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# The Reception of the Anglo-Norman Tristan and Ysolt in Medieval England

**Supervisor**
Ch. Prof. Massimiliano Bampi

**Assistant supervisor**
Ch. Prof. Marina Buzzoni

**Graduand**
Elisa Tubiana
Matriculation number
854220

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# List of Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| C | Cambridge Manuscript |
| $C^{arl}$ | Carlisle Manuscript |
| D | Douce Manuscript |
| GVS | *Tristan* by Gottfried von Strassburg |
| ST | *Sir Tristrem* |
| $Sn^1$ | $Sneyd^1$ Manuscript |
| $Sn^2$ | $Sneyd^2$ Manuscript |
| $Str^1$ | Strassburg $Manuscript^1$ |
| $Str^2$ | Strassburg $Manuscript^2$ |
| $Str^3$ | Strassburg $Manuscript^3$ |
| $T^1$ | $Torino^1$ |
| $T^2$ | $Torino^2$ |

# Introduction

The 13th century romance of *Sir Tristrem* is the earliest witness that preserves the Middle English translation of the Anglo-Norman *Tristan* written by Thomas of Brittany. The transmission of the Anglo-Norman text into the insular context proves that long established practise of translation has always played a fundamental role in the exchange between cultures.

That is the reason why the primary objective of my dissertation was to employ the Descriptive Translation Studies to carry out the comparison of some of the most relevant episodes transmitted in both traditions. As a matter of fact, I consider this innovative and dynamic approach to translation ideal to comprehend the complex semiotic process of reformulation that the anonymous author of *Sir Tristrem* carried out to produce an acceptable text for his audience.

Consequently, I articulated my study in two different stages. The first three chapters aimed at providing a comprehensive presentation on the development of the ill-fated love of Tristan and Yseult and its reception in the European context, with particular attention to the Anglo-Norman and Middle English romances. In Chapter 1, *The Romance of Tristan and Ysolt-From its origins to its Reception*, I decided to focus on the most quoted theories on the matter of the origins of the tale, which still divide scholars' opinions. In addition, I also presented an overview of the numerous European versions to comprehend how the translation of this romance allowed its circulation in both continental and insular Europe. Given that the main traditions of interest in my research were the Anglo-Norman and Middle English ones, I dedicated Chapter 2 (*Tristan and Ysolt by Thomas of*

*Brittany*) and Chapter 3 (*Sir Tristrem in the Context of the Auchinleck Manuscript*) to the investigation of these two romances belonging to the *courtoise* branch.

The second stage of my dissertation opens with Chapter 4, *Descriptive Translation Studies and Medieval Translation*. In this section, I provided a preparatory introduction on the topic of translation, illustrating a brief overview of the development of Descriptive Translation Studies. I considered this introductory paragraph necessary to comprehend why this approach is ideal for the analysis of the highly instable medieval literature. As a matter of fact, in the following chapter, *The comparison between Tristan by Thomas of Brittany and Sir Tristrem,* I applied the descriptive methodology of this approach to understand and explain the changes that differentiate the Anglo-Norman romance from its Middle English adaptation. Nonetheless, I believed it was useful to also introduce in the comparison another *courtoise* poem, the Middle High German work written by Gottfried von Strassburg. In fact, Gottfried's translation is at time essential to produce an exhaustive analysis due to the fragmentary nature of Thomas' version that inspired the Middle English one.

# Chapter 1

## The Romance of Tristan and Ysolt
## From its origins to its reception

Eros and Thanatos represent an oxymoron that perfectly summarises the essential traits of the passionate and inauspicious love story of Tristan and Iseult.[1] The two leading characters of one of the most engaging literary myths of all time were tied by an unconditional love that flourished "under the sign of death."[2]

Through the centuries, they became a symbol of both unconditional and ill-fated love in the collective consciousness. As perfectly summarised by the verses of *Chevrefoil* by Marie de France, in her brief 118 lines Breton *lai*, the medieval female poet describes their relationship as follows:[3]

Plusurs le m'unt cunté e dit,
E jeo l'ai trové en escrit
De Tristram e de la reïne,
De lur amur ki tant fu fine
Dunt il eurent meinte dolur,
Puis en mururent en un jur.

