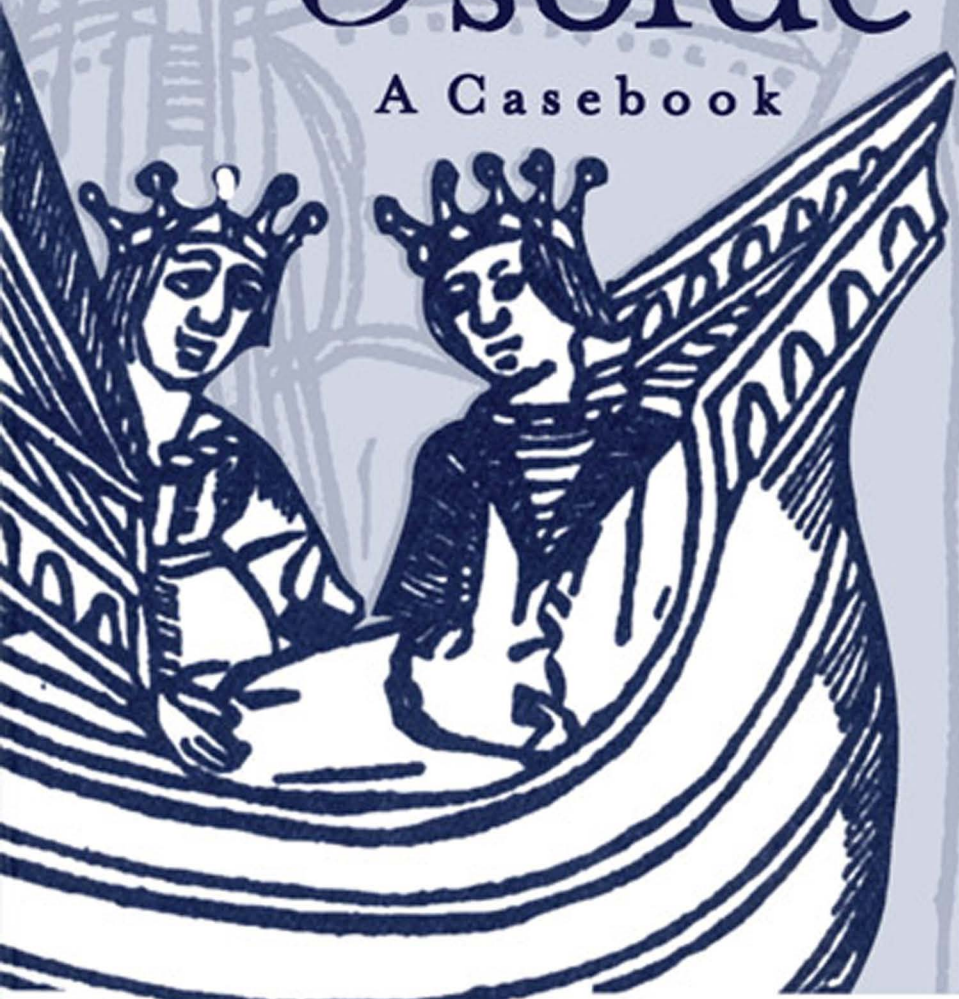


Tristan and Isolde

A Casebook



EDITED BY JOAN TASKER GRIMBERT

**TRISTAN AND
ISOLDE**

ARTHURIAN CHARACTERS AND THEMES

Norris J. Lacy, *Series Editor*

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ISOLDE**
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EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
JOAN TASKER GRIMBERT

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The publisher has gone to great lengths to ensure the quality of this book but points out that some imperfections from the original may be apparent.

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Preface

Norris J. Lacy

This is Volume II of "Arthurian Characters and Themes," a new series of casebooks from Garland Publishing. The series includes volumes devoted to the best-known characters from Arthurian legend: Tristan and Isolde, Arthur, Lancelot and Guenevere, Merlin, Gawain, and Perceval. One is also devoted to Arthurian women in general, and one to the Grail. Others may be added.

Each volume offers an extended introductory survey and a bibliography and presents some twenty major essays on its subject. Several of the essays in each volume are newly commissioned for the series; the others are reprinted from their original sources. The previously published contributions date for the most part from the past fifteen years, although a few older, "classic" essays are included in several of the volumes, the criterion being the continuing importance of the study.

All contributions are presented in English, and each volume includes essays that are translated here for the first time.

Heaviest emphasis remains on the development of the legend and its characters during the Middle Ages, but appropriate attention has been given also to modern, even very recent, treatments. Similarly, the central focus is on literature, but without excluding important discussions of visual, musical, and filmic arts. Thus, a number of the volumes, including the present one, are intently interdisciplinary in focus.

The proliferation of scholarly studies of Arthurian material is daunting. When the *Bibliographical Bulletin of the Arthurian Society* began publishing annual bibliographies, the first volume

(1949) included 226 items (books, articles, and reviews). That number has increased regularly until, in the most recent volumes, some 700 items are listed per year. Given this increase, which shows no sign of abating, it is next to impossible for readers, even for scholars, to keep up; furthermore, the major contributions to Arthurian scholarship are often dispersed widely through books and journals published through North America, Europe, and elsewhere.

That proliferation makes it very difficult even for the professional medievalist to keep abreast of Arthurian scholarship, and it would be very nearly impossible for the non-scholar with serious Arthurian interests to select and locate fifteen or twenty of the major scholarly contributions devoted to a particular character or theme. These difficulties clearly dramatize the value of this series, but they also remain an insistent reminder that even the most informed selection of about twenty major essays requires us to omit many dozens of studies that may be equally instructive and engaging. Editors have attempted to remedy this situation insofar as possible by providing introductions that present other writers and texts, as well as bibliographies that document a good many important studies that could find no room in these volumes. In addition, many of the contributions that are included here will provide discussions of, or references to, other treatments that will be of interest to readers.

This volume, edited by Joan Tasker Grimbirt, provides a very full and detailed introduction surveying the Tristan and Isolde legend—that is to say, both the development of the lovers as fictional characters and their tragic love as a universal theme—from its origins to its most recent incarnation in a 1994 novel by John Updike. Following that introduction and a thorough bibliography, the editor offers nineteen essays on subjects as diverse as Celtic material, Thomas of England, Gottfried von Strassburg, the Prose *Tristan*, the *Tavola ritonda*, Malory, Tennyson, Bédier, and Swinburne; in addition, the interdisciplinary character of the volume, and of the legend itself, is indicated by the inclusion of essays on Wagner's opera, on Cocteau's film, and on the treatment of Tristan and Isolde in art.

The contributions by Professors Hoffman, Maddux, Poulson, and Walworth are original essays prepared for this volume; the others have been previously published. In the latter cases, permissions from copyright holders sometimes prohibited us from modifying the texts in any way, and thus the decision was made to present all of them in their original form, with changes generally limited to the correction of typographical errors. However, in some cases authors have, with permission, chosen to update, expand, or rework their contributions. All such treatments, as well as the translation of some articles into English, are documented at the beginning of the previously published essays. (In the introduction and bibliography, an asterisk beside a title or an author's name identifies studies that are included in this book.)

The necessity to reproduce many essays in the exact form of their original publication yields results that, although inevitable, may perturb some editorial sensibilities. First, there are a few instances in which a reprinted book chapter refers to a passage that is not to be found in this volume. Second, note form will vary from one to another. Finally, style, usage, and even spelling (British vs. American) vary as well. Offsetting these inconsistencies is the advantage of having in one's hand a substantial selection of the finest available studies, new as well as previously published, of Arthurian characters and themes.

Herewith, then, a score of contributions to our understanding of one of the most famous love stories in history and of the processes by which it took shape and survived over a period of many centuries.

Such a volume could not be produced without the generosity of museum officials and editors of presses and journals, who kindly gave permission for us to reproduce illustrations and articles. We are pleased to express our gratitude to all of them. Reproduction credits accompany essays and plates.



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Introduction

Joan Tasker Grimbert

Gaston Paris called it the incomparable love epic, and for Jean-Charles Payen it was the most beautiful love story of all time: Tristan and Isolde bound by the singular power of an exclusive passion that forces them to violate the most sacred social and religious ties. As one of the founding myths of Western culture, it has been told and retold from the Middle Ages to the present day. It flourished first in the British Isles, France, and Germany, countries where its appeal has remained most enduring, then quickly spread to Italy, the Iberian Peninsula, Scandinavia, and well beyond, for there are even early versions in Czech and Byelorussian. Transmitted originally, no doubt, in the form of short oral tales, it was cast in verse romances by French and German poets in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. The subversive nature of the passion informing the tale also exercised a powerful attraction on lyric poets and artists, for whom the lovers epitomized ardor, ingenuity, and beauty. Stressing either the celebratory or the cautionary aspect of the legend, they encapsulated it, seeking to portray its essence in one or two emblematic phrases or images. Others expanded it: as Tristan was increasingly drawn into the Arthurian orbit, gaining eventually a seat at the celebrated Round Table, the legend was incorporated into the large prose cycles that recounted, starting in the thirteenth century, the adventures of Arthur's knights. In these romances (mostly French, English, Italian, and Spanish), where the focus was usually on chivalric exploits, the love story was at times eclipsed, although the parallel established with

Lancelot and Guenevere gave it new significance. It remained squarely in the forefront of later German and Scandinavian romances, but the subversive impact was blunted by other means.

The legend went into virtual eclipse after the medieval period, only to be resurrected several centuries later when Romantic poets and artists, troubled by the excesses of absolutist regimes and by the social changes wrought by the Industrial Age, embraced the Middle Ages as an idyllic time when people had lived—or so they imagined—happily in harmony with each other, and with nature and the universe. The masterpieces of that “golden age,” preserved in manuscripts or early printed editions but maligned and disdained by Humanist scholars and their Classicist successors, had been gathering dust in libraries and secondhand bookstores. Brought suddenly to light by philologists and other scholars, who published editions, summaries, and modern translations of them, the earliest versions of the Tristan legend became increasingly available to all those for whom the Middle Ages held a special attraction. The patient work of scholars and the impatient aspirations of Romantic and Victorian writers and artists conspired to bring about an important revival of the legend, in England most notably by Arnold, Tennyson, and Swinburne, who profoundly influenced British and American art and literature. Wagner’s opera was to have an exceptional impact, disseminating not just in Germany but throughout the Western world a singularly Romantic version of the legend. As if to counteract that effect, the eminent medievalist Joseph Bédier sought to turn attention back to the legend’s roots, reconstructing what he believed to be the “original” text and producing for the general public a graceful version in modern French that was widely translated. The extraordinary conjunction of these influences stimulated a new wave of retellings that was to peak in the early decades of this century. Although the legend has continued in the late twentieth century to inspire new and often highly creative retellings, it bears the scars of a difficult passage into an age that is at once more tolerant of adultery and less sanguine about the prospects for undying love. Indeed, it is not uncommon nowadays to see the venerable old story pressed into service to

pen its own critique or, more accurately, to condemn the kind of romantic fantasy it has come to represent for those who are unaware of the beauty and complexity of its earliest incarnations.

The foregoing summary, designed to give a broad overview of the legend's prodigious fortunes, purposely blurs the particularities of its evolution in each of the major countries where it first flourished and was rediscovered. Yet one of the most fascinating aspects of the legend is how it took root and thrived in the British Isles, France, Germany, and Norway, then branched out in varied and distinctive ways as it spread throughout Europe, Scandinavia, and, in this century, to the United States. In the more detailed discussion below, we shall see the various metamorphoses it underwent.¹

The Origins of the Legend and the Earliest Extant Versions

[Note: Items with asterisks are represented in this volume]

The origins of the legend remain obscure, despite numerous efforts to pinpoint them.² While the oldest extant versions are fragments dating from the late twelfth century, there are manuscripts preserving traces of earlier states, tales transmitted orally, no doubt, that constitute analogues if not actual sources but that may in fact have been influenced by early French and German versions. These are Celtic, for the most part, but certain motifs were evidently borrowed from Hellenic, Persian, and

1. When speaking of the legend generally, I refer to the major characters as "Tristan," "Isolde," "Mark," "Brangane," and "Kaherdin," but in discussing a particular version I use the form of each name favored in that work.

2. See McCann.* Early surveys were done by Eisner, Newstead, Schoepperle, Schröder, and Zenker. More recent studies include those of Bromwich, Carney, and Padel for the Celtic sources/analogues, and Gallais and Polack for the nonCeltic ones.

Arabic sources. The legend's roots have been described variously as lying in Cornwall, northern Britain, and Ireland. The names of the main characters can be traced to sixth- or seventh-century Britain: Tristan has been identified with the Pictish Drust, son of Tallorc, appearing in the Welsh Triads as Drystan, son of Tallwch, whose lover Essylt was married to his uncle March. Key elements of the plot are to be found in Irish works of the ninth and tenth century (*The Wooing of Emer* and *The Pursuit of Diarmaid and Gráinne*). Among the possible non-Celtic sources and analogues, the Persian *Wis and Râmin* is cited most frequently.

