its action, because the act of overcoming boundaries allows the narrative to progress, though not without difficulty or trickery.

As a result of society's opposition towards the lovers, love in romances of adultery can be called anti-social force. This can be seen in the most easily through the political implications of adultery for the medieval aristocracy. Therefore, if inheritance through bloodlines was deemed all-important for society's preservation and well being, then adultery threatened this system. "The status of the queen's adultery is different from that of the king's infidelity… [because] the queen's conception of an illegitimate child threatens the proper succession of the throne in a way that the birth of a king's bastard does not."[53] Thus, in reality adultery was anti-

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[53] Peggy McCracken, The Romance of Adultery: Queenship and Sexual Transgression in Old French Literature (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1998) 18.

social in that it could subvert the practice of inheritance, which was the very heart of courtly society. This anti-social aspect of love is repeated throughout these romances, and is central to understanding the role of adultery in them. For McCracken, romances represent society's insecurities over woman in power, and their power to deceive.[54] This occurs because, "while medieval queens accused of adultery defended their innocence through oaths or the ordeal, romance queens use tests and ordeals not to disprove a false accusation but to falsify the proof of a true accusation."[55] Thus, the lovers are often pitted against society, which they must deceive in order to prove themselves its superior, and to simply continue loving one another.

Thus, while the their love is opposed by society, and the ruse allows the lovers to overcome society, the lovers are also shown to be able to escape society altogether. Thus, in an "otherworld" of romance, desires are given free reign. There are boundaries between these worlds and courtly society that are similar, yet in some ways different, to the types of boundaries discussed above. These other-worlds "are thus at one and the same time narrative devices [to start or change the story] and the repositories of everything "we" lack and are not, and everything "we" would like to have and to be... [Thus, when these other worlds collide with the realities of courtly society in romances, the text] becomes a story and engenders meaning."[56] Thus, the of the otherworld is a tool that plays an especially important part in romances of adultery, because in these other worlds, places where fantasy becomes an alternate

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[54] Ibid, 23.
[55] Ibid, 20.
[56] Jeff Rider, "The Other Worlds of Romance" The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance, ed. by Roberta L. Kreuger, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000) 129.

reality, adultery can happen with a variety of different consequences for the court and the lovers, or even without consequences.

It becomes apparent that this is a complex and inconsistent subgenre within the already unstable genre of romance. It is sometimes seen as being subversive, and other times not. Also, the lovers sometimes die for their sin, and other times do not. We cannot expect to find a moral consensus amongst the authors of romances of adultery, though we do find similarities, just like in the genre of romance. The authors of these romances also create authorial personas separate from the narrator, so as to question and comment on the texts from a distance, in some instances trying to sway the reader's opinion, and in others demanding that we form our own opinions. Thus, romances are surprising both from how themes repeat throughout its entirety, as well as by the way that when using the same literary conventions, the authors each attempt to find a novel way to present the theme. This provides us with little agreement in terms of the truths held within their shared subject matter. Only through examining how these themes recur, how they vary and how they stay the same, can we hope to discover more about this subgenre's moral code, or perhaps prove that there is none. Also, if we can understand the theme of adultery in these romances, then we can gain a greater understanding of the medieval conception of "courtly love," or *fin' amors* as they would have referred to it: a concept that has been debated by scholars and moralists since Gaston Paris first coined the term late in the nineteenth century. Our study must begin with the Tristan legend, as it exerts the most formative influence on the subgenre of the romance of adultery.

## Chapter Two: A Dialectical Approach to *Tristan* and its Scholarship

"That the Tristan myth both inaugurates and defines the dynamics of Western romantic love is a likely supposition with a rich and respected tradition."[57] In addition to this more broad characterization, the Tristan legend acted as a myth of origin for romances of adultery. It was immensely popular in oral tradition, and it elicited numerous translations in romance languages. Its influence is best seen through its creation of a new type of hero: one who is diametrically opposed to the heroes one finds in epic tradition. Roland, the archetypal hero of chanson de geste, who embodies the community, is an externally oriented hero. His identity is attached to the judgment of his peers, because it depends upon his community's acceptance of his deeds. According to Howard Bloch, Roland is, "a conformist next to the problematic hero of romance."[58] This is because Tristan is the first major medieval literary hero who is at odds with the society in which he lives. This new heroic identity was made possible due to the conflict resulting from Tristan's adulterous love of queen Iseut.

Despite this act of transgression against authority, both religious and secular, Tristan remains a hero. This is because Tristan and his narrators are not concerned with the community's acceptance of his actions. Instead they present us with, "a growing emphasis upon the subjectivity of personal vision as opposed to the commonly acknowledged vision of the group," which makes him a far more relatable

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[57] Ibid, p. 61
[58] Bloch, Howard R. *Tristan, the Myth of the State and the Language of the Self*, in *Yale French Studies*, No. 51, Yale U.P., (1974), p. 70

hero than an externally oriented hero like Roland could ever be.[59] This interiority is matched by the inclusion of unique authorial personas, as well as by each reader's duty to discover his own meaning in these stories, as our inherent subjectivity creates an endless amount of truths in each text.

I contend that the essential aspects of the Tristan myth, the hero at odds with society, the increased focus on interiority, and namely the adultery that lies at the heart of these themes and the romance itself, serve to represent Tristan and Iseut's hidden goal to equate the harsh realities of courtly society with their fantasy of desire. This impossible goal, the act of harmoniously combining two oppositional concepts, is shown to ultimately be futile in the lovers' tragic death. However, the *Tristan* legend's self-reflexivity proves through story telling, which is a form of deception, that Tristan and Iseut's hidden desire can actually be achieved through literature. In fact the *Tristan* legend itself, as it does harmoniously combine real with fantasy, is evidence of the power of fiction to succeed where Tristan and Iseut failed, thereby transcending the real.

In order to better understand this, we must begin with an evaluation of the manuscript tradition and the basic plot line of the *Tristan* texts. Following this discussion, I will turn to scholarship, centered on Tony Hunt's ideas about dialectic's influence on Romance, and how it relates to this case in specific. Hunt's article shows the Tristan legend as characterized by its internal oppositions, which is a reflection of the 12th century advancements in medieval scholasticism, namely through the inclusion dialectical argumentation in romance. This trend of dialectic, not

[59] Ibid. p. 78

coincidentally, repeats itself in the divided scholarship on Tristan, partially due to the contradictions within the text itself. The major division between these parties of critics is centered on whether or not *Tristan* is subversive. Therefore, in a dialectically inspired argument, I will first explain in what ways the myth has been found to be subversive, before turning to an explanation of the other side of the debate. The common theme surrounding most of these critic's arguments, and the scholarship as a whole, is that the Tristan legend is in many ways influenced by the realities of 12th century society, proving that fiction does inherently respond to the realities of its time and place of creation.

The texts that I will be using for my argument are Béroul's *Tristan and Iseut*, Thomas' *Le Roman de Tristan*, and the two smaller texts, called *Les Folies Tristan*, one referred to the Oxford manuscript and the other as the Berne manuscript. The texts of Béroul and Thomas are both fragmented versions of a larger story, and each one describes a distinct sequence of events that take place at different times within the chronology of the legend. Thus, they we must read both texts outside of the larger context of the legend, all the while trying to imagine them in their original context.

Béroul's *Tristan* recounts events that happen towards the middle of the story, while Thomas' text begins after Béroul's has left off, and contains the only twelfth century version of the story's tragic conclusion. This is major formal difference between the two texts, but they also differ in that Béroul's text is often referred to as the "common" version, while Thomas' is called the "courtly" version. This

distinction pertains to the style and the content of the texts, as well as to each author's personal opinions in regards Tristan, Iseut, and their shared desire.[60]

The *Folie* texts are, somewhat like lais, smaller episodes that could make up a scene in a Tristan romance. They recount Tristan's brief return to king Mark's court to see his lover Iseut, and they center on the ruses he must carry out in order to be allowed back into Iseut's bed. They too have been distinguished between the "courtly" Oxford version, and the "common" Berne version, following the same distinction as the larger texts.[61] This designation as "courtly" or "common" is a modern interpretation of the texts, though we can be certain that a courtly audience could have differentiated the bawdy humor of Béroul, with the high-flown style of Thomas.

Because of the way that all the surviving texts exist only in fragments, in order to recount the story of *Tristan and Iseut* in its entirety one would have to compile these Old French sources, as other versions that were written outside of the chronological and geographical boundaries of this study. This is what exactly what Joseph Bédier did in his *Le Roman de Tristan*, published in 1900. However, such an endeavor can never hope to contain all the intricacies of these different versions of the legend, as each time the story was recopied, the authors took certain liberties with the tale, changing various details to a variety of different effects.

Bédier assumed that there was a single written version of the *Tristan* legend, now lost, from which all these authors copied. This theory, however, has little

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[60] Lacy, Norris J., Early French Tristan Poems II. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, (1998), p. 8

[61] Lacy, Norris J., Early French Tristan Poems I. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, (1998), p. 219

evidence to support it, and to me it seems more likely that the story first existed in multiple versions that were orally transmitted by bards, and it was from these oral sources that the earliest versions of the Tristan legend were composed.[62] This would make sense; given the way that way orally transmitted story's were passed down invited constant reinterpretation. Marie de France attests to the *Tristan* legend's having existed in both forms by the 1170's.[63] In her lay about Tristan, *Chevrefoil*, she says that: "Many people have recited it to me, and I have also found it in written form."[64] If this is the case, then Béroul and Thomas could have followed different oral traditions, or written versions, when composing their texts, one bawdier and the other more refined. This reflects the differences in literary tastes at the time among literary circles, where preferences must have ranged from hagiography to fabliaux.

The large number of versions of the Tristan legend, how it travelled quickly across Europe, the many mentions of the legend by contemporaries, and most of all the profound effect of this legend on later romances, all attest to the popularity that *Tristan and Iseut* enjoyed amongst its courtly audience in the 12th century. Further proof of this is that authors like Marie de France or the authors of the *Folies* could write a scene of a Tristan story and expect their audience to be familiar with its larger context. Thus, it is evident that this text was particularly attractive to its medieval audience. This I will contend is due to the creation of the new archetype of the heroic lover pitted against the society in which he lives. However, scholars like Jean-Charles

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[62] Grimbert, Joan Tasker. *Introduction*, from Tristan and Isolde: a Casebook, ed. by Grimbert, Joan Tasker. New York: Routledge P. (2002), p. *xvii-xviii.*
[63] Zink, Michel. *Medieval French Literature: An Introduction*. Trans. Jeff Rider. Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1995, p. 150.
[64] Marie de France. *The Lais of Marie De France*. Trans. Glyn S. Burgess and Keith Busby. Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1986, p. 109.

Payen suggest that the *Tristan* stories had, "tout autant inquitété leurs lecteurs qu'ils les ont bouleversés."[65] Because of this, he goes on to suggest that the earliest versions of the Tristan legend survive in a fragmentary state because of "l'effet d'une sorte de censure."[66] In other words, he says that medieval scribes' hesitated to recopy the Tristan texts because they were deemed uncomfortable to medieval audiences due to their apparent amorality or subversiveness.[67] Zink presents this opinion, but does not subscribe to it, calling the state of the text "a sort of curse."[68] I believe that he is right in his impartial stance, as Payen's argument is impossible to prove. Nonetheless, despite his censorship theory, Payen still cannot deny that the rarity of the early manuscripts is not indicative of its popularity amongst its medieval audiences, as its celebrity can be easily witnessed through its profound influence on later literature.[69]

Though we cannot be sure of the date of conception of the Tristan legend, as it was first conceived as an oral story, scholars generally date its transition into written form sometime in the 12th century. The dates that I subscribe to are that Thomas wrote his version between 1170 and 1175, and that Béroul's version was composed between 1180 and 1200.[70] The two *Folie* texts were, according to Joan Grimbert, also

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[65] Payen, Jean Charles. *Lancelot Contre Tristan: La Conjuration d'un Myth Subversif (Réflexions sure l'Idéologie Romanesque au Moyen Age.)* in Mélanges offerts à Pierre Le Gentil par ses collègues, ses eleves et ses amis (Paris: SEDES and CDU, 1973). p. 618
(My translation: "just as much worried its readers as it deeply moved them.")
[66] Ibid.
- My translation: "the effect of a sort of censor."
[67] Ibid.
[68] Zink, Michel, Medieval French Literature: An Introduction, p. 60-61
[69] Payen, Jean Charles, *Lancelot Contre Tristan: La Conjuration d'un Myth Subversif*, p. 618
[70] Zink, Michel, Medieval French Literature: An Introduction, p. 150-151

composed in the second half of the 12th century, though we cannot be sure of their exact dates of creation.[71]

The reconstructed story of Tristan and Iseut proceeds as follows. Tristan loses his mother at birth and is entrusted to his tutor, Gouvernal. He arrives in Cornwall: the realm of his maternal uncle king Mark. Tristan and Marc soon discover that they are related, and Tristan's prowess as a knight and bard win Mark's heart, who makes Tristan his heir. When the Irish giant knight Morholt arrives in Cornwall to take his annual tribute from Mark, Tristan kills him in battle. During the battle Tristan receives a poisonous wound. He believes himself dead and sets sail alone on a boat with his harp, only to arrive in Ireland.

There, he takes on the name Tantris and, disguised as a bard, is healed by Iseut, Morholt's niece. Afterwards, Tristan returns to Cornwall where Mark's affection for Tristan incites the envy of the barons, who wish to disinherit Tristan by forcing Mark to marry. Tristan, entrusted with the quest to find a bride for his uncle, once again sets sails to Ireland. His quest is to discover the woman whose strands of golden hair have been brought to Mark by two swallows. Coincidentally, they belong to Iseut the blond.

Once in Ireland, Tristan slays a dragon that has been tormenting Iseut's kingdom, and is again poisoned. The prize for killing the dragon is Iseut's hand in marriage. Iseut, sets out to find her future husband, and once again finds a wounded Tristan. Now, she discovers that he is a knight, rather than a bard. Also, she knows that she is destined to marry Tristan because of her father's promise. Once again,

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[71] Grimbert, Joan Tasker. *Introduction*, p. *xxxi*

Iseut heals Tristan's poisoned wound. However, upon seeing the missing part of Tristan's sword match with a fragment of metal se found in her uncle's skull, Iseut realizes that Tristan killed her uncle. She prepares to kill Tristan while he is bathing. Tristan convinces her not to however, and, once fully healed, obtains her father's permission to take Iseut to King Mark, avoiding his own obligation to marry by lying and saying that he is married. On the ship to Cornwall, after Tristan and an unhappy Iseut accidently drink a love potion that was intended for Iseut's wedding night, they consummate their love.

This potion causes the text to change irreversibly, inaugurating the theme of uncontrollable asocial passion, and making the link in the text between love and death known. From this point on, the text is no longer about knightly adventures, but is instead about the adulterous relationship between two doomed lovers. Brengain, Iseut's handmaiden, must sleep with Mark on his wedding night to conceal the fact that Iseut is not a virgin. This is the first instance of deception towards Mark, but after this, Tristan and Iseut, unable to control their love for one another, repeatedly meet in secret and because of this, must deceive their enemies. The barons, as we see in Béroul's text, try repeatedly to catch the lovers in order to prove the adultery to Mark. After Tristan and Iseut succeed numerous times in thwarting their traps, they are finally caught red-handed. Both lovers are condemned to death, but Tristan escapes and in turn manages to save Iseut. They flee to the forest of Morrois, where they live a primitive life. Mark eventually finds them asleep in their forest, but in a moment of reflection, he hesitates to take his rightful vengeance by killing them. He instead symbolically reclaims Iseut through an exchange of sword, glove and ring.

After this, the lovers become anxious to return to courtly society, and Mark agrees with their decision. However, Iseut must swear an oath of innocence upon holy relics and Tristan must remain in exile. Iseut, at the end of Béroul's text, succeeds in deceiving Mark through a carefully constructed half-truth, while Tristan enters the service of Duke Hoël in Brittany. The duke's son, Kaherdin becomes Tristan's companion, and the duke's daughter, Iseut of the White Hands, becomes his wife. This is around where Thomas' text begins. However, Tristan cannot consummate his marriage due to his love of queen Iseut.

Later on, after a long period of separation from Iseut, Tristan is once again poisoned in battle, this time fated to die. He sends for Iseut instructing the messenger to raise a black sail if she has not come, and a white one if she has. His wife, Iseut of the White Hands, learns of this code, and when asked by her husband of the color of the sails, she responds that they are black. Tristan, the trickster finally deceived, believing that Iseut has abandoned him, dies on the spot. When Iseut arrives she finds Tristan and immediately dies of a broken heart in her lovers arms.

Denis de Rougemont, though contemporary critics criticize him for his overly simplistic interpretation and his lack of interest in Iseut's role in the story, opened the discussion surrounding the Tristan myth.[72] He explained *Tristan* by saying that, it is a myth that "*is needed to express the dark and unmentionable fact that passion is linked with death*."[73] He goes onto say that "Tristan and Iseult do not love one another. They say they don't, and everything goes to prove it. *What they love is love and being in*

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[72] Rabine, Leslie W., *Love and the New Patriarchy: Tristan and Isolde*, in Tristan and Isolde: a Casebook. New York: Routledge P. 2002, p. 46

[73] De Rougemont, Denis, Love in the Western World, trans. by Belgion, Montgomery, New York: Pantheon Books, (1956), p. 21

*love.*"[74] This is an interesting hypothesis, but one that has been often challenged and refuted. In fact, scholarship now claims that are shown to love each other and are therefore in a consensual relationship, which constitutes marriage.

De Rougemont claims that, "there would be no myth and no romance if Tristan and Iseult were able to say what is the end they are making ready for in the depths – indeed in the abyss – of their wills." [75] By this secret desire, De Rougemont means death. However, this is an incorrect assumption, as one can discover this secret by simply reading the texts. For example, in the *Folie d'Oxford* text, Tristan's desire for death is quite plainly stated:

"Murir desiret, murir volt,
Mais sul tant ke ele soüst
K'il pur la sue amur murrust"

"He longed for death, was eager to die,
but only if she could know
that he was dying for love of her."[76]

Also, the fact the words potion and poison that occur in the text (which are the same in Old French as in English) also serves to make this connection apparent. Thus, De Rougemont's central argument is an obvious aspect of the texts, rendering his interpretation overly simplistic.

Where de Rougemont's analysis most distresses me is when he writes, "I confess, I was vexed to find one commentator describing the Tristan legend as "an epic of adultery." The phrase may be accurate enough in the dry bones of the

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[74] Ibid, p. 41.
[75] Ibid, p. 48.
[76] Anonymous, *The Folie d'Oxford*, Trans by Rosenberg, Samuel N., in Early French Tristan Poems I, ed. by Lacy, Norris J., Cambridge: D.S. Brewer P., (1998) lines 20-23.

Romance. That does not make it any the less vexatious and 'prosaically' narrow. I doubt it can be maintained that the real subject of the legend is the moral fault… For that matter, is adultery but a nasty word, or a breach of contract?"[77] Though he may be correct in asserting that the myth's focus is not the lover's morality, the way that he deals with the question of adultery is unsatisfactory. He simply writes it off as unimportant, asking us if adultery is just a word, or a transgression. Once again, he is oversimplifying the romance so that it fits with his thesis.

What he fails to see is that adultery in romance is both these things and so much more. Adultery and its moral implications are central to these romances and is the fundamental reason behind why scholars can continue to debate *Tristan's* meanings. It is also the reason why the *Tristan* legend still enjoy so much popularity today, as it presents modern readers with an unexpected amoral theme that does not match up with most people's preconceptions of the middle ages. The reason why de Rougemont can't deal with the theme of adultery properly is because he sees, "*Tristan*, not as a piece of literature, but as typical of the relations between man and woman in a particular historical group."[78] while this love really represents an idealized desire.

Despite these problems associated with his argument, there are some good parts as well that can act as a starting point for my discussion of adultery in the *Tristan* story. Firstly, he is aware that Tristan is caught between two conflicting codes, or "religions" as he calls them, of chivalry and feudalism.[79] What he fails to

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[77] Ibid, pp. 24-25
[78] De Rougemont, p. 19
[79] Ibid, p. 33

note however, is that feudalism is a real social institution while chivalry, an idealized code of conduct, was a literary phenomenon. He also claim's that Tristan cannot turn his passion turn into a reality, making it "result in the full possession of his lady," and that this is why the lovers part ways.[80] I believe that de Rougemont was correct in this assumption. Thus, while I cannot support his argument in its entirety, his notion of the way that the real and the ideal interact throughout the text is a useful starting point for me, as he references the disconnect between society and love that is the real hidden secret behind these romances of adultery.

The more recent scholarship surrounding the *Tristan* legend has broken from de Rougemont's assertions by focusing on the questions of morality that de Rougemont tried to ignore. The complex morality in *Tristan* was far too compelling not to incite criticism. De Rougemont's influence is still alive however. His thesis that the lovers are caught between of love and death paved the way for scholars like Tony Hunt. Love and death can be seen as opposites because love involves the act of creation, while death is a form of destruction. At the same time, he does note the paradoxical nature of Tristan's efforts to make his ideal love work with the realities of courtly society, thereby highlighting yet another set of opposing forces at play within the romance.

Tony Hunt, in his article "Aristotle, Dialectic, and Courtly Literature," picks up on these contradictions and expands upon them. He argues that, "the examination of contraries is a particularly marked characteristic of the rhetorical debates of courtly

[80] Ibid, p. 35

romance and has a function in semantic determination."[81] Thus, his argument is that dialectic was an important part of scholasticism at the time, having been brought to the forefront of Western thinking by the School of Laon and by Abelard, and that it began to impose itself on Northern French literature soon after its conception.[82] He calls Abelard's *Sic et Non* the "*locus classicus* in the development of dialectic."[83] Dialectic was a way to search for and present the truth in a text. The dialectician presents both oppositional sides of an argument in an well-ordered fashion, and used reason and rhetoric to either make the reader search for meaning, or through discussion of the opposites to try transcend their differences in order to show the truth behind the contradictory forces.

However, we can see both an Abelardian influence on courtly literature (which was derived from Aristotle's writings), as well as an Ovidian influence. The Ovidian influence had enjoyed more success with the Troubadours, but Aristotelian ideas, began to be used by authors in Northern France in the 12th century in conjunction with this Ovidian influence.

