



A COMPANION TO
GOTTFRIED VON
STRASSBURG'S "TRISTAN"

EDITED BY WILL HASTY

A Companion to Gottfried von Strassburg's Tristan

Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture

Edited by James Hardin
(*South Carolina*)

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Introduction: The Challenge of Gottfried's *Tristan*

Will Hasty

WHETHER IT IS CONSIDERED a myth that gives new expression to something fundamentally human (Wolf 1), the story of a passion stronger than life, social relations, and self which separates the magical East from the tragic West (de Rougemont 1956, 66–67), or “merely” the great ancestor and prototype of later literary depictions of passionate love as an individual experience at odds with social expectations (Wehrli 271), the emergence of the story about Tristan and Isolde in written form in the twelfth century was a signal development. Perhaps more than any other work or group of works in the flowering vernacular literatures of the time, this tale of adulterous love seems to have provided the possibility to test the limits of human love, along with religious and moral boundaries, with heroes and narrative events the likes of which had not been seen before in medieval literature (and perhaps not in *any* literature). These heroes and their actions set new standards, or points of reference, that were discussed, advocated or rejected according the predilections and preferences of different poets and audiences. Outside the handful of romances about Tristan and Isolde that have come down to us from the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, this singular story of passionate adulterous love seems to be everywhere in high medieval literature. The story is a point of reference for lyric poets in Provence, France, and Germany who are interested in ideal love (see Wolf 8–18), but it is also expressive of a life given over to the emotions, which other poets believed needed to be qualified, criticized, or rejected. Both in the different ways that the story was told in the Tristan romances proper, and in the variety of positions taken to the Tristan material by other poets, we observe a narrative that was in the forefront of literary and cultural developments, a story that explored the range and possibilities of human love in this earthly life. In the specific manner in which it enabled the depiction of individual emotions at odds with social expectations, and beyond this the experience — even if literary rather than religious in a stricter sense — of a salvation and bliss that are experienced by means of

love in this world and this life, and not first in the heavenly hereafter (a direction in which Gottfried arguably took the story the farthest), we observe both the extraordinary achievement and the seemingly immense provocation of the Tristan narrative, for both medieval and modern audiences.

Though based on a French source, Gottfried's romance fragment *Tristan* (fragmentary because it is unfinished, breaking off after some 19,500 lines) tested the potential of the Tristan material to explore boundaries to a greater extent than the source or any of the other medieval Tristan romances, for reasons we shall consider below. Gottfried's *Tristan* needs to be seen not only as one of the most interesting renditions of a Tristan story that moved with great facility over geographic borders (by the end of the thirteenth century the Tristan story can be found from Italy to Norway, from Czech-speaking regions to Iceland), but also as one of the greatest literary achievements of the blossoming of literature in the German vernacular that occurred in the latter twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. However provoked many of them may have been by his treatment of the subject matter, literary scholars in *Germanistik* from the nineteenth century to the present have never been in doubt about Gottfried's pre-eminence in formal artistry, and Gottfried's *Tristan* has long been regarded, along with the romances of Heinrich von Veldeke, Hartmann von Aue, and Wolfram von Eschenbach, as one of the greatest achievements of the first *Blütezeit* of literature in the German vernacular.

As a rule very little is known about the lives of significant poets in the High Middle Ages. This is certainly the case with Gottfried von Strassburg, who, in contrast to the other famous poets in Germany such as Hartmann and Wolfram, never explicitly identifies himself. It is only because he is named by later poets that it is possible to identify Gottfried as the author of *Tristan*. He may nevertheless have identified himself indirectly. The initials of the opening quatrains of Gottfried's strophic prologue form the beginning of an acrostic that is continued throughout Gottfried's romance. The beginning of the acrostic, contained entirely within the strophic prologue, comprises the letters GDIETËRICH. Although one cannot be completely sure about the significance of the acrostic, it has been postulated that the first initial, which is the very first letter of the narrative, is the first letter of Gottfried's name, DIETËRICH may be the name of Gottfried's patron (about whom nothing is known), and the T — along with the I with which the stichic prologue begins in line 45 — begins an alternating spelling of the names of the two lovers. The acrostic is interesting for reasons other than what it might possibly

say about Gottfried and his patron. The last initials that occur, L in verse 12503 and S in 12505, make it clear that Gottfried's narrative was planned to be significantly longer than the preserved fragment. There is no way to know for sure why Gottfried did not finish his romance. His continuators tell us that death prevented him from doing so. Beyond suggesting how long Gottfried's romance might have been, the acrostic also suggests reading as a mode of literary reception that, one might assume, was beginning to occur alongside the still predominant mode of oral performance (see Wenzel 261), perhaps particularly in the urban situation of Strasbourg in which Gottfried worked. Unfortunately, about this situation scholars know as little as they do about the life of the poet. Based on the ways in which the poet casts his audience (the *edele herzen*) as a privileged and exclusive group, it has often been assumed that Gottfried must have been working and performing for an aristocratic elite (Wehrli 267). Mark Chinca has recently suggested that patricians may have been only one group in a heterogeneous audience that may also have included ministerials of the bishop and clerics (11). However difficult it may be to establish any direct connections between Gottfried's romance and the place in which it was composed, it seems to be no coincidence that such a complex and provocative narrative would have been produced in the lively urban setting of medieval Strasbourg.