At the core of the legend as it evolved in the Middle Ages is a passionate love that is both fated and fatal, a mutual ardor so strong and exclusive as to override the most compelling family, social, and religious taboos. The potion/poison that is the source of this passion maintains the lovers in a constant state of unrest and drives them to a premature death. While most scholars agree that these are the key elements of the legend, others claim that the notion of a love potion guaranteeing reciprocity represents a travesty, a willful betrayal by twelfth-century poets who modified the original tale to reflect values associated with a society anxious to reinforce the patriarchal structures embraced by the emerging State and the Church (Rabine*). Indeed, in Celtic analogues, the heroine is a kind of goddess with magical powers: it is she who traditionally chooses a mate and, should the object of her desire prove indifferent to her, casts a spell over him. In the continental romances, this *geis*, which gives the woman a commanding influence over her heart's desire, has been replaced by the potion, which, on the one hand, renders the woman powerless to oppose her father's resolve to use her marriage for political ends, and, on the other, renders both partners impotent in the face of an inexorable fate that pits their individual desires against those of the community.

The precise sources of the legend and its early history will doubtless always remain an enigma, and while it is clear that there are analogues in the tales of the Celts and of other cultures as well, the story that has fired the imagination of artists of all kinds from the Middle Ages on derives from the versions told by French and German poets beginning in the twelfth century.

Nevertheless, the *mouvance* that characterizes the legend—the uncertain nature of the “original” and the fragmentary state of the earliest written texts—has been an inexhaustible source of creativity through the ages as poets, novelists, playwrights, artists, musicians, choreographers, and filmmakers have attempted either to recapture what they conceive to be the original spirit of the legend or to recast it according to their own particular aspirations and anxieties or to those of their age.

The earliest extant texts recording the legend date from the last half of the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth century and represent two separate “traditions” that have long been known respectively as the *version commune* (common or primitive version) and the *version courtoise* (courtly version), both of which either descended from a lost “original” romance or archetype (*estoire*) or were composed from various oral tales that had grown up around a thematic nucleus associated with the legend and were circulating on the Continent at the time.³ It is generally thought that the *version commune* is most faithful to an earlier state, while the *version courtoise* incorporates changes that were a product of the court culture flourishing in France and Germany in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. But as we shall see, these labels are somewhat misleading. The major French texts are fragments preserved in Anglo-Norman of two narrative poems composed in octosyllabic couplets in the late twelfth century, one by Béroul, representing the *version commune*, and the other by Thomas d’Angleterre (*version courtoise*). Roughly contemporaneous with these is a poem in Middle High German by Eilhart von Oberge, whose plot preserves a slightly different strand of the *version commune*. Dating from the thirteenth century are two texts whose authors claim to have followed Thomas, a long unfinished poem in Middle High German by Gottfried von Strassburg and a complete translation/adaptation in Old Norse by Friar Róbert. Since it is

3. The theory regarding the existence of a single archetype is set out in the introductory volume of Bédier’s *Roman de Tristan par Thomas*, II, 168–87, followed by an explanation of Bédier’s method and his actual attempt to reconstruct the “original poem.” For a detailed critique of this theory, see Várvaro, “La teoria dell’archetipo tristaniano.”

impossible to know what elements of these earliest extant versions were included in the “archetype”—if indeed a single one ever existed—the following rough outline of the legend is intended simply as a frame of reference to facilitate discussion and comparison of the individual versions.

Born to King Rivalin of Lyonesse and Blancheflor, sister of King Mark of Cornwall, Tristan loses his mother at birth, and in most versions his father dies in battle before or just afterward. His education is entrusted to his tutor, Govenal, who will become his trusted companion. He shows great promise, not only in all martial skills taught to young nobles, but also in more courtly ones, especially music. He arrives incognito in Cornwall, where his skills in harping and hunting win his uncle’s heart. When the Irish champion Morholt (the Irish queen’s brother) arrives to demand the annual tribute, Tristan defeats him, inflicting a fatal blow to the head, where a piece of his sword lodges and will later identify him as the slayer. Tristan himself receives a poisonous wound in that combat and eventually, believing he is doomed, has himself set adrift in an open boat along with his harp. He arrives by chance in Ireland, where, disguised as a minstrel named Tantris, he is cured by the Queen and her daughter, Isolde, and then returns to Cornwall, where his uncle’s affection for him and the determination to make him his heir cause the jealous barons to urge Mark to marry. Tristan is entrusted with the bridequest, which takes him back to Ireland, where in some versions he goes deliberately in search of Isolde, while in others a storm lands him there after he has set out blindly on a quest Mark hopes is impossible: to find the woman from whose head came the golden strand of hair brought to him by two swallows. In Ireland, Tristan slays the dragon that has been ravaging the land but faints from the poisonous flames emanating from its mouth. When Isolde learns that her father’s steward, a known coward, intends to claim the prize (her hand in marriage), she seeks out the real hero, finds Tristan, and nurses him back to health. Although outraged to discover the notch in his sword identifying him as her uncle’s murderer, she is persuaded not to kill him in order to avoid being married to the steward. Tristan obtains the king’s permission to take her

back to Cornwall for Mark, and the two set out with Isolde's servant and confidante, Brangane, to whom the Queen entrusts a love potion for the bridal couple.

On board the ship to Cornwall, Tristan and Isolde drink the potion by mistake and consummate the love that will give them no rest until they die. Isolde persuades Brangane to replace her in her nuptial bed (but later, fearing betrayal, she tries unsuccessfully to have her murdered). In Cornwall, the lovers lead a double life, meeting secretly while trying to thwart attempts by the evil dwarf Frocin and the felonious barons to prove their treachery to Mark, whose affection for the couple makes him reluctant to doubt their professed loyalty. In one famous episode, Frocin persuades Mark to spy on them by hiding in the tree in the orchard where they often meet, but the lovers see his reflection in the water below and engage in an exchange that dispels his doubts, causing him to invite Tristan to sleep again in the royal chamber. One night when Mark is supposedly away, the dwarf sprinkles flour on the floor between the lovers' beds and, although Tristan avoids it by jumping from his bed to Isolde's, blood from a reopened wound leaves telltale stains on the bedsheets. The lovers are condemned to death, but Tristan escapes by leaping from the window of a cliff-side chapel he entered for last-minute prayer and lands miraculously unhurt on the rocky coast below. Meanwhile, Mark has been persuaded to assure Isolde a shameful death by turning her over to the local leper colony. Tristan rescues her, and they flee to the Morois forest, where they lead an existence whose harshness is mitigated only by their ardent love for each other. At length, Mark learns of their whereabouts and goes there intending to kill them, but after finding them sleeping fully clothed in their hut, with Tristan's sword between them, he again persuades himself of their innocence and retreats, leaving signs to indicate his change of heart. Not long after, the lovers, anxious to reclaim their rightful roles in society, decide to return to court, a desire that in some versions is caused by the abatement of the potion's effects after three or four years. While Mark agrees to take back his wife, he is persuaded to exile Tristan and eventually to make Isolde swear an oath of innocence, an ordeal from which she emerges unscathed.

Tristan's travels lead him at last to Brittany, where he enters the service of Duke Hoël, whose son, Kaherdin, becomes his companion. He eventually marries Hoël's daughter, Isolde of the White Hands, but, realizing on his wedding night that he was temporarily bewitched by her name and beauty, he is unable to consummate the union. He returns periodically to see the Queen in Cornwall, variously disguised as leper, pilgrim, and fool. Back in Brittany while helping Kaherdin engineer a meeting with his lover, he is fatally wounded by a poisoned spear. All remedies failing, he sends for the Queen, instructing the messenger to hoist, on the return trip, a white sail if she is aboard, a black sail if she is not. His wife, apprised at last of his relationship and also of this code, informs Tristan that the white sail she sees on the returning ship is black. Tristan, believing that his lover has ceased to care for him, expires on the spot, as does the Queen when she arrives and finds him dead. Having learned the secret of the potion, a repentant Mark buries them side by side in Tintagel. From their tombs spring two vines that intertwine.

Béroul's poem, composed perhaps as early as 1150, but more likely closer to 1190, is a 4,485-line fragment that takes up the story at the point of the famous tryst under the pine (which establishes the lovers' unrepentant talent for verbal duplicity and Marc's touching gullibility) and recounts all events up through Yseut's return to court and Tristan's banishment. One of the most famous episodes is both highly comical and deeply disturbing: when Yseut is forced to swear her innocence at a ceremony presided over by King Arthur near the Mal Pas swamp, she arranges to have Tristan, disguised as a leper, carry her across the swamp on his shoulders so that she can swear honestly that she has never had any man between her thighs except her lord Marc . . . and the leper. That she is successful here seems to suggest either that God is satisfied with literal truth or that He deems her innocent because she has been driven to this sinful love against her will.

Béroul attributes to the abatement of the potion's effects (limited to three years) the lovers' decision to leave the forest, but they apparently remain bound by their passion, for they are

in the midst of still another secret rendezvous when the fragment breaks off. Comparing Bérout's poem with Thomas's, one is struck by the upbeat tone that stems partly from the lovers' mischievous delight in their ability to exploit language to achieve their subversive ends and partly from the narrator's overt espousal of their cause, a sympathetic attitude shared by all of Marc's subjects except Frocin and the felonious barons, who claim to have their lord's interests at heart. But the situation is not as clear-cut as it may at first seem. While Tristran's enemies (who, motivated by envy and spite, are clearly evil) manage occasionally to awaken a cruel streak in the King, Marc is actually portrayed with some sympathy, as he wavers between his love for his wife and nephew and his appreciation of the barons' position. As for the lovers, it is hard to believe that Bérout approves of their attitude of total self-absorption, evidenced by the delight with which they engage in their duplicitous schemes and their apparent lack of feeling toward Marc while the potion is in full force, and, when its effects abate, their refusal to repent of their behavior even as they seek to regain what they believe to be their rightful places in a society whose laws they continue blithely to disregard.

Thomas's poem, which was probably composed around 1170–75 and quite possibly for the court of Henry II of England and Eleanor of Aquitaine, is preserved in eight separate fragments from five different manuscripts (over 3,082 lines in all) representing probably only about one sixth of his original poem. Judging from the outlines provided by Róbert and Gottfried, it is Thomas who expanded the love story of Rivalin and Blanche-flor in a way that anticipates Tristran's own story: their love is a passion that erupts suddenly and ends in sorrow. (Tristran is conceived illegitimately and born an orphan; he is raised by his father's trusted vassal, Rual.) The extant portions of the poem begin with the lovers' adieu and pledge of loyalty preceding Tristran's self-exile in Brittany and recount their respective attempts to deal with the separation and their eventual death. But Thomas emphasizes the bitter toll the lovers' estrangement takes on each of them and includes episodes that show their increasing disarray and that of their entourage. Following Tristran's abortive attempt to replace Ysolt by marrying her

Breton counterpart, he arranges to transform a nearby cave into a beautiful hall in which are placed stunningly lifelike statues of his lover and her confidante. When an angry Kaerdin discovers by chance that his sister has remained a virgin, Tristran tries to justify himself by bringing him to the hall, where Kaerdin promptly falls in love with "Brengevein" and requests that they travel to Cornwall so that he can meet her. A rendezvous pleasing to all four ends in disaster when Kariado, an ardent suitor of Ysolt's, manages to convince Brengevein that her lover is a coward. Upon returning to Brittany, Tristran is persuaded by a dwarf (also named Tristran) to help him recover his lady, who has been abducted, and it is thus that he receives the poisonous wound that will prove fatal, although the circumstances in which he incurs it suggest that it is a double for Love's wound.⁴

By substituting these episodes for the ones found in the *version commune*, Thomas concentrates on the pain endured by the lovers and their loving but unloved spouses (and by the lovers' loyal confidants, Brengevein and Kaerdin). He is clearly interested in the psychology of this antisocial passion, the self-delusion it fosters, and the alienating effects it has not only on the lovers but on all those drawn into their orbit. The focus here is very much more on the pain—*dulur*—the lovers now endure than on the joy they have previously known, and although the extant fragments depict what is admittedly the "down side" of the legend (separation and eventual death), both protagonists evoke the pain they have endured for each other throughout lives characterized by isolation from family and, in the case of Tristran, outright exile. Moreover, the conclusion lacks the "compensating" effects found in other versions: there is no posthumous "reconciliation" with a repentant Marke, nor is

4. Because Tristran's wound is in the loins and is incurred in the service of an amorous "double," it evokes indirectly the Ovidian love wound, the usual metaphor in medieval literature for depicting the abrupt onset of passion. Thus, while the legend initially uses the love potion to fulfill this function, it eventually incorporates the more familiar metaphor of the dart at the point that the potion is about to fulfill the promise of death to which the dying hero refers when he states that its consumption proved fatal.

there the assurance of their own eternal union symbolized elsewhere by the intertwining vines.⁵

Eilhart's 9,446-line *Tristrant*, composed between 1170 and 1190, was long considered a clumsy translation of a French source, but recent research has challenged that view, seeing it more as a courtly adaptation.⁶ What is certain is that it is linked to the so-called *version commune*, of which it provides the earliest complete outline. It includes episodes found in the extant fragments of twelfth- and thirteenth-century French works, as well as episodes not preserved elsewhere. Eilhart's choice of episodes and the tone of his work seem to stem from two very different impulses. It may well be that his interest in showing the inexorable effects of fate reflects an earlier state of the legend, while his desire to present Tristrant as a man of action is dictated by his own tastes. In the first part of the poem, the sea is presented as a powerful instrument of fate. The hero is actually born at sea and is torn from his dead mother's womb, a sign of impending misfortune. He is twice carried to Ireland by the sea, the second time on the bridequest version involving the strand of golden hair. Finally, the drinking of the potion takes place when the boat puts into port temporarily in response to Isalde's complaint of seasickness.⁷ Although Tristrant and Isalde are shown anguishing at length over the feelings awakened by the potion, after they arrive in Cornwall they conduct their affair with a minimum of verbalization (unlike in Bérout), and their

5. However, Blakeslee speculates that it was a part of the original poem but was omitted in the extant manuscript to avoid the appearance of blasphemy.

