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Signs, Interpretation and Storytelling in Medieval French and German Tristan Verse Narratives

Fiona Nanette Suslak

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Declaration

This is to certify that the work contained within has been composed by me and is entirely my own work. No part of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

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(Fiona Suslak)

Abstract

This thesis provides a comparative analysis of late-twelfth and early-thirteenth century Tristan verse narratives from the French- and German-speaking worlds, in order to gain a more nuanced picture of how these specific writers reflect contemporary debates on interpretation and fictionality in their own works. While there is a vast body of critical literature on these texts, and a large amount of this scholarship examines the way that interpretation functions in these works, critics have so far not adequately considered how the Tristan texts from this period as a body engage with contemporary medieval debates on the relationship between truth, lies and fiction, particularly in relation to fiction as a new category for vernacular literary culture. Therefore, this thesis analyses how literary practice during this period is reflected in these texts, particularly regarding truth, lies, interpretation and authority.

The first part of the thesis thoroughly studies the use of verbal and visual signs in the texts, focusing on the way that characters both construct and interpret those signs. The second part of the thesis examines storytelling in these texts. This focuses firstly on the narrators' interjections into their works, discussing for example their relationship to their sources. Secondly, this analyses how the characters within the texts tell stories to each other, particularly those relating to their own pasts. Together, these two parts argue that interpretation and authority are key concerns for the writers of these texts. In conclusion, this thesis proposes that the writers of the Tristan verse narratives are participating in a dialogue about literary practice,

interpretation and authority as they attempt to engage with the new narrative mode of literary vernacular romance.

Contents

Introduction

There is a vast body of literature on the French and German versions of the Tristan story from the late-twelfth and early-thirteenth centuries. While a large amount of this examines the way that interpretation functions in these works, critics have so far failed to consider how the Tristan texts from this period as a body reflect contemporary debates on the relationship between truth, lies and fiction, particularly regarding fiction as a new category for vernacular literary culture. The late twelfth and early-thirteenth centuries were a time of cultural change, including debates among philosophers on issues such as universals.[1] Simultaneously, during this period stories were increasingly being written down in the vernacular. The latter fact in particular has prompted modern criticism on the relationship between history and fiction, and on the development of fiction as a concept, in this period.[2] The written word had previously been seen as a medium which carried authority, therefore this development led to discussion within the texts themselves on the nature of truth, lies, interpretation and authority. Although Gottfried's text has been the focus of some important research on this development in this period, particularly regarding his relationship to Latin authorities, this has yet to be thoroughly compared with the

[1] For an overview of these debates and their backgrounds, see Gordon Leff, *Medieval Thought: St Augustine to Ockham* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958; repr. 1962), pp. 104-14 and pp. 168-251. For an analysis of the influence of Alanus ab Insulis on the vernacular literature of this period, see Christoph Huber, *Die Aufnahme und Verarbeitung des Alanus ab Insulis in mittelhochdeutschen Dichtungen: Untersuchungen zu Thomasin von Zerklaere, Gottfried von Straßburg, Frauenlob, Heinrich von Neustadt, Heinrich von St. Gallen, Heinrich von Mügeln und Johannes von Tepl*, Münchener Texte und Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters, 89 (Munich: Artemis Verlag, 1988).

[2] Examples include D. H. Green, *The Beginnings of Medieval Romance: Fact and Fiction, 1150-1220* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), and Walter Haug, *Literaturtheorie im deutschen Mittelalter: Von den Anfängen bis zum Ende des 13. Jahrhunderts*, 2nd edn (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1992; repr. 2009).

other Tristan texts.[3] Although there has been some comparison between Gottfried's and Thomas' works, it is important to discover how all these writers viewed their work with regard to its truth or authority; was the concept of independent fiction in the vernacular beginning to emerge from these texts? The importance of connecting the discussion of fictionality to the way that characters interpret particular signs in the texts, especially regarding the truth or falsehood of a particular assertion, has not been adequately addressed. The characters of the Tristan stories are depicted engaging in interpretation so much in the texts that it is ideal material for writers who want to explore the relationship between truth, lies, fiction, interpretation and authority. This analysis will show that all of the writers of these texts are using their works as a location for discussing how interpretation functions, for example how characters interpret specific signs and how those signs acquire meaning. This will demonstrate that a key concept of fiction is an awareness of differing and sometimes equally valid interpretations that may or may not be truth or falsehood. There is therefore a connection between the interpretation of signs and narratives as seen in these texts and the bigger picture of literary practice in French- and German-speaking cultures from the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. A comparative study of these issues within the Tristan texts will not only lead to a greater understanding of the texts themselves, but also of medieval culture more generally.

There are seven extant versions of the Tristan story from the French- and German-speaking worlds dating from the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. They are Béroul's *Roman de Tristan*, Thomas' *Roman de Tristan*, Marie de France's

[3] Mark Chinca, *History, Fiction, Verisimilitude: Studies in the Poetics of Gottfried's 'Tristan'*, MHRA Texts and Dissertations, 35, Bithell Series of Dissertations, 18 (London: Modern Humanities Research Association for the Institude of Germanic Studies, University of London, 1993). Chinca provides an excellent analysis of Gottfried's poetics, particularly relating to the boundaries between history and fiction.

Chievrefueil, the anonymous *Folie Tristan de Berne* and *Folie Tristan d'Oxford*, Eilhart von Oberge's *Tristrant und Isalde* and Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan*.[4] Most of these works are fragmentary; Béroul's work is missing both the beginning and the end of the story, Thomas' is lacking the beginning and Gottfried's is lacking the ending. Eilhart von Oberge's work is the only complete version of the romance under discussion here. The earlier manuscripts of Eilhart's text are also fragmentary, but the full text is available from a later reworking, which is referenced in this thesis. The remaining three texts (Marie's *Chievrefueil* and the two *Folies Tristan*) are all shorter texts which depict one specific episode of the legend. The two *Folies* also provide summaries of the romance as a whole which can be related to one or other of the longer versions of the story.[5] This discussion is limited to texts dating from the

[4] Béroul, 'Le Roman de Tristan', in *Tristan et Iseut: Les poèmes français, la saga norroise*, ed. by Daniel Lacroix and Philippe Walter ([Paris]: Librairie Générale Française, 1989), pp. 23-227; Thomas, 'Le Roman de Tristan', in *Tristan et Iseut*, ed. by Lacroix and Walter, pp. 329-481; Marie de France, 'Le Chèvrefeuille', in *Lais de Marie de France*, ed. by Karl Warnke, trans. by Laurence Harf-Lancner ([Paris]: Librairie Générale Française, 1990), pp. 262-69; Anon., '*Folie Tristan* de Berne', in *Tristan et Iseut*, ed. by Lacroix and Walter, pp. 277-305; Anon., '*Folie Tristan* d'Oxford', in *Tristan et Iseut*, ed. by Lacroix and Walter, pp. 229-75; Eilhart von Oberg, *Tristrant und Isalde*, ed. by Danielle Buschinger and Wolfgang Spiewok, Greifswalder Beiträge zum Mittelalter, 12, WODAN, 27 (Greifswald: Reineke, 1993); Gottfried von Straßburg, *Tristan*, 3 vols (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam Jun., 2001-02), I, 9th edn (2001); II, 7th edn (2002); III: *Kommentar*, 6th edn (2002). All references to the primary texts throughout this thesis will be to these editions. The '*Folie Tristan* de Berne' will be referred to throughout as the *Folie Berne*. The '*Folie Tristan* d'Oxford' will be referred to throughout as the *Folie Oxford*. Marie de France's work will be referred to as *Chievrefueil*. References to Thomas' work will indicate which manuscript is being referenced, as featured in the edition listed above. Other editions of the primary texts include Eilhart von Oberg, *Tristrant: Synoptischer Druck der ergänzten Fragmente mit der gesamten Parallelüberlieferung*, ed. by Hadumod Bußmann, Altdeutsche Textbibliothek, 70 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1969), Gottfried von Straßburg, *Tristan und Isolde – Mit dem Text des Thomas*, ed. by Walter Haug and Manfred Günter Scholz (Berlin: Insel Verlag, 2012), Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*, ed. by Peter Ganz, Deutsche Klassiker des Mittelalters, Neue Folge, 4, 2 vols (Wiesbaden: Brockhaus, 1978), and Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*, ed. by Karl Marold, 3rd edn (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1969).

[5] Noble notes that the *Folie Berne* is 'traditionally linked' with Béroul's work. See Peter S. Noble, *Béroul's 'Tristan' and the 'Folie de Berne'*, Critical Guides to French Texts, 15 (London: Grant & Cutler, 1982), p. 93. Bromiley briefly discusses the potential relationship between the *Folie Oxford* and Thomas' *Tristan*. See Geoffrey N. Bromiley, *Thomas's 'Tristan' and the 'Folie Tristan d'Oxford*, Critical Guides to French Texts, 61 (London: Grant & Cutler, 1986), p. 77. See also Tony Hunt and Geoffrey Bromiley, 'The Tristan Legend in Old French Verse', in *the Arthur of the French: The Arthurian Legend in Medieval French and Occitan Literature*, ed. by Glyn S. Burgess and Karen Pratt, Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages, 4 (Cardiff: University of Wales Press,

late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries due to the debates surrounding interpretation and literature referenced above. The later Prose *Tristan* has been excluded from this discussion as the focus of this study is an examination of the development of vernacular literary culture, rather than specifically on the shift from verse to prose. The Tristan texts are particularly suited to a study of this kind. The events of the plot involve frequent attempts by certain characters to discover the truth about the protagonists' relationship. This therefore enables the writers of these texts to examine issues of truth, falsehood and interpretation in their culture through this story. The texts will be examined comparatively, in order to enable a broader discussion of issues of interpretation and fiction in the Tristan texts, and by extension the cultures from which they came, rather than merely using one text to enable a better understanding of another.

The scholarship on Tristan in general is vast. Gottfried's work in particular has attracted a great deal of critical attention.[6] The French texts are also well-represented in scholarship, including monographs on Béroul's work.[7] The shorter texts have also been tackled by critics. For example, despite its brevity, *Chievrefueil* continues to attract a substantial amount of critical attention, particularly regarding

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2006), pp. 112-34. This article offers a brief discussion of critical perspectives on the relationships between the two *Folies*, Béroul's work and Thomas' work (p. 124).

[6] There are many monographs on Gottfried's work. Some of the relevant ones for this thesis include: Chinca, *History, Fiction Verisimilitude*, Mark Chinca, *Gottfried von Strassburg: Tristan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), Christoph Huber, *Gottfried von Straßburg: Tristan*, 3rd edn (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2013), W. T. H. Jackson, *The Anatomy of Love: The 'Tristan' of Gottfried von Strassburg* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971) and Rüdiger Schnell, *Suche nach Wahrheit: Gottfrieds 'Tristan und Isolde' als erkenntniskritischer Roman*, Hermaea Germanistische Forschungen, Neue Folge, 67 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1992). There are also collections of essays dedicated to Gottfried's *Tristan*, such as Will Hasty ed., *A Companion to Gottfried von Strassburg's 'Tristan'* (Woodbridge: Camden House, 2003).

[7] Examples include Roger Pensom, *Reading Béroul's Tristran: A Poetic Narrative and the Anthropology of its Reception* (Bern: Lang, 1995), Alberto Varvaro, *Beroul's Romance of Tristran*, trans. by John C. Barnes (Manchester: Manchester University Press; New York: Barnes & Noble, 1972), and Neda Chernack Zovic, *Les Espaces de la Transgression dans le Tristan de Béroul*, Studies in the Humanities: Literature, Politics, Society, 19 (New York: Peter Lang, 1996).

the interpretation of the 'bastun'.[8] Eilhart's work is the only Tristan text under consideration here that has been somewhat neglected, featuring mostly in comparison with the other Tristan texts, Gottfried's in particular. Despite this extensive amount of work on Tristan, there are surprisingly few comparative works that deal with a broad range of the texts. Some monographs have been published which consist of a comparative study of the French Tristan texts.[9] By contrast, there are very few monographs which provide a comparison of only the German texts.[10] Many critical works which examine Gottfried's work also reference Eilhart's, but generally use it as a means of gaining a better understanding of Gottfried's text, rather than discussing Eilhart's in equal depth. Monika Schausten is an exception to this. She discusses Gottfried, Eilhart and Gottfried's continuators, noting that Gottfried has always been given the most attention, and that comparative studies between Gottfried and the other German texts have only examined some thematic points.[11]

Most comparative works on the Tristan legend are in the form of articles either examining most of the versions under discussion here, or comparing some of them.[12] It however remains the case that a comprehensive comparison of the Tristan

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[8] A good summary of this discussion is offered by Trachsler in 'Tant de lettres sur un si petit *bastun*. Le *lai du Chèvrefeuille* devant la critique littéraire (1200-2000)', *Medioevo romanzo*, 27 (2003), 3-32.

[9] Comparative literature on the French works includes Merrit R. Blakeslee, *Love's Masks: Identity, Intertextuality, and Meaning in the Old French Tristan Poems*, Arthurian Studies, 15 (Cambridge: Brewer, 1989), Jacques Chocheyras, *Tristan et Iseut: Genèse d'un mythe littéraire* (Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 1996), Pierre Jonin, *Les personnages féminins dans les romans français au XII^e siècle: études des influences contemporaines* (Gap: Ophrys, 1958), and Insaf Machta, *Poétique de la ruse dans les récits tristaniens français du XII^e siècle*, Essais sur le Moyen Âge, 48 (Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 2010).

[10] One example is Monika Schausten, *Erzählwelten der Tristangeschichte im hohen Mittelalter: Untersuchungen zu den deutschsprachigen Tristanfassungen des 12. und 13. Jahrhunderts*, Forschungen zur Geschichte der älteren deutschen Literatur, 24 (Munich: Fink, 1999).

[11] Schausten, pp. 15-16.

[12] There are many examples, some of which include Danielle Buschinger, 'Le rendez-vous épié dans le verger dans les romans de *Tristan* de Béroul, d'Eilhart von Oberg et de Gottfried von Straßburg, ou la mise en scène de l'amour', in *Remembrances et Resveries: Hommage à Jean Batany*, ed. by Denis Hüe, Medievalia, 58 (Orléans: Éditions Paradigme, 2006), pp. 21-27, Hunt and Bromiley,

stories from this period in the French- and German-speaking worlds is lacking. Some work has been done to rectify this; the lack of comparative work was noted by Eming, Rasmussen and Starkey in a collection of papers published in 2012:

> The pan-European and cross-medial nature of the surviving medieval evidence is not reflected in the scholarship on Tristan, however, which largely falls along disciplinary and linguistic lines. In literary studies, scholars of Old French publish on Thomas and Béroul, with some work on later French adaptations, while scholars of medieval German focus on their versions of the story by Eilhart von Oberg and Gottfried von Strassburg. There has been little dialogue between these groups of literary scholars and the art historians who are still documenting the vast number of visual representations of the story of Tristan and Isolde.[13]

This collection consists of essays from scholars from various backgrounds including art history and literature who examine visuality and materiality in the Tristan legend. However, although there are individual articles in this volume on different aspects of the Tristan story, these articles in and of themselves are rarely comparative, but rather focus on one issue or text alone. In addition, regarding the literary study of the Tristan legend in this collection, as opposed to those articles which focused on artistic representations of the legend, the focus was largely on Gottfried's text. Grimbert's *Tristan and Isolde: A Casebook* is another example of a collection of essays on the Tristan story, but also features articles which individually focus on one

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'The Tristan Legend in Old French Verse', and Evelyn Birge Vitz, 'Orality, Literacy and the Early Tristan Material: Béroul, Thomas, Marie de France', *Romanic Review*, 78 (1987), 299-310.

[13] Jutta Eming, Ann Marie Rasmussen and Kathryn Starkey, 'Visuality and Materiality in the Story of Tristan and Isolde', in *Visuality and Materiality in the Story of Tristan and Isolde*, ed. by Jutta Eming, Ann Marie Rasmussen and Kathryn Starkey (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), pp. 1-15. For a discussion of pictorial images in a Tristan manuscript, see Julia C. Walworth, *Parallel Narratives: Function & Form in the Munich Illustrated Manuscripts of 'Tristan' & 'Willehalm von Orlens'*, Kings College London Medieval Studies, 20 (London: Kings College London Centre for Late Antique & Medieval Studies, 2007).

or two of the texts.[14] The importance of the Tristan story to twelfth and early thirteenth century culture has been widely acknowledged, as have the relationships between the different Tristan texts. Some work has also been done on the relationship between French and German literary culture at this time, which is why this lack of comparative studies is surprising.[15] A comparative study of the Tristan texts reveals more about how different medieval writers engaged with contemporary issues and debates, including the evolving question of truth, lies and interpretation and emerging discussions on fictionality.

Modern scholarship has also tackled the issues of truth, lies and interpretation in the individual Tristan texts. The tension of the plot is mostly produced by Mark's attempts to discover whether the lovers are guilty or not, a process in which he interprets various different types of signs. Analyses of this have featured in many examples of Tristan scholarship. Uncertainty or equivocation surrounding how to access truth is evident, for example, in representations of the 'Gottesurteil', an episode which was been discussed frequently by scholars of Gottfried's text.[16] The importance of interpretation in the Tristan story has also attracted critical attention. There have been some studies about the use of specific key words (such as 'false'), works which examine the significance of the lovers' skill with words (and at manipulating signs in general), works on the influence of particular philosophical ideas in the Tristan texts, and also discussions of legal issues in these works,

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[14] Joan Tasker Grimbert ed., *Tristan and Isolde: A Casebook* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

[15] See for example Alois Wolf, *Erzählkunst des Mittelalters: Komparatistische Arbeiten zur französischen und deutschen Literatur*, ed. by Martina Backes, Francis G. Gentry and Eckart Conrad Lutz (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1999)

[16] The legal aspects of Gottfried's work were discussed by critics such as Rosemary Norah Combridge, *Das Recht im 'Tristan' Gottfrieds von Strassburg*, Philologische Studien und Quellen, 15, 2nd edn (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1964), and Florian Kragl, 'Das "verstrickte" Gottesurteil: Praktische Überlegungen zur mittelalterlichen "Präsenzkultur", *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, 127 (2008), 15-33.

particularly for Béroul's and Gottfried's versions of the story.[17] There are many other more general studies on how truth and falsehood is seen by the writers of the Tristan texts, sometimes relating to the interpretation of signs.[18] Although scholarship on this is comprehensive, some elements are missing from the discussion. For example, the Tristan texts all feature episodes in which the characters struggle to locate truth and yet the narrators do not seem to express anxiety about this, but scholars have yet to ask why there is this lack of concern on the part of the narrators. However, the more significant gap in current scholarship is that there is no connection between a discussion of the way that interpretation works in these texts and the way that the writers themselves were assessing new ideas about fiction.

The significance of Gottfried's *Tristan* for medieval fictionality has been widely recognised.[19] Much work has been produced on Gottfried's poetics, particularly examining his prologue, literary excursus and the *Minnegrotte* episode in order to assess his attitude towards his sources and his own work, and, alongside analyses of other key writers such as Chrétien de Troyes and Hartmann von Aue, to attempt to ascertain views on literary theory and practice during the period in which they were writing. This period is a crucial one in the development of vernacular medieval literature, as the rise of vernacular romance seems to have enabled writers to reflect more on their own acts of creation. However, the other Tristan narratives

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[17] Jacques Chocheyras, 'Sur le sens du mot "faux" à l'époque de Béroul, *Revue des langues romanes*, 106 (2002), 157-62, Tracy Adams, '"Pur vostre cor su jo em paine." Augustinian subtext of Thomas's Tristan', *Medium Aevum*, 68 (1999), 278-91, E. Jane Burns, 'How Lovers Lie Together: Infidelity and Fictive Discourse in Béroul's *Roman de Tristan*', in *Tristan and Isolde*, ed. by Grimbert, pp. 75-93, Chinca, *History, Fiction, Verisimilitude*, Combridge, Haug, and Kragl.

[18] See for example Schnell, *Suche nach Wahrheit*, and Marie-Louise Ollier, 'Le statut de la vérité et du mensonge dans le *Tristan* de Béroul', in *La forme du sens: Textes narratifes des XIIe et XIIIe siècles*, by Marie-Louise Ollier, Medievalia, 33 (Orléans: Paradigme, 2000), pp. 263-98.

[19] Chinca, *History, Fiction, Verisimilitude*, and Haug, 'Ethik und Ästhetik in Gottfrieds von Straßburg Literaturtheorie', in Haug, pp. 197-227. Green also uses Gottfried as an example throughout his work.

under discussion here have been somewhat neglected by those researching medieval fictionality. Thomas' work is occasionally examined, usually in comparison with Gottfried, but an exploration of the issue of fictionality in Tristan narratives as a whole from this period is lacking.

Walter Haug's *Literaturtheorie im deutschen Mittelalter* is one of the seminal works on medieval literary theory and deals with the issue of fictionality. [20] Haug analyses prologues, epilogues and other authorial interjections that will enable him to develop a theory of medieval poetics. He focuses partly on the issue of meaning in these works:

> Es ist diese die christliche Ästhetik wesentlich prägende Spannung, die in die literaturtheoretische Argumentation des mittelalterlichen Prologs hineinwirkt und hier über alle rhetorisch-topischen Spielformen hinweg dazu drängt, die literarische Konstitution von Sinn und die Probleme seiner Vermittlung zu reflektieren.[21]

This is a central question of his work and is something that he discusses in his chapter on Gottfried's text. For example, in reference to Gottfried's work he states that he intends to show 'in welchem Maße der Dichter im Spielraum der exordialen Argumentation sich das literarhistorisch Innovative seines Werkes bewußtzumachen und inwieweit er es theoretisch zu fassen vermochte'.[22] Haug states correctly that 'Gottfried hat die literaturtheoretischen Prämissen seiner Romankonzeption im "Tristan"-Prolog und seinem Literaturexkurs ausführlich dargelegt'.[23] Although Haug focuses on the search for meaning within these literary texts, he also addresses other issues. For example, he discusses the references that Gottfried makes to his source and notes that 'Wie immer man dieses literarische Spiel beurteilen mag,

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[20] Haug, *Literaturtheorie im deutschen Mittelalter*.
[21] Ibid., p. 23.
[22] Ibid., p. 200.
[23] Ibid., p. 200.

Gottfried schafft sich damit jedenfalls genügend Freiraum für die eigene Version'.[24] Haug also argues that the fact that Gottfried mentions how the audience can hear tales of the lovers who are long dead is Gottfried's 'entscheidende literaturtheoretische These'.[25]

Mark Chinca and Christopher Young responded to Haug's work in their 2001 article 'Literary theory and the German romance in the literary field c. 1200'.[26] Their main contribution in this article is to emphasise the importance of examining 'non-discursive passages that prompt reflection on the nature and function of literature', such as passages 'in narrative works where characters tell stories.' The examples discussed are the narrative told by Kalogrenant at the beginning of Hartmann's *Iwein*, and the description of Enide's horse and saddle in Hartmann's *Erec*.[27] Chinca and Young also briefly suggest the 'stories invented by the hero of Gottfried's *Tristan*' as examples, but do not analyse them in detail.[28] Chinca and Young claim that 'poetological statements in vernacular texts do not form a discourse functioning independently of the works in which they are articulated', emphasising the importance of not separating the statements made in passages such as prologues from the rest of the work.[29] They also discuss the notion of truth in these texts, stating in relation to *Iwein* that 'truth is not factual but is a matter of interpretation.'[30] This is an approach that is followed in this thesis, but on a larger scale, by examining the way that characters determine truth through the interpretation of specific signs, as well as

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[24] Ibid., p. 214.
[25] Ibid., p. 216.
[26] Mark Chinca and Christopher Young, 'Literary Theory and the German Romance in the Literary Field c. 1200', in *Text und Kultur: Mittelalterliche Literatur 1150-1450*, ed. by Ursula Peters (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2001), pp. 612-644.
[27] Ibid., pp. 618-26; pp. 626-34.
[28] Ibid., p. 615.
[29] Ibid., p. 632.
[30] Ibid., p. 619.

how they tell stories. Chinca and Young discuss Enide's horse, which Hartmann anticipates the audience would not see as plausible. The narrator will then:

> refute their doubts with more narrative [...] By offering an adventure, the author is pointing up the fact that, in his literary scheme, 'truth' or 'reality' is not to be sought externally, but within the work itself. Moreover, by offering a mere shadow of an adventure, he is hinting that the search for the type of 'truth' or 'reality' traditionally contained in writing should not be the prime objective of his recipients.[31]

They also discuss the saddle. For Chinca and Young, 'a very small saddle can contain too much to tell only if it exists in a realm other than reality'.[32] Chinca and Young therefore show how fiction can be a category alongside truth and falsehood. Here there is more of a focus on fiction as a category, other than truth, reality, or falsehood, rather than fiction as a literary category. In relation to the saddle in *Erec*, They argue that '[i]n this instance, "theory" is both realised in and centred on the creative act. It is more appropriate, therefore, to speak not of "literary theory" or "theory of fictionality" but rather of authorial self-reflection'.[33] Rather than consciously developing or adhering to a theory of fictionality, the authors are reflecting on their own ideas surrounding creativity. Chinca and Young have demonstrated that this is the case for Hartmann von Aue, and later work demonstrates that it is also the case for Gottfried, but it remains to be seen to what extent this is applicable in the other *Tristan* narratives.

Mark Chinca's monograph, *History, Fiction, Verisimilitude: Studies in the Poetics of Gottfried's 'Tristan'* examines the concept of fictionality in Gottfried's work in more detail.[34] Rather than presenting a criticism of or suggesting

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[31] Ibid., pp. 627-28.
[32] Ibid., p. 630.
[33] Ibid., p. 632.
[34] Chinca, *History, Fiction, Verisimilitude*.

modifications to Haug's theory, Chinca here explores history, fiction and verisimilitude specifically in relation to Gottfried's work, focusing mostly on the relationship between historical writing and fiction. He explains how vernacular texts in this period are developing their own poetics, which are linked to but also different from Latin poetics, stating that Gottfried's excursus shows 'how we should frame our inquiry into his poetics: the vernacular draws on the Latin legacy, but on its own terms'.[35] Chinca divides material into two separate categories, the archival and the experimental. The former refers mostly to historical subject matter, whereas the latter is related to the vernacular and its development is connected to that of the romance: 'The material basis of experimental narratives is fictional, and the attitude to meaning is open, in contrast to the closed ideology of archival narratives'.[36] Once again, meaning is a central concern for fictionality. Arthurian romances provide a good example of experimental narratives, where, as Chinca argues, meaning is created in the course of the narration.[37] Chinca's argument is that Gottfried took 'material considered archival and treat[ed] it in an experimental way'.[38] This can be seen through Gottfried's respect for and reliance on written sources. Gottfried is compared to an historian who is working from these sources.[39] However, Gottfried's concern was not with writing a historiographical account, but was with writing a *senemaere*. History is used as a point of departure for this *senemaere*.[40]

D. H. Green's monograph, *The Beginnings of Medieval Romance: Fact and Fiction, 1150-1220*, addresses specifically and in detail how writers from this period

[35] Ibid., p. 8.
[36] Ibid., p. 8.
[37] Ibid., p. 30.
[38] Ibid., p. 38.
[39] Ibid., p. 38.
[40] Ibid., pp. 57-58

thought about their own work, particularly regarding the relationship between texts that modern critics would term historical and fictional.[41] In the first chapter of his work, Green suggests a working definition of fiction:

> Fiction is a category of literary text which, although it may also include events which were held to have actually taken place, gives an account of events that could not conceivably have taken place and / or of events that, although possible, did not take place, and which, in doing so, invites the intended audience to be willing to make-believe what would otherwise be regarded as untrue.[42]

The crucial distinction between something being seen as fiction rather than as falsehood is the sense of complicity between the author and the audience reagarding a willingness to make-believe. For something to be fictional, the author must give cues to his audience so that they are aware that it is fictional. In addition, Green discusses the way that authors use gaps in previous texts in which to situate their own fiction, going into detail specifically with Chrétien de Troyes' relationship to Wace. Wace 'recognises the existence of fiction without practising it himself, but instead provides a historiographical seedbed from which Arthurian fiction sprang [...] Chrétien thus fills the gap left by Wace'.[43] Later in his work, Green uses Thomas' *Tristan* to discuss the relationship between historical writing and fictional writing: 'His *Tristan* is not history, but historical fiction, alluding to historical events for interpretative purposes that have nothing to do with historical writing'.[44] However, it remains to be seen whether these arguments are also relevant for the other Tristan texts.

It is understandable that most of the Tristan texts have been largely excluded

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[41] Green, *The Beginnings of Medieval Romance*.
[42] Ibid., p. 4.
[43] Green, pp. 177-78.
[44] Green, p. 144.

from the critical literature outlined above. However, as Green notes:

> By contrast with the relatively homogeneous sources of the antique romances, the variety of the material drawn on by Chrétien and the contradictory nature of the versions of the *Tristan* story before Thomas made it more difficult for them to handle and unify their material. But it offered them infinitely more scope to adapt it to their own ends, to choose, to add, to omit, to re-group as they thought best.[45]

This contradictory nature of the *Tristan* material is why it is so useful to examine and compare the different texts in order to discover more about the views of these writers on interpretation and fictionality, rather than just focusing on Gottfried's and Thomas' works. The above critics have provided excellent overviews of fictionality in medieval culture, but due to the fact that they are overviews they have not addressed some of the fine detail that can come from a more in-depth analysis of individual texts. For example, there is little discussion of the two *Folies Tristan*, which, it will be seen, are of great significance for debates surrounding fiction and storytelling in this period. This thesis will therefore examine the Tristan texts in depth, considering some of the key aspects of fictionality as discussed by the above critics, such as plausibility, the importance of make-believe, the relationship between history and fiction, and especially the idea that truth is a matter of interpretation. It will examine evidence from the texts themselves, including the way that characters interpret signs, how the characters tell stories and how the narrators themselves reflect on their own work. Throughout this thesis, the term 'narrative' will refer to an account of events that is related by a character to other characters. A narrative could be defined as either historical or fictional, but the majority of the examples under discussion in this thesis are somewhere between these two categories. The term 'history' will be used to refer to an account of events which is presented or interpreted

[45] Ibid., p. 95

as fact and as conveying the truth. This will often be a narrative that has, or allegedly has, authority behind it, such as an eyewitness account or a piece of physical proof. By contrast, the term 'fiction' will be used to refer to a narrative which is is not necessarily intended to be presented or interpreted as fact and does not carry any external authority. Although there may be some truth to a fictional narrative, it is intended to be aesthetic or entertaining. When discussing signs, this thesis will take as a starting point Eco's definition that a sign is '*everything* that, on the grounds of previously established social convention, can be taken as *something standing for something else*'.[46] This study will focus on those visual and verbal signs which require or invite interpretation by certain characters within the texts.

This thesis is divided into two parts. Part one examines the interpretation of signs in the Tristan texts, focusing largely on the way that the characters themselves interpret those signs. This is consistent with Chinca and Young's emphasis on the importance of examining parts of works where characters tell stories, but in this instance enables an examination of how the writers of the texts depict interpretation, particularly regarding how to access truth. This provides a framework for the second part of the thesis, as it establishes an analysis of how characters, and by extension their writers, view truth, falsehood and interpretation. The first part is divided into two chapters. Chapter One examines visual signs, discussing the way that characters use objects to communicate and to convey authority and also how those objects are interpreted in investigative or judicial situations. Chapter Two examines verbal signs including promises, reminders of past events and oaths used in judicial settings. Issues examined within these chapters include an analysis of how signification

[46] Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1977), p. 16. Emphasis his. For further discussion of this, see pp. 25-27.

works, how certain objects become significant, how certain words are significant, particularly in specific contexts, and how characters succeed in making certain objects and/or words mean different things to different people. Is there a difference in the way that certain writers approach interpretation, particularly with regard to determining the truth or falsehood of a particular version of events? Can the characters access truth and is it important for them to do so? How important is the distinction between truth and falsehood to the writers? What could this mean in a period when writers were beginning to write down stories in a medium which had until this point been considered to be authoritative?

Part One will show how little anxiety there is on the part of the writers about the difficulty of discovering the truth, as well as the equivocation surrounding interpretation. Part Two of the thesis deals more explicitly with literary theory and practice, examining how characters and writers viewed storytelling, particularly with regard to whether it can be defined as truth, falsehood or fiction. This enables a deeper discussion of the medieval debate surrounding fictionality (as set out by Haug, Green and Chinca) and the idea that the writers are exploring fiction as a category distinct from truth and falsehood. This part of the thesis focuses specifically on the way that writers use their work to discuss the emerging boundaries between what an audience today would think of as history and fiction. The writers of the texts use the substance of the plot to enter into this debate in order to define the new genre of 'romans' – experimental works, to use Chinca's terminology, that are expressed in the previously authoritative medium of the written word. Two approaches are used to examine this. Chapter Three analyses interjections from the extradiegetical narrator into the text. This follows Haug's approach, but examines interjections in general as

well as prologues and epilogues. This involves some discussion of the relationship between orality and literacy in these texts, but this will not be a major element of the discussion. Rather, this chapter will focus more on what the narratorial presence in these works reveals about how the writers viewed their own work, particularly regarding authority. Chapter Four takes the approach advocated by Chinca and Young, that it is important to examine parts of the works where characters tell stories. Previous critics have examined these types of episodes in Gottfried's and Béroul's work, and to an extent in the two *Folies* and *Chievrefueil*, but there has yet to be a comparative study of them in, particularly in relation to ficitonality. This chapter will take these approaches further, using Chinca and Young as the theoretical background to analyse similar stories within the story but expanding this to include more broadly narratives where the characters discuss episodes from their past, as well as narratives that are not a part of their own personal pasts. Examples include Rual's narration of Tristan's parentage at the beginning of Gottfried's work, the multiple narrations that occur in Béroul's text about the tryst beneath the tree from different perspectives, and the representation of the *lai de Guirun* in Thomas' text. Most of the chapter will focus on how characters tell stories from their own past, including references to and reminders of events from their own personal histories. Some work has been done on this for the two *Folies*, but this chapter is unique in that it takes a comparative approach, examining these episodes in several Tristan texts to gain an overview of how the individual writers used their characters to provoke discussions surrounding the difference between fiction and history. Chinca argues that Gottfried took archival material and used it in an experimental way. This chapter asks whether the writers of the other Tristan texts are doing something similar, arguing that this is a common

thread throughout the Tristan stories.

In short, there are two main aims to this thesis. Firstly, it is important to provide a truly comparative study of the Tristan texts, rather than merely using certain texts to improve understanding of one other. Secondly, although broad overviews of medieval literary theory are valuable and provide interesting insights into medieval culture, it is also important to examine the individual texts in greater detail. This is important in order to gain a better understanding of the individual texts and of how they relate to each other, but also to understand more about medieval culture in general. Moreover, although the relationship between French and German literary culture during this period has been acknowledged by some critics, this has not been comprehensively discussed by Tristan scholars, particularly those working on the French texts. Similarly, the large amount of critical literature on fictionality for the German-speaking world, compared with the lack of this type of work in the French-speaking world, suggests that there is a gap to be filled by examining the French and German works comparatively. This is particularly the case for the French texts, as there is currently little scholarship on fictionality in French culture during this period. This study will therefore illuminate understanding of medieval culture in two connected ways. Firstly, how do medieval writers discuss truth, falsehood and interpretation? Although this is something that has been analysed for some of the texts, a comparative study is lacking, and there is also little scholarship that connects it to the debate surrounding fiction. If truth is a matter of interpretation, is fiction also a matter of interpretation? It will be seen that it is not merely Gottfried and Thomas who are reflecting on their own processes of poetic creation, but that similar issues are being discussed in different ways within the different texts.

Part One: Interpretation of Signs

Chapter One: Visual Signs

Introduction

Tony Hunt, writing on Béroul's *Roman de Tristan*, argues that 'the poem represents a carefully and sensitively articulated exploration of the conflict of appearances and reality, the problems of reading signs and the challenge of how to access moral truth, all three issues, of course, being linked'.[47] It is well known that the production of signs, their interpretations, their ambiguity and the difficulty of establishing truth are central concerns of the French and German verse narratives of the Tristan story, but this chapter will provide a comparative study of them, focusing also on the authority conveyed by certain signs.[48] Visual signs are a key feature of all of these texts and feature in numerous episodes, enabling a discussion of the way that certain objects become significant for the characters in key episodes. This chapter will firstly analyse how sign systems function in communicative situations, specifically examining how characters use visual signs (usually physical objects) to convey a message to another character at a distance. This occurs both when characters assign a specific meaning to an object and also when they use an object to authenticate a verbal message. Secondly, this chapter will discuss the way that characters interpret the presence of visual signs in certain investigative situations, when they seek to

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[47] Hunt and Bromiley, p. 114.
[48] Examples of scholarship on truth in Tristan narratives include Schnell, *Suche nach Wahrheit* and Ollier, 'Le statut de la vérité'.

determine the truth about a particular course of events. This will then lead in to a discussion of how physical objects and other visual signs are used to determine a version of the truth in judicial situations. Clanchy, writing in reference to England, claims that oral traditions persisted alongside written ones during this period. In England, non-literate 'habits and methods of proof persisted in unexpected quarters for generations after the Norman Conquest'.[49] Although only some of these texts were produced in England, evidence of this will also be seen in many of these episodes throughout these Tristan narratives, particularly regarding authority. It will become apparent through the analysis of these texts that interpretation is not merely based on intellectual or logical deduction (e.g. by assigning a specific meaning to an object) but that other factors influence interpretation, such as context, emotions and the personal past of a particular character. This chapter will examine how objects are imbued with meaning and how that influences the interpretations that certain characters make of them. The fact that the characters of the Tristan story are frequently either seeking the truth or attempting to deceive others enables the writers of the different versions of this narrative to explore the tension between truth, falsehood and interpretation.

Communication

Umberto Eco claims that 'every act of communication to or between human beings [...] presupposes a signification system as its necessary condition'.[50] He also argues

[49] M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307* (London: Edward Arnold, 1987), p. 12. See also p. 21.
[50] Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*, p. 9.

that signification is linked to established social convention: 'I propose to define as sign *everything* that, on the grounds of previously established social convention, can be taken as *something standing for something else*.'[51] The social group which defines this convention can be a large one (such as courtly society as a whole), or it could be as small as an agreement between two or more individuals. Many of the differences in understanding in the Tristan texts are the result of different groups applying different conventions to the same signs. Similarly, A. J. Greimas states that 'La signification n'est [...] que cette transposition d'un niveau de langage dans un autre, d'un langage dans un langage différent, et le sens n'est que cette possibilité de *transcodage*'.[52] These practices are evident throughout these texts regarding both verbal and visual signs. This will firstly be examined regarding systems of communication in the Tristan texts, where characters use objects (such as twigs and rings) to communicate at a distance, having in some cases previously assigned meanings to those objects. A communication system requires a signification system that must be agreed between certain people in order to be understood correctly. Most signs interpreted by the characters in the Tristan stories are polyvalent, but there are some episodes in which the lovers use univocal signs in order to communicate with each other. Two such examples are the ship with black sails (Eilhart ll. 9462-9671; Thomas, Douce, ll. 1094-1817 and Sneyd 2, ll. 1-57) and the twigs (and/or leaves) used to arrange the tryst beneath the tree (Eilhart ll. 3420-3643, Gottfried ll. 14583-15046).[53] Both of these episodes involve the lovers communicating at a distance rather than face to face. These messages are themselves generally free from

[51] Ibid., p. 16. Emphasis his.
[52] Algirdas Julien Greimas, 'Du sens', in *Du sens: Essais Sémiotiques*, Algirdas Julien Greimas (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1970), pp. 7-17 (p. 13).
[53] This episode is also briefly referenced by Tristan in the *Folie Oxford* (ll. 525-26, ll. 777-816).

misunderstanding and misinterpretation because these signs are prearranged; the characters have already determined what specific objects will mean in order to convey a particular message to another character. These episodes enable an investigation into the nature of social conventions relating to signification, particularly regarding how characters arrange the meaning of a particular sign and how that meaning might be added to or manipulated. This section will show firstly that, when being used in communication systems, objects must have meanings clearly assigned to them in order to be correctly understood. However, it will also be seen that interpretation is not that simple as meanings are present other than those which have been specifically assigned. This analysis will reveal how the writers depict their characters' processes of interpretation, particularly relating to the different factors that can influence that interpretation.[54]

Twigs

The episode of the tryst beneath the tree provides an example of a communication system which uses a univocal sign. In this case, there is no deception. The portion of this episode which deals with the use of the twigs in the stream as a method of communication is extant in Gottfried's and Eilhart's works and can also usefully be compared with Marie de France's *Chievrefueil*, due to the similarities between the signification systems that are used.[55] Gertrude Schoepperle for example notes the

[54] For an analysis of words as signs during this period, see Christoph Huber, *Wort sint der dinge zeichen: Untersuchunge zum Sprachdenken der mittelhochdeutschen Spruchdichtunen bis Frauenlob*, Münchener Texte und Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters, 64 (Munich, Artemis Verlag, 1977).

[55] This episode is also extant in Béroul's work, but the portion of the text which explains how the lovers created and used their communication system is lacking, so it will not be discussed here.

similarity between *Chievrefueil* and the tryst beneath the tree episode and her article as a whole provides a brief comparison of this episode in many versions of the Tristan story, including Eilhart's and Gottfried's.[56] Schoepperle's focus was on the possible sources of this episode, but this comparison provides interesting perspectives on medieval attitudes towards reading and interpretation. Later in the Middle Ages the scene of the tryst beneath the tree was used frequently in the visual arts:

> one image emerges that serves to epitomize the conflict between the demands of love and society […] It focuses meaning derived from a large literary context and transports and maintains this message even after its initial textual base has largely fallen away.[57]

A similar conclusion was reached by Neil Thomas:

> The spatial demands of the pictorial and plastic media typically dictated a selective procedure in which key scenes were chosen (the Orchard scene was a favorite) capable of compressing the legend into a form epitomizing its essence as individual artists perceived it [...]. Even in the field of literature a long and rather complex story was sometimes distilled into one episode, as in Marie de France's *Lai de Chevrefueil*, which advances a *summa* of the lovers'plight in the image of a hazel branch entwined with honeysuckle, the symbiosis illustrating how together the lovers may prosper but parted they must die [...].[58]

Another indication of the importance of the twigs in this episode is in the *Folie Tristan d'Oxford*, in which Tristan refers to this episode briefly, describing himself as someone who 'Od cultel sai doler cospels, / Jeter les puis par ces rusels' (*Folie Oxford*, ll. 525-26). Although a later reference narrates this episode in more detail (*Folie Oxford*, ll. 777-816), this brief reference to the twigs indicates that they and

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For further discussion of the way the lovers communicate verbally in this episode, see Chapter Two.

[56] Gertrude Schoepperle, 'Chievrefoil', *Romania*, 38 (1909), 196-218 (p. 196).

[57] Michael Curschmann, 'From Myth to Emblem to Panorama', in *Visuaity and Materiality*, ed. by Eming, Rasmussen and Starkey, pp. 107-29 (p. 109, p. 113).

[58] Neil Thomas, 'Duplicity and Duplexity: The Isolde of the White Hands Sequence', in *A Companion to Gottfried von Strassburg's 'Tristan'*, ed. by Hasty, pp. 183-201 (p. 183).

the communication system attached to them were a highly recognisable feature of this episode. Although scholarship on the tryst beneath the tree does on occasion discuss the use of twigs as a communication system, and the scholarship on this issue for *Chievrefueil* is vast, this has been less the case for the German texts. Some work has been done on Gottfried's text, but very little on Eilhart's and there are also only a small number of critical works which compare the German texts to *Chievrefueil*.[59]

In both the German texts, the lovers arrange a communication system in which Tristan floats twigs (and leaves in Eilhart's version) down a stream, so that he can inform Isolde that he is waiting for her in a previously agreed location. In Eilhart's work, it is Tristrant who institutes the sign and tells Brangaene of this signification system, who then verbally passes this message to Isalde. Although the communication between Isalde and Tristrant here occurs via the twigs, it is important to note that a go-between is still necessary in order to set-up the communication system and crucially to tell Isalde how to interpret the signs she receives. This is possibly because the use of a go-between was part of the Tristan tradition. However, the use of the objects which are being used to communicate suggests that the writers were using these episodes to reflect on how reading, writing and interpreting function, as the twig, for example, provides a distillation of the message that Tristrant intends to send to Isalde. Firstly, Eilhart's Tristrant describes the material substance of the sign:

> wann in dem brunnen
> lob kumpt gerunnen
> durch die kemmenaᵛtte,
> so gang sie gar draᵛtte

[59] Examples of such comparisons include Schoepperle's article and Jean-Marc Pastré, 'Tristan et la magie du geste', in *Le geste et les gestes au moyen age*, Senefiance, 41 (Aix-en-Provence, CUER MA, 1998), pp. 461-83.

und wart ainß sponß da bÿ,
dar an gemaulet sÿ
ain crútz mit fúnff orten,
wan ich sie mit den wortten
besprechen laider nit mag. (Eilhart, ll. 3463-71)

The sign consists of leaves in the stream, followed by a twig carved with a cross with five marks. There is no indication as to why this carving in particular is on the twig. Moreover, Tristrant specifically notes that he is using this to communicate with Isalde when it is not possible to do so with words. The visual sign stands in for the words he might otherwise use. It is a substitution, a 'transcodage', using Greimas' terminology, enabling Tristrant to communicate with Isalde at a distance and in secret. [60]

Secondly, Tristrant tells Brangaene what the sign means:

eß sÿ nacht oder tag,
wann sú daß crutz find,
so bin ich bÿ der lind,
dú by dem brunnen staᵛt,
der durch ir kemnatten gaᵛt (Eilhart, ll. 3472-76)

He assigns a meaning to the cross (it signifies his location), but there is no explanation as to why this figure in particular is carved on the twig. Isalde is aware of this signification system created by Tristrant and she can then easily interpret the signs that he sends her:

die frow gar gedraᵛtte
zuᵒ dem fluß hin gieng,
do sú den spon inn fieng,
und begund daß crútz schowen.
und west wol dú frowe
Trÿstranden in der wart
und ÿlet vil hart,
da sú Trÿstranden fand. (Eilhart, ll. 3634-41)

There is no long explanation as to how Isalde interpreted the sign. In this case, the

[60] Greimas, 'Du sens', p. 13.

cross on the ‘spon’ is directly significative of the fact that Tristrant is under the linden tree, as this is the meaning that Tristrant and Brangaene earlier determined would be fixed to this sign.

However, it is difficult to determine how an extradiegetical audience might have interpreted the cross with five ends. Jean-Marc Pastré provides a plausible explanation for this carving. He suggests for example that it could be a pentagram.[61] However he then goes on to argue more forcefully that this cross is Ogam script. He indicates the importance of the number five in the Ogamic system of writing, and also explains what this symbol in particular could mean: ‘On notera qu’un trait vertical à cinq branches horizontales note en outre en alphabet orgamique la voyelle i, celle donc de l’initiale du nom d’Isolde’.[62] He also notes the comparison here with Gottfried’s version: ‘Gottfried ne fait guère autrement lorsqu’il fait graver par Tristan sur les copeaux un T et un I, les initiales des deux noms’.[63] It therefore seems plausible that Eilhart is actually describing a character which is Ogam, possibly without knowing it. Tristrant is not attempting to send Isalde a message which consists of nothing but her initial; the narrator does not draw attention to the fact that it is her initial, even if this is indeed the case. Rather, it is evident that the meaning of the twig carved with the cross with five ends is greater than the actual symbol carved on it, as its significance lies in the interpretation of it that Tristrant gave to Brangaene.

The importance of establishing a social convention, or an agreement between at least two parties, as to the meaning of particular visual signs is apparent in another

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[61] Pastré, p. 466.
[62] Ibid., p. 466.
[63] Ibid., pp. 466.

episode of Eilhart's *Tristrant*, in which Tristrant returns and communicates secretly with Isalde by throwing a twig into the mane of her horse (ll. 6493-6868). There are three instances of visual signs being used in this episode in order to communicate, but the way that these signs are used is different. Firstly, in order to set up this communication system, Tristrant sends Tinas as a messenger to Isalde. This functions in much the same way as establishing the communication system for the tryst beneath the tree; Tristrant wants to communicate with Isalde secretly and uses another person (Tinas) as a go-between to establish the conventions of the communication system. However, in this episode, rather than set up a signification system which assigns a specific message to a particular object, Tinas gives a verbal message to Isalde from Tristrant, telling Isalde to go out on procession with the court. Tinas is carrying a ring to act as a 'waᵛrzeichen' (l. 6597) that Isalde will recognise.[64] From Isalde's reaction to the ring, it seems that the ring signifies that Tristrant is either nearby or wants to speak to her. The word 'waᵛrzeichen' also suggests that it is intended to authorise Tinas'message. The second visual sign in this episode occurs when Isalde is on procession with the court. Tristrant states that once the queen is near them 'so will ich schiessen ain rÿß / miner frowen pferd in die mäne' (ll. 6580-1). This 'rÿß'is a signal for Isalde. When she sees it, she must halt and treat the dog (Utant) in such a way 'so daß min gesell sage, / daß ich waᵛr gesagt habe' (ll. 6585-6). This is presumably part of the message given by Tristrant to Tinas to give to Isalde. A twig in a horse's mane could not in and of itself mean this particular message; that meaning has been imposed on it by a prearranged agreement by the two lovers, similar to the twigs and leaves in the episode of the tryst beneath the

[64] The use of rings in these sorts of situations, to give authority to a verbal message or narration, will be discussed below (pp. 45-58).

tree.[65] The twig in the horse's mane is a simple cue to Isalde. Due to their prearranged code, she knows that it means that she must attend to the dog:

> so sol sú alß stille dane
> halten und sol daß húndelin
> füren durch den willen min
> so daß min gesell sage,
> daß ich waᵛr gesagt habe. (Eilhart, ll. 6582-86)

Moreover, Isalde's affectionate treatment of Utant is itself made into a sign, the third visual sign in this episode, and given meaning by the characters, specifically by Tristrant for Kehenis'benefit. The purpose of this sign is to prove to Kehenis that Tristrant is in love and therefore Kehenis' sister cannot compete. Tristrant has offered this as an explanation for why he has not yet consummated his marriage with Kehenis'sister, which is a complex interpretation to draw from this visual sign. His aim is for Kehenis to know that Tristrant is not lying:

> [...] ich bring úch dar,
> daß ir wol werdent gewar,
> daß ich úch recht han gesagt,
> und ob ich lieg, daß ir habt
> úwere vordrung uff mich. (Eilhart, ll. 6487-91)

There is as yet no indication as to why this behaviour from Isalde will prove that Tristrant is telling the truth. Tristrant manipulates Kehenis'emotions, assuming that Kehenis will interpret certain things in a particular way. Tristrant intends that Isalde's behaviour at this scene will lead Kehenis to believe that Tristrant really loves Isalde and that that love is reciprocated. Kehenis is not privy to the sign system that has been established between Isalde, Tristrant and Tinas and his interpretation of events is therefore manipulated by Tristrant, rather than being a simple process of substituting a verbal sign for a visual one, as was seen in the episode of the tryst

[65] This will also be discussed below in relation to *Chievrefueil* (pp.36-42) .

beneath the tree. Kehenis is impressed by the crowd in general and he initially mistakes another woman for Isalde. When he finally sees Isalde (prior to the twig being thrown into the horse's mane) he immediately states that his sister cannot compare (ll. 6777-79). His sister is therefore already compared unfavourably with Isalde, purely based on their physical appearances. Once Tristrant has thrown the twig into the horse's mane, Isalde begins to treat Utant in an indulgent way, as previously agreed. Kehenis takes Isalde's treatment of Utant as a sign of her treatment of Tristrant:

> […] min lieber gesell,
> du solt diner trúw frÿ sin:
> du wurdest von der swester min
> nie so wol gehalten. (Eilhart, ll. 6834-37)

It seems that Kehenis assumes that the treatment accorded to Utant is standing in for the way she would treat Tristrant, were he there with her. By contrast with the twigs discussed above, this sign is not assigned a meaning by an agreement between certain characters. Tristrant has to rely on the possibility that Kehenis will interpret the sign the way he intends.