A good example of this is seen in Andreas Capellanus' The Art of Courtly Love. Capellanus engages in dialectical argumentation on the subject of love, with his second book taking the form of spoken debates between lovers, showing each and every viewpoint, from a variety of different social classes, different combinations of social classes, and from both sexes. However, in his third book, Capellanus changes gears, and, "Whereas Andreas begins his treatise with the rapier of dialectic, he

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[81] Hunt, Tony, *Aristotle, Dialectic, and Courtly Literature*, Viator 10:10 (1979) p. 97.
[82] Ibid, p. 99.
[83] Ibid, p. 103.

concludes it with the sledgehammer of scriptural authority, thus ironizing the previously adduced lay authorities. Books 1 and 2 are now dismissed as mere theory (which, indeed, they were!) and by ironic inversion courtly virtues are now presented as moral vices."[84] Thus, he gives us two contradictory treatments of love, one from a student of Ovid, followed by another from a Christian moralist, and he uses dialectic to present his truth. He therefore concludes his book by refuting his initial statements, in a dialectical manner, proving the superiority of Christian morality over "courtly love." Therefore, Hunt believes that Capellanus is arguing that, "in neither authority nor argumentation can courtly love, as understood in the South, compete with the learning or moral tradition of the North. This seems to me to be the purpose of Andreas in *De Amore*: to burlesque courtly love by squeezing it in the vise of the *Logica Nova* of the northern French schools and the 'old' morality of the didactic tradition of the monasteries."[85]

Though this is not exactly the purpose of authors such as Thomas, who also makes use of dialectic throughout his *Tristan* romance, it is a useful starting point for us to see how dialectic was used. Dialectic had two principal significances: "the rhetorical expression of truth or the intellectual stimulus to the pursuit of truth, hence whether it leads to affirmation or to interrogation."[86] The way that dialectic will be most useful for this study is to show how the apparent contradictory aspects of these stories (questions like is this story morally subversive or not?) cause us to search for meaning. I contend that in no Tristan text is there a single obvious meaning within the

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[84] Ibid, 128
[85] Ibid, p. 128
[86] Ibid, p. 109

text, but that each reader is instead urged to try to use their own powers of reasoning in order to come to their own conclusions as to the morality behind the texts. Thus, as Tony Hunt points out, in order to do this we must identify the sets of opposites at play within these texts, in order to try and reason our way through them, in order to finally find a way in which the opposites can be harmoniously combined to illustrate truth.[87]

Dialectic is therefore the primary approach to understanding these texts in terms of their contradictions,. Even if there is not one single meaning to be discerned from these sets of opposites, by allowing each reader his own opinions, we find yet another way in which subjectivity permeates these texts. This is best seen when Thomas states,

> "Ore puet qui set esgart dire,
> A quel de l'amor mieuz estoit
> Ou qui greignor dour en ait."

> "Let those who know these things pronounce their verdict
> As to who came off best in love
> Or who suffered for it." [88]

He asks us to provide our own meaning, thereby creating a new sort of subjectivity for his audience, which is matched by the interiority of the characters in the romance, and in the individualized authorial persona who narrates the story. Thus, dialectic, as well as allowing us a means of understanding the texts, is also a key factor of the added importance of interiority.

In addition to this, the act of constructing an argument based on sets of opposites manifests in yet another way through the scholarship about the *Tristan*

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[87] Ibid, p. 129
[88] Thomas of England, *Tristan*, trans. by Stewart Gregory, in Old French Tristan Poems II, ed. by Lacy, Norris J. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer P., (1998) lines 1122-1124

myth. This is best seen in the way that scholars either see the text as subversive to authority, or as being in support of one aspect of society, while appearing subversive. This is an interesting development, because it means that for me to arrive at a truth, I would have to either discount one argument or find a way in which the contradictory arguments can be transcended and unified into a concise truth. The latter is the goal of this chapter.

In order to understand the scholarship surrounding the Tristan story, we must separate it into two opposing groups: those who think that the text is subversive towards both secular and religious authorities, and those who argue otherwise. At the heart of this debate is the adulterous love of Tristan and Iseut. The sexual acts of transgression cause Tristan and Iseut to subvert king Marc's authority, who occupies the roles of uncle, husband, as well being the chief representative of courtly society and secular authority. They also however, commit a mortal sin in the eyes of the Church and God. Let us first discuss the political implications of adultery, the focus of Peggy McCracken's book, The Romance of Adultery, before moving onto a discussion of the religious implications.

Queenship as a medieval institution was both difficult to define, and changed over time.[89] This change happened during the reign of Louis VII in France, or more precisely from 1136 when he married Eleanore of Aquitaine, to their divorce on the grounds of consanguinity in 1152.[90] In England, Elenore's reign as queen also marked the decline in influence associated with the institution of queenship, due to her revolt

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[89] McCracken, Peggy, The Romance of Adultery, p. 3-5

[90] Bouchard, Constance Brittain, *Eleanore's Divorce from Louis VII: The Uses of Consanguinity*, in Eleanor of Aquitaine: Lord and Lady, ed. by Bonnie Wheeler and John Carmi Parsons, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, (2003), p. 224

against her husband Henry II in 1173.[91] Before this pivotal time, the middle of the twelfth century, in royal court documents queens often appeared in lists of witnesses, and were referred to as *consortium regni*, or king's consort.[92] In this role of consort, a queen acted as the sexual partner and producer of an heir to the king, as well as his advisor. During this time, queens were susceptible to accusations by jealous barons of adultery, and could be divorced on these grounds, or if they failed to produce an heir.[93] Thus their position at court was potentially very vulnerable. French queens lost their political influence due to Louis VII's decision to consolidate royal power into a group of male officials.[94] Queens therefore became increasingly vulnerable to repudiation. Also, with the loss of her political role, queenship became a symbolic institution, associated with her sole remaining role at court: reproduction.[95] Their role as producer of an heir made adultery with a queen all the more threatening to the king and his court's authority, because feudal society was built upon bloodlines. Thus such an act directly threatens the proper succession of the authority, and is shown to be far more transgressive than, as De Rougemont suggested, "just a breach of contract."[96] In fact it is a direct attack on political authority itself, rendering this kind of adultery more than simply amoral; it is treasonous.

The fear of subversion of the royal bloodline manifests itself in romance; however, the adulterous love is also the expression of the ideal love. Here romances are again the realities, as well as the fears, of society. This is achieved at the same

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[91] McCracken, Peggy, The Romance of Adultery, p. 6
[92] Ibid, p. 4
[93] Ibid, p. 4
[94] Ibid, p. 5
[95] Ibid, p. 6
[96] Ibid, p. 18./ De Rougemont, Denis, Love in the Western World, p. 25

time as *Tristan* reflects the medieval imagination's fantasy of adulterous love with the queen: the most powerful woman in society, and in romances also the most beautiful. However, committing adultery with the queen was both deadly for those caught in the act, and severely destructive towards society, as it struck its main artery. What remains evident is that, though Romances of Adultery present us with a fictional form of love, their use of adultery has another aspect as a theme that is subversive to political authority, representing a hidden insecurity amongst courtly society. This can easily be seen from the implications that adultery brought with it in the realities of feudal society, where it was tantamount to treason.

If adultery challenges political authority in this way, then the ways that it subverts religious authority is best seen through an examination of the medieval legal system. The connection between the legal system and God exists because the medieval mind thought that God made the truth visible through external signs, which are called *li voirs*.[97] Visible proof was therefore necessary to prove guilt, and God was seen to control what was made visible. For example, lepers were thought to be internally immoral due to their external physical deformity, which was seen as proof of guilt based on God's justice.[98] However, in Béroul, Tristan's disguises himself as a leper and his use of deception subverts this idea of visible proof, making the leper instead of illustrating *li voirs*, symbolic of sexual and linguistic deviance.[99]

The medieval courts needed visible evidence as proof, and therefore, they devised various means of making God's will manifest itself at trials, which became

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[97] Burns, E. Jane, "How Lovers Lie Together: Infidelity and Fictive Discourse in the Roman de Tristan." Tristania, 8:2 (1983), p. 15
[98] Ibid, p. 24
[99] Ibid, p. 25

the essential part of the judicial proceedings. Often these trials were conducted and judged through an ordeal. In an ordeal, God was seen to intervene, proving the innocence or guilt of a certain party.[100] However, in Béroul's *Tristan*, the lovers are shown to repeatedly escape justice by deceiving their judges. Thus, the figure of the leper, who represents both the crime of unbridled sexuality and the solution to the crime through verbal and visual deception, is the perfect symbol for the lovers. Thus, the lovers prove with their ruses that, "language, like appearance, is thus shown to exist in arbitrary relation to reality."[101] This most notably happens during the trial scene at Mal Pas near the end of Béroul's text, when Iseut tricks Marc with a half-truth. Tristan, disguised as a leper, carries her across the river in front of all the court to her trial, so that she can swear to the relics that,

> "Qu'entre mes cuises n'entra home,
> Fors le ladre qui fist soi some,
> Qui me porta outre les guez,
> Et li rois Marc mes esposez."

> "No man has ever been between my thighs,
> except the leper who made himself a beast of burden
> and carried me over the ford,
> and my husband king Marc." [102]

Therefore, Iseut's oath is truthful, but it subverts justice through her masterful use of deception. The court's witnessing Tristan carrying Iseut is what allows this ruse to work by making her oath partially truthful, and this once again proves that the visible and verbal can be distorted.

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[100] Ibid, p. 15
[101] Ibid, p. 17
[102] Béroul, *Le Roman de Tristan*, in Early French Tristan Poems I, lines 4205-4208

What one wonders, however, is if God is deceived as well? God's role however, besides his miraculous intervention to save Tristan earlier in the romance, is a non-issue in this romance. Thus, "The one-to-one relationship between a criminal act and God's punishment of it, the very foundation of both legal and religious institutions in the Middle Ages, is called into question."[103] This is a major claim, in that Jane Burns is arguing that Béroul's legend undermines God's authority by valorizing the truthful lie, and by association the art of fiction.[104] Thus, God's justice is denied, and is its place, language becomes all-powerful. In this way, both McCracken and Burns provide us with concise arguments that that prove the Tristan legend's unavoidable subversiveness to the two pillars of medieval society: the monarchy and the Church. However, other scholars do not agree, instead finding proof of how the legend can be understood in relation of medieval society, rather than in opposition to it.

The inclusion of the love potion has served to complicate what would have been an obviously antisocial and immoral tale. As Tony Hunt argues in "Abelardian Ethics and Béroul's Roman de Tristan, the potion removes agency from the lovers' actions.[105] This makes their sin a venial one rather than a mortal one according to Abelard's system of intention-based ethics.[106] This is because, for Abelard, the fact that the lovers are forced to love each other by the potion removes the possibility of consent from their actions, thereby forcing them to love one another, causing them to

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[103] Burns, E. Jane, "How Lovers Lie Together," p. 25.
[104] Ibid, p. 26.
[105] Hunt, Tony. "Abelardian Ethics and Beroul's Tristran." Romania XCVIII (1977), p. 514.
[106] Ibid, p. 529.

lack any intention to sin, and absolving them of any type of serious spiritual transgression.[107] Thus, for Abelard, the morality of actions is defined by internal feelings, rather than external acts. This is in line with the fact that the *Tristan* legend presents readers with an increased focus on interiority. Hunt therefore suggests that, while, "critics have been led to assume, tacitly at any rate, that Béroul is a cynic with a penchant for deception, an amoral apologist of love… [Instead] it is appropriate, therefore, to consider how far the contrasts and apparent contradictions contained in Béroul's narrative might be harmonized in a point of view which derives from moral and religious preoccupations of the age in which Béroul lived."[108]

This is achieved through Abelard's theory of ethics, where intent is placed at the heart of sin. However, one does wonder why Tristan and Iseut remain in love with one another after the potion's effects have worn off, and why they never confess their sin. For Hunt however, this is explained by the fact that, "The virtue of their love resides in the perfect sharing of their sufferings and the absence of malice towards Mark and of contempt of God."[109] Thus, the lovers prove themselves morally upright through their efforts to remain both loyal to each other, and loyal to Mark. Thus, though they appear to be transgressing against Marc by deceiving him, the way that Iseut returns to her husband after regaining her agency proves her loyalty to Marc.[110] Loyalty was a chief virtue in feudal society, and so their actions are seen as morally upright in terms of is codes of conduct, as well as in terms of religious authority due to their sin's lacking any malicious intentions. Thus, though they do sin and

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[107] Ibid., p. 508.
[108] Ibid., p. 502-503.
[109] Ibid., p. 534.
[110] Ibid., p. 525.

transgress, it is not seriously subversive, because their intentions throughout the story remain good, thereby allowing the lovers to be cast as ideal and heroic, rather than criminally subversive.

The other major way which scholars have explained Béroul's *Roman de Tristan* as being in support of, rather than at odds with, society is through the marriage debate. As I have already explained the basic outlines of this debate, that there was a church model of marriage that was imposing itself upon the secular model of marriage, I will go on to explain its relevance to the *Tristan* legend. According to Sahar Amer, Béroul is not subverting the Church's authority, because he is in support of the ecclesiastical doctrine of consensual marriage.[111] Thus, she downplays the importance of the love potion by showing how Tristan and Iseut's feelings for each other don't change after the potion's decline, in order to prove that the lovers are actually actively in control of their destinies all throughout the text.[112] She writes, "My study shows that Tristan and Iseut are innocent NOT because they have been coerced into their love, but rather because they have consciously and freely chosen to love each other. For Tristan and Iseut are much more aware of their actions and much more active participants in their destiny than has been usually admitted. This does not make them innocent adulterous sinners (as Abelardian ethics would maintain) but rather, according to twelfth century marital laws, consensual partners in marriage." She also maintains that it is inaccurate to believe that the lovers do not suffer psychologically because of the potion, as Howard Bloch suggested, because both

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[111] Amer, Sahar, "Re-Defining Marriage and Adultery in Béroul's Roman de Tristan." Romance Languages Annual, XI, (2000), p. 1.
[112] Ibid., p. 3.

Tristan and Isuet are shown to be aware of their social decline, and the possible deadly ramifications of their actions.[113]

This is made evident by Iseut in Béroul's version:

"Je puis dire: de haut si bas!"

"I can truly say: how far I have fallen." [114]

And it is also seen in Thomas' text:

"Li rois a veu quanqu'avon fait,
Au Palais a ses omes vait;
Fra nos, s'il puet, ensenble prendre,
Par jugement ardoir en cendre.
Je m'en voil aler, bele amie"

"The king has seen all we have done
And gone back to the palace for his barons;
If he can, he will have us taken here together
And condemned to burn to ashes
I must leave, fair love." [115]

This is rather convincing proof, along with the other evidence that Amer gives, that the lovers are actually aware of their actions' repercussions, but that they commit adultery anyways, because they are actually, though not legally, married. Amer suggests, due to her position that Béroul's *Roman de Tristan* is in accordance with the church's model of marriage, leads her to write that, "Ultimately, such a reading invites us to review our definition and the status of adultery in all courtly literature,

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[113] Bloch, Howard R. "Tristan, the Myth of the State and the Language of the Self." *Yale French Studies* 51 (1974), p. 73
[114] Béroul, *Le Roman de Tristan*, vv. 40
[115] Thomas d'Angleterre, *Tristan*, vv. 19-24

and might allow us to begin to see continuity, rather than opposition, between courtly texts of supposed adultery."[116]

Based on the radical divergences of the critical analysis surrounding the *Tristan* legend, one cannot fail to be struck by the overwhelming amount of contradictions, resulting in something reminiscent of the dialectical trend present in the texts themselves. What I see as a constant theme throughout the scholarship is the importance of the tensions between society and the lovers' asocial love, or tensions between the reality and the fantasy of the text. The real manifests itself in the variety of ways that the *Tristan* legend has been proven to reflect medieval society: for example through legal codes, changes in the institution of marriage, or through the influence of contemporary scholasticism. I find all of these interpretations, which are all based on the social realities of medieval courts and scholars, to be equally valid. They prove to me that fiction, even one that outwardly transgresses against society, cannot help but mirror the society that produced it. However, this characteristic of romances of adultery also manifests itself in a contradictory way to this previous one.

This is through the reflection of the imagined ideals that permeated medieval thought, as seen through the ideal of "courtly love," as well as elsewhere in romances. The authors of the *Tristan* myth were obviously enthralled by its beauty due to this ideal love, and therefore they repeated and experimented with the theme allowing it to develop in different ways, creating a rich literary tradition where oppositions could flourish. Thus, I believe that the contradictions in *Tristan* texts were intentional, not only because they represent dialectic's influence, but because they are reflections of

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[116] Amer, Sahar, p. 5

fiction. Thus, the oppositional content in the texts mirrors the meanings behind the texts themselves because of their shared attempt to combine two opposed yet equally present aspects of the *Tristan* legend and fiction itself: the real and the ideal. While the aspects that are representative of society have been already been proven to exist by previous scholars, the other side of *Tristan* that deals with the imaginary ideals that it represents will be the focus of the rest of my argument.

## Chapter Three: Tristan and Iseut: Victims of Conflicting Identities

The ways in which romances represent the contradictory forces of real and ideal, manifest in more ways than simply the scholarship on *Tristan*, because the lover's multiplicity of identities express this conflict. They are defined both by their external identity as a knight or queen, and their internal one as lovers. The knightly identity is real and societal, while their lovers' identity is their ideal. Thus, these two ways of being are shown to be incompatible, due to the court's persecution of Tristan and Iseut, and the lovers therefore must enact carefully planned ruses, which in turn allow them to pass between these two oppositional existences. Thus, Tristan and Iseut's shared identity as deceivers, in which they take on many different disguises, represents the lover's desire to overcome society's efforts to control their asocial passion. Thus, the ruse is an essential tool for the lovers, as it alone allows them to fulfill their passion, and transcend the real, as well as allows them to return to society and forego their fiction. Thus, the ruse has a power to enact change, on the lovers, and the world in which they live.

In this chapter, I will first discuss the contradictory forces that interact in the characters of Tristan and Iseut, as they are torn between their role as lovers, and their roles in feudal relations. After this, I will move onto the other major aspect of their identities: tricksters. Their use of the ruse acts as an attempt to regain control of their conflicted identities in order to transcend them, as well as to resolve the external conflicts resulting from the forces of society exerting itself upon and against the lover's desire. Thus, while society represents the reality behind romance and is

external, "courtly love" presents us with this society's collective imagination and is internal. This binary, which pits the real, external, societal against the imagined, internal, asocial is a key aspect of the identity of the lovers themselves.

The lovers' societal roles as knight and queen and conflict with their ideal as perfect lover because, while loyalty towards Marc is expected of them due to their feudal positions as his vassal/wife, their adulterous love causes them to transgress against Marc and his court. This transgression is followed by the persecution of the lovers by the barons and Marc, forcing the lovers to abandon their societal identity, as is the case in Béroul, in order to live in a natural, wild state of passionate ignorance, thereby forcing them to choose one identity, which in this case is their ideal.

This happens in the scene when the lovers, having been caught in *flagrante delicto* by Marc's trap, and they are forced to escape his vengeful justice, and with it courtly society. They therefore flee to the forest of Morois, where they live a life free from the constraints of society. In this forest, they are free to practice their asocial passion, but nonetheless, the experience is not depicted as a wholly happy one.

"Or sont ensenble en la forest,
Tristran de veneison les pest.
Longuement sont en cel boschage…
Aspre vie meinent et dure:
Tant s'entraiment de bone amore
L'un por l'autre ne sent dolor."

"Now they were together in the forest
And Tristran fed them with venison.
They remained a long time in the forest…
They were leading a hard and painful life,
But they loved each other so truly
That they were oblivious to their suffering." [117]

[117] Béroul, *Le Roman de Tristan*, vv. 1359-1366

Thus, the life in which they live is one that is diametrically opposed to Tristan and Isuet's past life at court, which was as lavish as it was restrictive. Here, they can freely love each other without a cause for worry, but at the same time they must now lead a life free as well from society's benefits and comforts. This is evident simply by looking at their diet, which becomes entirely constituted by meat because of Tristan's replacement of his knightly identity with one of a hunter or a woodsman. Béroul writes that:

"Molt sont el bois del pain destroit,
De char vivent, el ne mengüent.
Que püent il, se color müent?
Lor dras ronpent, rains le decirent."

"They had no bread;
they lived on meat and ate nothing else.
Is it any wonder they became pale?
They had torn clothes, made ragged by the branches." [118]

Bread here represents the courtly diet, as its creation relied upon the work of a community of peasants, while meat is representative of Tristan's descent into the wilderness and its primitive lifestyle. Thus, he has in some ways degenerated himself, as well as Isuet through their sinful act of adultery, which is made evident by their pallor. Becoming pale was a symptom often associated with love-sickness, and was therefore an external representation of love and its negative consequences. However, it is surprising that here lovers' paleness is not caused by separation from each other, but by their having been removed from society, thereby inverting our expectations, proving that love, which is too passionate and free, can be equally destructive as a

[118] Ibid, vv. 1644-1647

lack of love. Thus,both society and love, the real and the ideal, and the desire to conflate these identities is shown to be necessary for Tristan and Iseut's continued happiness as well the cause of their decline. These two opposites are also be difficult to combine, as proven by how when combined, the lovers are in run the risk of being caught and punished.

Despite their having abandoned the court for the forest of Morois, society still manages to impose itself upon Tristan and Iseut's primitive and idealistic world. In fact, Tristan and Iseut's shelter remains only two leagues away from Marc's court, despite its stark opposition to the world of the court.[119] This proves the impossibility of a true escape from society's bounds as well as the deceptive nature of their ideal. Marc finds the lovers asleep in the forest, and after finding Tristan and Iseut asleep, he intends to kill them, thereby taking his legal right to vengeance. However, when he realizes that they are clothed, with Tristan's sword separating them, he thinks twice about taking his revenge, and instead replaces Tristan's sword with his own, exchanges rings with Ysuet, and puts a glove over Ysuet's face to protect her from the son. These exchanges serve to symbolically reinstate Iseut as Mark's wife, and to aid the lovers' self-awareness of their decrepit state, which is finally brought into full realization when the potion wears off less than two hundred lines later. Béroul first describes Tristan's revelation of how he has forgotten his knightly identity, and in doing so has lived a perverse life:

> “”Ha, Dex! fait-il, “tant ai traval!
> Trois anz a hui, que riens n'i fal,
> Onques ne me falli pus paine
> Ne a foirié n'en chevalerie,

[119] Ibid., v. 1854

A seure cort et baronie.
Ge sui essillié du païs,
Tot m'est falli et vair et gris,
Ne sui a cort a chevaliers."

"Oh God, I am suffering so much;
For three years to the day, without respite,
I have never been without pain –
On feast days and others alike.
I have forgotten chivalry,
The court, and the knightly life,
I am living in exile,
I am deprived of furs and fine clothes,
And I am no longer in the company of knights." [120]

At this moment, Tristan's knightly identity reclaims prominence over his previous identity as a lover, becoming his primary identity. This change in Tristan, which is mirrored by Iseut in her monologue about her own social decline and her own return to a queenly identity, inaugurates a major change in the story. Now, the lovers decide once again to part, Isuet regaining her role of queen and returning to Marc, and Tristan his role as a knight. This change, however, does not serve to make them happier, but instead increases Tristan and Isuet's shared pains and mutual desire for each other. This suffering from desire will increase until their eventual necessary death, never again sated for such a long period of time, but only momentarily relieved by brief encounters in forced secrecy at the court.

Similarly, Tristan tries to further reject his identity as a lover in Thomas' version of the legend, which begins after Béroul's has left off. Therefore we can assume for the purposes of this essay, that Béroul would have included a similar type of theme in his manuscript, though his treatment of it would be undoubtedly very

[120] Ibid, vv. 2161-2169

different. Tristan does this by taking a new wife, Iseut of the White Hands, and attempting to therefore create a new identity for himself that would allow him to live harmoniously with society: that of a husband. Tristan thinks that this will help relieve some of his suffering, at least through sexual release he reasons (out of jealousy for Iseut's situation) if not through love. He however, fails to overcome his love for Isuet with this new prospect. Before he decides to marry, there is an excellent example of dialectical reasoning as seen through Thomas' exposition of Tristan's conflicting thoughts on whether or not to marry. For example, he begins by despairing about his loss of Yseut:

"Ço que mien fu orë est suen.
Ço qu'aveir ne puis claim jo quite,
Car jo sai bien qu'el se delite;
Ublïé m'ad pur suen delit."