6. This theory has been developed by Danielle Buschinger, who has also provided a modern edition of this romance, of which the earliest manuscripts (latter twelfth or early thirteenth century) contain only about one-tenth of the work, with the rest supplied by three later manuscripts, a Czech translation, and a chapbook, all from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

7. On these intrusions of an irrational power, see J.W. Thomas, tr., *Eilhart von Oberge's "Tristrant"* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978), introduction, pp. 4–10.

decision to leave the Morois after the potion's effects have waned (four years) is accompanied by very little commentary.

Eilhart recounts numerous stratagems that demonstrate the lovers' resourcefulness—especially after they are separated—but in this latter part of the poem Tristrant's role as a lover seems much subordinate to that of faithful vassal and companion. He is linked briefly with Arthur's knights, who help him gain access to Isalde by organizing a hunting party that "gets lost" near Tintagel and takes advantage of Marke's hospitality. When Tristrant is cut on the sharp blades that his suspicious host has driven into the floor around Isalde's bed, Ké suggests that the entire party simulate a brawl so that they will all be wounded. The incident focuses more on the boisterous camaraderie that Tristrant enjoys than on his time with Isalde. Similarly, his involvement with Kehenis's seductions reinforces the sense of detachment he conveys by his prompt and utterly nonreflective decision to marry Kehenis's sister, his absurd claim that he has left her a virgin because she treats him badly (he claims to know a woman in Cornwall who treats a dog better), and his eventual decision to consummate his marriage simply to spite his lover. Given this mentality—so different from the one reflected in Thomas's version—it is perhaps not surprising that when Kehenis accompanies Tristrant to Cornwall to verify the above-mentioned claim, he is offered the sexual favors of Isalde's handmaiden, Gymele (who manages to foil his seduction attempt by giving him a magic sleep-inducing pillow lent to her by Isalde). No doubt it is the influence of the German epic tradition that causes Eilhart to emphasize Tristrant's heroic deeds and his role as a warrior preoccupied more with his ties to kin and community than with his love for Isalde (McDonald, "Character Portrayal").⁸

Róbert's adaptation is the earliest complete version of the Thomas tradition. Composed for King Hákon IV of Norway, *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* ("Saga of Tristram and Isold," 1226) may have been the first French romance translated into Old Norse, initiating not only the new, ornate "court style" but also the

8. A Czech verse translation of Eilhart dates from 1353–61.

vogue for Arthurian romance.⁹ Although Róbert defines the story as being that of “the overwhelming love they suffered for each other,” he adapted Thomas’s poem to the tastes of his audience, abbreviating considerably the passages that represent “pauses” in the narrative, such as the lovers’ introspective ruminations regarding their own feelings of pain and alienation, the narrator’s commentary on their distressing situation, and the considerable strain it places on Isönd’s relationship with her confidante. The few additions made suggest a Christianizing influence (see Kjær), the most significant being the pious prayer Isönd utters shortly before her death. This prayer alters considerably the tone of Thomas’s version, in which the lovers remain estranged from God from the moment they drink the potion to the moment they die. Róbert also includes the detail of the intertwining vines, reproduced by Eilhart but absent from the extant fragments of Thomas’s version.

Generally considered the classic version of the legend, Gottfried’s masterly *Tristan und Isold* (ca. 1210) is unfortunately incomplete, presumably owing to the author’s premature death. The poem (19,416 lines) breaks off just after the point where the extant fragments of Thomas’s poem take up the story—a strange and fortuitous coincidence, in that it appears to give us an entire account of the Thomas tradition. However, Gottfried was anything but slavish in his translation/adaptation: while he claims to have followed Thomas, it is clear both from a comparison of the overlapping portions of the two poems and from an analysis of each work that he had very different preoccupations. His poem is a kind of *summa*, reflecting various facets of the humanist ideal associated with the cathedral schools

9. Róbert’s saga, like other thirteenth-century Arthurian adaptations, is known through seventeenth-century copies of older manuscripts that have survived in only a few fragments. A study of the fragment of the *Tristrams saga* suggests that the style of the earlier version was considerably more refined than that of the copy. See Schach, “Style and Structure of *Tristrams Saga*.”

of the late twelfth century.¹⁰ A well-educated and highly accomplished poet, Gottfried incorporated into the Celtic legend numerous elements borrowed from classical and Christian thought. Given his background, it is not surprising that he was drawn to Thomas's depiction of a hero so unlike those portrayed in the romances of Chrétien de Troyes, where a knight cannot gain or preserve a woman's love without furnishing proof of his prowess. Except for the trials inherent to the legend (combat with the Morholt and the dragon), chivalric exploits—especially knight-errantry and tournaments—play a decidedly minor role in a work that stresses much more than Eilhart's version Tristan's courtly accomplishments. (On the significance of these changes, see Jackson* and McDonald.*) Gottfried, who in his prologue addresses himself explicitly to an elite audience of *edele herzen* ("noble hearts"), lavishes much attention on the episodes in which the lovers indulge their passion, but the figure of Tristan is clearly the focus since the consumption of the potion does not occur before what would presumably have been the midpoint of the completed romance.

If Tristan represents a model knight-courtier, the lovers' efforts to lead the double life required by their determination to pursue their clandestine affair without relinquishing their place in society serve nevertheless to underscore the negative elements of court life—a world of intrigue where men vie for the favor of the king. It is thus with some relief that Tristan and Isold abandon the court momentarily to enjoy their love freely—not in a primitive branch hut, however, but in the splendid "cave of lovers" which represents one of Gottfried's most stunning innovations. A detailed allegorical description of this idyllic refuge seems designed to celebrate the transcendent heights to which the pure love nourished in the lovers' noble hearts has raised them. The allusions to Christian tradition in this episode (among others) are unmistakable, and the spiritualized conception that Gottfried presents of what is essentially an anti-social passion is difficult to reconcile with orthodox beliefs.

10. Jaeger, *Medieval Humanism*. On this and other aspects of this point, see Jaeger's excellent entry on Gottfried in *New Arthurian Encyclopedia*, ed. Lacy, pp. 206–11.

Gottfried's successors, apparently imbued with a keener appreciation of conservative Christian ethics, would have to grapple with the same problem, and with mixed results, as we shall see.

The distinction between the *version commune* and the *version courtoise* has become a commonplace of Tristan criticism, particularly in discussing these five early versions; it cannot be ignored, therefore, despite various attempts to challenge both its value and its validity.¹¹ If Thomas's and Gottfried's poems are considered "courtly," it is because the authors seem to have eliminated some of the cruder elements of earlier states and rationalized or adapted certain archaic elements—traces of a pre-Christian culture. For example, it is often said that while in the Béroutl-Eilhart tradition the potion preserves its magical force (despite its limitation in time), it is thought to be little more than a symbol for Gottfried—and Thomas too, presumably—where the focus is on the force of this passionate, illegitimate love and its psychological effects on the lovers and their entourage. But the extant portions of both of these poems reveal that the "courtly" tradition is not purely a refined one in which love is seen only as an ennobling force. Gottfried retains a few jarring instances of Isold's cruelty toward Brangain and of Mark's cruelty toward the lovers, and Thomas's account of the pain, frustration, and outright anger experienced by six alienated individuals—the lovers, their spouses, and their confidants—is definitely composed in a minor key. One danger in applying the epithet "courtly" to the early Tristan poems is the problematic association it appears to make with "courtly love." Since Gaston Paris introduced the term *amour courtois* in 1883, a whole century of criticism has proven how ill-defined, elusive, and ultimately

11. Jonin, *Personnages féminins*, was the first to challenge it, drawing an impassioned defense of the distinction from Frappier, "Structure and Sens." In "Significance of Thomas's *Tristan*," Hunt summarizes the debate and supports Jonin, as does Grimbert, "*Voleir v. Poer*." Rather than taking sides, Bruckner* attempts to account for the multiplicity of interpretations evoked by this poem.

undefinable it is.¹² No matter how many poets may have nonchalantly compared themselves to Tristan, it is misguided to see what Germanists call Tristan-love as just one more example of a broader phenomenon that is said to “celebrate” adulterous love or even of the more refined *fine amor* associated with the troubadours. The love binding Tristan and Isolde is fated and reciprocal, dooming them to a premature death which they forestall as long as possible. If the lovers embrace their fate willingly, it is because they cannot do otherwise, but they realize how incompatible their passion is with their normal social obligations, which they nevertheless obstinately attempt to fulfill as best they can.

No doubt the best justification of the term “courtly” in reference to the Thomas/Gottfried tradition is the two poets’ sophisticated treatment of the scenes in which the narrator or the protagonists characterize their love by using many of the rhetorical figures found in the works of French and German court poets. This is particularly true of Gottfried’s poem, which reflects the humanist ideal of the twelfth-century renaissance and offers a stark contrast with Eilhart’s version. But the distinction works better for the Germans than it does for the French: to say that Thomas’s art is more sophisticated than Bérout’s is to ignore the complexity of the playful discourse in which Bérout’s story is embedded (see Burns*), where the incessant play on the opposition between illusion and reality is surely as reminiscent of the art of Chrétien de Troyes as is Thomas’s love of rhetoric and dialectic. Indeed, it is quite likely that Bérout’s poem, which elsewhere displays certain traits associated with epic—its episodic character and the narrator’s appeals to his audience—represents a deliberate attempt at an archaic style.

12. See Roger Boase, *The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love: A Critical Study of European Scholarship* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977), and Edmund Reiss, “*Fin’amors*: Its History and Meaning in Medieval Literature,” *Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 8 (1979), 74–99. For a concise statement of this complex issue, see Norris J. Lacy, “Courtly Love,” in *New Arthurian Encyclopedia*, ed. Lacy, pp. 101–02.

The Legend as Exemplum, Emblem, and Lyric

Before examining how these early versions were amplified in the great prose romances of the following centuries, we must consider various manifestations of the opposite impulse: compression of the legend into a single episode that somehow epitomizes it. For example, the anonymous *Donnei des Amants* ("Lovers' Courtship," late twelfth or early thirteenth century) contains in lines 453–683 what is virtually a lay, known as "Tristan Rossignol" ("Tristan the Nightingale"), which a man recounts to his lady as an example of how much one might be willing to risk for one's lover. He tells how Ysoud dared to elude her guards to escape into the garden for a clandestine meeting with her banished lover, after hearing him summon her by imitating the song of the nightingale and other birds. The lady, in turn, praises the sincerity of Tristran's love, demonstrated by his willingness to incur ridicule by disguising himself as various marginal figures in order to see Ysoud. The allusion demonstrates how well known the lovers were by the time the *Donnei* was composed and their reputation for self-sacrifice and inventiveness in their secret rendezvous.

The earliest lyric poets made abundant allusions to the legend. For them, the lovers were emblematic not only of unsurpassed beauty and great ingenuity, but also and especially of an ardent and enduring passion involving intense pain as well as great joy. Small wonder, then, that Tristan and Isolde became rapidly enshrined in the pantheon of passionate but hapless lovers with the likes of Antony and Cleopatra, Paris and Helen, Dido, and Pyramus and Thisbe, many of whom were later to be found languishing with the "lustful" in the second circle of Dante's *Inferno*, along with Paolo and Francesca, whose "Galeotto" (go-between¹³) was none other than the romance of Lancelot and Guenevere. The earliest extant reference to Tristan

13. Because it was Galehaut who facilitated the first secret rendezvous between Lancelot and Guenevere in the thirteenth-century Prose *Lancelot* (and later texts), the Italian equivalent, "Galeotto," came to mean an intermediary for would-be lovers.

and Isolde in the lyric poetry of medieval France is to be found in the work of the troubadour Cercamon (fl. 1137–48). Allusions proliferate from 1150 on,¹⁴ proving that the legend was well known on the Continent prior to Béroul and Thomas, no doubt in the form of lays or short narratives that were either recited or sung. Both Béroul and Thomas claim to have heard differing accounts of it from various minstrels, of whom the most famous and “trustworthy” appears to have been a certain Bréri.

One can imagine these early narratives thanks in part to Marie de France, a contemporary of Béroul and Thomas, who defines the subject of her *Lai de Chevrefoeil* (“Lay of the Honeysuckle”) as follows: “De Tristram e de la reïne, / De lur amur qui tant fu fine, / Dunt il eurent meinte dolor, / Puis en mururent en un jur” (“About Tristan and the Queen / and their love which was so tender / from which they had much grief / then died both on the same day”—ll. 7–10). The lay records a meeting that the banished Tristram engineers when he learns that the Queen plans to travel to Tintagel for Pentecost. To attract her attention, he throws in her path a hazel branch engraved with his name (or a message), signifying that their situation is analogous to that of the honeysuckle entwining the hazel: for while they can live a long time together, separated they cannot endure. “Bele amie, si est de nus: / Ne vuz sanz mei, ne jeo sanz vus” (“My beloved, it is thus with us: / neither you without me, nor I without you”—ll. 77–78).¹⁵

Marie claims to have heard *Chevrefoeil* recounted many times and even to have seen it in writing, and while it is not known whether she ever heard it sung, music and minstrels undoubtedly played a decisive role in the transmission of the legend, a tradition renewed many centuries later by Wagner, whose influence was both widespread and profound. Music is also an integral part of the legend itself. Tristan is the first romance hero whose skills as a musician are almost as celebrated

14. See Nathaniel Smith, “Troubadours,” in *New Arthurian Encyclopedia*, ed. Lacy, pp. 475–76. Many of the earliest allusions to the legend are recorded by Sudre.