Gottfried's version of the tryst beneath the tree episode is similar to Eilhart's, although it is Brangaene rather than Tristan who sets up the signification system, having a more active role than her counterpart in Eilhart's text, as opposed to merely being a messenger. Rather than sending leaves and a twig carved with a cross down the stream, Brangaene instructs Tristan to send a twig carved with their initials:

> sô nemet ein öleboumes rîs
> und snîdet spaene in lange wîs
> und zeichent die mit nihte mê,
> wan machet einhalp ein T
> und machete anderhalp ein Î,
> daz niwan der êrste buochstap sî
> von iuwer beiden namen dar an (Gottfried, ll. 14423-29)

There are three points to note here. Firstly, the material substance of the sign is important, as it is a twig from an olive tree. Given that olive trees are not native to Cornwall, this emphasises how literary the episode is. It is also important to note that the message is not merely conveyed by the carving. The sign consists of the twigs through the stream as well, the materiality of the sign rather than merely the words carved on it. Secondly, Tristan shapes the twig by cutting it lengthways. Discussing Cagnon's assessment that Marie de France refers to Ogam script in *Chievrefueil*, Trachsler notes that in order to carve the Ogam alphabet '[i]l faut [...] équarrir le bâton'.[66] It is possible that Gottfried's Tristan is also using Ogam, or that the description of him shaping the twig is an indication that earlier examples of this episode included Ogam. Thirdly, the actual symbols carved on the twig provide a striking comparison with Eilhart's version. Whereas Eilhart's Tristrant carved an unidentified symbol on the twig, Gottfried's Tristan carves their initials on it and then the narrator explains that this is what he has done (ll. 14426-9). Nicola Kaminski discusses this in some detail, pointing out that the initials 'T'and 'I'are sufficient for Isolde to fill in 'Tristan'and 'Isolde'.[67] Wandhoff makes a similar point. Tristan and Isolde 'manipulate many visual traces of their love'and communicate it,

> […] by inventing material objects, for instance, the carved wooden initials *T* and *I* that float down a stream, resembling the same initials that Gottfried hides and exposes in the acrostic in his prologue.[68]

Both critics emphasise the connection between love and art in Gottfried's work and

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[66] Trachsler, p. 16. See also Maurice Cagnon, '*Chievrefueil* and the Ogamic Tradition', *Romania*, 91 (1970), 238-55.

[67] Nicola Kaminski, 'Zeichenmacht: Gottfried's *Tristan*', *Oxford German Studies*, 37 (2008), 3-26 (p. 20).

[68] Wandhoff, Haiko, 'How to Find Love in Literature: Reading Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan* and His Cave of Lovers', in *Visuality and Materiality*, ed. by Eming, Rasmussen and Starkey, pp. 41-64 (p. 45).

Kaminski in particular compares Tristan to the author-figure of Gottfried's text, citing the use of the acrostic in the prologue as evidence. Kaminski's and Wandhoff's points are a reminder that the carving on the twig is far from being an arbitrary sign. They are letters associated with the lovers themselves and represent them. The fact that the letters are part of their names is explicitly stated by the narrator, unlike in Eilhart's version. Brangaene states that when she and Isolde see this, they will 'dâ bî bekennen wir iesâ, / daz ir dâ bî dem brunnen sît' (Gottfried, ll. 14442-43). Although the letters do mean something (they represent Tristan and Isolde themselves) their meaning in this instance includes Tristan's presence by the stream, as that is the meaning assigned to those letters in this context by Brangaene. It is striking that when Isolde sees the twigs 'Îsôt diu vienc si und sach s'an, / si las Îsôt, si las Tristan' (Gottfried, ll. 14673-74). The narrator explicitly characterises Isolde as a reader here, thereby supporting the argument that Tristan is a creator in a similar way to the narrator. Moreover, Isolde as a reader also fills in the gaps left by Tristan the writer, reading 'T' as 'Tristan' and 'I' as 'Isolde'. This shows clearly how Gottfried's treatment of the signs used in this episode goes further than Eilhart's.

Marie de France's *Chievrefueil* depicts an episode that can be compared with the tryst beneath the tree, as the lovers communicate in a very similar way.[69] Tristan wants to meet the queen in the woods and leaves a twig for her which he has shaped and onto which he has then carved a sign. The queen sees this sign and meets with Tristan, who later composes a *lai* to commemorate it. This text has been the focus of a great deal of critical attention. Writing on *Chievrefueil*, Trachsler states:

> Comment se fait-il qu'une vingtaine d'octosyllabes suggèrent autant d'interprétations différentes? Tout simplement parce qu'un texte, tout texte,

[69] As noted by Schoepperle, p. 196.

> ne dit jamais tout. Il ne peut pas être le texte et la glose, et quant il est texte, il n'est pas le monde.[70]

In this article, Trachsler gives a summary of scholarship on *Chievrefueil*, focusing exclusively on the debate surrounding the 'bastun'. The passage that has caused such discussion is ll. 51-78, which states that Tristan carves his name onto a twig, but then the narrator states 'Ceo fu la sume de l'escrit' (l. 61), and the subsequent lines are interpreted by some critics as being a much longer message. Some think that it was this that was carved on the twig, possibly using Ogam script, others argue that only Tristan's name is carved on it.[71] Some critical work also examines the material substance of the sign, and its significance, including regarding the type of tree from which the twig comes.[72] Scholarship has focused partly on the plausibility of this episode, both in terms of how plausible it is that a long message would be carved on a twig, and on how plausible it is that the queen would have been able to interpret a long message merely from Tristan's name.[73] This section will firstly discuss the possibility of the carving being in Ogamic script, and will secondly examine what is meant by 'la sume de l'escrit' regarding what may or may not be carved on the twig. This will lead into a comparison of *Chievrefueil* with the episodes discussed above.

Chievrefueil has been the subject of intense academic debate for more than a century. One key feature of this debate is the idea that the carving on the twig was in Ogam script. Schoepperle investigates possible Celtic sources for this episode and

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[70] Trachsler, pp. 19-20.

[71] Cagnon argues that the long message is carved on the twig, but in Ogam script. pp. 246-55. Other critics argue in favour of Tristan's name alone being carved on the twig, such as Lucien Foulet, 'Marie de France et la Légende de Tristan', *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie*, 32 (1908), 161-83; 257-89 (pp. 278-79), and Paula M. Clifford, *Marie de France: 'Lais'*, Critical Guides to French Texts, 26 (London: Grant & Cutler, 1982), p. 76.

[72] Examples include Clifford, p. 76, William Sayers, 'Marie de France's Chievrefoil, Hazel Rods, and the Ogam Letters Coll and Uilenn', *Arthuriana*, 14 (2004), 3-16 (pp. 3-6), and Vitz. p. 306.

[73] For example, Foulet (p. 279) argues that it is implausible that the longer message is carved on the stick, as do Hunt and Bromiley (p. 127). Clifford notes the controversy regarding how possible it is that the queen sees the stick while she is on horseback, but argues that it is plausible (pp. 75-76).

argues that Irish culture would have used Ogam in this context. As Ogam is not something recognisable in French culture, French redactors would deal with it differently. As she argues, 'it would be impossible for a twelfth century French poet to adopt completely the procedure of Cuchulainn'.[74] Therefore the scenario (of meeting in the forest) comes from a culture that cannot completely be understood by the one for which it is written. The argument that the carving on the twig was Ogam is now fairly widely accepted, and has been given weight by the fact that Marie describes Tristan squaring off the twig he is to carve (ll. 51-52), a feature of writing Ogam on a twig.[75] Sayers also agrees with this, providing more information in his article about the symbolism of using a hazel branch and discussing the use of Ogam and the shaping of the twig.[76] Given the possible use of Ogam in Eilhart's *Tristrant*, and the fact that Gottfried's Tristan also shapes the twig, this seems plausible.

Some of the debate surrounding *Chievrefueil* focuses on the actual carving on the branch, either Tristan's name, or the text that is given on ll. 61-78. Sayers argues that:

> [o]n balance and largely for esthetic reasons, I judge that Marie wished us to believe that a rather full statement by Tristan was engraved on the rod, but that the very act of writing made this a *sume* in relation to his mental process or an imagined utterance and to the *lai* he subsequently composes.[77]

However, this is a viewpoint that is not shared by some critics. Lucien Foulet claims that it was implausible that Tristan could have carved so much onto a twig. Foulet also argues that the text of ll. 77-78 constituted a letter that was sent by Tristan a few days earlier:

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[74] Schoepperle, p. 217.
[75] Trachsler, p. 16.
[76] Sayers, 'Marie de France's Chievrefoil', pp. 3-7.
[77] Ibid., p. 11.

> Tristan d'adresse là directement à Iseut et il ne s'agit plus seulement du symbolisme de la coudre et du chèvrefeuille, mais de l'explication que Tristan en suggère à la reine. Marie entend nous redonner les mots même de Tristan: ces deux vers devaient être écrits quelque part. [78]

Clifford has a slightly different interpretation of this passage, arguing that '[t]he most likely explanation is that Iseut, on seeing the name of Tristan, will read into it the content of the "message" of lines 63-76, and that the remaining couplet is Tristan himself speaking aloud in his emotion at the interpretation he envisages'.[79] Spitzer also argues that Tristan's name was all that was on the twig and that it did not convey any instruction to the queen '*d'abord* le coudrier n'est qu'un moyen de communication, un signal […] mais, à mesure que la poésie progresse, il devient un symbole essentiellement poétique'.[80] Taking these critical viewpoints into account, it seems likely that a message had been sent to the queen previously, possibly via a letter, and this may have occurred prior to the previous occasions when they met in a similar way. This agrees with the representations of the way that a communication system is established during for the tryst beneath the tree episodes in Gottfried's and Eilhart's texts, in which Brangaene is used as a messenger. Therefore, the carving on the twig is not the longer message as given in the text of ll. 61-78, partly because it is a digest of one sent previously, but also because it could represent the queen's interpretation of the twig, as argued by Clifford. Moreover, given that the audience is told later in the *lai* that Tristan composed a *lai* about this experience, with the implication that this is possibly the *lai* that the audience is receiving, suggests that this could also be the interpretation that Tristan makes of the message he sent to the queen and is therefore in fact his own interpretation of the sign that he carved onto

[78] Foulet, p. 279.
[79] Clifford, p. 76.
[80] Spitzer pp.84- 86

the twig. This is consistent with the use of the twig and indeed of other visual signs in Tristan narratives more broadly. There are many examples of signs meaning more than they seem to mean on the surface in these narratives; the episodes discussed above provide only a small sample of such signs.

Comparing Marie's text with the works of Eilhart and Gottfried can influence an interpretation of the 'bastun'. Firstly, it is important to note that the narrator informs the audience that Tristan and the queen have met like this before. Sayers disagrees with this assessment, as:

> To make this declaration the object of some prior communication with the queen [...] is to deflate the *lai* to the prosaic and quotidian and, more importantly, would not authorize an equation between the hazel rod and *lai*, composed at Iseut's request 'pur les paroles remembrer.'[81]

However, this fails to take into account the way that the twigs are used in other examples of the Tristan story and, in particular, how this episode may be adapted by different writers. The idea that the lovers have met like this before is consistent with both of the German texts, in which the characters have already arranged to meet using twigs to communicate. This also makes it more plausible that only Tristan's name could have been carved on the twig. The queen could therefore have interpreted the content of ll. 61-78 from that sign based on the events of previous meetings. However, this does not necessarily mean that it was the long message that was carved on the twig. It is more likely that the carving is merely Tristan's name, partly because the text states that Tristan's name was carved on it (l. 54). In addition, Gottfried and Eilhart both provide examples of twigs having a greater meaning than the specific letters carved on them. Sayers'argument that the long message was carved on the twig but was a 'sume'in relation to Tristan's mental process makes an

[81] Sayers, 'Marie de France's Chievrefoil', p. 11.

interesting point. The carving is a 'sume'in relation to a message sent by Tristan previously, but it seems more likely that the longer message is also either the interpretation that the queen makes of the twig or the interpretation that Tristan makes of his own sign. A great deal of scholarship has focused on the way that *Chievrefueil* addresses the process of poetic communication. Hunt and Bromiley, for example, have argued that the *lai* 'is a distillation, a synecdoche, a *summe* of the whole Tristan story'.[82] That being the case, it seems reasonable to assume that this could be reflected within the *lai* itself. The twig is also a distillation of the whole Tristan story, particularly in the minds of the characters themselves, who have lived it. Tristan is rewriting his own story. Objects are able to carry emotions and memories and this is something that will be seen more clearly with the analysis of rings in these texts.[83] Moreover, in this instance the object (partially) provokes the creation of a *lai*, on which this *lai* is based. Machta's comparison of *Chievrefueil* with the *Folie Oxford* argues that the branch is transformed from a signal into a poetic image: 'Les signes conçus n'ont pas seulement pour vocation de garantir la possibilité d'une reconcontre, mais d'emblématiser l'expression du désir, d'où leur statut d'image poétique'.[84] A similar argument could be made when comparing *Chievrefueil* to the German texts. However, it is not merely a simple signal in Gottfried's and Eilhart's works either and the use of the term 'image poétique' is vague. It is important to note the presence of writing in this text. In *Chievrefueil* Tristan is a creator, both of a *lai* and of the 'bastun'and the latter is used by Marie de France to reflect on audience interpretation of works of art. This is why it seems

[82] Hunt and Bromiley, p. 128.
[83] See pp. 45-58.
[84] Machta, p. 67.

unlikely that the text on ll. 61-78 is carved on the ‘bastun’, not merely because it is implausible that so much text is present on so small an item, but because it fits thematically with the rest of the *lai* as a distillation of a larger story.

In all three of these texts, simple signals provoke multiple interpretations in different ways. Eilhart’s twigs are straightforward signals, although the possible presence of Ogam makes the interpretation of the twig at the tryst beneath the tree more complex. The meaning of the twig is defined by the interpretation given to Brangaene by Tristrant, rather than being based on possible wider societal meanings of the cross with five ends. By contrast, Gottfried highlights other significant elements of the twig which could add to the interpretation of it assigned by Brangaene but do not contradict that interpretation, such as the fact that the twig comes from an olive tree. The presence of the lovers’ initials on the twig, representing Tristan and Isolde themselves, both connects Tristan to the figure of the narrator, due to the similarities with the acrostic and the fact that these are symbols which can be read and have significance over and above that specifically assigned by the characters. Marie de France takes this even further, representing the twig as a distillation of the entire *lai* and thereby making Tristan into both a writer who has authority over his own material and an interpreter of his own sign.

Manipulation of univocal signs

Although univocal sign systems are apparently exempt from misunderstanding, this does not mean that deception does not occur when they are used. The episode of the ship with white sails that occurs at the end of the Tristan story provides another

example of a communication system which uses a univocal sign. This sign has been previously agreed between two people, in this case Tristan and his messenger. This episode is extant in Thomas' work (Douce, ll. 1094-1817; Sneyd 2, ll. 1-57) and Eilhart's (ll. 9461-9689). In both texts Tristan has been fatally wounded and Iseut/Isalde is the only person who can cure him. He has sent a messenger to her and has arranged a communication system with this messenger which will enable him to know from a (small) distance whether or not Isolde is coming to cure him. A ship with black sails means that she is not coming, a ship with white sails means that she is. Of course, Iseut/Isalde agrees to come to him and the ship returns with a white sail. However, Tristan is deceived because his wife tells him that the sail is black. There is no ambiguity present in the communication system itself. Had Tristan seen the sail for himself, there would have been no possibility for deception. The problem in both texts is that Tristan's wife has discovered the code; Eilhart's narrator does not know who has told her of it (ll. 9574-75), Thomas' Iseut eavesdrops on a conversation between Tristan and Kaherdin (Douce, ll. 1101-08). Thomas emphasises the fact that she has understood the situation exactly:

> Ysolt estoit suz la parei,
> Les diz Tristran escute e ot,
> Ben ad entendu chacun mot:
> Aparceüe est de l'amur. (Thomas, Douce, ll. 1338-41)

She has also noticed Tristan's love for another woman, possibly giving her a motive for revenge. Due to the fact that she is aware of the code, she can easily manipulate it and deceive Tristan as to the true colour of the sails. It is crucial that Tristan is unaware that his wife knows of the code. Rather than other episodes in the Tristan

texts, in which deception occurs via a complex manipulation of the polyvalence of certain signs, here this deception, engineered by a character who is not as adept or as creative as the lovers, is caused by a simple lie.

The sign system in the tryst beneath the tree episodes is manipulated differently. The discovery of the lovers by Marke comes about in Eilhart's work because:

> Die nider hettent aber ainen ra^{v}t,
> mit welcher listigen ta^{v}t
> sÿ die minn möchten brechen. (Eilhart ll. 3505-07)

They consult the dwarf, Kumpan, who reads in the stars that the lovers are together in the woods and leads Marke to them. By contrast, Gottfried's narrator states that the lovers have used this system successfully eight times in as many days without being seen (ll. 14502-07). However, one night the dwarf (Melot) sees Tristan with a woman, but cannot see who she is (ll. 14508-20). He correctly assumes that the woman is Isolde and he therefore sets a trap for Tristan to ensure that he meets with the woman and ensures that Marke will see them together. In order to do this, he lies to Tristan, claiming to have a verbal message from the queen:

> si bat mich unde gebôt mir,
> daz ich iuch gruozte von ir
> und daz von herzen taete
> und iuch vil verre baete,
> daz ir si noch gespraechet dâ,
> ine weiz, ir wizzet wol wâ,
> da ir nâhest bî ir wâret,
> und ouch vil rehte vâret
> der selben stunde unde der zît,
> als ir gewon ze komene sît. (Gottfried, ll. 14542-14552)

The lovers are not discovered due to the failure of their message system, rather due to Tristan's acceptance of a verbal message from Melot that was not genuine and did

not fit into their pre-established code.[85] However, this code had an in-built flaw; it allowed Isolde no means to contact Tristan, which enables Melot to deceive him so easily. Isolde could have sent Brangaene to Tristan, but that was not prearranged. All the contact in this particular episode must be instigated by Tristan himself. In both of these texts (Eilhart's and Gottfried's) the signification system did not fail. The agreements that were made regarding the meanings of certain signs, established between Brangaene, Tristan/Tristrant and Isolde/Isalde, were interpreted correctly. In Eilhart's text the system was outclassed by a more efficient one, where a dwarf was able to read the truth in the stars. In Gottfried's text, a verbal message from Melot which takes advantage of a flaw in this system allows him to deceive Tristan and get Marke to see him with the queen. However, the flaw in this system is not one of meaning or of understanding, but more one of mechanics. The system itself is flawed, rather than the meanings attached to specific objects.

Rings and seals

It has been seen how visual signs are used in communication systems, specifically as a means of communicating with other people at a distance through signs whose meanings have been clearly arranged beforehand by specific people. The above discussion focused on how meaning was given specifically to a sign by the characters, although other meanings can be present which were not specifically assigned. However, objects are also often used alongside messages and other verbal

[85] Tristan does not seem to trust Melot's message at first, strenuously denying that he has done anything wrong (Gottfried, ll. 14571-82). Nevertheless, he carries out the instructions in the message.

signs in order to prove that these messages are authoritative. This is particularly the case with rings. The use of rings and seals is important in all of the Tristan texts; rings are used in all of the texts under discussion here with the exception of *Chievrefueil*. Rings, like twigs, can be used as signals, but the meaning that they carry is that the message or messenger accompanying them has authority. Therefore, they are generally accompanied by another character conveying a message verbally. Clanchy indicates that messengers could be given finger rings 'which the recipient could recognize as belonging to the sender'.[86] Therefore this usage was present in medieval culture. However, in the Tristan texts this authorising function has also sometimes been specifically assigned to it by a character. Insaf Machta argues correctly that the ring is a sign because it is equivalent to a piece of information. Tristan's absence means this sign of recognition has to be used.[87] In addition to their authorising function, rings are used by some of the narrators of the Tristan texts as reminders for the characters. This is particularly the case in Thomas'work, in which a ring plays a significant role on Tristan's wedding night. Their use as signals is not merely to authenticate a message, but also to remind characters of particular events and those memories may then influence their subsequent actions. Although rings are a prominent feature of all of these texts, comparative critical literature on them is surprisingly limited. Much work has been published on the use of rings in the individual texts, but there are few comparative studies of their use.[88]

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[86] Clanchy, p. 245.
[87] Machta, p. 56
[88] Exceptions to this include Machta (pp. 53-65), who examined the rings in the French texts, Shigemi Sasaki, 'Anel et seel: de *Béroul* et du *Lancelot* au roman de *Tristan en prose*', in *Miscellenea Mediaevalia: Mélanges offerts à Philippe Ménard*, ed. by J. Claude Faucon, Alain Labbé et Danielle Quéruel, 2 vols (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1998), II, pp. 1203-12, and Brent A. Pitts, 'Commerce, Memory and Composition in the French Poems of Tristan', *Medieval Perspectives*, 4/5 (1989/90), 150-60 (pp. 152-55). Critics who tackle the significance of rings in the individual

The issue of authority was one which concerned the writers of these texts, as can be seen from the emphasis they place on the authority of their own works.[89] A rare example of a written document requiring authorisation in these texts is Ogrin's letter to Marc in Béroul's work which he writes in an attempt to bring about a reconciliation between the king and the lovers. This letter is accompanied by Ogrin's seal.

> Ogrins l'ermite lieve sus,
> Pene et enque et parchemin prist,
> Totes ces paroles i mist.
> Qant il out fait, prist un anel,
> La pierre passot el seel. (Béroul, ll. 2428-2432)

In relation to seals, Clanchy states that:

> To students of diplomatic today seals are a method of authenticating documents which preceded the sign manual or written signature. To medieval people they may have appeared rather as visible and tangible objects symbolizing the wishes of the donor. The seal was significant even without the document [...] Just as letters 'speak voicelessly the utterances of the absent', seals regulate that speech. Emphasis on the spoken word remained.[90]

The seal therefore does not necessarily prove the truth or falsehood of the content of the letter. Rather, it shows that Ogrin is placing his authority behind the letter. The seal is a sign, recognised by society, which indicates that this particular communication (a letter in this case) carries the authority of an individual with some social status. Therefore the seal signifies authority, rather than that a particular communication is necessarily true or false. Ogrin bends the truth in his letter to Marc, therefore, for Béroul, the link between authority and truth is destabilised. The authority which is placed behind a letter may then influence the interpretation of the

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texts include Tracy Adams, 'Archetypes and Copies in Thomas's *Tristan*: A Re-examination of the "Salle aux Images" Scenes', *Romanic Review*, 90 (1999), 317-32 (pp. 322-23), Adams, '"Pur vostre cor"', p. 282, Blakeslee, p. 75, p. 102, and Chinca, *Gottfried von Strassburg*, p. 28.

[89] See Chapter Three (pp. 168-200) for a full discussion of sources and authority for these texts.

[90] Clanchy, pp. 207-208.

letter itself.

Rings are used more frequently with oral messages in Tristan narratives and their meaning varies depending on the context in which they are used. They can give authority to a messenger who is sent from one character to another, act as a sign of the identity of a particular character, and they can also remind characters of past events, sometimes provoking an emotional reaction. Sasaki argues that:

> Un objet tel que le sceau d'ailleurs interfère ici, dans une large mesure avec la réalité du temps. Dès Béroul, en effet, le passage s'effectue du message verbal à la communication écrite; entre les amants, toutefois, s'établit une convention, étant donné que l'anneau de la jaspe remis à Tristan est un anneau sigillaire mais qui ne suppose pas l'échange de lettres.[91]

The message that is sent is a verbal message with linguistic signs (i.e. transmitted orally), but the ring is also a sign as it signifies that Tristan is the source of the message, and is therefore equivalent to a piece of information. Machta also argues that the ring in Béroul's work is a token of identity and veracity.[92] When Béroul's protagonists are parted after their stay in the forest, they exchange Husdent (from Tristan to Iseut) and a ring (from Iseut to Tristan). The ring has a communicative function; if a messenger arrives claiming to be from Tristan but without the ring, she should not believe him, but if a messenger arrives with the ring, she will do anything asked of her (Béroul, ll. 2695-2724). The ring here is used to prove the veracity or authority of the verbal message: 'Certes, je n'en croiroie rien, / Se cest anel, sire, ne voi' (ll. 2714-15). Pensom discusses the exchange of Husdent and the ring in Béroul's work and argues that 'Tristran gives himself metaphorically and indexically to Iseut in Husdent and Iseut gives herself to Tristran metonymically and iconically

[91] Sasaki, p. 1211.
[92] Machta, p. 56.

in the ring'.[93] Pensom thereby suggests that the ring and the dog represent Tristan and Iseut. Machta describes this scene as a ritualised separation, the dog and the ring function almost as substitutes but the ring also authenticates the message.[94] Machta's assessment of the significance of the ring in this text is valid, but it is also important to note that this has been arranged beforehand between Tristan and Iseut. While Clanchy's point makes clear that rings were used in this way in society in general, the lovers in this text have decided and explicitly stated that if Iseut does not see the ring she will not believe the messenger.

Eilhart's Tristrant uses rings when sending messengers to Isalde when they are separated, as proof that these messages are genuinely from him. The ring is often referred to as a 'waᵛrzaichen' (l. 6597). The first instance of this occurs when Tristrant returns to court for the second time with Kehenis, after having married Kehenis'sister. Tristrant gives the ring to Tinas and tells him to convey a message (orally) to Isalde, using the ring as a 'waᵛrzeichen'. Eilhart's narrator provides an extensive description of how Tinas enables Isalde to see the ring whilst playing a game:

> do graiff er uff daß bret so vil hin
> und dicker dann er solt,
> dar umb daß dú kúngin wolt
> deß fingerlinß werden gewar
> so sach dú kúngin dar
> und erkant daß fingerlin.
> do muᵒst daß spil ain end sin. (Eilhart, ll. 6608-14)

She recognises the ring and the game ends. She knows that this must mean that Tinas has a message from Tristrant. On speaking with Isalde, Tinas explains that Tristrant wants to meet with her. She asks when, and he says 'daß fingerlin gab er mir' (l.

[93] Pensom, p. 75.
[94] Machta, pp. 54- 55.

6627), before going on to tell her the details of the message. The ring does not merely identify Tinas as Tristrant's messenger, rather the fact that it is mentioned after he has been accepted by Isalde emphasises its importance in authenticating his message. It is striking that the narrator does not relate the details of Tristrant's message here, he merely says 'und sagt die botschafft ir, / so er ir embotten hett do' (ll. 6628-9). This is in contrast to other versions of the Tristan story, in which messages are repeated. This indicates that Eilhart is less concerned with the practice of renarration than the other writers, particularly Béroul. He still sees the importance of providing authority for messages, but does not provide the narration to be authorised. Rings are commonly used to convince Isalde to trust messengers sent to her by Tristrant in Eilhart's work. On another instance of returning to see Isalde, Tristrant sends a man he trusts as a messenger to her, with the ring 'daß sú gelob da by' (l. 7756). Similarly, Tristrant institutes the ring as a particular signal between himself and Isalde on the last occasion that he sees her before he dies. Previous instances in this text have depicted Isalde merely recognising a ring that once belonged to Tristrant, but here he tells her when they are about to be separated that if he sends a messenger with the ring, she should do whatever is asked of her

> wann dir der bott min
> daß fingerlin bring,
> so tu^{o} gar häling
> weß ich dich dann wil bitten laussen. (Eilhart, ll. 9212-15)

He does not state that she should believe the messenger, although it can be assumed that that is implied. Rather, here there is a more specific meaning attached to the ring. In this case, the ring functions as a signal, conveying an instruction to Isalde. On seeing the ring when summoned to cure Tristrant, Isalde leaves immediately, as she is requested. The ring is here described as a 'wortzaichen' (l. 9525), which can be

defined as a sign which takes the place of words. It is not merely proof of the authority of the message, it also conveys a command in itself, and is itself a signal.

The use of the ring in the episodes depicting Tristan's feigned folly is more complex. In a way, the ring does authenticate the fool's speech, but it does this by acting as a sign of Tristan's identity.[95] This occurs in Eilhart's text when Tristrant is disguised as a fool in order to see Isalde, an episode that is also depicted in the two *Folies Tristan*. While in the shorter texts the narrative focuses on Tristan as a narrator of his own past, Eilhart's version of this episode is not concerned with narrating their past lives. Rather, the narrator tells the audience that Tristrant relates something to Isalde, but does not provide that narration. This is similar to the episode discussed above, in which the narrator does not provide Tinas'message which is authorised by the ring. This lack of narration of Tristrant's actual words emphasises the object accompanying the narration. It is the ring that identifies Tristrant: 'do erkant sü in ze hant / und ward innencklichen frow' (ll. 9148-49). By contrast, in the two *Folies*, which depict this scene in very different ways, this identification is more complex. In the *Folie Berne* the ring helps to validate Tristan's narrative. Combined with the welcome given to him by Husdent, the sight of the ring leads Iseut to accept that the fool is really Tristan:

> Ysiaut conut bien l'anelet
> Et vit la joie del brechet
> Que il fait, a po ne s'anrage.
> Or s'aparçoit en son corage,
> C'est Tritans a cui el parole (*Folie Berne*, ll. 550-54)

The ring plays a part in confirming the authority of Tristan's narration and therefore of his identity. By contrast, in the *Folie Oxford*, Iseut refuses to believe that the ring

[95] The way the ring acts as an authority for the Fool's narrative will be explored further in Chapter Four (pp. 250-54).

authenticates the fool's speech. However in this instance Tristan inserts the ring into his narrative. He reminds her of when they separated and she gave him the ring, and then he produces the ring. He narrates an event from their past and provides an object from it, but Iseut still refuses to believe him. She believes that this means that Tristan must be dead:

> En fin ai perdu mun ami,
> Kar ço sai je ben, s'il vif fust,
> Ke autre hume cest anel n'eüst.
> Mais or sai jo ben k'il es mort.
> Lasse! ja meis n'avrai confort. (*Folie Oxford*, ll. 964-68)

In this text, Tristan is disguising his voice, and it is only when he speaks with his normal voice that she accepts that he is Tristan. This is the only Tristan text that suggests the possibility of deception using the ring. There could be two reasons for this. Firstly, it could suggest that there is anxiety about the use of objects to convey authority in such a way, as they could fairly easily be stolen. Secondly, it is important to note the context of the *Folie Oxford*. As will be seen in Chapter Four, the *Folie Oxford* is specifically concerned with fictionality, renarration and authority and it is this gap caused by uncertainty surrounding authority that enables fiction to develop.[96]

Chinca states that for Béroul and Eilhart the ring is a proof of identity, whereas 'Thomas and Gottfried invest this ring with the symbolism of an "anulus fidei"'.[97] Although the significance of the ring is more complex in Béroul's and Eilhart's works than Chinca suggests, this is still a useful distinction to make. Machta argues that signs in Thomas'work, particularly the ring, are about remembering.[98]

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[96] See pp. 242-54.
[97] Chinca, *Gottfried von Strassburg*, p. 28.
[98] Machta, p. 57.

This is similar to the *Folie Oxford*, but the ring has a greater function in Thomas'text. In Thomas' work, Iseut gives a ring to Tristan just before they are separated at the end of the Cambridge manuscript: 'Nequedent cest anel pernés: / Por m'amor, amis, le gardés' (ll. 52-3). The audience has therefore witnessed the exchange of the ring. The ring is explicitly connected with the idea of loving Iseut; Grigoriu sees this as an attempt by her to ensure that love will never leave.[99] This is particularly significant given that the ring later prevents Tristan from consummating his marriage to Iseut as Blanches Mains.

Towards the end of the narrative, the ring is used to accompany a message that Kaherdin takes from Tristan to Iseut to tell her that Tristan is dying. Kaherdin subtly shows the ring to her and it is when she sees it that she immediately recognises him:

> Cum la reïne l'anel veit,
> De Kaherdin tost s'aperceit;
> Li quers li change e la colur
> E suspire de grant dolur. (Thomas, Douce, ll. 1425-28)

This is similar to Eilhart's work. The ring is both a signal and a sign of someone's identity. The ring is necessary to make Iseut aware of the fact that she is speaking to Kaherdin. Prior to this she does not realise who he is. Iseut reacts emotionally to this realisation and contrives to meet with Kaherdin alone. He then gives her a long message, from Tristan, which includes reminders of their life together, and asks Iseut to return with him as Tristan is dying (ll. 1437-88). Similarly to the *Folie Oxford*, Kaherdin anchors the object into a particular part of their past by narrating how Tristan came to have the ring. It is a specific ring with a specific history:

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[99] Brindusa Grigoriu, 'Origines et originalité: les voiles noires du Tristan en prose', in *Original et Originalité: Aspects historiques, philologiques et littéraires*, ed. by Olivier Delsaux et Hélène Haug ([Louvain-la-Neuve?]: Presses universitaires de Louvain, 2011), pp. 69-80 (p. 76).

Del covenant vus deit membrer
Qu'entre vus fud al desevrer
Einz el jardin u le baisastes,
Quant vus cest anel li dunastes:
Pramistes li vostre amisté;
Aiez, dame, de li pité! (Thomas, Douce, ll. 1475-80)

Kaherdin associates the ring here with the promise that Iseut made to Tristan (of her 'amisté'). As such, the ring is not merely an identifying marker, indicating to Iseut that Kaherdin's message is genuine, it is also a sign of the promise she has made to Tristan previously. By anchoring the ring in a specific part of their past, it reminds her of previous, important events that would have a bearing on her current actions. The ring authenticates the message, but it has the added significance of being a love token as well, rather than just a signal.

Discussing the role of pictures and memory, Carruthers observes that 'signs make something present to the mind by acting on memory. Just as letters, *litterae*, make present the voices (*voces*) and ideas (*res*) of those who are not in fact present, so pictures serve as present signs or cues of those same *voces* and *res*'.[100] She states in *The Book of Memory* in relation to Aristotle that memory images are 'sensorily derived and emotionally charged'.[101] In addition, she argues in *The Craft of Thought* that there are two elements to memory images: *similitudo* and *intentio*, defining *intentio* as referring to 'the attitudes, aims and inclinations of the person remembering […] if *intentio* is part of every memory image [...] then rekindling that sort of *intentio* will enable us to start finding those memories again'.[102] The same

[100] Mary J. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature, 10 ([Cambridge]: Cambridge University Press, 1990; repr. 1992), p. 222.
[101] Ibid., p. 59.
[102] Carruthers, Mary, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric and the Making of Images, 400-1200*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature, 33 ([Cambridge]: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 14-16.

ideas can be applied to objects as visual cues for memory. In Thomas' text, the ring provides the catalyst for Tristan's unwillingness to consummate his marriage to Iseut as Blanches Mains.

> Tristran reugarde, veit l'anel
> E entre en sun pensé novel;
> Le penser est grant anguisse
> Qu'il ne set que faire poïsse. (Thomas, Sneyd 1, ll. 396-399)

The narrative goes on to state that he repents of his marriage because he saw the ring, and that

> Membre lui de la covenance
> Qu'il li fist a la sevrance
> Enz el jardin, al departir... (Thomas, Sneyd 1, ll. 408-10)

Much critical literature has been published on the significance of the ring in this episode. Adams argues that 'His remembered desire for the real Iseut destroys the desire his body would normally feel'.[103] Blakeslee takes this a step further:

> Arousal is followed by impotence, triggered by the ring that falls from his finger, reminding him of Iseut. It is as though the curative power afforded him by the love of Iseut, who, he will claim, healed him of the wound inflicted by Le Morholt, has, with the loss of the ring, been lifted, allowing the effects of an old wound to rob him of his potency.[104]

He also indicates that a modern reader would possibly attribute Tristan's decision here to feelings of guilt.[105] In the other examples of rings in the Tristan texts the rings are used communicatively. Here it is a reminder both of an event and promises made and is attached to the past in a highly emotive way. While Tristan presumably does suffer guilt, it is more likely that it is the physical reminder of the promises he made to Iseut that prevent him from betraying her with his wife, and it is the ring that triggers these reminders. Machta argues that the ring reminds him of their constant

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[103] Adams, '"Pur vostre cor..."', p. 281.
[104] Blakeslee, p. 102
[105] Ibid., p. 75

link.[106] The ring falling from his finger (Thomas, Sneyd 1, ll. 393-95) indicates his intended infidelity, and is similar to the ease with which Marc's ring is removed from Iseut's finger in Béroul's depiction of the lovers in the forest, suggesting Iseut's infidelity (Béroul, ll. 2043-47).

Carruthers' ideas can also be applied to Gottfried's work, and can be seen in the episode of Tristan and Isolde's separation. Isolde gives the ring to him with a specific purpose:

> und nemet hie diz vingerlîn.
> daz lât ein urkünde sîn
> der triuwen unde der minne. (Gottfried, ll. 18307-09)

It is an 'urkünde'of her love. It is not merely a reminder, but a witness of their love. As the ring witnessed their love, it therefore carries authority, proving that their love exists. She goes on to state specifically that, if he decides to love another, the ring will be a reminder:

> ob ir dekeine sinne
> iemer dâ zuo gewinnet,
> daz ir âne mich iht minnet,
> daz ir gedenket derbî,
> wie mînem herzen iezuo sî.
> gedenket an diz scheiden,
> wie nâhen ez uns beiden
> ze herzen und ze lîbe lît. (Gottfried, ll. 18310-17)

Isolde attaches this as a message to the ring, that Tristan should not love anyone else. It is not merely a ring, nor is it merely a ring that carries authority, but it also conveys an instruction. This is similar to Tristan's reaction to the ring on the wedding night in Thomas'work.

Gottfried's *Tristan* provides another example of a ring being used in conjunction with a narrative, but its role is not merely related to establishing the truth

[106] Machta, p. 59.

or falsehood of any particular assertion. Rual uses a ring during his revelation of Tristan's parentage to Marke (ll. 4121-4332). In this episode, Rual tells the story of Tristan's birth and the death of his parents. When Marke asks whether the story is true, Rual presents him with a ring that belonged to Blanscheflur. The audience learns that Marke gave this ring to Blanscheflur after Marke received it from his father on his deathbed. The ring is proof of the truth of Rual's story, and is therefore also proof of Tristan's narration. However, this is not necessarily how it is presented by Rual. When Marke asks 'ist diser reder alsô?' (l. 4285), Rual's response is to give him the ring and to say 'sît gemant / mîner rede und mîner maere' (ll. 4288-89). He does not assert that his narration is true, but tells him to remember the story. The ring is therefore connected by Rual to a specific piece of information, Tristan's parentage and therefore Tristan's relationship to Marke. Marke reacts to the ring with grief:

> Marke der nam ez und sach ez an.
> der jâmer, den er dô gewan,
> der wart aber dô vester. (Gottfried, ll. 4291-93)

After telling of how the ring belonged to his sister and was given to him on his father's deathbed he states 'disem maere ich wol gelouben mac' (l. 4298). Therefore, for Marke the ring is associated with his father's death. The ring could be seen as reasonable proof of Rual's story, partly because it is an artefact connected with that story, but also due to the way that rings are used in literature from this period to provide authority for a messenger. However, in this episode the ring gains an extra significance. In Thomas'work, for example, the ring is explicitly connected to Tristan and Iseut's separation and therefore provokes emotional reactions in certain characters. However, this was a connection that was explicitly made by the lovers themselves. By contrast, in this episode Marke's memory of the ring is not one that

has been prearranged by Rual. It has extra significance that Rual, the creator of the sign, may not have foreseen. It is moreover striking that rather than state that his story is true when questioned on whether or not he should believe, Rual instead exhorts Marke to remember. The ring has an emotional link to Marke's memories. In this episode, the presence of the ring is not merely to convey authority to a message. In this case, as also seen with Isolde's ring, it acts as a memory sign, triggering emotions that have not been prearranged.

The above discussion has shown that interpretation is complex, even when signs have been arranged between characters beforehand. The visual signs used when characters attempt to communicate with each other can have two functions, that of transmitting information and of authenticating a verbal message. A comparative study of twigs in these texts enables the exploration of different medieval attitudes to reading and interpretation, particularly the interpretation of artistic works. Both Gottfried and Marie show how these twigs are more than mere signals, Gottfried by highlighting other meanings attached to the twig such as the fact that it comes from an olive tree, and Marie by connecting the twig so closely to Tristan's artistic creation. Gottfried and Marie also both connect Tristan to the narrator figure. In addition, the rings show how objects can carry memories and emotions that then influence the way the characters behave and how they interpret certain signs. The rings are used to authenticate messages and messengers, but are also interpreted by some of the characters based on events from their past with which the rings are connected, particularly in Thomas'and Gottfried's works. These interpretations may or may not have been arranged beforehand. The interpretation of objects whose meaning has not been previously arranged can also be seen in situations where the

characters are attempting to deduce the truth or otherwise of a particular version of events.

Deduction

The importance of interpreting signs is widely acknowledged by critics as a crucial element of the Tristan story.[107] Given the subject-matter of the plot, deception is a key feature of many episodes and the lovers in particular are adept at manipulating the ambiguity of signs in order to deceive Mark. The use of twigs as a communication system between the two lovers is a rare example in the Tristan texts of a univocal sign system, which is nevertheless open to poetic creation. By contrast, this section will focus on those episodes where characters are required to deduce something about a particular version of events, generally relating to its truth or falsehood. In Béroul's text in particular, these episodes provide much of the substance and tension of the narrative, but they are also a prominent feature of Gottfried's and Eilhart's works. Umberto Eco states that clues are seldom coded: 'their interpretation is frequently a matter of complex inference rather than of sign-function recognition, which makes criminal novels more interesting than the detection of pneumonia'. [108] This complex inference is evident in certain episodes of the Tristan legend, in which some of the narrators clearly describe the characters'processes of interpretation. This section will examine how the characters attempt to determine a version of the truth based on visual evidence, focusing on how

[107] Regarding Béroul's work, see Hunt and Bromiley, p. 114. Examples of the discussion on the interpretation of signs in Gottfried's work includeJames W. Hutchinson, 'Some Preliminary Hypotheses on the Semiotic microcosm of Gottfried's *Tristan*', *Semiotica*, 20:1/2 (1977), 39-48, and Kaminski.

[108] Eco, p. 224.

they determine truth based on items left at a particular scene and how this leads them to deduce a potential version of events which corresponds with the visual clues present. This will lead into a discussion of the use of visual evidence in judicial settings, focusing on how or whether it proves or disproves the truth of a particular version of events.

Investigation

For Eco 'the interpretation by an interpreter, which would seem to characterize a sign, must be understood as the *possible* interpretation by a *possible* interpreter'.[109] The fact that there are multiple interpretations of individual signs (verbal and visual) is a key feature of the Tristan texts, particularly, but not exclusively, in episodes where characters are trying to deceive others. The episode of the lovers'exile in the forest, which features in Béroul's, Gottfried's and Eilhart's works, is an example of how the same sign can be interpreted in very different ways. This scene has attracted a great deal of critical attention, particularly for Béroul, where discussions have focused on the meaning of the glove, ring and sword, and Gottfried, where scholarship has focused largely on the significance of the *minnegrotte*.[110] Eilhart has attracted less critical attention. There are also a small number of comparative studies regarding this scene.[111] In all three of these texts, Mark discovers the lovers asleep in

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[109] Eco, p. 16.

[110] Some examples of scholarship on this episode for Béroul's text include Burns, 'How Lovers Lie', p. 86, Pensom, pp. 43-64, and Diana B. Tyson, 'Some Thoughts on the Character of King Mark in Béroul's *Tristran*', *Annuale Medievale*, 20 (1980), 67-75. Examples of Gottfried scholarship on this episode include Christopher R. Clason, 'Deception in the Boudoir: Gottfried's *Tristan* and "Lying" in Bed', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 103 (2004), 277-96 (pp. 290-96), Jackson, *Anatomy of Love*, pp. 125-27, and Wandhoff.

[111] E.g. William D. Cole, 'Purgatory vs. Eden: Béroul's Forest and Gottfried's Cave', *Germanic*

the forest, after they have been exiled from court, and interprets the tableau that he sees. Depending on the text, this tableau can include the location of the lovers, the position of their bodies and any objects present at the scene, such as a sword placed between their bodies. The focus of this analysis will be those objects which are regarded as significant by the characters at the scene and are interpreted by them, leading to conclusions regarding how interpretation functions in the different texts and for different characters.

Eilhart describes the difficulties of Tristrant and Isalde's life in the forest (ll. 4685-4782), focusing particularly on how little they have to eat. He often emphasises that his statements are true, as if he is aware that his narration is at this point implausible:

> ich sag úch fúr wa^{v}r,
> daß die gu^{o}tten lút
> nicht aussen wen krut,
> daß sie in dem wald funden,
> wa^{v} sie daß su^{o}chen kunden:
> daß waß ir beste spÿß (Eilhart, ll. 4724-29)

Eilhart's description of their lives in exile shows that their lives are difficult but Tristrant and Isalde are happy:

> er het ain leben hert
> in dem wilden wald,
> beide er und die schön Ysald.
> ouch waß daß ain kindß spil,
> sie hetten ouch fro^{v}den vil
> von der gro^{v}ssen minn. (Eilhart, ll. 4744-49)

For Eilhart's protagonists, it is their custom to place the naked sword between them when they sleep. There is no explanation given as to why they do this, but the narrator states that it saved them:

Review, 70 (1995), 2-8.

do waß herr Trÿstrantß sitt,
deß volgt im die frow mit:
wann sie sich gelegten
und mit ain ander retten,
daß eß geducht genuᵒg so,
sin swert er uß zoch jo
und legt eß zwischen sich und sie;
daß wolt der held nie
durch kain ding gelaussen:
wann sie solten schlauffen,
daß schwert so lag zwúschen in.
daß waß ain fremder manneß sin
und kam in doch ze hail so. (Eilhart, ll. 4783-95)

This is a clear indication for the narrator that the position of the sword influences Marke's interpretation of the scene. The huntsman finds them initially and fetches Marke. The huntsman does not recognise Tristrant until he recognises his sword (ll. 4802-06). This is similar to the use of the ring, as the huntsman does not recognise Tristrant until the physical object prompts him to do so. Regarding Marke's interpretation of the scene, Chocheyras notes that no commentary is made on the sword but that Marke knows immediately what to do.[112] By contrast Mark's interpretative process is described to varying degrees in both Béroul's and Gottfried's work, suggesting that Eilhart is more interested in discussing actions than in discussing interpretation. Eilhart's narrator merely tells the audience of Marke's subsequent actions, including swapping Tristrant's sword for his own (ll. 4819-39). Again, similarly to the ring and as seen with the huntsman's reaction to the sword, objects stand in for people. Marke also places a glove on Isalde but, once again, no explanation is given as to why (ll. 4840-45). By contrast, Tristrant's interpretation of the signs left for him by Marke is described in more detail (ll. 4851-82). Tristrant asks Isalde where the glove has come from and she is scared as she does not know

[112] Jacques Chocheyras, *Tristan et Iseut*, p. 239.

(ll. 4851-59), but Tristrant thinks that the presence of Marke's sword indicates that Marke has been there and is nearby. In addition, he believes that death is certain for them unless they can rely on Marke's courtesy and Marke has shown himself to be courtly as he did not kill them when they were sleeping. This is in direct contrast to the interpretation the lovers make of these signs in both Gottfried's and Béroul's works (see below). Moreover, whereas Gottfried's and Béroul's narrators explain Mark's thought processes in more detail to the extradiegetical audience, Eilhart leaves the interpretation of Mark's behaviour to both the intra- and the extradiegetical audiences, placing the extradiegetical audience in the same position as Tristrant and Isalde themselves.

The tableau that Béroul's Marc interprets when he sees the lovers is more carefully described. Five elements of this scene are mentioned specifically; the fact that Iseut is wearing a 'chemise', there is a space between Tristan and Iseut, their mouths are not touching, there is a naked sword between them, and Tristan is still wearing his 'braies' (ll. 1995-2000). These visual signs, which indicate that the lovers are neither kissing nor naked, are enough to convince Marc to doubt what he should do next (ll. 2001-04). Marc decides quickly that he wants to show his pity to the lovers and leaves them signs which he thinks will indicate this:

> Je lor ferai tel demostrance
> Ançois que il s'esvelleront,
> Certainement savoir porront
> Qu'il furent endormi trové
> Et q'en a eü d'eus pité,
> Que je nes vuel noient ocire,
> Ne moi ne gent de mon enpire. (Béroul, ll. 2020-26)

His intent is to inform them that they were found sleeping, he had pity on them and he does not want to kill them, thereby explaining the interpretation he wants Tristan

and Iseut to make of the signs that he leaves for them. The narrator describes Marc's thought processes on viewing this scene, as the king states that if they were lovers he would have expected them to be naked, positioned differently and that there would not have been a sword between them. As Chocheyras notes, there is more commentary in Béroul's text than in Eilhart's.[113] Béroul's Marc leaves three items at this scene, a sword, a ring and a glove. He sees Iseut wearing an emerald ring that he gave to her and exchanges it for one of his own. He uses a glove that she gave him, originally from Ireland, to shield her from the ray of sunlight, and on leaving the 'loge' he exchanges the sword lying between them, which he recognises as the one which killed the Morholt, for his own sword (ll. 2027-50).

Similar to Eilhart, Béroul's protagonists have not deliberately set up the scene beforehand (ll. 1804-30). The narrator emphasises several points in his description of this scene including the fact that Iseut is not naked, emphasising that if she had been 'Mervelles lor fust meschoiet' (l. 1809), which is similar to Eilhart's narrator's statement about the sword. Béroul's narrator also notes that the ring she is wearing is one given to her by Marc, her finger is very thin, Tristan and Iseut's affection is evident and there is a space between them. By contrast with Eilhart's version, the huntsman recognises Tristan and Iseut but the text does not state that this recognition is brought about by him recognising Tristan's sword. Marc's interpretation of this scene has attracted a great deal of critical attention. Hunt and Bromiley discuss Mark's process of interpretation:

> Mark reasons from his observation of the lovers with almost forensic logic. The only sign of emotion comes in an assertion by him that he has taken pity on the lovers (2024), not through any depicted experience. The central irony is obvious: on the one occasion that Mark seeks to behave dispassionately, to

[113] Chocheyras, *Tristan et Iseut*, p. 239.

be ruled by his head rather than by his heart, he gets everything wrong.[114]

However, Marc does not necessarily get everything wrong, rather he merely interprets the signs differently to how Tristan, Iseut and scholars have done. Other critics have discussed in more detail possible interpretations of the items present at this scene. Noble argues that Marc 'suddenly sees the naked sword between the lovers and instantly recognising the symbol of chastity (although the sword had been put there by Tristan for quite other reasons) is struck with doubt'. He also notes that Marc wants to believe them innocent.[115] Pensom claims that the sword is a condensation of 'traces of meaning from every corner of the story: the conflict between the erotic and the social, the conundrum of the relationship between the sacred and the secular, the triple identity of Mark as Tristran's lord, blood-kinsman, and sexual rival, the duality of being and Meaning'.[116] Sargent-Baur also provides an analysis of the sword and argues that 'The absence of amorous words, acts, or attitudes is for him [Marc] a proof of innocence'.[117] Chocheyras sees the sword as a symbol of chastity:

> la signification du symbole de l'épée nue est devenue claire pour tout le monde: l'épée nue est un symbole non seulement phallique, mais ithyphallique. C'est un symbole de chasteté parce que l'épée est dressée, la poignée sans doute du côté de Marc, mais non dans son fourreau [...] Mais ce symbole n'a pas forcément été compris par ceux-là qui l'utilisaient.'[118]

These are valuable interpretations from the point of view of Béroul's work as a whole and they represent just some of the critical perspectives on this episode. However, they mingle Marc's interpretations with those that might be reached by an

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[114] Hunt and Bromiley, p. 115.
[115] Noble, p. 38.
[116] Pensom, p. 58.
[117] Barbara N. Sargent-Baur, 'Truth, Half-truth, Untruth: Béroul's Telling of the Tristan Story', in *The Craft of Fiction: Essays in Medieval Poetics*, ed. by Leigh A. Arrathoon (Rochester: Michigan, Solaris Press, 1984), pp. 393-421 (p. 404).
[118] Chocheyras, *Tristan et Iseut*, p. 240.

extradiegetical audience and it is therefore important to analyse Marc's interpretation in more detail. Firstly, Marc's personality influences the way he interprets particular signs. This was noted by Diana Tyson, in an analysis of the character of Marc. He has a 'psychological need to trust them. And trust easily becomes gullibility […] it does not occur to Mark that the naked sword may not mean innocence'.[119] Secondly, these are specific items from his past which have certain memories attached to them. This is in contrast to Eilhart's version; the items in Béroul's text are not merely substitutes for a character but they are reminders of Marc's relationship with Iseut. The ring was one which Marc gave Iseut in the past and he specifically notes that the sword was the one which killed the Morholt. It therefore functions as a visual reminder of the services that Tristan has performed for him in the past. Thirdly, these items gain meaning based on the context in which they have been found. The sword, for example, is not necessarily a symbol of chastity, but has gained that meaning due to its position in this scene. The fact that the sword is between them as well as the fact that they are not naked highlight the fact that the lovers are not currently engaging in sexual intercourse. Marc therefore interprets this incorrectly as indicating that they are chaste, but this does not mean that the sword itself is a symbol of chastity.