Gottfried is regarded as the most educated of the major medieval German poets. Later poets refer to him not with *her*, the form of address associated with knights and the lay nobility, but rather with *meister*, a title that may indicate Gottfried's high degree of learning (*meister* = *magister artium*), though it might also simply have been an expression of admiration of his artistry, or even a specific designation of his social class (burgher rather than a noble *her* — see Chinca 7). Whatever academic significance the title *meister* may have, a high level of educational accomplishment is abundantly demonstrated by Gottfried's poetry. His knowledge of Latin and French is impeccable, he is familiar with antique literary traditions, and his grounding in the liberal arts (*septem artes liberales*) goes beyond a "first rate" Trivium (grammar, rhetoric, dialectic) to include knowledge in the more advanced and specialized areas of theology, philosophy, jurisprudence, and the arts of the hunt and music (Huber 23). On the basis of all this, it has generally been assumed that Gottfried was a cleric (*clericus*), at least in the broad sense of "someone with academic education and familiarity with Latin" (Chinca 7). It has long been considered that Gottfried does not seem quite so interested in the chivalric life as his famous contemporaries Hartmann von Aue and Wolfram von Eschenbach, though it is possible that his treatment of

chivalry may have been more limited by the nature of his subject matter than by an aversion to or rejection of chivalry per se (see Jones 64–65). In the famous and incomparable passage in *Tristan*, referred to as the *Dichterschau*, or literary review, in which Gottfried assesses the major German poets of his time, we observe that the most important consideration shaping Gottfried’s relationship to Hartmann and Wolfram is not the status of chivalric deeds, but rather a rhetorical standard of stylistic clarity and formal elegance that Gottfried finds most perfectly represented by Hartmann and not at all by Wolfram. Gottfried spends much praise on the former (4621–37), and lambastes the latter, whose syntactically difficult verses and frequently obscure references and allusions he criticizes and whom he calls a “finder of wild tales” (4638–90 — though, as Marion Gibbs points out in her chapter, Gottfried never names Wolfram specifically, and a few scholars have contested the still prevalent idea that Gottfried specifically had Wolfram in mind here). These references, and some of the other statements made about poets living and dead, suggest that Gottfried was composing his *Tristan* at about the same time that Wolfram was working on his *Parzival*, which is to say the first decade of the thirteenth century. A dating of ca. 1200–1210 is also consistent with Gottfried’s depiction of the ordeal of the glowing iron, the outcome of which (Isolde is left unburned thanks to a Christ who is “pliant as a windblown sleeve”) has been construed as an ironic statement about the efficacy of such ordeals. Such a statement would have been consistent with ongoing debate about ordeals leading up to the fourth Lateran council in 1215, at which the participation of bishops in ordeals was prohibited (Chinca 9–10).

Gottfried’s romance is preserved in eleven complete manuscripts, the oldest of which (M and N) date from the thirteenth century (Batts 16). There are also more than a dozen fragments of other manuscripts dating from the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries. Among these is the Carlisle fragment of 154 verses discovered in 1995 (which depicts some of the action shortly after the lovers have drunk the love potion). Like much of vernacular medieval literature, the Tristan story was dormant during the age of Enlightenment, and a serious preoccupation with Gottfried’s romance is not in evidence until its publication at the end of the eighteenth century in Christoph Heinrich Myller’s *Sammlung deutscher Gedichte aus dem XII, XIII, und XIV. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1785). Editions of Gottfried’s work appeared throughout the nineteenth century, such as those of von Groote (1821), von der Hagen (1823), Massman (1843), Bechstein (1868–70), and Golther (1888). Despite these and other publications of Gottfried’s romance, the first philologically rigor-

ous edition based on an extensive study of the available manuscripts was that of Karl Marold (1906). Even this edition was considered inadequate, so the task of producing a critical edition was again taken in hand by Friedrich Ranke, who found numerous defects in Marold's critical apparatus and also had different views about the relative importance of the extant manuscripts. Unfortunately Ranke's work led to the publication only of a single volume in 1930 with no critical apparatus. As Rosemary Picozzi points out in her survey of the critical reception of Gottfried's poem, Ranke's edition, however incomplete, had the last word, as text-critical work gave way in the twentieth century almost completely to interpretation (77–78). The textual foundation of Gottfried scholarship is therefore far from ideal. In 1986 Huber wrote in his introduction to Gottfried's romance that there was still no critical edition of Gottfried's work that would satisfy modern philological standards. Because of its relative accessibility, the text cited in this volume is Rüdiger Krohn's publication in three volumes of Friedrich Ranke's edition along with Krohn's modern German translation and textual explanations and commentary (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1980). For English translations of Gottfried's German verses, the elegant prose rendering of A. T. Hatto has been used in this volume when the contributors did not prefer to do the translations themselves.

Despite his above-mentioned praise for Hartmann and his aversion to Wolfram, Gottfried might be seen as more different from these two poets than they are from each other, by virtue of the unique nature of his subject matter. With his *Tristan*, Gottfried participates in and must be seen in relation to an evolving narrative tradition, the historical origins of which reach back into an obscure past. The first stories about Tristan probably took shape in Britain in the early Middle Ages and may originally have had some basis in history. A Pictish prince named Drust, son of Talorc, lived at the end of the eighth and a Cornish king named Marke in the sixth century (see Batts 19), and other names from the story are documented in medieval Ireland, Wales, Cornwall, and Brittany (Huber 12). However the story may have first taken shape, the geography of the fictional world depicted in it is recognizable as that of southwestern Britain and Ireland, and suggests that its provenance and modes of transmission were similar to those of the stories about King Arthur, the other main component of the so-called *matière de Bretagne* with which the Tristan story maintained close and lasting associations.