[1] For clarity purposes, I would like to specify from the beginning of my work the spelling chosen to refer to the main characters of this story. When discussing the romance in general, I will employ the spelling "Tristan" and "Iseult". On the contrary, when referring to the characters of the Middle English, Anglo-Norman and German romances the names will be spelt respectively as "Tristrem" and "Yseult", " Tristan" and "Ysolt" and "Tristan" and Isolt".

[2] Hutcheon, 1999, p.270.

[3] De France, 1998, pp.187-195.

*(Many people have recited it to me and I have also found it in a written form. It concerns Tristan and the queen: their love was so pure that it caused them to suffer great distress and later brought about their death on the same day.)*[4]

## 1.1 On the origins of Tristan

As most medieval romances, the tale of Tristan and Iseult was transmitted both orally and on a written form. Even though the genesis of this romance has been discussed in a multitude of studies, its origins still divide scholars' opinions.

Although the most esteemed ones agree in attributing the provenance of the tale to the Celts, it is possible to recognise other significant inputs. The plot itself includes several elements in common, counterbalanced by an abundance of details, implemented by each receiving culture. According to the Italian scholar Benozzo, the fascination produced by this story lies on the cultural richness of its origins (Celtic, Classical, Germanic and Persian) that was transmitted to the Anglo-Norman, Middle English and Germanic traditions.[5]

One of the first relevant contributions to the study on the matter of the origins is provided by Paris in the second half of the 19th century. The French scholar theorises that the tale of Tristan and Iseult has primarily a Celtic provenance. Nevertheless, from his analysis also emerges a more ancient and mythological source of the tale.[6]

In order to support his thesis of the Celtic origin, he mainly focuses his study on onomastics and the etymology of the characters' names.

[4] This extract of Chevrefoil was translated by Burgess. Burgess, 1999, pp.109-110.

[5] Benozzo, 1997, pp.128-129.

[6] Paris, 1900, p.122.

In the first place, he analyses the onomastics of proper names. From his research emerges that several of the characters' names descend from the Celtic languages. For instance, he identifies the name of the hero, Tristan, as a Pictish first name.[7] According to his study, this name appears to be employed in Welsh from around the 11th century.[8]

Besides, the tale presents two more characters whose name etymologies could suggest their connection with the Celtic background. Not only Tristan's uncle, King Marc of Cornwall, was a notable sovereign, but also the meaning of his name indicates one of his most peculiar traits. In fact, in some sources, he has horse ears; as seems to be confirmed by the Celtic meaning of his name, which indeed means *horse*.[9]

This characteristic echoes a classical myth: the musical duel between Pan and Apollo. In this legend, Midas opposes himself to Apollo's victory on a music competition, and the God of music punishes him for his insolence by transforming his hears into the ones of a donkey.[10]

Another interesting etymology to look into is the one linked to the name of the giant Morholt. Initially, he was probably a marine monster as suggested by the first syllable of his name *mor*, which is the Celtic word for "sea". [11]

In the second place, he supported the idea that the absence of some of the typical traits of the knights-errant proves that the origins of the legend were more remote. Tristan does not own or fight on a steed, which later in history will become the most loyal companion of a knight. On the contrary, the

[7] Paris, 1900, p.122.

[8] Paris, 1900, p.141.

[9] Paris, 1900, p.132.

[10] Paris, 1900, pp.132-133.

[11] Paris, 1886, p.598.

disputes he is involved in are fought on foot. Moreover, his most faithful accomplice is his dog, named Hodain, which constantly follows him in his adventures.

Another relevant detail is provided by the weapons the hero employs. The readers are informed that he is an extremely skilful archer, his arrows are infallible and never fail to hit his targets.[12] He also fights with both his sword and javelin, other typical Welsh weapons. Nevertheless, there is no mention of the spear. Neither Tristan nor his enemies are seen resorting to the lance, the chivalric weapon *par excellence*. A detail that Paris attributes to the Celtic provenance of the core of the tale.[13]

According to Paris, the ability of Iseult and her mother to make love philtres and their healing abilities can be linked to a more remote cultural background.[14] In fact, he draws a comparison between the characters of Iseult and Oenone. Both women are expert healers and the only ones who could have saved their wounded lovers. Both Tristan and Paris, Oenone's husband, will perish from poisonous wounds.