15. A Norwegian prose version, *Geitarlauf*, dates from the first half of the thirteenth century.

as his prowess in combat, and when, mortally wounded by the Morholt, he is set adrift in a rudderless, oarless boat, he takes along only his harp: music is to be his sole consolation. Music will also be his salvation when he resorts to a minstrel disguise upon finding himself in the land of his enemies. Isolde first meets Tristan as the wounded minstrel who, in some versions, teaches her how to play and sing. (On the importance of music for the lovers' relationship in Gottfried, see Jackson.*) Thus it is that music presides over the first period of their acquaintance, but following Tristan's banishment it is their separation that makes them turn to song. Thomas depicts the Queen as singing the *Lai de Guiron* ("Guiron's Lay"), which recounts a tragic love story linked to the *cœur mangé* ("eaten heart") tradition, aspects of which no doubt strike a responsive chord in her,¹⁶ and the Prose *Tristan* (discussed below) contains a number of lays composed and sung by the lovers and others seeking consolation from the pangs of a frustrated love. (See Baumgartner.*) During periods of imposed separation, then, songs, lays, or other types of performances are used either to signal one's presence, as in the case of Tristan's bird calls, or to seek consolation or establish some kind of spiritual communion by commemorating one's love or that of other tragic couples. These two purposes are served in two short twelfth-century narrative poems, both known as the *Folie Tristan* ("Tristan's Madness") but differentiated by the location of the two manuscripts—one (572 lines) in Berne and the other (998 lines) in Oxford. In both versions Tristan appears at Mark's court disguised as a fool and recounts distorted versions of his story in order to signal his presence to Isolde, but the *Folie de Berne* appears to be related to the *version commune*, whereas the *Folie d'Oxford* is associated with the *version courtoise*.¹⁷ Tristan also appears disguised in a 1,524-line text inserted into the Fourth Continuation of *Perceval* and

16. In stories containing this motif, the jealous husband kills the lover and has the heart prepared and served as a delicacy to his unsuspecting wife.

17. The main differences between the two are summarized by Baumgartner, *Tristan et Iseut*, pp. 116–21. Payen* analyzes the *Folie Tristan d'Oxford*.

known as *Tristan Menestrel* ("Tristan the Minstrel") because after drawing Arthur and his knights to Mark's court, he uses a minstrel disguise to win a night of love with the Queen.

Just as the lyric lays in the Prose *Tristan* are intimately tied to love intrigues elaborated in the work as a whole, allusions to the legend in romances about other couples are often used to compare—or indeed contrast—their behavior with that of the celebrated lovers. Jean Renart's romance *L'Escoufle* ("The Kite," ca. 1200) contains not only a lengthy description of a cup engraved with several scenes from the Tristan legend but also a whole network of allusions to the lovers that invite the reader to note significant parallels.¹⁸ We owe the most sustained comparison of this type to Chrétien de Troyes, who, after claiming in the prologue of *Cligés* to have once composed a version of the legend, proceeds to recount a mock-Tristan. In this most curious version the heroine (Fénice), citing Ysolt's sexual double-dealing as a negative example, swears that she will never give her body to any man other than the one who has her heart. That Chrétien views her self-righteousness as a delusion and is having fun at her expense seems clear from the way he shows her engaged in conduct as duplicitous as Ysolt's and in no way more meritorious. If she does not end up like the woman she has no wish to imitate, it is because she is luckier: her confidante provides her with one potion to keep her husband from ever touching her and another potion to enable her to feign death, and the Emperor conveniently dies off at the end of the romance, thus allowing the lovers to inherit the throne and live happily ever after.¹⁹ *Le Roman de la Poire* ("Romance of the Pear," ca.

18. This may in turn have inspired a feature in the play *Tristan et Iseut* (1929), by Joseph Bédier and Louis Artus. The character (Prinis) who hands the protagonists the love potion points out that the scenes engraved on the silver flask show famous lovers: Lancelot crossing the Sword Bridge to reach Guinevere; Thisbe's mulberry bush.

19. The closing verses of the romance recount the crowning irony as Fénice also ends up as a negative exemplum: remembering her deceit involving the two potions, future emperors kept their wives closely guarded, allowing no man alone with her unless he be a eunuch from birth. On Fénice's double-dealing, see Peter Haidu, *Aesthetic Distance in Chrétien de Troyes: Irony and Comedy in "Cligés" and "Perceval"* (Geneva:

1250) by Tibaut is a particularly interesting case in that the narrative, in which the poet-lover becomes smitten with his Lady after biting into a pear that she offers him, is preceded by a kind of prologue composed of successive speeches by Love, Fortune, and four sets of famous lovers (Cligés and Fénice, Tristan and Isolde, Pyramus and Thisbe, Paris and Helen) and accompanied on each facing page by appropriate miniatures.

It is, no doubt, the exemplary nature of the legend that explains its great appeal for medieval artists. The cup described in *L'Escoufle* demonstrates how various artists seized upon certain episodes that for them epitomized the legend, such as the lovers' consumption of the potion at sea, their orchard tryst, and their death. The earliest manuscripts illustrating the legend date from the middle of the thirteenth century. Key scenes from the legend also adorned the walls of secular and religious buildings and were used in the paving tiles of at least one monastery (Chertsey Abbey). They were stitched onto silk or linen embroideries, woven into tapestries, and sculpted onto ivory and wooden boxes—even onto misericords preserved in two English cathedrals. As was the case in literature, the lovers, while generally depicted in a positive light, were sometimes presented as a negative exemplum. The orchard rendezvous—the overwhelming favorite among artists—had an iconography similar to that of depictions of Adam and Eve partaking of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden under God's watchful, disapproving eye. The lovers were shown standing on either side of a tree where one could observe the stern visage of King Mark, his crowned head reminding the viewer of the law transgressed by the sinful lovers.²⁰

Droz, 1968), pp. 104–06. Allusions to the legend abound in Chrétien's romances. Karl D. Uitti has detected a particularly well-sustained network in *Yvain* (see his "Intertextuality in the *Chevalier au lion*," *Dalhousie French Studies*, 2 [1980], 3–13).

20. On Tristan and Isolde in medieval art, see Walworth,* Loomis, Frühmorgen-Voss, Ott, and Whitaker. On the various interpretations of the orchard tryst in medieval art, see Michael Curschmann, "Images of Tristan," in *Gottfried von Strassburg and the Medieval Tristan Legend*, ed. Stevens and Wisbey, pp. 1–17, and Doris Fouquet, "Die

The Legend in France, Italy, Spain, and England Through the Sixteenth Century

From an examination of the various compressed forms of the legend attesting to its renown as a tale of exemplary value, we turn now to an opposing phenomenon that also demonstrates the legend's enduring popularity: its expansion—and dilution—in the long prose reworkings that began in the thirteenth century and continued up to the end of the Middle Ages in France, Italy, Spain, and Britain. The legend's development in these countries differs considerably from that seen in Germany and Scandinavia, as the lovers are drawn decisively into the Arthurian orbit, with Tristan eventually becoming a knight of the Round Table. In the earliest French and German verse redactions, Arthur and his knights either constitute a minimal presence (as in Béroul and Eilhart) or are wholly absent (as in Thomas and Gottfried).²¹ The dominance of the *version courtoise* in Germany and Scandinavia accounts for the legend's development as separate from the Arthurian one, whereas in the other countries of Western Europe the two traditions merged beginning with the long, highly influential romance known as the Prose *Tristan*.

The Prose *Tristan* (which may or may not have been begun by Luces de Gat and completed by Hélie de Boron) dates from the second and third quarters of the thirteenth century and is preserved in two basic traditions, one of which is only about three-quarters the length of the "long version."²² Composed after

Baumgartenszene des *Tristan* in der mittelalterlichen Kunst und Literature," *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, 92 (1973), 360–70.

21. Since Arthurian romance was very popular both in France and Germany at the time that the *Tristan* verse redactions were composed, the physical absence of Arthur in a poem like Gottfried's does not preclude his "presence" as an invisible force or influence. (See McDonald.*)

22. The short version is often identified with B.N. MS 103; the long version is also known as the "cyclical version" because certain manuscripts include a portion of the *Queste del Saint Graal* ("Quest of the Holy Grail"). See Baumgartner's critique of Vinaver's theory about the

the enormous Vulgate Cycle of five French Arthurian romances (ca. 1215–35) and decisively influenced by it, this extraordinarily popular romance underscores the connection between love and prowess first explored by Chrétien and further elaborated in the French Prose *Lancelot*. Tristan's story, which is eventually woven into the Arthurian tapestry, is preceded not just by that of his father, but by a whole "genealogy" that traces the hero's (and Marc's) lineage back to Sadoc, the only one of Joseph of Arimathea's sons who defies his father by choosing his own wife, setting off a series of family episodes involving violent, often lethal, passion that prefigure later ones (see Traxler). As in the verse redactions, Tristan is orphaned at an early age and threatened before and after his arrival at Marc's court by enemies bent on depriving him of his rightful heritage. Among these is his stepmother, who twice tries to poison him. But his eventual banishment from Cornwall is no longer a lonely exile spent pining away for his beloved and living only for the rare meetings he can engineer. Rather, it sets off an interminable series of *aventures* interspersed with tournaments in which Tristan measures himself against Artus's best knights and is seen very early to be on a par with Lancelot. He eventually gains admittance to the Round Table, where he takes the seat formerly occupied by his old rival Morholt, and he even participates in the Grail Quest. The emphasis on prowess is such that, as Merlin explains, Tristan is destined to rank with Galahot and Lancelot as one of the best, most celebrated knights in the world. Marc's jealousy is aroused not just by his nephew's amorous exploits but also by his chivalric ones, as Tristan becomes progressively more integrated into the Arthurian world. There emerges very early a striking opposition between Cornwall, with its cowardly barons and the increasingly unscrupulous Marc, and Camelot, with its valiant knights presided over by the illustrious Artus.

With the introduction into the legend of numerous chivalric encounters (some appearing as long digressions involving knights other than Tristan), the love intrigue is necessarily relegated to the background for long stretches.

two versions and her plot summary of the romance in her "*Tristan*" *en prose*.

Nevertheless, love is still a major theme, amplified in a curious way that transforms and in some ways banalizes the lovers' passion. Tristan's and Yselt's great beauty causes others to fall violently in love with them, and in these various doubles one can see reflected aspects of the core legend. At the tender age of ten, Tristan unwittingly awakens in the princess Belide an unreciprocated passion that drives her to suicide, a circumstance that links love to death. The first woman on whom Tristan actually sets his sights, Segurade's wife, is not only married but also the object of Marc's affections. Uncle and nephew are thus drawn into a love conflict even before Yselt enters the picture; indeed, Marc sends Tristan off on the bridequest to the very land where he is hated in the hope that he will be slain there. While the potion does seal the couple's love for all eternity as in earlier versions, here Tristan's love for Yselt is awakened well before, but only when he becomes aware of the passion that the Saracen Palamedes has conceived for her. It is thus a reaction of envy, although this sentiment seems to be linked with Tristan's desire to emulate the valiant knight and to surpass him in love and chivalry. Another rival for Yselt's affection is, surprisingly, Kahedin, who, having accompanied Tristan to Cornwall to see his companion's beloved, becomes instantly enamored of the Queen herself rather than of her confidante (as it is in the verse redactions). The various lovers exhale their passion at length in letters, long laments, or in lays that they compose and perform (analyzed by Baumgartner*). Love causes the death of one victim of unrequited love (Kahedin), who executes his mortal lay in more than one sense, and Yselt also performs a mortal lay and attempts suicide with Tristan's own sword when the false news of her lover's death reaches her. In the manuscripts that give an ending different from the traditional one, even Tristan's death is set to music: it is while performing for Yselt one of his own lays that he is treacherously slain with a poisoned lance sent by Morgain la Fee—the same lance Tristan had used previously to kill her lover.