It is assumed that the Tristan story first became a work of literature sometime around the middle of the twelfth century. On the basis of references in the extant romances, most scholars have assumed that there

was an original Tristan romance (alternately called the *Estoire, Ur-Tristan*, or *poème primitif*), now lost, upon which all the later verse romances were more or less directly based. Scholars then distinguish different manners of rendering this postulated original romance, a *version commune* and a *version courtoise*. The romances of Eilhart von Oberg and Béroul represent the *version commune*, or the *spielmännische* (minstrel) *Version*. Eilhart's romance, dated ca. 1170, is the oldest completely preserved Tristan romance. Eilhart seems to have followed his source, to which he refers as the *buoch* (the *Ur-Tristan*?) in his prologue, very closely. The broad outlines of the story as told by Eilhart are similar to those that we see with Gottfried, but there are numerous striking differences. In Eilhart's text, the story of Tristrant's parents is told in only a few dozen lines, and it has not been transformed, as it has in the *version courtoise*, into a love story in its own right along the lines of the love of Tristan and Isolde. From the start the focus is on external (epic) action, not on internal (perhaps more lyrical) psychology or reflection, and the action is frequently not for the squeamish. Eilhart reports tersely that Blankeflur became violently ill and died during the sea voyage back to Rivalin's kingdom and that the infant Tristrant was excised from her dead body. Later in Eilhart's romance, the two journeys of Tristrant to the Ireland of Isalde simply happen. In the first case Tristrant has been wounded by Morold, and rather than torment the people around him with the stench of his wound, he asks to be placed in a boat so that he can die alone; a gale then carries his boat to Ireland and his healer Isalde. In the second case, Mark, pressured by his vassals to marry, finds a hair dropped by two swallows and states (because he prefers not to marry and to have Tristrant as his heir) that he will wed only the woman to whom the hair belongs; Tristrant volunteers to find the woman, and he and his party set out into the world in search of her. A storm again brings them to Ireland, so that the quest for Mark's bride Isalde, to whom the hair naturally belonged, can be completed. (Gottfried, who explicitly mentions and criticizes the hair motif as nonsensical [8601–28], renders the second journey as a compelling and logical continuation of the first that follows upon Tristan's memorable words of praise at Marke's court about the younger Isolde's amazing beauty and accomplishments.) The idea of a love that is embraced even as it leads inexorably to death, the potential of which was so fully realized by Gottfried, seems to be mitigated in Eilhart's text when the strongest effect of the love potion is limited to a period of four years. The lengthy studies of the psychological and spiritual effects of love on individuals as we know them from Gottfried's text do not seem to have been a matter of such importance in Eilhart's text,

which places much greater emphasis on action. Literary scholars today are inclined to regard Gottfried's version as superior; medieval audiences seem as a rule to have had different ideas. The intensity and stark colors with which Eilhart rendered his depiction may explain why later versions of the Tristan story, such as the continuations of Gottfried's romance by Ulrich von Türheim and Heinrich von Freiberg, returned to and continued in the spirit of Eilhart's version rather than Gottfried's, the intellectual and aesthetic demands of which may not have suited all authors and audiences.

The other *version commune* of the Tristan story was Béroul's *Roman de Tristan*. This romance, composed sometime between 1170 and 1190, has survived in two fragments that also provide glimpses of a medieval way of telling the Tristan story that is quite different from that of Gottfried. The following sequence of events in Béroul's romance provides the most striking indication of how the so-called minstrel version of the story can differ from the more polished courtly version of Gottfried. After the bloodletting episode, in which Tristan's desire has got the better of him and his guilt has been proven by the presence of his blood in the flour on the floor and in the bed of Isolde, Marke sentences the lovers to be executed. Tristan escapes execution, saves Isolde from lepers, to whom Marke has given his wife so that they can satisfy their carnal desires with her — “commuting” her death sentence to another that is worse than death — and escapes with her into the forest. So begins their rough and dangerous forest life. All of this is a clearly a far cry from the manner in which Gottfried renders the relatively amicable banishment of the lovers by Marke that precedes the Love Grotto episode. Though this is an extreme example, it illustrates the importance given by the *version commune* to dramatic events that make an immediate impact on the audience and do not require much reflection or empathy. Scholars have long considered that the minstrel strand of the Tristan tradition as present in the romances of Eilhart and Béroul is a more archaic and, as such, aesthetically and artistically inferior manner of rendering the story. Recently some scholars, pointing in particular to the ongoing importance of Eilhart's version in the thirteenth century, have argued that the minstrel strand was merely a different and no less literary manner of rendering the story (see Schausten), thus suggesting that the differences between Gottfried's version and that of the earlier romances of Eilhart and Béroul are not as great as has been traditionally assumed. While there is still little doubt among most scholars that Gottfried's *Tristan* is a far more complex and artistically accomplished work than those of his predecessors and continuators, the study of the relationship between Gottfried's “classical” romance and its “pre-” and “post-classical” relatives — itself

part of a broader discussion of the relationship of the great works of the *Blütezeit* to the courtly works of earlier and later poets — continues to be a matter of lively scholarly debate.