"What once was mine is now his.
I renounce all right to what I cannot have –
I know that she takes her pleasure
And, in her pleasure, has forgotten me." [121]

Thus, here Tristan rejects his love of Isuet, or as he puts it his right to love her, simply because his suffering has become too great. I imagine Tristan here as desperate, seeking any possible remedy for his affliction. Thus, he goes on to state,

"Tenir m'estuit a mun pueir,
Car m'est avis faire l'estot:
Issi fait [cil] ki mais n'en pot."

"I can but take what is in my grasp,
And that, I think, is what I must do,
As do all who have no other choice."[122]

[121] Thomas, *Tristan*, vv. 73-76
[122] Ibid, vv. 89-91

Later, he even claims that he is justified in severing his ties to Isuet.[123] His insistence on the sexual aspects of love is perhaps influenced by Ovid's *Remedio Amoris*, which preaches the replacement of one lover by another as a way of falling out of love.

Thus, Thomas enters into a much larger debate here on the nature of love, whether it is physical or emotional. He defies Ovid however, in that Tristan proves to the reader that replacing one lover with another, when one is truly in love, is impossible. To prove this, one must look at how Tristan first tries to accept his predicament, but then changes sides, asking himself:

"Dunt vient a hume volunté
de hair ço qu'il ad amé,
U ire porter u haür
Vers [i]ço u ad mis s'amur?"

"How can a man come to wish
to hate what he has loved,
how can he come to turn his anger and hatred
against the object of his love?" [124]

Thus, Tristan's love is shown to be inescapable in his mind, and he cannot deny its power over his identityor his destiny. Thus, for Thomas and other romancers, true love is constant, eternal, and transcendent, and is therefore sublime ideal compared with the base sexual physicality of Ovid's *Art of Love*.

"Courtly love" does not allow hate or replacement as a remedy for its effects. Therefore, Tristan comes to the decision that he should wed, not to escape Iseut, but so that he can be more like her, by committing acts "ki est contre amur," in order to

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[123] Ibid, v. 98

[124] Ibid, vv. 180-183

"How can a man come to wish / to hate what he has loved, / how can he come to turn his anger and hatred / against the object of his love?"

learn if pleasure can exist where love does not.[125] He does not wed however, in order to replace Iseut the Blond and start hating, but instead to get closer to her psychologically through a shared experience. Tristan therefore takes Isuet of the white hands as his wife, but only because of her likeness in name and beauty to Iseut the blond. Thus, he is simply filling in his identity as a lover with a surrogate Isuet, in a haphazard attempt to provide himself with a new identity as a husband. In the end, he not only inspires a lengthy apostrophe to the reader from Thomas himself as to why his actions are immoral, he also increases his suffering, and causes his bride to suffer as well. He never consummates his marriage, therefore never really taking on his new courtly identity to replace his asocial one as a lover.

Tristan, through his marriage, is caught once again in a conflict of vows that mirrors his conflicting identity. Here he is not caught between the feudal and chivalric as before, but rather between his oath to Iseut his lover, and his marriage vow to Iseut his wife. However, in both cases there are two codes of conduct. The first, supported by legal and religious authorities, is the institution of marriage and a cornerstone of society, which Tristan cannot submit to no matter how hard he tries. The other is the idealized code of chivalry towards one's lover, and Tristan respects this code unfailingly, despite his efforts to leave it behind through marriage.

Instead of becoming a good husband, Tristan returns to Isuet, once his suffering has become unbearable, and disguised as a leper he gains access to his lover briefly, and rekindles their passion. Isuet, after Tristan has left her once more, in order to further reinforce her identity as a lover, decides to wear a sort of chastity belt:

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[125] Ibid, line 214.
My trans.: "which are contrary to love."

"Vest une bruine a sa char nue;
Iloc la portoit nuit e jur,
Fors quant culchot a sun siegnur.
Ne s'en aparceurent nïent."

"She put on a leather corselet against her bare flesh,
keeping it there by night and by day,
except when sleeping with her husband.
People had no inkling of this."[126]

This way, the symbol of her constant and singular love for Tristan, her leather girdle, is hidden beneath her clothing as a sign of the secret nature of her passion. It becomes evident that the lovers sway back and forth between their different identities, in the effort to both give allow their adulterous passion, or to quell it so that they might live harmoniously in society.

These episodes all show how the lovers fail to escape either side of their dual identity as lovers and as members of society. Therefore, this proves not only the all-powerful nature of their love, but also their need to be at one with the world around them. Since they find that they cannot restrict themselves to either their reality or their ideal world, they are left with only one form of recourse: the need to combine both identities harmoniously, so that their asocial love can exist within society. The only way that they are able to achieve this is through various ruses, which constitute the lovers' third and most important identity: them as tricksters. Isuet as a trickster is more associated with verbal deception, while Tristan, though he can deceive through language, is more often shown to be a master of disguise, so that he is visually deceptive.

[126] Ibid, vv. 2029-2032

Tristan and Iseut notably deceives the court three times in Béroul's text, though the second time is unintentional. The first time occurs in the garden during the scene under the pine tree, and the second occurs when Iseut is placed on trial at the Mal Pas. At the very beginning of Béroul's text, as it has survived today, we find Tristan and Iseut talking together underneath a pine tree, while the jealous king Marc spies on them from above, perched in its branches. The lovers would have been caught and proven guilty if Iseut had not noticed the king's reflection in the pool of water underneath the pine. Upon realizing that they are not alone, Iseut concocts an elaborate ruse.

In order to deceive her husband, who is in turn trying to deceive her, she creates a fictional story that appears to Marc to be true. She therefore says that Tristan is not her lover, but that instead:

> "Sire, molt t'ai por lui amé
> E j'en ai tot perdu son gré."
>
> "Sir, I loved you for his sake,
> and I have thereby lost his favor." [127]

Here, she counters what the barons have said by admitting that she loves Tristan, which is truthful, but she only admits to loving him like a brother-in-law, which is less than a half-truth. However, Marc, whose judgment relies on visible proof, is blind to the falsity of her story, and is overly susceptible to the untrue evidence that Iseut provides. This is partly due to the fact that if Marc proves that they are lovers, he therefore proves that he himself is a cuckold, and therefore, as his social status is

[127] Béroul, *Le Roman de Tristan*, vv. 79-80

tied to theirs, he hears what he wants to hear.[128] Once Marc has heard this explanation of the Tristan and Iseut's conduct, which also explains why the barons would be suspicious, Isuet takes the opportunity to spin a sad tale of their persecution, which will make the king feel guilty for his suspicion, and therefore allow the lovers some peace from his prying eyes.

This scene finds its parallel in the episode in the forest of Morois, in that Marc also sneaks up on the lovers with the intention to prove them guilty, but once again departs with a changed heart, having been falsely convinced of their innocence. In the Morois episode, unlike the scene beneath the pine tree, Marc is able to approach the lovers unnoticed. They remain sleeping and vulnerable, even after he leaves, and only realize that he has visited them after they awake, which then causes their "awakening" from their idealistic and primitive life.

As Marc approaches the lovers, he has every intention to kill them outright, however, upon seeing them lying separate, clothed, and with a sword in between them, he thinks twice, this time providing the lovers with an exculpatory fiction tale on the visual evidence available to him.[129] Therefore, Marc himself takes on Iseut's previous role as the trickster. Despite this new role, Marc also keeps his role as the one who is deceived. Thus, we have an example, again, of the trickster who is tricked, but this time, Marc enacts the ruse on himself. This scene is shown, through its careful inversions, to be essentially the opposite of the pine tree episode. Therefore, Marc allows the lovers to return to their status as innocent of adultery by his own act of deception, and this is good for him because the crime of adultery is only made

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[128] Jane Burns, "How Lovers Lie Together," p. 25
[129] Ibid, p. 22

legally true, once it is proven to be so by visual evidence. Thus, if he admits to their crime by killing them, he also admits to his weak status as a cuckold, where he too shares in sexual devience. Thus, in order to avoid sexual deviance, Marc deceives himself. Upon seeing them together, he says:

"Bien puis croire, se je ai sens,
Si il s'amasent folement,
Ja n'i eüsent vestement,
Entrë eus dues n'eüst espee,
Autrement fust cest' asenblee."

"It is reasonable to conclude that,
If they loved each other sinfully,
They would not be dressed,
And there would not be a sword between them.
They would be together in quite a different way." [130]

This is odd in the context of the story, for as we know, the lovers have already been proven guilty by the visual evidence of Tristan's blood on Isuet's sheets. Thus, Marc simply decides to discount this visual proof, and creates a verbal fiction that is more pleasing to him: that he has wrongly accused his wife. Thus, Isuet's verbal deception is transferred to Marc, who corroborates her lies with his own fiction that suits him almost as well as it suits her, but which still serves to obscure the truth of the matter. However, he is not able to fully accept Iseut until his barons' correct accusations of her have been quelled. Thus, Iseut is forced to defend herself in a trial at Mal Pas, where once again she uses half-truths to lie without consequence, so that she can regain her position in society free of (external) guilt.

In the trial scene at Mal Pas, Iseut swears on Holy Relics that she has never had any man between her legs besides her husband and a leper, Tristan disguised,

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[130] Ibid, vv. 2006-2010

who piggybacked her across the stream. Her claim is visibly proven by Tristan's disguise as the leper, and Iseut does not actually lie to the relics: an act that would be heretical. Instead, she tells a half-truth whose intention is to deceive. Thus, Isuet's mastery of the lie, which she embroiders with detail, supports with visual evidence, and presents as truthful, makes it an attractive fiction which society wants to believe.[131] This is what repeatedly allows her to overcome society's persecution of her so that she keeps to her role as queen and wife, while keeping her love too. "What Béroul shows us, both through the success of the verbally shrewd lovers and the failure of the barons to match valid accusations of guilt with proof of illegal acts, is a universe in which truth cannot be discerned; a world based on linguistic deceit, on the necessary dissociation of act from intent and willful bifurcation of word and deed. The shift has thus taken place from *seeing* to *telling*: from the unity of demonstrable legal truth to the plurality of fictive discourse… This is the textual (fictional) reality which Marc fails to perceive."[132] If this is one result of Iseut's half-truths, the other is the way that it proves that deception is a necessary tool for lovers such as Tristan and Iseut, if they wish to coexist with society.

Tristan, on the other hand, uses disguise to deceive the court visually, often presenting himself as a bard, a leper, or a madman. Significantly, while Iseut's ruses are geared towards allowing her reentry into society, Tristan uses deception in order to gain unmitigated access to the queen. This creates an inversion in their shared identities as tricksters, but nonetheless, their goal to fulfill their love and allow it to exist harmoniously with society remains constant. Therefore, Tristan lies in order to

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[131] Jane Burns, "Why Lovers Lie Together," p. 26
[132] Ibid, p. 21

continue to transgress against Marc so as to relieve his suffering, rather than to stop transgressing or disprove accusations of transgression, as Iseut does. Thus, the ruse is shown to work in two contradictory ways: either to allow the lovers reentry into society, or to allow them to commit asocial, criminal, sinful acts.

Tristan's musical abilities are very real, and thus his disguise as a bard suits him. Therefore, one wonders how much Tristan really needs to disguise himself in order to appropriate this role, as his courtly identity is composed of both his musical ability and his knightly prowess. Thus, unlike Tristan's other disguises, where he becomes unrecognizably changed, this courtly disguise exists somewhere between truth and lie, or between Tristan's internal identity and his external one. Another important aspect of this identity, is that through Tristan's artistic abilities, the authors of *Tristan* were able to include a layer of artistic self-reflexivity in their texts.

When Tristan first met Iseut, he was disguised as a bard and used the name Tantris, an inversion of Tristan. He was on the verge of death and had left Cornwall in alone, with only his harp, in a small boat. Iseut, who was attracted to Tristan because of his musical abilities, then saves him by healing his poisoned wound. This scene is not present in any of the texts that I have studied, but it does influence later scenes in the legend. Most notably, in both the *Folies de Tristan* texts, Tristan also uses the name Tantris, and in the Oxford version, he references the conditions of his first encounter with Iseut. Also important is the connection between music and healing becomes apparent from this episode, and is repeated later on in the text. Tristan says:

"Od ma harpe me delitoie;
Je n'oi cunfort ki tant amoie.

Ben tost es oïstes parler,
Ke mult savoie ben harper.
Je fus sempres a curt mandez
Tut issi cum ere navrez.
La raïne la me guari
De ma plaie, su merci,
Bons lais de harpe vus apris
Lais bretuns de nostre païs."

"I found distraction in playing my harp;
there was no comfort I loved more.
Soon word reached you
that I was a very good harpist.
I was summoned to court right away,
wounded as I was.
There the queen healed my wound, and I am grateful to her.
I taught you lovely lais on the harp,
Breton lais from my country." [133]

This shows how music, as a distraction from sorrow, serves to quell the pain and suffering of love in a similar way to how it causes Iseut to heal Tristan's poisoned wound. The healing associated with music has been transformed from a bodily to an emotional sort of recovery. However, this emotional form of healing is deceptive, in that it cannot stop the pains of unfulfilled passion, but can only lessen it for a short period of time. This speech also signifies how Tristan's harp, like Orpheus' lyre, has the power to attract.

This type of attempt to use music and art to quell the pain of love appears in Thomas' version as well. He writes that Iseut is composing a tragic lay about love, showing how love begets art, in a similar yet oppositional way to how Tristan's music attracted Iseut's love.[134] Thus Iseut, similarly to Tristan, takes on an artistic identity as a poet. Later on, we are told that:

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[133] Anonymous, *La Folie d'Oxford*, in Early French Tristan Poems I, lines 353-362
[134] Thomas, *Tristan*, line 835

"Apruef si prist un vïelur,
Si li manda tote sa vie
E sun estrë, e puis li prie
Quë il li mant tut sun curage
Par ensingnes par cest message.
Quant Tristan la novele sol
De la ren quë il plus amout,
Pensif en est e deshaitez:
En sun quer ne pot ester leez
De si la quë il ait veüe
La burine qu'Ysolt ot vestue
Ne de sun don n'ert ja ostee
De si qu'il venge en la cuntree."

Later she employed a fiddler and through him
Informed Tristan of how her days were spent,
Of how she was, also begging him
To inform her of all within his heart and mind
By means of tokens, sent through the messenger.
When Tristan heard the news
About the one he loved most of all,
He was downcast and miserable:
He could never be happy at heart
Until he had seen
The corselet donned by Yseut
And which would never be removed from her back
Until he had come to her land."[135]

Here we find that they compose lays in order to send them to each other as gifts and symbols of their mutual faithfulness. Similar to the gift of a ring, these lays act as a reminder of love, and the fact that they are sent through a proxy serves to keep their passion secret, yet at the same time, makes it public through their performance. One imagines that their love poetry would be like Troubadour poetry, which was often composed in the form of poetic exchanges of letters between lovers. This highlights an interesting aspect of their inspired music: its poetic self-reflexivity. Thus, Tristan and Isuet become love-poets, while they are characters in a poem. These poems that

[135] Ibid, lines 2041- 2053

the lovers send are, like the Tristan legend itself, reflections of an imagined ideal of love. This desire is both secret and beautiful, and it finds its expression only through art, as art is the only medium able to truly attempt to represent or make public the sublimity of passionate desire.

Tristan and Iseut are shown to take on artistic abilities through their love for one another, constituting another aspect of their identity and temporarily easing their suffering. This does not suffice however, because only shared passion can calm their desire. This is certainly somewhat different than the troubadour's concept of love and art, where love from afar is shown to be the ideal version of love, because patient suffering was viewed as exemplary for a lover. Here, on the other hand, one finds a different ideal version of love, which now desires proximity if it is to be sated, because in Béroul's *Roman de Tristan*, there is an increased emphasis on the physicality of love. This is a more realistic representation of love, showing how the romancers differ from their troubadour predecessors. However, though more realistic in this way, one cannot deny that the romance version of love is still idealized and therefore fictional. Tristan and Isuet's sending of poems thereby proves the deceptive natures of both love and art. This theme of deception therefore appears here in the form of the art that the lovers create, because they are deceiving themselves into thinking that it can cure their suffering, when really nothing can. Thus, poetry causes Tristan to envision an idealized version of love, as well as a remedy for his love, while really they are only increasing their suffering through constant reflection on his desire without the possibility of its satisfaction. Thus, we find the theme of the

trickster tricked again here, though this time it is not Marc, but the lovers themselves and through their own acts of telling fiction.

Tristan's other disguises as either a leper or a madman have similar implications. This is due to the way that both madness and leprosy were disease are diseases connected the notion of social decline in the texts. Therefore, Tristan's appropriation of these disguises serves to highlight the asocial nature of his love. By using these disguises, Tristan attempts to overcome society's restrictions on his desire. It becomes evident though that while leprosy and madness are symbols of asocial desire, they are also used to make this desire occur within society's bounds, and are thereby paradoxical in their very nature. Let us begin with a discussion of Tristan the leper, before moving onto the *Folies* texts representations of his madness.

In Béroul, after having been caught red-handed with Isuet, Tristan escapes to safety and leaves his lover to her husband's justice. Marc intends to burn her alive, and Tristan, knowing that he would be doomed to the same fate if he went back for her, decides to lie in wait with Governal until he hears news of Iseut's death, at which point he would return to take his vengeance on the barons. However, rather than being burned, we a bizarre twist of fate happens. A real leper, Yvain, arrives at court and devises a new punishment for Iseut which he deems more suitable for her crime. He tells Marc that Iseut's suffering in a fire will be brief, but his idea will make her suffer until her death. He says,

"Veez, j'ai ci conpaignons cent:
Yseut nos done, s'ert commune.
Pair fin dame n'ot mais une:
Sire, en nos a si grant ardor!
Soz ciel n'a dame qui un jor
Peüst soufrir nostre convers…

Quant or verra la nostre cort,
Adonc verra si desconfort.
Donc voudroit miex morir que vivre;
Donc savra vien Yseut la givre
Que malement avra ovré."

"You see that I have a hundred companions here;
Give us Isuet to be our common property.
No lady ever had a worse fate:
Sir, our lust is so strong!
No lady in the world could tolerate
A single day of relations with us…
When she sees our "court"
And all its discomforts,
She will rather be dead than alive.
The that viper Iseut will know
That she has sinned." [136]

This passage expresses the common medieval stereotype that moral deficiency, represented by lust, was made externally manifest by God's judgment. Hence, lepers were seen to be morally deficient because of their external ugliness.[137] Also, medieval doctors believed leprosy to be sexually transmitted, thereby specifying claim of their immorality to their supposed sexual deviance.

Therefore, Marc thinks giving Isuet to the lepers as concubine is a suitable punishment for his adulterous wife, because since she has been proven sexually immoral she should be punished with further sexual deviance. Thus, rather than to make her adultery end in death, he prefers to further disenfranchise her of her position in society through continued acts of adultery with a mass of lepers. Luckily, Tristan is waiting for her just outside of the castle, and saves her from this symbolic punishment.

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[136] Béroul, *Le Roman de Tristan*, vv. 1192-1197 and 1211-1215
[137] Jane Burns, "How Lovers Lie Together," p. 24

When saving Isuet, however, Tristan refuses raise a hand against them, because

> "Trop ert Tristran preuz et cortois
> A occire cent de tes lois."
>
> "Tristan was too valiant and courtly
> to kill such people."[138]

Instead, he has Governal attack them, and Yvain the leper, his rotting flesh struck with a stick, bleeds from his head down to his feet. What is of interest here is that, while Marc acted rashly by sentencing his wife to a harsh and vulgar fate as a concubine to a leper colony, Tristan on the other hand remains courtly even when taking his revenge.[139] For this reason, Béroul praises Tristan's actions while deprecating Marc, who is presented as weak and indecisive. Despite this, Marc remains the symbol of the court's authority, while Tristan is society's enemy: a felon at large who had lost all his feudal rights and could be killed with impunity. This is an interesting inversion, and I believe, a direct critique of society and its legal system, which like what Jane Burns says about Marc himself, is "unable to see shades of grey."[140] It also critiques the feudal system because Marc becomes tyrannical in this moment, blinded by jealousy, and in doing so, he fails to oblige the feudal contracts that he is supposed to uphold.[141] Thus, while Marc is culpable for the breaking of this contract, Tristan and Iseut are culpable for breaking the vow of marriage. This draws a connection between Tristan and Iseut, Marc, and the lepers, in that they are all shown to be morally impure, though in different ways.

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[138] Béroul, *Le Roman de Tristan*, vv. 1269-1270
[139] Tony Hunt, "Abelardian Ethics and Béroul's Tristan," p. 520
[140] Burns, Jane, "How Lovers Lie Together," p. 20
[141] Howard R. Bloch, "Myth of State and Language of Self," p. 68

At the trial scene in Mal Pas, Tristan, in order to help Iseut takes on the guise of a leper. While waiting for Iseut's arrival, Tristan engages in a symbolic act of covering and uncovering.[142] Firstly, Tristan disguises himself in a leper's dress by taking their attributes of a gourd with which to beg, a rattle to shake, a stick to help him walk, dirty clothing, and lumps on his face. In addition to all this, he walks with a limp and keeps his back hunched. These attributes that were common to lepers make it a perfect disguise, because lepers were recognizable as such, serving to further marginalize them from society. Thus, Tristan appears as not only sick and weak, but also assumes the appearance of those at society's lowest rung. Here, he effectively reverses his knightly identity with one that is directly opposed to it. In this way he represents his internal degenerate and conflicted identity, rather than his external courtly one. He appropriates this role perfectly, and no one sees through his disguise. Béroul even points out that Tristan is a world-class beggar, an odd skill for a nobleman.

Thus, it becomes apparent that Tristan's identity as a leper is symbolic of his loss of status in the court due to his sexual transgressions, as well as his acts of distorting the truth, which he is doing merely through his disguise. As I mentioned earlier during my discussion of Jane Burn's essay, these crimes of sexual and linguistic (though here more visual) deviance were associated with leprosy, which was thought to be both sexually transmitted, and an external sign of immorality. Thus, as Jane Burns also points out, not only Tristan, but also Iseut and Marc are implicit in these acts of sexual and linguistic deviancy, and are therefore also symbolically

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[142] Burns, Jane, "How Lovers Lie Together," p. 24

lepers.[143] Tristan makes this clear during this scene, when King Marc arrives and he engages him in conversation. Tristan here decides to tell the truth, telling Marc that he is Welsh, has been a social outcast for three years, and that he loved a courtly lady who gave him his disease. He tells Marc,

> "Dans rois, ses sires ert meseaus,
> O lié faisoie mes joiaus,
> Cits Maus me prist de la commune."