The link in the Prose *Tristan* between *aventure* and *cortoisie*, between prowess and love, is primordial. Indeed, it is an axiom among Artus's knights that one cannot be a great knight if one does not love. Tristan's remarkable prowess—and his no less

remarkable beauty—earn him the love of many women, and once he has partaken of the potion, his love for Yselt becomes the actual source of his prowess and elevates him to the rank of the very model of love-inspired valor, Lancelot dou Lac. Under these conditions, it is inevitable that the lovers' illicit passion should be both compared and contrasted with that of Lancelot and Genevre (a development that necessarily implies a comparison between Marc and Artus). According to one widely held view (Payen, "Lancelot contre Tristan"), the Prose *Tristan* neutralizes the subversive impact of the earlier versions of the Tristan legend by proposing as a more acceptable alternative to anti-social Tristan-love (*amour fatal*, or "fated/fatal love") the passion that Lancelot first displayed for Arthur's queen in Chrétien's *Chevalier de la Charrete* ("The Knight of the Cart"), a love that, though still adulterous, inspires prowess that benefits the entire community (*amour chevaleresque*, or "chivalric love"). Thus, certain innovations brought to the legend by the Prose *Tristan* (reduction of the importance of the potion, linking of love and prowess, Tristan's death by an outside force) transform the *amour fatal* of the verse redactions into an *amour chevaleresque*. But if that was the author's intention, it is only partially realized, for Tristan never succeeds in truly integrating the two spheres of his existence, and the longest periods he spends with Yselt are in various castles where they live in relative isolation from society (see Østergaard). The difficulty in reconciling these two spheres can be seen in the nontraditional version of the lovers' death. Tristan dies at the hands of the lord and uncle he has betrayed by loving Yselt. Thus his death recalls his reputation as a lover and has no connection with his knightly preoccupations. He laments not having achieved an honorable battlefield death and asks Sagremor to convey his greetings to his fellow knights and his armor to Artus. Still, he cannot bear to die without Yselt, whom he embraces so hard on dying that she follows him. The reconciliation between love and chivalry left unrealized in life is symbolized in death when a repentant Marc orders that a great sepulcher be built adorned with life-sized statues of the lovers: Tristan dressed as a knight with Yselt at his side. It is an artifice that emblemizes the hero "as a reintegrated, triumphant, and fulfilled chivalric hero, forever idealized—and officially

recognized by Mark and the Cornish—as the perfect knight and lover” (Seidenspinner-Núñez, 36).

It may seem surprising that a work that spends so much time detailing chivalric exploits and recounting the joy and pain of passionate love to what was clearly the great delight of myriad readers should actually wish to question the value of such activities. But the romance does incorporate a critique of the twin ideals espoused by Tristan, a critique that becomes increasingly explicit as the romance progresses, particularly with the introduction of Dinadan, who points out the pain of loving and the folly of jousting with any knight who challenges him. Although criticism of the lack of moderation in matters both of love and chivalry dates back at least to Chrétien, who also anticipates the move to transcend the concern for worldly love and glory represented by the Grail Quest, the explicit character of the critique found in the Prose *Tristan* is striking, and it is a feature that will be echoed in later versions of the Tristan legend—especially those that exploit the lovers’ passion to questionable ends, i.e., to highlight the solid middle-class virtues they either refuse steadfastly to exemplify or are eventually persuaded to embrace.

The Prose *Tristan* may well have been the most popular prose romance of the Middle Ages, judging not only from the unusually large number of manuscripts preserved (seventy-five) but also from the frequency with which it was reprinted: eight editions were published in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.²³ It was also widely translated and imitated, spawning romances in Italian, Spanish, English, Danish, Russian, and Polish, as well as later French versions. All of these subsequent retellings of the legend distinguish themselves in part by the weight they accord chivalry, on the one hand, and love, on the other, and in the

23. See the discussion in Baumgartner, “*Tristan*” *en prose*, and in Renée Curtis’s introduction to her (Curtis’s) edition, *Le Roman de Tristan en prose*, vol. 1 (Munich: Hueber, 1963). Besides the versions in French, Spanish, Italian, and English discussed below, a Russian/Serbo-Croatian *Tristan* has been preserved in a Russian manuscript of the late sixteenth century. See Zora Kipel, tr., *The Byelorussian “Tristan”* (New York and London: Garland, 1988).

treatment of the parallel between Tristan and Lancelot as famous knights and lovers.

In France, the popularity of the Prose *Tristan* generated interest in other Arthurian figures associated with Tristan, including his father (Meliadus) and his son. *Palamedes*, which actually predates the cyclical version of the Prose *Tristan*, is a collection of tales about Meliadus's generation, including the fathers of Palamedes, Arthur, and Erec. It comprises two parts that were often considered as independent texts and, indeed, were published separately in the sixteenth century: *Meliadus de Leonnoys* ("Meliadus of Lyonesse," seven editions between 1528 and 1584) and *Guiron* (or *Gyron*) *le Courtois* ("Guiron the Courteous," three editions between 1501 and 1509). The earliest version of *Palamedes* is preserved as part of a compilation by Rusticiano da Pisa called *Le Roman de Roi Artus* ("The Romance of King Artus") or *Compilation* (ca. 1272) and is included in the Arthurian compilations made by Jehan Vaillant de Poitiers (ca. 1391) and Michot Gonnot (1470). The Prose *Tristan* also produced, in the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century, *Ysaïe le Triste* ("Ysaïe the Sorrowful"), published in 1522 as *L'Histoire d'Isaïe le Triste* ("The Story of Ysaïe the Sorrowful"). It was conceived as a "dynastic continuation" of the earlier romance in that it recounts the seriocomic adventures of the Cornish lovers' son, Ysaïe, and his own son, Marc, who, appalled by the anarchy into which Arthur's realm has fallen since his death, struggle to restore its harmony by eliminating the evil forces and customs. Besides these editions of medieval Tristan romances, sixteenth-century France also produced two new prose romances. Written for François I^{er}, Pierre Sala's *Tristan* (1525–29), considered his best work, draws on material from various sources (the Prose *Tristan*, the Prose *Lancelot*, the *Tavola Ritonda* ["Round Table"], and the *Dame de la Licorne* ["Lady of the Unicorn"]) to tell "a new and joyous tale of adventures" that may well be a critique of Arthurian ideals. In 1554 appeared Jean Maugin's *Premier Livre du nouveau Tristan de Leonnois, chevalier de la Table Ronde et d'Yseulte Princesse d'Yrlande, Royne de Cornouaille* ("The First Book of the New Tristan, Prince of Leonnois, Knight of the Round Table and of Yseulte, Princess of Ireland, Queen of Cornwall"), known as the *Nouveau Tristan*. It was reprinted three times

between 1567 and 1586, but the promised second book never materialized. After the sixteenth century, interest in the legend faded, although it can be argued that it contributed indirectly to the depiction of fatal love in various plays and novels of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.²⁴

In Italy, the Tristan legend was echoed throughout the Middle Ages in lyrical poetry, figuring even in Dante's *Inferno*.²⁵ The lyrical tradition intersects with the prose tradition in several *cantari*, or "songs" (preserved in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century manuscripts) that recount various episodes of the Prose *Tristan*. In the early sixteenth century, a further generic blending (with Carolingian epic) occurred in Matteo Maria Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato* and Ludovico Ariosto's continuation, *Orlando Furioso*. The Prose *Tristan* was also the source of several extant Italian prose romances. Four of these are fragments, of which the earliest (late thirteenth century) and longest, *Tristano Riccardiano*, strays the farthest from its source, actually exaggerating the preference for chivalric adventures over love.²⁶

The most innovative of the Italian prose versions is the *Tavola Ritonda* (second quarter of the fourteenth century), which draws on a variety of sources besides the Prose *Tristan* and may well have been inspired by aspects of the lyrical tradition, for it puts the love intrigue squarely back into the foreground,

24. See Jean Frappier, "Les Romans de la Table Ronde et les lettres en France au XVI^e siècle," in his *Amour courtois et Table Ronde* (Geneva: Droz, 1973), pp. 263–81. See also the entries in *New Arthurian Encyclopedia*, ed. Lacy, by Jane H.M. Taylor on *Ysaïe le Triste*, p. 530, and by Norris J. Lacy on Sala, p. 395, and Maugin, p. 316, and his article "The Arthurian Ideal in Pierre Sala's *Tristan*," *Arthurian Interpretations*, 1.2 (1987), 1–9.

25. The legend is also represented in *Il Novellino* (ca. 1300), a collection of tales by an anonymous Florentine author. No. 65 recounts the orchard tryst.

26. The *Tristano Riccardiano* lacks only the conclusion of the romance; its modern editor has provided the one found in the *Tristano Panciatichiano*. On these romances and the other fragments (the *Tristano Veneto* and the *Tristano Corsiano*), see the entries on them by Donald L. Hoffman in *New Arthurian Encyclopedia*, ed. Lacy, pp. 473–74, as well as Branca's introduction.

idealizing it in an original and somewhat disturbing way (Hoffman,* Grimberty, "Translating Tristan-love"). In exalting Tristano's and Isotta's love, the anonymous author places it at the summit of a secular hierarchy parallel to that of Christian love. As in the French Prose *Tristan*, Tristano, Galeotto, and Lancilotto are destined to become the three best knights in the world, but the *Tavola Ritonda* departs from the French tradition in making it clear that Tristano surpasses Lancilotto in the areas both of love and chivalry. Tristano was the best knight in the world but also the most "unfortunate," in that he would have reached the High Table if fate had not willed that he drink the potion. Although Lancilotto and Ginevara are also seen as victims of inordinate love, their succumbing to a sudden passion conceived on their very first meeting is seen as a bond inferior to that shared by Tristano and Isotta, who loved with a "loyal" love (based on reciprocal service) even before the effects of the potion subjected their reason to the desire for carnal pleasure. Tristano and Isotta, though they consummate their love, are considered "chaste" in that they are faithful to each other (and because their passion was forced on them). One of the most innovative aspects of this romance is the decision to invest the potion with a force equal—indeed superior—to that seen in Bérout. (On the drink's powerful effects, see Hoffman.*) In the comparison of Tristano with Galasso (Galahad), of the former's fatal love with the latter's Christian love, the mysterious potion takes on religious overtones, particularly with the lovers' death.²⁷

The Tristan legend filtered into Iberia in the twelfth century, arriving first in Catalonia. The Catalan troubadour Guiraut de Cabrera alluded to it around 1170. The popularity of the legend was particularly discernible in lyric poetry and romance in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, owing to the influence of the Prose *Tristan*. A ballad, "Herido está don

27. "The allegorization of the grape vines growing out of the lovers' tomb invites an ecstatic exegesis that blends Dionysian celebration with eucharistic devotion, recreating Tristan as the patron of a new communion of lovers who will drink the wine transubstantiated from his body and blood" (Hoffman, "Arthurian Tradition in Italy," p. 177).

Tristán" ("Wounded Is Sir Tristan"), recounting Tristan's death, is preserved in over ten texts. All of the Spanish prose versions of the legend appear to have descended from the same (lost) version of the Prose *Tristan* that served as the basis for the Italian versions, although the intermediary may well have been Catalan.²⁸ The only complete Spanish version is the *Libro del esforçado cauallero don Tristán de Leonís y de sus grandes fechos en armas* ("The Story of the Valiant Knight Sir Tristan of Leonis and of His Great Feats of Arms"), published in Valladolid in 1501 with subsequent imprints in 1511, 1525, and 1528. It contains several interpolations from Juan de Flores's sentimental novel *Grimalte y Gradissa*. A comparison of this version and two earlier fragments with the Prose *Tristan* and the Italian versions suggests that the version of the legend that circulated in Spain in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries followed the Italians in their move toward greater narrative economy—concentration on Tristan's amorous and chivalric activities at the expense of those of his fellow knights—and their effort to equalize the emphasis on love and chivalry. The 1501 imprint, on the other hand, influenced no doubt by the vogue for the sentimental novel, reorients the legend toward the love tragedy, replacing the statues adorning the lovers' sepulcher with the image of "the boat of love on the sea of vain hope" (Seidenspinner-Nuñez, 38). In 1534 appeared *Corónica nueuamente emendada y añadida del buen cavallero don Tristán de Leonís y del rey don Tristán de Leonís el joven su hijo* ("Newly Revised and Expanded Chronicle of the Great Knight Sir Tristan of Leonis and His Son, King Tristan of Leonis, the Younger"), a reworking of the *Libro*, followed by a sequel recounting the adventures of the lovers' children, Tristán and Yseo.²⁹

In England, the reception of the Tristan legend was totally different than in Italy and Spain. The earliest known version is the alliterative Middle English romance *Sir Tristrem* (late

28. On this theory and on the medieval Spanish *Tristans*, see Harvey L. Sharrer, *A Critical Bibliography of Hispanic Arthurian Material* (London: Grant & Cutler, 1977), Vol. 1: *Texts: The Prose Romance Cycles*.

29. It was translated into Italian as *I due Tristani* ("The Two Tristans") and published in 1555 in Venice.

thirteenth century), attributed—no doubt erroneously—to Thomas of Erceldoune by its first editor, Sir Walter Scott. The (unfinished) 3,344-line poem follows closely the plot of Thomas's version but alters considerably its spirit, presenting the story from a more rationalizing and moralizing viewpoint. Little interested in courtly love psychology, the author condenses those passages and develops the references to hunting, fighting, and gaming, topics that presumably appealed both to him and to his audience. (On this work, see Rumble, "The Middle English *Sir Tristrem*," and Pickford.)