Although Marc has clear ideas about the meanings of the signs that he leaves for Tristan and Iseut in the forest (his sword, his ring, his glove), they do not interpret them in the way that he intended; they do not see this 'demostrance'as indicating his 'pité'. Firstly, Iseut deduces that Marc has been there as she recognises his ring and Tristan recognises his sword (ll. 2077-88). Tristan concludes that they must leave as

[119] Tyson, p. 69.

they are guilty in Marc's eyes and he believes that Marc has gone to fetch reinforcements (ll. 2089-2100). He is so confident in this interpretation that he informs Governal that this is what has happened (ll. 2105-21). It is possible that their reaction to these signs is due to the fact that they are physical objects with specific histories from their own past, although this is not explicitly stated in the text. Pensom argues that the presence of the sword and the ring are what provoke the confession of guilt from Tristan: 'Thus there appears at the surface of the text the message encoded in the sundering sword: that the internalized paternal law is reasserting itself within Tristran against the force of passion'.[120] This, combined with the diminishing effects of the love potion, could explain their swift return to society. However, their predominant reaction to these signs is fear. This may be due to the fact that Iseut has woken after a dream which made her cry aloud, and also the fact that Marc's glove falls onto her chest may have contributed to her fear. Pensom argues that the dream and the glove falling occurred simultaneously. In discussing the lovers' interpretation of this scene, Noble states 'It is not his [Marc's] fault that the lovers misinterpret his gesture, Iseut waking in terror from her nightmare when the gloves, so thoughtfully left to shield her face, fall on her breast. Her fear communicates itself to Tristan and remembering their previous experience of Mark, they conclude that he has gone for help'.[121] They deduce, correctly, that Marc has discovered them, but believe that he must have returned to fetch reinforcements, and that he is still hostile towards them. Their knowledge of his past behaviour is enough to interpret Marc's current behaviour as hostile. Hunt and Bromiley argue that 'This double misunderstanding at a key moment in the poem seems to establish incontestably that the interpretation of

[120] Pensom, p. 64.
[121] Noble, pp. 38-9.

signs is a central concern of the work'.[122] This misunderstanding on the part of both Marc and the lovers is due to other factors, such as their emotions, their memories, other associations that objects may have, the expectations of those viewing the scene (e.g. Marc expects to see something more explicit) and the context in which the objects are located. The interpretation of signs is a key feature of Béroul's work, but this episode shows more than that. Two sets of signs are created by different people. Firstly, Tristan and Iseut set up the tableau (although not intentionally) that Marc interprets when he finds them. They are guilty, but he sees innocence. Secondly, Marc leaves certain signs for them when they awake to indicate his pity, but they see hostility. The same signs are being interpreted in completely different ways by different characters. The creator of a sign is unable to control its interpretation. Previous critics have largely focused on how to interpret specific signs in this episode, but the key point to note from Béroul's depiction of their life in the forest is how interpretation functions. No clear message is attached to the sword but a sword can mean many things in medieval society, therefore interpreting it is difficult. Rather than specifying any particular interpretation for the sword, the narrator leaves its meaning open, provoking discussion about its interpretation among his characters, but also among his extradiegetical audience, as is seen by the vast number of critical works which attempt to determine the meaning of these objects. Eilhart does not describe Marke's intention in leaving these signs and therefore leaves their interpretation to the audience to determine, both the intradiegetical audience (Tristrant and Isalde) and the extradiegetical audience. Béroul takes this a step further. By specifying different interpretations of the same sign, he is not necessarily

[122] Hunt and Bromiley, p. 115.

highlighting Marc's ineptitude with regard to interpretation. Rather, he is provoking discussion about how interpretation functions.

Gottfried's *minnegrotte* has attracted a great deal of critical attention.[123] Rather than assessing the meaning of the *minnegrotte* as a structure, this section will focus on Marke's interpretation of the scene he views, as well as the lovers' interpretation of the way Marke modifies that scene. The set-up of the scene differs from both Eilhart and Béroul in that they deliberately arrange it. Tristan and Isolde lie down:

> reht alse man unde man,
> niht alse man unde wîp.
> dâ lac lîp unde lîp
> in vremeder gelegenheit. (Gottfried, ll. 17408-11)

Tristan also places the naked sword between them deliberately, but without telling anyone what interpretation he intends Marke to make of this object, although the narrator does emphasise that Tristan and Isolde are separated by it (ll. 17412-16). Marke's interpretation of this scene is similar to Béroul's Marc's. He sees them lying on the bed, but facing in opposite directions and with the sword between them. Neither a glove nor a ring are mentioned in Gottfried's version. He recognises Tristan and Isolde and has a very strong emotional reaction to this of mingled pain and joy (ll. 17498-99). He is happy because he believes they have not deceived him and sad because he ever doubted them (ll. 17513-15). Gottfried's narrator relates a lengthy monologue during which Marke describes his doubt about whether or not they are guilty. Similar to Béroul's Marc, he has expectations about how they would be

[123] Some examples of critical works which address Gottfried's *minnegrotte* include Dominique Battles, 'The Literary Source of the *Minnegrotte* in Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan*', *Neophilologus*, 93 (2009), 465-69, Clason 'Deception in the Boudoir', pp. 290-95, Huber, *Gottfried von Straßburg*, pp. 113-28, James F. Poag, 'Lying Truth in Gottfried's *Tristan*', *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 61 (1987), 223-37 (pp. 231-21), and Wandhoff.

positioned if they were guilty:

> wîp sol doch liebem manne
> under armen z'allen zîten
> cleben an der sîten.
> wie ligent dise gelieben sô? (Gottfried, ll. 17522-25)

The explanation of Marke's interpretative process is, however, more extensive t-han in Béroul's work. Poag describes the possible interpretations of this scene:

> the tableau is open to two interpretations at once: Tristan, the vassal, has drawn the separating sword of the law between himself and the queen; Tristan, the lover, has committed adultery with Isolde. Mark is again called upon to judge for himself.[124]

Clason notes Marke's lust in this episode. [125] This may indicate that Marke's final decision is based on love (or lust) for his wife and he decides that the lovers are innocent. The focus in this text is less on the objects themselves (which in this case is limited to the sword) and more on the fact that the lovers are not embracing. Unlike in Béroul's work, it is not stated that Marke is attempting to convey a message to Tristan and Isolde. Rather, he blocks up the window because the sun is shining on Isolde's face. The lovers wake up, see the window and go outside, seeing footprints outside the *minnegrotte*. They are not certain, but think that Marke was present and are thankful that they were found in the position they were in (ll. 17627-58). Gottfried's depiction of processes of interpretation in this scene is similar to Béroul's and Eilhart's, in that different interpretations are seen as being possible. There is no certainty in these interpretations. Marke is initially uncertain about whether or not Tristan and Isolde are innocent and the lovers themselves are uncertain about how to interpret the signs that Marke leaves for them: 'dekeine gewisheit / die enhaeten si dar an niht' (ll. 17652-53). This lack of certainty regarding interpretation is echoed

[124] Poag, p. 232.
[125] Clason, p. 193.

particularly in Béroul's work, possibly provoking discussion among the extradiegetical audience, mirrored by the intradiegetical audience. The key difference between the versions of Béroul and Eilhart and that of Gottfried is that Gottfried's Tristan intentionally places the sword at this scene. Tristan is therefore a deliberate creator of this sign. As Tristan is frequently described as an artist and compared by scholars to the narrator figure himself, the discussions surrounding how to interpret signs in this episode could reflect contemporary debates about the interpretation of literary works.[126] Tristan does not specify why he arranges the sword in a particular way, which could suggest that writers of texts also do not necessarily tell their audiences how to interpret specific signs.

While the episode of the lovers in exile in the forest indicates how the same signs can be interpreted in multiple ways, there are many other examples of visual signs being used as clues in situations where the characters attempt to determine the truth about a certain version of events. The splinter from Tristan's sword that was embedded in Morolt's wound and then found by Isolde (and her mother) provides the means for Isolde to identify Tristan when he is found wounded in Ireland after killing the dragon. This identifying marker provides proof that he is the man who killed Morolt and is therefore Tristan. This episode occurs in Gottfried's and Eilhart's texts. However, it is not the splinter itself which identifies Tristan, but his sword, which has a gap in it where the splinter fits. In both texts, the audience is told of the splinter well before it becomes significant or becomes a sign. The presence of the splinter is ominous: 'zu grossem ungelúck / belaib in der wunden ain stúck / deß schwerteß, daß

[126] For a discussion of Tristan as an artist, see W. T. H. Jackson, 'Tristan the Artist in Gottfried's Poem', in *Tristan and Isolde: A Casebook*, ed. by Grimbert, pp. 125-46. Kaminski argues that the character of Tristan can be connected to the author (pp. 11-26).

ab brach' (Eilhart, ll. 967-69). Gottfried is more explicit:

> dô er daz wâfen zucte wider,
> daz von dem selben zucke
> des swertes ein stucke
> in sîner hirneschal beleip,
> daz ouch Tristanden sider treip
> ze sorgen und ze grôzer nôt:
> ez haete in nâch brâht ûf den tôt. (Gottfried, ll. 7054-60)

The fact that Isalde keeps the splinter in Eilhart's text is described alongside her grief for the death of Morolt; she weeps while examining it:

> graiff sú im in die wunden
> mit ir wÿssen hand.
> ain scharten sú dar inn fand
> dú von Trÿstrandß schwert brach.
> wainent sie in an sach. (Eilhart, ll. 1012-16)

The splinter here is a trigger for Isalde's emotions. It is a reminder of the death of her uncle, and it enables her to show her grief. This is also present in Gottfried's text. Isolde and her mother examine Morolt's wound and are already feeling grief: 'besâhen s'oben und unden / ange unde jaemerlîche' (ll. 7182-3). They then remove the splinter from the wound:

> sî und ir tohter sâhen s'an
> mit jâmer und mit leide
> und nâmen sî dô beide
> und leiten sî in einen schrîn,
> dâ sît daz selbe stuckelîn
> Tristanden brâhte ze nôt. (Gottfried, ll. 7190-95)

The word 'schrîn'can mean a casket, a box to store precious things, or a shrine or a place to store relics. Isolde almost treats the splinter as if it were a relic. In both texts, the sight of the splinter causes an emotional reaction in Isolde (and her mother in Gottfried's). There are other instances in the texts where objects are used to elicit an emotional reaction from characters, whether intentionally or unintentionally, where the sign is not merely intended to communicate a message, or to prove a point,

but also acts more emotively on the person receiving. Interpretation is not always about deciding where to discover truth, or about constructing a version of the truth, but it has other functions. This has been seen above in the discussion on the use of rings in relation to memory. Signs can be emotionally charged; in this instance, the splinter becomes an outward symbol of the death of Morolt, a reminder of their loss, which enables them to grieve, or over which they grieve.

Moreover, the splinter enables Isolde to identify Tristan, or rather, the notch in the sword into which the splinter fits enables her to identify him as the man who killed her uncle, and she knows that her uncle was killed by Tristan. Eilhart's Isalde begins to clean Tristrant's sword and sees by the notch in it that the man in front of her is Tristrant: 'do sach sú bÿ der schart, / daß eß Trÿstrand waß' (ll. 1974-5). When she places the splinter from Morolt's wound into the gap in the sword, the text states 'do ward och sin schuld kunt' (l. 1982). The splinter and the sword are not merely signs of Tristrant's identity; they are signs of his guilt. This functions as proof of Tristrant's guilt in a similar way to how the dragon's tongue functions as proof that whoever has the tongue in his possession is the one who killed it, as will be discussed below. This is similarly dealt with by Gottfried, but in more detail. Eilhart's Isalde reacts immediately with anger, whereas Gottfried gives a more detailed description of her emotions when she suspects the truth about the identity of the man in front of her: 'nu begunde ir herze kalten / umbe ir schaden den alten' (ll. 10087-88). The splinter and the sword together do not outright identify the man as Tristan yet. She questions how the 'veige wâfen' (l. 10094) came to Cornwall, and then she realises that the minstrel gave his name as Tantris and works out the wordplay and deception surrounding this choice of name. It is not merely the splinter and the sword that

identify that man as Tristan, or that reveal his guilt. Rather the splinter and the sword provide the cue for a chain of recollections or of a chain of thought which lead to her deducing the truth of Tristan's identity. In a sense, the recollections are the interpretation. The process of interpretation is clearly depicted. In this text, the immediate reaction that Isolde has to the splinter and the sword is not to state that the man must be Tristan, but to be reminded of her past grief, to the extent that 'begunde ir herze kalten' (l. 10087). The splinter and the sword here are clues in the sense that they point to Tristan's identity, but the reaction they produce in Isolde is not one of intellectual interpretation. It is not purely intellectual in Eilhart's text either, but the deduction is more immediate and the emotions do not seem to be the primary result of the sign. Rather, in Gottfried's work it is more related to memory. The object in itself (that specific object with that particular background) has the ability to freeze Isolde's heart with her old suffering, not merely reminding her of her past grief, but making it immediate and making her suffer once more. Of course, her intense reaction is exacerbated by the revelation that the man who is responsible for that grief is in her room, and is someone she has trusted in for her safety and to save her from the steward, but the emotional significance attached to the splinter and the sword is still highlighted.

Another investigation occurs in Eilhart's work, in the episode which directly precedes Tristrant's death (ll. 9259-9460). This episode features characters deducing the presence of another character based on objects connected with that character. Tristrant and Kehenis have entered Nampetenis'castle, so that Kehenis can spend time with Gariole, his beloved and Nampetenis' wife. They successfully enter and leave without being discovered by Nampetenis, but their presence is later discovered.

In Kehenis'case, this is due to his hat, which blew off his head as they entered the castle. Rather than directly identifying Kehenis, Nampetenis merely wonders where the hat came from: 'do wundert den held gut, / von wennen käm der hut dar' (ll. 9366-67). It does not signal the presence of Kehenis specifically, but it arouses Nampetenis'suspicion, as an item that obviously belongs to someone else. It is only when he sees the 'rÿß [...] daß von Tristrand dem recken / waß geschossen in die wand' (ll. 9371-3) that he deduces their identities. Tristrant has the reputation of being skilled at this game and his reputation precedes him. Nampetenis attributes the skill to him and from that deduces that the man whom the hat belongs to is Kehenis:

> 'diß schiessen nieman kan,
> wan Tristrand der ain man:
> der haut eß gewisslich ta^{v}n'
> und gedaucht in sinem mu^{o}t san,
> Keheniß wär mit im komen dar (Eilhart, ll. 9375-79)

Nampetenis' deduction is not due to the fact that he recognises items belonging to a particular person, but because he realises that the 'rÿß'must have been shot by Tristrant and that Kehenis would have been with him. This episode leads directly to their deaths, as Nampetenis carries out his revenge and Tristrant is dealt a fatal wound. It also details Nampetenis' thought process, showing that interpretation is also a concern for Eilhart, even though he does not place as much emphasis on it as Béroul and Gottfried.

The above examples have shown how characters correctly deduce the identitiy or presence of a particular character based on objects connected with them. However, another factor in the interpretation of clues is audience expectation. One example of this is the investigation into the death of the dragon, as depicted by Gottfried and Eilhart. There are many visual signs associated with this event, but the

focus here is the investigation that certain characters make of the location where the dragon was killed. The identity of the man who killed the dragon becomes a judicial matter, but that originates from an analysis that certain characters make of particular visual clues. The steward in both texts has returned to court claiming to have killed the dragon. Gottfried's steward has taken the dragon's head with him to prove his claim (as well as verbal testimony from his men), whereas Eilhart's steward has persuaded his men to state that he killed the dragon. In both texts, the word of the steward is doubted, but it is in Gottfried's work that Isolde, her mother, Brangaene and Perinis investigate the ground where the dragon was killed (ll. 9327-9401). They do not know at this point who they are looking for; they merely suspect that a man who is not the steward killed the dragon. They find a saddle which is unlike any seen before in Ireland:

> und in ir sinnen ahten,
> sin gesaehen nie z'Îrlande
> gereite solher hande (Gottfried, ll. 9334-36)

They therefore assume that it could not have belonged to the steward and deduce that it must belong to the man who killed the dragon. The saddle does not, at this point, specifically indicate Tristan's presence; it merely suggests that someone not from Ireland was present at the scene. The women interpret these signs based on expectations they have when they investigate this scene. They think the steward is lying about having killed the dragon, but they also want him to be lying (ll. 9264-97). The saddle is nothing more than a sign that somebody else was there and they jump to the (correct) conclusion that it belongings to the man who killed the dragon. Brangaene then sees light glinting off a helmet, which alerts them to the fact that someone has sunk into a pool. This leads them to discover Tristan lying in the pool,

and it transpires that he is the man who really killed the dragon. He is also holding the dragon's tongue, which will later feature as evidence before the king.

Kurvenal carries out another investigation on the same ground, but for different reasons. Tristan's men have heard rumours that a knight has died and has left the remains of his horse behind. The fact that they have not seen Tristan for two days makes them certain that this knight is Tristan, as he would otherwise have returned to them. They therefore send Kurvenal so that he 'des orses naeme war' (l. 9639). Kurvenal finds the charred horse and recognises it as belonging to Tristan (no indication is given as to how) and he also finds the dead dragon. However, the fact that he cannot find any more items belonging to Tristan makes him doubt whether Tristan is alive or dead:

> und alse er dô nimêre vant
> von keinen sînen dingen
> an gewande noch an ringen,
> dô kam in michel zwîvel an. (Gottfried, ll. 9644-47)

The uncertainty Kurvenal feels may have been caused by the fact that the women had been at the scene prior to him; otherwise he may have found Tristan's saddle and possibly Tristan himself. This is similar to Marke's uncertainty at the *minnegrotte*, showing once again the difficulty of accessing truth through the interpretation of signs. It is important to note that neither the women and Perinis nor Kurvenal have gone to investigate this scene with an open mind. They have expectations about what they may see there, or have gone to discover something in particular, which affects the way they interpret the signs in front of them.

This discussion has shown how the characters in the Tristan texts seek to determine the truth based on visual signs. It has been seen that objects carry meaning from different sources, including meanings that were previously arranged between

two or more characters, cultural meanings and specific histories that are attached to them. However interpretation is also influenced by the emotions and personal pasts of the interpreter, as well as the context in which the object is placed and the expectations of the character receiving the sign. A comparison of the three texts discussed in this section highlights how the writers reflect contemporary debates on interpretation. Eilhart's depiction of Nampetenis'process of interpretation shows that he is concerned with how interpretation functions, as is the fact that during the episode of their exile in the forest he does not specify Marke's intent behind the signs he leaves but leaves the audience free to come to their own conclusions. Béroul takes this further, provoking discussion surrounding the meaning of the signs in the forest by depicting various interpretations from Marc, Tristan and Iseut. The fact that it is only in Gottfried's text that the lovers deliberately place the sword between them creates a link between Tristan and the narrator, thereby suggesting that the uncertainty surrounding Marke's interpretation could be a reflection of the differing ways that an extradiegetical audience could interpret the text itself. In addition, Marke's apparent gullibility and difficulty with interpretation at the *minnegrotte* is not necessarily intended as a criticism of his character, but rather a reflection on the way that audience expectation influences interpretation.

Proof

The above analysis has shown how characters in the Tristan texts use visual signs in order to construct a plausible version of events in situations where they seek to determine the truth. However, a version of events which is accepted by certain

characters as representing the truth does not always come from an analysis or investigation of visual signs located at a particular scene. These texts frequently provide examples of characters accepting a certain version of events as true based on visual evidence, as opposed to clues. An object is presented to prove a narrative, rather than the presence of certain objects being used to construct a narrative. In reference to factual beliefs, Eco argues that they must be coded 'or in some way recognized by society'.[127] Certain versions of events are accepted as being true and historical, even though they may be equivocal. Trials and other judicial procedures enable certain ideas or deductions to become accepted as fact, at least officially. There are two main instances of judicial procedures in the Tristan narratives, the trial to determine who killed the dragon and Isolde's ordeal. This section will firstly discuss the attempt by the king of Ireland (and others) to discover who really killed the dragon (Tristan or the steward), an episode which is present in the works of Gottfried and Eilhart. It will then focus on Isolde's ordeal, which features in the works of Gottfried, Eilhart and Béroul. In both episodes, the legal proof presented by some of the characters involves, at least partially, a visual sign of some kind.

In Eilhart's and Gottfried's works, both Tristan and the steward claim before the king to have killed the dragon. Eilhart's steward asserts to his men that he killed the dragon and asks them to support that claim:

> nun sprecht, daß ich in erschlagen hab
> und gond der red nit ab:
> so mach ich úch rich. (Eilhart, ll. 1787-89)

They then attempt to kill Tristrant, but cannot find him. The steward lies directly to the king, but it is evident that the king does not believe him:

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[127] Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*, p. 99.

ich wölt dann tu^{o}n boustlich,
so mag ich sin nit wider komen.
doch het ich gern baß vernomen,
wer den tracken schlüg. (Eilhart, ll. 1810-13)

The steward offers no physical proof to support his claim. The king's reaction suggests however that he does not believe the steward as the steward is not trustworthy. By contrast, Tristrant offers two types of proof that he was the one who killed the dragon:

so bewär ich, daß ich in schlu^{o}g,
mit vieren siner holden,
ob sie deß jehen wolden,
die mit im wa^{v}ren da,
die ritten mit im dem tracken na^{v}ch
(deß ist in misselungen)
und ouch mit diser zungen,
die ich dem tracken uß schnaid. (Eilhart, ll. 2278-85)

There is very little discussion of the court's reaction to this claim. The narrator merely states that they were all convinced.

This is in contrast to Gottfried's version of this episode, in which the claims that characters make are accepted as evidence, but both claimants also provide physical proof. The steward presents the dragon's head:

hie lît daz houbet, seht ez an.
daz selbe urkünde brâhte ich dan.
nu loeset iuwer wârheit.
küneges wort und küneges eit
diu suln wâr unde bewaeret sîn. (Gottfried, ll. 9815-19)

As Combridge notes, the steward offers several types of proof for his claim:

> Er hofft, durch Vorweisung des Drachenkopfes, durch geräuschvolles Angreifen des (toten!) Drachen, durch das Augenscheinzeugnis seiner Verwandten, denen er den toten Drachen zeigt, in dessen Hals sein abgebrochener Speer steckt, das Landgericht gegen jeden möglichen Gegenanspruch zu überzeugen, daß er es sei, der den Drachen getötet habe.[128]

[128] Combridge, p. 62.

Jackson also observes that had Tristan not been discovered, this would have been as effective as the real thing.[129] Isolde's mother responds that this proof is not good enough:

> Sie leugnet weder die Verpflichtung des Königs noch den Tod des Drachen, trifft aber den Beweis des Truchsessen an seiner schwachen Stelle, nämlich an der unterschobenen Voraussetzung, wer den Kopf des Drachen abhaue, habe auch den Drachen getötet.[130]

The dragon's tongue is a more effective proof than the dragon's head. Schnell also argues that the head loses value when it goes against the tongue as proof.[131] Of course, the extradiegetical audience knows that Tristan killed the dragon and has already taken the tongue. The audience is therefore prepared for the importance of the tongue to the plot when Tristan, after having been taken back with Isolde and her mother, but before presenting the evidence before the king, awakes and asks where the tongue is: 'diz kumt uns rehte'(l. 9608). Once Tristan has presented the tongue, it is widely accepted that he is the one who killed the dragon. Discussing the tongue as proof, Clason notes:

> On the one hand, it accurately represents to the court the true progression of events leading to the death of the dragon. On the other hand, however, not a soul among the Irish courtiers understands the deeper significance of the poisonous dragon's tongue in Tristan's breast. This powerful, metaphorical identification of Tristan with deceit and falsehood eludes the court's capabilities to understand abstract representations.[132]

However, it is not necessarily true to say that the tongue accurately represents the course of events. It is connected to the course of events, in that the tongue was at some point removed from the dragon's head and it is reasonable to assume that the man who possesses the tongue is the man who killed the dragon. However, Tristan's

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[129] Jackson, *Anatomy of Love*, p. 155.
[130] Combridge, p. 63.
[131] Schnell, p. 129.
[132] Clason, p. 283.

possession of the tongue does not actually prove that he killed the dragon, but rather it proves that the steward did not. This is essential for the women as they want to prevent the steward from marrying Isolde and therefore find a version of events which is convenient for them. The extradiegetical audience knows that Tristan killed the dragon, whereas Isolde can merely deduce that. Without Tristan's interference, as Jackson notes, the steward's deception would have been effective; the head would have offered an apparently effective proof of the steward's claim, but in this case it would have been a false proof.[133] Gottfried's depiction of this episode shows how characters attempt to determine the truth based on visual signs, but can only do so by making certain assumptions.

The episode of Isolde's attempted murder of Brangaene as featured in Gottfried's text is another example of the ways in which the writers of these texts question the authority of visual signs (ll. 12675-12934). Isolde has decided to have Brangaene killed after she has taken her place during the wedding night with Marke, partly because she is worried that Brangaene has fallen in love with Marke and partly because she is worried that Brangaene will betray her. The men who were supposed to kill Brangaene were told by Isolde to bring Brangaene's tongue to her as proof that she was killed. They show Brangaene mercy and instead take back the tongue of one of their dogs, and present it to Isolde as proof (ll. 12865-98). The fact that Isolde requests a tongue as proof could be symbolic, as she fears Brangaene's speech. In that sense, the tongue functions as a sign for the extradiegetical audience to interpret. Moreover, this sign and the interpretation of it show once again that the link between truth and visual signs is destabilised. On a practical level, the deception perpetrated

[133] Jackson, *Anatomy of Love*, p. 155.

by the huntsmen succeeds due to the fact that Isolde is unable to differentiate between a human tongue and a canine tongue. The proof provided in this episode functions in a similar way to that in the episode of the dragon's tongue. Isolde accepted the dog's tongue as evidence of Brangaene's death and only discovers the truth because the huntsmen confess. The tongue cannot actually prove the fact of Brangaene's death, in much the same way as the dragon's head cannot prove that the steward killed the dragon.

The importance of visual signs in judicial procedure is also seen in a different way in the episode of Isolde's trial, which is present in Béroul's and Gottfried's works.[134] In these episodes, the visual evidence presented is not connected to the events that occurred, but is intended to represent God's judgment on oaths that are sworn. It provides authority for a statement, rather than proving a particular version of events. Béroul's Iseut swears her oath on relics:

> Seignors, fait el, por Deu merci,
> Saintes reliques voi ici.
> Or escoutez que je ci jure,
> De quoi le roi ci aseüre:
> Si m'aït Dex et saint Ylaire,
> Ces reliques, cest saintuaire,
> Totes celes qui ci ne sont
> Et tuit icil de par le mont,
> Qu'entre mes cuises n'entra home (Béroul, ll. 4197-4205)

Miyashiro states that 'Unlike other medieval versions of this scene, Iseut's *escondit* is not an ordeal by means of a heated iron; instead, she pledges her fidelity upon *saintes reliques*, giving final authority to the judgment of God'.[135] By contrast, Gottfried's Isolde grasps a burning iron:

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[134] This episode will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two (pp. 112-129).
[135] Adam Miyashiro, 'Disease and Deceit in Béroul's *Roman de Tristan*', *Neophilologus*, 89 (2005), 509-25 (p. 510).

in gotes namen greif si'z an
und truog ez, daz si niht verbran.
dâ wart wol g'offenbaeret
und al der werlt bewaeret,
daz der vil tugenthafte Crist,
wintschaffen alse ein ermel ist. (Gottfried, ll. 15732-36)

The purpose of this ordeal is for the characters to discover the truth, yet the narrator relates that instead all that has been discovered is that Christ is 'wintschaffen alse ein ermel'. This episode will be discussed at length in Chapter Two, but it is important to note here that there is a conflict between the significance that the burning iron is intended to have, and therefore the interpretation that Marke and others make of it, and what it actually signifies according to the narrator. This is supposed to prove that Isolde is either innocent or guilty. Marke accepts the result of the ordeal as proof of Isolde's innocence, but for the extradiegetical audience and for the narrator it proves that Christ is 'wintschaffen'. Rather than showing God's authority, it destablises it, or rather it calls into question the system that humans use to establish God's authority.

This analysis of the use of visual signs in trials has shown how different writers of the Tristan texts challenge the authority of certain judicial procedures. Trials are intended to determine a version of the truth, but this is often called into question. Visual evidence can easily be faked, as the dragon's head and Brangaene's tongue, and even God's authority is destablised by the creative language of the lovers. This casts doubt on authority in general, especially regarding trials. It seems that, for Gottfried and Béroul, trials cannot be trusted as they do not necessarily give a completely accurate account of events, suggesting that other traditionally authoritative sources of information, such as written sources, could also be called into question.

Conclusion

The above analysis has shown how the different writers of the Tristan texts discuss the tensions between truth, lies and interpretation. The fact that this is a feature of all of these texts suggests that it was a key concern in late-twelfth and early-thirteenth century culture. The representation of carvings on twigs in Eilhart's, Gottfried's and Marie de France's works shows how these different writers viewed reading and interpretation, from the twig functioning more or less as a signal in Eilhart's work to its significance as a distillation of the *lai*, and possibly also a distillation of the themes of the entire story, in *Chievrefueil*. This clearly demonstrated that meanings can be varied and subjective, and go beyond those assigned to the signs by specific characters earlier in the text. Moreover, the interpretation of the twig in *Chievrefueil*, and the suggestion that the longer message is in fact either Tristan's or the queen's interpretation of the twig shows how the interpretation of artistic works can provoke more artistic works. In addition, the difficulty of accessing truth via visual signs is a key feature of all of these texts. The link between signs and the truth is on occasion broken. All of the texts question authority in one way or another. Audience expectation is highlighted by both Béroul and Gottfried as a factor of interpretation, which may or may not affect a character's judgment when interpreting. Moreover, both Béroul and Gottfried highlight the fact that different interpretations can be possible of the same sign. Meaning can be subjective, possibly leading the extradiegetical audience to also discuss the interpretations of these signs. However, the key element of this discussion is authority. It is clear that there is little authority

for interpretation, as meanings can be subjective, but it is also clear that even those visual signs that are coded by society as a whole to convey authority fail to represent the truth, such as those used in trials. It is exactly this gap between authority and truth in these texts that enables fiction to flourish.

Chapter Two: Verbal Signs

Introduction

The ambiguity of language has long been established as a key element of the Tristan story and has been a feature of much Tristan scholarship. Many critics have produced work on the relationship between truth and falsehood in the Tristan texts, including on how the characters manipulate language in order to deceive.[136] Medieval thinkers were discussing the way that words can signify. This has been discussed by modern critics. Zimmermann, for example, discusses how for Aristotle 'speech signifies thoughts in the soul, without anything in between'.[137] Tetsuro explains that in Augustinian tradition mental concepts were linked to words, which corresponded to God's word.[138] The idea of words being true and representing thoughts in the soul, being connected to God's word, seems to be challenged by the writers of the Tristan texts. Discussing semiotics with reference to a slightly later period, Maddox argued that '"True" and "False" are not understood in any absolute ideological or philosophical sense, for they acquire meaning only within the specific discursive context which constructs its own particular coherence with regard to these terms'.[139]

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[136] Some examples include Ollier, 'Le statut de la vérité', Sargent-Baur, 'Truth, Half-truth, Untruth', and Schnell.

[137] F. W. Zimmermann, *Al-Farabi's Commentary and Short Treatise on Aristotle's 'De Interpretatione'*, trans. by F. W. Zimmermann, Classical and Medieval Logic Texts, 3 (Oxford: Published for the British Academy by the Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 10.

[138] Shimizu Tetsuro, 'Words and Concepts in Anselm and Abelard', in *Langages, Sciences, Philosophie aux XII^e siècle: Actes de la table ronde internationale organisée les 25 et 26 mars 1998 par le Centre d'histoire des sciences et des philosophies arabes et médiévales (UPRESA 7062, CNRS/Paris VII/ÉPHÉ) et le Programme international de coopération scientifique (France-Japon) 'Transmission des sciences et des techniques dans une perspective interculturelle*, ed. by Joël Biard (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1999), pp. 177-97 (p. 177).

[139] Donald Maddox, *Semiotics of Deceit: The Pathelin Era* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1984), p. 25.

Although this argument can also be applied to the Tristan texts, this chapter will argue that the relationship between truth and falsehood is more complex in these works, and it will be seen that verbal signs are used to explore how interpretation functions, rather than as a means of expressing either direct truth or direct lies. This section will argue that the writers of these texts use them as a location to discuss the relationship between truth, lies and interpretation and in particular to question the way that authority is given to particular signs in certain contexts. This chapter will firstly examine promises made by authority figures in these works, suggesting that characters in positions of authority must ensure that any promises they make are kept, as their speech must be authoritative. Promises can therefore have the ability to direct future events. Secondly, the function of oaths in these texts will be analysed, focusing particularly on the way that the characters manipulate language so as to swear something which is apparently true yet deceptive, and how that destabilises the authority of those oaths, emphasising that words are signs to be interpreted rather than direct indicators of truth or falsehood. Thirdly, this chapter will discuss the role of words as reminders of past events, in which memories of particular characters affect their interpretation of the present, and also how memories are used to reflect the reliability or unreliability of the speaker.

Promises

Discussing promises, Austin states:

> we are apt to have a feeling that their being serious consists in their being uttered as (merely) the outward and visible sign, for convenience or other record or for information, of an inward and spiritual act: from which it is but a short step to go on to believe or to assume without realizing that for many

> purposes the outward utterance is a description *true or false*, of the occurrence of the inward performance.[140]

Austin allows here for people who make false promises, however it seems that in the Tristan texts false promises cannot occur. A promise is a sign of intention from a speaker and in the cases discussed here must be authoritative and made to be true. They therefore direct future events, changing the future to correspond with the promise. Gottfried's text presents several examples of promises made by kings which must be kept. This includes one example of the literary motif of the 'don contraignant', which portrays characters who are obliged to keep a rash promise. This is a common motif in twelfth- and thirteenth-century literature, featuring for example in Chrétien de Troyes' *Chevalier de la Charrette*.[141] Jean Frappier's article on the 'don contraignant' emphasises the importance of honour in this motif:

> Le roi, le chevalier ou la dame qui se sont endettés d'un don doivent acquitter leur promesse, même si elle contredit leurs principes moraux ou leurs sentiments profonds.[142]

Frappier then argues that this is not merely about keeping a promise, but there is almost a psychological constraint, obliging the person who has promised the 'don' to not go back on that promise.[143] However, rather than being a psychological constraint, the reason for keeping the promise is more due to honour, as the king's word must be trusted, as will be seen below. It is not merely in situations which correspond to this popular literary motif that authority figures are obliged to keep the promises they make, even when those promises go against their own inclinations or

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[140] J. L. Austin, *How to do Things with Words: The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955*, ed. by J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisà, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Oress, 1975; repr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 9. Emphasis his.

[141] Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Chevalier de la Charrette ou Le Roman de Lancelot*, ed. by Charles Méla ([Paris]: Librairie Générale Française, 1992), ll. 129-98 (pp. 52-57).

[142] Jean Frappier, 'Le motif du "don contraignant" dans la littérature du Moyen Age', *Travaux de Linguistique et de Littérature*, 7.2 (1969), 7-46 (p. 8).

[143] Ibid., p. 8. Frappier is discussing Chrétien de Troyes here specifically.

desires. An analysis of promise-making in these texts shows that once a promise has been made it must be kept. The promises made by kings, and by one queen, control their subsequent courses of action.

One example of the 'don contraignant' in the Tristan texts is the Gandin episode in Gottfried's work (ll. 13097-13450), which is absent from the other extant versions of the Tristan story.[144] This episode shows Marke being obliged to act in a way contradictory to his wishes because of a promise he has previously made. Frappier refers to this episode in Thomas' text, as preserved in Gottfried and the Norse Saga, where, he explains, it is combined with the motif of 'une joute musicale'.[145] In Gottfried's version, Gandin, who is a musician, arrives at Marke's court, and the king requests that Gandin play for him (ll. 13184-89). Marke promises to give Gandin anything he wants, almost in exchange for this entertainment:

> welt ir iht, des ich hân,
> daz ist allez getân.
> lât uns vernemen iuwern list,
> ich gib iu, swaz iu liep ist. (Gottfried, ll. 13193-96)

Gandin requests Isolde, something which Marke presumably did not expect, although given the popularity of the motif, it is possible that the extradiegetical audience would have expected this development. Marke's initial response is to refuse to comply with this demand (Gottfried, ll. 13215-13221). Gandin, however, emphasises the importance of Marke honouring his word:

> hêrre, sô enwelt ir niht
> behalten iuwer wârheit?
> werdet ir des überseit,

[144] A similar episode seems to be mentioned in the *Folie Berne* (ll. 390-95). However, this focuses on Gamarien's request and Tristan's role in saving Iseut rather than on any promise made by Marc, and will therefore not be discussed in detail here.

[145] Frappier, p. 23. As this episode is not present in the fragments of Thomas' *Tristan* that have survived, this analysis will exclude discussion of Gandin in Thomas' work, rather referring directly to Gottfried alone.

daz ir urwaere sît,
so ensult ir nâch der selben zît
dekeines landes künic wesen. (Gottfried, ll. 13222-27)

It is crucial that Marke keeps his promise, otherwise, according to Gandin, he is not worthy to be king of any land (l. 13227). This is largely due to the fact that Marke forgot to amend his promise to exclude doing anything against his honour. Slightly earlier in the passage, Marke is described as 'der künec der hovebaere' (l. 13184), suggesting that he has a reputation to uphold. In this instance, this means keeping his word. The word 'urwaere' means both untrue and faithless, indicating that were he to break this promise Marke would become both a liar and someone lacking in honour. The Middle High German phrase used for keeping a promise is 'behalten iuwer wârheit' (l. 13223), which is translated by Rüdiger Krohn as 'Euer Wort halten'.[146] However, the word 'wârheit' specifically means 'truth'. If Marke were to break his word, that would turn that truth into a lie. The act of making a promise therefore determines the way that the person making the promise will react to subsequent events. It therefore seems that in this case the promise is not merely a statement of intent, but an authoritative statement that must be made true. Critical perspectives on this episode focus on how it reflects Marke's weakness. Johnson argues that Tristan's moral right to Isolde is strengthened, while Marke's is weakened.[147] Dicke claims that Marke's failure here disqualifies him as both a king and a spouse.[148] Classen takes this further, noting that Marke's response signals not only his own weakness

[146] Gottfried von Straßburg, *Tristan*, ed. and trans. by Krohn, II, p. 201.
[147] L. Peter Johnson, 'Gottfried von Straßburg: *Tristan*', in *Interpretationen: Mittelhochdeutsche Romane und Heldenepen*, ed. by Horst Brunner (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1993), pp. 233-54 (p. 251).
[148] Gerd Dicke, 'Gouch Gandin. Bermerkungen zur Intertextualität der Episode von "Rotte und Harfe" im *Tristan* Gottfrieds von Straßburg', *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur*, 127 (1998), 121-48 (p. 135).

but also that of the entire political system.[149] Classen's argument is accurate, but can be taken further to indicate how Gottfried questions the authority of speech in this episode more generally, as it is shown that a king can make a promise with the best of intentions, but that on gaining more information, he does not necessarily want to make that promise true. To use Austin's terminology, a promise is a performative act but can be made either void or hollow.[150] The situation with this promise is more complex. On the one hand, it could be argued that the promise becomes hollow when Marke receives more information about what Gandin wants from him. On the other hand, it becomes apparent that Marke's promise actually was hollow already, as he promised to give Gandin anything he wanted, when he was not really willing to give anything to him. This shows the gap between authority and truth in this episode; Marke's promise is supposed to be a truth but that is destabilised by Marke's imprecise use of words.

The authority of speech is further questioned in this episode when Gandin suggests a duel to determine whether or not he is in the right. Discussing the concept of the 'Gottesurteil', Kragl states 'Der Sieg im Kampf gilt als göttliches Zeichen für die Aufrichtigkeit des Siegers und gibt diesem Recht'.[151] However, the legitimacy of the judicial duel was being questioned in this period and many critics have discussed this in relation to Gottfried's work.[152] In this case, the duel is rejected as a means of

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[149] Albrecht Classen, 'Unjust Rulers and Conflicts with Law and Sovereignty: The Case of Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan*', in *Law and Sovereignty in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. by Robert S. Sturges, Arizona Studies in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, 28 ([Turnhout]: Brepols, 2011), pp. 3-22 (p. 14).

[150] Austin, pp. 14-16.

[151] Kragl, p. 18.

[152] Michael S. Batts, 'Gottfried's Strasbourg: The City and its People', *A Companion to Gottfried von Strassburg's 'Tristan'*, ed. by Hasty, pp. 55-69, Ulrich Ernst, 'Häresie und kritische Intellektualität in der mittelalterlichen Stadtkultur: Gottfrieds von Straßburg *Tristan* als Antword auf die Ketzerverfolgung im 13. Jahrhundert', *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur*, 137 (2008), 419-38, Klaus Grubmüller, '*ir unwarheit warbæren*: Über den Beitrag des

discovering who is in the right as Tristan is absent and there would therefore be no one who would be able to fight Gandin. However, the narrator states that Marke's reason for not fighting Gandin himself is that Gandin is 'von solher craft, / sô menlîch und sô herzehaft' (ll. 13251-52). No mention is made of Marke's opinion of the justice or otherwise of his position. God is expected to provide a 'göttliches Zeichen' of which combatant is in the right, yet Marke's fear is not due to God revealing that he is in the wrong, rather he is worried by Gandin's superior physical strength. The fact that Marke is apparently not worried about justice suggests that he does not actually believe that the duel shows the judgement of God. Hutchinson, discussing the use of words in the episode of Isolde's trial, indicates that this is also a factor in this episode:

> There are other examples where such wordplay [as seen in Isolde's trial] is shown in a more clearly negative light. In some such cases there is less possibility that the poet's intent may have been merely ironic, while many would like to see the trial by ordeal as merely an ironic jab at the church for supporting such ordeals, rather than as a heretical comment [...] The episode in which Gandin tricks Mark into giving him Isold for his musical contributions is one such example where the courtly concept of taking one at his word (quite literally) is associated with deceit, the latter being a clearly uncourtly value [...] .[153]

Hutchinson argues that Gottfried's work 'can be viewed as a semiotic critique of the courtly semiotic system.[154] This is accurate, but there are broader implications to the attitude towards speech in this episode. It emphasises that speech from a king is supposed to be authoritative, but also shows how that speech can be doubted, therefore destabilising that authority. This example therefore suggests that when

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Gottesurteils zur Sinnkonstitution in Gotfrids *Tristan*', in *Philologie als Kulturwissenschaft: Studien zur Literatur und Geschichte des Mittelalters. Festschrift für Karl Stackmann zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. by Ludger Grenzmann, Hubert Herkommer and Dieter Wutke (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987), pp. 149-63, and Schnell, pp. 57-73. This will be discussed more fully later in the chapter.

[153] Hutchinson, pp. 43-44

[154] Ibid., p. 48.

promises are made there is a gap between authority and truth. This can be related to the contemporary debate on the development of romance; writing carries authority, but that authority can also be questioned.

Hutchinson also argues that it is 'interesting to note that Gandin's triumph is frustrated only by an even more blatantly uncourtly deceit – on Tristan's part'.[155] The uncourtly deceit referred to by Hutchinson is Tristan's disguise as a minstrel and subsequent successful attempt to deceive Gandin regarding his identity and intentions for Isolde. This is in complete contrast to Marke's use of language with Gandin earlier, in which he is obliged to hand Isolde to Gandin in order to make his speech true. Tristan's speech is more deceptive. He disguises himself as a minstrel and claims to Gandin that he is from Ireland:

> man sagete mir an dirre zît,
> daz ir von Îrlande sît.
> hêrre, dannen bin ouch ich.
> durch iuwer êre, vüeret mich
> hin wider heim in Îrlant! (Gottfried, ll. 13301-05)

Tristan manipulates Gandin here with his words, lying about his place of birth so as to identify further with Gandin, his intradiegetical audience, while also producing beautiful music. Isolde refuses to board the boat that Gandin will use to take her away unless it is the minstrel who takes her. Gandin agrees and hands Isolde over to Tristan at which point he reveals how Gandin has been tricked (ll. 13306-13422). The contrast between the authority of Marke's words and Tristan's ability to be more creative with words is striking. In this instance, Tristan makes a false statement regarding his intentions for Isolde, but for the deception to work it is crucial that Gandin believes that this is a genuine statement. Hutchinson is correct that this

[155] Hutchinson, p. 44.

critiques the courtly system, but it also enables reflection on the authority of different types of speech. This difference between Marke's and Tristan's attitude towards promises could be because Marke is a king and his word must be seen to be true. Moreover, this is another instance of Tristan being identified with the narrator. He creates a deceptive account of himself, with the intent to deceive, and lies both verbally and visually. In contrast with Marke, Tristan does not 'behalten [sîner] wârheit' here, but he makes that truth into a lie. The fact that Tristan is disguised as a minstrel is significant, as it is possibly this identification that enables him to break his promise without the damage to his honour which Marke faces. Austin notes that 'a performative utterance will [...] be null and void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in a soliloquy'.[156] It is clearly seen here that for Gottfried, minstrels can be less authoritative with their speech.

Marke is not the only king depicted by Gottfried who is required to keep his word when it is not advantageous for him to do so. Gurmun, Isolde's father and the king of Ireland, has promised to give his daughter to whoever slays the dragon, and fears that he will have to give her to the steward. The steward attempts to deceive Gurmun, wanting to make him believe that he, the steward, was the man who slew the dragon (ll. 8897-9982). This episode is also present in Eilhart's text (ll. 1766-2250). In this instance, the king mentions the importance of keeping his word but insinuates that the steward is lying:

> do sprach der kúng rich:
> 'ich wölt dan tuᵒn boustlich,
> so mag ich sin nit wider komen.
> doch het ich gern baß vernomen,
> wer den tracken schlüg.' (Eilhart, ll. 1809-13)

[156] Austin, p. 22.

Gottfried's steward begins his speech with a vehement reminder that Gurmun promised to give Isolde to the man who slew the dragon:

> hêrre, ich ger unde bite,
> daz ir dem lande küneges site
> niemer zebrechet an mir.
> welt ir's jehen, sô sprâchet ir
> und lobetet ez ouch beide
> mit rede und mit dem eide (Gottfried, ll. 9797-9802)

Using a similar argumentative strategy as Gandin, the steward begins by stating that the king could go back on his word, but that it would be damaging for him to do so. He therefore trusts that Gurmun would not do so. The importance of maintaining authority is again shown here; firstly, the king must keep his word as he is a king and his speech must be authoritative. Secondly, the king's promise is described as an 'eit' (l. 9807). The steward is, of course, lying and his claim is refuted by the queen and by Tristan, accompanied by the physical proof of the dragon's tongue. When the queen initially casts doubt on his claim, the steward exclaims 'Vrouwe, ir redet, ine weiz wie. / ich hân doch diz wortzeichen hie' (ll. 9845-46). He places trust in the head as proof, although he knows that it is false. His inability to understand the queen's speech is significant. Of course, he does not know that the real man who killed the dragon has been found by the women, and therefore his lack of knowledge would make it impossible for him to be able to interpret the queen's words. However, he knows that his claim is false, which may explain his outright dismissal of the queen's doubts. This suggests that the steward is unable either to interpret complex language or to manipulate language himself. Rather than engaging with her words, he dismisses her speech completely. Furthermore, once the tongue has been presented in support of Tristan's story, the steward becomes speechless:

> der veige der begunde

> mit zungen und mit munde,
> mit rede und mit gedanken
> schranken unde wanken.
> ern kunde sprechen noch gelân,
> ern wiste, waz gebaerde hân. (Gottfried, ll. 11251-56)

His confusion with speech contrasts sharply with the verbal dexterity which will be seen later in the text displayed by other characters, principally Tristan and Isolde. In this episode, Tristan and Isolde are in the right, but in later episodes they use this skill with wordplay to convince the court that they are innocent when they are in fact guilty.[157] It is therefore clear that for Gottfried, these conventional means of accessing truth are inadequate, as they depend rather on the skill the speaker has with manipulating words and the skill the listener has with interpreting. What is at stake here is neither truth nor falsehood, but rather interpretation.

It is not merely in public situations, where reputations are at stake, that characters value the spoken word and the importance of keeping promises. Another example of a character refusing to break her promise is that of Isolde's mother, the queen, after discovering Tristan's true identity and the fact that he killed her brother, Morold. When discussing this episode, critics examining promises tend to focus more on the king's promise to accept Tristan, rather than on the queen's promise to spare him.[158] The queen, Isolde and Brangaene discover Tristan after he has been wounded following his battle with the dragon. Tristan has met Isolde before under the name of Tantris and the women therefore believe that that is his true identity. The

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[157] See the discussion of Isolde's trial below (pp. 112-29)

[158] Dicke, p. 124, Frappier, p. 25, and Stefano Mula, 'Qui a donné le philtre aux deux amants? Qui veut tuer Tristan? – L'évolution de quelques passages dans la légende de Tristan et Iseut', in *Tristan und Isolde:Unvergängliches Thema der Weltkultur / Un thème éternel dans la culture mondiale*, ed. by Danielle Buschinger and Wolfgang Spiewok, Greifswalder Beiträge zum Mittelalter / Études médiévales de Greifswald, 57, Series 3, Tagungsbände und Sammelschriften / Actes de colloque et ouvrages collectifs, 33 (Greifswald: Reineke-Verlag, 1996), pp. 181-89 (p. 186).

queen states that he will have ‘vride unde genâde’ (l. 9545). It is likely that this promise is motivated by the fact that Tristan has done them a great service; he killed the dragon and can therefore save Isolde from marriage to the steward, which is similar to Eilhart’s version. The queen’s promise is absent from Eilhart’s version and it is possible that Gottfried included it in order to demonstrate Isolde’s careful use of words. Later in the text, Isolde discovers that the shard of sword taken from Morold’s wound fits into the notch on Tristan’s sword (ll. 10065-86) and she also deduces that the name ‘Tantris’ is a reversal of ‘Tristan’ (ll. 10100-22). She then reveals this information to her mother, who however refuses to kill Tristan. The reason that she initially gives for this refusal is that she gave him her word that he would have ‘vride unde genâde’, therefore he must be spared. She said that events would proceed in a certain way, and therefore she must keep her word. Authority is given to the spoken word to such an extent that it can control her behaviour even to the point of sparing the life of the man who killed her brother. This reasoning is similar to that given by Marke and Gurmun in the episodes discussed above. Isolde’s mother continues to insist that Tristan be spared:

> er ist in mîner huote
> mit lîbe und mit guote.
> ich hân in, swie’z dar zuo sî komen,
> genzlîche in mînen vride genomen. (Gottfried, ll. 10213-16)

However, Isolde is unwilling to admit that he was promised protection. Despite the fact that she was present when her mother promised this, she insists that no such promise was given:

> ‘du liugest!’ sprach diu junge dô
> ‘ich weiz wol, wie diu rede ergie.
> sine gelobete Tristande nie
> weder vride noch huote
> an lîbe noch an guote.’ (Gottfried, ll. 10222-26)

Isolde is speaking to Tristan here, and it is therefore surprising that she refers to him in the third person (l. 10224). This suggests that Isolde very carefully interprets the promise her mother made, indicating that protection was promised for Tantris, but not for Tristan. This careful attention to detail in speech on Isolde's part will also be seen during her trial. The queen's subsequent attempt to persuade Isolde that Tristan should not die focuses more on the use he can be to them in extricating Isolde from marrying the steward. Tristan is necessary to disprove the steward's claims.