Gottfried says that he is telling the Tristan story in the same way as *Thômas von britanje*, an Anglo-Norman poet who composed a Tristan romance that has survived only in fragments. Gottfried's *Tristan* thus becomes the most complete version of the courtly strand of the verse romances (the *version courtoise*, or *höfische Version*). This is because only about thirty-four hundred verses from the end of Thomas's romance have been preserved, which coincidentally match almost exactly the part that is missing from Gottfried's romance. It is thought that Thomas composed his romance for the court of Henry, duke of Anjou and future king of England, and Eleanore of Aquitaine not long after the middle of the twelfth century. This would make Thomas's text older than those of Eilhart and Béroul, even if the manner in which he renders the story is generally considered to be more sophisticated or "modern." The preserved verses of Thomas's romance show, in contrast to the focus on dramatic action typical of the *version commune*, a more subtle and sophisticated treatment of love as an individual experience. As Paul Schach has written, "His greatest strength was his delicate and discerning psychological analysis of his characters. He was less interested in their actions than in the motives of their actions" (xv). When Gottfried says that he ascribes to Thomas's manner of rendering the Tristan story, he announces that what is going on in the hearts and minds of his heroes will be more important to him than what his heroes do. Thomas and Gottfried, with their *version courtoise* of the story, "represent the lovers' interiority more extensively, they develop it into a mode of loving in its own right" (Chinca 34–35). Corresponding to this realization of the potential of the Tristan story to explore interiority, the adulterous love itself — as the specific matter of this interiority — assumes both a greater complexity and a higher value in the *version courtoise*. Its primary function is not merely to hide its own tracks by means of epic action, as tends to be the case in the *version commune*, but rather to be a different, alternative way of living and feeling with a value of its own upon which Thomas and Gottfried linger at length and with relish. In the specific characteristics of their "courtly" treatment of the Tristan story, Thomas and Gottfried might be considered to be taking a position with respect to the moral and ethical implications of the love they are depicting (though it must also be conceded that it is not always easy to pin this position down). This position, as was suggested above, represents both a provocation and an achievement, or as Max Wehrli puts it (268–71), a "Verwirrung und

Vertauschung der Ordnungen" (confusion and permutation of the order of things) on the one hand, and possibly a "Vorstoß zu einer eigenen Ethik" (a move forward to its own ethics) on the other, to which later authors and scholars would respond in a variety of ways.

Given that the preserved parts of the romances of Thomas and Gottfried coincide for only a few hundred verses, it has been difficult to compare them and thus to assess Gottfried's original contributions to the Tristan tradition. Fortunately, later romances that were also based on Thomas have provided some help. Thomas's romance was also the source for the *Saga af Tristram ok Ísönd*, a prose rendering of Thomas's romance in Old Norse produced in Norway by an author called Friar Robert (1226), and for a freer prose rendering in Middle English (before 1300) called *Sir Tristram*. Especially the former text has been used in endeavors to reconstruct the lost part of Thomas's work, though it is evident that Friar Robert, while he generally seems to have been very faithful to the Anglo-Norman source, did not shirk from leaving out sections that he might have regarded as "excessive introspection and moralizing" (Schach xvi). Though it is by no means a perfect reflection of Thomas's text, the *Tristrams saga* provides the best available idea about the content of the Anglo-Norman work, and it is frequently used as a point of reference in attempts to establish how closely Gottfried followed Thomas's polished courtly rendition. Comparisons with the few preserved fragments of Thomas's romance and with the Old Norse text seem to confirm what is already strongly suggested by Gottfried's statements about his own narrative art and the narrative art of others in his literary review. One would not expect that Gottfried would have departed from his source in the same radical way as that "finder of wild tales," Wolfram von Eschenbach, who seems in his *Parzival* to have denied his allegiance to his true source, Chrétien de Troyes, and to have invented a pseudo-source named Kyot to stand in for all the creative liberties he has taken with the French author's *Perceval*. Gottfried indubitably would not have taken such great liberties with the source material, though the extent to which he too might have parted ways with Thomas (perhaps particularly in his employment of religious imagery in the depiction of love and its value) should not be underestimated. Max Wehrli, whose view might again be taken as representative, has posited that Gottfried followed Thomas very closely, diverging from the source only to make minor corrections in motifs, to shift accent and formulation, and to embellish with additional reflections. The result, for Wehrli, is a continuation and intensification (*Steigerung*) of the tendency that was already present in the version of Thomas (263). While Gottfried's

own contribution may not jump to the eye in the same way as that of Wolfram, his subtle modifications of the story as he found it — and subtlety of depiction might be regarded as one of Gottfried's great strengths — doubtless transformed the Tristan story in a different, but no less significant way. The difference between Thomas and Gottfried is put very elegantly and insightfully by Schach: "If Thomas can be said to have refined and rationalized the oftentimes uncouth and fiercely passionate Tristan story, Gottfried von Strassburg must be credited with having spiritualized it and, through his formal artistry, with having marvelously transmuted it into a magnificent poem of surpassing beauty" (xvi).