> "Good King, her husband was a leper;
> I made love to her,
> And I contracted the disease from our union."[144]

Thus, is it apparent that leprosy has become a metaphor for the adulterous love and its deceptive consequences, but also it has become symbolic of Marc's own identity, as he is included in their leprosy similarly his being implicated in their love. This happens without his knowledge, despite the fact that Tristan reveals it to him indirectly. Tristan here recounts the truth, which nonetheless remains unperceived by Marc's characteristically unperceptive ears. Thus, Marc's susceptibility to see through visual and verbal deception is what makes him a leper by proving his weakness as a ruler, husband, and as a judge. This is mirrored by Tristan's ability to deceive, which also designates him a leper. There is a careful inversion of roles here as Tristan once again betters the king. Thus, both men are shown to be unable to uncover the truth, as both characters work to spin a fiction that will disguise the lover's sins. Tristan, through this act of uncovering the truth of his adultery and Marc's implicitness makes it apparent that Marc is incapable of untangling the web of deceit, and is therefore weak in his position as king due to his blindness as a judge.

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[143] Ibid, p. 25
[144] Béroul, *Le Roman de Tristan*, lines 3771-3773

Another aspect of the play on covering and uncovering in this scene occurs is when Tristan tricks the knights to passing Mal Pas, a ford in a river, at its muddiest point. The knights end up covered in mud: not a very courtly appearance. Later, Tristan begs from the knights, receiving not only King Marc's hood, but also King Arthur's leggings. Here Tristan manages to invert courtly society's outward appearance in a way that is similar to his own disguise, in that they appear less noble, while he appears more noble, though still a leper. "This is a moment symbolic of the radical ambiguity of appearance and language for Tristan, in this scene, is both a leper *and* a nobleman *and* neither. The disrobed kings and knights share a similarly ambiguous status for like Tristan, they represent a form of social deviance: a nobleman smeared in mud and a leper dressed in aristocratic garb are equally inappropriate personages at King Arthur's court… [Therefore,] through contact with Tristan any attempt to uncover (to reveal the Truth) becomes necessarily an act of covering up"[145]

This fact is reiterated through the outcome of the trial scene, where Iseut, through a half-truth, is able to distort and cover up the truth. Thus, Tristan's identity as a leper is shown as representative of his internal identity, because leprosy not only symbolizes his adulterous passion, but also is also representative of his effort to regain his courtly identity through deception and the ruse. Tristan is proven successful in this instance of deception, and he is able to regain his courtly identity in the scene that immediately follows, where he battles in the tournament dressed as a mysterious knight in black. Thus, though he is able to take back his role as a knight

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[145] Burns, Jane, *How Lovers Lie Together*, p. 24

and to give Iseut back her role as queen through his inversion of his own identity in the guise of a leper, he afterwards must still remains shrouded in mystery and disguised in black, because his love is still very much alive.[146]

In Thomas' *Tristan*, therefore, Tristan once again takes the guise of the leper, this time to gain access to Iseut for a brief period of time. Here, leprosy is certainly more connected with his desire and the reduced status that it leaves Tristan in than to his linguistic and visual deceptiveness, as was the case in Béroul. Tristan arrives in the court and seeks out Iseut, who is unable to recognize him. She soon notices the bowl that he is using to beg with as his, which causes her to identify Tristan. Brengain, Iseut's maidservant and pander, also recognizes Tristan, and due to her animosity towards the queen at this point in the story, stops Iseut from giving Tristan a ring as a keepsake. Thus, Tristan's disguise is less effective here, but still holds its symbolic function of his suffering in love. When Tristan asks Iseut for alms, he really is asking for sex, as this is what he believe will cure him of his painful degeneracy, which is the cause of his leprosy.[147] Brengain however ruins Tristan's prospects of gaining access to the queen by treating him like the leper that he is supposed to be, driving him away from the queen's personage due to his vulgar appearance.

Tristan goes and laments his fate under in a ruined courtyard, representative of his own state, where a woman finds him weeping. She is alarmed by his unruly appearance, and

"Trove s'esclavine velue,
Crie, a poi n'est del sen seue,

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[146] Jean-Charles Payen, "The Glass Palace in the *Folie d'Oxford*," Tristan and Isolde: A Casebook ed. Joan Tasker Grimbert, New York: Routledge, 2002. p. 119.
[147] Thomas, *Tristan*, vv. 1798.

Quide que ço deable seit
Car el ne sot que ço estait."

"She touched his shaggy pilgrim's mantle,
Cried out, almost out of her mind,
Thinking it was a devil she had found
Since she did not recognize it for what it was."[148]

Here we find Tristan represented as both a pilgrim and a devil in the eyes of this woman. This brings up an interesting point concerning Tristan's identity. Are we to see him a devoted lover on a pilgrimage to his shrine and whose love for Iseut is similar to the love of God, or are we to see him in the way that he outwardly appears: as a disfigured man who is amoral due to the very nature of his existence? This raises a good point, though Thomas characteristically does not provide us with his own opinion on the matter. Thus, Tristan's moral ambiguity is once again invoked, in a similar way to how his courtly and vulgar appearances combine ambiguously at the trial in Mal Pas. Later on in the episode, Tristan is able to convince Brengain to take Iseut's side again, and is granted the relief that he so desires. Once again, his use of a degenerate disguise has allowed him to transgress against courtly society through his realization of his goal as a lover.

Tristan's disguise as a madman is similar to his disguise as a leper, in that both diseases are a metaphor for uncontrollable passion, and the deception he must commit in order to appease it. This disguise appears in two shorter texts: *Les Folies de Tristan*, which are shorter adventures taken from the Tristan legend, representing a scene that we must assume was a popular one. Like Tristan in the scene from Thomas, he enacts a sort of pilgrimage in disguise in order to see Iseut so that he can

[148] Ibid, vv. 1900-1903.

temporarily appease his desire. Like Tristan at Mal Pas, he talks to King Marc in front of his court, and while disguised recounts his tale of love. Marc remains unable to see through the half-truths, as he is unable to interpret, only understanding the literal meaning. Interestingly though, Iseut is also unable to recognize Tristan, until Tristan's dog Husedent makes his identity apparent.

When Tristan takes on the guise of a leper, he is not actually afflicted with leprosy. Here however, Tristan is so changed by his suffering and long-separation from his love that he is actually mad, or on the point of madness.[149] This explains why even Iseut cannot recognize him, as he appears so weakened, vulgar, and disheveled due to his reduced state. This madness is therefore actually Tristan's true state, which cause madness to become a part of his identity for this moment in the story. This makes sense as Tristan is literally madly in love, as is seen by his symptoms of love-sickness, and he has lost his ability to reason. He has no choice but to see Iseut, cannot delay any longer, and is physically ruined by his suffering. However, while his madness is real, it is also a suitable disguise that will allow him to gain entry into the court.

When at the court, Tristan's ruse is to make his identity evident in a way that Iseut will discern his true identity, while Marc will be characteristically tricked. Thus, Tristan recounts his love affair to Marc openly and plainly, which infuriates Iseut. Marc, who believes it to be total fiction, misunderstands the implications of his story. Here Tristan, disguised as a madman, takes on the identity of a degenerate courtly bard or poet who excels in the bawdy. Really, he is like a troubadour who has

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[149] Jean-Charles Payen, The Glass Palace in the *Folie d'Oxford*," p. 112

travelled to his lover. Thus, he tricks the entire court into thinking the truth is fiction, once again causing an inversion of values through his symbolic actions of covering and uncovering, and once again, he manages to subvert the court through his trickery so as to temporarily ease his suffering.

Tristan and Iseut therefore share these conflicting sets of identity as they share their passion. Due to these identities, they are both barred from society, and allowed to reenter and take part in it. Interestingly, in the *Tristan* romances there are shifts in identity, showing their identities' interchangeability, but there is no progression towards a perfected identity. In fact, this is because their ideal is an impossibility, because it involves their combination of the realities of their situation with their fantasy. I will discuss this them of these romances in my next chapter, dealing primarily with the effects of the *Tristan* legend's geography on the lovers, and their shared conception of "courtly love."

## Chapter Four: Geography and Courtly Love in *Tristan and Iseut* - Reality and Fiction

To begin my discussion, I will first discuss the geography of *Tristan*, before moving onto a discussion of "courtly love's" appearance in the romance. These two aspects of the legend prove the central aspect of Tristan and Iseut's desire to realize their impossible fantasy. However, this chapter will also seek to prove that through the romance, this desire is proved to be futile for the lover's, though the story itself manages to succeed where the lovers fail.

It is only through deft inversions of true and false that the lovers are able to realize their ideal fantasy of love within the boundaries of the courtly society that restricts it. However, as we saw before, when outside of courtly society, as in the forest of Morois their love is unsatisfactory. This is because both Tristan and Iseut want to retain both their courtly identities as queen and knight, as well as their secret identity as lovers. This proves impossible however, because these identities prove incompatible vis a vis their reality, and so they are repeatedly persecuted and finally exiled from the court. This exile, though it is idealized, is also too primitive of a lifestyle for the lovers. Hence, they return to courtly society only to experience more accusations. These they overcome through their appropriation of identities like the leper and the madman in order to deceive the court so that they may rejoin society. Thus, they are caught in between their two conflicting desires for acceptance and adulterous love, where their only possible recourse in their pursuit of happiness is to lie and distort the truth, tricking king Marc into accepting them so they may regain their original courtly identities. This theme is made evident through the romances'

use of a specific geography that creates distinctions between their reality, their love, and the deception that allows for the equation of these two incompatible concepts.

This geography follows the same sort of duality as seen elsewhere in the Tristan legend. There is the reality of the court, which is the realm of feudal society, and there are other worlds where the lover's desires are given free reign. In between these two oppositional worlds, there is a clearly marked frontier that the lovers must cross upon their return to society. The court is most often represented in its great hall, in the bedroom, and in the garden. These places are where tricks as well as lovemaking occur, and the court is defined by the need of secrecy and deception on the part of the lovers. Other worlds, like the Forest of Morois or the cave of statues in Thomas' text are places where desire is allowed to exist without the need of secrecy, however these places, despite their transparency, often fail to satiate the lovers' desire. In between these two worlds are frontiers like the Mal Pas, where the lovers pass between these two worlds and the conflicting identities that go with them. This is the geography of the Tristan legend, and it hinges on the same set of oppositions between reality and imagined ideal. The effort to combine these two is also equally present here, as it was in the case of Tristan and Isuet's identities.

The court is the seat of feudal power and is representative of feudal society. Marc is king here, and so the lovers must attempt to abide by his authority. Tristan and Iseut transgress against this authority, and so they must hide their crime from Marc through various ruses. This is a necessity of their continued existence at court, as they risk death if their secret is revealed. Thus, in the court, where love is both practiced and condemned, secrecy and the ruse are paramount. However, "Béroul

describes the impossibility of complete secrecy in the court setting. Lovers who live at court face unavoidable scrutiny and will inevitably reveal their love."[150] This is because the court is also the home to an array of other courtly characters. The most important members of in the court besides king Marc are his three barons, who follow commonplace romance role of the *lausengier* and who are, according to Béroul, "felons" or traitors.[151]

One role of the barons in the *Tristan* romances is to make it apparent that the lovers' secrecy is easily visible to the watchful eye. This must have been true of the realities of courtly society as well, because courts were inhabited by large numbers of people in a relatively small and enclosed space, making privacy scarce in the public areas. At the same time, even private areas like bedrooms were public, as we see in Béroul's flour-scene, where many people are shown to sleep in the king's bedroom. This realistic lack of privacy is reflected in Béroul's romance, when he writes:

"Ha, Dex! Qui puet amor tenir
Un an ou dues sanz descovrir?
Car amors ne se puet celer:
Sovent cline l'un vers son per,
Soven vienent a parlement,
Et a celé et voiant gent.
Par tot ne püent aise atendre,
Maint Parlement lor estuet prendre."

"Oh, God! Who could love
for a year or two and still keep it secret?
For love cannot be hidden:
Often one lover nods to the other;
They often meet to speak together,
Both in private and in public.
They cannot expect to meet freely just anywhere;

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[150] McCracken, Peggy, "The Queen's Secret: Adultery in the Feudal Court," Romanic Review, 85:2 (1995:Mar) p. 296
[151] Béroul, *Le Roman de Tristan*, v. 613

They must arrange frequent trysts."[152]

Béroul goes on to explain how the barons who have noticed Tristan and Isuet's love for one another. They have caught them guilty of adultery in the garden, which is a public courtly space, and have suspected them of adultery in the bedroom, which is a private space. Their suspicion derives from how Tristan would lie and tell Marc that he was going hunting but would then spend the day in Iseut's bedchamber.[153]

They decide to threaten to wage war on king Marc if he does not banish Tristan, causing King Marc to try to catch the lovers in the episode of the pine tree and in the flour scene. The way that they threaten Marc with war, thereby forcing him to choose between his vassals and his family, illustrates McCracken's suggestion that accusations of adultery in the court show how varying factions could compete for power, which was gained solely through influence over, proximity to, and the favor of the king.[154] Thus, as Tristan is Marc's nephew and heir and Iseut is his wife and queen, they are the two characters that occupy the places closest to the king within the court. This is a major reason why the barons attempt to remove them from their prominent positions within the court, despite the fact that proof of the crime of adultery will destabilize the court, leaving Marc's kingdom without an heir or even the possibility of an heir. This act is certainly one reason why Béroul describes the barons as traitors.[155] This is because the secrecy of Tristan and Iseut's adultery is essential to the well-being and self-perpetuation of courtly society itself, and thus their revelation of this secret is treasonous and treacherous. On top of this, they are

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[152] Béroul, *Le Roman de Tristan*, vv. 573-580
[153] Ibid, vv. 581-598
[154] McCracken, Peggy, "The Queen's Secret: Adultery in the Feudal Court," p. 298
[155] Denis de Rougemont, Love in the Western World, p. 33

motivated to transgress against courtly society by greed and jealousy, as opposed to Tristan and Iseut's noble transgression due to love.

The barons are also personifications of the court's desire to reveal these dangerous secrets, and are therefore shown to be representative of the court itself, because throughout much of romance literature, "The court is defined by a desire to discover, accomplish, and recount unknown adventures; it is defined by the desire to know secrets."[156] Therefore, while at court, Tristan and Iseut are shown to divert the truth in the scene under the pine tree, though they only postpone their eventual and inevitable fate. They are finally caught in *flagrante delicto*, and the lovers would most certainly have been condemned to death and killed for this had Tristan and Iseut not narrowly escaped through chance, or because as Béroul puts it, "Bele Marci Dex li a fait!" ("God had generously granted him mercy").[157]

Thus, their adulterous love is shown to be ultimately incompatible with courtly society, not only because it causes the lovers to transgress against king Marc, but also because it allows the Barons an easy way to attack their position in the court. Marc is therefore caught in the middle of these equally destructive forces, and is made to choose between the two parties. He attempts to keep both the barons and lovers in the court, and to therefore delay his ultimate choice, but like Tristan and Iseut's attempt to keep their adultery secret, this too fails when Marc finally agrees to test the lovers. This desire to keep the court together is explicable through Marc's need for both of these two conflicting groups, as his dynasty must be ensured through

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[156] Ibid, 297
[157] Béroul, *Le Roman de Tristan*, line 960

inheritance, as well as through his maintaining of his contractual relationship with his vassals, whose mutual support gives him authority.

As we know, Tristan and Iseut are eventually exiled from court, but manage to return through their replacement of the truth with a half-truth at the trial scene in Mal Pas. This reinstates some of the stability of the court that was enjoyed at the start of the romance, though this status remains vulnerable as Tristan and Iseut are still in love, and Marc is still childless. It does however allow Iseut to regain her role as queen, and Tristan to regain his role as knight. Thus, the court is defined by its desire to reveal secrets, or truths, but the lovers and Marc, as representatives of individuals within society, need these secrets to remain hidden. This illustrates the contradictory desires of the court to reveal, while its individual members attempt to hide, the truth. Thus, the court, as a representation of reality, is shown to be at odds with the lovers' desire for an impossible union, which is shown to be fantastical. Thus, the court, like the lovers conflicting identities, is governed by paradox. In addition to this, the ruse serves to hide these secrets so that it makes the real into fiction, combining them into one "truth." This combination, or distortion as it may be, of these two opposing forces to both cover and uncover, is the ultimate goal of the lovers and of Marc, in that it would allow them to transcend the conflicts that surround them. And so the imagined truth that Tristan and Iseut use to deceive the court is shown to be more powerful than the actual truth, as the court accepts it in the end, and the lie in turn ensures the court's continued wellbeing. Thus, the ruse allows Iseut to act as both a wife and a mistress despite the incompatibility of these oppositional roles, so long as her dual-identity remains imperceptible to Marc.

The court is shown to be a dangerous place for the lovers, but nonetheless it constitutes a major part of their identity, and they desire its comforts, its privileges. This is because the court is representative of reality, and romance as a genre draws much of its inspiration from reality. For the lovers therefore, life at the court is essential to their identity, as we can see from how they do actually remain loyal to Marc's position as king, always trying to keep his status as a cuckold from him and trying to keep his kingdom stable, even if they do transgress against his authority. This crime however, is surprisingly not shown to be especially damaging to the court as long as it remains hidden. For example, throughout the romance tradition of Tristan and Iseut, the lovers never have a child. In fact, Iseut appears as perhaps a barren woman, making her adultery practically harmless in a physical and political sense. Nonetheless, as we can only postulate on Iseut's barrenness, the possibility of her bearing Tristan's child looms over the romance as the unfulfilled danger behind their adulterous passion. This transgressive love is not restricted to the court however, but also manifests itself in the setting of the "other world," where fantasy is allowed to become reality.

Other worlds, which are a common occurrence in the genre of romance as well as in the literature and media of today, are best seen in the Tristan romances through the forest of Morois in Béroul's Tristan, where the lovers lead a life of idealized ignorance in a forest reminiscent of the Garden of Eden, and in the bizarre sculpture cave in Thomas' version of the legend, where Tristan is able to give a his fantastical love physical form through his creation of a realistic sculpture of Iseut upon which he practices his love during his visits to the cave. Thus, these other

worlds are places where the lovers most wild and passionate fantasies are given free reign.[158]

One must be aware however, that the actual court in romance is a fictional place, as it only exists within the romance and as it is a fictionalized representation of reality. The other world is equally a creation of the imagination, as it represents the fantastical desires and the collectively imagined ideals of courtly society, which is in this case an idealized erotically charged desire. However, it is not based on any reality. Thus, the rules of society do not apply to other worlds. Thus, though both worlds are fictional the court and the other world are oppositional concepts. As we saw earlier, courtly societies in romance are defined by their internal contradictions, but as I will now illustrate, contradictions with places outside of its sphere also help to define the court. Thus, "romance's other world was a fictive world created to stand over and against the equally fictive world of its central aristocratic society."[159] In order to illustrate this, we must first look at Tristan and Iseut's stay in Morois, before turning to the sculpture cave.

Tristan and Isuet flee almost certain death at the hands of king Marc, and escape to the forest of Morois for a period of three years. This forest is surprisingly close to the court, but it exists separate to it. For example, there is the physical boundary of the edge of the forest, and the rules of chivalry as well as feudal society no longer apply here. The forest in romance is always a dangerous place where adventure occurs, which in turn forms the narrative in a cyclical manner, in that the knights depart from court to the forest, only to return to court with fantastical stories

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[158] Rider, Jeff, "The Other Worlds of Romance," p. 122
[159] Ibid, p. 116

of their adventures. Thus, it is a type of other world where adventure happens. For example Yvain finds a lion in Crétien de Troyes' *Le Chevalier au Lion*, even though the romance is set in Brittany. Thus, the forest is both dangerous to the knights, and a positive place, as identity is formed through the dangerous adventures that occur there. Béroul's Tristan inverts this aspect of other romances, by making the adventures happen at court, which is actually the most dangerous place for the lovers. This is seen through Béroul's statement that:

"Tristan s'en voit a la roïne;
Lasant la plain, et la gaudine
S'en vet Tristan et Governal.
Yseut s'esjot, or ne sent mal.
En la forest de Morrois sont,
La nuit jerent desor un mont.
Or est Tristan si a seür
Con s'il fust en chastel o mur."

"Tristan went away with the Queen,
They left the plain, and Tristan and Governal
Passed through the forest,
Iseut rejoiced; she no longer felt any pain.
They were in the Forest of Morois,
And that night they slept on a hill.
Now Tristan felt as safe
as he would in a fortified castle."[160]

Thus, the forest of Morois acts as a sort of sanctuary for the lovers, in opposition to the dangers of the court. This is made apparent by the way that Béroul compares the forest to the castle, playing with our generic expectations. Thus, Tristan himself is the danger that inhabits the forest, making Morrois unsafe for all Marc's subjects. This is another inversion as Tristan, who is the hero of the legend, takes the role that

[160] Béroul, *Le Roman de Tristan*, 1271-1276

normally would be held by a monster or bad knight in another romance. This is made apparent when Béroul writes:

"De Cornoualle du païs
De Morrois erent si eschis
Qu'il n'I osout un sol entrer.
Bein lor faisoit a redouter;
Qar, se Tristan les peüst prendre,
Il les feïst as arbres pendre."

"The people of Cornwall were so afraid of Morrois,
That none of them dared to enter it.
They had good reason to be afraid,
For if Tristan could capture them,
He would hang them from the trees."[161]

Thus, Tristan in some respects becomes more dangerous to society as an exile than he was as an adulterer, creating yet another inversion. The fact that he might hang people by trees seems to be a rather violent act for someone as courtly as Tristan. However, it does illustrate that the forest has effectively become his and Iseut's domain, and they act as lords here, by punishing trespassers and hunting its game. However, his violence is also due to his loss of his courtly identity and his new primitive life. Here, he need not abide by the rules of society, and so he is to act savagely. Another reason is that Tristan knows that his forest is actually very close to the court, and thus it is permeable. By defending the forest of Morois, Tristan is actually defending his love, though this time he does not do so through the ruse, but rather through his strength of arms.

Despite all these inversions between the courtly and otherworldly geographies of romance, what does remain constant throughout the lovers' passage between these two oppositional worlds is the love that Tristan and Iseut hold for one another. Their

[161] Ibid, lines 1661-1666

stay here can be seen as, "the romantic *topos* of the desert island where a couple can relish in their dual solitude to the fullest."[162] Thus, in Morois, the lovers are shown to practice their love as though they were married, and not as before when they were adulterers. This change where they are finally allowed un-impinged access to each other causes them to live as equals, as both the social and "courtly love" hierarchy that would place Yseut in control have disappeared. Their relationship reaches a new level of transparency, where secrecy is no longer necessary to ensure their safety.

This new status as fictional husband and wife, which one would assume would be sufficient to render the lovers content, is however not enough. They are described as living a life that is harsh and uncomfortable, as they must forego all the luxuries of the court. Thus, instead of eating bread, they must eat meat, which acts as a symbol of their degenerate status. When the love potion wears off, they find themselves immediately regretting having lost their positions within society, and desire to return to the court despite the fact that they still love each other. Just before this, Marc has penetrated into their forest and leaves signs of his stay, which proves to the lovers that their supposed sanctuary is not as safe, or as removed as they had initially thought and ruins Morrois' attractiveness to them. Thus, this otherworldly forest, despite the way that it seems like a lovers paradise, is actually shown to be insufficient for Tristan and Iseut, despite the fact that the ability to openly love one another had appeared to be their goal. It comes as a surprise that, upon regaining their reason they decide to part ways. They even reproach themselves and feel guilty for having lived in such a way, though they do not truly repent for their sins of adultery.

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[162] Payen, J-C, *The Glass Palace in the Folie D'Oxford*, p. 114

This is due to the fact that believe themselves to have no control over their fate. They also feel that they have neglected the other half of their identities, or their real identity, and therefore desire to be reunited with their roles in courtly society.