In short, it is clear that, for authority figures such as kings and queens in Gottfried's work, promises must be made true. They therefore direct future events. However, there are two exceptions to this which involve Tristan and Isolde respectively. Isolde's attempt to enable her mother to break her promise to keep Tristan safe is due to her careful interpretation of language, a trait that will be seen in her throughout Gottfried's work. Although her mother keeps her promise, it is implied that this is due to the fact that they need Tristan to prevent the steward from winning Isolde. This indicates the attitude towards words in Gottfried's work, showing that promises must be true, even if on the surface they appear to represent something other than what they actually represent. More significantly, the fact that Tristan completely breaks his promise to Gandin when disguised as a minstrel shows that minstrels are not required to be authoritative. This could therefore imply that literary works in general do not always need that authority.

Oaths

The above section focused on the ability of words pronounced in certain contexts by particular people to direct the future course of events. Promises carry authority as they must be made true, at least when they are made by kings and queens. Oaths function in a similar way, although in the examples discussed below, oaths are authoritative statements about past events which are officially accepted as true. In judicial situations in particular, the oath carries a great deal of authority and therefore an oath, whether sworn on relics as in Béroul's work, or accompanied by an ordeal as in Gottfried's, enables the characters to establish an authoritative version of past events. However, the writers of the Tristan texts frequently question that authority. The above analysis of promises in Gottfried's work shows how the link between authority and truth regarding promises is destabilised, firstly by Marke making a promise to Gandin that he would prefer not to keep, and secondly by depicting Isolde's ability to set aside a promise by using language carefully. In addition, Tristan's deception of Gandin when dressed as a minstrel suggests that for Gottfried, the speech of a minstrel can carry less authority than that of a king. This broken link between truth and the apparent authority of the spoken word is also seen with the use of oaths in Gottfried's and Béroul's works. The authority of oaths is called into question on occasions when characters swear something which seems to proclaim their innocence, but actually acknowledges their guilt. Even in situations such as judicial procedures where the spoken word is assumed by certain characters to reveal the truth, it is shown by the writers of these texts that words do not necessarily depict the truth, but are rather a sign to be interpreted.

Coleman argues that:

> The habit of approaching late medieval literature with the standard oral/literate polarities ready-mapped before our faces […] has led us down some debatable paths. If we are willing to adopt a more 'ethnographic' approach, following the texts as they draw their own map for us, we will identify not a triumphal, quick-step march from 'orality' to 'literacy,' but a long-term, intricate interdigitation of the oral, the aural and the literate.[159]

Coleman's argument is supported by the representation of judicial procedures in these texts, in which the importance of the spoken word is depicted as well as the importance of physical objects. The previous chapter discussed the importance of objects in legal situations in order to establish the truth or falsehood of a particular assertion, such as the dragon's tongue in Gottfried's work. This section will examine the role of the spoken word in legal contexts, particularly in relation to oaths. Both visual and verbal elements coexist in these situations in order to prove or disprove a particular statement. In literary contexts, oaths are sworn frequently; they can be sworn on relics or other objects, and they may or may not be accompanied by an ordeal. In these Tristan narratives, this is seen primarily in the episode of Isolde's trial for adultery in Béroul's and Gottfried's texts. The practice of undergoing ordeals, as well as that of the judicial duel, is prominent in literature from this period, but was being questioned by the church in the early thirteenth century. A large amount of critical literature has been produced on this, particularly in relation to Gottfried's work, due to his statement that Christ is as pliable as a wind-blown sleeve.[160] Once again, social convention plays a large role in legal procedure,

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[159] Coleman, Joyce, *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature, 26 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 2.

[160] Critical literature which deals with Isolde's trial in Gottfried's text includes Batts, 'Gottfried's Strasbourg', pp. 61-62, Chinca, *Gottfried von Strassburg*, p. 10, Combridge, pp. 83-112, Jutta Eming, 'On Stage: Ritualized Emotions and Theatricality in Isolde's Trial', *MLN*, 124 (2009), 555-71, Ernst, Grubmüller, Nigel Harris, 'God, Religion, and Ambiguity in *Tristan*', in *A Companion*

particularly in the way that characters determine truth or falsehood from oaths, such as the idea of the ordeal as a sign of God's support or otherwise of the person swearing the oath. Trials and other judicial procedures establish a version of events that is accepted on some level as true, or more accurately, it gives authority to the particular version of events established during those legal procedures. However, this is destabilised in these narratives in general. In the scenes of Isolde's trial, she is found innocent, but this is not true, as the extradiegetical audience and a few of the characters are aware. Moreover, this judgement is later doubted by other characters. A procedure that is intended to be authoritative and determine a version of past events that will be accepted as factual has not achieved its object. Trials are influenced by social convention and audience expectation, and it is therefore important to examine both the construction and reception of oaths in such trials in these texts. The authority of the spoken word when accompanied by certain rituals is high in judicial procedures, enabling the lovers to create a version of past events that is not actually true, or that manipulates the truth. Once again, the equivocation depicted shows that the writers do not necessarily see the spoken word as authoritative, but as a matter for interpretation.

M. T. Clanchy, writing on the role of the spoken word in legal procedure, states that 'Dependence on symbolic gestures and the spoken word persisted in law and literature, and throughout medieval culture, despite the growth of literacy'.[161] Oath-swearing in these texts depicts social conventions and judicial procedures in which the spoken word is seen as having a precise, clearly defined meaning. These

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to Gottfried von Strassburg's 'Tristan', ed. by Hasty, pp. 113-36 (pp. 119-24), L. Peter Johnson, 'Gottfried von Strassburg', pp. 246-48, Kragl, Schnell, pp. 57-73, and Ernest C. York, 'Isolt's Ordeal: English Legal Customs in the Medieval Tristan Legend', *Studies in Philology*, 68 (1971), 1-9.

[161] Clanchy, p. 226.

words are pronounced in specific contexts, whether by an authority figure in the case of promises or in a recognised judicial procedure in the case of oaths, indicating the importance of context for interpretation. These contexts are ones in which the spoken word is seen to be completely reliable and yet these are episodes in which that reliability is questioned. Rather than unequivocally establishing the truth, they instead portray characters deliberately manipulating judicial situations in order to introduce equivocation into the meaning of the oaths that they swear. Two examples of this are discussed in this chapter, which both present statements about Isolde's sexual past. These episodes are the tryst beneath the tree and Isolde's trial in both of which the lovers (Isolde in particular) use language skilfully in order to deceive the king. Although the tryst beneath the tree is not a judicial setting, it is a situation in which Isolde makes apparently authoritative statements about her sexual past. Grubmüller claims that 'Die Parallelität von Baumgarten-Szene und Gottesurteil beruht auf dem Verfahrensinstrument Sprache', arguing that it is the pragmatic 'Mehrdeutigkeit' of sentences that establishes deception so 'daß sie scheinbar als Wahrheit bewiesen wird'.[162] This section will examine how the deception is established and will discuss the wider implications that attitudes towards authority and the interpretation of speech has for twelfth- and thirteenth-century culture. The careful use of language in these key episodes of the Tristan story is being used by the writers of these texts to explore the relationship between truth, lies and interpretation, and in particular the relationship between history, fiction and authority.

Eco defines a sign as 'everything which can be taken as significantly substituting for something else. This something else does not necessarily have to

[162] Grubmüller, p. 159.

exist or to actually be somewhere at the moment in which the sign stands for it. Thus, *semiotics is in principle the discipline studying everything which can be used in order to lie*'.[163] This is the case with oaths in these episodes which enable an examination of how characters use words in order to lie. This is made more complex as they often tell the truth deceptively, rather than lying directly. Eco later states: 'I propose to define as a sign *everything* that, on the grounds of previously established social convention, can be taken as *something standing for something else*'.[164] For example, the importance of a previously established social convention was seen in the previous chapter regarding the arrangements for the lovers to meet using twigs in a stream (as seen in Gottfried's and Eilhart's works). The importance of social convention also applies to language as well as to visual signs. In order to enable clear communication, social conventions must exist so that people can understand each other. However, signs can carry meanings based on other criteria. Words, as well as visual signs, may have connotations for one particular individual that they may not have for others. The meaning of individual words is partially objective, as language is a signification and communication system which is based on social convention and is used by many people. However, the interpretation made of certain words or phrases by individuals is also subjective. This is apparent in Tristan narratives and leads to the creation of deceptions and fictions. Words take on meaning based on the context in which they are used and on the knowledge of the people uttering or hearing them. The emotions felt by the person receiving the sign also affect how the sign is interpreted. The way this works in Tristan narratives will be examined, leading to a discussion of how the indeterminacy of meaning surrounding language

[163] Eco, Umberto, *A Theory of Semiotics*, p.7. Emphasis his.
[164] Ibid., p. 16. Emphasis his.

can be exploited to create deception and fiction. There are many situations in these narratives that lead characters to deceive others. Those who succeed in deception are those who are creative with language. There is a relationship between the creation of deception and the creation of fiction.

Tryst beneath the tree

The episode of the tryst beneath the tree is a key feature of Tristan scholarship and the importance of this episode for Tristan criticism has been well-established. Eming and others argue that the terms visuality and materiality:

> encompass the tradition's unique ability to be collapsed into one, emblematic scene – the tryst in the orchard – whose visuality [...] relies on the sacred iconography of Adam and Eve next to the forbidden tree. Thus the visuality of this single scene enfolds the materiality [-...] of the entire romance tradition and challenges the viewer to perceive its theological subtext.[165]

However, there are relatively few studies of this scene which analyse it comparatively. Exceptions to this include work by Newstead, who has published work on the possible sources of the episode, and Buschinger, but a comparative study of this episode is otherwise lacking, particularly regarding the importance of verbal signs.[166]

A vast amount of work has been done on the tangle of truths, lies and half-truths which are presented by the lovers in the Tristan story, including Béroul's characters at the tryst beneath the tree. Burns, for example, discusses the connection between

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[165] Eming, Rasmussen and Starkey, 'Visuality and Materiality', p. 3.
[166] Helaine Newstead, 'The Tryst beneath the Tree: An episode in the Tristan Legend', *Romance Philology*, 9 (1955), 269-84; Buschinger, 'Le rendez-vous épié'.

sexual deviance and linguistic distortion in Béroul's work in general.[167] Ollier argues that Béroul's text 'se présente comme une mise en scène du langage en situation, où signifient autant la distribution des rôles que celle des lieux de parole'.[168] Machta examines the way that ruses with language blur the boundaries between lies and truth, arguing that the conversation at the *rendez-vous épié* is a 'ruse langagière', responding to the dwarf's initial ruse to induce Marc to spy on the lovers. Their aim is to convince Marc that what he sees and hears is true, thereby establishing a 'contre-vérité'.[169] Sargent-Baur notes that this episode is 'representative of the thick tangle of truth and falsehood, appearance and reality, of which Béroul's romance is very largely composed'.[170] Ollier notes the importance of the act of language in the production of meaning, including the tryst beneath the tree and the oath scene.[171] She also argues that:

> ce texte élabore pour lui-même une 'vérité' qui se manifeste au XII[e] siècle avec la force du scandale, et que la fiction elle-même, qui est en train d'éprouver ses propres vertus et pouvoirs, accueillera avec stupeur: dès qu'il s'agit de conduites humaines, la vérité transcendante et une, accessible en effet à Dieu seul, cède la place à *des* vérités, relatives, partiales et partielles, jamais acquises.[172]

However, there is only one truth present in this episode, but the use of language by the characters in this episode means that it is difficult for some of the characters present at the scene to access that truth. Rather than repeating previous analyses, this section will focus on the technicalities of how words are used to signify and to create deception and move beyond earlier discussions to suggest how the ways that the authors and/or the characters viewed truth, falsehood and interpretation might reflect

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[167] Burns, E. Jane, 'How Lovers Lie', p. 80.
[168] Ollier, 'Le statut de la vérité p. 281.
[169] Machta, pp. 76-77.
[170] Sargent-Baur, 'Truth, Half-truth, Untruth', p. 399.
[171] Ollier, 'Le statut de la vérité', p. 264.
[172] Ibid., p. 265.

contemporary views on late twelfth and early thirteenth century literary culture, in particular the construction of history. The previous chapter explained how characters use visual signs to signify and also to deceive others, usually by confusion or equivocation over what a particular sign actually signifies. A similar process occurs when certain characters use verbal signs in order to manipulate the beliefs or interpretations of those around them. Of course, this process is most evident with the ways in which the lovers attempt to deceive the king. This will open up into a broader discussion on how the need for deception enables the creation of fiction. Ollier argues:

> Ni songe ni mensonge, la fiction se fait l'expression d'une vérité multiple, complexe, impossible à dire autrement que dans la seule langue capable d'énoncer les contraires, de révéler et de dissimuler ensemble, d'être mobilisée par les uns et par les autres: le langage humain.[173]

Previous critics have attempted to disentangle the truths and lies in this episode, but have not adequately addressed the argument that these writers were part of a larger discussion occurring during the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries regarding the relationship between fiction, history and authority. Characters in these Tristan narratives frequently use words with multiple meanings, that seem as if they should be univocal, in order to lie. The tryst beneath the tree provides an excellent example of how Iseut accomplishes this. The previous chapter analysed the communication system that was created in order to enable the lovers to meet, whereas this section will focus on how Isolde in particular uses language in order to deceive one man (Mark), whilst communicating truthfully with the other (Tristan). This episode is extant in Béroul's, Gottfried's and Eilhart's works. The conversation between Tristrant and Isalde in Eilhart's version of this episode (ll. 3642-3744) does conceal

[173] Ollier, p. 282.

their relationship, but Isalde makes no overt proclamation regarding her virginity or her relationship to Tristrant, therefore this discussion will focus on Béroul's and Gottfried's works.

Throughout Béroul's version of this episode, Iseut's speech mingles truth, lies and half-truths and succeeds in convincing Marc that she and Tristan are innocent of adultery.[174] This verbal deception is made possible by the fact that Iseut does not refer to either Marc or Tristan by name. Other critics have noted the complexities of the verbal communication in this episode. Pensom notes that Iseut's exchange with Tristan becomes a message addressed to Marc in the tree, which in turn becomes a message for Tristan.[175] Machta describes this episode as a 'ruse langagière'; the king believes he is simply witnessing their meeting and therefore cannot be manipulated linguistically.[176] During Iseut's conversation with Tristan underneath the tree, knowing that Marc is watching her from above, although he is unaware that she knows of his presence, she states that the only man she has loved is 'cil qui m'ot pucele' (Béroul, l. 24). It is significant that her statement here is almost like an oath, which lends it a greater appearance of authority. She begins her sentence by referring to God; God is her witness and may punish her if she is lying (ll. 22-26). This reference to divine judgment suggests that her statement must be true and is similar to the scene depicting Iseut's duplicitous oath at the 'Blanche Lande' later in the text. It is also reminiscent of the way that the writers cite authorities to make their own work seem more authoritative. Machta argues that this statement is like a mini oath, arguing that Iseut addresses God sincerely, but is lying. Machta's explanation of this

[174] Sargent-Baur, 'Truth, Half-truth, Untruth', pp. 396-401.
[175] Pensom, p. 13.
[176] Machta, p. 76.

is that she is convinced of her innocence, but it is not an innocence of facts, but a subjective innocence.[177] However, although Iseut does mingle truth and lies throughout this episode, this particular statement is factually correct. The phrase 'cil qui m'ot pucele' is, in itself, unambiguous. Only one person could have been with her as a maiden. The one who took her virginity is the only one who had her 'amistié' (l. 25), a word which can refer to friendship, love or favour. However, the identity attached to the man who fulfils this role is ambiguous. The way this phrase is interpreted is dependent on the prior knowledge that the characters have about past events, specifically regarding the loss of Iseut's virginity. The previous chapter showed how characters use prearranged signs in order to communicate with each other, for example when arranging to meet. Their interpretation of such signs is dependent on knowledge that they have acquired previously. The same thing is true of certain verbal signs, although, in this instance, the interpretation of a particular verbal sign is based on the knowledge that a character has of the past, rather than an attempt to decipher a code that has been arranged secretly between the lovers. Tristan knows that he was the man who took Iseut's virginity. Marc, however, believes that he was the one to take her virginity, due to the wedding-night deception.[178] This deception follows a similar construction to the oath episode, as characters use disguises in order to create a visual deception to precede the verbal deception and make it possible. Due to the success of exchanging Brangien for Iseut in the marital bed on the wedding night, Marc can believe with apparent certainty that he was the man to take Iseut's virginity. Had Iseut used Marc's name (or Tristan's name), then

[177] Ibid., pp. 81-82.

[178] This episode is only extant in Gottfried's work, but the fact that Marc clearly believes that he was the one to take her virginity suggests that a similar episode occurred in Béroul's text.

this deception would not have worked. This is similar to the linguistic awareness shown by Gottfried's Isolde when she rejects her mother's promise of protection for Tristan by indicating that her mother actually promised to protect Tantris. Rather than lying directly at the tryst beneath the tree, Iseut uses words in such a way as to enable her to avoid lying and also to create something that can be interpreted in different ways. She is here telling a truth that Marc cannot understand because he has been manipulated previously. Ollier's argument that one truth gives way to multiple truths is not supported by this episode. Rather, there is only one truth, but the way that it is presented by Iseut allows Marc to continue to believe in the lovers' innocence. Discussing Marc's later interpretation of the events at the tryst beneath the tree, Burns explains that Marc 'listened to their embroidered tale of innocence, Marc has taken his cue from what he has heard, not what he has seen. In interpreting the lovers' secret meeting, he simply continues to weave the tale that was begun by Tristan and Iseut'.[179]

This episode is also present in Gottfried's *Tristan*. The background to the episode is similar and the general plot is the same. However, Gottfried's Isolde is much less direct than Béroul's Iseut in her use of language. The deception that is created in this scene is very similar to that which occurs in Béroul's text, but the actual content is different. Isolde states:

> und gihe's ze gote, daz ich nie
> ze keinem manne muot gewan
> und hiute und iemer alle man
> vor mînem herzen sint verspart
> niwan der eine, dem dâ wart
> der êrste rôsebluome
> von mînem magetuome. (Gottfried, ll. 14760-66)

[179] Burns, 'How Lovers Lie Together', p. 86.

By contrast, Béroul's Iseut's statement is as follows:

> Mais Dex plevis ma loiauté,
> Qui sor mon cors mete flaele,
> S'onques fors cil qui m'ot pucele
> Out m'amistié encor nul jor! (Béroul, ll. 22-25)

Firstly, Béroul's Iseut is absolutely passive regarding her virginity, but it is implied that Gottfried's Isolde is slightly more active. Secondly, like Béroul's Iseut, Gottfried's Isolde refers to God in her speech (l. 14760), thereby making her statement seem authoritative. She is of course telling the truth. Huber argues that this anticipates Isolde's trial:

> Hier geht es um mehr als nur die harten Tatsachen. Die Wahrheit und Rechtmäßigkeit des Geschehenen werden aus der Haltung der Figuren heraus begründet, und dafür wird Gott als Zeuge angerufen.
> Diese Konstellation nimmt das **Gottesurteil** bis ins Detail vorweg.[180]

Although it is the case that the legitimacy of events is not necessarily developed from the facts, the truth of events is the same as the facts. In exactly the same way as in Béroul's version, Isolde carefully uses language so as to simultaneously tell the truth while provoking an interpretation on Marke's part which is contradictory to that truth, and is based on a previous deception. Isolde suggests that this is authorised by God as her words are factually correct. Thirdly, the general meaning of both passages is the same: Isolde does not love any man other than the one who took her virginity. The use and interpretation of this statement shows the importance of audience interpretation when dealing with verbal signs. Gottfried's Isolde states that all are spared by her heart except for the one who was given the first rose of her maidenhood. Béroul's Iseut swears that no one other than the one who had her maidenhood had ever had her 'amistié'. The interpretation of Gottfried's Isolde's

[180] Huber, *Gottfried von Straßburg*, p. 103. Emphasis his.

statement is dependent on both the intradiegetical and extradiegetical audiences associating the idea of a rosebud with a loss of virginity. This could be because Gottfried's Isolde is less crude than her counterpart in Béroul's work, something that will be seen again below in the discussion of the episode of Isolde's trial. In both texts, Isolde's primary motivation is to deceive her husband and she achieves this by not using anyone's name. This means that the phrases referring to her virginity, and to the identity of the person to whom she lost it, can be interpreted in different ways depending on the listener. It is therefore crucial that this role is something that can only have been undertaken by one person. It is a sign which seems to be univocal. For Mark, it refers to him but for Tristan and the extradiegetical audience, it refers to Tristan himself. The main difference between these statements in Gottfried's and Béroul's works is that Gottfried's Isolde uses more flowery language than Béroul's Iseut. The connection between Gottfried's Tristan and the narrator figure has been widely acknowledged, but here it is evident that Isolde is creating a poetic text. This is similar to Tristan's use of an olive branch earlier in this episode, as the olive branch has other connotations which emphasises the literary element of Gottfried's work. Béroul's Iseut and Gottfried's Isolde manipulate language in similar ways, but Gottfried's version takes this slightly further, enabling Isolde to create a poetic text out of an event from her past.

Isolde's Trial

The importance of physical objects and other visual signs in situations (legal or otherwise) where characters are attempting to discern the truth or falsehood of a

particular statement has been discussed above, with emphasis primarily on the role of the visual sign.[181] Although physical objects or other visual signs are necessary in legal situations to provide proof or evidence, the authority of the spoken word itself is also apparent. A trial establishes an official version of events, which is subsequently accepted as authoritative. Clanchy, discussing legal proceedings in England, states that, 'The *narrator* or *conteur* made the formal claim or pleading on the litigant's behalf'.[182] In the Tristan texts, the litigant makes a formal claim which is then accompanied by a physical sign, such as the dragon's tongue or the burning iron. As York describes it '[t]he ordeal by hot iron is a medieval trial procedure employed to determine the guilt or innocence of the accused'.[183] This occurs either by means of providing evidence, or by showing the judgement of God by an outward sign. When accompanied by an oath, the burning iron determines the truth or falsehood of that particular statement, which then reveals the guilt or innocence of the person making the oath. Obviously, this is manipulated by the lovers throughout these texts, enabling them to create a version of the truth which is publicly accepted and yet deceptive. They tell stories, which may or may not be true, which are then supported by physical signs. Verbal statements, particularly in the form of oaths, can be imbued with authority due to elements from social convention, but it is clear that at various points the lovers have convinced society at large that something which is true is actually false, yet it is publicly, officially defined as fact. If judicial procedures can be manipulated in such a way, then this destabilises their authority. It is a social convention that a version of events confirmed during such procedures carries

[181] See pp. 78-84.
[182] Clanchy, p. 221
[183] York, 'Isolt's Ordeal', p. 1.

authority, possibly even divine authority, but this is consistently called into question. They once again destabilise the link between truth and situations which are seen as authoritative due to social convention. There are many critical works dealing with these episodes, some of which argue that Gottfried's work was criticising the practice of ordeals at the time.[184] Although these critical perspectives are valid, it is also important to note that this attitude towards authority is part of a larger contemporary debate on the nature of authority and how to access truth. As Burns argues, Béroul may be interested less in the moral truth of the lovers and more in how they manipulate the legal system 'exposing thereby its weakness'.[185] This can be taken further to argue that, although he is exposing the weakness of the legal system, Béroul is contributing to a discussion regarding interpretation and how to access truth. This can be connected to developments in vernacular literary texts during this period.[186] Ollier argued that the idea of one truth is giving way to that of multiple truths.[187] In contrast, this section argues that there are no multiple truths presented, rather differences of interpretation. The writers are concerned with how to access truth, but in these episodes Béroul and Gottfried also show how important interpretation is in the reception of oaths, suggesting that it is possible for verbal signs, and narratives more generally, to have multiple interpretations. This section examines both the creation of Isolde's oath and its reception by different characters, and the comparison between Béroul's and Gottfried's works will show how both writers deal with the importance of interpretation regarding Isolde's oath. Béroul's *Tristan* shows that Arthur offers a particular oath to Iseut which she ignores (ll. 4189-

[184] This scholarship was referenced above (p. 101). Scholarship on Béroul's work will be detailed below (p. 116).
[185] Burns, 'How Lovers Lie Together', p. 78.
[186] See Chapters Three and Four.
[187] Ollier, 'Le statut de la vérité', p. 282.

4216), and this will be compared with Gottfried's *Tristan*. This section will also examine how a skilled interlocutor and deceiver like Isolde succeeds in swearing a 'gelüppeter eit' (Gottfried, l. 15748), which is true and yet deceptive, convincing others to believe her so absolutely.

Gottfried's *Tristan* features several trials, some of which present different ways of determining the true version of events. For example, during the procedure regarding the identity of the man who killed the dragon, evidence is presented and then assessed. This evidence takes the form of the dragon's head and tongue, as well as the verbal testimonies of various characters. By contrast, in both Béroul's and Gottfried's works the episode of Isolde's equivocal oath relies on an oath sworn by Isolde, rather than the presentation of other evidence. Specific words are sworn which are imbued with authority and sometimes accompanied by a visual sign, such as the accused grasping a burning iron and coming away unscathed, as in Gottfried's text. Pierre Jonin discusses Iseut's trial in Béroul's text at length, asking 'Ces scènes d'allure juridique se déroulent-elles selon les coutumes du temps ou bien font-elles appel à des notions qui leur sont étrangères?'[188] He concludes that 'le procès d'Iseut et de Tristan va continuer à se dérouler selon les formes regulières'.[189] Rosemary Combridge also notes that Gottfried's version of this episode is relatively faithful to the way that such procedures would have occurred in reality.[190] This trial differs in some respects from the judicial procedure undergone when Isolde's father in Gottfried's text attempts to discover the truth as to who killed the dragon. The evidence presented there arguably offered causal proof as to the legitimacy or

[188] Jonin, p. 60.
[189] Jonin, p. 71.
[190] Combridge, p. 112.

otherwise of their claims. Divine judgement is not present here, although a judicial duel is suggested, as it is in the Gandin episode as well. The cognitive decision in Isolde's trial is supposed to come from God, who is the ultimate authority. This decision is then manifested visually (i.e. God performs a miracle as a sign of the innocence of the accused). In Béroul's work, the trial proceeds with Iseut being summoned before two Kings (Arthur and Marc) and presumably also other members of the court. She is commanded by Arthur to swear a specific oath on some relics. The swearing of the oath is essential for the structure of the trial and forms the basis of it. The fact that she must swear on relics gives her oath more authority.

This is one of the most frequently discussed scenes in both Béroul and Gottfried scholarship. In the case of Béroul's text, much work has been done on the way that Tristan and Iseut set the scene for the oath, based on the performance of both Tristan in disguise and Iseut, and on examining the legal procedures, including being aware of the fact that the oath Iseut swears is not the one that Arthur asks her to swear. Some of this work also focuses on the specifics of her speech, such as her statement that the leper was between her thighs.[191] Scholarship on Gottfried's work has taken a slightly different angle. Although work has been produced on the visual deception of this scene – which is less striking than in Béroul's version, given that Tristan is disguised as a pilgrim rather than a leper and carries Isolde in his arms,

[191] Scholarship on the trial in Béroul's work includes J. M. Anderson, 'Romantic Love as Natural Right in Béroul's Romance of Tristan', *Comitatus*, 39 (2008), 41-61), Geoffrey Bromiley, 'Le serment ambigu dans le *Roman de Tristan* de Béroul: la conscience et la droit, une tentative de conciliation', in *Le droit et sa perception dans la littérature et les mentalités médiévales: actes du Colloque du Centre d'Études Médiévales de l'Université de Picardie, Amiens 17-19 mars 1989*, ed. by Danielle Buschinger (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1993), pp. 31-39, Sally L. Burch, 'Leprosy and Law in Béroul's *Roman de Tristran*', *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 38.1 (2007), 141-54, Jane Gilbert, 'Gender, Oaths and Ambiguity in *Sir Tristrem* and Béroul's *Roman de Tristan*', in *The Spirit of Medieval English Popular Romance*, ed. by Ad Putter and Jane Gilbert (Harlow: Longman, 2000), pp. 237-57, and Ernest C. York, 'Isolt's Trial in Béroul and *La Folie Tristan d'Oxford*', *Medievalia et Humanistica*, 6 (1975), 157-61.

rather than falling between her thighs – scholarship has tended to focus more on Gottfried's presentation of the trial and compare this with contemporary criticisms of the 'Gottesurteil' as a legal procedure.[192] There are very few comparisons of these scenes in Gottfried's and Béroul's works.[193] This section will provide such a comparison, examining how they engage with truth, lies and interpretation in these judicial procedures, focusing specifically on the way in which the verbal deception itself works. The visual manipulation is essential for the success of the lovers' deception, such as Béroul's Tristan being disguised as a leper, or Gottfried's Tristan disguised as a pilgrim, and Tristan, in both texts, in this disguise, carrying Isolde across the marsh. However, it is also essential that Isolde speaks very carefully in order to both assert her own innocence and satisfy the terms of the oath and therefore to avoid saying something that would cause God's wrath to be displayed. Isolde's skill with rhetoric and as a narrator is depicted here. Both her skilful construction of the oath and the way that others interpret and react to her speech will be analysed. This will provide an insight into the issue of authority within these judicial trials as represented in literature, examining how these writers viewed authority, fiction, and the way that an official version of past events is constructed but called into question.

In Béroul's text, Arthur asks Iseut to swear the following oath:

> Que Tristran n'ot vers vos amor
> De puteé ne de folor,
> Fors cele que devoit porter
> Envers son oncle et vers sa per. (Béroul, ll. 4193-96)

This is very clear and straightforward. Arthur refers to Tristan by name, so no

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[192] Scholarship on this was outlined above (p. 101).

[193] One exception to this is Roger D. Groot, 'Isolt's trial and ordeal: A legal-historical analysis', in *Adventures of the Law: Proceedings of the Sixteenth British Legal History Conference, Dublin, 2003*, ed. by Paul Brand, Kevin Costella and W. N. Osborough (Dublin: Four Courts Press in Association with The Irish Legal History Society, 2005), pp. 1-18.

confusion can be possible as to the identity of the person concerned, unlike Iseut's speech in Béroul's version of the tryst beneath the tree. Arthur also makes an exception for the love that it is proper that Tristan should bear towards his uncle and his uncle's relatives (l. 4198), which would of course include Iseut. She is merely asked to swear that the love that Tristan has for her is not dishonourable. This proposed oath seems to leave no room for manoeuvre and no possibility for deception as Arthur has covered the option that Tristan could bear love for Iseut that would not be defined as adulterous. This gives Iseut an option for her oath, in which she could claim that Tristan loves her but not in a dishonourable way. However, Iseut does not take this option, rather completely changing the terms of the oath and instead swearing a different one. Anderson argues that in this episode Iseut is acquitted because, according to Abelardian ethics, she has not loved Tristan sinfully:

> In the Abelardian approach, the inner disposition of the individual matters. This justifies Tristan and Iseut's adultery and deceit and exonerates them morally and ethically from their unlawful and sinful behavior.
>
> The question for Béroul is not whether Tristan and Iseut committed adultery – they did – but whether they were guilty of adultery. The issue is clouded because they were victims of a potion whose power they were unable to resist.[194]

While this is possibly accurate from the point of view of the ethics behind the oath, the fact that Iseut's oath offers more than is necessary suggests that this is not the narrator's only aim with this episode, but rather that he also uses it to explore the role of interpretation in judicial procedures. This agrees with Burns' assessment of this episode, which argues that:

> The question posed by Béroul's text is not so much moral or legal as it is literary. The issue is no longer one of judgement, but one of interpretation. On one level, at least, the problem at hand is not whether Tristan and Iseut are guilty of a sinful amorous liaison, for their carnal rapport is well-attested and

[194] Anderson, p. 56.

> even encouraged. Rather, the narrative appears specifically to be concerned with the generation of faulty, or more accurately, fictive discourse. One could conclude in fact that the project of Béroul's text is not to establish whether Tristan and Iseut lie together as lovers, but to demonstrate how well these lovers lie together as tellers of a fictional tale.[195]

It is therefore clear that Béroul uses this episode to explore the nature of interpretation.

Iseut's revised oath appears to more forcefully proclaim her innocence, but the specific words she uses enable her to deceive her intradiegetical audience:

> Or escoutez que je ci jure,
> De quoi le roi ci asseüre:
> Si m'aït Dex et saint Ylaire,
> Ces reliques, cest saintuaire,
> Totes celes qui ci ne sont
> Et tuit icil de par le mont,
> Q'entre mes cuises n'entra home,
> Fors le ladre qui fist soi some,
> Qui me porta outre les guez,
> Et le rois Marc mes esposez.
> …
> De deus ne me pus escondire:
> Du ladre, du roi Marc, mon sire.
> Li ladres fu entre mes janbes (Béroul, ll. 4199-4208; 4211-13)

The extradiegetical audience knows Iseut's sexual history, that she has had sexual relations with both Marc and Tristan and that she was carried over the marsh by the leper, who was Tristan in disguise.[196] The distinction between the interpretations made of this scene by the intra- and extradiegetical audiences was noted by Gilbert, but she focuses largely on the effect that gender has on this episode.[197] By contrast, the discussion presented here examines the way that the different audiences interpret Iseut's words. Regarding Iseut's reasons for constructing the oath, her aim is to tell the truth; as she is swearing an oath before God, it must be factually correct. She also

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[195] Burns, 'How Lovers Lie Together', pp. 79-80.
[196] Pensom provides an overview of what various parts of the audience do or do not know, p. 101.
[197] See Gilbert, especially pp. 248-57.

intends to deceive Marc and make him believe that he is the only man with whom she has had sexual intercourse. There are three key ways in which she accomplishes this. Firstly, her introduction to the oath emphasises its authority (ll. 4199-4204). This is accomplished by the use of the word ‘jure’ as well as the references to God, St. Ylaire and the relics. On the one hand, this describes the scene for the extradiegetical audience. On the other hand, it emphasises the fact that God, the saint and the relics all bear witness to her oath. This gives it authority, leading the intradiegetical audience to assume that her speech must be true, which of course it is. Secondly, Iseut does not refer to Tristan by name, unlike Arthur’s exemplar oath. At no point during her oath does she state that Tristan has not loved her ‘De puteé’ (l. 4193). She refers to Marc by name, but it is safe for her to do so. By referring to Tristan as ‘li ladre’, an identity that only Tristan, Governal, Iseut herself and the extradiegetical audience are able to interpret as one belonging to Tristan, she can tell the truth about her adultery while also asserting her innocence. The success of the deception is dependent on her intradiegetical audience assuming that there are three separate people: Marc, Tristan and ‘li ladre’. This highlights the broken link between words as signs and the signifieds to which they are attached, emphasising the fact that the reception of this oath is about interpretation rather than judgment. This supports Burns’ argument cited above. Thirdly, the two different oaths (Arthur’s and Iseut’s) refer to the sexual act in different ways. Arthur refers to ‘amor’, albeit a type of love that could be ‘de puteé’ or ‘de folor’ but not necessarily, whereas Iseut uses a statement (ll. 4205-07) during her oath which can refer to sexual intercourse, but it can also be interpreted as referring to the physical position of someone occupying the

space between her thighs, as Machta notes.[198] Gilbert argues that the equivocal oath trope was well-known during this period, claiming that Iseut must make herself seem unfeminine to avoid what Gilbert terms the Equivocal Oath scenario, to avoid 'being caught in a trap of representation peculiar to the feminine: that a woman is most obviously guilty when she protests her innocence [...] She mimics the brazen whore of the Equivocal Oath so perfectly, and yet with such apparent irony, that she disarms any attempt to identify her with that role'.[199] Moreover, Iseut plays on the expectations that the audience has of genre, as she uses language that is not from a courtly register.

There are two audiences to Iseut's statement and therefore at least two interpretations of it, as well as different types of audience expectation. Firstly, there is the interpretation made by Iseut, Tristan, Governal and the extradiegetical audience. They all know that she has had sexual intercourse with both Marc and Tristan, as well as the fact that Tristan, disguised as the leper, has been between her thighs in a non-sexual way. Secondly, there is the interpretation of the statement made by the intradiegetical audience, principally Marc and Arthur. They know that she has had sexual intercourse with Marc and that the leper has been between her thighs innocently. It does not occur to them that the leper could be Tristan in disguise, or indeed that she could actually have had sexual intercourse with the leper as well, which would have been a shocking idea. The performance of the leper carrying her over the marsh distracts the intradiegetical audience from the sexual implications of Iseut's speech. In addition, Iseut's speech subverts expectations that her intradiegetical audience may have of her. She rewrites the oath that Arthur gives

[198] Machta, p. 99.
[199] Gilbert, p. 249, p. 251.

her, referring verbally to and earlier in the scene performing a physical representation of, sexual intercourse, rather than referring more abstractly to ‘amor’. The oath that Iseut actually swears is unexpected, referring directly to sex rather than abstractly to love. Moreover, the fact that the intradiegetical audience interprets her speech as proving her innocence may be because they expect her to swear her innocence, and do not expect her to admit openly to adultery, especially with a leper. In another context, the audience may interpret the statement of someone being between her thighs as referring to a sexual act, but in this instance they interpret it in a non-sexual way. Given beliefs during this period regarding leprosy, this assertion on Iseut’s part would be particularly unexpected, especially given Marc’s attempt to punish her for adultery by giving her to Yvain and a band of lepers (ll.1155-1227). It is possible that the intradiegetical audience would react to this in a similar way to the reaction of Marc’s court to the elaborate stories told by Tristan as fool in the two *Folies Tristan*. The narrations are so ludicrous that they cannot possibly be true and in the *Folies* are therefore not assessed as either true or false but seen as entertaining. Something similar is happening here, although the context is different. The fool in the *Folies Tristan* is in the position of a minstrel, whereas the oath is in the context of a judicial procedure; the audience expects to hear a statement either confirmed as true or rejected as false. In the *Folies Tristan*, Tristan tells absurd stories and then admits to committing adultery with the queen, which works because both his disguise and his absurd stories combine to create an identity for him that convinces his audience that he is not an authoritative narrator. By contrast, Iseut’s physical appearance and references to God give a general appearance of authority. The audience can accept as true the fact that the leper lay between her thighs and that this was not adulterous, as

they were eyewitnesses to it. They assume that the leper would not have been between her thighs in a sexual way, as that would be nonsensical, and they cannot equate the leper with Tristan.

Gottfried's version of this episode has attracted a vast amount of critical attention. The argument that Gottfried was criticising the practice of ordeals is valid, but it is also important to note that in addition to that criticism, this episode provides a useful situation for Gottfried to examine the process of interpreting a verbal sign in a supposedly authoritative situation, particularly when that sign must be manipulated. This is similar to Béroul's approach to this episode. The outline of the plot in Gottfried's version of this episode is similar to Béroul's, but with a few significant differences. Rather than being disguised as a leper, Tristan is disguised as a pilgrim. Rather than carrying Isolde across the marsh on his back, he carries her in his arms, trips and falls, lying next to her on the ground with her still in his arms. These differences are partly due to the tone of Béroul's and Gottfried's works. More significantly, Arthur does not feature in this text. Rather than an authority figure like Arthur proposing an oath that Isolde should follow, there is a debate between various characters about what her oath should actually contain (ll. 15681-96). What is striking about this passage is that it is clear that the oath is not objective truth as it can be formulated either to her advantage or her disadvantage. Gottfried here destabilises the authority of the oath, firstly because there is no authority figure such as Arthur to formulate the terms of the oath and secondly because there are so many different voices clamouring to put forward their advice about the oath. Isolde interjects into this discussion: 'ir aller lêre der ist ze vil' (l. 15705). This agrees with the argument that Gottfried criticises the procedure of the ordeal in this episode, but

also indicates equivocation regarding the interpretation of verbal signs. The oath that Isolde subsequently swears is as follows:

> vernemet, wie ich iu sweren wil:
> daz mînes lîbes nie kein man
> dekeine künde nie gewan
> noch mir ze keinen zîten
> weder ze arme noch ze sîten
> âne iuch nie lebende man gelac
> wan der, vür den ich niene mac
> gebieten eit noch lougen,
> den ir mit iuwern ougen
> mir sâhet an dem arme,
> der wallaere der arme. (Gottfried ll. 15706-16)

The fact that she interjects into their debate to then offer her version of the oath makes it seem more authoritative. The men who are speaking cannot decide, so she offers something decisive. There is a clear reference to sex in this oath (ll. 15707-08), but because this is immediately followed by the statement that no one lay next to her this distracts the audience from her admission. She directly admits to engaging in sexual intercourse with the pilgrim, but the audience concentrates merely on the fact that she was lying by his side. The verbal aspect of the deception functions similarly here to that in Béroul's work. Once again, the deception is dependent on Isolde not mentioning Tristan by name, but rather by referring to him as 'der wallaere der arme' (l. 15716). As with Béroul's work, the deception is therefore dependent on her intradiegetical audience being tricked into assuming that there are three people (Marke, Tristan and the pilgrim), rather than just two (Marke and Tristan). Another identity must be created in the minds of the audience in order for the deception to function. The oath that Gottfried's Isolde swears here is striking, particularly in comparison with Béroul's Iseut. In the latter work, Arthur proposes an oath referring to love, and Iseut talks about sex instead. Gottfried's Isolde is very different. She is

speaking directly to Marke here, saying that she has lain with no other man but him (l. 15711), but when referring to the pilgrim she states that she can offer neither oath nor denial ('eit noch lougen', l. 15713) about him as they are eyewitnesses and saw her lying in his arms. This is a completely different formulation to the oath sworn by Béroul's Iseut. Iseut swears the oath and makes both Marc and the leper the exceptions to that. Gottfried's Isolde swears the oath, to which Marke is the exception, but the pilgrim is excluded completely from the oath that she has made. A careful analysis of the words she has used means that she could have done anything with the pilgrim and the fact that she has lain in his arms is merely an excuse for excluding him from the terms of the oath. This is important because it enables her to completely avoid referring to the pilgrim within the oath itself, but it merely gives the impression that she is very conscientious about the terms of the oath. Moreover, she deliberately makes the intradiegetical audience into eyewitnesses (they have seen it 'mit iuwern ougen', l. 15714), which is a highly authoritative form of source.[200]

Isolde's statement about her oath is intriguing. She states openly that it should be pleasing to Marke:

> mîn eit muoz doch gestellet sîn,
> swaz ir dekeiner gesaget,
> als iu gevellet unde behaget. (Gottfried, ll. 15698-15700)

She does not mention that it will convey the truth, although, as has been seen above, her intradiegetical audience may assume that it will. Promises are generally trusted and oaths are believed, especially when God is an authority for or witness to that oath. However, Isolde states openly that her aim is to produce an oath that will please Marke and appease him. The actual oath that she swears is, of course, that which she

[200] See Chinca, *History, Fiction, Verisimilitude*, p. 20.

set up earlier in the episode and has been discussed at length above. She even tells Marke to give her a different oath, if the one that she has sworn is not sufficient (Gottfried, ll. 15721-23). Marke does not accept this offer, but by making it Isolde has made herself appear more trustworthy.

During Isolde's trial, Béroul and Gottfried present examples of how language can be used to manipulate audience interpretation. The confusion surrounding the signification of certain words has been discussed, as well as the way that interpretation can be manipulated based both on the context in which these verbal signs are presented and on the knowledge of the characters. The effect of this as a narrative is seen on those who constitute the audience to Isolde's deception. As mentioned above, the expectations that an audience has in relation to an oath affect their interpretation of it. This section will focus on the way that the audience interprets these oaths and the importance of that interpretation in these judicial scenes. Immediately prior to the reaction of the audience to the oath, Béroul's narrator states 'Tuit cil qui l'ont oï jurer / Ne püent pas plus endurer' (ll. 4217-18). There is an omission directly preceding these lines in the manuscript, so it is difficult to say what this means with certainty. However, it is possible that the people present did not want to hear any more explicit language. The idea of Iseut sleeping with a leper was so shocking to them, that the image of it was something they no longer wanted to endure. Iseut's oath is not merely a distraction; it is also a shock for her audience.

As has been seen, Béroul's Iseut does not swear the oath that Arthur required of her. Her intradiegetical audience notices this, but rather than being a reason for criticising her, they interpret it as her having sworn more than was necessary, a fact

which they admire:

> Dex, fait chascuns, si fiere en jure :
> Tant en a fait aprés droiture!
> Plus i a mis que ne disoient
> Ne que li fel ne requeroient:
> Ne li covient plus escondit
> Qu'avez oï, grant et petit,
> Fors du roi et de son nevo.
> Ele a juré et mis en vo
> Qu'entre ses cuises nus n'entra
> Que li meseaus qui la porta
> Ier, endroit tierce, outre les guez,
> Et li rois Marc, ses esposez. (Béroul, ll. 4219-31)[201]

This passage depicts the interpretation that one of Iseut's audiences (the spectators of the oath, with the exception of Marc and Arthur) makes of her oath and their reaction to it. It shows that they understood her oath in the way she intended. The fact that she has said much more than was required is remarked upon, as if it makes the oath that she has sworn much better than the oath that was initially asked of her. The oath she swears is much more effective because it answers to Iseut's requirement that it be deceptive and yet factual and it also provides a more entertaining story. The leper carrying her across the marsh, Tristan's effective disguise, Iseut's physical appearance, the fact that everyone wants her to be innocent, her physical position between two kings (Marc and Arthur), the oath which mentions the previous incident with the leper, and the crudity which may make them laugh, combine to create an entertaining narrative, even to her intradiegetical audience. The audience reacts to the narrative rather than to the judicial procedure. The oath suggested by Arthur is clearer. Iseut's oath is necessary because it is essential for the plot that she can successfully deceive people whilst not actually lying before God. This episode enables the narrator to explore how verbal signs can be used to create something

[201] This is also noted by Bromiley, 'Le serment ambigu', p. 36.

convincing and that carries authority but is still manipulative, as well as also in this instance being entertaining.

Gottfried draws attention to the fact that the oath is deceptive more than Béroul does. Isolde prepares her audience for her oath verbally, in a way that Béroul's Iseut does not. Gottfried's Isolde is carried in the arms of Tristan disguised as a pilgrim. Once Tristan has fallen with her in his arms, she argues that he could not have done anything else:

> Îsôt dô smierende sprach:
> 'welch wunder waere ouch nû dar an,
> ob dirre wallende man
> mir mir wolte schimpfen?' (Gottfried, ll. 15612-15)

It is something to laugh about; she is entertaining her audience and making this incident into a joke, thereby also creating a rapport with the audience. It is also a circumstance that allows her to be praised by others. They interpret Isolde's behaviour here as evidence of her good qualities 'diz begunden s'ir gelimpfen / ze tugenden und ze höfscheit' (ll. 15616-17). Marke's position in this audience is significant. He is not merely an observer of Isolde's behaviour, he is also an observer of the way that others react to her behaviour; 'und Marke der sach allez an / und hôrte diz unde daz' (ll. 15620-21). He is a double spectator and it is possible that the reaction of the rest of the audience affects his own interpretation of Isolde's words.

It is clear that the authority of trials is questioned throughout these texts. Conventions which are intended to convey divine authority, such as ordeals, are seen to be easily manipulated. Béroul's Iseut destabilises the authority of both God and Arthur, by using her own oath rather than Arthur's and by swearing an oath that is

technically true, but deceptive. Gottfried, however, depicts more equivocation with the original version of the oath that Isolde is asked to swear, which contrasts sharply with Béroul's version. It seems that both Béroul and Gottfried are concerned with the importance of interpretation in these scenes, indicating of course that it is difficult to access truth using such conventions, but also encouraging interpretation among their own audiences. Moreover, it is important to note that trials are intended to provide authority for a particular version of events. They therefore construct an official, apparently accurate version of previous events. However, in these texts they establish a version of events which is not true, due to the interpretation the audience makes of Isolde's oaths. Oaths are seen here clearly as verbal signs that can be interpreted in multiple ways. Given the fact that these verbal signs are pronounced in authoritative situations, Béroul and Gottfried also seem to suggest that language itself has the power to establish and create new facts.

Reminders

The previous sections have discussed the way that individual words or phrases can be manipulated in order to deceive, particularly due to the fact that certain words can have multiple meanings. However, this is not the only way in which words function as signs. Although it is evident that characters exploit the meanings of individual words, it is also important to analyse how words function as reminders. The use of physical objects as memory signs was discussed in the previous chapter.[202] This section will examine how verbal signs are similarly used and how they may be

[202] See pp. 45-58.

combined with physical objects or visual images in order to remind characters of a particular event. The two main episodes of the Tristan story where characters reference events from the past are the tryst beneath the tree, as seen in Béroul's and Eilhart's texts (Béroul, ll. 1-319; Eilhart, ll. 3420-3767), and the episode of Tristan's feigned madness, as depicted in Eilhart's work (ll. 8860-9156), as well as in the *Folie Tristan de Berne* and the *Folie Tristan d'Oxford*.[203] Similarly to rings, verbal reminders of past events are used in these episodes as signs, usually of the identity, trustworthiness or authority of the speaker and they also influence or manipulate the emotions of the characters who receive them. The focus here is specifically on how these words function as reminders of previous events and how that influences the interpretation a character makes of a particular episode. The significance of these reminders as retellings of previous events, particularly relating to the way that the characters tell stories based on their own pasts and deeper implications for the boundaries between history and fiction resulting from this analysis, will be discussed in Chapter Four.

The above discussion on Béroul's tryst beneath the tree examined how Tristan and Iseut use verbal signs in order to lie.[204] However, the verbal deception in this scene is created not merely by exploiting the different meanings attached to certain words, but also by using verbal reminders to function as signs of the general character of a particular person, particularly regarding their trustworthiness and reliability. Eilhart's version of this episode features only a vague reminder from Isalde of the services that Tristrant has performed for Marke in the past:

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[203] The tryst beneath the tree is also present in Gottfried's work (ll. 14583-15046), but the characters do not mention past events during it.

[204] Eco, p. 7.

ich waß durch minen herren dir hold,
sÿd du sin neff ward
und im ere gebard
me dann andern all. (Eilhart, ll. 3678-81)

However, the narrator does not explain Marke's response to this reminder in detail, merely stating that 'do ward der kúng frow / von dem, daß er gehört habt' (ll. 3750-51), which refers to the entire conversation between Tristrand and Isalde. Therefore, the narrator does not provide the audience with a more detailed explanation of Marke's interpretation of the scene.