If the manner in which the Tristan story continued to be told in medieval Germany is any indication, one might venture to say that most poets and audiences were either unwilling, unable, or disinclined to adopt the "position" taken by Gottfried, though there is nothing comparable to the frequently pointed coupling of literary criticism and religious/moral condemnation that one finds in the modern critical reception of Gottfried's romance. In the continuation of Ulrich von TÜRHEIM (ca. 1250), Gottfried is mentioned as the illustrious predecessor, his artistry is praised, and then Ulrich proceeds to tell the story to its conclusion — not in the spirit of Gottfried's intellectually and aesthetically challenging conception, but rather in that of Eilhart's *version commune*. Writing much later and in a different geographic and cultural situation, Heinrich's continuation (ca. 1300) also follows the spirit of Eilhart's text. But as Marion Gibbs points out in her chapter in this book, the reception of Gottfried is complex and multi-faceted. Next to cases such as Ulrich and Heinrich, which indicate that Gottfried's conception of love may not have been preferable to all poets and audiences, there are numerous other cases (such as many of the works of Rudolf von Ems and Konrad von Würzburg) that show a sympathetic response and indebtedness not only to Gottfried's formal artistry, but also to the great predecessor's more provocative "position" with regard to the subject matter. In the later Middle Ages it was again the version of Eilhart, and not of Gottfried, that enjoyed the greatest popularity. The German chapbook *Tristrant und Isalde* (ca. 1350) was derived from Eilhart, and this chapbook in turn provided the material for five poems (ca. 1551) and a *Tragedia mit 23 personen von der strengen Lieb Herr Tristrant mit der schönen Königin Isalden* (1553) by Hans Sachs. Beyond Germany the Tristan story continued to be popular in the later Middle Ages, though this popularity was largely indebted to the thirteenth-century prose rendering of the material that became part of the French Vulgate Cycle (ca. 1225–1235; recast in German a few years later). The French prose

Tristan served as the source of the Tristan sections of Malory's *Arthurian*, in which the complex relationships that are central to the courtly verse romances of Thomas and Gottfried recede somewhat into the background, and Tristan is transformed to an adventuring knight along the lines of Lancelot. Tristan and Lancelot are the two best knights in the world, and the depiction of their chivalric prowess eclipses, for large sections of the narratives, their love for their respective queens. The tragedy of Tristan as cast in the Vulgate and in the version of Malory is thus much transformed and becomes a small part of the broader turmoil that eventually engulfs the entire world of Arthur.

Not until the nineteenth century did the reception of Gottfried's romance, along with that of most of the other medieval German works that are known to us today, resume in earnest, both in the form of artistic renderings of the Tristan story based on Gottfried and other sources and in the form of literary scholarship (origin research, text-critical work, and interpretation, all of which are surveyed by Picozzi). Ulrich Müller's chapter in this volume shows how the modern artistic reception of Gottfried's *Tristan*, as that of other great medieval works (the *Nibelungenlied*, Wolfram's *Parzival*), has been largely shaped by the musical art of Richard Wagner, whose opera *Tristan und Isolde* was first performed in 1865. In the scholarly evaluation of Gottfried's poem and his "position" to the Tristan story, we observe an admiration of the poet's formal artistry that is similar to, and doubtless to some degree influenced by the laudatory comments of medieval authors (who doubled, albeit in their own specific way, as literary critics). A generation after Gottfried, Ulrich von Türheim, one of Gottfried's continuators, framed his tribute to his illustrious predecessor primarily in terms of formal artistry:

er (Gottfried) hât sîner tage stunde
mit künste erzeiget wol dar an:
er was ein künstrîcher man.
uns zeiget sîn getihte
vil künstliche geschichte.
ez ist eben unde ganz;
kein getihte an sprûchen ist sô glanz,
daz ez von künste gê der vür,
der ez wiget mit wîser kûr. (6–14)

(Gottfried demonstrated very well in his day with his talents that he was a true artist. His poem shows us many a well-conceived story. It is well-crafted and complete; if one considers the matter wisely, no other poem is more brilliantly composed. [My translation.])

In the late nineteenth century Wilhelm Scherer's appraisal stressed the same features of Gottfried's romance, albeit with a nationalistic spin: "No French treatment of the story, as far as we know, attained to the artistic perfection of Gottfried's *Tristan*; it was reserved for a German to give a classical form to this famous medieval legend" (158). Praise such as that of Scherer, of Gottfried's skill as a crafter of beautiful verses, has been one of the prominent and abiding characteristics of the critical reception of *Tristan* to the present day. The critical assessment of Gottfried's depiction of love, however, has been anything but uniformly positive.

The scholarly assessment of Gottfried's *Tristan* story in the nineteenth century is striking for the vehemence with which many scholars attacked, for its perceived religious and moral shortcomings, a narrative produced during the much more thoroughly Christian and presumably intolerant Middle Ages (during which time such vehement criticisms were notably lacking). The vehement criticism begins with the influential philologist Karl Lachmann (1820), who considered that Gottfried's "soft, immoral" poem presented nothing more than "Üppigkeit oder Gotteslästerung" (voluptuousness or blasphemy). Heinrich Laube considered in 1839 that, when moral criteria are applied, Gottfried's *Tristan* is "ein Gräuel" (an abomination, 113; cit. Picozzi 84). In his literary history (1843/44), August Vilmar considered Gottfried's story the most despicable mockery of marital fidelity, a revolting work in which the laws of man and God are trampled underfoot, and suggested that the shamelessness went back to the profligate Celts, though the French also deserved some of the blame (177–78; cit. Picozzi 84–85). Closer to the end of the century, Scherer's assessment is somewhat less fanatical, though its condemnation on moral grounds is clear: "He [Gottfried] adopts as gospel the easy-going tolerant view of life held by the nobility, defending it with the inexorable logic of a fanatical apostle, and actually declaring that without love no one can possess either virtue or honour. He recognizes no bounds for the desires of men, except the public opinion of refined society, which for its part allows everything that does not create a painful sensation. There is no hint of any higher code of morals than this" (160).