The most important and influential English version of the legend is *The Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones*, which Sir Thomas Malory placed in the middle of his *Morte Darthur* ("Death of Arthur"), published by Caxton in 1495.³⁰ Based on several sources, but mainly on the Prose *Tristan*, the *Tristram* reflects the tastes of Malory's fifteenth-century English audience and also draws on the conventions of English romance.³¹ The focus is much less on Tristram's reputation as a great lover than as a celebrated knight. The hero seems preoccupied mainly with obtaining "worship" and enjoying the bonds forged in the fellowship of Arthur's knights. The main theme is thus *chevalerie* rather than *courtoisie*, but *chevalarie* in a heroic context. Indeed, Malory's refusal to focus on adulterous love is clear from his treatment of the Launcelot/Gwenyver/Arthur triangle. While Gwenyver states in the last book of the *Morte Darthur* that hers and Launcelot's sinful love brought Arthur down, her lover never does so; rather, the disintegration of the Round Table is blamed by both Launcelot and Gawayne on their own pride, the epic sin *par excellence*, for Arthur himself states that he would have been willing to forgive the couple if only he could have

30. Malory called it *The Hoole Book of Kyng Arthur and His Noble Knyghts of the Round Table*, but it has been known as the *Le Morte Darthur* since Caxton mistook the title of the last tale for that of the whole work. On the interesting history of the various editions, see Peter J.C. Field, "Sir Thomas Malory," in *New Arthurian Encyclopedia*, ed. Lacy, pp. 294–97.

31. See Mahoney,* who nuances the interpretation in Benson, Malory's "Morte Darthur."

enjoyed anew the company not so much of his queen as of his best knight. (He even states that one can have many queens, but only one such company of knights!)

Since adultery is much less of an issue for Malory than is faithful chivalric service, comparatively little space is devoted to Trystram's and La Beale Isode's numerous attempts to elude discovery by Marke either before or after Trystram's banishment; indeed, the lovers spend a good part of their time living in "comfortable domesticity" at Joyus Gard (Mahoney,* p. 238). Like Launcelot and Gwenyver, they feel no compunction about their behavior, and Marke's character is blackened so much that he elicits no sympathy whatsoever. In any case, Trystram believes (like Launcelot) that his lord's first consideration should be the great service he has rendered to him. The other kings he serves—the Irish king, the Breton king Howell, and Arthur—cherish him well, in marked contrast to his own uncle. When his Irish hosts discover that it was he who killed Marhalte, he ably defends his actions by claiming to have done battle for the love of his uncle and his country and to increase his honor, for he had just that day been knighted. He also points out that Marhalte left the field alive, his shield and sword behind him. It is an explanation that the king willingly accepts, in part because he recognizes Trystram's worth and is grateful for his service, even though he is obligated to banish him to preserve harmony within the kingdom. The comparison between Arthur and Marke, though always implicit, becomes explicit when Launcelot, despairing of being able to work the reconciliation with his lord that Bors foresees, evokes the treacherous slaying of Trystram after he had been invited to return to Cornwayle. Bors points out that Arthur, unlike Marke, has always been one to keep his word. No doubt the clearest evidence of Malory's lack of interest in Trystram as a lover is the fact that the book devoted to him does not recount his death, but rather ends on a joyful note of epic celebration: the baptism and induction into the Round Table of Palomydes (Mahoney,* p. 245). Only much later does the narrator mention Trystram's sad fate, as he evokes knights of valor who have perished. The manner of death is first described in the context of the treacherous slaying of noble knights, and, as noted, Launcelot and Bors also have occasion to evoke the event.

Malory's influence was enormous, especially in the modern period. Many of the numerous British and American versions can be traced back to him, but few authors were content to leave the love intrigue in the background, though for widely divergent reasons. Tennyson, writing in Victorian England, was not willing to overlook the adultery issue, especially as it concerned the Cornish lovers, while Swinburne, like Wagner, was eager to celebrate its transcendent nature.

The Legend in Germany and Scandinavia from the Mid-Thirteenth Century Through the Eighteenth Century

Gottfried's unfinished poem inspired two continuations for which the authors, Ulrich von Türheim and Heinrich von Freiburg, drew heavily on the latter part of Eilhart's version.³² Ulrich's *Tristan* (1235) begins with the hero's decision to marry the second Ysôt and borrows from Eilhart the magic-pillow episode and the hero's stay at Mark's court disguised as a fool, but the 3,731-line poem does not draw the tale to a conclusion. Heinrich's own attempt (*Tristan*, 1285–90) appears to be more successful in every way. In a style that is closer than Ulrich's to that of Gottfried, he begins his 6,890-line poem with Tristan's marriage (attributing the hero's failure to consummate it to a vow he made to the Virgin Mary to abstain for a year) and follows Eilhart's outline right up to the end, where he inverts the intertwining-vine motif, placing the rose over Tristan's head and the grapevine over Ysôt's. Both poets refer to Gottfried in their prologues, presenting themselves humbly as comparatively untalented successors to a great master. Heinrich's use of a common modesty topos unwittingly sets the tone for future assessments of their work and, indeed, of all subsequent versions in German up to Wagner, since critics have been unable

32. See the entries on these authors by Marianne E. Kalinke in *New Arthurian Encyclopedia*, ed. Lacy, and the chapters devoted to their works in McDonald, *Tristan Story in German Literature*.

generally to resist the temptation to measure these works against Gottfried's, rather than judging them on their own terms.³³ Heinrich espouses Ulrich's revisionist view that reflects bourgeois morality, presenting the lovers' adulterous passion as reprehensible behavior that will deliver them into the hands of the Devil. Tristan's disdain for the conjugal bliss offered by his excellent wife can only be explained by the force of the potion and the astrological configuration that determined the lovers' destiny. Heinrich contrasts the sinful and ultimately ephemeral delights of Tristan-love with the love of God and the promise of eternal joy. Unrelated to either of these versions (or indeed to Gottfried or Eilhart) is a shorter verse romance (2,705 lines), *Tristan als Mönch* ("Tristan as Monk"), which dates from the first half of the thirteenth century and may depend on a French source. It recounts Tristan's successful attempt to visit Ysot by posing as "Brother Wit," a chaplain who accompanies a funeral procession to Cornwall. When Ysot feigns sickness, he takes the disguise of a physician and remains at her side long enough to "cure" what ails them both.

In the later Middle Ages, Eilhart's version of the legend overtook Gottfried's in popularity. A relatively faithful prose redaction, to which has been added some didactic material (reflecting the attitude taken by Ulrich and Heinrich), is preserved in a 1484 incunabulum, *Ein wunderbarlich vnd fast lustige Historij von Herr Tristrand vnd der schönen Isalden* ("A Marvelous and Quite Pleasing Tale of Sir Tristrant and the Beautiful Isalde"). The chapbook was reprinted every ten or twenty years up to 1664, fifteen times in all, followed by seven modern printings or editions. It was the source for the play written in 1553 by Hans Sachs, the prolific shoemaker of Nürnberg, who also celebrated scenes from the legend in six of his *Meisterlieder* (1551–53). In his seven-act play of 1553, *Tragedia von der strengen Lieb, Herr Tristrant mit der schönen Königin Isalden* ("Tragedy of the Strong Love of Sir Tristrant and the Beautiful Queen Isalde"), Sachs recounts the legend from the cautionary perspective of a middle-class German Protestant, appending an

33. In *Tristan Story in German Literature*, McDonald makes a conscious attempt to avoid this pitfall.

epilogue in which the audience is urged to eschew illegitimate passion and opt instead for love sanctioned by marriage.

The Tristan legend was very popular in Scandinavia from the thirteenth century on, owing primarily to the influence of Róbert's *Tristrams saga*, which inspired several reworkings. The most important of these is the fourteenth-century Icelandic *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd*, known also as *Tristrams saga ok Ísoddar* ("Saga of Tristram and Isolt"), once harshly judged as a "boorish account" but now thought to be a parody of the legend and indeed of Arthurian romance generally.³⁴ Various motifs of the Tristan legend took on a life of their own as they were either incorporated into indigenous works or became the subject of ballads and folktales. Of the ballads preserved in Icelandic, Danish, and Faroese, the most beautiful is the Icelandic ballad "Tristrams kvæ i" ("Poem of Tristram," ca. 1400), which recounts Tristram's wounding and death and distinguishes between the "fair" Ísodd and the "dark" one. In three of the four redactions, each strophe ends with the haunting refrain: "For them, it was fated only to part." While this ballad is clearly related to the Icelandic saga, the Danish ballads, "Tistram og Jomfru Isolt" ("Tristram and Maid Isolt") and "Tistram og Isold" ("Tristram and Isold"), and the Faroese "Tístrams tåttur" ("Tale of Tristram") depart significantly from the traditional plot. In the Icelandic folktale *Tistram og Ísól* ("Tristram and Isolt"), Isolt the Dark is both Isolt's wicked stepsister and Tristram's (unchaste) wife, whom Isolt replaces on her wedding night, revealing her identity to her lover through a song that alludes to their past.³⁵

34. The earlier assessment was made by Leach in his chapter "Tristan in the North." Paul Schach, "Tristrams Saga ok Ýsoddar as Burlesque," *Scandinavian Studies*, 59 (1987), 86–100, claims that it is a burlesque parody of the legend, and Kalinke, *King Arthur, North-by-Northwest*, suggests that the burlesque intention extended to Arthurian legend in general. On Róbert's influence, see Schach, "Some Observations on the Influence of *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* on Old Icelandic Literature."

35. On these works and others, see Schach, "Tristan and Isolde in Scandinavian Ballad and Folktale."

Much innovation can be seen as well in the popular Danish chapbook *En tragoedisk Historie om den ædle og tappre Tistrand, Hertugens Søn af Burgundien, og den skønne Indiana, den store Mogul Kejsereens Daatter af Indien* ("A Tragic Story of the Noble and Courageous Tistrand, Son of the Duke of Burgundy, and Indiana, the Daughter of the Ruler of India"), preserved in four editions (1775, 1785, 1792, 1800) and purporting to be translated from a fifteenth-century German chapbook. While it preserves the basic outline of Róbert's redaction, the spirit of the romance is altered considerably to suit the taste of the time, with the "lovers" enjoying a chaste, though passionate, friendship. It is presumably their suffering and virtuous denial, even as they fulfill their obligations to their respective spouses, that leads to their canonization. As Tistrand is bringing Indiana from India to marry his uncle, Alfonsus of Spain, the inadvertent drinking of the potion leads Tistrand to kiss Indiana's hand, the chaste gesture to which this and all subsequent sexual encounters are reduced. Persecuted at court by his jealous cousin (Røderich), Tistrand eventually returns to France and marries Innanda, with whom he has children. Following his death, as Indiana prepares to follow him, she seeks consolation in two highly symbolic unions to which her husband agrees: her burial with Tistrand in the same coffin and the marital union of the "lovers'" children by each of their marriages. Having learned about the potion from Indiana's handmaiden, an aggrieved Alfonsus arranges a royal burial in a monastery for the pair, who are then canonized. Lilies sprout from their breasts and intertwine: this is said to be the source of the fleur-de-lis on the French coat of arms. This popular version was translated into Icelandic as *Tistrans saga ok Indiönu* ("Saga of Tistrand and Indiana"), which inspired two nineteenth-century rímur, by Sigur ur Brei fjör and Niels Jónsson, respectively.³⁶

36. On the Scandinavian versions, see Kalinke, *King Arthur, North-by-Northwest*, and her "Arthurian Literature in Scandinavia," in *King Arthur Through the Ages*, ed. Lagorio and Day, I, pp. 128–51, and Paul Schach, "Tristan in Scandinavia," in *New Arthurian Encyclopedia*, ed. Lacy, pp. 469–71.

The Legend in the Modern World

After the Middle Ages, the story of Tristan and Isolde, like Arthurian legend generally, suffered a decline owing largely to the reputation that romance had developed among Renaissance neoclassical theorists as a degenerate or popular form of literature. Although Boiardo and Ariosto managed to incorporate romance characters into their great epics, many authors considered such figures unworthy of their attention.³⁷ Interest in the Tristan legend was not revived until the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when the Romantics revolted against the tyranny of neoclassical rules concerning subject matter and form. It enjoyed a glorious and distinctive resurrection in each of the major countries where it had originally flourished—France, Germany, and England, from which it travelled across the ocean to the United States. The legend reemerged in other countries as well (e.g., Spain and Italy), but for some reason its impact was much less dramatic in southern Europe than in northern. Consequently, in describing the legend's rebirth in modern times, this survey will focus on the versions in English, French, and German. Given the nexus of interdisciplinary influences at work in the history of the legend in the modern period, it has seemed sensible to integrate into this overview, devoted primarily to literature, some discussion of the most important interpretations of the legend in music and film; however, it has not been feasible, unfortunately, to interweave a running account of the legend as represented in the visual arts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.³⁸

37. The most impressive Arthurian interpretation in the sixteenth century was in fact Miguel de Cervantes's celebrated parody of romance ideals, *Don Quijote*, a work seen by many as situated midway between romance and novel. On this transition, see Edwin Williamson, *The Half-Way House of Fiction: "Don Quixote" and Arthurian Romance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984).