By contrast, Béroul's representation of this episode provides more detailed reminders of past events as well as a more detailed explanation of Marc's interpretation of the conversation he has heard. Iseut deceives Marc by telling the truth in such a way as to convince him of her innocence and this is subsequently supported by reminding him of events from their shared past, such as the death of the Morholt, as signs of Tristan's loyalty. Marc knows that these references are true as he was a witness to these events and this therefore influences his interpretation of the scene as a whole. In addition, these reminders distract Marc from what he is really there to see. They encourage him to focus less on the idea of Tristan and Iseut's adultery and more on the idea of Tristan's service for him, distracting him from the idea of Tristan and Iseut's deception and replacing it with the idea of Tristan's loyalty. Iseut plays with the expectations of her audience here. As was seen above, during her equivocal oath, she unexpectedly refers to the leper. Similarly, in this episode she discusses the death of the Morholt during a scene in which Marc has expected to see proof of her adultery with Tristan.

The first reference that Iseut makes to the killing of the Morholt occurs close to the beginning of the fragment. This reference is almost paranthetical to the rest of

her speech. She begins by discussing the fact that Marc believes they are adulterous, and then makes her statement, with reference to God, that she has not given her love to anyone other than the one who took her virginity (ll. 22-25). She goes on to claim that it is the barons who have made Marc believe that she and Tristan are guilty (ll. 26-31) and therefore the idea that she and Tristan are adulterous came from the barons. She introduces them in her speech by referring to them in relation to Tristan's defeat of the Morholt:

> Se li felon de cest'enor
> Por qui jadis vos conbatistes
> O le Morhout, quant l'oceïstes,
> Li font acroire (Béroul, ll. 26-29)

These lines summarise the whole story of Morholt's threat to Cornwall and his defeat at the hands of Tristan. She discredits the barons immediately by referring to them throughout as 'li felon' and by stating here that Tristan did something on their behalf. This statement has two effects. Firstly, it insinuates that the barons cannot be trusted, rather than claiming it directly, and their cowardice therefore makes their statements unreliable. Secondly, it enables Iseut to present Marc with a favourable picture of Tristan's character, by reminding him of his service to Marc rather than his alleged betrayal of him. She subsequently mentions the fact that Tristan was injured in this battle:

> De la plaie que vos preïstes
> En la batalle que feïstes
> O mon oncle. Je vos gari. (Béroul, ll. 51-53)

Her intent here may be to excite Marc's pity, to remind him verbally of the services Tristan has previously performed for him and to remind him that Tristan suffered because of this battle. As Carruthers argues, 'if *intentio* is part of every memory image […] then rekindling that sort of *intentio* will enable us to start finding those

memories again'.[205] Memory signs rekindle emotions that were felt at the time, which seems to be the case with Marc's reaction to these reminders. Moreover, by referring to the Morholt as 'mon oncle' she reminds Marc that he was her relative therefore implying that any love she would have for Tristan is unlikely. However, Iseut then anticipates objections which may be made to her claim of innocence, in a similar way to Gottfried's Isolde prior to making her oath at her trial:

> Je vos gari.
> Se vos m'en erïez ami,
> N'ert pas mervelle, par ma foi! (Béroul, ll. 53-55)

She subverts Marc's expectations of this scene by referring to these possible objections directly. Firstly, the word 'ami' is itself ambiguous, as it can refer to a friend, a kinsman or a lover. This is another example of Iseut's linguistic skill, as also seen during her trial. Secondly, the way that Iseut phrases this strongly suggests that they did not become lovers (or friends), but does not directly claim that they are innocent. Thirdly, Iseut anticipates criticism here, that it would not have been a surprise if they had become lovers. The fact that she addresses this directly is another indication of her innocence.[206] These carefully phrased reminders of Tristan's battle with the Morholt are therefore intended to influence Marc's opinion of the truth or falsehood of the claim that the lovers were adulterous.

Tristan also uses reminders of his battle with the Morholt during this episode to influence Marc's interpretation of his relationship with Iseut. While Iseut emphasised Tristan's sufferings, Tristan emphasises the barons' lack of willingness to fight for Marc, as already mentioned by Iseut. Tristan expands Iseut's previous

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[205] Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, p. 16.

[206] It is worth noting that both Eilhart's and Gottfried's texts show Isolde's extreme anger towards Tristan when she discovers that he was the one who killed her uncle (Eilhart, ll. 2020-27; Gottfried, ll. 10123-10153).

statements, blaming the barons for the suspicions that Marc currently has of him (ll. 121-25), and stating that Marc should not believe them 'Deceü l'ont, gote ne voit' (l. 134). Rather than merely trying to acquire sympathy for himself, he attempts to discredit the barons. He tells of their behaviour when the Morholt arrived in Cornwall, depicting them in such a way as to suggest their cowardice. Tristan portrays himself as the one to act for Marc's honour. The 'felons' are not to be trusted:

> Molt les vi ja taisant et muz,
> Qant li Morhot fu ça venuz,
> Ou nen i out uns d'eus tot sous
> Qui osast prendre ses adous.
> Molt vi mon oncle iluec pensis,
> Mex vosist estre mort que vis.
> Por s'onor croistre m'en armai,
> Conbati m'en, si l'en chaçai.
> Ne deüst pas mis oncles chiers
> De moi croire ses losengiers. (Béroul, ll. 135-44)

As far as the extradiegetical audience knows, Tristan is telling the truth here. With reference to other texts of the Tristan story, which contain the episode of the defeat of the Morholt, Tristan was the only one to fight him, so it can therefore be assumed that the barons had refused to do so. Tristan very carefully constructs his narration here in order to manipulate Marc's reaction. By emphasising the barons' refusal to respond to the Morholt's challenge, he suggests their cowardice. They do not have a good reputation and their word cannot be trusted, therefore they cannot function as reliable witnesses. This casts doubt on the truth of their claim that Tristan and Iseut are guilty of adultery. By highlighting the fact that his priority was to fight for Marc's honour, Tristan suggests his own faithfulness. Therefore, Marc should not believe 'ses losengiers' (l. 144; meaning to praise, flatter or deceive by flattery). This narration, combined with that given by Iseut, characterises the barons, Iseut and

Tristan in such a way as to make the lovers appear trustworthy and, in Tristan's case, ready and willing to fight (possibly to the death) to defend Marc's honour, whereas the barons are portrayed as cowardly by contrast. This has the effect of making Tristan and Iseut seem innocent. The fact that they are depicted here as trustworthy would influence Marc's interpretation of their relationship as innocent.

Marc's reaction to and interpretation of this scene is shown on two separate occasions. It is firstly described by the narrator while Marc is still in the tree:

> Li rois qui sus (en l'arbr)e estoit
> Out l'asenblee bien veüe
> Et la raison tote entendue.
> De la pitié q'au cor li prist,
> Qu'il ne plorast ne s'en tenist
> Por nul avoir; mout a grant duel,
> Molt het le nain de Tintaguel. (Béroul, ll. 258-64)

This is a reaction to the scene as a whole, including the physical staging (i.e. that it takes place in a garden), Iseut's statement that she has only loved the man who took her virginity, her refusal to help Tristan financially and their references to Tristan's battle with the Morholt. Marc's reaction to this scene, as described in this passage, is not an intellectual deduction, but an emotional response. Tyson argues that 'Mark is […] kindly and tenderhearted […] in situations which excite his pity'.[207] Carruthers' arguments about rekindling *intentio* with a memory sign are supported by the fact that Marc's reaction to these reminders and the memories to which they refer is primarily an emotional one. He feels 'pitié' (l. 261) and reacts physically by crying. He feels 'duel' (l. 263) and he feels hatred towards the dwarf (l. 264). His conclusion, which he has come to swiftly, is that the lovers are innocent of adultery and that the dwarf is lying: 'De mon nevo me fist entendre / Mençonge' (ll. 269-70). It is possible

[207] Tyson, p. 71.

that Marc believes this so quickly because he is gullible and wants to believe in their innocence. However, it is also important to note the significance of witnesses. It is important to discredit the barons in order to destabilise their authority. The verbal signs used here do not establish a version of the truth in the same way that the oaths discussed above do. Rather, they remind Marc of the loyalty of Tristan and the cowardice of the barons, thereby suggesting that the claims made by the barons regarding Tristan and Iseut's adultery are not true. This is an example of the gap between authority and truth.

Secondly, Marc's reaction to this scene is shown in his later conversation with Iseut. Marc reveals to her that he was in the tree and explains his reaction to the scene, which describes his interpretation of the fact that they mentioned Tristan's battle with the Morholt:

> Qant j'oï a Tristran retraire
> La batalle que li fis faire,
> Pitié en oi, petit falli
> Que de l'arbre jus me chaï. (Béroul, ll. 479-82)

He felt pity, as has already been seen, and almost fell out of the tree. This shows the extent of the effect that this reminder had on him. This is unusual, as it was an event that he already knew had occurred and to which he was a witness, indicating the fact that he did not expect to hear about it in this context. The characterisation of Tristan as a treacherous adulterer is of stark contrast to that of Tristan as a faithful knight. Marc then tells of his reaction to the allusions made by Iseut to Tristan's wound and his reaction to their discussion about finances:

> Et quant je vois oï retraire
> Le mal q'en mer li estut traire
> De la serpent dont le garistes,
> Et les grans biens que li feïstes,
> Et quant il vos requist quitance

De ses gages, si oi pesance
[…]
Pitié m'en prist an l'arbre sus.
Souef m'en ris, si n'en fis plus. (Béroul, ll. 483-88; 491-492)

Once again, he felt pity and 'pesance'. His reaction to this scene was not produced by an assessment of the truth or falsehood of the statements that the lovers presented to him. Rather, he responded emotionally to a verbal sign of a past event, including an event that was not related to the alleged adultery. These emotions then affected his interpretation of their relationship as innocent rather than adulterous.

This episode has shown the lovers using reminders of past events for two reasons, as signs of Tristan's good character and as a means to discredit the barons. The interpretation of these signs is not about accessing the truth or falsehood of a particular assertion, as Marc already knows that the references to the battle with the Morholt are true. However, Tristan and Iseut use references to true events to manipulate Marc into believing a falsehood, that they are innocent. This episode focuses on authority, particularly regarding the authority of a speaker. The references to Morholt's death increase Tristan's authority and make him seem more reliable, by presenting him as honourable and someone who will willingly fight for his king, rather than someone dishonourable who would commit treason by committing adultery with the queen. Moreover, they call into question the authority of the barons and therefore of their claims regarding Tristan and Iseut's adultery by reminding Marc of their past cowardice. This questioning of authority, as well as the many renarrations of both the battle with the Morholt and of the tryst beneath the tree itself, mean that this episode has greater implications for the study of medieval literary

practice.[208]

Another example of the way that verbal reminders of the past are used as signs occurs in the episode of Tristan's feigned madness, which is present in Eilhart's work, as well as in the *Folie Berne* and the *Folie Oxford*. In all three texts, Tristan has been banished from Mark's court. In order to see Isolde, he disguises himself as a fool in order to make it possible for him to return to court and speak to her. In each text, he uses narrations of events from their shared past to convince Isolde that he really is Tristan, rather than a fool. She, however, is reluctant to believe him. During Béroul's tryst beneath the tree, reminders of the past are used as signs of the characteristics of certain individuals, particularly regarding their authority and reliability as witnesses. In these episodes, they are used as proof of Tristan's identity, which is also connected to his reliability as a narrator. When alone with Isolde, he asserts that he is Tristan. He then uses these references to events which are known only to themselves (and possibly Governal and Brangien) as proof of that assertion. Once again, it is seen that the prior knowledge a character has about certain events determines how they will interpret verbal signs. This section focuses primarily on these reminders as signs of Tristan's identity.[209]

The basic outline of the plot is the same in both of the *Folies Tristan*.[210] Tristan disguises himself as a fool in order to see Iseut, travels back to court, is presented before those at court and entertains them, while also attempting to convince Iseut of his true identity by referring to events in their shared past. In the *Folies Tristan*, he also tells stories which do not come from their shared past. He later

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[208] See pp. 210-20.
[209] Their status as renarrations of his past will be discussed in Chapter Four (pp. 242-54).
[210] As Eilhart's version of this episode does not provide the words used by Tristrant when reminding Isalde of past events, this will be discussed in Chapter Four (239-41).

sees Iseut more privately (with Brangien) and continues to attempt to convince her of his true identity, also by referring to past events which they both experienced. However, in neither of the *Folies Tristan* are these reminders interpreted correctly by Iseut as signs of Tristan's identity. In the *Folie Berne*, Iseut is only convinced on seeing the ring that she gave him as well as Husdent's reaction to being united with his master (*Folie Berne*, ll. 550-54). By contrast, in the *Folie Oxford*, the fact that the fool has the ring merely convinces Iseut that Tristan is dead and it is Tristan's voice (which he has until the end of the text disguised) that convinces her of his true identity (*Folie Oxford*, ll.903 -977. The Tristan story would have been well-known to the extradiegetical audience receiving this text, therefore the references that Tristan makes to his past with Iseut are reminders to that audience as well as to some of the intradiegetical audience. The way that these references function as renarrations of the Tristan story, and the implications of that for the discussion of medieval literary practice more broadly, will be discussed in Chapter Four.[211] This section focuses predominantly on how the references to a shared past function as reminders and signs, and the way that those signs are interpreted by different characters.

At the beginning of the *Folie Berne*, Tristan receives a message explaining that he has lost Marc's favour. He then begins a monologue lamenting the fact that he is separated from Iseut and expressing the suffering that he feels due to his love for her, as well as the suffering that she will feel on his behalf (ll. 54-113). During this monologue he mentions his battle with the Morholt and the wound that he received during it:

> Mout me gari soëf ma plaie
> Que je reçui en Cornuaille

[211] See pp. 242-54.

Qant al Morholt fis la bataille
En l'ile ou fui menez a nage
Por desfandre lo treüssage
Qu cil devoient de la terre;
A m'espee finé la guerre. (*Folie Berne*, ll. 77-83)

This passage supports the argument that the narrator's intent is to tell the Tristan story in a shorter form; there is a great deal of information in this short passage about the events surrounding the death of the Morholt. Moreover, it enables the narrator to provide information about the character of Tristan, Iseut and to a lesser extent Marc. Bruckner argued that the problem of the *Folie Berne* is one of recollection and reconstruction: 'we readers are witnesses and participants who must use our powers of memory, just as Tristan and Iseut themselves, to reassemble in the present the scattered fragments of the past'.[212] Although Bruckner was referring to the ring and Husdent, she was also comparing the *Folie Berne* with the *Folie Oxford* and the way that the renarrations of the past function in both of these texts. This passage provides context for the text as a whole, acting as a reminder to the extradiegetical audience of Tristan's previous service to Marc, in much the same way as Tristan and Iseut referred to the same events in order to remind Marc of Tristan's previous loyalty. This monologue does not have an intradiegetical audience, but by referring to these events in a monologue Tristan makes it seem as if he is performing even when he is alone. The writers of the Tristan texts, including the writer of the *Folie Berne*, tend to draw parallels between the intra- and extradiegetical audiences.

Once he has arrived at Marc's court, Tristan mentions various events in their past life in order to convince Iseut of his true identity. While Marc is present, he mentions the love potion and he explains that Tantris was in fact Tristan: 'Metez le

[212] Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, *Shaping Romance: Interpretation, Truth, and Closure in Twelfth-Century French Fictions* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), p. 33.

tris devant le tran, / Et vos y troverez Tristan' (*Folie Berne*, ll. 186-7). He then mentions the episode in which Marc found him with Iseut in the forest. He outlines their respective positions, even describing the heat of the day:

> Tes ganz botas enz el partuis
> Si t'en alas, il n'i ot plus,
> Car je ne voil outre conter
> Car il li devroit bien manbrer. (*Folie Berne*, ll. 216-19)

The only characters who witnessed this particular episode were Marc, Tristan and Iseut (and possibly Governal and a hunstman, depending on the version). The fact that the fool states he will not narrate anymore because they should remember it (ll. 218-19) can be applied both to Marc and Iseut and to the extradiegetical audience. These particular words, it is implied, remind the audience of the whole of the narrative. In this instance, the interpretation of the verbal sign can be a memory and therefore a whole story. The verbal sign condenses a larger narrative.

Iseut responds to this angrily (ll. 224-25), but Marc's reaction is not really described, merely his observation of Iseut:

> Marc en esgarde la raïne
> Et cele tint la chiere encline,
> Son chief covri de son mantel (*Folie Berne*, ll. 220-22)

It is clear that Iseut is discomfited by the fact that the fool is narrating events from their past, some of which are unknown to any but themselves. However, she does not interpret them in the way that Tristan intended. Although these narrations are reminders, Tristan intends them to also function as signs to his identity. He assumes that she will realise that, if he is telling her of things known only to a select few, she will realise that he is Tristan in disguise. However, this is not the case. It seems that the physical disguise is too successful. As Bruckner argues, 'the fool who frightened and humiliated her in Marks' court simply cannot fit into those memories,

remembered in this context with intense pain'.[213]

Brangien accepts that he is Tristan later in the text, before Iseut does. This is partly because she notices that there is a discrepancy between his body and his apparent folly:

> Bien est tailliez par la çainture.
> En son cuer panse qu'il est sage
> Et meillor mal a que n'est rage. (*Folie Berne*, ll. 305-07)

She is beginning to doubt his folly, but is not yet fully convinced. It is only when he mentions the love potion that she accepts the truth of his identity: 'A cest mot l'a bien conneü', (l. 333). Due to her knowledge of her own and Tristan's past, she accepts this statement as proof that the man before her must be Tristan, as he refers to something that only herself, Iseut and Tristan know about. By contrast, Iseut does not accept the verbal signs as proof of the Fool's identity presumably because the Fool is not a reliable narrator. Whilst they are still at court with Marc, Tristan mentions their separation and the ring that he gave her when they parted:

> Encor ai l'anel pres de moi
> Qui me donastes au partir
> Del parlement que doi haïr. (*Folie Berne*, ll. 233-35)

She does not believe that the Fool's knowledge and narration of this event proves his identity. It is only when Tristan presents her with this ring later in the text, she realises the truth:

> Ysiaut conut bien l'anelet
> Et vit la joie del brechet
> […]
> Or s'aparçoit en son corage,
> C'est Tritans a cui el parole (*Folie Berne*, ll. 550-51; 553-54)

Although Iseut does not initially accept these narrations as proof of Tristan's identity,

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[213] Bruckner, *Shaping Romance*, p. 18.

it is clear that they nonetheless affect her emotionally. When Tristan tells of Marc's discovery of them in the forest, she does not deny that it took place. Marc was there as well, so there is no reason to deny it. However, she reacts angrily:

> Fol, mal aient li marinel
> Qui ça outre vos amenerent,
> Qant en la mer ne vos giterent! (*Folie Berne*, ll. 223-25)

She is not attempting to hide the truth and there is no question of deception at this point. She responds out of anger, reacting emotionally to a verbal reminder.

The *Folie Oxford* also shows Iseut reacting emotionally when Tristan refers to something which happened to them previously. When he states that he is Tantris, her response is as follows:

> Ysolt l'entent, del quer suspire,
> Vers le fol ad curuz e ire:
> Dit : 'Ki vus fist entrer ceenz?
> Fol, tu n'es pas Trantris, tu menz.' (*Folie Oxford*, ll. 319-22)

Tristan continues to mention events from their past and, as he is still in disguise, Iseut persists in doubting him. She concludes that he must be an enchanter, as he knows so much of their shared history:

> Certes, cist fol, cist jugleres,
> Il est divins u enchanteres,
> Kar il set mun estre e ma vie
> De chef en chef, ma dulce amie. (*Folie Oxford*, ll. 563-66)

Iseut here analyses this more than in the *Folie Berne*; her reaction to these narrations is discussed in more depth. The key distinction between the two *Folies* is in regard to the way that Iseut is finally convinced of Tristan's true identity. In the *Folie Berne*, it is the ring that convinces her. By contrast, here, it is Tristan's voice. The *Folie Oxford* prioritises speech and the voice. Towards the beginning of the text, we see how closely speech is linked with identity, as those who see Tristan in disguise

respond with, ‘Veez le fol! hu! hu! hu! hu!’ (*Folie Oxford*, l. 250). In addition, Tristan has disguised his voice. He only speaks with his true voice at the end of the text (l. 975) and it is this, rather than the ring, which convinces Iseut of his identity. Rather than the narrations themselves, it is the sound of his voice which is an authority that she can trust. His voice therefore provides proof of his identity and authorises his speech.[214]

Conclusion

It has been seen that, in the correct contexts, words can have such power that they can direct the future course of events as well as authorise a certain version of past ones. The main concept running throughout this chapter is authority. Promises made by authority figures must be kept, and therefore these verbal signs proscribe future events so as not to make that promise into a lie. Oaths are seen to be authoritative, despite the fact that in both Béroul’s and Gottfried’s works that authority is called into question. It was noted above with regard to visual signs that there is a gap between authority and truth, and it is possibly in this gap that fiction can flourish. This is also seen with the representation of verbal signs and their interpretations in these texts, particularly with regard to oaths and reminders. In both works, Isolde swears an oath which is factually correct and yet deceptive. Her creative skill with words results in her innocence being officially accepted as fact, when in fact that is not what she has sworn. However, what is most striking about these texts is that the narrators do not seem to be concerned by the fact that deceptions are being accepted

[214] This will be discussed more fully in Chapter Four (pp. 242-54).

as fact officially by certain characters. This suggests that their concern is more with portraying the way that interpretation functions. The creative way that the lovers deal with language, as well as the emphasis in Gottfried's and Béroul's works in particular on the importance of audience interpretation and expectation suggests that, rather than merely critiquing conventional ways of accessing the truth, the writers are also engaging in a debate regarding the way that signs are interpreted. Moreover, the way that reminders are interpreted in these examples also questions authority. In Béroul's work, at the tryst beneath the tree Marc is trying to assess the truth of the claim that the lovers are adulterous, but this is clouded by their references to the battle with the Morholt and, as in the trial scenes, distract Marc from what he thinks he is there to see. In the *Folies Tristan*, Tristan is trying to convey the truth of his identity to Iseut using references to past events, but this is unsuccessful. This once again shows the gap between truth and authority. It is true that the Fool is Tristan, but the Fool does not carry authority and is therefore not trusted by Iseut. This can be connected to the way that the writers of these texts subtly discuss the boundaries between history and fiction in their own works. Writing was a supposedly authoritative medium, but these works show how authority in general was being questioned by the writers of these works, so as to create a developing narrative mode of vernacular literary fiction.

Part Two: Storytelling

Chapter Three: Interjections from the Narrator

Introduction

There are two key methods involved when researching late-twelfth and early-thirteenth century attitudes towards literary practice. In his work on medieval literary theory, Haug's approach is to examine prologues and epilogues in the works he analysed.[215] Chinca and Young acknowledged the worth of this approach, but take it further by also examining those parts of the works where the characters themselves tell stories.[216] Both of these approaches will be taken here. This chapter will examine interjections from the narrator and Chapter Four will analyse parts of the works where characters tell stories. By examining prologues, epilogues and other interjections from the narrator, it is possible to discover more about the attitudes held by the different writers of the Tristan legend towards storytelling, and by extension towards fiction, history and authority. Gottfried's prologue and other excurses, particularly the literary excursus, have already been a feature for much academic debate.[217] However, there has been very little comparative study of such passages

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[215] Haug, pp. 3-4.
[216] Chinca and Young, p. 614.
[217] There are many examples of this in Gottfried scholarship including Walter Haug 'Ethik und Ästhetik in Gottfrieds von Straßburg Literaturtheorie', in *Literaturtheorie im deutschen Mittelalter*, by Haug, pp. 197-227, and Chinca, *History, Fiction, Verisimilitude*. The literary excursus is briefly discussed in Nigel F. Palmer, 'Literary Criticism in Middle High German Literature', in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism. Volume 2: The Middle Ages*, ed. by Alastair Minnis and Ian Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 533-48 (pp. 534-36). These passages are also discussed in more general works on Gottfried's text, such as Huber, *Gottfried von Straßburg*, pp. 39-48.

with similar ones in the other Tristan texts, with the exception of some comparison with Thomas' work.[218] Vitz discussed such interjections from the narrator in the French texts, focusing on the works of Béroul, Thomas and Marie de France, but she focused mostly on orality and literacy rather than on their wider implications for literary practice and did not compare them to the German Tristan texts.[219] Although much work has been done on the attitudes towards medieval literary theory in the German-speaking world for the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, comparatively little has been published on the French texts.[220] Recent work has also been published on the beginnings and endings of texts and their significance for an examination of medieval literary culture, but they have yet to be examined in depth with regard to the Tristan legend.[221] This chapter will firstly focus on the relationship between the narrator and the audience in these texts as evidenced by the way that the narrators engage with their audiences. Secondly, the attitude of these writers towards their sources will be examined. Chinca argues that 'Vernacular narrative before Gottfried contains two tendencies: the one, archival, deals in a fixed form of truth that can stand independently of the experience of its textual representation; the other, experimental, creates a meaning out of the aesthetic experience of a text's internal structure'.[222] This chapter will suggest that it is not merely Gottfried but also the other writers of the Tristan story who deal with archival material in an experimental way.

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[218] See for example Chinca, *History, Fiction, Verisimilitude*, pp. 92-99.
[219] Vitz, 'Orality, Literacy and the Early Tristan Material'.
[220] Exceptions to this include Simon Gaunt, *Retelling the Tale: An Introduction to French Literature* (London: Duckworth, 2001; repr. 2010) and Bruckner, *Shaping Romance*.
[221] *Seuils de l'oeuvre dans le texte médiéval*, ed. by Emmanuèle Baumgartner and Laurence Harf-Lancner, 2 vols (Paris: Presses de la Sorbonne-nouvelle, 2002). For prologues in the *chansons de geste*, see Paula Leverage, *Reception and Memory: A Cognitive Approach to the Chansons de geste*, Faux Titre, 349 (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 2010).
[222] Chinca, *History, Fiction, Verisimilitude*, p. 37.

Engaging with the audience

According to Baumgartner, the text of a prologue:

> reste le passage obligé vers l'œuvre, le moment où énoncer ce qui impulse, fonde, justifie l'écriture ou la réécriture, en définit (ou en brouille) le statut générique et le projet et où se module l'interaction entre l'auteur, ses commanditaires, le public qu'il espère atteindre.[223]

This section specifically examines that interaction between the narrator and the audience, although it is obviously only possible to see the narrator's side of that interaction, and will look particularly at those instances where the audience is directly addressed. The material discussed here deals to some extent with the issues of orality and literacy. As this is such a large subject and not the focus of the present study, it will be impossible to address them here with sufficient depth. Therefore, the aim is specifically to examine these interjections by the narrator from the point of view of how they depict his interactions with the audience, or the relationship with the audience that he wishes to have, rather than an in-depth analysis of orality and literacy in medieval culture. This will firstly examine those texts which seem to be more oral in tone, in which there is a greater prevalence of commands from the narrator for the audience to listen and where the narrators seem to address the audience as if they are actually present (Béroul, Eilhart) and will then discuss the texts which appear to be more literary in tone (Gottfried, Thomas).

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[223] Emmanuèle Baumgartner, 'Présentation', in *Seuils de l'œuvre*, II, ed. by Baumgartner and Harf-Lancner, pp. 7-15 (pp. 7-8).

The narrator of the *Folie Berne* addresses his audience directly at the end of his text:

> Con vos avez ici oï,
> Entre Tritanz soz la cortine:
> Entre ses braz tient la raïne. (*Folie Berne*, ll. 582-84)

There are many similar instances throughout the Tristan texts, particularly in Béroul's and Eilhart's. In this example, the narrator speaks to his audience, indicating that this narrative is something that they have heard ('oï', l. 582) but it is debatable whether the narrator suggests that the narration is occuring while both narrator and audience are present or whether this is intended to be read aloud. This raises the question of fictive orality, as critics have attempted to explain why a written text would command the audience to listen. Vitz, for example, argues that remarks such as 'oyez' indicate a 'narratorial, authorial, presence' until later in the twelfth century, when they become nostalgic.[224] Coleman, however, argues that aurality deserves more importance 'as a long-standing, sophisticated means of experiencing medieval literature'.[225] She also denounces the fictive orality argument, stating that 'If all evidence of orality is fictive, and any evidence of reading is not only factual but co-opted to dividuality, how can we recoup any space for the read-aloud book?'[226] The idea that a work could be read aloud could apply to this example quoted from the *Folie Berne* and indeed to examples from the other Tristan texts; the narrator refers to the audience as having heard something but gives no indication that he is actually standing in front of that audience telling the story to them. However, while the notion

[224] Vitz, p. 300.
[225] Coleman, p. 5.
[226] Ibid., p. 57, p. 59.

of aurality is a useful way of discussing the reception of medieval works, assigning a fixed mode of reception to these texts (whether of orality, aurality and literacy, or of fiction and history) is not necessarily adequate when they are discussed comparatively. Rather these texts, in different ways, reflect contemporary debates on the nature of written works in the vernacular, which include orality, reception and authority. To an extent, they are interacting with each other and reflecting different perspectives on these issues. This contrasts with the more linear progression described by critics such as Haug and Green with regard to the analysis of medieval literary theory, possibly because they are focused on presenting a broader overview of medieval literature. By comparing these texts in detail, a more nuanced picture emerges of the way that the narrators relate both to their audiences and to their sources.

Throughout Béroul's work, the narrator uses words such as 'oiez', 'escoutez', or 'seignors' (or variations on them) to draw the attention of his audience at specific points in the narrative. Vitz takes this as an indication that the work was orally composed and casts doubt on Béroul's literacy.[227] It could also be argued either that he is writing as if the audience is present and listening to him speak in front of them, or that the text was written in order to be read aloud. Given that his interjections to the audience are more or less limited to commands to listen, the latter interpretation seems more likely. The command 'Oez' is used approximately twenty-five times during the course of his narrative. As Bik notes, it is generally used at points in the text where the narrator wants to involve the audience in the narration: 'le narrateur les utilise-t-il tout d'abord pour piquer l'intérêt de son auditoire. Il n'y a là rien de

[227] Vitz, pp. 300-01.

nouveau: les auteurs médiévaux usent fréquemment de ce procédé'.[228] This is emphasised by his use of imperative constructions, leading their interpretation of the narrative. Moreover, such interjections are used in situations where the narrator wishes to switch from one episode to another, or from the viewpoint of one character to another and they therefore help to structure the narrative. Bik notes that different episodes all begin with a similar phrase to those discussed here.[229] She discusses the Morois episode as an example, arguing that 'L'importance de cette partie est soulignée par plusieurs interventions d'auteur qui constituent le commencement d'un épisode'.[230] A similar phrase is used at the beginning of the fragment, introducing a description of how Iseut takes action during the episode of the tryst beneath the tree. She reprimands Tristan for coming there and then begins to weep:

> Com ele aprisme son ami,
> Oiez com el l'a devanci:
> 'Sire Tristran, por Deu le roi,
> Si grant pechié avez de moi,
> Qui me mandez a itel ore!'
> Or fait senblant con s'ele plore. (Béroul, ll. 3-8)

Iseut's skill at deception in this scene is a key feature of the work and has been much discussed by critics, as noted in Chapter Two.[231] Here the narrator himself draws his audience's attention to it by the use of the word 'Oiez' (l. 4). Similarly, shortly after this scene, immediately after Marc's decision that the lovers are innocent, the narrator then introduces Frocin, who will be instrumental in rousing Mark's suspicion once again regarding the guilt of Tristan and Iseut: 'Oiez du nain boçu Frocin' (l. 320). Key points of characterisation, as well as plot, are highlighted by the

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[228] Elisabeth J. Bik, 'Les interventions d'auteur dans le *Tristan* de Béroul', *Neophilologus*, 56 (1972), 31-42 (p. 32).
[229] Bik, p. 33.
[230] Ibid., p. 33.
[231] See pp. 105-110.

command to the audience to listen.

The use of commands such as ‘oez’ is not limited to introducing new characters or episodes, but is also used to refer to events that occur earlier or later in the story. There are two occasions where the narrator addresses his audience with specific details about the narrative. One of these occurs immediately prior to Marc’s discovery of the lovers in the forest:

> Mex li venist son cors conduire,
> Qar puis morut a si grant honte
> Con vos orrez avant el conte. (Béroul, ll. 1918-20)

Bik argues correctly that references to future events increase the tension.[232] This is the case with this example. In this instance, the idea of a shameful death to come also interjects an ominous note to the narrative and may influence the audience’s reaction to the forester’s character. There is also a plot summary which occurs immediately after the episode of Marc’s horse’s ears and introduces a new section of the story.

> Seignors, molt avez bien oï
> Conment Tristran avoit salli
> Tot contreval, par le rochier,
> Et Governal sot le tertrier,
> S’en fu issuz, qar il cremoit
> Qu’il fust ars, se Marc le tenoit.
> Or sont ensemble en la forest, (Béroul, ll. 1351-57)

The events of the narrative prior to this were Tristan’s jump from the chapel (ll. 941-64), his rescue of Iseut from the lepers (ll. 1228-70) and their subsequent flight to the forest (ll. 1271-1305), all of which are briefly mentioned in the above quotation. After these events are told in the main narrative proper, it then breaks off (‘Oiez du nain com au roi sert’, l. 1306) to tell the episode of Marc’s horse’s ears, during which Frocin reveals to the barons that Marc has the ears of a horse. This episode has little

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[232] Bik, p. 38.

influence on the events of the plot and does not feature in any of the other versions of the Tristan story. The passage quoted above, occurring after the episode of the horse's ears, enables the narrator to return to the major events of the plot, summarising key events in some detail, some of which were told fewer than a hundred lines previously. This could be an indication that the work was intended to be received aurally, recited from the written text in segments, as this passage could be seen as a reminder to the audience of the story so far. This would support Coleman's theory of the importance of aurality for receiving medieval literature.

There is also one instance of a rhetorical question being asked of the audience by the narrator:

> Pensez que onc arester s'ost
> De si que il vint as degrez
> De la sale? (Béroul, ll. 1868-70)

Bik states that this piques the curiosity of the audience.[233] It also has the effect of drawing the audience directly into the narration, at a particularly tense point of the story. The forester, who is hurrying into the hall, has just seen the lovers together in the forest and is rushing to tell Marc about it. Addressing the audience at this point enables the narrator to heighten the tension and make them more involved in the events being narrated. It also asks them to reflect on the events taking place, engaging their imaginations more fully in the events of the narrative. Therefore, the narrator's interjections in Béroul's work not only structure the narrative and signal that structure to the audience, they also directly encourage the audience to engage with and interpret that narration. A parallel can be drawn here with Iseut's speech during her trial, in which she focuses the audience's attention on a particular issue.

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[233] Bik, p. 34.

Similarly to Béroul's, Eilhart's work features interjections from the narrator which seem to emanate from oral culture. Eilhart has attracted less critical attention than Béroul's text and it therefore remains to be seen whether these interjections have a similar function in structuring the text and subtly directing the audience's interpretation of and attention to certain key scenes. In order to discover more about the relationship that the narrator of Eilhart's text has with his audience, this section will firstly examine Eilhart's prologue and will secondly discuss interjections made by the narrator at different points throughout the narrative. As the epilogue deals with sources and authority, it will be discussed later in the chapter. It will be seen that Eilhart's work features evidence that it was read aloud, but that this is more forceful than in Béroul's work, as there are instances where the narrator appears to be speaking in person to his audience as if he is actually present, almost as if it is one side of a dialogue.

The narrator of Eilhart's work frequently addresses the audience directly and also uses the first person to refer to himself, giving the impression that the narrator is physically present when the text is being received orally. This is made apparent in the prologue, where much more space is given to addressing the audience which is supposedly in front of him than is devoted to any discussion of sources or authority. For example, the narrator states 'Syd mir ze sagen geschicht / lütten, die man hie sicht' (Eilhart, ll. 1-2). The use of the word 'hie' makes it explicit that the narrator imagines that the audience is physically present. This is mentioned again:

> doch furcht ich, daß ettlich man
> under unß hie sÿ,
> der miner sag gern wer frÿ (Eilhart, ll. 6-8)

He anticipates criticism from his audience and criticises in turn those who do not

appreciate this work. Before moving on to a discussion of the sources he has used and the importance of truth in his work, the narrator says 'wölt ir nuº schwigen still' (l. 33). He addresses a command directly to the audience, as if they are physically present with him. A similar argument could be made here to the one made above for Béroul's work, that this written text was intended to be recited, but the fact that the narrator actually asks his audience to be quiet before he begins the tale suggests that the situation is more complex. Such a statement presupposes that the audience is not quiet and it is therefore something that someone reading the text aloud would say spontaneously, rather than it being written into a verse narrative. As noted above, Vitz argues that general commands to 'Oez' in Béroul's work indicate that it was orally composed. A similar argument could be made here, but it is also important to note that in this instance the writer is writing as if he were present in front of his audience, without that necessarily being the case. This could be a convention of narration that has transitioned from oral to written culture, but it is also possible that the writer of this text is using the narrative to determine what kind of literature he is writing. As will be seen, the Tristan texts as a whole resist definition regarding orality and literacy, or fiction and history.

Brownlee and others state that pleasure was beginning to be seen as a positive factor in the reception of literature.[234] They also discuss the relationship between the author, the audience and meaning:

> A fundamental assumption is that both the artistic skill of the poet and the critical appreciation of the recipient reside in the elucidation of the deeper meaning of a fable and what can be learned from it.[235]

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[234] Kevin Brownlee and others, 'Vernacular Literary Consciousness *c*. 1100-*c*. 1500: French, German and English Evidence', in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism. Volume 2: The Middle Ages*, ed. by Minnis and Johnson, pp. 422-471 (p. 438).

[235] Brownlee and others, p. 443

Eilhart's work displays evidence of the importance of both enjoying the reception of literature and of the critical attention of the audience. The final section of his prologue contains two other examples of statements that will reappear in one form or another throughout the text, a command to listen (l. 51) and a commmand to not become bored:

> merckent recht den sin,
> und laussend úchß dunckent nit ze lang,
> wann diß ist nu^{o} der anfang. (Eilhart, ll. 48-50)

It is clear that the audience's role here is twofold, to notice correctly ('recht') the meaning of the work, and to be entertained (although expressed negatively, to not be bored). The command to 'merckent recht den sin' is striking, suggesting that the audience should be interpreting the text correctly. For Eilhart's narrator, there is seemingly only one correct way of interpreting it, rather than several equally valid ones. This is in contrast to Béroul's narrator, who more subtly directs the audience, asking them to reflect on particular events rather than commanding them to interpret correctly. However, this also contrasts with certain elements of the narration of Eilhart's work, as during the episode of the exile in the forest he leaves the interpretation of the signs left for the lovers by Marke to the audience (both intra- and extradiegetical).

There are various points throughout the text where the narrator commands his audience to 'verniempt' or an equivalent. Similarly to Béroul, it seems to occur at points where there is a change of viewpoint or where the narrator is moving to a new episode. Typical examples of how Eilhart's narrator addresses the audience include 'ir súlt verniemen mere' (l. 342), preceding the introduction of Tinas as a character, and the following example, which introduces an explanation of how Isalde

discovered the truth about the death of the dragon:

> verniempt, mit welcher wÿshait
> die frow erfuᵒr gefuᵒg,
> wer den wurm erschluᵒg. (Eilhart, ll. 1850-53)

The narrator also sometimes draws the audience's attention to a particular part of his narrative:

> nun merckent al besunder,
> wie si ir ding fiengen an,
> wann ich úch berichten kan. (Eilhart, ll. 4754-56)

These lines function as a slight pause in the story. He tells the audience of the happiness of the lovers in exile and of Kurneval's suffering (ll. 4744-53) and then here states that he will tell the audience of their lives in the forest. The command to 'merckent all besunder' highlights his subsequent narration. This is very similar to the way that the interjections of Béroul's narrator function.

The narrator takes this further during the episode of the flour on the floor, where he reminds the audience about something they have already heard in order to explain why Tristrant jumped from one bed to the other, behaviour which is described by the narrator as a 'tumphait' (l. 4053): 'doch hab wir wol vernomen, / daß eß von dem tranck kam' (ll. 4058-59). The use of the pronoun 'wir' is significant as it shows that the narrator here identifies himself with the audience. Moreover, the narrator frequently uses the verb 'mercken' to tell the audience to take note of specific points, for example Tristan's reason for returning to Cornwall after his journey to Ireland ('nun merck recht', l. 1347) and insisting on the truth of the episode regarding the swallows and the hair (l. 1449).[236] At the beginning of the orchard scene, the narrator also asks rhetorical questions of the audience, presumably

[236] The swallows will be discussed in full below (pp. 181-83).

in order to draw them into the narrative, as also happens in Béroul's work:

> raut nun, wie mag daß geschehen?
> wie wirt in deß laideß buᵒß?
> ich wen, Brangenen muᵒß
> sie ze samen bringen. (Eilhart, ll. 3424-27)

This episode is well-established in the Tristan tradition and was discussed at length in Chapters One and Two.[237] Brangene plays a key role in this episode by enabling the lovers to meet. The questions quoted above (ll. 3424-25) draw the audience's attention to this particular point, perhaps ensuring that they are still paying attention, but also emphasising Brangene's role. More importantly, however, they raise issues of narrative motivation and authority. This particular passage is cited as an example by Schultz of Eilhart's narrator drawing attention to the absence of narrative motivation by asking the audience to suggest how to bring the lovers back together:

> Narrator motivation plays such a prominent role in Gottfried's *Tristan* that it acquires a certain autonomy […] the narrator claims the authority to motivate Tristan's victory over Morolt however he pleases, regardless of his source or public opinion: he will 'make it true' merely by virtue of his authority as narrator. Where Eilhart's narrator draws attention to the absence of motivation, Gottfried's draws attention to his own motivational autonomy.[238]

Schultz goes on to argue that motivation in Eilhart's work is open because it invites the audience's involvement, whereas Gottfried's motivation is closed because he does not.[239] Although Schultz's observations on narrative motivation are important, he neglects to fully explore the implications that this has for the authority of interpretation in Eilhart's text. On the one hand, his work is more open and audience involvement is encouraged. This can be seen for example when the characters attempt to interpret the signs that Marke leaves for the lovers in the forest, as well as

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[237] See pp. 27-42 and pp. 105-12.
[238] James A. Schultz, 'Why do Tristan and Isolde Leave for the Woods? Narrative Motivation and Narrative Coherence in Eilhart von Oberg and Gottfried von Straßburg', *MLN*, 102 (1987), 586-607 (pp. 593-94).
[239] Schultz, pp.601-602.

in the example above. The phrase ‘ich wen’ (l. 3426) allows the audience to interpret for themselves. On the other hand, the attitude towards authority in Eilhart’s work is more complex. Although the use of ‘ich wen’ does enable the audience to interpret this statement for themselves, it could also indicate that there is an authoritative version of events over which the narrator and also by implication the audience have no control. This could be an historical account or a previous version of the Tristan story. The command from the narrator in the prologue that the audience would interpret the story correctly supports this argument. Therefore, authority for the interpretation of this narrative could come from three different locations. Firstly, the narrator could offer this authority as he commands the audience in the prologue to interpret the text correctly. Secondly, authority could come from a previous version of the tale, either historical events or another story, as also evidenced by the command to interpret correctly and his use of the statement ‘ich wen’. Thirdly, the audience could provide authority for the interpretation, as also evidenced by ‘ich wen’ and the fact that little guidance is given from the narrator over the interpretation of certain episodes, such as the exile in the forest. Although it is difficult to draw definite conclusions as to this question, a thorough analysis of Eilhart’s work indicates its greater importance for the discussion of fiction and authority in the twelfth century than has previously been indicated.

It is clear that there is evidence of both oral and written culture in Béroul’s and Eilhart’s works, and that the use of phrases which would suggest that these texts were intended to be read aloud has a key role in structuring the narrative. The relevance of this for Béroul’s text, in which phrases such as ‘Oez’ are used to introduce new sections or change viewpoint, has been noted by previous critics, but

the implications of such interjections for the study of literary practice in these texts are also important. This is especially the case with regard to how both these writers either direct audience interpretation, or open interpretation up to the audience by addressing them directly. Green's definition of fiction emphasises the relationship between the author and the audience and focuses on the notion of make-believe.[240] There is some evidence of this in Eilhart's work. In those instances where the narrator states that he does not know why something occurred, the audience's interpretation is invited, and so they are free to imagine reasons for themselves. Béroul's use of the word 'Pensez' is also evidence of this. Therefore, there is an element of make-believe in the way that the audience might respond to these particular interjections from the narrators. Moreover, this has greater implications for the attitude towards authority displayed by the narrators, particularly the authority for interpreting the texts. This will be discussed more fully below regarding their attitude towards the sources of their works.

Marie de France, Thomas and Gottfried

Narrators do not merely interact with their audiences using phrases that can be described as coming from oral culture. All of the writers of the Tristan texts interact with their audiences, whether they are presenting themselves as actually present, reading aloud their work to their audience, or whether it is implied that the narrator is absent when the audience is receiving the work. This section will examine the relationship between the narrator and the audience in *Chievrefueil*, Thomas's text and

[240] Green, p. 4.

Gottfried's text in order to determine how interpretation and authority is expressed through this relationship in those texts which seem to either be more literary in tone or draw some of their material from written sources.

Vitz argues that, unlike Béroul, Marie de France does not participate much in her material, but that she is in debt to oral tradition.[241] She goes on to claim that 'Her message and her ambitions were, I believe, substantially more literary than what the audience she had available could handle'.[242] Marie addresses the audience directly at the beginning of the *lai* of *Guigemar*: 'Oëz, seignur, que dit Marie, / ki en sun tens pas ne s'oblie' (ll. 3-4). In addition, in her general prologue she discusses her reasons behind her work and her relationship to oral tradition. However, the only instance of her addressing her audience directly in *Chievrefueil* is as follows:

> Ne vus enmerveilliez niënt,
> kar cil ki eime leialment
> mult est dolenz e trespensez,
> quant il nen a ses volentez. (*Chievrefueil*, ll, 21-24)

She interjects here in order to draw a general conclusion from her story, or possibly to apply something that is well known (like a proverb or a saying) to her text. In this story, Tristan proves that those who love loyally suffer when they do not get what they want. She therefore directs the interpretation of the audience. There is no indication in the text of *Chievrefueil* that Marie intends her audience to receive this text orally and the context of the *lais* as a whole suggest that it is something that could be read (*Prologue*, l. 15). However, the creation story of *Chievrefueil*, that it was originally composed by Tristan 'ki bien saveit harper' (l. 112) indicates that oral reception was a part of the *lai*'s history, even if this history is an invented one. Marie

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[241] Vitz, p. 308.
[242] Vitz, p. 309.

also notes that she has both heard and read the story (*Chievrefueil*, ll.5-6) . Throughout Marie's work, she explores the concept of literary creation and the relationship between orally transmitted tales and those that were written down. Although Vitz is correct in stating that Marie is in debt to oral tradition while also acknowledging the literary quality of her work, when compared with the other Tristan texts it becomes apparent that the tensions that can be seen in her work reflect the fact that written literature in the vernacular cannot easily be defined.

There are fewer instances of the word 'Oez' (or similar) in Thomas' work than there are in Béroul's. He addresses his audience directly on three occasions, one of which occurs during the unfolding of the final tragedy of the story:

> Oiez pituse desturbance,
> Aventure mult doleruse
> E a trestuz amanz pituse;
> De tel desir, de tel amur
> N'oïstes unc greniur dolur. (Thomas, Douce, ll. 1584-88)

This serves to emphasise the tragedy of the story, enabling the narrator to draw attention to the suffering that the lovers are undergoing. This is similar to instances in the works of Eilhart and Béroul discussed above. It also suggests an emotional reaction to the tale they are about to hear, therefore in a sense the narrator is suggesting an appropriate response on the part of the audience to the section of the story they are about to hear. This is similar to how Tristan and Iseut attempt to direct Marc's emotions during the episode of the tryst beneath the tree. Moreover, the narrator addresses the audience directly in order to introduce his digression on inconstancy (Sneyd 1, ll. 234-305), which he begins with 'Oez merveilluse aventure' (l. 234). This digression is didactic in tone and involves the narrator directly engaging his audience on a moral topic. This discussion of inconstancy immediately

follows the explanation that Tristan has begun to desire Iseut as Blanches Mains. In this instance, the events of the story become the starting point for a discussion of wider issues, in this case of morality. Thomas is not merely focused on telling the story, but also on potential responses to it.

However, the most striking instance where the narrator directly addresses the audience is where the narrator cannot decide which character has suffered more (Tristan, Iseut, Marc, Iseut as Blanches Mains) and leaves it for the audience to decide:

> Hici ne sai que dire puisse,
> Quel d'aus quatre a greignor angoisse,
> Ne la raison dire ne sai,
> Por ce que esprové ne l'ai.
> La parole mettrai avant,
> Le jugement facent amant,
> Al quel estoit mieuz de l'amor
> Ou sanz lui ait greignor dolur. (Thomas, Turin, ll. 145-52)

In this case an interpretation is left entirely up to the audience as the narrator leaves the judgment of the situation to them. The question of which of these four characters suffered the most is not one that actually affects the plot but is completely a matter of opinion and is left open. Regarding this passage, Bruckner argues that Thomas is not omniscient. He 'is a narrator above all bent on delineating his role as that of the teller of a tale, while the best judges of the tale told are the lovers who read or hear his version'.[243] Therefore, the authority of either a source or of the narrator is lacking regarding an emotional point. This is similar to the instances discussed above in Eilhart's work. These examples have shown how this text allows the story itself to open up into wider digressions and discussion. The story is a vehicle for other kinds

[243] Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, 'The Representation of the Lovers' Death: Thomas' *Tristan* as Open Text', in *Tristan and Isolde: A Casebook*, ed. by Grimbert, pp. 95-109 (p. 105). This passage is also discussed by Ramm '"Cest cunte est mult divers"', p. 363

of discussion, both moral digressions and discussion about the characters themselves. Eilhart left some of the plot details open, claiming ignorance of them, which would allow individual audience members to fill the gap themselves. Something similar is occuring here, but Thomas is more directly opening up discussion for this, specifically by saying that it is up to his audience to judge ('Le jugement facent amant', l. 150), rather than merely claiming his own ignorance.

There is a vast amount of scholarship detailing the interjections of Gottfried's narrator to his audience. Much discusses Gottfried's prologue, literary excursus and other excurses within his text.[244] The importance of such passages for an understanding of attitudes towards literary practice has long been recognised, but this has rarely been compared with similar passages in the other Tristan texts.[245] There are many digressions and excurses in Gottfried's work, as there are in Thomas's *Tristan*. The prologue and literary excursus in particular have attracted a great deal of critical attention. Therefore, rather than discuss these excurses in depth, this section will focus on smaller interjections to the audience, comparing them with similar instances in the other Tristan texts. Similar to Thomas, there is a much lower rate of the use of the word 'vernemen' or its equivalents than in Béroul's work or in

[244] Examples of scholarship dealing with Gottfried's prologue include Chinca, *History Fiction Verisimilitude*, p. 37, p. 49, p. 120, Chinca, *Gottfried von Strassburg*, pp. 48-57, Haug, pp. 197-227, and Huber, *Gottfried von Straßburg*, pp. 39-48. Excurses, including the literary excursus are discussed by many critics, including Chinca and Young, pp. 639-44, Kaminski, p. 11, Palmer, pp. 534-36, Annette Volfing, 'Gottfried's *huote* excursus (*Tristan* 17817-18114)', *Medium aevum*, 67 (1998), 85-103), and Alois Wolf, 'Gottfrieds Dichterschau als Versuch einer Neubegründung der deutschen Literatur aus dem Geist der Mythe von Tristan und Isolde', in *Erzählkunst des Mittelalters*, ed. by Backes, Gentry and Lutz, pp. 339-63.