Thus, Béroul illustrates that such a fantasy as this, completely removed from society and ruled by passion, is impossible to keep separate from society, but it is also impossible to find true happiness in a place where desire is the only governing principle because desire thrives on postponement of its fulfillment. The lovers therefore not only love each other, but they love to lie. They love the adventures that result from their lies, and thus they too desire postponement, which is brought about through their conflicts with courtly society. They strive on contradiction and opposition, and thus this static life alone in nature is shown to leave them restless. They need this because otherwise their love would become insignificant, as there would be no test to prove its worth. Thus, they, like Adam and Eve, are driven from their Eden and forced the society that is less appealing for them by all appearances, but which they are also shown to desire through their own agency. Through this, Tristan and Iseut's anti-court in the forest of Morois is shown to rely upon its differences with the actual court of Marc of Cornwall, or otherwise it would be so purely fictional that the lovers would not be able to derive pleasure from it. Such is the case in Tristan's otherworldly cave.

The cave, or statue grotto, in Thomas' version of Tristan is also representative of an otherworld, although it manifests itself in a different way, and it serves a different narrative function. It describes a scene in which Tristan, after his marriage to Iseut of the white hands, is shown to have sculpted a realistic statue of Iseut as well

as one of her maidservant Brengain, whom he visits regularly and converses with, pretending to have a real relationship with her while he woos her and then accuses her of treachery before being reduced to tears. Besides being totally bizarre, this is obviously different to the forest of Morois simply from the fact that Isuet is no longer present, making this episode representative of only Tristan's interior qualities.

While the forest of Morrois in the narrative illustrated the importance of both the real and the ideal for Tristan and Iseut to continue loving each other and also serves to allow the narrative to develop upon its cyclical course, the sculpture grotto serves a different purpose. Firstly, it illustrates how Thomas's *Tristan* contains far more expressions of unfulfilled desire, while Béroul's text contains far more acts of passion, though both authors do include a bit of both. Though this may be partly due to the parts of the tale each one covers, I believe it to be mostly due to the difference in style and the differences in treatment of the major themes by the two authors. This contrast manifests itself in the cave because here Tristan vainly attempts to vent his emotional desire on an inanimate object, while in Morois Tristan languishes in his very physical adulterous passion. Secondly, this cave is even more removed from society than the forest was, and is only accessed by Tristan and his companion Kahendrin, and it is therefore more of a removed fantasy world, in that it stays impenetrable by and imperceptible to society. This is because it is a secret place, while Tristan and Iseut's stay in the forest was widely known. This shows the grotto to be even more of an imagined reality than the one we have previously discussed. Thirdly, while the forest of Morois episode is an adventure that serves to advance the narrative in a cyclical manner, causing Iseut to return once more to king Marc's court,

the statue grotto episode repeats and reflects upon the previous adventures within the story itself in order to idealize them, as well as crystallize them within our memory without adding to the progression of the larger narrative.[163] Thus, while Morois had a narrative purpose as well as a symbolic one, the grotto here is shown to serve only a symbolic and thematic purpose. What we must ask ourselves, is what is the significance of this strange and otherworldly grotto and the statues contained within it?

According to Leslie W. Rabine, the statue grotto "expresses the rupture between ideals and reality, since it is removed from lived reality and represents realistically that which is absent from reality. Moreover, like the courtly love lyric, the statues, offering Tristan a pretext for isolated meditation, serve to make him more self-conscious."[164] Tristan is shown to be incapable of love from afar, and thus like the troubadours he creates art in order to ease his suffering, though this time it is sculpture and not poetry. This recalls our discussion earlier on Tristan the bard, who writes lays for exactly the same purpose. This coincides with the internal emotional aspects of Tristan's relation to the sculpture, whose realism is unsettling in its implications. It causes him to seemingly lose touch with reality, for he uses it to vent his unfulfilled desire. Thomas writes that:

"Por ico fist il ceste image
Que dire li volt son corage,
Son bon penser, as fole errur,
Sa paigne, sa joie d'amor,
Cer ne sot vers cui descovrir
Ne son voler ne son desir."

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[163] Rabine, Leslie W., "Love and the new Patriarchy," p. 72.
[164] Ibid, p. 72

"He made that statue
Because he wanted to tell it what was in his heart,
His good thoughts, and his wild misconceptions,
The pain he felt, and the joy of love,
Since he knew not whom to disclose
His longing and his heart's desire."[165]

Thus, the statue acts as Tristan's silent and immobile confidant, his lover, and his source of pain and anger. Tristan wants this to help him to ease his pain, but his efforts are futile, as nothing but Iseut's presence can actually heal him, and the statue cannot replace Iseut. Thus, once again, the other world is shown to lack the power to fulfill the lovers' desire, however in an opposite way to the last place. The sculpture grotto is too far removed from reality to satiate any kind of realistic desire. In fact, the fiction that Tristan creates here only serves to dupe him, as he exacerbates his ailment through constantly reflecting on it in this unhealthy and tragicomic way. This place, despite the fact that it is simply a reflection on earlier passages in the text, therefore illustrates this fact, and the love that so ails Tristan and Iseut is both ideal and real, attainable and unattainable, and ultimately futile because of these contradictions. These otherworldly places of the forest and cave acts as representations of the paradoxical desire that afflicts the lovers, as the real is distorted to become a fantasy in Morois, creating an anti-court in nature that highlights the antisocial nature of their desire, and as the fiction is distorted in the statue grotto to become realistic, thereby tricking Tristan and illustrating the fact that their love is ultimately an ideal that can only be fulfilled within the lovers' imaginations or dreams.

However, there is a third type of place in the *Tristan* romances: a border between these two distinct geographies of the court and the otherworld. This frontier

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[165] Thomas, *Tristan*, lines 986-991

manifests itself in the perilous ford and the Mal Pas. It is not the place of dangerous love or unmitigated desire, like in either the court or Morois, but rather it is the crossing between these two worlds. Thus, both frontiers are suitably located at a river, which is symbolic of the geography's narrative function as a barrier between the realities of the court and the fantasy of the lovers'. Also, it is both a courtly setting, as attested by Marc and his barons' attendance, as well as an otherworldly place due to the intervention of king Arthur and his knights.

At the perilous ford, Isuet is accepted back by into courtly society by Marc, though not by his barons because they still believe her to be guilty of adultery. Thus, this constitutes more of a physical crossing in between the otherworld and the court for Iseut, though it does not constitute full acceptance for Iseut into society because the possibility of her guilt leaves her at odds with society, and in a symbolically weakened position within the court as she is still vulnerable to accusations of adultery. Also, after this scene, Tristan does not regain his knightly identity, but instead stays living the cellar of the forester Orri until he can ensure Isuet's full passage back into society, and then affect his own return to knighthood. Thus, this scene is only a partial crossing in between the two worlds, which must be later on reaffirmed and cemented through the trial at Mal Pas.

Tristan and Iseut, before going to the perilous ford, promise to love one another until death, and exchange gifts: an emerald ring in exchange for Husedent, Tristan's hunting dog. This illustrates the fact that their love remains constant despite separation. Her motivation seems to be simply social status; she is tired of living her primitive life as an exiled felon in the forest. Thus, she only physically returns to the

court in order to take her external identity as queen and wife back, but remains psychologically unchanged, retaining her identity as a lover and mistress. Tristan here attempts to prove Iseut's innocence, albeit unsuccessfully. He offers to be tried by for the adultery. Tristan lies and says that no one has proved their guilt yet. This is not a real test of innocence however, because Tristan is easily the strongest knight in the land. Thus, this passage between the two worlds is deceptive, because it does not constitute a real guiltless return to society for either of the lovers, and Tristan's defense of Isuet is backed by his superior strength in arms. No one would dare challenge Tristan in such a trial, as doing so would not only exonerate him, but would be suicide for the accuser. Thus, this return is an act of deception in itself, and does not constitute an honest return to society, for Tristan has not only lied in speech, but also defends Iseut's honor in an unfair way.

At Mal Pas, however, this bridge to society is effectively crossed. Here, the barons have decided to wage war on Marc, fortifying themselves in their castles, in order to force the king to try his wife through an oath on holy relics in a final attempt to secure their own positions. However, this trial at Mal Pas will serve to return Iseut to her former status as a wife and queen untainted by charges of adultery, while at the same time it will stabilize the court by putting its internal conflicts to rest. However, Iseut tells Marc that if exonerated, the barons will continue to accuse her, because she has no family in the court to defend her honor. Thus, asks to swear to an oath of her own choosing, foreshadowing the subsequent lie or half-truth that she tells, and she wants king Arthur there for, she says:

"Se devant lui sui alegie,
Qui e voudroit aprés sordire,

Cil me voudroient escondire,
Qui avront veü ma deraisne…
Por les seurdiz se conbatroient.
Roise, por c'est biens devant eus set
Faiz li desraisne de mon droit."

"If I am declared innocent before him,
And if anyone makes accusation against me later,
Those who witnessed my judgment
Will be willing to defend me…
They would willingly take up arms against slander.
King, that is why
my defense should take place before them."[166]

Thus, king Arthur and his court are here shown as an idealized type of knight, who practices perfect chivalry and honor. They would in turn defend her honor because of their own honor. This idealized version of king Arthur is what makes him otherworldly. Thus, he holds an odd role in the text, as a fantastical character that ensures Iseut's reacceptance into society. At the same time Tristan tricks him into giving away his royal clothing and Iseut tricks him into accepting her innocence.

Iseut's deceptive oath, which is visibly true to all who hear it, is made fully true through the mutual acceptance of king Marc, king Arthur, and even God himself. And so, this episode at Mal Pas illustrates the power of fiction over reality, as in the end, it is the lie that triumphs. This seems paradoxical, as a lie cannot really be true, but nonetheless it is characteristic of the legend as a whole, where fiction and truth meet and comingle in a variety of ways for many reasons. Thus, the geography in which Tristan and Iseut live reflects upon their situation, their actions, and their love itself through a variety of ways. For example, while the court showed that their love was incompatible with society, the otherworlds proved that their ideal was

[166] Béroul, *Le Roman de Tristan*, lines, 3250-3264

unattainable, while the ruse at the frontier of these two diametrically opposed worlds acts as an intervention which allows the real and the ideal to synthesize themselves, returning the legend to its status quo. Tristan and Iseut's love, the most constant aspect of the text, is also shown to plagued by inconsistencies however, which will be the next focus of this chapter.

Tristan and Iseut's uncontrollable love for one another, though constant throughout the story, is similarly characterized by contradictions. Some of these contradictions are accounted for by the different treatments that each author ascribes to their love, while other reasons are a result of internal incongruities in the treatment of "courtly love." The major differences between Béroul and Thomas' theme of love, is firstly that for Béroul the love is physical while for Thomas it is emotional. Secondly, in Béroul the love potion, a symbol of their uncontrollable passion, lasts only three years, despite the fact that the lovers never stop loving each other, while in Thomas' version it lasts forever providing an explanation for their continued transgressions and attempting to exonerate the lovers from their mutual guilt. This potion causes their love to be described as magical, and therefore their love must be understood as belonging to the world of magic. Through this, it is shown to constitute an otherworld where erotic desire is the goal and the ideal. Thus, their love must exist in opposition to the real world of courtly society, not just because of its treasonous political implications, but also because of its being a product of the collective medieval imagination and therefore, it is a fantastic ideal. It allows to desires that would be condemned by society, and therefore represents the innermost desires of a sexually repressive society.

The love potion, which the lovers unknowingly consume, has been explained in a variety of different ways. Denis de Rougemont believes it to be both an "alibi for passion," and symbolic of their fated death.[167] Other scholars have picked up on these ideas and expanded on them. I believe that he was right in his connecting the lovers' love with their inevitable death. Thus, the potion is also a poison. Both potions and poisons, whose syntactical similarities is notable, figure throughout the *Tristan* texts, and the connection between both should not go unnoticed. For example, Tristan is finally mortally wounded because of a poisoned wound, but nonetheless he ultimately dies of a broken heart, because he is lead to believe that Iseut has abandoned him. Thus, while the potion makes Tristan and Iseut, love each other, it also brings about both of their deaths.

While their passion is beautiful and desirable, it is also shown to be dangerous and degenerate. This is because of the fact that it is adulterous, and thus it is an asocial love that causes the persecution of the lovers by the court. This puts them at odds with society, because they are trapped in a passionate world of love from which they cannot escape or even repent. In fact, they tell the hermit Ogrin that they cannot repent because of it, and the narrator Béroul agrees with this fact of their lives, saying:

"Out li vins si soupris Tristran
Et la roïne ensenble o lui
Que chascun disoit: "Las n'en sui."

"The wine [potion] had so dominated Tristan
And the queen along with him
That each said, "I have no regrets.""[168]

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[167] De Rougemont, Denis, *Love in the Western World*, p. 48
[168] Béroul, *Tristan*, lines 2144-2146

They have no regrets because they are not ultimately in control of this magical love, though, as Sahar Amer points out, they are show, to be able to control their actions, if not their emotions, surrounding this love.[169] Thus, they act as they can in light of their situation, trying to mediate between their love for one another and the pain of being apart.

This pain of being apart causes them to further lower their social status, as can be seen by Tristan's use of disguises as a leper or a madman, when the love becomes to great for him too handle. The lovers must also mediate between their loyalties to the court and their loyalties to each other. It is these sets of contradictions that cause them so much suffering. They cannot resist fulfilling their mutual desire, as we saw in the Folie texts and in the leper scene from Thomas. Yet despite this, they also desire to play their respective roles in society and to do what is expected of them. Thus, while the love represents the ideal and society the real, the two worlds, or states of identity, are thus shown to be wholly incompatible for the lovers without the use of some kind of trickery. Thus, the ruse is shown to be the passage between love and society, because it makes their love real and keeps it secret, all the while fictionalizing society, through a set of inversions that embellish and falsify the truth.

In addition to this connection between love and death, their love for one another is shown to have another set of oppositional characteristics: it is both creative and destructive. Their love is shown to be transgressive in part due to the threat that Iseut will conceive Tristan's child and not her husband's. However, they never have a

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[169] Sahar Amer, "Re-Defining Marriage and Adultery in Béroul's Roman de Tristan." p. 5

child, and so this aspect of their adultery only menaces society through its implications, without actually ever affecting society. In fact, if they did reproduce, it would be equally destructive for society as it would be an act of creation. However, their love does cause them to create art, in that the lovers write poetry or make sculpture. This association between love and the act of creating art stems back to the troubadours, but it is used differently in Romance. In troubadour poetry, the narrator and the hero or speaker have one voice, while in romance the narrator and hero are separate.

Having Tristan create art makes a sort of self-reflexivity between the author and his tale. Just as Tristan and Iseut's passion inspired them to write, so does it inspire Béroul and Thomas. However, while the lovers create in order to ease their suffering in love, the authors write in order to present us with a truth, and if not, to present us with a search for truths. This can be illustrated through the example of the sculpture grotto. The realism in the sculpture of Iseut is representative of the new emphasis on realism in romance as a genre, as can be seen through the increased importance of psychology and interiority. Therefore, while Tristan wonders about his love, so Thomas wonders about it too, and in directly after this episode, he poses his audience the question of "A quel de l'amor mieuz estoit / Ou qui greignor dolur en ait," or "who came off the best in love / or who suffered the most for it."[170] Thus, Thomas implicates the reader, as well as himself in the tale. Along with the author being implicated in their acts of love, the reader is also implicated. We are given access to the hidden secrets, and internal thoughts and desires of each character. We

[170] Thomas, *Tristan*, lines 1123-1124

are, being presented with their story so as to reflect on it in terms of our own lives and our own love. This explains why Thomas addresses his story to lovers, as this legend would have particular relevance to them. However, he does not provide us with one clear message, but instead simply asks us to provide one for ourselves. Thus, he presents his tale as not a moral story meant to teach a single lesson, but rather a story that is seeped in the dialectical tradition and that is meant to incite a search for a meaning or many meanings. Thus, in this manner, the story is ambiguous, just like the love that its heroes feel.

This ambiguity is caused by various series of contradictions, which we have discussed throughout this chapter. These contradictions are what in turn incites our search for meaning in the story. For example, we are forced to weigh the benefits of feudalism's rules against courtly love's ideals, or are asked to and find a way to somehow transcend the differences between these apparently contradictory forces. Each reader can take away his own message from any of the specific texts, and we are encouraged to do so. However, in looking at the Tristan legend in its entirety of Old French texts from the 12$^{th}$ and 13$^{th}$ centuries, I was struck by a single theme of oppositions, which I believe is essential to understanding this text. This major contradiction, that I have repeatedly referred back to is the opposition of the real and the fictional.

Because romance's representations of the real and ideal conflict within its fictional structure, I believe the Tristan text is meant to be self-reflexive of the practice of writing fiction. Fiction must contain a trace of reality in order to be accessible and useful, and must contain fantasy for its own embellishment as well as

for our enjoyment, for what would fiction be if it did not allow us to escape from reality. Thus, fiction itself is shown to transcend the very boundaries that Tristan and Iseut cannot overcome, and therefore as it harmoniously combines contradictory elements, the text in and of itself  the transcendence that they desire. It manages to succeed where the lovers fail, once again illustrating the power of fiction.

Above I discussed how the author, heroes and audience are all implied in the texts' searches for meaning, and this suggests that there is another way that this self-reflexivity occurs. The *Tristan* legend provides us with both realities of courtly society and its ideals. The characters within the text are subject to both of these oppositional forces, and try to find a way to navigate between them. They do so by tricking with fiction society into believing that their love is fictional, and therefore, they falsify the realties of their situation through the act of story telling. Thus, through the act of the creation of a fiction, we find that the lovers can overcome their difficulties and can pass between the realities of the court to of from their ideal otherworld of desire leaving their troubles behind. However, though they do manage to transcend these contradictions in Béroul's trail scene through the ruse, or their fiction, they are still later on forced apart. Thus, their fiction is shown to have the power to pass between the real and the ideal, but it does allow them to transcend or combine both, in the way that the story does. Thus, the story is once again the fulfillment of their ultimate desire, though its' fictiveness in turn highlights the falsity of their lies.

The best illustration of this occurs in the *Folie d'Oxford*, and with this example I will conclude my argument. The folie texts are the perfect place to look for

such an example, as they are later reflections on the Tristan legend, that only described a scene in the hopes of illustrating something very important, or in this case central, to the rest of the legend. Here, Tristan travels across a frontier from the real world of his suffering at home with Iseut of the White hands, to a sort of half-magical court where Iseut lives with her husband Marc. The court where he arrives is described as both fantastic and physically real. The castle, Tintagel, is described as a beautiful and well-fortified castle, indicative of its fantasy and realities:

Sur la mer en Cornuaile.
La tur querree, fort et grant,
Jadis le fermerent jeant.
De marbre sunt tut li quarrel,
Asis e junt mult ben e bel.
Eschekerez esteit le mur
Si cum de sinopre e d'azur.
Enz al chastel ert une porte;
Ele esteit bele e grant e forte.
Ben serreit l'entrée e l'issue
Par dous prudumes defendue."

"On the Cornish coast.
The square keep, large and stong,
Had long ago been built by giants.
The building blocks were all of marble,
Artfully arranged and fitted together.
The wall was in a checkered pattern
Of heraldic red and blue.
The gate to the castle
Was large and splendid, strong enough
To be defended by two good men."[171]

First of all, this castle is said to exist in a real place, the Cornish coast, thereby cementing it within the reality of the fictional tale. However, it is magical in its construction by giants, and in its beautiful red and blue marble, allowing it a sort of otherworldly size, strength, and beauty. But, the stones are likened to heraldic colors,

[171] Le Folie d'Oxford, lines 104-114

making us certain that this place is the home of courtly society, and that it is therefore, despite its magical origins, governed by the realistic laws of feudal relations. Most importantly, it is shown to be impenetrable, a referencing the vulnerability of courtly society, which needed strong defenses to protect against its enemies: for example, Tristan.

However, the person who is destructive to this society, Tristan, passes through its gates easily with the help of his disguise as a madman. While there, Tristan goes into the court, and acts as a mad entertainer, quite like a degenerate storyteller. The story he tells is real however, and it is the tale of his love for Iseut. He blatantly asks Marc to trade Iseut for his non-existent sister, which is a wholly unfair trade. Marc laughs at his suggestion, and asks Tristan where he would bring her. Tristan replies as follows:

“”Reis” fet il fol, “la sus en l’air
Ai une sale u je repair.
De veire est faite, bele e grant;
Li solail vait par mi raiant.
En l’aor ese e par nues pent,
Ne berce, ne crolle pur vent.
Delez la sale ad une chambre,
Fraite de cristal e de lambre.
Li solail, quand par main lefrat,
Leenz mult [grant] clarté rendrat.””

“”King” said the fool, “up there in the air,
There is a palace that I call home.
It is large and splendid and made of glass;
The sun shines right through it.
It hangs from the clouds and floats in the air,
Never rocked or shaken by the wind.
Next to the great hall, there is a chamber
Made of crystal and marble.
The sun, when it rises tomorrow morning,

Will flood the room with light.""[172]

J.C. Payen, makes an interesting an important observation about this. He writes that, "Tristan's ravings when he evokes the place palace suspended between earth and sky convey his aspiration for another existence where Yseut and he might love each other in complete freedom, in absolute transparency, far from society and its repression."[173] Thus, Tristan's ideal is shown to be a place removed from society: a glass palace that is suspended in the sky. Thus, he describes this fantasy in terms of his innermost desires for a union with Yseut. Firstly, he desires to be with Yseut, separate from the king Marc's court and the accusations of adultery that come with it. In his home in the sky, their love would be visible to all, but they would be protected from all those who see it. This transparency shows us a major part of his desire, which is to no longer be confined to brief secret trysts in order to practice his love with Iseut, but instead, what he really desires is a continued relationship with her in the light of day, without reproach. However, Payen takes this castle in the sky to be representative of Tristan and Iseut's desire to escape society and its confines.[174]

However, if we look at this castle in comparison to Tintagel, some interesting discrepancies occur. This castle can be made of transparent and fragile material because is it so far removed from the dangers of society. Thus, like Tintagel, it fears no attack, which is something that Tristan can only dream of, having spent the precedent years of his life in exile due to accusations of adultery from the jealous barons. In addition to this, his castle is also shown to be similarly beautiful and strong

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[172] Ibid, lines 301-310
[173] Payen, J.C. *The Glass Palace in the Folie D'Oxford*, p. 111
[174] Ibid, p. 122-123

as Marc's castle, but in wholly different ways: while one is colorfully beautiful his derives its beauty from its transparency, and while Tintagel is physically defensive due to its fortifications the other is made of fragile materials yet it is impenetrable because of its geography. Therefore, this castle is a fictional space, which Tristan imagines, notably while trying to gain access to Iseut. He has realized that his stay with Iseut must be short-lived, and will therefore not suffice to ease his suffering.[175] And so he imagines his ideal fictional realm, where he can practice his love indefinitely without fear of reprisal, and in the light of day. However, what Payen failed to observe in his reading of the castle in the sky as purely fictional, is that the castle is still a court, and is therefore an idealized representation of a very real place in society. Thus, Tristan is shown to desire the court, though it is a fictional and very much changed court, removed from the rules that govern the society and the dangers that come with it, but still imbued with the beauty, order, and luxuries of the court. He has realized in his stay in Morois that he needs society for his and Iseut's continued happiness, as their courtly identities cannot accept a full loss of social status. He has also realized that his love of Iseut is as all-powerful as it is dangerous for him, as we find him at the beginning of both folie texts on the verge of death. Thus, Tristan's ideal is a court where his erotic fantasy is brought out into the daylight, allowed, and protected from the realities of society. This otherworldly reality is the culmination of his desires, as it would allow him to live both his role in society, and his role as a lover indefinitely and without fear of persecution.