To focus only on negative appraisals such as this, however prevalent and striking they are, would be to overlook the complexity of the critical reception, in which many scholars managed to see Gottfried's position not merely as a blasphemous or immoral provocation. Early in the nineteenth century August Wilhelm Schlegel made allusions to the innocence of *Tristan*-love in his Berlin lectures of 1803–1804, and a few years later

the philologist Bernard Docen saw in Gottfried's romance a "noble simplicity" and also regarded the lovers as innocent (though his view of Gottfried's art as childish and naive — a fixed notion in many of the early assessments of medieval literature — itself looks naive from today's perspective) (see Picozzi 80). In the introduction of his publication of Gottfried's work along with that of Eilhart in 1821, Franz Mone defended Gottfried's poem against detractors and "damnators," saying that it was free from all traces of immorality. For Mone, Gottfried's chief purpose was to transform the Tristan story into a heroic song in which the German ideals of heroism and loyalty unto death found expression (see Picozzi 88–89). In the lengthy introduction to his translation of Gottfried's *Tristan* (1847), Hermann Kurtz not only clears Gottfried of any charge of immorality, but even maintains that Gottfried made an immoral (French) tale more moral than it had been. Mone and Kurtz, along with other scholars who argued on behalf of Gottfried, tended to do so by stressing the bond they perceived between the Tristan and the Siegfried stories. By so doing, they provided an alternative view from that of Lachmann and other detractors that is perhaps welcome as such, but that is suspect on account of its more or less transparently political, nationalistic agenda (as we have already seen above in his appraisal of Gottfried's formal artistry, even Scherer's assessment was not immune from such political influences). Despite his reservations about the lack of a "moral code" (see the citation of him in the previous paragraph), Scherer nevertheless also makes out an achievement in Gottfried's depiction of love: "It leads to deceit and immorality, and yet from a certain point of view it is a moral power, for though an egotistic passion it yet goes contrary to egoism. Such a passion makes a man endure all the agonies of longing and the most terrible dangers without flinching, and develops in him all the energy of devotion and self-sacrifice" (158). Here also it is not difficult to hear echoes of the "German virtues" stressed by Mone and Kurtz.

The condemnation of Gottfried's poem on moral grounds and the defense of it on the basis of its presumed expression of heroic (German) perseverance in the face of all obstacles, show in different ways how closely connected the critical appraisal of Gottfried's romance was in the nineteenth century to the different values and interests of the critics themselves. Nationalistic interpretations of Tristan-love no longer carried any weight after 1945, and condemnations of the perceived immorality of Gottfried's romance gradually gave way in the twentieth century, under the increasing influence of *Geistesgeschichte*, to interpretations of it in view of the historical and intellectual situation in which it was pro-

duced. In the history of Gottfried criticism, the twentieth century has been regarded as a century of interpretation. Particularly important and influential was the interpretive work of Friedrich Ranke, especially his essay on the allegorical significance of the Love Grotto (1925). Following Ranke's lead, other scholars examined Gottfried's poem against the backdrop of religious currents in the Middle Ages, from mystical thought centering on the exegesis of the Song of Songs to heretical movements such as Catharism, and frequently arrived at quite different interpretations. In his succinct survey of the critical literature, Huber notes a shift in the 1960s away from attempts to arrive at an all-encompassing interpretation to analyses of more specific aspects of Gottfried's romance. In the latter part of the twentieth century, and in the beginning years of the twenty-first, the whole gamut of interpretive approaches has been represented, and it is worthwhile to reiterate something that Huber states in his introduction: the scholarship dealing with Gottfried's romance is "in allen Grundfragen der Interpretation uneins" (divided on all of the most basic questions).

From the early thirteenth century to the present day, Gottfried's challenging romance has made unusual demands on its audiences and readers. Although it has been suggested that the Tristan story may lose its vibrancy according to the extent to which the religious, moral, and social structures in relation to which Tristan-love defined itself become less uniform and more diffuse in contemporary modern (or postmodern) culture (see de Rougemont 1973, 15–16), it seems unlikely that Gottfried's narrative, and the Tristan story in general, will lose any of their appeal to audiences and scholars in the twenty-first century, if for no other reason than their strikingly aesthetic orientation. In its numerous narratorial statements about the characteristics of its preferred audience, Gottfried's romance evinces a mode of communal identity formation or construction that seems primarily aesthetic, rather than religious or feudal (however elitist the identity of Gottfried's artistic community may be in its own ways). Even if this aesthetic mode of identity-formation is imbued with the authority and depth of religious elements, which distinguishes the medieval situation in which it was composed from antiquity and modernity, the religious purport of these elements seems to some extent to be undone by means of their artful employment in the context of this singular romance. At the plot level of Gottfried's work, the identities of the lovers also seem to be constituted largely in aesthetic terms, which is to say in languages and the arts (that is, literature and music), media that are subject to manipulation by people with know-how, and not in truths that are authoritatively given and to which all are subjected

(even if, as already suggested, Gottfried artfully employs religious forms to impart depth and seriousness to his narrative). Whether seen in terms of Gottfried's poetic project as articulated in the prologue and literary review (see Haug 196–227), or in terms of the plot level of his narrative, Gottfried's romance has largely to do with identities in and of love that are grounded *aesthetically*. The primacy of the aesthetic in Gottfried's romance not only makes it a particularly striking landmark along the “weathered Roman road from antiquity to modernity,” as Ernst Robert Curtius designated the Middle Ages. It would seem to pose an obstacle to the evaluation of the course of literary and cultural history according to simple oppositions such as medieval-religious-communal versus modern-aesthetic-subjective. In view of its striking aestheticism, its audacious conception of passionate love, and the complexity of the individuals and social relations depicted in it, it seems likely that Gottfried's *Tristan* will continue in the third millennium to speak to different readers and scholars with a variety of interests. It is hoped that the present volume will be of some help in this ongoing discussion, by presenting contributions that make important aspects of Gottfried's romance accessible to non-specialists (hence the translation of passages in Middle High German), survey some of significant areas of the scholarly discussion of *Tristan*, and chart some of the ways in which we might expect the scholarly discussion to go in future years.