[245] There are some general works which discuss them side by side, for example Brownlee and others briefly discuss Béroul's, Thomas' and Gottfried's works (p.426-27). The use of sources has also been discussed by Green, who refers to both Gottfried and Thomas throughout his work, but also discusses them together briefly (pp. 143-44, p. 183). Adrian Stevens, 'Killing Giants and Translating Empires: The History of Britain and the Tristan Romances of Thomas and Gottfried', in *Blütezeit: Festschrift für L. Peter Johnson zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. by Mark Chinca, Joachim Heinzle and Christopher Young (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2000), pp. 409-26 also discusses the use of sources in both Gottfried's and Thomas' works, which will be discussed in more detail below (pp. 170-84).

Eilhart's. The majority of instances where the narrator addresses the audience directly occur when he is telling them what he is going to narrate next or reminding them of something they have already heard. Instances of the former can lead into renarrations of events that the audience has already heard. One example of this describes the joy and sorrow people feel when Tristan returns victorious after his fight with Morolt:

> aldâ gehôrte er bî dem mer
> grôze vröude und grôze clage,
> vröude unde clage, als ich iu sage. (Gottfried, ll. 7090-92)

In addition, it is important to note that the combination of orality and literacy is not absent from Gottfried's work either. There are various other points in the text where the narrator refers to the fact that the audience has heard something (e.g. l. 9329, l. 7021), which could support Coleman's argument that medieval texts were often received aurally.

A more complex example is as follows:

> Ob iu nu lieb ist vernomen
> umb dirre hêrren willekommen,
> ich sage iu, alse ich hân vernomen,
> wie sî dâ wâren willekommen (Gottfried, ll. 5177-80)

Firstly, the narrator states that he has heard this episode and will tell it to the audience as he has heard it. Whether this means that he has heard this from a written source that was recited aloud, whether it was from a text that was orally transmitted, or whether it is hearsay is debatable. Secondly, he consults what the audience would like to hear as a criterion for the material that he will include. This is similar to the instances discussed above in Thomas' work, and does not feature in the other Tristan texts. The pleasure of the audience is important for the narration. There are also various points where the narrator says he wants to tell the audience something (e.g. l.

16995). This contrasts with the insistence of the narrator that his work is true (which will be discussed below). These examples suggest that it is not merely a concern with relating the truth that dictates the content of the narration, but also the pleasure of the audience and, possibly to a lesser extent, the wishes of the author. This raises questions about the narrator's attitude to his sources. It seems that in this text the narrator indicates that certain elements could be left out of his narration if they would not be pleasing to the audience. Creating something that would be pleasing to his audience is an important factor for the narrator. Moreover, the fact that he says he will narrate what he wants to narrate shows that he is asserting his own authority over the material, rather than completely following an external source. Similarly, the fact that he consults the audience's pleasure regarding this narration could also suggest that he is not merely following an outside source.

There are many other examples of Gottfried's interaction with his audience, two of which occur during the episode where Tristan marries Isolde Weisshand. Firstly, he tells his audience to notice something:

> hie merket âventiure:
> Tristan vlôch arbeit unde leit
> und suohte leit und arbeit... (Gottfried, ll. 18418-20)

This occurs shortly before he meets Isolde Weißhand. The use of the word 'merket' is similar to Eilhart; in both instances the narrator draws the audience's attention to a specific point. Here, the narrator also offers an interpretation of Tristan's actions, warning the audience that suffering will come from his marriage to Isolde Weißhand. Rhetorical questions are also used in this episode in order to draw the audience into the narrative, emphasising the suffering that Tristan will undergo (ll. 18425-33). Moreover, much earlier in the text the narrator uses the audience's wishes, or what he

claims to perceive to be the audience's wishes, to govern his narration. He talks about suffering (ll. 1850-64) and says that he does not want to speak too much of suffering because it is difficult for the audience to hear:

> nune sol ich aber noch enwil
> iuwer ôren niht beswaeren
> mit z'erbermeclîchen maeren
> wan ez den ôren missehaget,
> swâ man von clage ze vil gesaget (Gottfried, ll. 1854-58)

It is important to note that in this instance the narrator does not use this criterion (the audience's pleasure) as a means of adjusting the events of the plot, or of rejecting or accepting specific episodes, but it does affect, or so he claims, the manner in which the tale is told. It is clear however that, even though he uses their wishes as something to guide him when narrating, he retains control over the material narrated.

It has been seen that literary texts pave the way for further digressions and discussions, something that is particularly apparent in the works of Thomas and Gottfried. This is mostly with regard to discussion of issues outwith but connected to the story, such as questions of morality which have been raised by the events of the text. Only Thomas and Eilhart (to a lesser extent) seem to provoke discussion about events in the text, such as which of the lovers suffered more (Thomas). The texts are therefore vehicles for debate, provoking discussion about events in the text and/or attitudes towards particular characters. This is the case with Thomas, Eilhart and Béroul and shows the importance of audience pleasure and interpretation. Moreover, they direct the interpretation of the audience, using words such as 'Oez' to indicate important points of the text. With regard to authority, this analysis of the interaction between the narrator and the audience shows that the relationship between history, fiction and authority in these texts is highly complex. The narrators are therefore not

blindly following their sources, rather consulting both their own pleasure and that of the audience when narrating.

Sources

Writing about the information given by writers in the prologues to some of the *chansons de geste* Leverage states:

> Untangling the real from the fictional in the prologues to the *chansons de geste* is a frustrating task […] Reading literally what the first-person voice pronounces runs the risk of encountering inconsistencies […] Why should we approach the prologue to the *chanson de geste* any differently to the way in which we read the poem as a whole? […] If we approach prologues with the idea that these are fictional introductions to a narrative of entertainment, then […] we can simply observe that the poet wants his audience to believe that this is the case […] the important point is not whether certain historical characters [...] did actually conduct research, but that the author or authors want to create the impression, based on truth or fiction, that the poem has associations with Saint-Denis.[246]

Her warning that just because the narrator states something does not mean that it is true is appropriate, as is the observation that it is important that the narrators want the audience to believe that a particular statement is true. The writers of the Tristan texts all refer to their sources in one form or another. A lot of work has been done on the sources of the Tristan legend, particularly related to Thomas and Gottfried, partly because they both name their previous sources and discuss the process of using sources to a varying degree, and partly because Gottfried states that he has used Thomas' work.[247] Less attention, however, has been given to an analysis of the way

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[246] Leverage, pp. 51-57.

[247] See Chinca, *History, Fiction, Verisimilitude*, pp. 49-53 for a discussion of sources in Gottfried's word, and Ben Ramm, '"Cest cunte est mult divers": Knowledge, Difference and Authority in Thomas's *Tristan*', *Modern Language Review*, 101 (2006), 360-74 (pp. 366-71) which partly discusses Thomas' relationship to Breri, his acknowledged source. See also Green, p. 15, p. 70, p. 95, and pp. 183-84, for analyses of Thomas' and Gottfried's relationships to their sources.

that sources are discussed in the other works, and there is no comparative study of this issue throughout the Tristan texts. Regarding types of sources, Chinca states:

> The poetics of historiography consists in engaging the reader in a representation of the past pieced together out of and [...] guaranteed by sources. Medieval historiographers ranked different types of source according to their reliability: the most trustworthy historical reports were those of eyewitnesses; next came written documents; least reliable was the evidence of hearsay.[248]

The writers of the Tristan stories are not historiographers, but all of these types of sources are referred to in the Tristan texts. Other critics have focused on the way that individual writers deal with their sources. For example, particular attention has been paid by Chinca to Gottfried's and Thomas' rejection of certain episodes that are present in the sources they have used. [249] The aim of this section is to provide an in-depth, comparative analysis of the the way that sources are referred to in these texts, particularly with the intention of discovering the attitudes towards sources in those texts which have been given less attention (all except Thomas and Gottfried). This will provide a greater understanding of medieval attitudes towards authorities, as well as to the way that these specific texts are dealing with issues of authority, truth, interpretation and by extension fictionality in their works. This will firstly focus on those texts where, according to the narrators, the sources are mostly written ones (Thomas, Gottfried), then those where the narrators claim to have used a mixture of oral and written sources (Béroul, Eilhart), concluding with those texts where the authority for the narration comes, in one way or another, from Tristan himself (either an apparently historical figure, or the character within the text, or both).

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[248] Chinca, *History, Fiction, Verisimilitude*, p. 20.
[249] Chinca, *History, Fiction, Verisimilitude*, pp. 92-97.

Thomas and Gottfried

There are two sections of Thomas's *Tristan* which discuss the idea of sources, including his epilogue (Sneyd 2, ll. 38-57) and an earlier section (Douce, ll. 837-88). The latter passage has been discussed by critics such as Chinca, Ramm and Bruckner, as the narrator rejects an episode on the grounds of 'raisun'.[250] Thomas, similarly to Béroul, acknowledges that there are many other versions of the legend and insists on the authority of one version in particular. He discusses his approach to writing his version, something that is only done in such detail by Gottfried von Strassburg after him:

> Seignurs, cest cunte est mult divers,
> E pur ço l'uni par mes vers
> E di en tant cum est mester
> E le surplus voil relesser.
> Ne vol pas trop en uni dire:
> Ici diverse la matyre. (Thomas, Douce, ll. 837-42)

Bruckner argues that in this section of his romance, Thomas 'stresses his personal experience as listener and reader of other versions in order to establish his authority'.[251] Other writers such as Béroul and Gottfried mention the fact that there are other versions of the tale and reject them as inaccurate (e.g. Béroul, ll. 1265-70, Gottfried, ll. 146-54; ll. 8608-15), but Thomas' work is the only one in which the narrator states that he wants to unite diverse material. The impression given is that this is the definitive version of the tale, and therefore the surplus has not been included in this work. Green, writing on structure in Chrétien's *Cligés*, compares his manner of composition with Thomas's:

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[250] Chinca, *History, Fiction, Verisimilitude*, pp. 92-94, Ramm, '"Cest cunte est mult divers"', p. 363, and Bruckner, *Shaping Romance*, pp. 54-56.
[251] Bruckner, *Shaping Romance*, p. 56.

> […] omitting what he does not regard as acceptable. Such a technique, picking and choosing what suits the author's intention rather than conscientiously following a source from which nothing is omitted and to which nothing is added, enables […] Thomas to maintain that rival versions of his story 'sunt del cunte forsveié/E de la verur esluingné' [...] (Douce 879-80) […] the contradictory nature of the versions of the *Tristan* story before Thomas made it more difficult for [him] to handle and unify [his] material. But it offered [him] infinitely more scope to adapt it to [his] own ends, to choose, to add, to omit, to re-group as [he] thought best.[252]

Ramm also notes that there is a tension in Thomas' treatment of his material:

> It would be possible, he says, for the poem to become too un(equ)ivocal, and the inherent diversity of the narrative should therefore be respected […] (l. 2261). There is already a tension here, then, between the narrator's desire to promote the unity of his narrative and, on the other hand, the need to admit of material that is deemed excessive or 'other' to the narrative frame.[253]

A connection can be made here with the way that Thomas considers his audience's pleasure when telling parts of his story, as will be discussed below. The notion of adaptation is a crucial one in Tristan scholarship, particularly given that the material is so diverse. It will become apparent that Thomas has shaped the material to his own ends, but it is also important to take into account that he continues to insist on the truth of his own work, or more accurately, to condemn those writers who have moved away from the truth.

The narrator then discusses Breri, his acknowledged source. He does not explicitly state that he views Breri as authoritative, but it is heavily implied. Thomas' narrator notices that there are many who tell the tale of Tristan and all do it differently:

> Asez sai que chescun en dit
> E ço qu'il unt mis en escrit,
> Mes sulun ço que j'ai oï.
> Nel dïent pas sulun Breri
> Ky solt les gestes e les cuntes

[252] Green, p. 95. Buckner also discusses Thomas' wish to unite diverse material, pp. 54-59.
[253] Ramm, '"Cest cunte est mult divers"', p. 367.

De tuz les reis, de tuz les cuntes
Ki orent esté en Bretaingne. (Thomas, Douce, ll. 847-853)

The impression of Breri is that his work is a comprehensive narrative of tales about kings and counts in Britain. However, the episode he rejects on the grounds of 'raisun' is not explicitly stated as having been absent from Breri's version. The narrator merely states that it is not true. This episode explains how Tristan ended up with his fatal wound, that he was wounded by a dwarf who was in love with Kaherdin's wife. The aspect of the episode that he rejects on the grounds of 'raisun' is that Tristan sent Governal back to England to fetch Iseut, but this is unlikely as Governal would have been recognised by people at court. The narrator asks rhetorical questions of his audience in order to persuade them to agree with the argument that this particular episode is not plausible. He then goes onto compare this with his own version:

Il sunt del cunte forsveié
E de la verur esluingné,
E se de ço ne volent granter,
Ne voil vers eus estriver;
Tengent le lur e jo le men:
La raisun s'i pruvera ben! (Thomas, Douce, 881-86)

Truth and reason ('verur' and 'raisun') are both listed here by the narrator as important criteria for the content of his narrative. His aim, it appears, is to tell the historical truth. However the idea of 'raisun' is also important and could be linked to verisimilitude, as Chinca and Ramm both suggested. The direct criticism the narrator makes of the episode he rejects is that it would not make sense for Governal to return as a messenger because lots of people would recognise him, but as Ramm argues, there are other moments in Thomas's narrative in which Governal is sent as a

messenger to Iseut.[254] Green argues that:

> The truth of this detail depends for Thomas not on any historically attested source, but rather on its imaginative plausibility […] Thomas […] asks questions of his audience (Douce 871ff.), inviting their response and participation. They are to join him in an imaginative experiment in which he seeks their connivance.[255]

It has already been noted that questions asked of the audience serve to draw them into the text and enter (partly) into a dialogue with the narrator. The importance of the audience's pleasure as a criterion for the narration has been indicated, but it is important to note the way that the audience's interpretation is viewed by the narrators of the text. There is a tension inherent in the way that Thomas relates to sources and authority; he insists on the importance of truth and reliability of Breri, but in rejecting this particular episode he asserts his own authority over the narrative. However, he also allows his audience to reach their own judgment on certain points, as discussed above.

As has been noted above, prologues and epilogues provide places within medieval literature where the writers reflect on their own poetics. This is also the case with the epilogue of Thomas' *Tristan*.[256] The bulk of Thomas' epilogue deals with his audience, their reaction to his work and his purposes for writing. The narrator describes the people for whom he has written this work:

> A tuz amanz saluz i dit,
> As pensis e as amerus,
> As emvius, as desirus,
> As enveisiez e as purvers,
> (A tuz cels) ki orunt ces vers. (Thomas, Sneyd 2, ll. 39-43)

Thomas is focused more here on comforting the 'amants' than on their interpretation

[254] Ramm, '"Cest cunte est mult divers"', p. 371.
[255] Green, p. 15.
[256] See Haug and *Seuils de l'œuvre*, ed. by Baumgartner and Harf-Lancner.

of his work. Moreover, in common with most of the Tristan narratives under discussion here, Thomas insists on the truth of his narration whilst also claiming modesty for his own narration:

> (S)i dit n'ai a tuz lor voleir,
> (Le) milz ai dit a mun poeir,
> (E dit ai) tute la verur,
> (Si cum) jo pramis al primur. (Thomas, Sneyd 2, ll. 44-47)

He anticipates criticism, which also happens in Eilhart's work (Eilhart, ll. 6-8). The impression that is given by the narrator here is that he has done his best and that he has told the truth, even if he has not told all that the audience wants to hear. The audience's opinion is important, as has been seen above with the other texts, but the truth is also something that is valued. Thomas gives his reasons for composing this work, focusing on bringing pleasure and comfort to lovers, he says that he wants this to bring comfort to lovers and pleasure as well, 'Que as amanz deive plaisir' (l. 51). Here, the narrator emphasises the emotional response of the audience to his work, rather than their intellectual interpretation.

The narrator names himself as Thomas and describes his work as a piece of writing: 'Tumas fine ci sun escrit' (Sneyd 2, l. 38). This is in contrast to some of the other works which are described neither as something spoken nor as something written. He also names himself as the narrator, and describes his attitude to his source material:

> E diz e vers i ai retrait:
> Pur essample issi ai fait
> Pur l'estorie embelir… (Thomas, Sneyd 2, ll. 48-50)

The word 'retrait' suggests that his work has been assembled, or compiled, which fits with his previous statement that the tale is 'mult divers', and seems to suggest that he has assembled things from different sources, lending support to Green's argument

above that Thomas has used disparate sources to create the best tale for his purposes, rather than blindly following a source. This is reflected in his statement that he wants to 'l'estorie embelir'. The word 'estorie', similar to Béroul's 'estoire' suggests something written and authoritative, which Thomas wants to 'embelir'. This again reflects the tension inherent in Thomas' work between adhering to authorities and asserting his own authority over the work. This is a tension that is present in all of the Tristan texts, albeit in different ways.

Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan* is a focal point for studies on medieval fictionality. Walter Haug examines Gottfried's prologue in his work on medieval literary theory and Mark Chinca's work on the poetics of Gottfried's *Tristan* analyses his attitude to written sources and discussed the apparent importance of verisimilitude to Gottfried, as seen by his rejection of certain episodes and his reasons for that rejection.[257] This is particularly significant given the attitude it suggests towards sources and authority, that Gottfried for example chooses certain events of his narrative on the basis of their verisimilitude rather than on their alleged truth. Much work has been done on this issue in Gottfried's work, but it has rarely been compared in a broad way with the other Tristan texts.[258] This section will firstly give a brief overview of the issues raised by Gottfried in his prologue and examine those instances where Gottfried mentions sources that he has used, analysing those situations where it seems that the narrator has moved away from the authority of those sources and towards his own.

Using both Thomas and Gottfried as examples, Brownlee and others argue that there is evidence of a critical attitude to authoritative sources in French, German

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[257] Haug, pp. 197-227; Chinca, *History, Fiction, Verisimilitude*.
[258] Chica, *History, Fiction, Verisimilitude*.

and English vernacular writing, but also a belief in the importance of 'individual skill in the rewriting of received matter'.[259] Critics such as Haug and Huber have provided in-depth analyses of Gottfried's prologue, and this section will therefore focus exclusively on the way Gottfried discusses sources and authority in his prologue. While Thomas talks in general terms about the diversity of the Tristan material, Gottfried develops this and discusses this issue in more detail. He talks more about the amount of material available and his approach to it:

> Ich weiz wol, ir ist vil gewesen,
> die von Tristande hânt gelesen;
> und ist ir doch niht vil gewesen,
> die von im rehte habe gelesen. (Gottfried, ll. 131-34)

Like Thomas, Gottfried acknowledges that many others have written about Tristan, or, more accurately, that there are many who have read about Tristan, but they have not done so correctly. Here he focuses on the way that others have received the Tristan material. It is possible that he is referring to other contemporary versions of the story, that their versions are false readings or interpretations of the narrative. He elaborates on this in the next section of the prologue, repeating that other people have written the story in the wrong way and that they wrote with good intentions but have not read it correctly (ll. 135-232). The only other writer that he names in relation to his sources is Thomas and it is clear that he considers Thomas to have also worked sufficiently with external sources:

> aber als ich gesprochen hân,
> daz sî niht rehte haben gelesen,
> daz ist, als ich iu sage, gewesen:
> sine sprâchen in der rihte niht,
> als Thômas von Britanje giht,
> der âventiure meister was
> und an britûnschen buochen las

[259] Brownlee and others, p. 428.

aller der lanthêrren leben
und ez uns ze künde hât gegeben. (Gottfried, ll. 146-54)

Gottfried claims that Thomas has read about the lives of the 'lanthêrren' in these books. There are several critical perspectives on this passage. Chinca argues that Gottfried's prologue discusses authors from the point of view of their 'poetologischen Orientierung', rather than their content. There are those who follow *rihte* and *warheit* and those who don't, and the difference between them is partially dependent on the author's relationship to the historical facts.[260] Jackson argues that when the narrator says that few have written correctly about Tristan, he is referring less to the subject matter than the method.[261] This highlights the complexities of Gottfried's attitude towards authority. On the one hand it could be argued that Gottfried wanted to follow Thomas in both respects. They both treat their sources in a similar way, they both reject an episode for a reason other than its absence from an authoritative source, and there is some evidence that the content of their works is similar. On the other hand, Gottfried does not state that he blindly follows Thomas, but that he has then done his own research, although he does state that Thomas told the truth about Tristan:

Als der von Tristande seit,
die rihte und die wârheit
begunde ich sêre suochen
in beider hande buochen
walschen und latînen
und begunde mich des pînen,
daz ich in sîner rihte
rihte dise tihte. (Gottfried, ll. 155-62)

The narrators of both Thomas' and Gottfried's works give the impression that they are solidly researched and reliable versions of the story. Moreover, when comparing

[260] Chinca, 'Mögliche Welten, p. 318.
[261] Jackson, *The Anatomy of Love*, p. 59.

Gottfried's and Thomas' works, Stevens notes that there is no evidence in Thomas' work that he consulted British books as Gottfried claims: 'it may well be that in misrepresenting Thomas as the master of romance narrative […] as an author who not only read British books but wrote the history of Britain, Gottfried is mischievously conflating him with Geoffrey, the real historian of Britain'.[262] There is no proof that Thomas had read such books, but Gottfried wanted to historicise Thomas' work.

Although Gottfried's narrator discusses his attitude to sources in depth in his prologue, there are also references to his sources at various points throughout the story itself. In a similar way to some of the other writers such as Eilhart and Béroul, the narrator of Gottfried's text refers both to things he has heard and things he has read when supporting certain statements he makes throughout the narrative. He refers frequently to a 'maere', which appears to be his source, as well as other tales, although he does not specify who produced them.[263] There are three occasions where he supports a detail of his narrative by basing it on something that he has heard, rather than something he has read. They are when discussing Blanscheflur's beauty ('wir hoeren von ir schoene jehen', l. 636), describing Tristan's clothing when he fights Morold (ll. 6553-60) and when describing Petitcreiu ('daz was gefeinet, hôrte ich sagen', l. 15806). These examples show that the narrator received some information for his work orally, whether the material came from oral tradition or whether it came from written works read aloud. Some of the archival material he used comes from something that was not received by reading, as Gottfried's narrator claims.

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[262] Stevens, p. 417.
[263] He only names Thomas at the beginning of the text.

However, the majority of references to outside sources are to those which have been read. One example of this occurs when Rual takes Blanscheflur to Canoêl after her marriage to Riwalin:

> der vuorte sî ze Canoêl
> ûf daz selbe castêl,
> nâch dem sîn hêrre, als ich ez las,
> Canêlengres genennet was,
> Canêl nach Canoêle. (Gottfried, ll. 1643-47)

Here, Gottfried's narrator claims to base his work on a written authority. The specific detail that the narrator says that he read is the name of the castle and the derivation of that name. Intradiegetically, this is a factual detail which could have come from one of the 'buochen' about the 'lanthêrren' mentioned in the prologue. It gives this part of the narrative a concrete, tangible location, making it seem grounded in history. However, it is not merely statements about factual details that are authorised by referring to a source, but also emotional details and information about the characters. Some examples of this are the loyalty of Rual and Floraete (ll. 1795-1810), the beauty of Tristan's hands (l. 3549 regarding him playing the harp), and the welcome Floraete gives to Rual and Tristan on their return from Cornwall (l. 5259). The narrator also specifically mentions that certain details are told in other tales, such as Morold's reputation. In this instance, he implies that other tales have told about his strength, for example, and that that should be enough for his audience, implying that he will not tell any more than other tales have done:

> diu zal von ime ist manicvalt,
> daz er an muote, an groeze, an craft
> ze vollekomener ritterschaft
> daz lob in allen rîchen truoc.
> hie sî des lobes von ime genuoc. (Gottfried, ll. 6510-14)

The word 'manicvalt' can mean either 'many' or 'diverse'. Gottfried, unlike Thomas,

does not explicitly mention the diversity of the tales about Morolt and does not describe the way he has dealt with different versions of the episode. Where Thomas leads into a discussion about composing the tale, Gottfried merely says that enough has been said already.

There are also various instances where the narrator refers to the 'maere', which could refer to his source, to provide authority for certain descriptions or events in this narrative. These references all function similarly to the rings and oaths that were discussed in earlier chapters; they authorise the narrative in the same way that rings authorised messages, or ordeals authorised claims to innocence.[264] One example of this is Riwalin's name:

> Wie er aber genennet waere,
> daz kündet uns diz maere.
> sîn âventiure tuot es schîn:
> sîn rehter name was Riwalîn,
> sîn ânam was Canêlengres. (Gottfried, ll. 319-23)

Similar to the example given above, this seems to be a factual detail that Gottfried has found in the 'maere'. It is a specific detail that does seem as if it has come from the books about the 'lanthêrren'. The 'maere' has also provided the information about the fact that Tristan learned to hunt (l. 2117) as well as about how much Floraete and Rual loved Tristan, 'an disem selben maere' (l. 1951) and 'als wir daz maere hoeren sagen' (l. 1944). This latter reference suggests that in this instance the 'maere' is oral material. The 'maere' is also referenced for Tristan's clothing when he arrives in Cornwall (l. 2547), Urgan leaving his hand on a table (l. 16101), and Isolde's reasons for keeping Petitcreiu with her (l. 16352). The narrator's concern with acknowledging his sources, and therefore providing authority for numerous and

[264] For a discussion of rings, see Chapter One (pp. 45-58). For a discussion of oaths, see Chapter Two (pp. 100-29).

diverse parts of his narrative, is clear. The fact that information in Gottfried's text allegedly comes from a mixture of oral and written sources makes Gottfried's version of the tale seem authoritative, giving it the appearance of history. In addition, there are several instances in which Gottfried specifically emphasises the truth of the sources that he uses to authorise some of his points. The introduction of Riwalin is one example of this:

> Ein hêrre in Parmenîe was,
> der jâre ein kint, als ich ez las.
> der was, als uns diu wârheit
> an sîner âventiure seit,
> wol an gebürte künege genoz (Gottfried, ll. 245-49)

This is similar to the examples above where other works are referenced as if they were historical, but here something is specifically described as being the truth.[265]

It is evident from the above examples that Gottfried's narrator frequently uses sources to authorise elements of his narrative; finding authority for his narrative from external sources is clearly important for him. However, this authority is then destabilised when he rejects different versions of certain episodes and that rejection is not based on the presence or absence of these episodes in his source. Two such examples will be discussed here, both of which are examined by Chinca.[266] The first is the episode of the swallows, in which swallows drop a woman's hair near Mark, and he then states that he will only marry the woman to whom this hair belongs. A version of this episode, which may or may not be the one to which Gottfried is referring, appears in Eilhart's work (ll. 1419-1548). Eilhart explicitly mentions that he is telling the truth in this episode (ll. 1448-50). Secondly, the episode of Tristan's

[265] Other examples include meeting Marke's men while hunting (l. 2763), the location of the dragon (l. 8942), Melot (ll. 14244-49) and Tristan's manhood (l. 15915).

[266] Chinca, *History, Fiction, Verisimilitude* discusses the swallows (pp. 94-96) and Tristan's battle with Morolt (pp. 104-07). In 'Mögliche Welten', Chinca discusses the swallows (pp. 322-23) and the battle with Morolt (pp. 321-22).

battle with Morolt will be analysed, during which Gottfried says that there were two armies fighting but that these two armies were actually just Morolt and Tristan.

The episode of the swallows carrying a hair to King Marke is rejected by the narrator of Gottfried's text on the grounds of plausibility:

> genistet ie kein swalwe mê
> mit solhem ungemache,
> sô vil sô sî bûsache
> bî ir in dem lande vant,
> daz s'über mer in vremediu lant
> nâch ir bûgeraete streich?
> weiz got, hie spellet sich der leich,
> hie lispet daz maere. (Gottfried, ll. 8608-15)

He rejects this episode because it would be unlikely for a swallow to carry material to build its nest such a distance and it would also be unlikely for Tristan to travel such a distance without knowing for whom he was searching (ll. 8616-29.), which are both reasonable points to make. Chinca uses this episode as evidence that Gottfried was concerned with the principle of verisimilitude:

> Cicero, it will be remembered, states that a verisimilar narrative is one that fits the nature of the actors in it, the habits of ordinary people, and the beliefs of the audience […] Nobody believes that it lies within the nature of a swallow to fly such great distances in search of nesting material, and the story therefore falls down […] Told in such a way, the narrative would become a *spel*, a fabulous or mendacious tale, and it would lisp, or speak incoherently […] A *spel* […] can be an untrue story, and of the author who insists on the motif of the voyage with no destination Gottfried says: 'waz rach er an den buochen, / der diz hiez schriben unde lesen?' (8622-23). What kind of books Gottfried has in mind is not clear, but one undertone in this statement might be that whoever tells the story in this way deviates from the authoritative and factual version enshrined in the written historical records.[267]

These are useful points, however Chinca's argument that telling the story in this way deviates from the written historical records may be too speculative. It is also possible that the statement 'hie lispet daz maere' is intended to question the authority of the

[267] Chinca, *History, Fiction, Verisimilitude*, pp. 95-96.

source. If the ‘maere’, which in other sections refers to his source, is babbling, then the narrator here directly calls into question its quality and therefore its authority.

The episode of Tristan’s battle with Morolt provides another example of the narrator modifying an episode, or modifying the interpretation of an episode, even though it is present in his source. He does not change any of the material facts, but he changes the way he narrates the episode to such an extent that he feels the need to explain this process. He begins by describing how other people tell this story:

> Nu hoere ich al die werlde jehen
> und stat ouch an dem maere,
> daz diz ein einwîc waere,
> und ist ir aller jehe dar an,
> hiene waeren niuwan zwêne man. (Gottfried, ll. 6866-70)

The source and many others say that the fight between Morolt and Tristan was a duel. He then immediately contradicts this:

> ich prüeve ez aber an dirre zît,
> daz ez ein offener strît
> von zwein ganzen rotten was.
> swie ich doch daz nie gelas
> an Tristandes maere,
> ich mache ez doch wârbaere. (Gottfried, ll. 6871-76)

He goes on to state that he will show or prove that this is true, although he has not read it anywhere. This is a new development, to openly state that he has read something, to reject it even though he has read it, and to make it ‘wârbaere’ himself. The narrator, by stating that he will make something true that contradicts his source is asserting his own authority over the material. He proves this by explaining that it was actually a battle of two armies, because Morolt has the strength of four men, something ‘als uns diu wârheit / ie hât gesaget und hiute seit’ (ll. 6877-78) and that this therefore means that it was as if he was an army by himself. The narrator has supported this by claiming that the source states that Morolt had the strength of four

men. Tristan also is a party of four:

> daz eine got, daz ander reht,
> daz dritte was ir zweier kneht
> und ir gewaerer dienestman,
> der wol gewaere Tristan,
> daz vierde was willeger muot,
> der wunder in den noeten tuot. (Gottfried, ll. 6883-88)

Therefore, there were two 'armies' of four men each. The narrator has not changed the actual facts of the tale (there are, in reality, two men still fighting and it is therefore still a duel), but he is interpreting it differently. Chinca states:

> what we witness here is a supplementation of the archival version of the narrative by the experimental construction of fictional figures, along with their meaning […] To the author's *bilden* corresponds the audience's *vernemen*; together the two terms describe a process in which a meaning is engendered experimantally ('Let's see what I can make'), a process that has nothing to do with any mode, allegorical, integumental, parabolic or otherwise, that aims at the disclosure of a pre-existent truth hidden inside the already narrated history.[268]

Taking Chinca's argument further, it therefore becomes apparent that, although Gottfried discusses sources a great deal in his work, he is also beginning to assert his own authority over the text. In this instance, this takes the expression of providing a different understanding of what the first text says. The facts have not been changed, but the narrator has given the audience a different way of telling the tale and of interpreting it. Moreover, the fact that he describes his approach to Tristan's story as 'ich mache es doch wârbaere' (l. 6876) is striking, given that it can only be true in a metaphorical and literary sense.

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[268] Chinca, *History, Fiction, Verisimilitude*, p. 107.

Studies on the use of sources in medieval literature regarding fictionality tend to focus more on the use of written sources than on the use of oral ones. However, as stated above, eyewitness accounts were seen as more authoritative than written ones.[269] Every version of the Tristan legend discussed in this study deals with sources and their apparent authority in slightly different ways. As seen above, Thomas and Gottfried claim to rely largely on written sources, yet they change episodes on occasion for reasons of verisimilitude or of 'raisun', whether they are rejecting a version of events (Thomas and Gottfried) or the interpretation of a series of events (Gottfried). However, this needs to be compared with the attitude towards sources, authoritative or otherwise, in the other Tristan narratives, regardless of whether or not they are written, in order to determine whether or not the narrator views himself to have any authority over the material.

There are two instances in Béroul's work where the narrator refers to an authoritative written source, the *estoire*, one of which occurs during the lovers' exile in the Morois:

> Ainz, puis le tens que el bois furent,
> Deus genz itant de tel ne burent;
> Ne, si conme l'estoire dit,
> La ou Berox le vit escrit,
> Nule gent tant ne s'entramerent
> Ne si griment nu conpererent
> La roïne contre lui live. (Béroul, ll. 1787-93)

An *estoire* can be defined as a 'Geschichtserzählung', an historical narrative.[270]

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[269] Ibid., p. 20.

[270] See Adolf Tobler, *Tobler-Lommatzsch Altfranzösisches Wörterburch: Adolf Toblers nachgelassene Materialien*, 11 vols (Berlin: Weidmann, 1925-), III, *E-F* (1954), p. 1402.

Béroul claims to have seen it written down and seems to view it as authoritative. Vitz notes that Béroul does not actually claim to have read it and it is therefore linked to memory and a claim from oral, not written tradition, but that he does see texts as authoritative.[271] The fact that he has seen it written down (l. 1790) shows that he is claiming that it was not transmitted orally, nor did he merely hear it read aloud. In this instance, the *estoire* is used to support the idea that no other lovers have loved each other as well as Tristan and Iseut did. While in Gottfried's work he frequently refers to the written source in matters of historical fact, this example deals with emotional details. This in turn contrasts with Thomas' work, in which an emotional detail (which of the lovers suffered more) is opened up to the audience for discussion.

The narrator, earlier in the text, uses the *estoire* to reject an alternative ending to a particular episode, which is similar to the rejection of certain episodes in Thomas' and Gottfried's works. The leper Yvain is said by some to have been drowned, but the narrator here rejects that idea as it is not in the *estoire* and Tristan was too 'courtois' to have done such a thing. Brownlee and others note that the narrator 'remembers the correct details better'[272]:

> Li conteor dïent qu'Yvain
> Firent nïer, qui sont vilain;
> N'en sevent mie bien l'estoire,
> Berox l'a mex en sen memoire,
> Trop ert Tristran preux et cortois
> A ocirre gent de tes lois. (Béroul, ll. 1265-70)

Thomas and Gottfried reject episodes based on their lack of plausibility or 'raisun', rather than on their absence from a particular source. By contrast, Béroul is the only

[271] Vitz, pp. 302-03.
[272] Brownlee and others, p. 427.

writer discussed here who rejects an episode based partially on its absence from an authoritative source. However, it it is important to note that in this instance the narrator also rejects the episode of Tristan killing Yvain based on the characterisation of Tristan.

In general, the authority of the *estoire* is not questioned, but there are other instances in the text which seem to ground it in something historical. On discussing Iseut's attendance at church shortly after her reconciliation with Marc, the narrator mentions a chasuble:

> Une chasublë en fu faite,
> Qui ja du tresor n'iert hors traite
> Se as grans festes anvés non.
> Encore est ele a Saint Sanson:
> Ce dïent cil qui l'ont veüe (Béroul, ll. 2991-95).

This is not an eyewitness account of the events that occurred during the Tristan story, but the presence of an artefact which, according to the narrator, other people have seen and was present during these events, gives the impression of anchoring the story in an apparently historical past.

During the episode of the 'saut de la chapelle' (ll. 928-64), when Tristan escapes from imprisonment after being detained for adultery, he jumps out of a chapel window and lands on a rock partway down a cliff. The narrator here ensures that his audience knows that there were many people in the chapel to see Tristan make this jump (l. 955). These statements are not direct eyewitness accounts; the narrator does not seem to have met these people himself, but the assertion that there were witnesses makes the text seem as if it is grounded in something historical and

authoritative. In this instance, the point of referring to the eyewitnesses may be to help the audience believe that Tristan would have survived such a jump, which seems unlikely. Moreover, the narrator tells his audience that natives of Cornwall still call this stone the 'Saut Tristran': 'Encor claiment Corneualan / Cele pierre le Saut Tristran' (ll. 953-54). The story of Tristan has entered into local history to the extent of having this landmark named after him. It is remembered by the fact that the rock is named after it, the rock functioning both as a commemoration and as proof that it happened.

Chinca makes the argument that Gottfried's work uses archival material in an experimental way.[273] However, Gottfried and Thomas were not the only writers to claim that they were using historiographical material. Béroul's work is, according to the narrator, grounded in history; there are references to the authoritative *estoire* as well as references to eyewitnesses, which could make Béroul's work itself seem as if it were authoritative as well. He only rejects an incident based partly on the fact that it is not present in the source and therefore does not question those sources as much as Gottfried and Thomas do. However, this does not mean that Béroul's work is an historiographical text. An analysis of the way that characters within the text tell stories will show that Béroul questions such authority in a more subtle way, as will be seen in Chapter Four.[274]

In his prologue, Eilhart's narrator claims to be telling the tale 'oᵛn all valscheit' (l. 35) and that he has found this tale 'in sinem buᵒch' (l. 37) but there is no indication as to whose book this was. Other sources are also referred to rather than just written ones. In comparison with Béroul, Eilhart goes into much less detail about

[273] Chinca, *History, Fiction, Verisimilitude*, p. 38.
[274] See pp. 210-222.

his use of sources. While Béroul refers specifically to eyewitness accounts and hearsay, the evidence in favour of Eilhart's use of sources he has received orally (or aurally) is limited to telling the audience of things he has heard, as opposed to things he has read. There are numerous examples of this, including the claim that one can only travel from Cornwall to Ireland by boat ('so ich recht hab vernomen, l. 1050) and Tristrant being asked to take a harp and sword with him when he leaves for Ireland ('hort ich sagen', l. 1188) In the latter example, it is possible that this phrase, interjected into the middle of the sentence, is intended to draw attention to an important detail that the audience should notice. Tristrant will need both his harp and his sword in Ireland, and the sword plays a crucial role in identifying him to Isalde. However, the narrator's aim is not merely to highlight important details to the audience, but also to authorise some of the statements he is making about the story. For example, regarding the effects of the love potion, the narrator states:

> vier jaᵛr sie pflegten
> so groᵛsser lieb baid,
> ja daß sie sich nit schaiden
> möchten och ainen tag.
> stätlich ainß deß andern pflag
> an ze sehen bÿ nacht und tagen:
> also hort ich da von sagen. (Eihart, ll. 2394-2400)

The duration of the love potion and the specific requirements it places on the lovers differ from text to text. Gottfried's love potion, for example, does not seem to have a time limit, whereas Béroul's expires after three years (Béroul, ll. 2133-46). It is possible that the narrator's use of 'also hort ich da von sagen' here is intended to forestall any criticism he might receive based on different versions of the tale. The narrator uses it to convey that the statement he is making has authority because he has heard it from an outside source. To emphasise this point further, the narrator

states that Tristrant had met Kurnewal and returned to his own kingdom ‘ob ich recht hab vernommen’ (l. 8085). This suggests two things; firstly that the narrator is anticipating criticism here; if there is something he has said that is wrong he obviously cannot have heard it correctly. Authority does not rest with him. He absolves himself of responsibility for the material and is not in control of this work. This is unlike Gottfried and Thomas. Secondly, it gives the impression that there were actual events that needed to be correctly reported. Phrases such as ‘ob ich recht hab vernomen’ imply that there are right and wrong ways to tell this story, something which is outright stated by most writers of the Tristan legend.

This is an impression that is also given in Eilhart’s epilogue (ll. 9672-84), in which he emphasises that his version of the tale is the correct one:

> nun spräch licht ain ander man,
> eß sÿ anderß um in komen:
> daß man eß unglich von im sagt.
> Seghart mit gu^{o}tten zügen daß betagt,
> daß eß recht also ergieng. (Eilhart, ll. 9678-83)

Once again, he refers to external sources, although he does not in this instance specify whether those sources are written, oral or a mixture of the two. These sources support his story, resulting in the claim that there are right and wrong ways to tell his tale.

Eilhart also refers to written sources throughout his text and beyond the prologue. One example of this supports the fact that a messenger arrived to tell Marke of Tristrant’s return to Cornwall from Ireland:

> zu hand lieff ain bot, ich laß,
> und sagt dem kúng mär,

daß Trÿstrand komen wär. (Eilhart, ll. 1372-74)

Similarly, he refers to the books that he has read to support his claim that the love potion wears off after four years:

[...] biß deß tranckß craft vergie.
deß warin do, alzo sprechen die,
die eß in biechern hond gelesen,
- eß mag wol war wesen –
vier jar, daß sie in trancken. (Eilhart, ll. 4939-43)

Once again, this could be a means of anticipating criticism if it is a point that other writers dispute. Moreover, it is interesting to note that he refers to books in the plural here; he has not just referred to one source, despite his assertion in the prologue. The fact that he has read it in books is explicitly connected to the claim that it should be true. There is more evidence of the use of multiple sources slightly earlier in the text, where a combination of written and oral testimony is mentioned:

doch sagt daß buᵒch bloᵛß
und ouch diu lút fur waᵛr,
daß sie me denn zwaÿ jaᵛr
in dem wald waᵛrent,
stett und dörffer sie enbaren. (Eilhart, ll. 4778-82)

The fact that the lovers were in the woods for two years is affirmed by both the book and the people. Both oral and written history confirm this point. Both Béroul and Eilhart show the ways in which oral testimony is used to provide authority for certain events, the sojourn in the forest for Eilhart, and the jump from the chapel for Béroul.

In Eilhart's work, the issue of authority does not merely focus on the use of sources. The narrator of Eilhart's text insists on occasion that his audience should believe him. The first instance of this occurs when Tristrand leaves Cornwall for Ireland after being wounded by Morolt:

mit wainenden ougen
- sölt ir mir gelouben -

> sach der kúng nach sinem frúnd,
> do die wilden unde
> triben ferr uff die see. (Eilhart, ll. 1197-1203)

Once again, he seems to anticipate criticism. He gives no reason as to why the audience should believe him, he just states that he should be believed. Something similar occurs when the narrator tells of the swallows who drop a woman's hair, an action that persuades Marke to seek out the woman for his wife 'merckt recht, eß ist wa^{v}r' (l. 1449). Chinca argues that if Gottfried is criticising Eilhart in his discussion of the swallows episode, he misrepresents Eilhart's version, as it does not correspond exactly to the episode that Gottfried rejected.[275] Eilhart appears here to anticipate objections to this particular episode, but he does not say why, once again merely insisting that what he says is true. The audience must accept it, which is similar to Green's argument that the audience should make-believe. However, the narrator here also asks his audience to accept his authority over this narration, although this is different to Thomas and Gottfried as Eilhart does not mention sources here at all.

Critics who have worked on fictionality in medieval literature have tended to focus mostly on those texts in which the narrators talk about their work at length, which is why Gottfried has featured so prominently in these works. It has been seen that the focus on make-believe and plausibility that was advocated by previous critics has failed to properly assess the role of authority in medieval literary works specifically with relation to the development of fictionality. It has been seen above how Béroul and Eilhart mingle the sources they refer to, both written ones and oral ones, but it is in the shorter narratives that the issues of the use of sources and where to locate authority move away from the need for sources as written pieces of work. It

[275] Chinca, *History, Fiction, Verisimilitude*, p. 96.

will become apparent that, for these texts, authority for their narrative comes from Tristan himself, who can either be seen as an historical figure, or merely as a character within the text itself, or as both simultaneously, thereby enabling the writers to assert their own authority over their texts in a more subtle way than the writers discussed previously.

Chievrefueil and the *Folies Tristan*

Previous scholars have focused on specific issues in an attempt to define the attitude that writers of the Tristan legend and their contemporaries had towards what modern readers would think of as fictional texts. Mark Chinca, as seen above, indicates the importance of a narrative being apparently plausible, but also describes material as being either archival or experimental, and one of his arguments about Gottfried's work is that he uses 'material he considered archival and treating it in an experimental way'.[276] Green focuses on the issue of make-believe, that in a fictional text both the author and the audience would agree to make-believe that something is true.[277] Walter Haug is concerned with the search for meaning.[278] Some of these concerns are present in both of the *Folies*. Plausibility, using archival material in an experimental way and agreeing to make-believe are all apparent in the narrations that Tristan makes in front of the court, and this will be addressed in detail below.[279] However, it seems to be the case that a text can more accurately be defined as fictional if it does not have any outside authority to support its content. The *Folies*

[276] Chinca, *History, Fiction, Verisimilitude*, p. 38.
[277] Green, p. 4.
[278] Haug, p. 23-24.
[279] See Chapter Four, pp.242-54.

and *Chievrefueil* show that these writers are beginning to move away from the need for authority as they deal with it in a much different way to the other writers. Firstly, those instances in the *Folies* where there is an indication that the work is grounded in history will be examined, and this will then lead into a discussion of authority for the text itself.

Gaunt has discussed Marie de France's attitude towards her sources, largely from the point of view of discussing the tension between oral and written sources:

> As with Béroul's *Tristan*, the orality of Marie's *Lais* is feigned and fictional. However, the repeated insistence on oral sources suggests that the oral tradition to which Marie appeals has a value both to her and to her public, that it is being deployed for a specific purpose […] whereas writing is thought to be arch, indirect, potentially devious and calculating, the oral tradition claims authenticity, immediacy and sincerity. Hence Marie's repeated claims to truth […] which are supported by the stories' ostensible provenance from eye witnesses, contemporaries, or on two occasions the protagonists themselves (*Chaitivel* and *Chievrefueil*). The oral tradition that Marie evokes suggests a nostalgia for the immediacy and unproblematic authority of a world before writing, a world prone to magic solutions to insoluble problems.[280]

Gaunt notes some important points here, including the tension inherent in praising oral witnesses from the perspective of a written culture and the fact that the authority for *Chievrefueil* comes from one of the protagonists. However, Gaunt does not go far enough in using this evidence to assess Marie's attitude towards authority in general in her work, focusing instead on the implications of this for the relationship between orality and literacy in Marie's work. In order to analyse Marie's attitude towards authority, particularly relating to *Chievrefueil*, this section will firstly examine the prologues to the *Lais* as a whole, both the general prologue and the prologue to *Guigemar*, exploring the tension between the varying sources that Marie refers to for her work, whether they are oral, written or apparently eyewitness accounts. This

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[280] Gaunt, p. 57.

section will firstly examine the way that Marie refers to authorities in her prologue and then examine her choice of the *Lais* in particular as subjects for discussion, before discussing *Chievrefueil* itself.

Referring to authorities and other established works is a key feature of Marie's general prologue. Firstly, she refers to other writers in order to support her statements:

> Custume fu as ancïens,
> ceo testimoine Precïens,
> es livres que jadis faiseient
> assez oscurement diseient
> pur cels ki a venir esteient
> e ki aprendre les deveient,
> que peüssent gloser la letre
> e de lur sen le surplus metre. (Marie de France, *Prologue*, ll. 9-16)

This explanation and the references to classical authorities justify the approach she takes to her work. She supports the approach she takes to her work by a direct reference to Priscian. She then goes on to mention philosophers who have claimed that as time goes on people have more of an ability to understand older poetic texts. It is also interesting that so much of her prologue focuses on the search for meaning. Marie is not concerned that it might be difficult to find meaning in poetic texts, rather she states that the meaning will become clear in the future.

Her reasons for choosing to write the *Lais* in particular also raise the issue of where authority for the story comes from. In the prologue, Marie discusses the possibility of writing a text of a different sort, an *estoire*, but rejects the idea as many others have done the same thing:

> Pur ceo començai a penser
> d'alkune bone estoire faire
> e de Latin en Romanz traire;
> mais ne me fust guaires de pris:
> itant s'en sunt altre entremis. (Marie de France, *Prologue*, ll. 28-32)

She wants to work on something original in order to gain praise, and she therefore rejects the idea of working on something that comes very much from a written culture, an 'estoire' that she would need to work on from the Latin into the vernacular. That, she goes on to say, is why she chose the *Lais* (l. 33). She is deliberately creating a completely new kind of text, with a different kind of authority. This is somewhat different to Gottfried's attitude to his material. Whereas he refers to and claims to follow established sources while actually rejecting their authority on occasion, Marie here claims to use both written and oral sources. Throughout this prologue and the prologue to 'Guigemar' it becomes very apparent that she deliberately chooses to work on something that comes partly from an oral tradition:

> Plusurs en ai oïz conter,
> nes vueil laissier ne oblïer.
> Rime en ai e fait ditié,
> soventes feiz en ai veillié. (Marie de France, *Prologue*, ll. 39-42)

She takes something from oral culture and transmits it in writing. It is clear, however, from her attitude to the material, that it is seen as authoritative. The prologue to *Guigemar* describes them as being true:

> Les contes que jo sai verais,
> dunt li Bretun unt fait les lais,
> vos conterai assez briefment. (Marie de France, *Guigemar*, ll. 19-21)

This is an idea that is reflected in *Chievrefueil* itself, as the *lai* is apparently a version of something that Tristan had composed. It is therefore presented as true because it was created by someone who participated in the events of the narrative, but this is more problematic as this person is also a character created by the narrator. The authority for *Chievrefueil* is therefore complex, indicating that, although outside sources are necessary to authorise a work, Marie is beginning to assert her own

authority over the *lai*, possibly in a more forceful way than Gottfried and Thomas.

Marie explains the creation of the *lai* of *Chievrefueil* twice, in both the opening and closing sections of the text. At the beginning of the text she insists that she is telling the truth and explains where she found the tale:

> Asez me plest e bien le veuil,
> del lai qu'hum nume Chievrefueil,
> que la verité vus en cunt
> coment fu fez, de quei e dunt.
> Plusur le m'unt cunté e dit
> e jeo l'ai trové en escrit
> de Tristram e de la reïne... (*Chievrefueil*, ll. 1-7)

She refers to two types of source, both oral and written, therefore it is evident that this *lai* does not come from oral tradition alone, but it is certainly not part of the corpus of written authorities that she referred to in the prologue. There is no indication of a hierarchy between the two types of source (oral tale or written one). Neither one is seen as more authoritative than the other. This text is both a retelling of the *lai* of *Chievrefueil* and an account of its creation.

The last few lines of the *lai* explain its creation in more detail:

> Pur la joie qu'il ot eüe
> de s'amie qu'il ot veüe
> e pur ceo k'il aveit escrit,
> si cum la reïne l'ot dit,
> pur les paroles remembrer,
> Tristram ki bien saveit harper,
> en avait fet un nuvel lai.
> Asez briefment le numerai:
> 'Goteleaf' l'apelent Engleis,
> 'Chievrefueil' le nument Franceis.
> Dit vus en ai la verité,
> del lai que j'ai ici cunté. (*Chievrefueil*, ll. 107-118)

It is claimed that the purpose of the *lai* is commemoration (l. 111), to remember what Tristan had written (l. 109), which presumably refers to the message carved on the 'bastun', and to remember what the queen had said (l. 110). It was for these reasons

that Tristan composed a new *lai* (l. 113), and then Marie wrote this text, which she names 'Goteleaf' or 'Chievrefueil', about the creation of Tristan's composition. This is similar to Marie's creative process; she stated in the prologue to *Guigemar* that the purpose of writing them down is that they might be remembered. The significance of this *lai* is that Tristan is described as being the origin of this particular piece of work. The authority for the story comes very directly from Tristan himself, who is both an historical figure and a character within the text. Walter describes this as follows: 'Tristan est donc le premier "auteur" du lai que Marie vient de rappeler. Autorité fictive, il va sans dire, mais qui justifie l'entreprise de commémoration tentée par Marie: le texte "met en abîme" les circonstances de sa propre création'.[281] However, the purpose of the *lai* is not merely commemoration, although that is a part of it. The *lai* also reflects contemporary developments in the way that literary texts were being approached. It has been seen that authority is a key issue in the debate surrounding fictionality and is also a central feature of *Chievrefueil*. The fact that the authority given for the *lai* is potentially a fictive one claiming to be the truth reflects the complexity of the issues of fictionality, interpretation and authority in the literature of this period.