38. Fortunately, the most prolific period, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British art, is treated by Poulson.*

The Legend in the English Romantic Revival of the Nineteenth Century

In the early nineteenth century, British scholars made available to the public several medieval versions of the Tristan legend, either as printed editions or summaries. Sir Walter Scott published the incomplete thirteenth-century *Sir Tristrem* in 1804, adding an ending of his own invention based on Malory; John Dunlop's *History of Prose Fiction* (1814) included a summary of one version of the Prose *Tristan*; and there were several successive editions of Malory, the most notable being a deluxe Caxton-based edition by the poet-laureate Robert Southey (1817). But two cheaper versions based on the corrupt Stansby text of 1634 were to influence the Romantic Revival decisively before a second Caxton edition, by Sir Edward Strachey, appeared in 1868. Summaries of the Tristan legend and other Arthurian legends published in various scholarly journals added to the rich fund of material that inspired poets and artists to revive the legend in a guise that would appeal to contemporary audiences. The tales of Arthur's knights fighting for great and honorable ideals while experiencing passionate love fired the imagination of the Romantics in search of an antidote to an increasingly industrialized society, dominated by the homely, materialistic values of an upwardly mobile bourgeoisie. But the revival in the Victorian age of legends that appeared to celebrate adulterous love posed the problem of how to reconcile this love with the moral ideals of the age. Medieval poets had been faced with a similar dilemma when portraying a love inimical to the Church, but they had also been concerned with the betrayal of feudal and kinship bonds. For the Victorians, it was the tantalizing issue of "free love" that inspired feelings both of revulsion and fascination, which explains the ambivalence one detects in many Romantic retellings.

Matthew Arnold (*Tristram and Iseult*, 1852) was the first modern English poet to treat the Tristan legend, which he found

summarized in a French journal.³⁹ Although the story remains strongly anchored in the medieval tradition, Arnold transposes it to the realm of ordinary experience by emphasizing the element of human psychology. The three-part poem is devoted successively to Tristram's musings on his deathbed, to a last reunion that the poet accords Iseult of Ireland, and to a totally new episode: Iseult of Brittany's attempts a year after Tristram's death to cope with her fate by telling her two children the tale of Vivian's beguiling of Merlin, which offers an obvious parallel to that of the Tristan story. If Arnold focuses on the lovers' death, parts of the legend are retold in flashback or dream sequences, while others are encapsulated in various details. He uses a complicated system of narrative devices, which, in stark contrast to the suffering imposed on all three protagonists by the fatal passion, offer a more positive view of that love as it is transposed into the realm of dream, memory, and fable—virtually metamorphosed by art. Consequently, although earlier critics interpreted his sympathetic presentation of the legitimate spouse and his portrayal of the suffering caused by the adulterous passion as an indictment of it, Arnold was apparently aware of the insufficiencies of both unbridled passion and the placid joys of domestic life, and he tried to show how one can use art and fantasy to compensate for the barrenness of modern life.⁴⁰

Alfred, Lord Tennyson displays in his *Idylls of the King* an attitude that is ambivalent only in that he appears to have a certain sympathy for Lancelot and Guenevere, despite the fact that he (unlike Malory) identifies their sinful love as the cause of the destruction of Arthur's realm. But his heartless portrayal of

39. His sources were Théodore de la Villemarqué, "Les Poèmes gallois et les romans de la Table Ronde," *Revue de Paris*, 3rd series, 24 (1841), 274–75, and "Visite au Tombeau de Merlin," *Revue de Paris*, 2nd series, 41 (1837), 45–62. He read Dunlop only after being advised to use it as a preface to his poem in order to compensate for his oblique mode of storytelling.

40. Taylor and Brewer, pp. 79–85. Leavy has suggested that the inclusion of the story of Merlin and Vivian shows the forbidden attraction that passionate women like Iseult of Ireland and Vivian held for Victorian men like Arnold.

the parallel love of Tristram and Isolt in "The Last Tournament" (1871) seems calculated to show the extreme degradation of that form of love (which in this version no potion excuses). This idyll, which springs almost purely from the poet's imagination, features little action: at what is fated to be the last Arthurian tournament (presided over by Lancelot), Tristram wins the prize—a ruby necklace donated by Guinevere (for whom it symbolizes the innocent death of a foundling she had adopted)—and takes it back to Isolt in Tintagel, where, as he sits harping to her, he is brutally slain by Mark. The bulk of the episode is devoted to dialogues engaging Tristram first with Dagonet the Fool and then with Isolt. Tennyson situates the lovers' story in one of the last of the *Idylls* (in a depressing autumnal setting), just before Guinevere's retreat to the convent, and utterly transforms Malory's most courteous of knights into a crude, haughty, and self-indulgent rebel who sings the praises of free love while cynically debunking the vows that Arthur's knights used to respect. His celebrated harping skills are seen by Dagonet as making "broken music," a disharmonious cacophony that contrasts with the "harmony" of Arthurian ideals. Tristram appears just as unprincipled in his love relationships, blithely breaking vows to both Isolts. (See Taylor and Brewer, 117–20.)

Considerably more positive in conception is *Tristram of Lyonesse* (1882), Algernon Charles Swinburne's exuberant paean to the lovers, which may have been influenced by Wagner and was written in reaction to his English predecessors' innovative—and, in the case of Tennyson, degrading—treatment of "the dear old story" he remembered so fondly from his youth.⁴¹ Following the "Prelude," an extremely lyrical celebration of Love where Iseult, a veritable Pre-Raphaelite beauty, appears as the April star along with other great female lovers from Helen (January) to Guenevere (December), Swinburne presents in nine cantos a series of tableaux comprising the decisive moments of the story, from the drinking of the potion through the lovers' sojourns before and after Tristram's hapless marriage and their eventual death. We are witness to Tristram's battles with the giant Urgan

41. *The Swinburne Letters*, ed. Cecil Y. Lang, 6 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959–62), IV, 260.

(an episode drawn from the Thomas-Gottfried tradition) and with the double for whose sake he is mortally wounded, and other Arthurian material is introduced in the lovers' conversations, which focus on the loves of Lancelot and Guenevere and of Merlin and Nimue. As in Arnold's poem, Iseult of Brittany plays a sizable role, particularly in her waiting mode, which echoes the lovers' various vigils and parallels their stay at Joyous Gard. Although she is presented positively at first (with Tristram musing sadly that she will never know the joys of motherhood), bitter jealousy eventually transforms her gentle radiance into the dark instrument of Fate, striking Tristram dead with the false report of the black sail. Because the lovers are under the sway of Love and Fate, they are victims of "sinless sin," a fact to which they allude only occasionally, so aware are they of loving each other more than God. Swinburne wanted the story to have the scope of a classical tragedy, and, while the potion can hardly be considered a tragic flaw, the treatment is both epic and lyrical. Tristram and Iseult seem born of the sun and immersed in nature, with which they are in communion throughout their lives and after death. As in Tennyson, the change of seasons from spring to winter serves to mark the progression of their lives, but the daily succession of glorious dawns constantly renews them. The sea, which plays such a prominent part in the legend, not only conveys the protagonists between Ireland, Cornwall, Camelot, and Brittany, but also provides the backdrop for their vigils on the strand and eventually engulfs their tomb, taking the lovers to its bosom. Swinburne's sensuous natural imagery heightens the intensity of the lovers' frustrated desire and places his provocative version in a universalizing context so as to render it more morally acceptable and justify the blend of medieval motifs with modern psychological expression.⁴²

42. See Taylor and Brewer, pp. 149-59, and Harrison.* In *Swinburne's Medievalism*, Harrison also discusses Swinburne's earlier treatment of the Tristan material in *Queen Yseult*, a long unfinished poem (only six of the ten planned cantos) following Tristram from his birth to his marriage, and "Joyeuse Garde," which may have been a continuation.

The Legend in Germany in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

In the English and Romance prose versions of the Middle Ages, Tristan was eventually inducted into the Round Table, but he remained aloof from the Arthurian realm in the German and Scandinavian versions, as previously noted. Thus, the legend was revived in Germany as an independent story rather than as one of a series of Arthurian tales. This revival was due, as in Britain, to the fascination that the Middle Ages held for the Romantics and to the prodigious work of medievalists imbued with a desire to rediscover and make accessible the masterpieces of Germany's past. In the period from Eberhardt von Groote's 1821 edition to Friedrich Ranke's in 1930, at least ten editors tackled the *Tristan* poems, mostly those of Gottfried and his immediate successors; in the same period, there appeared, starting with Hermann Kurz's 1847 modern German rendering of Gottfried, four translations and two prose adaptations.⁴³ The abortive retellings by Romantic poets (Schlegel, Platen, and Rückert) testify to the difficulty of reconciling the adulterous, worldly love depicted by Gottfried with the Romantic conception of love as a semireligious, otherworldly phenomenon. A significant plot alteration seen in Karl Immermann's more successful (but also incomplete) verse romance (*Tristan und Isolde*, 1841) reveals the dilemma faced by many German poets and dramatists, namely, how to portray the divine quality of passion while upholding the "sanctity of the moral code" (Batts,* p. 512). In the first part of the poem, the lovers are prepared to atone for their sin by devoting themselves to the cause of the Church, and Isolde, after emerging unscathed from her ordeal, determines to adhere to public morality, thus refusing to see Tristan again until the moment of his death.

It was, of course, Richard Wagner's celebrated "music-drama" *Tristan und Isolde* (published in 1859, first performed in 1865) that was to revive the legend most decisively not only in

43. See Adams for the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century German editions and translations of the medieval Tristan texts.

Germany but all over Europe. Indeed, it is to Wagner that most nonspecialists today owe their knowledge of the Tristan legend. This is in some ways unfortunate, for his opera, which concentrates on pivotal moments of great emotion that lend themselves particularly well to musical expression, offers not only a drastic simplification of the legendary plot and cast of characters but also a radical transformation of the meaning of Tristan-love, a change that would have a profound effect on the way the legend was viewed, both as it was reinterpreted by modern adaptors and also—more problematically—as early critics sought to elucidate the meaning of the medieval texts.⁴⁴

Because the movement of the opera is essentially psychological (internal), there is very little action. Background material is furnished by the lovers in their reminiscences as “incidents remembered in, and blindingly illuminated by, emotion.”⁴⁵ Thus, the plot, adapted from Gottfried and doubtless influenced by Immermann, is easily summarized. Act I takes place on board the ship bearing the lovers to Cornwall. Isolde is beset by strong conflicting emotions: although she already loves Tristan, her resentment of his willingness to relinquish her to Mark and her desire to avenge the death of Morholt (here, her fiancé) lead her to propose to Tristan that they consume what they think is poison. Unaware that Brangaene has substituted the love potion, they feel free to express openly a strong mutual passion that reaches a high pitch just as the crew prepares for landing. For Act II, Wagner condensed into a single moment of tryst and betrayal all the lovers’ secret meetings and their enemies’ attempts to catch them. The extraordinarily protracted moment known as the “love duet” is an outpouring of the ecstasy experienced by the lovers in an intense spiritual union fostered by Night, which frees them momentarily from the

44. It influenced not only a whole generation of early medievalists, but also Denis de Rougement’s controversial—and highly influential—interpretation of the medieval legend, which betrayed little understanding of Gottfried. (See n. 76 below.)

45. Newman, p. 204. For a comparison of Wagner and Gottfried, see Curtis, “Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde*,” and Frederick L. Toner’s entry on Wagner in *New Arthurian Encyclopedia*, ed. Lacy, pp. 502–05.

falseness of the realm of Day, represented by external, material reality. Their yearning for an eternal bliss that can be realized only in death virtually wills the fatal blow that brings an abrupt end to their rendezvous: as night yields to day, the traitor Melot bursts on the scene with Mark and Kurvenal and mortally wounds Tristan, who seems to welcome the blow after receiving Isolde's assurance that she will follow him into the realm of Night and Death. In Act III, a languishing Tristan, whom Kurvenal has brought back to Brittany (his "homeland"—there is no second Isolde), awaits his love, without whom he cannot leave the earthly realm. As she arrives, he rips off his bandages and staggers toward her, expiring in their final embrace. Isolde succumbs as well after singing the achingly beautiful passage known as the "Liebestod" ("Love-Death"), in which the yearning that has been sustained melodically gives way to peace as the music is at last resolved. Significantly, Wagner actually called this passage the "Verklärung" ("transfiguration"). A rather melodramatic ending ensures that the lovers are properly forgiven and mourned (Brangaene has revealed the truth to Mark) and that their treacherous death is avenged by Kurvenal, who slays Melot and is in turn slain.⁴⁶

Wagner's transformation of the legend is best understood in the musical and philosophical context that shaped it, for his interpretation was strongly influenced by the German Romantics and Schopenhauer. What he found in Gottfried's poem was primarily a passion so strong and compelling that it gave rise to a yearning (*Lust*) to be transported out of the material world into a spiritual realm, which alone could ultimately offer peace. Following the poet Novalis, Wagner identified this realm with Night and Death and infused it with the Schopenhauerian notion of the renunciation of the Will, "the final negation of the desire for life," which he modified in accordance with his conviction that salvation could be achieved through love.⁴⁷ His reading of

46. On Wagner's opera generally, see Newman, as well as Kerman,* who shows how Act III is both a culmination and a transfiguration of themes introduced in the two earlier acts.