This volume has been divided into four sections that focus on different aspects of Gottfried's work. In the first section, *Tristan* is viewed within the broader intellectual and social climate in which it was composed. The contribution of Alois Wolf shows that Gottfried's *Tristan* represents a specifically medieval case of humanism, informed as no other German work of the High Middle Ages by the humanism of antiquity, but at the same time profoundly shaped by the potential of humanity within the framework of Christian salvation history. According to Wolf, *Tristan* is a work that manifests a uniquely medieval humanism and that anticipates, in many respects, the kind of humanism that one will see about a century later in Dante's *Commedia*. Michael Batts turns his attention to the specific social, political, and religious currents of the medieval Strasbourg in which Gottfried composed his poem. Batts shows that this vibrant urban situation was characterized both by increasing prosperity and by “the developing consciousness of the uses of capital,” but that it was also strongly shaped by religious authorities such as the bishops of Strasbourg with their ecclesiastical court, and by new religious groups such as the Beguines. Batts's chapter thus illuminates the specific social and political situation in which Gottfried's romance was produced.

In the second section, a half-dozen contributions concentrate on some of the most important figures, themes, and episodes in *Tristan*. The story of Riwalin and Blanscheflur is the subject of the chapter of Danielle Buschinger, who demonstrates that Gottfried, much as Thomas before him — though the German poet sometimes proceeded independently —, embellishes the story of Tristan’s parents with elements from the story of Tristan and Isolde and casts the former in typological terms as the “prefiguration” of the latter. As in the typology of biblical exegesis, the differences as well as the similarities between the pairs of lovers are crucial, and these form the focal point of Buschinger’s analysis. Sidney Johnson’s essay explores the nature and significance of an object that is of central importance in Gottfried’s romance, the love potion with which the fatal love unto death of Tristan and Isolde begins. Johnson surveys love potions in history, the rendering of the love potion in the other versions of the Tristan story, the manner in which the love potion has been understood in significant critical appraisals of Gottfried’s poem, and ends by suggesting that the concrete reality of love potions in the Middle Ages may be at least as significant for understanding Gottfried’s potion as the various symbolic functions with which the potion has typically been laden in the critical literature. The contribution of Nigel Harris explores the treatment of God and religion in Gottfried’s poem, a topic that has been of central importance in Tristan scholarship since Friedrich Ranke’s essay on the Love Grotto in 1925. Harris looks at some of the important critical assessments of God and religion in *Tristan*, undertakes a consideration of some of the important relevant episodes — such as that in which Isolde is saved during the ordeal of the glowing iron by a Christ who is as “pliant as a windblown sleeve” (to use the words of Hatto’s translation) —, and underscores the importance of ambiguity in the poet’s treatment of religious elements.

Many of the important characters of Gottfried’s romance and the degree to which they enact assumptions about masculinity and femininity form the topic of Ann Marie Rasmussen’s chapter. Focusing in particular on important women characters — Blanscheflur, the elder Isolde, the younger Isolde, and Brangaene — Rasmussen demonstrates the degree to which these figures manifest both traditionally feminine and traditionally masculine attributes in order to deal independently with the many obstacles presented to them. In her analysis, Rasmussen shows the degree to which cultural assumptions about gender shaped the content and course of Gottfried’s narrative. In my own chapter, I have endeavored to draw attention to the relationship of Tristan and Isolde to Marke’s court as a dramatic performance, which is frequently appreciated *as such* by their

courtly “audience” (i.e. Marke, Majodo, Melot, and others at court). The dramatic, performative aspect of Gottfried’s depiction of this relationship provides an understanding of events at the plot level of Gottfried’s romance that is consistent with the importance placed on transparent, elegant artistry in the poet’s “theoretical” conceptions of love and art in his excursions and depiction of the Love Grotto. In the final chapter of the second section, Neil Thomas studies Gottfried’s fragmentary version of the story of Tristan and Isolde White Hands in view of other medieval authors’ treatment of this episode with which the Tristan story traditionally ends. Thomas finds that Gottfried, much as Thomas before him, casts Tristan as a man who, following the separation from his first Isolde, endeavors to rehabilitate himself as a knight, but who is “held back by deep, unfathomable forces, and his tortured awareness of the philter as a psychological force countermanding the rational part of his mind.”

In the critical appreciation of a poem such as Gottfried’s *Tristan*, one is never far from the question of the poet’s narrative artistry. Many of the chapters in this volume address this question in one way or another, but the two contributions of the third section focus directly on central aspects of Gottfried’s narrative art. In his chapter Daniel Rocher draws attention to lyricism as an aspect of Gottfried romance that sets it apart not only from the other courtly romances in Germany, but also from the other current versions of the Tristan story. On the basis of an analysis of episodes in which the emotional intensity of Gottfried’s approach to his depiction of the lovers is manifest, and of rhetorical devices in Gottfried’s language (chiasm, oxymora, repetition, alliteration, assonance) designed to increase the audience’s identification with the lovers’ experiences, Rocher posits that it is the profound lyricism of Gottfried’s poetry that has lent his unfinished work the power to move its audiences to the present day. Adrian Stevens’s contribution explores the relationship of Gottfried’s romance to the version of Thomas and to episodes of the Tristan story in other, older texts belonging to the “Matter of Britain” (Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britanniae* and Wace’s *Roman de Brut*), in order to shed light on the position of Gottfried’s narrative between history and fiction. On the basis of a consideration of Gottfried’s treatment of traditional parts of the Tristan story, Stevens shows that Gottfried’s romance, much like that of Thomas before him, was a hybrid of history and fable, and that Gottfried’s own contribution was to have recast the Tristan story as a symbolic “history of love.”