The writers of the *Folies Tristan* do not refer explicitly to sources, whether written or transmitted orally, but there is other evidence of the way that archival material may be influencing the writing of these texts. This differs from Gottfried's use of archival material; whereas he mentions books and other sources which he claims to have used for research, the *Folie Oxford* gives more subtle indicators that this story is grounded in historical details. Firstly, the setting of Tintagel for this story

[281] Marie de France, '*Lai du Chèvrefeuille* (Ph. Walter)', in *Tristan et Iseut*, ed. by Lacroix and Walter, pp. 307-13 (p. 313).

is grounded in history. The narrator describes Tintagel in some detail, explaining that:

> […] ki vaille
> Sur la mer en Cornuaile
> La tur querree for e grant.
> Jadis la fermerent jeant. (*Folie Oxford*, ll. 103-06)

Tintagel would have been seen as a real, although physically distant, location. Similarly, the existence of giants in the past was also seen as a recognised fact. For example, Wace's *Roman de Brut* states that Britain was originally inhabited by giants who were defeated by Brutus in the distant past:

> En cele ille gaianz aveit,
> Nule gent altre n'i maneit.
> Gaianz erent mult corpora,
> Sur altres genz erent creü;
> Ne vus sai lur nuns aconter
> Ne nul n'en sai, fors un, nomer. (Wace, *Roman de Brut*, ll. 1063-68)[282]

Therefore for the twelfth-century audience of this story, it was reasonable to suppose that Tintagel, a real, historical location, was indeed built by giants.

Secondly, the narrator of the *Folie Oxford* refers to memory while setting the scene for Tristan's journey back to Cornwall in disguise:

> Tut droit vers Engleterre curent;
> Dous nuiz e un jur i demurent;
> Al secund jur venent al port
> A Tiltagel, si droit record. (*Folie Oxford*, ll. 91-94)

By stating that he hopes he has remembered events correctly, this implies, unsurprisingly, that the events of this tale exist somewhere outside of his own imagination. This is the only part of either of the two *Folies* where a source other than Tristan himself is mentioned. This existence of the story outside of the narrator's imagination implies authority, which could either come from another version of the story, an historical account, or even that he remembers the events himself, although

[282] Wace, *Roman de Brut*, ed. I Arnold, Société des Anciens Textes Français, Paris, 1934

the latter seems unlikely.

More significantly, the authority lying behind the story being told by the writers of both the *Folie Berne* and the *Folie Oxford* comes primarily from the fact that Tristan becomes a narrator to the intradiegetical audience telling part of the story himself. Tristan becomes his own biographer, narrating his own past. However this is problematic; it is not a simple eyewitness account. Firstly, Tristan is a narrator within a larger narrative, which is related by a heterodiegetic narrator. His authority therefore would be valid for the parts of the overall Tristan story that he tells on his arrival at court, which is further complicated by the fact that not all of these narratives are true. Secondly, while Tristan is a figure who exists outside of the text itself (whether as an historical figure or not is open to debate, but he is certainly a figure from a well-known literary tradition), he is not an objective figure created entirely from an outside source, but is also partially created by his writer. This is further supported by the character of Tristan as narrator in the text; the fact that he tells stories which are partly true and partly invention supports the argument that this was also true for the writers of the Tristan story itself. This will be further examined in Chapter Four, which discusses how characters from the texts narrate their own pasts.

Conclusion

Most work that has been undertaken by those writing on fictionality and authority in the Tristan legend has focused on Gottfried and Thomas, largely due to the fact that they reject certain episodes. This previous work analyses the narrators' explanations

for those rejections. While it is striking that the writers of those texts make that decision to affirm the authority of sources and then reject them in order to assert their own authority over their material, it is perhaps in the shorter Tristan narratives where the developments in literary texts during this period were most interestingly discussed. By focusing specifically on written sources and on those texts which explicitly discuss their own poetics, previous critics have not adequately addressed the attitudes towards authorities in the other texts. Both Béroul and Eilhart also question authority, by claiming ignorance over certain elements of the narrative, which thereby invites discussion from the audience, or by referring to eyewitness accounts that could not possibly be real. It is in the shorter texts, however, that authority is more subtly and more effectively taken away from outside sources and given to the writer of the text itself, more so in the two *Folies* than in 'Chievrefueil'. By making the authority for the story dependent on a character within that story, even if that character is a semi-historical figure, the text is in effect self-authorising.

Chapter Four: Stories within the Story

Introduction

Walter Haug's work on literary theory indicates that it is in prologues, epilogues and other excurses that vernacular writers reflected on their own work.[283] Mark Chinca and Christopher Young later added to this discussion, indicating that it was also important to examine those parts of works where characters tell stories:

> Where does poetological reflection occur? Haug limits his discussion to the poetological utterances contained in prologues, epilogues and literary excursuses [...] we could [...] also consider non-discursive passages that prompt reflection on the nature and function of literature.[284]

They argue in favour of examining scenes 'in narrative works where the characters tell stories', and suggest specifically looking at the stories invented by Tristan in Gottfried's work, but their article focuses mostly on examples from Hartmann von Aue, such as Enide's saddle.[285] They also discuss Kalogrenant's narration of an event which occurred from his past at the beginning of Hartmann's *Iwein*.[286] Other critics suggest similar approaches, for example noting the importance of examining Tristan as a storyteller, usually in Gottfried's work. Kaminski, writing on Gottfried's *Tristan*, argues in favour of a connection between Tristan as narrator and the narrator of the Tristan romance, comparing both of these figures against the picture of a narrator which is advocated in the literary excursus.[287] The final chapter of Chinca's monograph discusses Tristan as a narrator, focusing largely on those episodes such as

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[283] Haug, p. 7.
[284] Chinca and Young, p. 614.
[285] Chinca and Young, pp. 626-34.
[286] Chinca and Young, pp. 621-26.
[287] Kaminski, p. 11.

Tristan meeting the pilgrims, in which he invents a past for himself.[288] Other critics have discussed similar episodes, but not necessarily with the emphasis on discovering more about medieval literary practice.[289] Moreover, these critics do not generally compare these episodes with similar instances in other Tristan texts and do not make the connection between the characters as narrators and the act of narrating which is being undertaken by the extradiegetical narrator. The examination of such intradiegetical narrations in Gottfried's text tends to focus on Tristan's inventions, where he attempts to deceive other characters by inventing a persona for himself, rather than analysing those passages where characters narrate events from their own pasts. The previous chapter examined those discursive passages where the narrator discusses the way that he deals with his material and his attitudes towards sources and authority. However it is also in those instances in the narratives where characters tell stories that attitudes to storytelling can profitably be examined. Chinca and Young focus on narratives such as Enide's saddle, which tells a tale which is not a part of the story of Erec and was depicted clearly as a story separate from the main text. This chapter will examine parts of the Tristan narratives where similar narrations are told, focusing on the *lai de Guirun* in Thomas' work, as well as non-verbal storytelling, such as the *salle aux images*. More importantly this chapter will focus on those instances where the characters, Tristan in particular, make the past a subject of their narrations. I will analyse the relationship between fictional and historical material, with the aim of determining how the characters (and therefore also the narrators who are portraying them) deal with and relate to their source

[288] Mark Chinca, 'Tristan as Storyteller' in *History, Fiction, Verisimilitude*, by Chinca, pp. 110-22.
[289] See Brent A. Pitts, 'In Praise of Tristan: Oral Composition and Epic Technique and Béroul's *Roman de Tristan*', *Romance Philology*, 46 (1992), 1-12.

material. When compared with the conclusions drawn from the previous section, this will provide a comprehensive view of the attitudes towards storytelling and fictionality expressed by the writers of the Tristan texts.

Extradiegetical Stories

Coleman argues that:

> If a character within the text starts to tell a story, he or she is likely to refer to written sources and to move the narration along with a standard "as I read" or "as ye have heard devise." [...] Such duplication of basic phrases (and modes) within embedded narratives seems to support the hypothesis that aural phrases are the basic building blocks of narrative structure, rather than evidence of any nostalgia-creating strategy or lame-duck minstrelisms.[290]

At this point in her work, Coleman is discussing texts from a slightly later period of the Middle Ages than these Tristan narratives. It is interesting to note that, although by that period characters were likely to refer to their written sources, this was not the case in the Tristan texts. Thomas's *Tristan* is the only Tristan narrative to feature, in detail, the narration of a *lai*. *Lais* typically originated from oral culture, as can be seen in *Chievrefueil*, and that would explain why Iseut does not state that she has read the *lai de Guirun* somewhere, but does not explain why she does not mention an oral source. Songs are also frequently mentioned in Gottfried's work. Jackson, for example, discusses how Isolde's songs affect the emotions of her audience.[291] However, none of these songs are actually repeated by the narrator. The *lai de Guirun* does not use the Tristan story for its subject matter and is itself not repeated by Thomas' narrator, but the narrator relates the gist of its content, as sung by Iseut:

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[290] Coleman, p. 105.

[291] Jackson, W. T. H. 'Tristan the Artist in Gottfried's Poem', in *Tristan and Isolde: A Casebook*, ed. by Grimbert, pp. 125-46 (p. 137).

En sa chambre se set un jor
E fait un lai pitus d'amur:
Coment dan Guirun fu supris,
Pur l'amur de la dame ocis
Qu'il sur tute rïen ama,
E coment li cuns puis li dona
Le cuer Guirun a sa moillier
Par engin un jor a mangier,
E la dolur que la dame out
Quant la mort de sun ami sout. (Thomas, Sneyd 1, ll. 782-91)

In this instance, the narrator essentially tells the story of the *lai* without narrating the *lai* itself, and this therefore constitutes a retelling, adaptation and interpretation of the *lai*. The points mentioned by the narrator about the *lai* focus largely on the emotions of the characters within it, Guirun's love for the lady and the lady's pain on discovering his death. It is clear that this *lai* is intended by the narrator of Thomas' text to be a reflection of the story that he is currently relating, that of Tristan and Iseut's tragic love. Huber argued in favour of similarities between the *lai de Guirun* and the Tristan story, particularly noting the fact that they are both love triangles, that Iseut is concerned for a lover far away and that the *lai* may offer a forecast of her own end.[292] It is described as 'un lai pitus d'amur' (Sneyd 1, l. 783), a description which could also apply to Thomas' work, and the focus on the pain of the lady following the death of the lover is a simple prefiguration of the suffering Iseut will undergo when she discovers that Tristan is dead. Curtis describes this as follows: 'The ominous foreboding of death pervades the text long before Tristan has received his mortal blow'.[293] This is emphasised by the introduction of Cariado. Iseut compares him with the bird of ill-omen, which is apt as the news that he brings her is

[292] Christoph Huber, 'Spiegelungen des Liebestodes im *Tristan* Gottfrieds von Straßburg', in *Tristan und Isolde*, ed. by Buschinger and Spiewok, pp. 127-40 (p. 138).
[293] Renée L.Curtis, 'Love and death in Thomas' *Tristan*', in *Tristan Studies*, by Renée L. Curtis, pp. 36-41 (pp. 38-39).

unpleasant:

> Males noveles vos aport
> Endreit de Tristan vostre dru:
> Vos l'avez, dame Ysolt, perdu;
> En altre terre ad pris moillier. (Thomas, Sneyd 1, ll. 857-60)

It is Tristan's marriage which sets in motion the deaths of both of the lovers. It is Tristan's wife, Iseut as Blanches Mains, who lies to Tristan about the ship that is bringing Iseut to him, which then directly leads to both his death and Iseut's. When Cariado initially brings her this message, it therefore is bad news to Iseut because Tristan has married another woman.

However, the *lai* has a deeper significance. The function of the *lai* in this text is not merely to provide the characters with foreboding and prefigure the death of Tristan. It can also offer valuable insights into the way that writers thought about literary texts and the way that their characters respond to music. It could be argued that the narrator's description of the content of the *lai de Guirun* constitutes a repetition of it. The narrator is presumably emphasising those parts of it which are relevant to his own work and, on an intradiegetic level, are also relevant to the conversation that Cariado and Iseut will subsequently have about it. The narrator's description of it constitutes an interpretation of the *lai*. He focuses on details such as the eaten heart and the suffering of the lady, thereby making it relevant for the audience of his Tristan romance. This may encourage the audience to focus on similar aspects of the Tristan story. A parallel can be drawn here with the way that Iseut manipulates Marc in Béroul's tryst beneath the tree episode to focus on certain aspects of Tristan's past. Therefore, by including this interpretation of the *lai de Guirun*, Thomas' narrator is also influencing the audience's interpretation of and response to his own romance. Pitts, discussing Béroul's *Tristan*, argues that the

different repetitions of narrations made by the characters or the narrator himself amount to 'incremental reconstruction of a whole as Tristan's heroic past is gradually revived'.[294] It will be seen that in Béroul's text events which are narrated repeatedly tend to focus on the aspects of those events which are relevant to the audience of the renarration. Béroul's work shows that it was a recognised technique to narrate things that were relevant to a particular situation and, as will be seen, those different narrations can still be accepted as valid.[295]

Cariado is Iseut's intradiegetical audience for the *lai*; he enters as she is singing. The way that he responds to her song can therefore provide useful insights into the way that songs such as this were received, or on how the writers of the texts thought that songs could be received. The subsequent discussion between Iseut and Cariado only deals implicitly with the content of the *lai*. Cariado equates Iseut with the bird of ill-omen:

> Il ert molt bels e bons parleres,
> Doneür e gabeeres:
> Trove Ysolt chantant un lai,
> Dit en riant: 'Dame, bien sai
> Que l'en ot fresaie chanter
> Contre de mort home parler,
> Car sun chant signefie mort;
> E vostre chant, cum jo record,
> Mort de fresaie signifie:
> Alcon ad or perdu la vie. (Thomas, Sneyd 1, ll. 816-25)

This seems prescient on Cariado's part. Cariado's skill with speech is also noted here, possibly suggesting that his interpretation of the *lai* is intended to manipulate Iseut. He is the one who introduces the idea of the owl and by comparing Iseut to it he hints at her own death. The content of the *lai* is only discussed between them in the

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[294] Pitts, 'In Praise of Tristan', p. 4.
[295] Renarrations in Béroul's work will be discussed in detail below.

description of her song as an ill-omen. The subject matter of it is an adulterous relationship which ends in tragedy and, as Cariado knows that Iseut had been committing adultery with Tristan, this could be why he sees her as the owl. It is significant that they do not discuss the content of the *lai*. Rather, it is the emotions caused by Iseut's performance that have an effect on their subsequent conversation. It has been seen that narrators invite discussion from their audience, and that that discussion comes from the texts themselves. This is particularly the case with Thomas, who has explicitly invited his audience to engage emotionally with the characters and to discuss their suffering. Here, a brief discussion is caused by Iseut's song. Obviously, had Iseut not been singing when Cariado entered the room, he would presumably still have told her about Tristan's marriage, but it is possible that Thomas included the *lai* in order to feature a song used as a basis for discussion between two characters and, possibly more significantly, in order to depict the emotional effect of Iseut's voice. The response of Iseut and Cariado to the *lai* gives an insight into different responses to literature. For Iseut, it is consolation, she sings it in order to help deal with her emotions. For Cariado, it is an omen of death. Both of these responses are seen as valid; Iseut presumably receives some consolation from it and Cariado is correct that there will be a death. It is also important to note that no authority is offered for the *lai*. Iseut gives no indication as to where she found it, she does not say that she read or heard it anywhere. This could be because it is a text intended to provide consolation (or possible entertainment) rather than to be informative and narrate events which actually occurred. Moreover, it indicates that the *lai de Guirun* does not need external authority to support it.

Green argues that, for Gottfried, history was a starting point for fiction:

> By introducing what in his day could be recognised as fabulous features Gottfried reveals that his historical stance is not an end in itself, that he uses history without historiographic intentions. For him the past is a point of departure for the narration of a love-story, not for the reconstruction of history.[296]

However, it remains to be seen whether this is also true for the other writers of the Tristan story. This section will examine those instances in which characters tell stories based on the past, in order to discover how the idea of history as a starting point for fiction may or may not be reflected by the characters within the Tristan texts. Some scholarship has been produced on Tristan as a narrator, particularly for Gottfried's work, but focuses on those instances where Tristan invents narrations about himself in order to determine how he tells invented stories, such as his false claims about his identity when he meets the pilgrims on his arrival in Cornwall.[297] This section will focus on those episodes where Tristan and other characters tell stories about their own past, with the aim of discovering how their pasts inform their narrations and how those narrations change depending on the context and the audience for which they are intended. Different versions of the same events can all be valid. The truth and falsehood of these narrations will be examined, but particular emphasis will be given to the authority, or lack of authority, for these narrations, and audience interpretation.

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[296] Green, p. 186.
[297] Chinca, *History, Fiction, Verisimilitude*, pp. 110-22; Kaminski, p. 13.

Béroul

In much the same way as there are different versions of the Tristan story, some of the writers of it also provide different versions of events narrated by the characters within the texts themselves. This is common in Béroul's work, in which there are numerous repetitions of key events.[298] One example of this is the episode of the tryst beneath the tree. Various different versions of the same sequence of events are presented by the narrator and the characters, particularly during the conversations between different pairs of characters after the events of the tryst take place. These renarrations are intended to convince Marc of the lovers' innocence. Firstly, the way that the lovers talk to each other for Marc's benefit while he is hiding in the tree, convinces him of their innocence.[299] They offer an innocent explanation for their relationship, which has presumably previously been presented as guilty by the evil barons. There is only one thing to note with regard to this scene that tentatively relates to authority. When in conversation with Tristan, Marc currently spying on them, Iseut refers to the Bible when talking about their relationship:

> Sire, molt dist voir Salemon:
> Qui de forches traient larron,
> Ja pus nes amera nul jor. (Béroul, ll. 41-43)

This differs from the way that the narrators themselves use authorities; Iseut does not use Solomon to confirm the content of her claims (i.e. that she is not adulterous), but the fact that she refers to him suggests that she is attempting to convey an aura of authority to the tale she is weaving.

Secondly, the renarrations that occur after this episode serve to fix the idea of

[298] See Pitts, 'In Praise of Tristan'.
[299] Discussed at length in Chapter Two (pp. 105-110).

their innocence in Marc's mind when he hears how they narrate something that they know he has seen, although he is unaware that they know that he has seen it. The first renarration of this episode is made by Iseut when telling Brangien of what happened at the fountain (ll. 339-69). In this instance, Iseut is an eyewitness who wants to tell Brangien the truth about what happened.[300] Brangien immediately realises that Iseut has heard something to upset her due to her pallor (l. 340). Iseut then summarises her conversation with Tristan, including the position of Marc in the tree (ll. 349-69). She informs Brangien that she blamed Tristan for summoning her, that Tristan said he wanted her to reconcile with the king and that she refused to do so.

It is significant that in this conversation Iseut claims that she does not want to lie to Brangien:

> Brengain, ne vos vel pas mentir:
> Ne sai qui hui nos vout traïr,
> Mais li rois Marc estoit en l'arbre (Beroul, ll. 347-49)

This is similar to the way that the narrators of the Tristan texts also say that they are telling the true version of the tale and, from Iseut's perspective, she does tell the truth about the episode of the tryst beneath the tree. Secondly, the main focus of her narration of this episode is on Marc's behaviour throughout it. She informs Brangien that she noticed Marc hiding in the tree, having seen his shadow (ll. 349-51). She then summarises the conversation that she had with Tristan and ends her speech to Brangien by assuring her that Marc would not have been able to notice what was really going on (ll. 367-69). Regarding the *lai de Guirun* in Thomas' work, it was suggested that the narrator of Thomas' text emphasised the aspects of the *lai* that

[300] Something similar occurs on ll. 381-84 where Tristan relates the events to his 'mestre', Governal who thanks God that Tristan did not say any more than he actually did say. As Tristan's narration is not reproduced by the narrator, this will not be discussed in detail.

were relevant for the audience. Here, this can be seen in a much clearer fashion. Iseut knows that Brangien will be most interested in the fact that Marc was present at Tristan and Iseut's meeting and that their secret is still safe. As a result, her narration emphasises Marc's presence and interpretation of events, rather than detailing the linguistic complexity of her conversation with Tristan. Thirdly, Iseut acknowledges that she has told a condensed version of the events at the tryst beneath the tree: 'Ne sai que je plus racontasse' (l. 365). Although her narration to Brangien is true, it is not the full version of events.

The most important renarration of this episode is that which occurs during the conversation between Marc and Iseut after the tryst, in which Iseut reinforces Marc's impression of the innocence of the lovers. In contrast with her description of the episode to Brangien, Iseut's explanation of her meeting with Tristan to Marc has a different emphasis. Firstly, she is intent on emphasising the truth of her speech. Marc begins by asking her to tell him the 'verté (l. 394) and she then spends a large portion of her explanation to Marc merely stating that she is telling the truth (ll. 395-99, ll. 400-02, 412-14, l. 439, l. 447). In addition, she emphasises that others have been telling lies about her (ll. 428-29, ll. 419-21, l. 413). Once again, this is similar to the way that narrators assert the truth of their own versions while claiming that other versions are false. Iseut presents her speech and that of other characters as being either truth or falsehood, when the situation is actually more complex. As has been seen, interpretation is key for these episodes. Secondly, the content of Iseut's narration, after the emphasis on telling the truth, focuses mostly on Tristan's desire for a reconciliation with Marc and for money to help him pay for his accommodation. She discusses practical problems and focuses on Tristan's

relationship with Marc, rather than on Tristan's relationship with her. Thirdly, she offers a plausible reason to Marc for her affection for Tristan:

> Sire, jos tien por mon seignor,
> Et il est vostre niés, ç'oi dire.
> Por vos l'ai je tant amé, sire.
> Mais li felon, li losengier,
> Quil vuelent de cort esloignier,
> Te font acroire la mençonge. (Béroul, ll. 424-29)

Iseut therefore presents an interpretation of events which will continue to convince Marc of their innocence. By comparing this renarration with that which she offers to Brangien, it can be seen how she amends her narrations to fit the audience to which she is speaking. This suggests that for the narrator of Béroul's text, narrations of past events do not consist of a simple opposition between truth and lies. However, eyewitness authority is destabilised here; even though Marc was present during the events of the tryst, Iseut is still able to manipulate his interpretation of the scene.

In this episode, Marc is both audience and narrator. He is the audience of Iseut's version of the tryst beneath the tree episode and he then gives his own account of it. The narrator states that Marc knew Iseut was telling the truth as he was an eyewitness: 'Li rois sout bien qu'el ot voir dit, / Les paroles totes oït' (Béroul, ll. 459-60). Marc is also a narrator as he gives Iseut his own explanation of what he saw during the tryst beneath the tree, first explaining how he came to be there:

> Or dit li rois a la roïne
> Conme le felon nain Frocine
> Out anoncié le parlement
> Et com el pin plus hautement
> Le fist monter por eus voier
> A lor asenblement, le soir. (Béroul, ll. 469-74)

Marc then gives his interpretation of the conversation he heard between Iseut and Tristan, which focuses completely on an emotional reaction to their conversation,

including the reference to elements of their shared past and to their discussion about where Tristan will find money. It is not an intellectual deduction, but his emotions have been manipulated. Iseut also emphasises that, had they been lovers he would have noticed it: 'Se il m'amast de fole amor, / Asez en veïsiez senblant' (ll. 496-97). This also emphasises the importance attached to eyewitness testimony and again calls it into question. Béroul here calls into question the reliability of eyewitness testimony. The difficulty that Marc has with interpretation in general has been argued by several critics. However, this was challenged above, particularly relating to Marc's interpretation of signs in the Morois episode, in which it was argued that Marc's attempt to interpret these signs mirrors that of the audience.[301] While this example differs in content, it could also provide a reflection for the narrator of the importance of authority when interpreting truth and falsehood and how that authority can be called into question. In this instance Marc's belief in Iseut's version of events is due to the fact that he is unaware that they knew he was present, and therefore he was unaware that he was watching a performance, rather than an example of honest conversation between Tristan and Iseut. Green's emphasis on the author and the audience both knowing that a narrator is indulging in make-believe is relevant here.[302] For Marc, this scene can only be defined as either truth or lies. However, for the extradiegetical audience, it could also be fictional. As will be seen below, this contrasts with the presentation of Tristan's narrations in the two *Folies Tristan*, as it is possible for both Marc and the extradiegetical audience to define those narrations as fiction. Moreover, it becomes apparent that the relationships between narrator and audience (intradiegetically) with regard to this episode are circular. Marc believes

[301] See Chapter One, pp. 63-68.
[302] Green, p. 4.

that he has seen a genuine conversation between his nephew and his wife and therefore believes himself to be a reliable eyewitness to factual events, whereas in fact he was a duped observer of a deceptive conversation. As Iseut states, Marc would not have believed their speech if he had not observed them: 'Sire, s'or ne nos veïsiez, / Certes ne nos en creïssiez' (ll. 503-04). He believes Iseut's subsequent assertions to him of her innocence purely because he is unaware that he was observing a deception rather than truth. This can also be compared with the *Folies Tristan*, in which, as will be argued below, Marc does not require authority for the fool's narrations, as he was not required to interpret them as either truth or falsehood. Although others have argued that this episode indicates Marc's gullibility, it is also important to note that rather than merely being a reflection on Marc's character, this episode indicates the way that Béroul's narrator was questioning authorities, subtly suggesting that it is actually not possible to acquire a completely reliable authority for a given narration.

There are other episodes of the Tristan story which are retold in Béroul's work by the characters but which, due to the fragmentary transmission of the work, do not actually feature in the text itself. Tristan's battle with the Morholt is an example of this. It is obviously not possible to examine the retellings of this episode made by the characters in comparison with the way that it was originally depicted by the narrator, unlike the renarrations of the tryst beneath the tree episode. In a sense, the original version of it, or rather the first depiction of those events, has been lost and it is therefore interesting to see how the characters retell this story, in order to determine how they narrate events from their past for specific purposes.[303] This

[303] The renarration of the battle with the Morholt as a sign of Tristan's character in order to convince

raises questions relating to authority; if there are different versions of specific events from different characters who were eyewitnesses to the events narrated, that could destabilise further the reliability of an eyewitness or, rather, raise the issue of whether or not different versions of the same event can all be true in some way. This enables an examination of the importance of different types of narrations with different purposes and audiences.

Pitts analyses the role of the repetitions of Tristan's battle with the Morholt. He argues correctly that 'As successive characters relate Tristan's victory over the Morholt, their accounts seize upon a different detail, thus contributing to the composite picture that forms gradually in the listener's mind'.[304] He focuses largely on the use of memory in the composition of Béroul's work and the importance of this when reconstructing the past:

> the complements of memory, rememoration and reminiscence foster reconstruction of the mythical past. A single turn of phrase in Béroul's poem can function like a memory hook, drawing up earlier passages of the romance. As characters remember, the listener's memory too is summoned to shed light on events in the narrative present.[305]

The notion that they are reconstructing a mythical past is significant, but Pitts fails to consider the idea that the renarrations of Tristan's battle with the Morholt could have a different emphasis because of the purpose of those narrations, rather than just because the narrator intends the audience to form a greater picture of those events from these smaller narrations.

The first instance of a reference to the battle with the Morholt made by another character is as follows:

Marc of his innocence, was discussed in Chapter Two (pp. 131-135).

[304] Pitts, 'In Praise of Tristan', p. 3.

[305] Pitts, 'In Praise of Tristan', p. 5.

Se li felon de cest'enor
Por qui jadis vos conbatistes
O le Morhout, quant l'oceïstes,
Li font acroire, ce me senble,
Que nos amors jostent ensenble,
Sire, vos n'en avez talent... (Béroul, ll. 26-31)

As discussed in Chapter Two, Iseut mentions this here in order to support the idea that Tristan is not an enemy of Marc's and therefore to imply that Tristan and Iseut are not adulterous.[306] It is also important to note the fact that here Iseut becomes the narrator of events from her own past. This first reference to the battle informs the audience that Tristan fought and killed the Morholt for Marc, but on behalf of the barons. She talks about what did not happen (the barons did not fight the Morholt) as well as what did (Tristan did fight the Morholt). The focus here is not on Tristan's wound or the outcome of the battle, but purely the part of it which is relevant for this particular occasion, in order to both provide a character reference for Tristan and to discredit the barons, as they are depicted as cowards. Marc was a witness to these events and therefore knows what happened.

The second reference to this battle also occurs during the episode of the tryst beneath the tree:

Molt vus estut mal endurer
De la plaie que vos preïstes
En la batalle que feïstes
O mon oncle. Je vos gari.
Se vos m'en erïez ami,
N'ert pas mervelle, par ma foi! (Béroul, ll. 50-55)

Here it is stated that Tristan suffered from a wound which Iseut then cured. This helps Iseut depict her relationship with Tristan in an innocent light, as Tristan would feel grateful for someone who saved his life. As was noted above, Marc's behaviour

[306] Discussed in Chapter Two (pp. 131-35).

is condemned by a reference to Solomon, whereas Tristan's innocence is suggested by references to his own past. Marc, presumably, already knows of these events. This narration will therefore agree with his own memory of events and the fact that this convinces him of Tristan's innocence indicates the importance of authority when assessing the truth or falsehood of a particular version of events. Marc is aware that these events occurred, but does not realise that the reference to these events here is being used to manipulate him. As will be seen in the *Folies Tristan*, Marc does not require authority for any of the narrations told to him by the fool, despite the fact that some of them he will know to be true from his own past, and should therefore alert him to the fact that all is not what it seems. This is not the case, purely because the authority or reliability of the fool as a narrator is lacking. In contrast, Béroul's Marc believes that he is listening to reliable narrators as both Tristan and Iseut are eyewitnesses and Marc himself was also a witness to some of these events, therefore the testimony of those events must be reliable. In addition, Iseut's statement about their relationship is significant: 'Se vos m'en erïez ami, / N'ert pas mervelle, par ma foi!' (ll. 54-55), as discussed in Chapter Two.[307] The ambiguity surrounding the word 'ami' enables her to tell the truth about her past, while also deceiving Marc.

Tristan himself gives a longer narration of the events surrounding the battle with the Morholt later in the tryst beneath the tree episode. The audience has so far heard about the death of Morholt, Tristan's wound and subsequent healing by Iseut, but here Tristan emphasises the politics which preceded the battle in order to discredit the barons (ll. 132-44). This is by far the longest reference to the battle in this episode, focusing entirely on how the barons refused to fight for Marc. As

[307] See p. 133.

mentioned above, the purpose of these retellings of the battle is purely to convince Marc of Tristan's good qualities and loyalty, as well as convince him of the disloyalty and cowardice of the barons. Tristan therefore only focuses on those parts of the story which are relevant to his purposes in narrating the past, showing how even apparently reliable renarrations of past events omit certain details or emphasise others.

It is not merely the participants in the events who tell of Tristan's battle with the Morholt, it is also the general public. Like Iseut, they use this episode as a proof of Tristan's innocence after Tristan and Iseut have been caught together by Marc:

> Qant le Morhout prist ja ci port,
> Qui ça venoit por nos enfanz,
> Nos barons fist si tost taisanz
> Que onques n'ot un si hardi
> Qui s'en osast armer vers lui.
> Vos enpreïstes la batalle
> Por nos trestoz de Cornualle
> Et oceïstes le Morhout.
> Il vos navra d'un javelot,
> Sire, dont tu deüs morir.
> Ja ne devrion consentir
> Que vostre cors fust ci destruit. (Béroul, ll. 848-59)

This gives an insight into how these events from the past were remembered by the general public. They see this battle very much as having been carried out on their behalf, it was done 'por nos enfanz', (l. 849) and they have remembered that the barons had remained silent (l. 850), which agrees with Tristan's narration of this episode earlier in the text. They also emphasise that the battle was undertaken 'Por nos trestoz de Cornoualle' (l. 854). The narrations of Tristan, Iseut and the Cornish people regarding the battle with the Morholt are not contradictory, rather they generally agree with each other, but each narrator has chosen to emphasise a slightly different angle, whether it be the wound that Tristan suffered (Iseut), the fact that

Tristan fought the Morholt rather than the barons (Tristan and the Cornish people), that he was specifically helping Marc (Tristan) or that he was saving the children (the Cornish people). These interpretations of events are not contradictory, but nevertheless they involve subtle differences in the narration of these events, different emphases rather than differences in facts. Béroul is moving towards the idea that there can be different narrations, different versions given of one event which can all have some accuracy in them. Various characters intend to deceive and they use the narration of a past event to aid that deception. Truth-claims therefore cannot always be relied upon.

The other important renarration of past events to be examined is Ogrin's letter to Marc, in which he becomes in a sense a writer of the Tristan story itself (ll. 2333-2427). As Pitts argues, Ogrin 'assumes the specialized role of writer', arguing that he mirrors the poet's 'outburst on *mémoire*: just as the poet strongly denies the accounts of Tristan's treachery that he has heard, Ogrin now writes to silence slanderous tongues. For Béroul and for Ogrin, writing repairs the lies of *li conteor*'.[308] However, he then remarks that Ogrin leaves certain things out of his letter:

> Ogrin's letter in praise of Tristan is, rather, a sympathetic patchwork of the hero's past, a register of tales where memory performs its editorial ministry. In the act of writing the letter – in the process of remembering – Ogrin replicates the poet's rememorative role.[309]

Pitts' emphasis is on the importance of memory in the composition of the work, arguing that Béroul is attempting to describe his memory and his text as 'the only secure links in the chain of remembrance'. However, this does not adequately answer the question as to why Ogrin's written account of events deliberately excludes certain

[308] Pitts, 'In Praise of Tristan', p. 6.
[309] Ibid., p. 8.

parts of the story, such as the scene of the flour on the floor and Marc's discovery of the lovers at the Morois.[310] The obvious solution to this is that Ogrin's purpose in writing is to provoke a reconciliation between the king and the lovers and, therefore, reminding him of instances where he has almost caught them *in flagrante delicto* would not aid him in that aim. Machta discusses Ogrin's letter, analysing the relationship between truth and lies in it and defining what is meant by 'bel mentir', but she does not assess the letter as another version of the Tristan story within the text itself.[311] Pitts is correct in asserting that Béroul stands between 'the truth of the estoire and the lies of li conteor on the one hand, and his recollection of that uneven testimony and his poem on the other'.[312] Béroul presents his work as being based on the *estoire* and yet it is also clear that he has referred to oral testimony as well, or so he claims. This section of the story features a character who is a writer of the Tristan legend itself, but in a context in which his words would be accepted as factual and historical rather than fictional. Ogrin does not lie to Marc in the letter, but he is selective about the information that he includes. This is not necessarily about deception (the episodes omitted by Ogrin were ones at which Marc was present) but shows the way that historical, factual material is used selectively by Ogrin to persuade Marc to act in a certain way. The narration is tailored to the audience. This of course has been seen in the renarrations of the tryst beneath the tree episode above, but this is more significant as it is in reference to a written text which is accompanied by a seal and therefore has Ogrin's authority behind it.[313] Ogrin has written something authoritative, which he intends to be believed and he has neither

[310] Ibid., p. 8. Pitts suggested these as examples of episodes omitted by Ogrin.
[311] Machta, pp. 84-88.
[312] Pitts, 'In Praise of Tristan', p. 8.
[313] See Chapter One, pp. 46-47.

lied in it nor indulged in make-believe, and thus differs from Tristan as narrator of the story in the *Folies Tristan*, and yet his work does not tell the whole truth. This is a feature of Béroul's work, in which the characters tell different versions of the same event, some of which are true, some of which are deceptive, and the emphasis of certain aspects of those events are highlighted or downplayed depending on the audience to whom those narrations are addressed. This raises questions about Béroul's attitude to his own material, particularly given his stated reliance on the *estoire* and yet his references to other sources as well. He also calls into question the reliability of written material, as even something that is written with the intent of being a reliable account of events can deliberately fail to transmit the entirety of the truth.

Thomas

Thomas' *Tristan* features fewer examples of characters narrating events from their past than Béroul's, possibly because only the latter portions of Thomas' text have survived. However, there are several examples in which the characters narrate events from the past. In these episodes, Brangien, Iseut and Tristan become narrators of the Tristan story. One such example is an argument between Brangien and Iseut, in which Brangien reveals how she felt about having to act as a substitute for Iseut on her wedding night and Iseut's subsequent attempt to murder her (Thomas, Douce, ll. 3-26). This outburst was provoked by Iseut's wish to marry Brangien to a man whom she does not believe is worthy of her. In this passage, events from an earlier part of the romance are depicted from Brangien's viewpoint, focusing mostly on her feelings

about them. Her attitude here is not that of the faithful servant one might expect, rather she curses the hour that she met the lovers (Douce, ll. 4-5). She left her country for Iseut and lost her virginity ('pucelage' l. 8) because of Iseut's 'fol courage' (l. 7). She states that she did it for Iseut's love (l. 9), that they promised her great honour but then did not deliver on that promise. She curses Tristan and states that her first humiliation came from him 'Par li fu ge primer hunie' (l. 14). Rather than actually narrating the details of the episode in which Iseut attempted to have Brangien murdered, which are known from other versions of the story (and the way it is referred to here suggests that it had also been narrated more fully elsewhere in Thomas' work), Brangien refers to it more briefly, highlighting the fact that it was not Iseut's mercy that spared her. She also indicates that she would have been justified in seeking Iseut's death after this attempt on her own life. Unlike Iseut in Béroul's work during the tryst beneath the tree episode, Brangien neither insists on the truth of her narration nor provides proof for it, presumably because she is speaking to another participant of the events narrated. Her narration is more motivated by emotion, and instead shows a different perspective on events that had occurred earlier in the story.

One result of this argument between Brangien and Iseut is that Iseut begins to resent Tristan's influence on her life (Douce, ll. 83-132). Iseut now blames Tristan in his absence because he brought her to a foreign country. There are problems between her and Marc, and now Brangien is also angry with her. At this point she blames and curses Tristan for her situation. He brought her to this country where she has only known suffering (Douce, l. 89-90). Her focus here is entirely on the suffering she has undergone and the hostility from the barons rather than on the love she bears Tristan.

She extolls Brangien's support for her:

> Ben la'i suffert,
> E suffrir uncore le peüse,
> Se l'amur de Brengvein eüse . (Thomas, Douce, ll. 94-96)

She blames Tristan entirely for having taken her away from her parents and also for having taken Brangien from her (ll. 99-118). This is also a different viewpoint on the events of the narrative than the audience has so far seen, although Iseut's point of view is still at the forefront of the text as a whole. Rather than contributing a new interpretation of events that have occurred regarding their truth or falsehood, this conversation between the two women gives another emotional dimension, addressing the fact that they could have been angry by the treatment they have received. It is therefore apparent that Brangien has a different emphasis and different interpretation of events from their past, and that this narration is still true.

The third retelling of the Tristan story in Thomas' work comes from Tristan himself. When he is dying, he sends Kaherdin with a message to Iseut to tell her of his illness and bring her back to cure him. The full content of this message (ll. 1184-1301) includes Tristan's emphasis on the use of a ring that Kaherdin should take with him to prove to Iseut that the message is genuine, which has been discussed in Chapter One.[314] This section in contrast will focus on the reminders of his past that he sends to Iseut via Kaherdin (ll. 1216-56). He emphasises initially how much he needs her to cure him (ll. 1197-1215), and then tells Kaherdin to remind her of their past. Within the text, there are two audiences to this narration: Kaherdin and Iseut, who will be told this by Kaherdin later in the work (ll. 1437-88). Tristan begins this part of his message, where he starts to remind her of things that occurred in their past

[314] See pp. 52-54.

with the phrase ‘Dites li qu’or li suvenge’ (Douce, l. 1216), exhorting Kaherdin to tell her to remember certain things. These include the joys and sufferings they have shared in their love, the love potion, the suffering he has undergone due to having been exiled and the oath they made in the garden, affirming that he has never loved another woman, including his wife. He gives his own interpretation of the drinking of the love potion:

> Quant ele jadis guari ma plaie,
> Del beivre qu’ensemble beümes
> En la mer quant suppris en fumes.
> El beivre fud la nostre mort,
> Nus n’en avrum ja mais confort;
> A tel ure duné nus fu
> A nostre mort l’avum beü. (Thomas, Douce, ll. 1222-28)

It is clear that Tristan views the fact that she cured his wound as a key part of their story, although this may be because he is suffering under a similar wound, which is therefore at the forefront of his mind. He may also want to focus Iseut’s attention on this, in order to prepare her for his request to help in the same way again. The drink is closely linked to death in Tristan’s mind as well, possibly for a similar reason. Interestingly he brings up similar complaints to those mentioned by Iseut when she was angry with Tristan earlier in the work. For example he laments the fact that he has lost relatives, such as his uncle (l. 1229-36). In contrast to Iseut, however, Tristan is insistent that throughout all of this suffering, their love cannot be shaken (ll.1237-44). This is not what Iseut said earlier in the text. They have responded emotionally to the same events in different ways. He then connects the ring to a story about the exchange of it in the garden, thereby indicating that the ring is an artefact from a story and therefore provides authority for this message. These three instances have provided three different responses to and narrations of the Tristan material from the

characters who participated in the events narrated (Brangien, Iseut, Tristan). This could be connected to the way that Thomas emphasises discussion surrounding the narrative itself. However, there is another episode of Thomas' work which deals more with the way that the past can inform creative expression, the *salle aux images*.

In their article on literary theory, Chinca and Young discuss Hartmann von Aue and analyse the description of Enide's horse as a poem within a poem. They claim that here 'fictionality looms large', arguing that Hartmann sees himself as a subject of the fictive narrative.[315] They assert that 'This tight nexus between fiction and the perfect artefact is the key to the description as a whole'.[316] There are very few examples within the Tristan narratives of situations where physical objects are used to reflect on fiction by telling a tale themselves. Thomas' *salle aux images* is one such example. However, when the *salle aux images* is analysed in the same way as Enide's saddle above it becomes apparent that there are some subtle but crucial differences between the two narrations. While Hartmann views himself as a subject of the fictional narrative, the focus in the episode of the *salle aux images* is more on Tristan who is recreating a scene from his own past.

Of the examples under discussion in this section, Thomas' s*alle aux images* is the only one in which the creator of the narration and the audience are the same person. For Tristan, it is a visual narration which commemorates an event that occurred in his past. Little evidence remains from the fragments of Thomas' works that describe the statues themselves. However, due to the explanation of Tristan's thoughts and actions relating to the statues, it becomes apparent that the room includes statues of both Iseut (Turin, l. 35) and Brangien (Turin, l. 29). It is also

[315] Ibid., p. 626.
[316] Ibid., p. 627.

stated by the narrator that the statue of Iseut is holding an image of a ring: 'Regarde en la main Ysodt, / L'anel d'or doner li volt' (Turin, ll. 35-36). Given the memories which this image inspires in Tristan, it seems that this is the ring which Iseut gave to Tristan at their parting (Cambridge, l. 52).[317] The fragment of Thomas' *Tristan* which deals with the *Salle aux images* explains Tristan's reasons for creating it:

> E les deliz des granz amors
> E lor travaus et lor dolurs
> E lor paignes et lor ahans
> Recorde a l'himage Tristrans. (Thomas, Turin, ll. 1-4)

It has a commemorative function; he wants to remember the joys and sufferings that they have experienced. Moreover, the inspiration for the statues is subject matter from Tristan's own past, although it is not clear whether or not the statues depict a specific event. Given the references to the ring later in the text it seems as if these statues depict the episode when Tristan parted from Iseut, which the extradiegetical audience knows was something that occurred in Tristan's own past. Thomas' audience has witnessed the moment when it is exchanged (Cambridge, l. 52) and, on Tristan's wedding night, it is the same ring that reminds him of the promises he made to Iseut (Sneyd 1, l. 396). These previous references to the ring could be the incidents which are depicted in the *salle aux images* or they could merely suggest to the audience the associations that Tristan has with the ring in general. It is a physical object that reminds him of events in his past and it therefore influences his current behaviour.[318]

However, the *salle aux images* does not merely function as a memory sign. Machta argues that the statues enable Tristan to express his feelings, making the

[317] See Chapter One, pp. 52-56.
[318] As discussed in Chapter One, pp. 52-56.

point that his speech to the statues is like delirium.[319] Adams goes somewhat further, pointing out that Tristan attempts to re-enact his love for Iseut.[320] Her paper focuses on the importance of medieval image theory and she compares Iseut as Blanches Mains with the statue of Iseut in the *salle aux images*. She suggests that a possible reason for the success of his relationship with the statue rather than his relationship with his wife is because 'Iseut's statue suggests a narrative; she is shown stamping on the brass figure of the evil dwarf [...] When Tristan looks at the statue he remembers the details of the story of his life with Iseut, the entire narrative they had created together'.[321] There is no evidence in Thomas' work that Iseut is stamping on a dwarf. However, the argument that the statue is more successful than his wife due to the fact that she suggests a narrative and that it 'allows communication between Tristan and Iseut' is valid.[322] This is not merely due to the commemorative function of the statues. He does of course remember their relationship which presumably gives him consolation, but it is also important to note that he uses these images to fuel his imagination, daydreaming about what Iseut may be doing. Not only has he created the statues themselves as an artistic representation of a moment from his past or, possibly, if the statutes do not depict a particular scene, as an artistic representation of their relationship as a whole, he also uses the statues to then imagine other potential stories about Iseut, which then distress him:

> Molt la baise quant est haitez,
> Corrusce soi, quant est irez,
> Que par penser, que par songes,
> Que par craire en son cuer mençoinges,
> Qu'ele mette lui en obli

[319] Machta, p. 57.
[320] Adams, 'Archetypes and Copies', p. 318.
[321] Ibid., pp. 328-29.
[322] Ibid., p. 329.

Ou qu'ele ait acun autre ami;
Qu'ele ne se pusse consirrer
Que li n'estoce autre amer,
Que mieuz a sa volunté l'ait. (Thomas, Turin, ll. 5-13)

Chinca's argument that Gottfried used archival material in an experimental way can also be applied to the attitude that Tristan, as a character within the French texts, has towards his own past. Green states that Chrétien de Troyes filled a gap left by Wace.[323] Tristan's daydreaming in this episode reflects a similar process, although for different purposes. He speculates about what Iseut may be doing without him. This is something the narrators of the Tristan stories, including Thomas, sometimes encourage their audiences to do; they encourage them to discuss those details that the narrators of the stories know little about. However, the difference between writers such as Chrétien situating stories in a gap in history and Tristan's speculation in this episode is that Tristan, up to a point, believes that his daydreams may be real. It is when Tristan contemplates these statues and interacts with them that he begins to imagine. He initially dwells on his past, particularly on his previous relationship with Iseut, remembering the pain that he felt (Turin, ll. 5-13), but he then begins to speculate about what Iseut may be doing at the same time as he is in Brittany. This speculation centres on Iseut's feelings for Cariado. Initially, he fears that she could return Cariado's feelings for her:

Del biau Cariados se dote
Qu'ele envers lui ne turne s'amor:
Entur li est nuit e jor.
E si la sert e si la losange,
E sovent de lui la blestange.
Dote, quant n'a son voler,
Qu'ele se preigne a son poer,
Por ce qu'ele ne puet avoir lui,
Que son ami face d'autrui. (Thomas, Turin, ll. 16-24)

[323] Green, p. 178.

Presumably, Tristan has previously heard about Cariado's interest in Iseut and it is therefore understandable that this should cause him anxiety. However, the intensity of his feeling and the way that he expresses this towards the images themselves suggests that this is more than just anxiety. His behaviour is almost as if he is actually communicating with her, or pretending to:

> Quant il pense de tel irur,
> Donc mustre a l'image haiur,
> Vient l'autre a esgarder;
> Mais ne volt ne seoir ne parler:
> Hidonc emparole Brigvain,
> E dist donc [...] (Thomas, Turin, ll. 25-30)

His speculation and his fears surrounding Iseut and Cariado lead him to actually talk to Brangien's statue. Earlier in the text, it is also stated that he embraces a statue, presumably of Iseut (Turin, l. 5), in order to express his feelings for her, which is the reason why he made the statues:

> Por içe fist il ceste image
> Que dire li volt son corage,
> Son bon penser et sa fole errur,
> Sa paigne, sa joie d'amor,
> Car ne sot vers cui descoverir
> Ne son voler, ne son desir. (Thomas, Turin, ll. 45-50)

He knows that the statues are not real. He knows that Iseut and Brangien are in Cornwall, but at the *salle aux images* he can pretend that he is with them. Tristan is indulging in make-believe, a concept crucial to Green's definition of fictionality. Yet this refers to Tristan's speculation after having contemplated the statues, rather than referring to the statues themselves. This pretence enables him to escape to a fantasy world in which it is possible for him to communicate with his beloved. This is in turn an interpretation of the statues themselves, and this escape may also be a reflection of the extradiegetical audience's experience when receiving Thomas' work.

The episode of the *salle aux images*, while it focuses on commemoration, also provides an example of Tristan using his past to create a piece of art. He uses experiences from his own personal history to create statues, which in turn leads him to speculate about what Iseut might be doing now. These speculations fill in a gap in his knowledge, so up to a point he is free to let his imagination take over. As his emotional reactions to the idea of Iseut loving Cariado are so extreme, it suggests that he is beginning to believe his own imaginings. Tristan uses his past to create something that is not entirely historical, but is based on his past. There is no intent to deceive, but his interpretation of events leads him to believe something about Iseut which is not true.

Gottfried

Much work has been produced on Gottfried's poetics and the notion of Tristan as storyteller, particularly relating to the stories he invents about his identity on his initial arrival in Cornwall.[324] Similarly, much attention has been paid to his attitude to his material.[325] Other critical work focuses on storytelling in the text in a different way. Wright argues that Petitcreiu could be seen as a text and the *minnegrotte* has of course attracted a great deal of critical attention. [326] This section will focus on some of those instances in the text where the characters tell each other stories about the past, whether personal or political, which can illuminate understanding as to how Gottfried's characters tell stories from history, referring to their own archival

[324] For example, see Chinca, *History, Fiction, Verisimilitude*, pp. 110-20, and Kaminski, pp. 8-10.
[325] For a discussion of Gottfried's relationship to his sources, see pp. 175-84.
[326] Aaron E. Wright, 'Petitcreiu. A Text-Critical Note to the "Tristan" of Gottfried von Strassburg", *Colloquia germanica*, 25:2 (1992), pp. 112-121 (p. 116). There is a vast amount of scholarship on the *minnegrotte*, some of which includes Battles, Cole, and Wandhoff.

material. Due to the emphasis in this study on how characters use their past as a basis for narrations, this will exclude discussion of Tristan's invented narrations, as discussed by Chinca and Kaminski.[327]

Early in the romance there is an example of Gottfried using an apparently archival source to enrich his narrative (ll. 420-453). This is an explanation of Marke's kingdom and its recent history. The narrator begins this section by saying that Riwalin has heard a lot about Marke's reputation and then uses that to lead into his own exposition about the recent history of Marke's kingdom. This is therefore a clear indication of the way that Gottfried is apparently using archival material within his own work, as a part of the story itself, grounding the information that Riwalin hears into something archival. This section begins with an explanation of what Riwalin has heard about Marke:

> er haete vil gehoeret sagen,
> wie höfsch ind wie êrbaere
> der junge künic waere (Gottfried, ll. 420-22)

The narrator goes on to explain that Riwalin has heard that Marke united the kingdoms of Cornwall and England. There is a large amount of detail which is then narrated about various battles that had occurred in the past. The narrator states how impressive Marke's reputation is and then says that Riwalin wanted to go to Cornwall:

> ouch saget diu istôrje von im daz,
> daz in allen den bîlanden,
> diu sînen namen erkanden,
> kein künec sô werder was als er.
> dâ hin was Riwalînes ger. (Gottfried, ll. 450-54)

There are two possible interpretations of this. On the one hand Riwalin has heard in

[327] Chinca, *History, Fiction, Verisimilitude*, pp. 110-20, and Kaminski, pp. 8-10.

apparently authoritative histories that Marke has a great reputation and therefore he wants to go his court. On the other hand, the narrator has heard in histories all of the previous information that he has given us about Marke and his abilities, therefore he has a great reputation and Riwalin wants to go there. These alleged historical sources seem to be used by the narrator in order to enrich details of the plot. The audience does not merely have Riwalin's or the narrator's word that the description of Marke's court is accurate, but it has been supported by a source. Moreover, it seems that a character within the text was able to refer to a similar source as the narrator, making the text as a whole seem more historical.