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[175] Ibid, p. 123

This vision of a castle in the sky illustrates beautifully for us that Tristan dreams of what only literature can truly achieve: the synthesis of a fantastical dream of desire and perfect passion shared by two lovers, with the real world and its rules, despite the fact that the two are shown to be truly incompatible. This desire however, through the legend's tragic ending, is shown to be unattainable in this life. Instead of being allowed to live out their socially subversive passion together, they are instead shown to die trying to realize it. This ultimate tragic death that the lovers share is however, for the medieval mind, a form of transcendence of the real and the ideal, as they will now be allowed to live on in an idealized perfection in heaven, which was understood by all to be real and attainable. Though we cannot be sure where they go upon their death, heaven or hell, we can be sure that they are finally allowed to be together in the afterlife. I believe that, given God's grace towards the lovers, they would be saved, with perhaps some time in purgatory. Thus, the lovers' final desire to ascend to their castle in the sky would be achieved, and their souls would be allowed to live on, loving one another indefinitely, openly, and without fear, as they can only dream of doing in this life. However, if this ideal is shown to be allowed by a heroic death where the two lovers once again prove their dedication to their love and to each other, this ideal is also shown to be achieved by the art of literature, which is therefore raised up by through its own existence, allowing us to realize its beauty as an ideal, as well as its purpose as a reflection of reality, meant to teach. Thus, the main lesson to be learned in the Tristan legend, is that literature is able to achieve what no man can, in that it can transcend the real and the fiction, forming a perfect union, which the lovers can only achieve in death.

## Chapter Five: *Le Chevalier De La Charrette* – Lancelot's Achievement of the Ideal

Truly gauging the impact of the Tristan legend on medieval society is an impossible feat for a variety of reasons. However we can be certain that it had a pronounced effect on romance literature produced in the second half of the twelfth century in both France and England. If one takes time to look, there appears to be a startling number of direct references to the Tristan legend throughout the genre of romance. Often, for example, Tristan and Iseut's love was used to gauge other pairs of lovers, and they overshadowed Greek lovers known from Ovid's works like Pyramus and Thisbe as the ideal of amorous devotion. The most notable uses of the with the *Tristan* legend as intertext appears in the works of Chrétien de Troyes. The similarities between Tristan and Lancelot are manifested in the shared content of the texts, which for the purposes of this essay is the theme of adultery between the queen and a heroic knight. Another example of the Tristan legend's influence on the two authors is seen in Chrétien's claim to having written a version of Tristan and Isuet in his prologue to *Cligés*, though his version no longer exists or perhaps never did exist. The fact that Chrétien was aware of the legend serves to prove that the story was very popular, and that authors often used it as a source of inspiration. We can also assume from these examples that the themes central to the Tristan texts were both attractive to and debatable for medieval authors and their aristocratic audiences. In fact, it has been said that, "Chrétien was never able to get away from them," in reference to his perceived obsession with the Tristan texts.[176] As a full study of the Tristan legend's

[176] Zink, Medieval French Literature: An Introduction 59.

influence on medieval literature is outside of the scope of this essay, in this chapter I will explore in the relation between the Tristan legend and Chrétien de Troyes *Le Chevalier de La Charrette*, which will in turn prove helpful to our understanding of the role of adultery in the genre of Romance.

Most critics discuss the Tristan legend in terms of Chrétien's *Cligés*. This is in part due to the reference to Tristan in its prologue, but it is mostly due to how the two romances' narrative structures present themselves in stark opposition to each other, with *Cligé*s as a sort of anti-*Tristan* legend, in order to prove a point that literature need not be socially subversive, if it is to be enjoyable and meaningful. In *Cligés* ennobled love is not problematic, nor is it adulterous, though the themes of adultery and asocial love remain present. Instead, the protagonists avoid and overcome these negative aspects of love. For example the heroine, Fenice, like Iseut herself, tricks her suitor into sleeping with another woman on his supposed wedding night. However, unlike Iseut this allows her to avoid sexual deviance by sleeping with two men. Thus, unlike Iseut, she remains morally and physically pure until her marriage to the man she loves. In the end, rather than sharing a tragic death, the lovers marry. This act fulfills Cligés' ultimate knightly identity allowing him to become emperor, and making the romance into a *Bildungsroman*, which the Tristan stories certainly are not, as Tristan's identities conflict with each other, but are not able to advance towards any sort of perfection. Thus, Cligés and Fenice are able to avoid the mistakes that Tristan and Iseut made, and in the end are rewarded for it. However, in creating a romance that takes a starkly oppositional stance towards the Tristan legend, Chrétien forms a sort of dialectical debate between his own work and the Tristan tradition.

I believe that in his later romance, *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*, Chrétien de Troyes has continued on in this debate with the Tristan legend, though this time he takes a different, more ambiguous stance than he had before. Before delving into the matter at hand however, we must realize that Chrétien de Troyes, unlike the largely anonymous authors of the Tristan stories dealt with in the last chapter, is an author in a more modern sense of the term, having written five romances which highlight his authorship and all address similar themes differently. He does this in order to make his readers look at both sides of a single debate, so as to arrive at solution to their contradictions. A good example of his reuse and reevaluation of themes can be seen from his treatment of marriage in *Erec et Enide*, where the hero loves his wife too much and forgets his chivalric duties, compared with his treatment of marriage in *Le Chevalier au Lion*, where the hero Yvain forgets his wife for in the pursuit of knightly adventure. Erec and Yvain are therefore opposite types of married knights, and both must resolve their problems through numerous chivalric tests, until they can finally achieve a sort of perfected identity. In the end, both knights are allowed to become king or lord, and therefore they too achieve a superior identity. When these two romances and their contradictory representations of problematic marriage, along with their similar endings where a perfect knightly identity is achieved, are studied together, one learns that what Chretien is really preaching is moderation in marriage between love and duty. Therefore, these two romances act as a dialectical argument concerning marriage and knightly identity, as they present both sides of the marriage debate before transcending the problems of both sides with this message of moderation, in order to create a single and unifying truth about marriage.

Despite this apparent clarity in his other romances, *Le Chevalier de La Charrette* is much more ambiguous in terms of presenting its audience with the truth concerning love and adultery. Therefore, in this text it will prove to be difficult to discern one single overarching truth from between its lines. However, this fact also makes it more interesting, as its ambiguity of meaning reflects the Tristan legend in that it incites a search for meaning rather than presenting us with a clear path to understanding. As I stated earlier, this is one of the two purposes of dialectical argumentation, and therefore Chrétien is shown to use both approaches in different romances, as can be seen through a comparision of the endings of *Erec et Enide,Yvain* and *Cligés*, with the abrupt ending of *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*.

Despite the fact that we really do not know much about the actual Chrétien de Troyes, though various theories circulate concerning his true identity, Chrétien does supply us with some information about himself, allowing us some insight into this mysterious man's writings. This information mostly supplied in the prologues and epilogues to his five romances, in each of which he names himself, and through them he creates an interesting authorial persona that more pronounced and unique than that of any of his contemporaries. Chrétien de Troyes, in his prologue to the *Chevalier de la Charrette* explains that he is writing for the countess Marie de Champagne. Some have suggested that he was a member of the court, but as Benton points out, he was most likely not continuously present at the court of Champagne, and was instead most likely a "court author" rather than a resident.[177] This is supported by the fact that the name Chrétien never appears in the charters of the court of Champagne, making it

[177] Benton, "The Court of Champagne as a Literary Center" Speculum 562.

unlikely that he was a common presence at the court.[178] However, this should be no surprise, as court authors were rarely at the courts for which they wrote, unless perhaps presenting their work to their patron, or conducting some other kind of business.[179] Instead, we can assume that Chrétien was a clerk, and was most likely attached to a monastery or church in the area surrounding Champagne. That he was well educated and incredibly gifted as a author of romance is undeniable. However, making hypotheses about Chrétien's, or for that matter his patron Marie's, actual identity and opinions based on his romances is a common pitfall that must be avoided at all costs.

All we have is minimal information, and thus we must avoid making statements that can have no grounding in fact. In addition to this, we must also be sure to keep Chrétien's authorial persona separate from any theories we may have about the actual man, as Chrétien's authorial persona is about as fictitious, and far more ambiguous, than the characters in his romances. Having briefly introduced how the Tristan legend's influence manifested itself in contemporary romance, as well as having addressed the questions surrounding Chrétien de Troyes' authorship, it is appropriate to turn our discussion to *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*, so as to begin our comparison of the two stories.

In *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*, Chrétien write a story about an adulterous queen, Guinevere, who is in loves the greatest knight at her husband's court: Lancelot du Lac. This adulterous relation bears obvious similarities to the protagonists to in the legend *Tristan*, however his text is really nothing like Béroul or Thomas' story. From

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[178] Ibid.
[179] Ibid.

the very beginning his story is different, as it begins with a claim of authorship. He interjects himself into the tale claiming in his prologue to have written the story under the order and direction of his patron, Marie de Champagne. His tone is wholly humorous, as he tells us that he wont flatter his patroness and derides flatterers, before proceeding to flatter her himself. Chrétien writes about himself in opposition to the vain flatterers saying,

"Par foi, je ne sui mie cil
Qui vuelle losangier sa dame;
Dirai je : tand come une jame
Vaut de pelles et de sardines
Vaut la contesse de reïnes?
Naie, je n'en dirai [ja] rien
S'est il voirs meleoit gré mien,
Mes tant dirai ge que mialz oevre
Ses comandemanz an ceste oevre
Que sans ne painne que g'i mete."[180]

"But I, by God, refuse
to spin sweet words about
My lady. Should I say: "This lady
Is worth her weight in queens,
One gem as good as silks
And onyx?" No, I won't
But even if I don't, she is.
What I have to say is that this
Story has been better polished
By her work and wisdom than by mine."[181]

His ironic prologue sets a new tone for romance, where the humor is no longer the bawdy slapstick of Béroul's text, but is instead characterized by witty inversions of our expectations. Another layer of this joke is that, despite the fact that we know Chrétien to be the author, he playfully denies this role, confusing the readers

[180] Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* vv. 14-23.
[181] Chrétien de Troyes, *Lancelot: The Knight of the Cart* vv. 14-23.

expectations in regards to his authorship. Chrétien then proceeds to name himself, an act that would normally be a claim to authorship:

"Del *Chevalier de la charrette*
Comance Chrestïens son livre,
Matiere et san li done et livre,
La contesse et il s'antremet
De panser, que gueres n'i met
Fors sa painne et s'antancïon."[182]

"As Chrétien begins this tale
Of Lancelot, the Knight
Of the Cart, he declares that the subject
And its meaning come from his lady.
She gave him the idea, and the story.
His words do the work of her matter."[183]

However odd this seems to a modern reader, here he adopts a common practice for a medieval author by refusing to take credit for his work, similar to Geoffrey of Monmouth's claim to a Welsh source, and the anonymous author of the *Mort D'Artu*'s claim to be Walter Map. This could be explained by his suitable humility as a clerkly author, but I believe it to be Chretien setting the stage for a variety of inversions, especially concerning issues of authorship, and issues surrounding patronage and his intended audience. After this, Chrétien launches abruptly into his tale, starting as usual with the beginning of spring.

The romance begins at Arthur's court in the realm of Logres. Everything appears normal at until Méléagant, the proud son of king Badgamus and heir to the realm of Gorre, rides into court and demands a contest. He offers to return the prisoners that he keeps exiled in his kingdom, if a knight can defeat him in battle. If Méléagant is victorious however, he will abduct the queen. Keu, Arthur's seneschal,

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[182] Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* vv. 24-29.
[183] Chrétien de Troyes, *Lancelot: The Knight of the Cart* vv. 24-29.

takes the king's place in this challenge for Guinevere, who is helplessly caught in the middle as the object of exchange between men. Later, we learn that Keu has lost the queen. The court has therefore quickly been transformed from its healthy state, to one of disrepair and chaos, with Arthur's and his knights shown to be weak.

Gauvain decides to pursue Guinevere, so as to save the court. On his way, he meets a mysterious unnamed knight who is also in search of the queen. We know that this knight is Lancelot because of the prologue, but he remains anonymous within the context of the romance. Lancelot is in so much of a hurry that his horse has died from exhaustion. Upon arriving at a cart, driven by a dwarf, a sort of mobile pillory for criminals, he gets in to travel faster, an act that we view from chivalrous Gauvain's disdainful eyes. This act subsequently ruins his reputation, becoming instantly, and universally known as the knight of the cart throughout the next half of the romance.[184] Gauvain and Lancelot then spend a night at a noblewoman's house, where Lancelot encounters a magical adventure of the Perilous Bed. After this, the knights take separate paths to the two magical entrances to Gorre, Lancelot's path leading to the Sword Bridge, and Gauvain's path leading to the Underwater Bridge. From this point, the romance follows Lancelot, as he encounters many different adventures upon his path. These adventures are a battle with a knight who is defending his ford whom Lancelot accords grace because of a lady's wishes, a woman who hosts Lancelot and falls in love with him and then accompanies him on his quest, a proud and violent knight who tries to abduct this lady leading to a meeting with this knight's wise father, and a prophetic adventure where Lancelot proves his future glory while

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[184] Cohen, "Masoch/Lancelotism" The New Literary History 240.

discovering his tomb. After this, Lancelot is hosted by a generous lord of Logres whose sons replace the lady as companions. Lancelot traverses the rocky path where he battles another knight, then the revolt of the captive people of Logres where Lancelot leads the exiles on to victory. Afterwards, another battle erupts with a proud knight where a lady on a mule demands the head of the loser, until he finally arrives at the Sword Bridge. Here, without any regard for his own physical suffering, Lancelot crosses into the realm of Gorre.

He arrives wounded from his crossing, and is taken to king Badgamus' castle. Badgamus turns out to be a wise and just father with a proud and devious son. Soon after Lancelot rests, he fights Méléagant for Guinevere and wins by default when king Badgamus stops the fight. Méléagant gives the queen to Lancelot on the condition that they battle again in exactly a year's time. Thus, Lancelot frees the captives and the queen. At this point in the tale, Guinevere finally lets the audience know Lancelot's true name and identity, and he is freed of his infamous title as the knight of the cart. She however rejects Lancelot and spurns him when he comes to see her.

His freeing of the prisoners is taken badly by the men of Gorre, who capture Lancelot. Rumor leads Guinevere to believe him dead, and she contemplates suicide from her guilt, without actually doing it. Her extreme symptoms cause others to believe she's dead, and when Lancelot, having escaped captivity, hears of this he actually attempts suicide. Once back at court, the lovers are reconciled and arrange a meeting at the queen's window. Lancelot arrives, and is separated from her by bars, but he easily bends them to allow himself entry. In doing this, he cuts off the tip of a finger. In his passion, he feels nothing, but stains Guinevere's bed with his blood. The

next morning, Méléagant sees this blood, and accuses the still wounded Keu of having committed adultery. Lancelot defends Keu's honor from this false accusation, and once again defeats Méléagant, proving Keu and Guinevere's innocence.

After this second combat, Lancelot goes to help Gauvain who has still not arrived. However he is once again captured, this time by a dwarf who is a servant to Méléagant. He is taken off to a remote castle and kept prisoner. Here, the narrative turns to Gauvain, who temporarily takes Lancelot's place as protagonist, and escorts Guinevere back to Arthur's court. Once back at court, king Arthur calls for a tournament at Noauz.

The narrative jumps back to Lancelot in captivity, who hears of the tournament. He manages to persuade his captor, a woman, to let him leave, on the conditions that he returns. Lancelot then travels to the tournament and disguises himself, hoping to take the prize anonymously. At the tournament, Guinevere notices his prowess, and as a test to see if it is Lancelot, sends him a message asking that he fight his worst. Lancelot obeys at his own risk, and ruins the esteem he had won. The next day, Guinevere does the same, and he again obeys. Certain of his identity, she finally tells him to do his best. At this command, Lancelot immediately proves himself the worthiest of all knights. However, he is bound by contract to return to Gorre, leaving all the tournaments spectators astounded and curious as to his identity.

Back in Gorre, he is once again imprisoned, though this time alone in a tower with no door on a remote island at the edge of the realm. Méléagant meanwhile travels to king Arthur's court to inform them of his scheduled duel with Lancelot. Gauvain agrees to take Lancelot's place if he cannot be found before the date, and the

court disperses to search for the knight. None of the knights find him, but instead the lady with the mule, Méléagant's sister, reappears as Lancelot's savior. She wants to repay him for the knight's head, and so she releases him from his prison. Lancelot returns to Arthur's court just in time for his final combat. He is once again victorious, and Lancelot mercilessly knocks in Méléagant's teeth and cuts off his head.

With this, the story comes to an abrupt ending, and Chrétien in his epilogue once again addresses his audience, and his role as author. Here, there is a similar rejection of authorship, as in the prologue, though of a far more odd and unprecedented sort. Chrétien claims that, at the point in the story when Lancelot was imprisoned in the tower, he stopped writing. He says, that a clerk named Godefroi de Leigni, of whom we have no information, finished the text for him under his direction. What is odd about this, is 'that there is no mention of Marie, the patron who supposedly guided the conception of the book. This is an aspect of the *Chevalier de la Charrette* that we will have to return to later on, as this basic plot summary suffices for the moment to introduce the story. Now, we must turn to the story's themes and structure, in order to witness how they are both similar and different from those in the Tristan legend, before moving on to discuss how the text creates opposition within itself.

While a clear division between the real and the fantastic characterizes the Tristan legend, *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* is defined by the ambiguity between these two oppositional concepts. Thus, there is no magical explanation like the love potion to explain the origins of the love between Lancelot and Guinevere. Instead, Chrétien makes their love a fact from the very beginning of the romance, and omits

any explanation of their mutual and mystical passion. Importantly, this difference marks how the style of Chrétien's writing differs with that of his predecessors, in that he tells a tale that allows itself to be knowingly read as fiction without any intrusion of reality. Therefore, while Tristan and Iseut's love is magical, the setting of the legend and the problems that the lovers face are inspired by the realities of courtly life. In Lancelot, this mirror of reality is shattered, and the reader finds himself in a mystical world where anything can happen. For example, even the reality of gossip, which we can be sure was widespread in courtly society, is transformed into an otherworldly action, where news of Lancelot's ride in the cart is allowed to travel great distances in a seemingly instantaneous fashion. For example, when Lancelot arrives in the camp of the wise father with the proud son, the crowd immediately identifies him,

> "Veez, le chevalier, veez,
> Qui fu menez sor la charrete!"[185]
>
> "See! See! It's the knight
> Who rode in the cart!"[186]

This is fantastical because it was only a matter of days earlier that Lancelot rode in the cart, and there is a great distance between this camp and the town in which he made his fateful decision. The way that the gossip travels, much like the love in the story, is both unexplained and inexplicable. Both marvels, love and gossip, becomes simply a part of the fabric of the world created in this romance. Their purpose is to engender meaning, rather than act as a representative of reality. This is the most important way in which *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* is different from the Tristan

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[185] Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* vv. 1646-1647.
[186] Chrétien de Troyes, *Lancelot: The Knight of the Cart* vv. 1671-1672.

legend, in that it is a complete escape from reality, and is therefore more literary through its overtly fictive nature. In fact, its realism is found almost exclusively in depictions of psychology, rather than reflections on society.

While this remains the major difference in style between the two texts, they contain an interesting relationship between their respective narrative structures, which are both similar and different. Both the Tristan story and *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* are a larger narrative comprised of many individual narrative threads, or episodes. The overall shape of the narrative is characteristically circular, as they are comprised of passages to and from the court. This circularity is however, more pronounced in Chrétien's text, can be seen through the way in which the text begins with a departure from the court, and ends with a return to court. Tristan on the other hand, is made up of many circular narratives that combine to form the entirety of the story.

The narrative threads contained within the larger scope of romances often interrelate with one another, as can be seen in the Tristan stories. This occurs, for example, in the sculpture grotto, which recalls the moment of the lovers parting, as well as all the other instances where love engenders artistic creation. Chrétien uses this technique as well, though his method in constructing his romances is more refined as it is based on the form of the narrative as a whole, as well as content of the episode, while the interrelations between episodes in Tristan are created solely through their shared content.

Chrétien coined the term to refer to this type of narrative structure, calling it a "*bele conjointure,*" or a beautiful composition, in the prologue to his romance *Erec et*

*Enide*.[187] Through this term, he means that his romance is organized in a specific and well thought out way, so as to incite meaning through comparison of various episodes, as seen through his division of the narrative into separate interrelated parts. On top of this, Chrétien also uses this term to defend his secular subject matter, which would have been scorned by some of the more spiritual literary elite of the day. He argues that even if a story's subject matter is held in disdain, through much thought, hard work, beautiful speech, and in making a story that incites learning by containing meaning, an author can produce a beautiful composition.[188] In order to see how this *bele conjointure* works in his romance, we will have to examine the order and interrelation of episodes in *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* in order to see if we can discern any patterns.

In *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*, there are many different ways in which to divide the manuscript in order to create sets of similar or oppositional parts. One such way would be to look at the manuscript in terms of its geography for example. The principle place that divides the romance's geography, takes place at the Sword Bridge. Not only does Lancelot cross a frontier, but he also arrives at his goal of finding Guinevere, allowing him to become a different sort of character and forcing the narrative to continue on in an different fashion than before. The quest is changed, becoming not so much about saving Guinevere through various dangerous adventures, as we finally realize that she was never in grave danger, but instead it starts to be about Lancelot's love for her and his quest for his own identity, as proven

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[187] Chrétien de Troyes, *Erec et Enide*, ed. Jean-Marie Fritz, (Paris: Livre de Poche,1992) vv. 14.
[188] Ibid, vv. 1-13.

through dangerous adventures. This quest for love and identity had before been implicit in the narrative, but had not been described or openly discussed by the author, who preferred to keep his text and his hero shrouded in mystery. Chrétien achieves this by not naming Lancelot, as well as by displaying him as a kind of anonymous anti-hero, who initially appears a fool, though at the same time is shown to be the greatest knight in the world.

In addition to this, the structure of the narrative changes as well after this crossing. Before the Sword Bridge, the adventures that Lancelot encountered can be grouped into two separate groups of short episodes, each of which mirrors an episode from the previous set of adventures. I will call these groups A and B. The division between A and B occurs after the prophecy in the cemetery, where Lancelot is shown to be the greatest knight in the world, revealing part of his true identity. This moment changes our perception of Lancelot, who can no longer be viewed as shameful, like before at the cart when we were saw him through Gauvain's eyes. Instead we are allowed some knowledge of his future glory, though his full identity, signified by his name, is still not revealed, or achieved. We are made to wait anticipate what is yet to come from this now noble mysterious knight. Thus, throughout B, we watch Lancelot prove himself until his ultimate arrival at the Sword Bridge, where Lancelot once again proves himself superior to any other knight by completing an impossible feat. Shortly after this act, Lancelot is allowed to complete his initial goal, and Guinevere finally names him for us. After the Sword Bridge however, the narrative structure changes through its not being split up into two equal parts as before though despite this, certain episodes do still interrelate with one another in meaningful ways.