In the final section, two chapters focus on the medieval and modern reception of Gottfried’s romance. The contribution of Marion Gibbs

surveys the variety of different responses of medieval poets to Gottfried's poem, which extend from Gottfried's influences on other significant poets later in the thirteenth century such as Rudolf von Ems and Konrad von Würzburg, to the continuations of Gottfried's unfinished work by Ulrich von Türheim and Heinrich von Freiberg, which despite all admiration of Gottfried are quite independent in their poetic conception, even if they were unable to match the artistry of Gottfried's language and style. The volume concludes with Ulrich Müller's chapter on the modern reception of Gottfried's romance in particular, and of the medieval story of Tristan and Isolde more generally, in literature, opera, and cinema. Müller focuses in particular on the importance of Richard Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* for the manner in which the Tristan story has been rendered in much of modern art, literature, and music.

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Tristan.
A depiction on the Chertsey Tiles.

I. Cultural and Social Contexts

Humanism in the High Middle Ages: The Case of Gottfried's *Tristan*

Alois Wolf

HUMANISM AS A MODERN CONCEPT, first used around the middle of the nineteenth century to designate a historical period, is integrally connected to the literature of antiquity. In the works of the Greeks and Romans, it was thought, the *studia humanitatis* (Cicero) had reached such a degree of accomplishment that they could provide a model for all human education. Beyond the purely literary aspect, humanism as an intellectual movement also involved an emancipatory potential. The humanism emanating from Italy in the early modern period was seen to mark the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of a new epoch. In the meantime developments in historical research have suggested that humanism made a much earlier appearance. The critical discussion of humanism, which has increasingly shown itself to be a very complex historical phenomenon, was stimulated especially by Charles Haskins's book *The Renaissance of the 12th Century*, but this discussion continues to the present day to be largely shaped by Jakob Burckhardt's problematical conception of the Renaissance, and Gilson's contribution on medieval humanism in 1926 could do very little to change the traditional view of humanism as a post-medieval development (see Gilson 171–96, Leclercq 69–113, and Southern 29–135).

In the secularized thinking of today, people find their reason for being within themselves and consider the development of one's inner potential as the goal of humanity. Neither Greco-Roman antiquity nor Christianity is necessary for self-realization. The Middle Ages of course had a different conception of humanity, according to which man had been created *ad imaginem Dei*. To be sure, this *imago* had been corrupted by original sin, but it had not been completely destroyed. It was in the Creator, rather than in themselves, that medieval people found their reason for being, but with its basic idea of the Incarnation of the divine, Christianity did include the possibility of a grand view of humanity and the world, even if this possibility was not generally realized in a humanism in the proper sense of the word. One can observe how theo-

logians in the High Middle Ages increasingly trusted their own reason, instead of depending on the authority of tradition. One need only think of Abelard, who wished to formulate his credo in his own words, rather than merely to rehearse the traditional formula (Abelard's *Historia calamitatum*, 88): "Cum autem ego ad profitendam et exponendam fidem meam assurgerem, ut quod sentiebam verbis propriis exprimerem, adversarii dixerunt non aliud mihi necessarium esse nisi ut symbolum Athanasii recitarem, quod quisvis puer eque facere posset" (When I then stood up to make a full profession of my faith and to explain it in my own words, my adversaries declared that it was only necessary for me to recite the Athanasian Creed, as any boy could do). Or one only need think of Wolfram von Eschenbach, whose hero Parzival, inspired by *unverzaget mannes muot* (the courage of a steadfast man) and love, achieves his lofty goal of the grail and whose romance *Willehalm* depicts heathens as creatures of God and therefore as human beings worthy of respect. These would be examples of a humanism that is not based directly on antiquity.

Of course, the European Middle Ages are unimaginable without the literary presence of Latin antiquity. Views of antique literature from early Christianity onward fluctuated between mistrust and rejection, on the one hand, and instrumentalization on the other. The wish to employ antique literature was based on the idea that valuable and useful aspects of antique culture should not be conceded to paganism. This fluctuation between acceptance and rejection continued with changing accentuations through the centuries. In the second century Tertullian questioned the relevance of Athens for Jerusalem, Jerome followed suit in the fourth century when he asked what Horace has to do with the Psalter, and so on. Despite problems with its pagan origins, the bulk of antique literature was not forgotten in the Middle Ages, but rather became the foundation of education. Later on, with the early modern Humanists, the turn to the literature of antiquity for its stylistic value and its humanistic orientation did not mean a break with religion, as is clear in the cases of Petrarch, Pope Pius II, Erasmus, and others. Earlier, in the Middle Ages, the relationship to antiquity was a different one. However impressed one was with the achievements of the ancient world, the basic superiority of Christianity was considered the point of departure for any, even remotely humanistic orientation. The weakening and ultimately the dissolution of the medieval conviction that Christianity is superior to antique culture can be seen as a consequence of the intensive activity of the early modern Humanists. At the end of this preoccupation in Germany stand Goethe and Schiller, the latter writing: "Und die Sonne Homers, siehe! sie lächelt auch uns!"