Tristan is not the only character in Gottfried's work who becomes a narrator. On arrival at Marke's court Rual reveals the truth about Tristan's parentage (ll. 4121-4232) in such a way that shows that he has great skill as a narrator, particularly in building up tension among his audience. The practice of storytelling Rual is engaged in can be compared with the two *Folies Tristan* as Rual becomes a storyteller, narrating events to the court. However, his narration is intended to be received as true, rather than as entertainment. This is an important distinction, as will be seen below. In common with most narrators of these stories, both intra- and extradiegetical, Rual affirms the truth of his narration. This is particularly significant here, as Rual's claim that Tristan is Marke's nephew would affect political issues such as inheritance. He does this in two ways, firstly by actually stating that this story is true ('vür wâr', l. 4121, referring to the time that has elapsed since he has left home) and secondly by presenting Marke with a ring, which was discussed in Chapter One. The ring is necessary in order to prove the validity of a supposedly historical narrative.

Rual's narration can be divided into two parts: the build-up to his story and the story itself, in which he explains Tristan's parentage. The first section (ll. 4121-70) is remarkable for the skill that Rual displays in gaining the audience's attention, creating more tension surrounding the narrative and engaging with the audience when they ask him questions about the story. The first example of this is as follows:

> und swar ich sider hin geriet,
> dane gevrâgte ich keines maeres nie
> wan des, dâ mite ich umbe gie
> und daz mich her geleitet hât.'
> 'waz was daz?' 'Tristan, der hie stât. [...]' (Gottfried, ll. 4124-28)

It is possible that the interjections from the audience mirror the way that storytelling actually happened at the time, as something similar happens in the *Folies*. Marke plays an instrumental role in making Rual explain Tristan's parentage: 'Saget an, wie ist dem maere so? / er ist iuwer sun doch, alse er giht?' (ll. 4141-42). Marke, as part of Rual's audience, deliberately questions the use of the word 'vremede', as used by Rual. He closely interprets this speech and opens it up for discussion. Marke questions Rual in a similar way throughout this passage and Rual responds by deliberately increasing the narrative tension by being initially evasive with his answers. When asked who Tristan's father is, Rual replies 'hêrre, daz weiz got und ich' (l. 4153) and he continues to evade the question:

> ob ez mich niht geriuwe
> und ob ez mir hie waere
> ze sagene gebaere,
> hêrre, ich möte iu wunder sagen,
> wie sich diz dinc hât her getragen
> und wie ez sich gevüeget hât
> umbe Tristanden, der hie stât. (Gottfried, ll. 4158-64)

By this point, the audience is desperate to know who Tristan really is. Rual has their full attention:

> und al diu massenîe,
> Marke und sîn barûnîe
> die bâten an der stunde
> alle alse ûz einem munde:
> ‘saget an, saeliger man,
> getriuwer man, wer ist Tristan?’ (Gottfried, ll. 4165-70)

They are members of an audience intent on knowing the end of the story.

Rual’s actual narration about Tristan’s parentage (ll. 4171-4232) begins with Riwalin leaving Parmenie due to having heard about Marke’s reputation, then leads into a description of his relationship with Blanscheflur. He reveals that she ran away with Riwalin, describing this as an ‘aventiure’ (l. 4187), but also notes that this is something they already know ‘so wizzet ir wol’ (l. 4186), indicating that Blanscheflur running away was common knowledge. The tale ends with a description of their deaths, after Rual has affirmed that they were married with eyewitnesses (l. 4191-95). The presence of eyewitnesses was important legally as it proves that Tristan could inherit from both Marke and Riwalin, although this is something that is not explicitly discussed by the characters here. Yet it also gives authority to his tale in general, in addition to the ring, as the presence of eyewitnesses proved that their union actually occurred. This is a narration about something that actually happened, which in this case has some political import, and it therefore requires proof. The reaction of the audience to this tale is largely emotional. Rual weeps, as do the rest of his audience including Marke (ll. 4213-26). The narrator describes the reaction of all of the sections of the audience. This shows both how emotive the actual material is and the skill that Rual has as a narrator to elicit such a reaction from his audience.

The way that Tristan and Isolde tell stories to each other in Gottfried’s *minnegrotte* is discussed by Jacobson: ‘their love is not only expressed through

poetry, it becomes poetry. Opposed to this perfection are again *falshheit* or deception (17004), *Lüge* (17013), and *gewalt*: love "loschet in der wilde" (17078)'.[328] The *minnegrotte* is not like Thomas' *salle aux images*. It is not an artistic representation of their relationship, but it will be argued that it represents the experience of receiving fiction. This can be seen in the way that Tristan and Isolde indulge in literary pursuits such as telling love stories to each other, as well as in the representation of the *minnegrotte* itself as an escape from their real lives at court.

Wandhoff notes the vast amount of critical attention on Gottfried's *minnegrotte* and argues that her article:

> move[s] a step further, treating Gottfried's amazing re-creation of the cave not only as a conceptual nucleus but also as a *mise-en-abyme*, that is, an internal representation of his *Tristan*. In its function to enclose and disclose at the same time a precious example of true love, the Cave of Lovers mirrors the Romance of Lovers and vice versa. Reading Gottfried's text as a grotto and the grotto as a text sheds new light on his very conception of love and literature and reveals in particular a dominant metapoetical or even metafictional feature of the romance.[329]

Wandhoff analyses the *minnegrotte* itself in detail, comparing it to statements the narrator makes in the prologue. Her suggestion that '"finding Tristan and Isolde in the grotto" is explicitly rendered as "finding an *âventiure* of Tristan and Isolde" in the wasteland, a story to be read and interpreted...' is convincing. However, it is also important to note that, within the context of the narrative itself, the *minnegrotte* is a real place. For example, Gottfried states that he has been there, despite the fact that he has never entered Cornwall:

> Diz weiz ich wol, wan ich was dâ.
> […]
> ich hân die fossiure erkant
> sît mînen eilif jâren ie

[328] Jacobson, p. 244.
[329] Wandhoff, p. 42.

und enkam ze Curnewâle nie. (Gottfried, l. 17100; ll. 17136-38)

It is therefore important to note that from the point of view of the characters within this Tristan story, the *minnegrotte* is real. It is given a historical background and Tristan has visited it beforehand, having discovered it by chance one day while hunting:

dâ wiste Tristan lange ê wol
in einem wilden berge ein hol,
daz haete er z'einen stunden
von âventiure vunden. (Gottfried, ll. 16683-86)

Moreover, the narrator states that it was built in the time of giants (l. 16692), giving it a basis in the past.[330] The fact that Gottfried's narrator also states that he has visited it indicates that he was an eyewitness to the existence of the *minnegrotte*. Similar to Riwalin's knowledge about Marke's court that came from an external source, this sets up a connection between the narrator and the characters. The *minnegrotte* is a significant episode for researching Gottfried's attitude towards fictional narratives for two reasons. Firstly, for the characters it exists as a real place, but Gottfried's attitude to it makes it clear that he is aware that his story does not take place in the real world and that therefore the *minnegrotte* should be interpreted by both himself and his extradiegetical audience in a figurative way. Secondly, the life that Tristan and Isolde lead at the *minnegrotte* is literary. However, their stay there is not tenable and the *minnegrotte* cannot be a permanent part of their lives. They literally find refuge there and shut out the world. Their pursuits are literary; they sing and play music, they hunt, they do not require any nourishment other than the sight of each other. Although the *minnegrotte* may be physically real, it does not and cannot form a part of their lives at court. It has different rules to the rules at Marke's court, the most

[330] As discussed in relation to Wace. See above, p. 199.

obvious being that the lovers can be together openly. This is a form of pretence and make-believe that persists only for the duration of their time at the *minnegrotte*. The argument that this episode could be seen as a way of exploring the experience of receiving fiction can be strengthened by the reaction of those outside of these idyllic spaces when they enter into them. This is particularly true of Gottfried's huntsman, who is scared when he discovers Tristan and Isolde in the *minnegrotte*. The huntsman is very unsettled, describing the sight of the lovers in bed with the sword between them as, 'wilden dingen', (l. 17451) and, 'schoene âventiure', (l. 17463). He has his own interpretation of what he has seen, for example that he saw 'ein man und ein gottine' (l. 17470). It seems otherworldly to him.

The texts examined above (Gottfried's, Béroul's and Thomas' works) all referred to outside sources for their work, and it has been seen how the narrators claim to base their works on historical discourse. The stories within these texts that are told by the characters also provide an insight into the way that history was used by them as a basis for storytelling. All of the narrations analysed above feature characters within the Tristan texts telling parts of the Tristan story for themselves and becoming narrators of their own pasts. They are grounded in something authoritative, as they were witnesses of their own histories. However, it has been seen that some of these narrations are embellished or modified; certain details are omitted in order to either appeal to a specific audience or to fit the purpose of the person narrating (e.g. to convince Marc of the lovers' innocence). Something similar occurs in the two *Folies Tristan*. Some of the stories told by Tristan in the texts discussed below are also grounded in his own past but their purpose and reception is very different. This indicates that there is no simple explanation of the relationship between history,

fiction and authority in these works, but rather the writers of the texts themselves were using their works to explore those boundaries.

Eilhart and the *Folies Tristan*

The episode of Tristan's Folly provides an excellent example of the way that Tristan becomes a narrator of his own past. This episode is present in Eilhart's work and of course in both of the *Folies Tristan*. It has been seen that elements from historical discourse are present in the narration of the two *Folies Tristan*, although they are apparently much less reliant on outside sources than the other Tristan texts. This indicates that their attitude towards previous material differs to that of the other writers of the Tristan story. Chinca and Young's argument that stories told by characters within texts should be examined as well as Green's argument that the past is a point of departure for narratives can both be applied to these two shorter texts. Whereas in the examples discussed above the characters narrate events from their pasts which are intended to be believed as true, the status of the narrations in the two *Folies* as either truth or falsehood is more complex. Therefore, this section will analyse Tristan as storyteller, particularly regarding his use of his own past as a point of departure in order to create stories which are to be received by some of his audience as entertaining fictions, rather than as factual, accurate accounts of past events. This differs from the narrations of past events in the texts discussed above. Iseut is supposed to interpret Tristan's narrations as a reconstruction of their past together and therefore deduce that the fool who has appeared at court is really Tristan in disguise. The rest of the characters are not supposed to receive his narrations as

being either true or false, but they are supposed to be entertained by them. The fact that there are different audiences to the same narration highlights the importance of interpretation when receiving narrations. Due to the content of the *Folies Tristan*, much scholarship on them focuses on Tristan's narrations.[331]

This episode is most simply narrated in Eilhart's text. Eilhart places much more emphasis on the physical and visual signs in this scene than on the verbal ones. For example, a more plausible reason is given for the fact that no one recognises Tristrant than is given in any other version of this episode, as he has been ill for a long time and therefore no longer looks as he did before: 'er wz och anderß getaʸn / er waß do bevor' (ll. 8879-80). Once Tristrant has reached Marke's court and is in front of Marke and Isalde, he claims that Isalde loves him and emphasises to Marke that he is telling the truth:

> 'ich bin ir lieb oʸn pflicht.'
> 'du spottest!' 'nain ich en tuº.'
> 'du tuºst.' 'eß kumpt licht dar zuº,
> daß ich sÿ schier minn.'
> […]
> 'ja kan ich nit geliegen.'
> 'nu laust du doch lúgen und hie fliegen.'
> 'eß ist war, wz ich hie red.' (Eilhart, ll. 9036-39; 9045-47)

This is much less elaborate than this episode in the two *Folies*. Eilhart's version depicts a simple opposition between truth and lies, although complicated merely by Tristrant's disguise.

Unlike the other versions of this episode, Tristrant's narration of their previous life does not begin until Marke is no longer present. Eilhart does not actually narrate these events; he merely states that they were narrated by Tristrant:

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[331] See for example Bruckner, pp. 12-36, and Ben Ramm, 'Losing the Plot: The Melancholy of Remembrance in the Old French *Folie Tristan* Poems', *The Modern Language Review*, 107 (2012), 108-23.

der tor da mit list
sagt gar hällingen
gar vil der dinge,
die im mit ir wa^{v}ren geschähen. (Eilhart, ll. 9140-43)

The narrator states that Tristrant speaks 'mit list' and 'hällingen', noting the skill of his speech. However, the narrator does not include that narration for the extradiegetical audience. They are told that he speaks skilfully and secretly, but not shown how he does so. Eilhart's narrator gives more attention to other aspects of this episode, for example he mentions the ring. It is necessary as a means of validating the narration and therefore of proving Tristrant's identity.[332] The narration itself is not prioritised here. It is merely one element that is used to prove that he is who he claims to be alongside the ring, which contrasts with the two *Folies*. There are several possible reasons why Eilhart does not include Tristrant's narration of their past life in his text. Firstly, it is not necessary for this text as Eilhart has already provided us with the entirety of the narrative, whereas the two *Folies* are shorter narratives, telling the whole of the Tristan legend in a shorter form. Secondly, Eilhart does not seem as concerned with exploring the nature of storytelling and the creation of fictions as the other writers are. Throughout this episode, the concern is more with truth and falsehood. Eilhart depicts Isalde's intellectual deduction that the madman is Tristrant. She needs two pieces of evidence for this, his narration and his ring, something verbal and something visual. Therefore, the presence of the ring shows that it is important for Eilhart to provide some authority for the statements Tristrant makes, but unlike the writers of the *Folie Oxford* and the *Folie Berne*, he does not use this episode to explore the boundaries between truth and falsehood in such narrations.

[332] See also Chapter One, pp. 49-51.

In contrast with Eilhart's version of this episode, the two *Folies Tristan* provide much more in-depth narrations of Tristan's past. The events of this episode are somewhat similar to Eilhart's work. Tristan cannot return to court in any way other than in a disguise, as Marc must not discover his true identity. The choice of a fool as a disguise is an appropriate one, as fools in the Middle Ages had a specific status. Sylvia Huot states that there was 'a troubled suspicion that madness [...] may be more honest and genuine than sanity; that the mad are gifted with deeper insights'.[333] Tristan openly discusses his adultery with the queen in front of the court, which is somewhat dangerous. He tells Marc something which is true but a dangerous claim and it his disguise which makes this possible, as they do not necessarily have to believe him. Huot also argues that '[t]he madman […] though certainly not a member of the social group, is none the less integral to its formation. It is not uncommon to see this immense and instant delight taken in the appearance of a *fol* manifesting absurd speech or behaviour, and she cites as an example 'the Cornish court's enthusiastic reactions to the supposedly […] mad Tristan in the *Folie Tristan*'.[334] This is indeed seen in the *Folie Oxford.* On seeing a fool, people respond with derision: 'Veez le fol! hu! hu! hu! hu!' (*Folie Oxford*, l. 250).

Therefore, purely because of his physical appearance, Tristan is already a figure of derision, providing entertainment for the people he meets. Apparently, he is therefore not a reliable source; the characters do not expect a reconstruction of history from him. In his disguise, he enters the court and then begins telling stories in order to entertain those at court. So as to convince Iseut of his true identity while

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[333] Sylvia Huot, *Madness in Medieval French Literature: Identities Found and Lost* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 16.
[334] Ibid.

concealing it from the other members of his audience, he tells stories about their past that only he and Iseut (and on occasion Brangien) would know were true, mingled with other narrations which are somewhat implausible and seem to have a fantastical element to them. He presumably intends that the fantastical and absurd narrations will thoroughly convince others of his folly, but that Iseut will recognise his true identity when she hears that he knows intimate details about their lives together. Tristan presumably intends that this narration of his past will function as proof of his identity to Iseut.

In both the *Folies Tristan*, the stories that Tristan tells the court can be divided into those which are based on his past and those which are inventions. The latter are so incredible that it seems unlikely that the audience within the text would accept them as factual. For example, in the *Folie Oxford*, Tristan, in disguise, claims to have been present at the wedding of an abbot to an abbess, a scenario which is highly unlikely to occur:

> Li fols respunt: 'As noces fui
> L'abé de Munt, ki ben cunui.
> Une habesse ad espusee [...]' (*Folie Oxford*, ll. 229-231)

Moreover, Tristan claims, in both texts, that his parents were animals; in the *Folie Berne* he says that his mother was a whale and his father was a walrus (ll. 161-162). Similarly, in the *Folie Oxford* he claims that his mother was a whale and he was nursed by a tiger (ll. 271-284). By telling these absurd stories he is trying to make the stories based on his past, that he narrates later, sound absurd as well. Were those stories to be believed, they would implicate Iseut and claim that she was guilty of adultery. Jacqueline T. Schaefer, in an article about Tristan's narratives as metadiscourse, examines these claims about his parentage:

> Beyond the flights of fancy which these allegations appropriately represent at the diegetic level, a mediaeval listener familiar with Tristan's 'enfances' would have recognized the evocation of the extraordinary circumstances of the hero's birth, and his upbringing by parental substitutes endeavouring to shield the threatened life of the orphan.[335]

Gottfried's version of the Tristan story depicts Tristan being brought up by foster parents after the death of his biological parents.[336] This is part of the Tristan tradition and it would probably have been known by the audiences of the *Folie Berne* and the *Folie Oxford*. In this instance, Tristan describes his parentage in a way which seems to be completely absurd on the surface, but could actually be a means of expressing his own parentage in a more poetic or aesthetic fashion. He expresses it in such a way, however, that the truth about his parentage could not be guessed. He is not merely evoking his birth, but is taking elements from his past (his status as an orphan and upbringing by foster parents) and turning them into a fiction. This is not meant to be informative. There is no indication that any of his listeners interpret this as the fool having had an obscure birth in real life. Rather, it is intended to entertain and create the impression that his narrations are not factual, even though, in this case, they are based on something from his past. They are not a reconstruction of his past, but an embellishment or adaptation of it. It functions as inspiration for his narrative.

Tristan then begins to tell stories of his time with Iseut. He does not do this chronologically, but mentions episodes of their life together (with which the extradiegetical audience would have been familiar from the other Tristan narratives), interwoven with other narrative elements, as discussed above, that do not come from the well-known Tristan legend. For example, in the *Folie Berne* he initially mentions

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[335] Jacqueline T. Schaefer, 'Specularity in the Mediaeval *Folie Tristan* Poems or Madness as Metadiscourse', *Neophilologus*, 77 (1993), 355-68 (p. 358).
[336] This is seen in Gottfried's work, ll. 1704-2042.

his real name immediately after talking about his false parentage. He states that he wants to exchange his sister, Brunehaut, for Iseut and then says that he will build a house in the clouds for Iseut (*Folie Berne* ll. 163-171). The sister, Brunehaut, is non-existent, suggesting that he is intentionally creating something that is not history. This sets the tone for the rest of his narration as being something made-up or literary. He then says 'Encor n'ai pas finé mon conte' (l. 173). Tristan goes on to ask where Brangien, Iseut's maidservant, is:

> Tien, je t'afïance en ta main,
> Del boivre don dona Tritan,
> Dont il sofri puis grant ahan,
> Moi et Ysiaut, que je voi ci,
> En beümes : demandez li! (*Folie Berne*, ll. 175-179)

Tristan and Iseut's adulterous relationship began after they mistakenly drank a love potion intended for Marc and Iseut. This is a clear reference to something from the lovers' shared past. In contrast to the vaguer reference to his foster parents, the love potion is an episode that is firmly established in the Tristan tradition. However, the only characters within the *Folie Berne* who know that Tristan and Iseut drank a love potion are Tristan, Iseut and Brangien and therefore the rest of his audience at court would not have realised that it was a reference to his own past.

He then leads into a longer narration of another well-known episode of their exile in the forest, after having been discovered together by King Marc (*Folie Berne*, ll. 204-222). In the *Folie Oxford* Tristan talks about his past at court in a similar way to the *Folie Berne*, but then has a lengthier discussion with Marc about hunting (*Folie Oxford*, l. 491-528) and his other courtly abilities:

> Ben sai temprer harpe e rote
> E chanter après a la note.
> Riche raïne sai amer,
> Si n'at suz cel amand mun per.

> Od cultel sai doler cospels,
> Jeter les puis par ces rusels.
> Reis, ne sui je bon menestrel?
> Ui vus ai servi de mun pel. (*Folie Oxford*, ll. 521-527)

This passage clearly describes both Tristan's character and certain events in his past, but in such a way that they would be obscure to any character who was unaware of his true identity. Tristan's musical skill is an important part of his characterisation in the tradition, as is the fact of his loving the queen and the fact that he is a lover without compare. The 'cospels' probably refer to the arrangements made between the lovers for meeting prior to the tryst beneath the tree, as examined in Chapter One.[337] It is significant that this passing reference refers to an episode in which the linguistic skill of the characters was on show. As in that episode, where they both had to speak cleverly in order to conceal the truth from Marc, here Tristan's references to his past are meaningless to an audience member who did not know about it and can be explained away by the character of the fool.

As Schaefer states 'the alleged proofs given by the fool of his being Tristan constitute in fact a recapitulation of the Tristan saga by the hero himself'.[338] Within the text itself, Tristan is using his own past to create an aesthetic narrative. Although the purpose of his storytelling is to convince Iseut of his true identity while he is in disguise, he is nonetheless telling stories which he intends to be aesthetically pleasing to the court. There is no indication that his hearers assess the truth or falsehood of his statements (with the exception of Iseut), rather it is intended that they merely enjoy the show. The narratives that he tells from his own past are true, but they are not necessarily judged as such by his audience. The issue of whether or

[337] See pp. 27-42.
[338] Schaefer, p. 356.

not they are truth or lies is not addressed by anyone except Iseut. The lines, 'ne sui je bon menestrel?' (*Folie Oxford* l. 527) and 'Encor n'ai pas finé mon conte' (*Folie Berne* l. 173) are significant, as they show that, in both texts, he is characterising himself as a storyteller, one narrating for entertainment, rather than as a chronicler, someone narrating in order to be informative.

Green's argument that Gottfried von Strassburg was using 'history without historiographic intentions' can also be applied to the character of Tristan in the two *Folies*, although here it applies to a character within the text, rather than to the compiler or narrator of the text itself.[339] The mixture of absurd narratives and stories from his own past, as well as the way in which he presents these stories and deliberately characterises himself as a storyteller show that he is not attempting to reconstruct his own history, at least not for Marc and the other people at court. In his attempt to simultaneously deceive Marc and communicate secretly with Iseut, Tristan creates an aesthetic narrative for the pleasure of those at court, a narrative which is based on his own past, on his own history. Although his material comes from previous events in his life and is, from his point of view, factual, it is not history. Tristan wants the tales he tells to be aesthetically pleasing to the rest of the court so that he can speak honestly to Iseut, but this in turn allows the writer of the texts to explore the boundaries between history and fiction. The narrators of the two *Folies Tristan* are using this device of Tristan telling his own story in order to tell the Tristan legend as a whole but in a shorter format than a full-length romance. If the story that is presented here by Tristan, disguised as a fool, can be seen by his audience within the text as the invention of a fool, it is possible that the whole Tristan

[339] Green, p. 186.

tradition is also the invention of a fool and not something that can be interpreted as being historically true. It is a reflection on the way that writers at the time were negotiating the boundaries between history and fiction and questioning the authority (in the sense of historical truth) of vernacular written romances. It is therefore apparent that Gottfried is not the only writer of the Tristan texts who deals with the issue of treating archival material in an experimental way. Although there is no indication as to the attitude of the writers of the two *Folies Tristan* towards their material, Tristan, as a character created by those writers is experimental with his own archival material.

Green's working definition of fiction for romance composed *c*. 1150-1220 states:

> Fiction is a category of literary text which, although it may also include events that were held to have actually taken place, gives an account of events that could not conceivably have taken place and/or of events that, although possible, did not take place, and which, in doing so, invites the intended audience to be willing to make-believe what would otherwise be regarded as untrue.[340]

He emphasises the importance of the idea that readers will be aware that the text they are receiving is fictional and will be willing to make-believe something that would be regarded as untrue. Tristan has various different types of audience in this text, including Marc, Iseut, others at court, and the extradiegetical audience of both the *Folies Tristan*. In general, Marc and others at court are entertained by Tristan's narrations, both those which the extradiegetical audience knows to have come from Tristan's past, and those which are invention. In the *Folie Oxford*, Marc plays along with the fool's narration. When he arrives at court, the king questions him playfully: 'Markes dit: "Ben vengez, amis! / Dunt estes vus? K'avez si quis?"' (*Folie Oxford*,

[340] Green, p. 4.

ll. 269-270). He enters into conversation with him. After the fool asks him to exchange Iseut for his sister, the king smiles (l. 285) and continues to participate in the fool's narration, asking him what he would do with Iseut if he (Marc) gave her to him (Tristan) (ll. 296-300). Tristan then claims to be Tantris, a pseudonym that Tristan has used in the past, and states that he is the one who killed Iseut's uncle and that his wound was subsequently cured by Iseut. This refers to the episode of Tristan killing the Morholt, references to which were discussed in relation to Béroul's work above. Mark is aware that Tristan was the one who killed Iseut's uncle, yet he still does not seem to realise that the fool could indeed be Tristan. His response is one of enjoyment: 'Li reis s'en rit a chascun mot, / Ke mult ot bon deduit del sot.' (*Folie Oxford*, ll. 533-534). Marc then suggests that the fool is Iseut's lover (l. 385). It is also important to note that this episode is set during a period in which Tristan was banished from court, meaning that Marc has already had suspicions about Tristan and Iseut's relationship, and yet he can still participate in jokes about Iseut's fidelity and be entertained by them. This is, of course, primarily because he does not believe that the fool is Tristan, due to his successful disguise and his ability to act like a fool. However, this is also enabled by Tristan's careful mingling of invented narratives and references to past events. This particular reference to the death of Iseut's uncle should theoretically alert Marc to Tristan's identity, but does not because it is being performed in a context in which he expects to be entertained, as well as being mixed with other tales which are invented by the fool. The Tristan story as a whole is filled with episodes in which Marc attempts to deduce the truth of a particular version of events, mostly regarding whether or not Tristan and Iseut are adulterous. Unlike these other episodes of the Tristan story, Marc is not assessing this narration by the

fool from the point of view of whether it is true or false, history or lies. Rather, he responds to it merely as an aesthetic narrative, and enjoys the show. Moreover, Tristan's disguise means that Marc does not realise that his narrations are an eyewitness account and therefore, from Marc's point of view, there is nothing to give them authority. This adds further weight to the argument that calling authorities into question is an element of the debate surrounding the boundaries between history and fiction in this period. It was seen above that the narration of the *lai de Guirun* in Thomas' work did not require external authorities, and the same is true for Marc's reception of the fool's narrations in both of the *Folies.*

All of the other writers of the Tristan story claim to rely on written sources to authorise their narrative, while destabilising that authority in other ways, such as by rejecting certain episodes which occur in their sources.[341] This particular episode of the Tristan story allows the writers of the *Folies* to do the same, but in a different way. Iseut's reaction to the fool's narrations is somewhat different to Marc's. Throughout the fool's tales, she knows that he is telling the truth in some of them and is visibly disturbed by what she hears (*Folie Berne*, ll. 220-225), sometimes insisting that he is lying (*Folie Oxford*, ll. 319-322). In common with Marc, this is largely because she does not believe that the fool is really Tristan, but is unsettled because she knows that some of the stories are true. Tristan's attempt to convince her of his identity using the stories alone has not been successful. In the latter sections of both texts, the fool is left alone with Iseut, where he continues to attempt to convince her of his identity, referring once again to incidents from their relationship that only he and Iseut would know about (*Folie Berne*, ll. 386-504; *Folie Oxford*, ll. 713-897).

[341] E.g. Gottfried (ll. 8608-15) and Thomas (Douce, ll. 837-88), as discussed above.

However she remains sceptical until she has received other proof of his identity. In the *Folie Berne* Iseut accepts that the fool is Tristan once he is recognised by his dog, who had been in her care, and because she recognises a ring that she had given him in the past (ll. 519-559). In the *Folie Oxford*, Tristan is also recognised by the dog and also gives her the ring, but she does not accept these as proof of his identity (ll. 907-968). She only believes that he is really Tristan when he speaks to her with his own voice, which he had until this point disguised (ll. 969-978). When his voice was disguised, he was seen as a narrator of fiction, or more clearly for Iseut as a creator of deception. It is only when he speaks with his own voice that he has authority.

Iseut's need for extra proof is especially significant when contrasted with Marc's response to Tristan's stories. Tristan wants Marc to reject the narratives he offers as nothing more than a fool's ramblings and it is clear that Marc has no suspicion that the fool is actually Tristan. As has been seen, Tristan merely wants him to be entertained by his stories. However, Tristan explicitly wants Iseut to believe the stories that he tells. In order for her to do this in both of the *Folies*, she needs an authority other than the stories themselves in order to prove Tristan's identity. This proof is either the ring, the dog's recognition of Tristan, or Iseut's recognition of Tristan's voice. This can be compared to the way that the writers of the texts themselves related to the Tristan material. Rather than focusing on the issue of make-believe in this period, as Green suggests, it is important to note the attitude of both the narrators and the audience to authority. A fictional text, one which the narrator and audience are all willing to make-believe is true, although it may not be, does not require any outside authority, because it can, if necessary, be based on the imagination of the narrator. However anything that is to be received as historically

accurate requires external authority; it cannot merely have been imagined by the narrator. Iseut does not require authority for the content of the fool's narrations, as she knows that they are true, but she does need external proof for the identity of the speaker. Proof of the identity of the narrator in this case would also provide authority for the narration, because that identity shows that the narrator is an eyewitness to, and participant in, the events narrated and is therefore reliable. However, this is also called into question by the fact that other writers of the Tristan story suggest that eyewitness accounts are not always reliable.

The *Folie Tristan d'Oxford* and the *Folie Tristan de Berne* address contemporary tensions surrounding the relationship between history and material that a modern audience would define as fiction. The beginnings of vernacular romance allowed writers at the time to use history as a basis for their own narratives and therefore debate issues of fictionality and authenticity within the texts themselves. This is clearly seen in the two *Folies*, featuring Tristan as a character performing stories (make-believe or otherwise) in a context where the audience within the text expects to be entertained rather than informed. From the point of view of some in his audience, Tristan is fictionalising his own history, telling the truth about his past and turning it into an entertaining experience for his audience. As stated above, most other versions of the Tristan story from this period refer to other written narratives, or on occasion eyewitness testimony, to give authority to their works. Even if that eyewitness testimony is an invention, the writers still show a concern with quoting their sources. However, it is striking that this is not the case for the *Folies Tristan.* Although the narrator of the *Folie Oxford* states that he hopes he has remembered something correctly (l. 94), there is no explicit statement that this version is the true

one. The claim for authority in the *Folies Tristan* is implicit, coming instead from the fact that Tristan is a character in this text telling his own story. However, even this is called into question by the fact that his narrations are presented to those at court as being merely the inventions of a fool. Their status as truth or falsehood is only called into question by Iseut, who is asked to believe in the authority of the speaker as an eyewitness to the events he is narrating. It is this which unsettles her; she already knows that some of the stories are true, but is confused because they are being told by somebody who apparently should not know them. She therefore publicly decries them as false (*Folie Oxford*, l. 322). The reception of Tristan's narrative by Marc and Iseut shows that Green's focus on make-believe in his definition of fictionality does not go far enough.[342] On the one hand, Marc is presented as merely enjoying the fool's narrations, rather than judging them as either true or false. On the other hand, Iseut insists on having outside proof of the identity of the fool. Therefore for the writers of the *Folies Tristan*, it is apparent that, for a text which is supposed to be received as fictional, no authority is required, whereas, for a text which is intended to be received and believed as history, external proof of some description is required, particularly in relation to the authority of the speaker. This therefore explains why the only authority referred to by the narrator of the *Folie Oxford* is a vague reference to memory and why there is no reference to authority at all in the *Folie Berne*. On the one hand, this could be because the authority comes entirely from Tristan, who could be seen both as an historical figure and as a character within the text. On the other hand, this text is meant to be interpreted as completely fictional. This is supported by the fact that Marc is not offered any authority for the narrations that Tristan gives at

[342] Green, p. 4.

court, nor does he ask for any. Very little authority is offered to the extradiegetical audience by the narrators of the *Folies*, suggesting that these texts are nothing more (or less) than the inventions of fools.

Conclusion

Episodes in the Tristan story where characters tell stories based on their own pasts enable an examination of the attitudes of their writers towards storytelling. Gottfried's significance for medieval fictionality has been well documented, but the contribution of the other Tristan texts has so far been overlooked. For example, the analysis of storytelling in Béroul indicates that the narrator presents multiple narrations of the same event, some of which are seen as equally valid. The act of narrating the same event from different viewpoints does provide a composite picture from that event, but also suggests that different versions can be in some way true. The authority of the written word is also questioned by the treatment of Ogrin's letter. Thomas also highlights the issue of authority, for example no authority is required for the *lai de Guirun*. Similarly to Béroul, Thomas also offers a different attitude towards the events of the Tristan story when Brangien becomes angry with Iseut. Furthermore, the *Folies Tristan* offer another perspective on narrations and authority, clearly showing that narrations regarded as entertainment do not require authority, as Marc does not demand any, whereas those which are regarded as telling the truth, do require authority, as shown by Iseut's demand for more evidence. An analysis of storytelling within these texts shows that the writers themselves were all engaging with contemporary debates on interpretation and authority in different

ways.

Conclusion

Walter Haug discusses how prologues reflect 'die literarische Konstitution von Sinn und die Probleme seiner Vermittlung', Mark Chinca emphasises the importance of verisimilitude in Gottfried's poetics, and D. H. Green argues that the contract between an author and an audience to make-believe is the key feature of a fictional text.[343] These scholars all provide useful viewpoints on fictionality in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, including broad overviews (Haug, Green) and in-depth analyses of Gottfried's work in particular (Chinca, Haug). However, these critical works have not addressed the more detailed picture of literary practice which emerges through a study of individual texts from a specific period. For example, although Chinca argues correctly that Gottfried deals with archival material in an experimental way, and he briefly discusses Thomas' work, he does not address the possibly more complex way that other writers of the Tristan story dealt with material that could be considered archival, including written works, oral testimony, hearsay and memory.[344]

Plausibility and make-believe are therefore key issues of the discussion between modern scholars relating to twelfth- and early thirteenth-century fictionality and provide useful indications as to the approach of certain writers from this period towards their material and their audiences. However, the above analysis of a broader range of the Tristan texts has argued in favour of a more varied and nuanced picture of the attitudes certain writers had towards their works, particularly relating to questions surrounding truth, lies, interpretation and authority. This has been seen

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[343] Haug, pp.23-24; Chinca, *History, Fiction, Verisimilitude* discusses verisimilitude throughout, especially pp. 92-99; Green, p. 4.
[344] Chinca, *History, Fiction, Verisimilitude*, p. 38.

through an analysis of how characters interpret signs in the texts themselves, particularly relating to the difficulties of accessing truth and different meanings that can be attached to certain signs. The way the writers discuss interpretation and authority regarding such signs is similar to their attitudes to their own work, as seen particularly through an analysis of the narrators' interjections into their own narratives. Furthermore, the analysis of how characters tell stories within the texts is particularly illuminating, as it goes further than previous critics by examining narratives told by the characters which are based on their own past. This enables an investigation into how the characters dealt with narrating archival material from their own pasts, rather than discussing narratives which are either completely separate from their own histories or are invented by Tristan to give him a false identity. Throughout this thesis it has become apparent that authority and interpretation are key concerns for both the writers of the Tristan texts and the characters within them. This conclusion will firstly summarise how conventional authorities are called into question in these texts in different ways, and will then discuss the importance of the authority of the narrator and of audience interpretation. Although Chinca is correct in arguing that Gottfried uses archival material in an experimental way, the other writers of the texts are also experimental with archival material. Previous critics have discussed Gottfried, and to a lesser extent Thomas, with regard to fictionality as part of broader overviews and theories relating to this issue in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. However, they are part of a wider discussion which has so far been neglected by critics. The other writers of the Tristan story provide other facets of this discussion, contributing to a possibly wider discourse on truth, lies, interpretation, authority and ultimately fiction during this period.

As has been seen, most of the narrators of the Tristan story claim that their texts have supposedly authoritative sources, whether these sources are eyewitnesses, written accounts or hearsay. The only exceptions to this are the two *Folies Tristan*. Written sources in particular are seen by the writers of these texts as carrying authority. This is of course evident in Gottfried's work and Thomas also deals with a written source that he views as authoritative, the account of Breri. However, both Thomas and Gottfried reject elements of previous stories on the grounds of verisimilitude, as noted by Chinca.[345] The narrators therefore call into question the authority of their sources by rejecting these episodes for reasons other than their absence from a source. Neither narrator specifies where their amended episodes came from, but it is clear that they are not from their acknowledged authorities. Eilhart refers to a 'buoch' as a written authority in his work and Béroul also refers to an *estoire*, suggesting that it was a written, historical, true account. Although there is no indication that he is dubious about the authority of this text, it is important to note that the authority of written material is questioned elsewhere in Béroul's work with regard to the letter sent from Ogrin to Marc. Ogrin omits certain elements from the lovers' past and therefore does not tell the whole story. However, the letter is written and authoritative, particularly given that it is accompanied by Ogrin's seal. Béroul does not here openly state that the written word is not authoritative, but the fact that Ogrin's letter is intended to manipulate Marc means that the truth of the written word is subtly questioned here.

Moreover, it is clear that one individual written authority is not the only source for these works. Béroul's narrator, for example, claims to use hearsay as a

[345] Chinca, p. 93, p. 96. Verisimilitude in Thomas' work is also discussed throughout Ramm's article, '"Cest cunte est mult divers"'.

source, and Eilhart's narrator also states that he has used oral sources. Both narrators make use of fictive orality, using vocabulary to address their audience that suggests that the audience is actually present with them. This is particularly the case for Eilhart's work. The fact that both writers use other examples of sources to support their material, including hearsay, could suggest that these sources are fictive. However, the fact that they are referred to at all is significant, as whether or not the sources are fictive, it is clear that the narrators wanted the audience to be aware of the authority behind the work. This example shows that, while Gottfried's and Thomas's works were undoubtedly significant for the development of twelfth and thirteenth century literary practice, they only provide part of the discussion surrounding literature and authority, other elements of which can be seen in the works of Béroul and Eilhart.

The texts which claim to have the most reliable authority are the shorter narratives (the *Folie Berne*, the *Folie Oxford* and *Chievrefueil*), in which authority for their stories comes from Tristan himself. These texts clearly indicate the tension that exists in them regarding authority, history and fictionality, in a very different way to Gottfried's and Thomas's works. On the one hand, the authority for the stories comes from the fact that Tristan could have been seen as an historical figure, which suggests that these texts are effectively based on eyewitness accounts. On the other hand, their authority comes from inside the story itself, as Tristan is a character within these texts. This is particularly the case in the *Folies*, where Tristan is presented as a narrator who is telling his own story, but within the framework of another story told by the narrator of the *Folies*. Although this study has largely focused on how characters function as narrators and interpreters, it must not be

forgotten that these characters, including Tristan, are also the creation of a narrator. This complex attitude to authority is a key feature of these texts and an attempt to define them as either fictional or historical would be the wrong approach. Rather, they are deliberately engaging with contemporary debates or concerns about authority and where it is located, as well as the emerging concept of independent literary fiction. If the authority for a text comes from a character within that text, as suggested by all three of the shorter narratives, this could therefore indicate that the writer of that text has authority and control over it. Although Gottfried's and Thomas' narrators assert their authority over their own work by rejecting episodes which they regard to be implausible, the writers of the two *Folies* in particular do this much more forcefully by not referring to outside sources for their work, and thereby leaving themselves as the only authority for the text, or rather suggesting that the location for that authority is a character that has been at least partially created by themselves. It is also important to note here that authority is not required for narrations which characters do not attempt to assess as either truth or falsehood, such as the *lai de Guirun* in Thomas' work and the narrations Tristan gives in the *Folies Tristan*. This suggests that a lack of concern with authority is an important aspect of fiction for these writers. However, this is complicated by the fact that some of the narrators themselves insist on authorities for their own work. It would therefore be more accurate to consider the discussion surrounding authority in these texts as part of a wider debate in society at the time surrounding literary practice, rather than attempting to define medieval attitudes towards fiction.

In short, each of the texts under discussion in this thesis addresses the issues of truth, lies, interpretation and the relationship between history and fiction in

different ways. Chinca's assessment of Gottfried's work is largely correct, particularly the fact that he is intentionally being experimental with archival material, discussing that relatively openly in his own work, such as rejecting certain episodes. Chinca is correct that plausibility is a concern for Gottfried, but it is also important to compare Gottfried's approach with that of the other writers of the legend. Thomas' attitude towards authority is similar to Gottfried's, but that is not the only element of discussions surrounding medieval literary practice to be present in his text. Episodes such as the narration of the *lai de Guirun* and Tristan's emotional response to the *salle aux images* provide interesting perspectives on how an extradiegetical audience may have responded in an emotional way to a poetic creation, and the narrator's other interjections suggest how the text may have been a subject for discussion among the members of the extradiegetical audience. Béroul's attitude towards authority is less evident, but a careful examination of the text suggests that he was also being experimental with material that could be considered archival. This is supported by the attitude towards interpretation throughout his work, particularly taking into account the number of repetitions that occur in the text. The episode of the tryst beneath the tree is, for example, narrated several times by different characters, demonstrating very clearly how the same material (witnessed by several people) can be narrated in different ways and for different purposes. The situation in the shorter narratives is perhaps more striking. *Chievrefueil* not only locates the authority for the episode on one of the characters within the text itself, but also depicts an elaborate interpretation in the text itself, in which a twig with a simple carving can become an entire lay. The interpretation is both an act of reading and an act of poetic creation. However, it is in the two *Folies* in which ideas about the

boundary between history and fiction are perhaps most clearly discussed. Both texts feature Tristan as an intradiegetic narrator telling stories about his own past, some of which are known to be true by some members of his audience, others of which are nonsensical. The key difference between the two *Folies* is Iseut's reaction to the ring at the end of the text. Her acceptance of the ring and the dog as proof of Tristan's identity is similar to the use of rings in the other texts. It gives authority to the messenger and in this case the messenger claims to be Tristan himself, therefore it also functions as proof of his identity. However, in the *Folie Oxford*, Iseut will only accept Tristan's voice as proof of his identity, and therefore as proof of the truth of his stories. The voice of the narrator, or the voice of the author, authenticates the narrative, rather than an external sign.

Although the authority of the narrator is suggested in these texts, audience interpretation is also encouraged by some of the writers. Interpretation is a key factor of the Tristan stories, as is evident from their subject matter. In addition, it seems that the centrality of interpretation to the plot is not merely due to the subject matter, but is also because, while destabilising authorities for their work, the writers also emphasise the importance of the act of interpretation, rather than defining signs as true or false. This is evident in several of the texts, such as Marc's attempt at interpreting the signs in the forest in Béroul's work, Tristan's monologue surrounding the interpretation of the *salle aux images* in Thomas' work, Thomas' narrator leaving judgements about which characters suffered the most to the audience to decide, and Eilhart's treatment of Marke's interpretation of the lovers in the forest. These texts in particular encourage the audience to be active participants in the interpretation of the works.

As is evident from the above analysis, meanings in the Tristan texts are not prescribed. An examination of the way that characters interpret different kinds of signs is important in order to see how such considerations may also influence the interpretation of whole narratives. In the depictions that the narrators give of characters interpreting particular signs, there are many elements which influence their interpretations, some of which will be summarised here. Firstly, the context in which a sign is placed influences the way that a character interprets it. The twigs are good examples of this. Eilhart and Gottfried in particular specify the location of the twigs (and the leaves, in Eilhart's case) when arranging the sign with Brangaene. For example, Eilhart clarifies that the leaves, floating down the stream as well as the twig carved with the cross with five ends indicate that Tristrant is waiting for her. Some scholarship on *Chievrefueil* has also suggested that the fact the lovers have met in the forest before using a twig as a communication system is crucial for the interpretation of the twig. Similarly, the swords during the period of exile in the forest in both Béroul's and Gottfried's works are interpreted based on the context in which they have been found, both by Mark and sometimes by critics as well, suggesting for example that the sword is a symbol of chastity. Secondly, the knowledge that a particular character has about a version of past events or about the details of a scene influence the interpretation that he or she makes of certain signs. The episode of the tryst beneath the tree in both Béroul's and Gottfried's works provides a good example of a verbal sign that means two different things depending on the knowledge that the person interpreting that sign has of previous events. Isolde's claim to love only the one who took or was given her virginity is present in both works, as is the fact that Mark's erroneous belief that he was the one to take her

virginity means that he interprets her words as an admission of love for himself, whereas Tristan and Isolde of course know that he was deceived on the wedding night as to her virginity. Similarly, during Isolde's trial the fact that the court, including Mark, is unaware that Tristan is disguised as either the leper (Béroul) or the pilgrim (Gottfried) enables Tristan and Isolde to deceive them, specifically allowing her to swear an oath which is true, but which others at court interpret differently to how others with more privileged knowledge about events would interpret it. These examples are frequently discussed as examples of how Tristan and Isolde deceive Mark. However, these are not merely indications of the characterisation of the protagonists, but they also indicate an awareness of and interest in processes of interpretation on the part of the narrators. Thirdly, the interpretation of certain words and objects is influenced by wider social convention, meanings which are current in society as a whole, rather than arranged between two or three individuals. Examples of this include promises made by authority figures which must be made true, as seen in Gottfried's and Eilhart's works, the use of oaths at trials, as well as the use of relics (Béroul) and the burning iron (Gottfried), and the way that rings and seals are used to convey authority in these texts (in all of the texts except *Chievrefueil*). In these instances, authority is imputed to the signs presented as it has been determined by society at large that these signs carry authority.

Moreover, the interpretation of certain signs is also influenced both by the memory and emotions attached to specific objects and to the expectation that a particular audience has of a scene or sign to be interpreted. The importance of memory in interpretation is apparent in characters' processes of interpretation in all of the texts. A fairly simple example of this is *Chievrefueil*, in which the lovers have

met in the forest using a twig as a communication system before and the emotions expressed in the longer interpretation of the twig may be based on memory of these previous events. This is more clearly seen with the use of rings, particularly in Thomas' work, in which the ring is attached for Tristan to the memory of his separation from Iseut, which then influences his subsequent behaviour. The same is true of some verbal signs, as the reminders of Tristan's valour in defeating the Morholt influence the emotions that Béroul's Marc feels during the tryst beneath the tree episode, enabling him to think more favourably of the lovers. It is therefore clear that meanings can be highly subjective, dependent not only on wider social conventions but also on the personal pasts of specific people. In addition, the expectations that an audience might have of a scene influence their interpretation of it. This is seen in several of the texts. The investigation of the ground where the dragon was killed involves the interpretation of various significant objects, but both the women and Kaherdin in Gottfried's text jump to conclusions about what the presence of these objects may indicate. The women have gone to investigate the scene because they are sure that the steward could not have killed the dragon. Similarly, Kaherdin is deliberately looking for Tristan. Both the women and Kaherdin discover what they had set out to find. Isolde's trial in both Béroul's and Gottfried's works is another example in which the expectations of the audience influence their interpretation of events, in this case of Isolde's oath. The audience expects Isolde to swear to her innocence, blinding them to the intricacies of her speech and leading them to assume that she has sworn her innocence when this is not the case. Mark's expectations during the discovery of the lovers in the forest (Béroul and Gottfried) also show how important audience expectation is. In neither text does

the sword indicate their chastity, but Mark has expected them to be touching and therefore deduces (incorrectly) that the presence of the sword precludes their guilt. Applying these observations to a broader context shows how important audience interpretation and expectation is for a discussion of literary practice in the Tristan texts.

Previous scholarship on medieval literary practice has failed to adequately consider the importance of interpretation with regard to fictionality, particularly in terms of whether to interpret something as truth, lies or something else. Chinca tackles the argument that 'vernacular narrative gradually shakes off first theological schemata, and then any historiographic intention whatsoever, in order to reach the goal of independent literary fiction', arguing instead that elements of 'an outdated ideology' remain present in the twelfth century 'as a means of ordering and shaping narrative'.[346] Although this is accurate, an analysis of the way that characters interpret signs in the texts themselves provides useful insights into how stories may also have been interpreted. For example, the interpretation the extra- and intradiegetical audiences make of Tristan's narrations in the two *Folies* depends entirely on both the context in which those narrations are made, such as Tristan's disguise as a fool and his behaviour, and on the prior knowledge that a particular individual has of Tristan and Iseut's previous actions. In these instances, it is not the truth or falsehood of the narration that is being questioned, except by Iseut, nor is there really a concern regarding the accuracy of the stories being told. Marc's courtiers are not concerned about the truth or falsehood of the story because it is being told to them by a fool, but Iseut is made uneasy by the Fool as she knows that

[346] Chinca, *History, Fiction, Verisimilitude*, p. 17-18.

the stories are true. The interpretation depicted in the *Folies* comes mostly from Iseut, who initially refuses to accept the narratives as signs of Tristan's identity. Whereas with other signs in the texts, the truth or falsity of a statement or visual sign is a key consideration, certainly for Mark, this is not necessarily the case here. The importance of interpretation in literary creation, including the fact that interpretations are not subscribed but can be subjective is summed up in Marie de France's *Chievrefueil*, in which the twig provokes an interpretation by Iseut or possibly by Tristan, which is 'la sume de l'escrit' (l. 61) and also an entire poem (the twig caused an episode which was then commemorated by Tristan), which then inspired another poem (as written by Marie de France). Truth and falsehood do not come into this text at all; rather the characters (and Marie) produce new interpretations of the twig, or of the *lai* as a whole, and create new ones. This suggests a reflection on the adaptation of Tristan texts in general; particular (and possibly differing) accounts of the Tristan story can still have authority.

A comparative analysis of the Tristan texts shows that each of the writers is engaging with contemporary debates surrounding truth, lies, interpretation and authority in different ways. Although several of the texts claim to convey the truth, they actually provoke interpretation, specifically amongst the audience. Although Green's overview of fictionality in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries and Chinca's assessment of Gottfried's work provide interesting perspectives on the attitude towards literary practice presented in these texts, analysing them comparatively leads to a more nuanced awareness of the debate occurring within these texts themselves on the boundaries between historical and fictional writing. Rather than using the Tristan texts to develop an overall theory of medieval attitudes

towards fiction and vernacular romance, analysing them in more detail reveals that they are potentially part of a wider debate surrounding literary practice, provoking interpretation and discussion among their audiences as well as questioning the need for established authorities for written work.

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Psalm 121