Chrétien also divides his romance into three parts. However, the first division occurs at Lancelot's passage into Gorre, which happens at the 2192nd verse Lancelot when he passes the physical frontier into Gorre through the *Passage des Pierres*, and then the second division occurs when Guinevere finally departs from the land of Gorre and Lancelot is made a prisoner, at the 5300th verse. The final part describes Lancelot's captivity, until his escape and his ultimate defeat of Méléagant. The manuscript ends at the 7114 verses, making these divisions, and their similar lengths, seem completely purposeful on Chrétien's part, allowing his readers further insight into the thought process of his, *bele conjointure*.

Another instance of this type of partition also occurs in the way in which Lancelot is named. This moment occurs a matter of verses away from the central line of the manuscript, marking an enormous change in Lancelot's identity, which has been interpreted in many different ways, though is always cited as central to the romance.[189] Thus, it becomes apparent that Chrétien's romance has been painstakingly calculated and perfected so as to contain these divisions that occur at specific points in the manuscript and coincide with changes within the structure of the narrative as well. This helps to illustrate the carefully planned process that Chretien must have used in composing his story, which becomes another signature of the author, indicative of his use of *bele conjointure* that Chretien defined and believed in.

In addition to these two examples of *Bele Conjointure*, this literary tool also manifests itself in the smaller narrative threads of the text. These parts also interrelate through sets of similarities and differences. In this way, both similarities

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[189] Lori J. Walters, "Introduction" Lancelot and Guinevere: A Casebook, ed. Lori J. Walters (New York: Garland P, 1996) xx.

and differences act to provide *sens*, or meaning, to Chrétien's text through dialectical reasoning. Dialectical argumentation is not evident in his context however, unlike in the Thomas' Tristan. Instead, it simply informs how he presents his text's meaning. I

If we look at the adventures that take place before Lancelot's arrival at the Sword Bridge, which I have designated as series A and B, we notice that there are two sets of five different episodes. In both cases, Lancelot is first given hospitality, then fights a knight, then receives hospitality again, and then fights another knight, before finally completing an adventure that is prophetic of Lancelot's greatness. Despite this order, noteworthy differences appear if we look closer at these episodes. For example, we find that the first set of hosts are both women and the second are all men.

Along with this, Lancelot has a companion throughout each part, and this role is first filled by a lady and is later filled by two young knights. The ways in which this apparent unity is broken down by the author is made apparent in this way, troubling his readers. Therefore though we would expect the first episode of each series to be similar to its counterpart, this is not the way that Chrétien constructs his story. Instead, for example, there are marked similarities between the first episode of the first series and the penultimate adventure of the second series, both of which involve a battle near to a body of water with a proud knight, at which a lady is present to ask a favor of Lancelot. In the first case, Lancelot defeats the knight who ignobly attacked him while he was lost in contemplation. He is about to kill the knight, when a lady arrives and asks for his life. Lancelot therefore gives the knight to the woman, according her a gift, and she promises him a favor in return. In the second episode,

another similarly proud knight attacks Lancelot, who Lancelot also defeats in battle. Here however, a woman comes and demands the knight's head, while the knight pleads for his life. Lancelot thinks about it, and accords the knight a second chance at armed combat. After defeating him a second time, he cuts off his head as a gift for the lady. Thus, Lancelot is shown, in opposite ways, one peaceful and one violent, to be a knight who respects a woman's wishes no matter what. This second lady also promises him a favor in return. She actually returns her favor however, as she returns as the woman who frees Lancelot from his prison, while the first lady never returns to return her favor, creating yet another inversion. This use of similarities and differences, which can be seen in comparisons of any prior episodes, is exemplary of the ways in which the two series of A and B relate, allowing insight into Chrétien's method of arranging his story, as well as what his meaning behind these carefully composed episodes are.

Also important to note, is that these narrative threads are not confined to relate only with episodes from the other series of adventures. They can also mirror events from their own series of narrative threads, as well as with events that happen later on in the romance. At the same time, a single episode can relate to many other episodes. This can be seen from the adventures involving women as hosts, which relate to the other scenes of hospitality, and  despite the fact that the adventures seem completely different, they relate to each other as well. Thus, both notably feature a bed as central to the quest. In both instances, Lancelot must prove his prowess as a knight and as a

lover, and in both cases he must disobey his host in order to do so.[190] These quests also serve to highlight Lancelot's conflicting identity as perfect knight and anti-knight in the first case, and Lancelot's predisposition to be caught in sets of conflicting vows in the second case. Not coincidentally, Lancelot's conflicting vows occur because of his conflicting identities as both Guinevere's lover, or anti-knight, and as an exemplary knight. This conflict occurs when the immodest damsel tells Lancelot that he may stay with her only on the condition that he sleep with her.[191] Lancelot stays, and is able to overcome this conflict of oaths by literally fulfilling his promise, though not doing what she actually meant. Thus, he does not choose one identity, but instead is loyal to both. This type of interrelation is also apparent in a comparison of the proud son and his wise father with Méléagant and his father Badgamus, who are respectively proud and wise too.[192] In both of these families, the father attempts to restrain his son from fighting Lancelot, as the father is shown to be aware of Lancelot's knightly prowess and is not prone to violence. In the first instance, the father controls his son by physically binding him, while Badgamus is shown to be unable to control Méléagant. These instances instead serve to reinforce Lancelot's knightly identity, signifying his worthiness. Thus, Chrétien's inclusion of interrelations between narrative threads occurs all throughout the manuscript, thereby forming his *bele conjointure*.

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[190] Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, "An Interpreter's Dilemma: Why Are There So Many Interpretations of Chrétien's Chevalier de la Charrette?" Lancelot and Guinevere: A Casebook, ed. by Lori J. Walters, (New York: Garland P, 1996) 57.
[191] Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* v. 993-4.
[192] Bruckner, "An Interpreter's Dilemma: Why Are There So Many Interpretations of Chrétien's Chevalier de la Charrette?" Lancelot and Guinevere: A Casebook 67.

These references and contradictions are shown to be problematic, because when we see a similarity between two episodes, there will undoubtedly be a difference between the two as well, leaving the reader perplexed. However, this playful ordering of his text in a way that both makes sense and confuses, serving to incite his readers into search for meaning contained within these differences and parallels. Thus, his text is structured in a way that seems orderly, but whose order turns out to be illusory, leaving the reader troubled and uncertain, forced to search for its meaning. In order to discover something of the elusive sens behind Chrétien's text, we must turn to a discussion of Lancelot himself. This is because I believe *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* to be a text centered around Lancelot's identity. What we must ask ourselves is how do these episodes, as well as other aspects of the tale, relate to Lancelot's conception of himself, and how do they present his progression towards his ultimate twofold goal: to be an exemplary lover and a perfect knight.

As Lancelot's identity is, I believe, the central theme of the text, it will be the issue at hand for the remainder of this chapter. Similarly to Tristan, Lancelot is the victim of conflicting identities as a knight and a lover. However, once again Chrétien plays with our expectations. He does this by the fact that these contradictory identities were shown to be irreconcilable in the Tristan legend, and any effort to combine them is a trick that ends up damaging society, and only temporarily calms the lovers' suffering. Thus, the text ends with the lovers' noble deaths together, as ultimate proof of the impossibility of their goal. For Lancelot however, Chrétien writes romance that claims that these identities can be combined harmoniously without being detrimental to society, as king Arthur is never allowed to discover the secret of Guinevere's

adultery, removing all negative consequences from Lancelot and Guinevere's crime. In addition to this, Lancelot's actions are shown to restore order to king Arthur's court, thereby making Lancelot into society's savior, despite his adultery with the queen.

These conflicts of identity, for Lancelot as for Tristan, firstly appear through the internal conflicts experienced by the hero between the obligations of knighthood and the obligations of a lover. Secondly, they manifest through the importance of a geography that divides between the two opposing worlds of the courtly realm, or Logres, and the otherworld, or Gorre. These places serve to define and test the hero's identity, allowing him to realize not only his capabilities as a knight, but also the goal of his quest, and through this, his identity.

However, there are also major differences with the Tristan legend as can be seen in the ways that Chrétien constructs Lancelot's identity. While in Tristan, the humor is had at the expense of the court, which is comprised largely of the hero's enemies, in *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*, the humor is mostly had at Lancelot's expense, leaving scholars wondering, as well as disagreeing about whether he is a perfect knight, or a perfect fool.[193] I believe Lancelot to be a little bit of both, but I must return to this thought later on. Just as Lancelot causes these two contradictory readings, he can also be defined with another paradox. This is seen in his identity as desiring to be realized, or to be negated completely. Thus, we are forced to ask, if he is the perfect knight who saves the kingdom, or the anti-knight who transgresses

[193] Ibid, 55.

against his lord by committing adultery with the queen. Once again, I believe him to be a both.

This aspect of his identity is illustrated through a major difference with the Tristan romances. In *Tristan*, the lovers were more or less equal in love, embodying the troubadour ideal of "courtly love." Chrétien's conception of love, however, is much closer to Andreas Capallanus's treatise on "courtly love." Thus, in *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*, Lancelot is shown to be his lady's servant, and even according to Cohen, a masochist. These are the conflicts between Lancelot's identity as a knight and his identity as a lover, as opposed to Tristan's identity, this opposition is the basis of his ambiguous persona, and central to this debate.

To begin our discussion of Lancelot's complex and paradoxical identity, I will begin with a discussion of the shared character traits that he and Tristan both embody, before moving on to their differences. As stated above, the most obvious way that Lancelot and Tristan are alike is through the conflict of their knightly identity with their role as lovers. As we should expect, given the often troubling aspects of Chrétien's text, there will also be contradictions between Lancelot and Tristan within this aspect of their identities.

While both heroes are obviously caught in between these two oppositional roles, the way in that this theme manifests in *Le Chevalier de la Charette* is wholly different. In Tristan, for example, the incompatibility of feudal relations and love is shown through the felonious three barons repeated conflicts with Tristan. Tristan's efforts to reconcile himself with king Marc ultimately fail, and his attempt to do so damages courtly society itself. Therefore, this conflict of identities manifests itself

externally, despite it being an interior conflict. It is also shown to be an insurmountable obstacle. For Lancelot however, though he suffers from the same problem, this conflict is shown in a wholly different way. This is because Lancelot's identity as a lover remains secret throughout, and therefore there is no external conflict at hand for him. Instead, he is plagued by internal conflicts, as can be seen when he prepares to mount the cart. As Cohen deftly points out, this act will subvert Lancelot's knightly identity, by making him a subject of the law, rather than being the enforcer of law, which is what was expected of him.[194]

Chrétien writes that Lancelot, upon being offered to ride in the cart and to have knowledge of the queen by nightfall:

"Tantost a sa voie tenue
Li chevaliers que il n'I monte.
Mar le fist et mar en ot honte
Que maintenant sus ne sailli,
Qu'il s'an tendra por mal bailli.
Mes Reisons, qui d'Amors se part,
Li dit que del monter se gart,
Si le chastie et si l'anseigne
Que rien ne face ne anpreigne
Dom il ait honte ne reproche.
N'est pas el cuer mes an la boche
Reisons qui ce dire li ose,
Mes Amors est el cuer anclose,
Qui li comande et semont
Que tost an la charrete mont.
Amors le vialt et il I saut,
Que de la honte ne li chaut
Puis qu'Amors le comande et vialt."[195]

"The cart rolled slowly on, not stopping
For even a moment; and the knight
Followed along behind
For several steps, not climbing

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[194] Cohen, "Masoch/Lancelotism" The New Literary History 240.
[195] Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* vv. 360-377.

Right up. But his hesitant shame
Was wrong. Reason, which warred
With Love, warned him to take care;
It taught and advised him never
To attempt anything likely
To bring him shame or reproach.
Reason's rules come
From the mouth, not from the heart.
But Love, speaking from deep
In the heart, hurriedly ordered him
Into the cart. He listened to love,
And quickly jumped in,
Putting all sense of shame
Aside, as love had commanded."[196]

This scene is a central moment for the text, as it inaugurates Lancelot's initial mysterious identity as the knight of the cart, and sets the stage for the future degradations that Lancelot will be forced to endure later on in the text. Here, Chrétien defines the conflict between knightly identity and a lover's identity as the internal struggle between Reisons, or reason, and Amors, or love. Reisons and Amors are connected with different parts of the body: the mouth and the heart respectively. This is odd, as we would expect Reisons to come from the intellect, or the brain, and have the mouth as its agent, rather than being described as coming from the mouth alone. This inversion of our expectations serves to denigrate Reisons, making it a skill that is solely characterized by speech and eloquence and not by thought. In this comparison, we find that one is internal and the other external, and one necessary for life, while the other is not. Thus, Reisons is shown to be guided by the public's perception of one's prowess, and is therefore externally oriented. This is what holds Lancelot back for two steps, before he decides ultimately to follow his internal identity and his heart,

[196] Chrétien de Troyes, *Lancelot: The Knight of the Cart* vv. 358-376.

which proves more noble. Thus, Chrétien defends Lancelot's action in this way, despite the public's misinterpretation of the cart.

What is most important to our discussion of this episode however, is that it all happens in the mind of Lancelot, and is therefore a wholly internal conflict, proving this to be very different from the representation of the same problem in the Tristan stories. In fact, this entire discussion takes place in the instant that it takes for Lancelot to take two steps, and I believe it to be a realistic representation of an internal conflict in one's mind, as well as being evidence of the importance of interiority and subjectivity in Chrétien de Troyes' Romances. Those who encounter Lancelot while in the cart only see his final decision, which was to follow his heart, and so they cannot understand the reasoning behind his actions. Nonetheless, just after this, we view Lancelot through Gauvain's eyes, seeing his external degradation, without understanding his internal triumph as a submissive lover.

This scene finds its counterpart later on in the story, when Guinevere tells Lancelot to do his worst at the tournament. In this case, Lancelot publically shames himself and undergoes extreme physical duress for his love. Once again however, the internal aspects of love triumph over the external and bodily aspects of knighthood. However, what is different about this scene from the episode of the cart is that Lancelot this time follows Guinevere's command unthinkingly, without even waiting the time it takes to make two steps. He is rewarded for this, and therefore he still manages to be named the victor, because his love asks him to do his best. Thus, at the episode of the cart, Lancelot chooses his internal lover's identity over his knightly one, while at the tournament at Noauz, he presents himself as first and foremost a

lover, but on his lady's command, he also assumes a knight's identity, successfully synthesizing these two conflicting identities and allowing him to become the perfect knight that he is supposed to be.

This aspect of his identity is again shown during his battle with Méléagant. When Lancelot sees Guinevere watching him from the tower, he is empowered with the strength to finally overcome his opponent. Thus, love is shown to aid and abet knightly deeds in this romance, thereby identifying the benefits of noble love. While Tristan is a perfect knight from the very beginning, Lancelot in turn needs his identity as a lover in order to realize his identity as a knight. Thus, the internal identity as a lover comes first for Lancelot, here like at the cart, as this is what allows him to achieve his unmatched prowess as a knight. Lancelot shows us that through love and unfailing service to one's love, these two conflicting identities can be overcome and synthesized, creating a new type of knight who is shown to be a sort of perfection of knightliness and chivalry, while at the same time being an anti-knight. And so, Lancelot's identity is being characterized by a unity of contradictions begins to become apparent.

The geography of Chrétien's romances is similarly significant to its meaning, as was the geography of the Tristan romances. Chrétien uses geography differently however. For example, the entirety of the tale seems to happen in the otherworld. Despite the author's sympathies with the realm of Logres, where king Arthur rules, this realm is in many ways similar to its counterpart of Gorre. One way that Chrétien does this is through making the passage between the two lands ambiguous, as Lancelot is already in Gorre when he frees the captives from the fortified castle, only

to later have to cross a more tangible, physical frontier when crossing the Sword Bridge. This double crossing into Gorre blurs the boundaries of the two realms to create an uncertain and mystical geography.

For example, both realms contain inexplicable fantastic adventures, and in both places Chrétien often resorts to hyperbole to describe Lancelot's actions. These marvels, as Chrétien calls them, often cast Lancelot as a Christ figure. In the first case, Lancelot decides to disobey his hostess when forbidden to stay in the Perilous Bed. A flaming lance falls from the ceiling, cutting Lancelot's side. This wound recalls Christ's wound on the cross. In the second instance, Lancelot crosses the Sword Bridge, cutting his hands and feet, also referencing Christ's crucifixion through the placement of the wounds. Thus, since it comes after a metaphorical crucifixion, Gorre can be seen as a land that represents Hell, and Lancelot's action of freeing the captives is symbolic of the Apocryphal story of the Harrowing of Hell. This connection of Lancelot with Christ serves to further confuse the reader, as well as the author, due to Lancelot's adulterous nature. We must once again ask ourselves whether this man is a savior or a traitor, and this serves as further prooves Lancelot's double nature.

These two realms are also victims of two ancient customs. The first is called the rash boon, and it appears three times in the romance, first when the queen is taken, second when a knight tries to abduct the immodest damsel, and third when Lancelot wins back the Guinevere. The immodest damsel mentions this custom, when she tells Lancelot that she would not accompany him if he were not a strong knight. Chrétien expounds upon what she means, explaining that a solitary lady could not be

abducted by a knight without his losing his renown and becoming an enemy of the court, but a lady that is accompanied by a knight can be won through combat.[197]

The second custom, that of Gorre, is that once one arrives, one can never leave and becomes a captive. Thus, Gorre is a place where hospitality, a central aspect of courtly society, is changed into forced captivity. Both of these are explained as being ancient yet disliked customs, and they are shown to conflict with the contemporary vows that Lancelot, as well as king Arthur and Badgamus make. However, while these kings are shown to be incapable of overturning these customs, Lancelot proves himself capable. Through his act of freeing Guinevere, in whose very person these customs collide, Lancelot effectively overcomes both of these ancient customs. His action defines him as the literal, as well as the figurative savior.

It becomes all the more apparent that Lancelot himself is defined by similar internal conflict as Tristan and Iseut. As I have said before, Lancelot is different from Tristan and Iseut because he is shown to be able to overcome these contradictions and combine them in a way that is beneficial to society. However, unlike these lovers, Lancelot does not seem to care about this act, and seems solely focused on his primary identity as the queen's lover. Thus, while Tristan and Iseut's love was characterized by equality, Lancelot's love is extreme in its inequality. Thus, it resembles a feudal relationship of lord to vassal. We must now turn to this submissive self-deprecating aspect of Lancelot's identity, before turning to his heroic one.

The first way that Chrétien causes Lancelot to be seen as an anti-knight is by making Lancelot into a comedic character. Lancelot, because of his extreme love of,

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[197] Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* vv. 1295-1316.

and longing for Guinevere is made to seem a fool. The effect of these jokes is that Lancelot appears as an anti-knight. In fact, from the very first time we see Lancelot in this romance, when he is walking without a horse, we are forced to wonder, what is a *chevalier* without a *cheval*, and can this man truly be a knight? However having reached the end of the story, our opinions will have undoubtedly been changed by his constant efforts to prove himself, and his repeated success in these exploits. Thus, Lancelot evolves from anti-knight and fool, to a new kind of knight: something different and superior to any other before him.

This humorous tone that surrounds Lancelot is first seen early on in the text, and along with the cart, it establishes our initial impression of Lancelot. He is standing in the tower of his first hostess' castle, when he sees the queen walking in the distance. Chretien writes:

"De l'esgarder onques ne fine
Molt antentis, et molt li plot,
Au plus longuemant que il pot.
Et quant il ne la pot veoir,
Si si vost jus lessier cheoir
Et trebuchier aval son cors,
Et ja estot demis defors
Quant mes sire Gauvains le vit,
Se trait arrieres, se il dit :
"Merci, sire, soiez an pes !
Por Deu, nel vos pansez ja mes
Que vos faciez tel desverie !
A grant tort haez vostre vie."[198]

"His eyes followed her along
The path, watching with passionate
Care, trilled at the sight,
For as long as he could. Then,
When he wasn't able to see her,
His body went slack, he felt

[198] Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* vv. 562-575.

He could let himself fall from the window,
And was halfway over the sill
When Gawain saw him and, from
Behind, pulled him back,
Saying, "Be calm, my lord:
In the name of God, don't even
Think of committing such folly!
How wrong to despise your life!"[199]

This episode shows a ridiculous parody of the devoted lover, Lancelot, as having almost killed himself simply he sees his love. Gauvain believes this to be a suicide attempt, though it cannot be because Lancelot, who is experiencing a moment of deep contemplation, has no agency over his body, and thus it is wholly unintentional. His body is no longer able to support his weight, and Lancelot's mind is no longer able to control his body. It is a classic instance of exaggeration this in love. Later on, however, when he believes Guinevere to be dead, Lancelot actually does try to kill himself.

This scene has its parallel when Lancelot finds the queen's comb, and upon realizing it is hers, he swoons. Chrétien writes:

"Quant cil l'ot, n'a tant de vertu
Que tot nel coveigne ploirer,
Par force l'estut apoirer
Devant a l'arcon de la sele.
Et quant vit la dameisele,
Si s'an mervoille et esbaïst,
Qu'ele cuida que il cheïst."[200]

"Brave as he was, he almost
Fell from his horse, hearing
These words; he supported himself
By leaning down as hard
As he could against the bow
Of his saddle. The girl was astonished,

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[199] Chrétien de Troyes, *Lancelot: The Knight of the Cart* vv. 561-574.
[200] Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* vv. 1424-1430.

Stunned by this sudden reaction.[201]

These two passages define the comedic principle that Lancelot is weakened by his love, conversely to the way that love strengthens him, and they make Lancelot seem ridiculous and laughable. We are forced, at this point, to ask ourselves whether Lancelot is a perfect knight, or a perfect fool, but Lancelot, even at his most humorous, is shown to be both, here through devotion to his lover. There is another moment that also reflects these issues of Lancelot's love, also early in the text. Lancelot is riding through the forest on his way to find Guinevere, and he falls into a state of deep contemplation on his love. As he continues on unawares of the world around him, dreaming his fantasy of love, Lancelot comes upon a knight. This knight challenges Lancelot three times, and afterwards attacks. Lancelot, unaware of his situation and surroundings, is thrown from his horse into the ford, and at this point is shown to be most ridiculous. Thus, here Chrétien proves that Lancelot's love is extreme, in that even just the thought of Guinevere, rather than the sight of her, is shown to have a profound weakening affect of Lancelot. His contemplative state also highlights his exaggerated emotional interior, allowing Lancelot to be seen as a feminine knight, as opposed to the externally oriented masculine ideal that heroes like Roland embody.