47. See Furness,* p. 393. On the importance of Wagner's passion for Mathilde Wesendonck in the genesis and progress of the opera, see

Schopenhauer had a profound effect on his music as well, causing him to modify his theory on the importance of achieving a balanced synthesis of music, poetry, and drama: he now privileged music as the most potent and expressive of the arts, alone capable of transporting one beyond the material world toward the metaphysical Will. Wagner's belief in the extraordinary power of music explains why in each of the acts of *Tristan und Isolde*, the lovers' emotions carry them toward transcendent heights before the dream is either shattered—as in the first two acts—by a brusque intrusion of quotidian reality or—as in the third—carried into oblivion, where the death wish caressed since the drinking of the potion is at long last fulfilled. The sense of yearning, which the listener is compelled to share with the lovers, begins in the Prelude with the famous First Chord (actually called the "Tristan Akkord") and is sustained throughout the opera by the technique of suspension that Schopenhauer described as "a dissonance delaying the final consonance that is with certainty awaited: in this way the longing for it is strengthened and its appearance affords the greatest satisfaction."⁴⁸ While for Schopenhauer it was melody that represented the striving will, Wagner's expressive means is harmonic, the chromatic movement of entire chords. The power of his music stems in large part from his relentless use of chromaticism, which he called the "art of transition." He saw the leitmotifs in Act III as "restlessly emerging, developing, separating, then again reuniting, growing, diminishing, finally

Martin Gregor-Dellin, *Richard Wagner: Sa vie, son œuvre, son siècle*, tr. Odile Demange et al. (Paris: Fayard, 1981), pp. 417–38. Wagner finished the first draft of the libretto in 1857 (the same year that *Madame Bovary* was published) and offered it to Mathilde. Gregor-Dellin calls the *Tristan* a beneficial outlet for a frustrated and sublimated sexuality. On Schopenhauer's influence, see Zuckerman, pp. 1–31, Magee, and Stein.

48. *The World as Will and Representation*, tr. E.F.J. Payne, 2 vols. (Indian Hills, Colo.: Falcon's Wing Press, 1958), II, 455–56; cited by Zuckerman, p. 18.

clashing, embracing and well-nigh engulfing one another."⁴⁹ The ceaseless modulation increases the tension until, at the end of the "Liebestod," the long-awaited B major chord finally provides resolution.

The association of love with death has always been a part of the Tristan legend, but the "Liebestod" had a very different meaning for the earliest medieval poets. In Thomas's version, the dying Tristan tells Kaerdin to remind Ysolt of all they have suffered since they "drank their death," but if separation from each other has caused them great suffering, so has their effective alienation from a society of which they would have preferred to be a part. The major conflict posed is between the desire to enjoy fully their deep passion and the wish to be wholly integrated into society.⁵⁰ Although death proves to be the only way out ultimately, they do not yearn for death (or even transfiguration), unlike Wagner's lovers, who seem to welcome the prospect from the very beginning. Nor does their union go unconsummated as it apparently does in the opera, where the death wish is a craving for physical as well as spiritual union. In the medieval versions, the lovers consummate their love soon after drinking the potion and renew their physical relationship as often as they can in future meetings. This cyclical movement gives way in Wagner to a linear one in which the lovers' passion is prolonged in an agonizing anticipation of final fulfillment that can only be in death. Wagner's *Tristan* "apotheosizes the unhealthiest Eros—the boundless desire for a suicidal union with the Infinite, objectified in a human love impossible of fulfillment" (Zuckerman, 24).

The effect of Wagner's *Tristan* was immediate and enduring. It exercised a prodigious influence generally on the music, art, and literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries throughout the West and its impact on the

49. Richard Wagner, "Ludwig Schnorr von Carolsfeld," *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen*, 12 vols. (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1911), VIII, 186; cited by Zuckerman, p. 19.

50. See Curtis, "Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*," and Grimbert, "Love, Honor, and Alienation."

history of the legend's interpretation is incalculable.⁵¹ As in the case of the English Romantics, it sparked a renewed interest in the medieval Tristan, encouraging scholars like Jessie Weston and Adolf Bonilla y San Martín to make available to the public the medieval sources in English and Spanish literature, respectively, of "Wagner's legends." The opera stimulated an enormous wave of new retellings, especially in dramatic form, but it also influenced literary technique generally, most notably in the use of the musical leitmotif to convey a particular recurrent feeling. Marcel Proust, for example, in his monumental *A la recherche du temps perdu* ("In Search of Lost Time," published in English as *Remembrance of Things Past*), uses the "petite phrase" from Vinteuil's sonata as a central motif whose evocative power is explicitly related to Wagner's *Tristan*. (Swann thinks of it as the national anthem of his love for Odette.) The technique of the leitmotif, transposed to literature in the form of a phrase, symbol, image, or allusion, was to be used increasingly in the modern novel, whose various parts tended to be related in a spatial rather than linear pattern.⁵²

Wagner was also responsible for another, more flamboyant—Nietzsche was to call it "dangerous"—effect, giving rise to the phenomenon of "Tristanism," which affected poets, novelists, and composers who appeared to be overwhelmed by or totally infatuated with the music (Zuckerman, 30–31). Indeed, the opera spawned a number of works in which the musical score plays a prominent catalytic role, kindling the flame of passion in the hearts of those who hear it, much as the romance of Lancelot and Guenevere had served as the Galeotto for Dante's Francesca and Paolo. For some, as in the case of the protagonists of Thomas Mann's novel

51. Wagner's influence and that of English Romantic poets on British art are examined by Poulson.* For his influence on literature generally and the resulting transformation of the legend, see Furness, *Wagner and Literature*.

52. On this technique generally, see Furness, *Wagner and Literature*, pp. 7–19; on Mann's use of the technique with specific reference to Wagner, see Frank W. Young, *Montage and Motif in Thomas Mann's "Tristan"* (Bonn: Grundmann, 1975).

Buddenbrooks (1900) and novella *Tristan* (1902), the effect of the music is not simply overpowering, it is unwholesome. This is particularly true in cases where the "Liebestod" is used to convey the notion that the ultimate consummation is death at the moment of sexual climax.⁵³

Both Immermann and Wagner influenced the German writers who in the last half of the nineteenth century recast the legend in dramatic form, usually in blank verse.⁵⁴ These include Josef Weilen's *Tristan* (1860), Ludwig Schneegan's *Tristan* (1865), Albert Gerhrke's *Isolde* (1869), and Adolf Bessel's *Tristan und Isolde* (1895).⁵⁵ Invariably labeled tragedies (*Tragödie* or *Trauerspiel*), they betray the playwrights' desire to downplay the elements of the traditional plot that are driven by magic (potions and poisons) and to highlight instead the sad fate of the lovers, portrayed as relatively innocent, whose passion brings them into conflict with a rigid and soulless society that sanctions marriage without love. The potion, if present, generally serves only to reinforce the love that already binds Tristan and Isolde, who attempt to suppress or renounce it, an impulse seen as misguided, despite the difficulty of defying an unyielding and unfair moral code.

Drama also dominated the first decades of the twentieth century, which saw Albert Geiger's *Tristan* (1906), Ernst Hardt's *Tantris der Narr* ("Tantris the Fool," 1909; translated into English as *Tristram the Jester*, 1913), Emil Ludwig's *Tristan und Isolde* (1909), George Kaiser's *König Hahnrei* ("King Cuckold," 1910), Eduard Stucken's *Tristram und Yseult* (1916), Maja Loehr's

53. See Furness,* who focuses on this (decadent) aspect of Wagner's influence in the novels of Mann, George Moore, Maurice Barrès, and Gabriele d'Annunzio, among others. See also Zuckerman, pp. 136–44.

54. The following survey of modern German versions of the legend owes much to three articles: Batts* and, in *New Arthurian Encyclopedia*, ed. Lacy: Batts, "Tristan in Modern German Versions," pp. 465–69, and Richard W. Kimpel, "German Arthurian Literature (Modern)," pp. 188–94.

55. For plot summaries of these plays, see Batts, "Tristan in Modern German Versions," pp. 466–67.

Tristans Tod ("Tristan's Death," 1919), Robert Precht's *Trilogie der Leidenschaft: Ysot, Marke, Tristan* ("Trilogy of Passion," 1922), and Joseph-Herter Ammann's *Tristan und Isolde* (1928).⁵⁶ While most of these continued the dominant trend of the earlier plays in the attempt to recount in five acts the entire legend from the shipboard scene to the lovers' death, some tried to limit the scope to a few episodes or to the emotions felt by two or three of the main characters. Geiger's two-part play focuses on "Blanscheflur" and "Isolde," while Loehr uses five acts to explore the sense of betrayal felt by the two Isoldes, and Ammann uses two dramatic tableaux to finesse the difficulties of portraying the countless episodes of deception in Cornwall by limiting the first part to the episodes leading up to the potion's consumption and having the second part span the events from Tristan's arrival in Brittany to his death.

Of all of these, only Hardt's retelling of the legend is truly successful, partly because it tries to distill the essence of the legend into the events of a single day set in motion by Tristram's covert return to court following his exile (ten years before) and his marriage. Denovalin, the jealous baron who had first denounced the lovers, claims to have glimpsed Tristram in the woods, and Mark, convinced at last that he has been ensnared by Iseult's lies, determines to hand her over the next day to the lepers. But Tristram, disguised as a leper, disperses the group, kills Denovalin, and leaps from the castle walls, thus convincing the Cornish that God has reiterated his belief in the lovers' innocence. That night, Tristram reappears in court as a jester named Tantris and reveals such intimate knowledge of Iseult that she retires in dread. Unable to convince her of his true identity during a last interview at dawn, he tries at least to defend his "friend" Tristram as Iseult exhales her bitter feelings of betrayal. In a desperate gesture, she sends him off to see his dog, Husdent, which has gone mad with rage since his departure, then learns too late the jester's true identity upon seeing him head into the woods with his joyful canine

56. For plot summaries of these plays, see Batts, "Tristan in Modern German Versions," pp. 467–68. Discussion of the plays by Hardt and Kaiser is also included in Batts.*

companion. This moving rendition draws its power from the portrayal of the complex emotions aroused in the three protagonists, all of whom earn our compassion.

Despite Kaiser's importance for German Expressionist drama, his *Tristan* drama is disappointing, although it is certainly worthy of note as one of the more bizarre subversions of the legend. It explores the potential for perverse pleasure in the love triangle, since the aging king, disturbed by his inability to possess Isolde, is acutely aware of the sexual currents passing between her and others, including the one he imagines between her and her little brother. Though jealous, he is a most unusual cuckold in that he derives a vicarious thrill from the affair between his wife and nephew, which he purposely prolongs. Similarly, the source of the lovers' passion stems from their knowledge that it is illicit. Consequently, their death, and that of their love, occurs when Mark reveals his voyeuristic desire: revolted by his command to embrace openly before him, they refuse and are summarily put to death by him.

Interest in the Tristan story declined in Germany during the National Socialist period but was revived in the late 1960s. Of the few works produced during the period of relative eclipse, three are noteworthy for their attempt to subvert the legend. The Austrian known as Wilhelm Kubie wrote a novel *Mummenschanz auf Tintagel* ("Masquerade at Tintagel," 1937, 1946), in which Bedivir, taking Mark's side, narrates the lovers' story as a farce. Denounced as a delusion are not only their love but also Arthurian ideals as a whole. The two other works are both attempts at contemporary versions of the legend. In Karl Albrecht Bernouilli's *Tristans Ehe* ("Tristan's Marriage," 1926), Marke appears as an American millionaire whose wife becomes unbalanced following Tristan's disappearance. The novel focuses on her psychiatric treatment, which ensures the "happy" ending in which the lovers are reunited with their spouses. Hans Erich Nossack's *Spätstens im November* ("November at the Latest," 1955; published in English in 1982 as *Wait for November*) is not immediately recognizable as a retelling of the legend. Set in postwar Germany, it focuses on the affair between a writer and a rich industrialist's wife, who, finding their love diminished by society's tolerance of it and bored with their life together, seek

transcendence in death. Because the traditional conflict with society becomes one that divides the lovers against themselves, the novel seems to question the legend's ability to live on productively into the modern age.⁵⁷

The revival in the late 1960s of the Tristan legend, and indeed of Arthurian legend in general, was partly in response to the desire of both the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany to define their respective national identities by emphasizing their cultural heritage (Kimpel, 190). In this latter part of the twentieth century, prose fiction has been the dominant genre, ranging from Ruth Schirmer-Imhoff's fairly traditional retelling, *Der Roman von Tristan und Isolde* ("The Romance of Tristan and Isolde," 1969), to more politically motivated celebrations of the legend as an important part of German culture, such as Günter de Bruyn's idealizing *Tristan und Isolde* (1975). Bruno Gloger's *Dieterich: Vermutungen um Gottfried von Strassburg* ("Dieterich: Speculations About Gottfried von Strassburg," 1976) features a pseudo-biography of the medieval poet—about whom nothing is really known—used as a frame for Gottfried's *Tristan*.

The modern period has also been characterized by a desire to combine the medieval text with images and music and thus to interpret the legend simultaneously in several media. The movement is in some sense anticipated by two attempts to marry text and image: Leo Stettner's *Tristan und Isôt: Ein Spiel nach einem alten Wandteppich* ("A Play Based on an Old Tapestry," 1964), in which the characters emerge from a tapestry to perform their story, and Lawrence Lacina's *Tristan und Isolde: 21 Kaltnadel-Radierungen von Salvador Dali* ("21 Drypoint Etchings by Salvador Dali," 1969), featuring a greatly abbreviated text. Hans Werner Henze's orchestral work *Tristan, Prelude für Klavier, Tonbänder und Orchester* ("Prelude for Piano, Tape Recorder, and Orchestra") combines medieval music (*Lamento di Tristano*—"Tristan's Lament") and the music of Wagner's *Tristan* and the

57. Batts* discusses Nossack at length. For Bernouilli, see Batts, "Tristan in Modern German Versions," p. 467, and for Kubie, see his entry by Siegrid Schmidt and William C. McDonald in *New Arthurian Encyclopedia*, ed. Lacy, p. 264.