We see the counterpart to these scenes, in which Lancelot is weakened by love, during Lancelot's first combat with Méléagant. During the combat, Guinevere names him, and Lancelot is told to look and see who is watching him. Lancelot turns and sees Guinevere watching from the tour. Their respective positions have been

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[201] Chrétien de Troyes, *Lancelot: The Knight of the Cart* vv. 1428-1434.

effectively reversed from when Lancelot saw Guinevere from the tower, and now Guinevere is watching him from the raised position. However, Lancelot finds that he cannot take his eyes off of his love, and is forced to comically defend himself with his sword held behind his back. Lancelot then manages to position his opponent between himself and the queen, so that he can both fight, and see his lover. This mutual act of seeing has an opposite effect from the opposite scene. Lancelot immediately takes control of the combat, pushing Méléagant back close to the tower until he can no longer see Guinevere, and so he retreats to a distance where his line of sight is not impeded. Like this, Lancelot proves himself the victor, and frees Guinevere.[202] Thus, Lancelot's love has a double and contradictory effect on him, allowing him to appear comically weak or strong, depending on his proximity to the queen, for if she can see him, then he is empowered, but if only Lancelot sees her, then he becomes lost in thought and in turn loses himself, proving the necessity of his lover's approval for his identity to exist.

Thus, Chrétien uses humor in order to make us question Lancelot's worth as a knight, and in order to illustrate for his audience the negative and the positive effects of love on him. These humorous and contradictory aspects of love are what cause us to become aware of Lancelot's double identity as a perfect knight, and a perfect anti-knight, as he is both heroic and ridiculous at the same time. This concept of his identity as an anti-knight deserves more attention, as it too is caused by his love for Guinevere, which is at the heart of these complex sets of paradoxes that characterize Lancelot by extremes.

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[202] Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* vv. 3669-3763.

Lancelot is different from other examples of heroic knights, in that he proves his love and his worth in a new way. A traditional knight's value was externally proven through various tests of his valor and chivalry. This can be achieved through battle, as a guest, or as a lover, among other options. Lancelot however, foregoes the idea of external worth, and focuses more on his internal loyalty to Guinevere, his *domna*. This internal identity, after having proven his worth to her, allows him to accrue unmatched fame and prowess in a traditional, external sense. Therefore, Lancelot's contradictory identity as a knight and lover is shown to achieve the ideal of knighthood: fame.

Lancelot's heart defines this interiority, which is symbolic of his love for Guinevere. This is made apparent during the cart scene, when Lancelot picks *Amors*, or his heart, over *Reisons*, or his mouth. Upon entering the cart, he loses whatever status his knighthood brought with it, becoming instead the Knight of the Cart. Because of this act, Lancelot undergoes ridicule and insults, though he never seems to mind. His mounting the cart is therefore the first, and seminal instance of his self-destructive behavior. Because Lancelot is known as the knight of the cart until half way through the text, his true identity, despite having been revealed in the prologue, remains anonymous until Guinevere names him, symbolically giving him an identity, or in another sense, allowing him to be. Thus, Lancelot's identity is established by and through his lover, who also acts as his master.

Lancelot is shown to be incredibly passive in terms of his own identity, and instead denies any form of identity that is not sanctioned by his love. For example,

twice during the text, he uses the words *non* or name, and *non*, or no at the end of consecutive rhymes. For example, when asked:

> “”Sire, or ai grant envie
> Que je seüsse vostre non.
> Direiez le me vos?” “Je, non.””[203]
>
> “”My lord, you’ve made me most
> Anxious to know your name.
> Would you tell me, please?” “Me?
> No.” [204]

This repetition of the word *“non”* in this way, not only shows the importance of the act of naming in Chrétien’s romances, but also serves to verbally equate being and not being.[205] Without Guinevere, Lancelot does not desire an identity but rather self-effacement, because his identity is shown to be contingent on the queen’s approval of him. Therefore, largely during the first half of the text, as Lancelot is not in the queen’s presence and is unable to prove himself to her, Lancelot’s desires negation. However, at the tournament of Noauz, in the second half of the text, Lancelot arrives disguised as a novice knight, and goes unrecognized by all but Guinevere. Here, through this anonymity, he finds a way to realize his non-identity as well. “He is so focused on the closed relationship he maintains with the Queen that other identity-giving gestures matter little to him. His name (non) finds its meaning most fully when on the verge of negation (non), not when being celebrated in some exterior, public theatre of knowledge,” as a normal knight would seek to define himself.[206] This act of

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[203] Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* vv. 1920-1922.
[204] Chrétien de Troyes, *Lancelot: The Knight of the Cart* vv. 1925-1928.
[205] Cohen, “Masoch/Lancelotism” The New Literary History 241.
[206] Ibid, 244.

self effacement is pleasurable to Lancelot, because of the denigration which he desires that comes from it.[207]

Cohen sees this self-destruction as a sign of Lancelot's masochism. Therefore, his vow to love Guinevere can be seen as a masochistic contract.[208] He attempts to regender Lancelot, so as to present him as the female this hierarchical relationship, which placed the male in the position of power that Guinevere enjoys.[209] His lower status in their relationship is contingent both on the fact that Guinevere is a queen, and thus her social status is higher than his, and that he is her suitor, in which case Capellanus would place her in a position of control. However, this contract is taken to the extreme, as Lancelot endures horrific amounts of pain and suffering for Guinevere. For example, at the Sword Bridge he takes off his armor, causing himself greater pain, but also allowing him to cross the bridge and reach his destination: the queen herself. Another moment, later on in the story, when Lancelot demonstrates his dedication, is during the tournament at Noauz, when he agrees to fight his worst, so as to both identify himself to Guinevere, and to prove his dedication to a non-identity as her lover and servant. Therefore, Lancelot can be seen to be suppressing his bodily identity as a knight, and as I said before, stressing his interior emotional qualities. His interiority and exaggerated emotions, which cause him to appear weak and therefore feminine, manifests when Lancelot swoons, or falls into a dreamlike state of contemplation. While this rejection of the body classifies him as a feminine, it also makes is a form of *imitatio Christi*. Therefore, this self-negation is another

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[207] Ibid.
[208] Ibid, 236.
[209] Ibid, 232.

contradictory element of Lancelot's identity, at the same time it characterizes his adulterous love for Guinevere. His transgressive love for the queen is another way that Lancelot is presented as a bad knight, as it characterizes his attraction to things that are harmful to his reputation. This love is therefore another way that Lancelot expresses his paradoxical state in between being and not-being, good and bad, as it is only through adulturous love that Lancelot is allowed to achieve his destiny as the greatest of all knights.

Lancelot and Guinevere are allowed one adulterous night together in Chrétien's story. This love remains secret, though it is almost revealed by Méléagant, who through his accusation of Keu proves that appearances can decieve. This fact highlights the dangers of misinterpretation.[210] **CITE** Their love for one another, because it remains secret due to this fault, is free of consequence though Chrétien does imply the possibility of the damage that this adultery entails. For example, Méléagant's discovery of the bloody sheets raises this concern, as well as when earlier in the text, Guinevere prays that Lancelot come to her aid and is overheard. Here, Chrétien tells us that:

> "Molt le cuida avoir dit bas,
> Mais li cuens Guinables l'oï."[211]
>
> "But Count Guinables, who stood
> Close by, heard what she'd said."[212]

However, Chrétien is again playing with our expectations, knowing us to be familiar with the genre of romance and the character type of the *Lausinger*, and he does not

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[210] **CITE**
[211] Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* vv. 212-213.
[212] Chrétien de Troyes, *Lancelot: The Knight of the Cart* vv. 213-214.

actually let this come back to haunt the lovers, though we expect it to.

If this love is not given its political implications, it is instead allowed troubling spiritual implications. As I stated earlier, certain ones of Lancelot's adventures, as well as his denial of the body, make him a Christ figure. This is most notable in his act of freeing the captives, where he appears like Christ in the Harrowing of Hell. Because Lancelot is a Christ figure, his love is likened to spiritual devotion. This could be influenced by Bernard de Clairvaux's eroticized relationship with God in his writings, but Chrétien inverts this type of love. Instead of eroticizing the spiritual, Chrétien spiritualizes the erotic, and his romance thereby appears all the more subversive.

Chrétien first references this when Lancelot discovers the comb, and takes Guinevere's hairs, treating them with veneration as though they were a saint's relics. However, more important for our discussion is the actual night of their passion, when their sexual desire is finally fulfilled. Here, Lancelot goes to Guinevere's window, bends the bars, and enters. He cuts off the tip of his finger however, and is completely unaware of the wound, again illustrating Lancelot's denial of the body. This episode has obvious intertexts with the flour scene in Béroul's Tristan, though it is also shown in many ways to be different. In both cases, visible evidence of adultery is left by the man's blood on the queen's sheets.

However, as I stated earlier, Lancelot is not caught. Keu is accused of the crime, and Lancelot defends his honor through trial by arms with Méléagant in his second battle. Therefore, if the first battle with Méléagant was to overturn the customs of Logres and Gorre, this second battle legally annuls the crime of adultery

that Guinevere has committed with him. However, the loss of this finger and the symbolic bloody sheets also serve to feminize Lancelot. Here, Lancelot staining the sheets with blood embodies the *topos* of the wedding night virgin.[213] **CITE** He is representative of consummation through feminine loss, "but here the masculine body has stained the sheets, and itself. Or, rather, the masculine body has become feminine."[214] Important to note here, is that, through his embrace of feminine identity, which requires a rejection of his body when he cuts off his finger, Lancelot achieves salvation, and transcends gender. However, despite his efforts to excise the bodily and replace it with the emotional, Lancelot is shown to be only able to do this through a physical, and therefore bodily, union. Thus, the destruction of the body is again shown the means to salvation, but here Lancelot is unlike Christ, in that Christ achieved this salvation through the spiritual, while Lancelot through the bodily. [215] Once again, the part of our identity that is supposed to be of less worth, the body, is shown as essential in achieving spiritual or internal perfection, just like Lancelot must hurt himself and his reputation in order to fulfill his role as savior. This also highlights another textual contradiction.

Despite his positive role as savoir, his love of Guinevere is adulterous. The way that he loves her, seeking to idolize and worship her, is also inherently sacrilegious in its combination of crime and Christianity. Chretien writes that Lancelot:

"vint au lit la reïne,
il l'aore et se li ancline,

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[213] **CITE**
[214] Cohen, "Masoch/Lancelotism" The New Literary History 249.
[215] Ibid, 50.

Car an nul cors saint ne croit tant,
Et la reïne li estant
Ses braz ancontre si l'anbrace,
Estroit pres de son piz le lace,
Si l'a lez an son lit tret
Et le plus bel sanblant li fet."[216]

"He approached the queen's bed,
Bowing in adoration
Before the holiest relic
He knew, and the queen reached out
Her arms and drew him down,
Holding him tight against
her breast, making the knight
As welcome in her bed, and as happy,
As she possibly could."[217]

Here, the queen's bed has become an altar for Lancelot, and she is the holiest of relic. His love act, or his communion so to speak, is therefore described as both divine and sinful. Chrétien tells us that he will not describe their love, saying:

"Mes toz jorz iert par moi teüe,
Qu'an contes ne doit ester dite."[218]

"And that's all I'm allowed
To tell you; I can say no more."[219]

However, once again, Chrétien is not being serious, as he goes immediately on to describe, not the actual act of their lovemaking, but the emotional response that the lovers feel from it: one of immense joy and delight, causing their love to be described as a perfect union.[220] **CITE** Thus, Lancelot is shown to be an exemplary lover because of his unfailing secret dedication to Guinevere, who in turn empowers him as a knight.

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[216] Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* vv. 4651-4658.
[217] Chrétien de Troyes, *Lancelot: The Knight of the Cart* vv. 4658-4666.
[218] Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* vv. 4680-4681.
[219] Chrétien de Troyes, *Lancelot: The Knight of the Cart* vv. 4687-4688.
[220] **CITE**

His identity as a knight, and his identity as a lover are both connected with his role in the text as a Jesus figure, as they all bestow perfection upon him, thereby contradicting his negative identity with a positive one. Either way however, Lancelot lives in a world of extremes, where his love is both his salvation and his ruin, and he is both the savior and destroyer. However, his destructive nature is not allowed to run its full course, and hence Lancelot overcomes these negative aspects of his identity. His acceptance of this self-less denigration is what allows his perfection, and therefore his identity as an anti-knight, paradoxically allows him to be superior to his peers. Thus he mimics Christ in a knightly way, which was a novel conception of knightlyhood.

This paradoxical idea that self-destruction and self-negation through ignoble acts leads to a perfection of knightly identity, mirrors the Christian *topos* that salvation can be achieved through devoted suffering in imitation of Christ. Thus, Chrétien points out a central contradiction at the heart of Christian doctrine, and then changes it by applying it to a secular text. Thus, he makes Lancelot's sinfulness the key to his greatness, and his suffering is the test that allows him to combine his dual-role as perfect knight and perfect lover. Therefore, conflicting identities characterize Lancelot, but through the destruction of the boundaries between these identities Lancelot is shown able to overcomes them and achieves his ultimate identity, as a savior.

This marks a clean break from the Tristan legend, because here adultery is shown to empower Lancelot as a knight, giving him the strength to do what is required of him, and therefore becoming a positive force. However, this

characterization of adultery is incompatible with the realities of adultery in medieval courts. The Tristan legend went through great lengths to include various signs of what these realities were, in order to make the text truthful in terms of its meaning. However, Chrétien establishes truth in a wholly different way.

I believe that the key to undertanding *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* is by a close reading of the text's interrelation with its prologue and epilogue. These two bookends, which serve to frame the narrative, also establish two separate interpretative levels within the text. Thus, there is the level of the text, which is shown to be wholly fictional, and the second level of the author and his audience, which is presented as real. However, on a closer look, this aspect of the story becomes equally troubling as the text itself, through the ways that Chrétien mirrors the text itself in his prologue and epilogue. These interrelations cause us to realize that actually, the supposed real is actually equally fictive as the text itself, once again troubling our faculties of interpretation and proving to us that the real is subject to distortion, just like in the Tristan legend.

Chretien begins his text by claiming that his romance has been composed by him on the order and under the direction of his patron Marie de Champagne. This establishes a relationship between patron and author that mirrors the relationship between *domna* and *amis*, lord and vassal, or Guinevere and Lancelot. Thus, he relates the act of writing with the adventures and quests that Lancelot must pass through, and his search for meaning is analogous to Lancelot's search for identity. This second narrative level of author and patron is therefore in its associations and implications literary. However it is shown to be as fictional as the story itself through

this comparison. Critics have often fallen into Chrétien's trap, which is intended to cause us to misinterpret his prologue as being evidence of reality. Therefore, scholars take this to mean that the love shown in the text is actually a creation of Marie de Champagne, and that it displays her conception of love. Some have even gone so far as to suggest a relationship between Chrétien and his patron, but they are missing his meaning. Instead, the text, prologue and epilogue included, is really of Chretien's, rather than Marie's, careful construction.

As we realize in the epilogue, the text's narrative level that deals with authorship, despite the fact that we assumed it to be real, is actually entirely fictitious, just like the tale itself. Chrétien commits authorial adultery by telling us that he has abandoned his text earlier on, and that the clerk Godefroi de Legni has finished it. Thus, we are called to question what an author is, as well as who's text is this: Chrétien's, Marie's, or Godefroi's. On top of this, Marie de Champagne, the patron, is entirely absent from the epilogue, removing her from this complex discussion. Thus the role of patron is passed to Chrétien and the role of author to Godefroi.

Some scholars have taken this supposed abandonment of the text to be indicative of Chrétien's apparent distaste in his text, due to its subversive nature. However, I believe this to be another misreading, because it assumes that Chrétien was a moralist without any tangible proof. What it really tells us is that author's words are not to be trusted, in that his representation of himself within his romance is just as fictitious as the text itself. Thus, fiction is shown to be misleading, which we also experience in the lack of a clear single meaning behind the text, causing us to desperately search for meaning and truth without finding one that can hope to explain

all of the stories' intricacies. This search is what Chrétien seeks to invite, rather than a clear representation of a single universal truth. Thus, we are left with varying sets of contradictions, that we must struggle to reconcile. While we have so much trouble getting past these contradictions, Lancelot is shown to be able to do so effortlessly, further emphasizing and showing the impossibility of accurately representing reality through fiction. Thus, this romance becomes about authorial practice itself, in that it makes it apparent to the audience that fiction is a construct and that its meaning is subjective. Thus, Lancelot's conflicted identity becomes representative of the conflict between the real author's intentions, and the authorial persona whom the reader defines himself through interpretation. On top of this, the way that this denies fiction its claim to meaning, by constantly asking us to question it in a hopeless search for meaning is a reflection of Lancelot's self-destructive nature.

*Le Chevalier de la Charrette*, like the *Tristan* legend is a self-reflexive literary construction. It seeks to represent the ideal, and to present truth, but the truth that it presents us with is unsettling, in that it proves that fiction is removed from reality, despite our natural effort as interpreters of the text to find evidence of reality in fiction, and therefore to combine incompatible elements. This paradox, that romance can be both fictional and pragmatic, is central to our understanding, or as it be misunderstanding of these texts. Thus, while Tristan shows us that visual truth can be distorted in order to deceive, *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* illustrates this too. Also, Tritstan shows its readers the incompatibility of the real and the ideal. Chrétien, through illustrating the combination of contradictory elements like real and fiction, and through his intended ambiguity in making opposites seem compatible through his

*bele conjointure*. At the end of the text however, we come to the startling realization that Chrétien has been playing a game with us, in that he unveils the ultimate fictional nature behind his creation. He also does this through the way that the text shows itself to be a literary construction by relating the author with his hero and by removing himself as the author of his text, in its ultimate subversive authorial act, despite the fact that we cannot bring ourselves to believe him. These elements of *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* serve to illustrate that the real is easily distorted into fiction, just like the way that we took fiction for real. This, I believe is representative of subjectivity, proving that one reality is different for all who experience it, and that therefore each version of reality is in turn its own fiction. Thus, Chrétien's lesson is really about our ability to interpret, which he is showing to be questionable and problematic in a similar way to his text, as each can come away with a different meaning from any single tale. Thus, Chrétien's work, through a reworking of the Tristan legend, proves a similar point about fiction in a very different way, that goes deeper into literary theory. Hence, he takes a step further, not simply inciting a search for meaning, as Thomas does, but also proving the futility of our search. This does not prove literature useless and devoid it of meaning, but instead proves an essential fact of humanity, showing us how literature becomes and inspires reality through both its creation and interpretation, rather than the real imposing itself on fiction.

## Conclusion: The Culmination of the Romance of Adultery and its Impossible Desire

In this essay, I have argued that romances of adultery attest to a hidden desire that existed in medieval society to transcend the harsh and banal realities of the world in which we live. Transcendence, or the realization of one's fantasy, is an understandable desire that through these texts is shown to only be possible within the medium of fiction. Thus, the act of creating art is valorized by these texts as allowing man to achieve the impossible. Thus, this is a self-reflexive statement about literature, whose meaning is associated with the practice of writing and specifically with the creation of fiction. I believe this desire to be still reflected in modern literature and media. However, in romance this hidden desire is revealed through a close study of the conflicting themes within each text, as well as within the subgenre itself. Thus, while the texts all interrelate, they remain essentially different. It is these differences, however, that gives these texts their meaning, defining them in opposition to each other.

This message is stated in different ways, as the Tristan legend and *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* arrive at this shared conclusion by following radically different paths. For example, the *Tristan* legend proves this culmination of Tristan and Iseut's desire to be impossible through their final noble death. This pair of lovers is, throughout their story, the object of persecution due to their conflicting identities of lover and knight. They try to make this conflict disappear through their use of the ruse, which in and of itself is symbolic of the act of writing and envisaging fictions. This ruse however, like the romances themselves, is proven to only provide the lovers

with a temporary escape from their harsh realities, and therefore cannot truly satisfy their desires. However, the texts themselves stand as proof that this fantasy can live on, can combine the real and the fiction, and thus can succeed in achieving an impossibility that we can only dream of.

On the other hand Lancelot actually achieves his transcendence, marking a major break with the *Tristan* legend, despite Chrétien's use of *Tristan* as a basic model for his story. Thus, Lancelot's conflicting identities and transgressions against religious and political authority remain secret. Their secrecy allows the destructive nature of Lancelot and Guinevere's love to go unachieved, and in turn, Lancelot's secondary identity as a perfect knight allows him to act the savior of his kingdom, rather than its destroyer. Though this might seem to suggest that transcending the real is possible, Chrétien's authorial persona's interjections into the story lets us know that this is not true. He does this through his interesting prologue and epilogue, where he denies authorship at every available chance. Here, Chretien's removal of himself from this story mimic's Lancelot, highlighting the fact that the man who we thought was the text's author is as much a product of fiction as the characters that he creates. Thus, we realize that what we assumed was a representation of reality, is really a composed and symbolic fiction, just like the text itself. Therefore, through Chrétien's interesting take on authorship, we come to realize that what he made us believe was achieved in the text, the realization of fiction, is really only possible within the confines of a well composed written text. Thus, fantasy is shown to remain fantasy, and the real remains real.

However, interestingly, I believe that Chrétien's text is the culmination of this desire in literature, because it's representation of the possibility of transcendent love is shown to be compatible with society inside the boundaries of the text. Thus, Lancelot, as a symbol, is the shown to same as the "glass palace" that we saw in the *Folie d'Oxford*. In other words the glass palace and Lancelot represent an ideal of fiction, that it be so far removed from society as to be fantastical, thereby idealizing reality, creating a perfected version of fiction that is at once relatable and ultimately desirable. However, we are still left with a fulfillment that is ultimately shown to be temporary. Chrétien, in my opinion, answers this question through his abrupt ending to his text, that leaves much more unresolved than not. This act is a way to disseminate his text, inciting other authors to attempt to finish the story and to show the harsh consequences of actually living out a restricted fantasy.

Chrétien de Troyes has here attempted to make Lancelot into a similarly recurrent literary figure as Tristan, by urging his contemporaries to continuously reinterpret and rewrite his text. Thus, he has not only cemented his protagonist in Western European literary culture, but he has also managed to recreate the way that oral tradition was enacted. Significantly, this is achieved in written form. This act of textual self-regeneration that is achieved in this way proves that these fictions can, in a way reproduce themselves, aided by and though the imagination of others. Thus, he proves his transcendent hero to live on in reality through fiction.

What remains at the heart of my argument is the importance of dialectical argumentation's influence on romance literature, as was proven by Tony Hunt. Both *Tristan* and *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* are literally filled with internal, as well as

external contradictions. This reflects the way that romance was initially conceived, based on external differences with other genres, as well the way that it evolved as seen through the internal similarities that recur and could be used differently amongst authors to a variety of effects. It is these differences that create the truths held within these texts.

This way of engendering meaning is essential for my thesis, because of the way that these texts represent the desire to combine opposites, the real with the ideal. They however, only make us search for meaning without designating what we are looking for, and thus we can arrive at any number of truths from any one text. However, this binary between the real and the ideal is so present here, exactly because these are fictional creations that were written to contain truth, that we cannot ignore their meaning. They represent the all too human desire for transcendence, which must have been all the more poignant in Catholic medieval Europe, where people believed that death signified a passage to another world, which was either paradise or hell, our longing or our fear.

The supposed truthfulness of these texts, because we assume them to contain a pragmatic meaning, causes us search for their message amongst the evidence that we have of medieval society. Therefore, we attempt to apply reality to the fiction in our very act of interpretation matching the desire of the texts to make reality into fiction. Therefore, interpretation, through these texts is shown to be a similarly creative as act to the writing of fiction itself. Their ultimate self-reflexivity of the subgenre of romances of adultery is thus shown to include the reader and his imagination, in its ultimate act of creation.

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