Unlike Iseult, Oenone refuses to assist Paris since he abandoned her for Helena of Troy. Despite her initial refusal, she re-evaluates her decision. However, Paris has already died and she does the same when she sees his corps. Iseult has the same reaction, when she arrives before Tristan's inanimate body, whom she accepts to cure despite him having married another woman.[15]

[12] Paris, 1900, pp.131-132.

[13] Paris, 1900, pp.125-126.

[14] Paris, 1900, pp.130-131.

[15] Paris, 1900, p.133.

Another detail concerning Tristan's decease appears to be inspired by yet another classical myth: the employment of the white and black sails. In fact, Tristan abandons himself when he is informed that the landing ship has black sails, meaning Iseult was not on board. The makeup of this ending was inspired by Aegeus' tragic death. The king of Athens committed suicide at the sight of the black sail, which was supposed to symbolise the death of his own son, Theseus.[16]

In addition, the presence of two dogs marks another ancient resonance. Both his dogs, Petitcru and Hodain, display specific traits that make them both unique and magical. The first mentioned is able to alleviate sorrow thanks to the bell that hangs from his collar, whereas Hodain has been trained to hunt without barking.[17] As mentioned above, the latter is Tristan's most loyal companion to the extent that their connection resembles the one of Odysseus and Argos.

Both heroes have disguised themselves when they came back home and no one manages to unveil their identity except for their dogs. Both Argos and Hodain instantly recognise who is standing in front of them and welcome back their beloved owners.[18]

Paris goes as far as to acknowledge a resemblance between Tristan and a solar god, whose time was organised in day and night or summer and winter, opposing pairs embodied by the two Iseults.[19]

According to him, in the first period Tristan and Iseult's legend was transmitted through *lais*, romances and orally, that later had been assimilated

[16] Paris, 1900, p.133.

[17] Paris, 1900, p.132.

[18] Paris, 1900, p.133.

[19] Paris, 1900, p.130.

“dans les grands poèmes où l'on a essayé de réunir en une histoire suivie toutes les aventures de Tristan, depuis sa naissance jusqu'à sa mort.” [20] He attributed to “la harpe bretonne” the power of divulging the illegitimate love story “de siècle en siècle”, without basing his study on scientific arguments. Consequently, his study has often been described as *romantic*, due to the lack of a philological approach, much favoured by modern scholars.[21]

Another fundamental contribution to the study of the origins of the tale is provided by Bédier, a French scholar, who does not completely agree with the proofs presented by his compatriot. Despite recognising the presence of a Celtic and Welsh core in the legend, he also suggests the Norman culture provided a significant influx on the story. [22]

Similarly to Paris, the Celtic provenance is proved by Bédier through the study of the etymology of proper names. He agrees with his predecessor on the fact that the choice of Tristan as the name of the main character is not fortuitous. Although some research has demonstrated this name was not extensively employed, it has been attested that it was present both in Wales and in Brittany. [23]

He also believes Tristan was a Pictish first name. In order to support his theory, he refers to *The Dream of Rhonabwy,* a Middle Welsh prose tale, in which a certain *Trystan ab Tallwch* is mentioned as one of King Arthur’s councillors.[24] In addition, he is also described as the lover of his uncle Marc

[20] Paris, 1900, p.149; Benozzo, 1997, p.107.

[21] Paris, 1990, p.117.

[22] Benozzo, 1997, p.108.

[23] The employment of the name Avel mab Tristan is attested in the *Liber Landavensis*, referring to Tristan, Avel’s father, who lived in Wales around the end of 11th century. Moreover, another reference to this name is provided by an island called Tristan Island, situated in the Douarnenez bay.

[24] Guest, 1910, 351.

wife, Essyllt. [25]

To corroborate this hypothesis, he employed the research of Zimmer based on the *Annales de Tigernach* and *Annales d'Ulster*, in which the names of the Scottish sovereigns from the 6th to the 8th centuries are mentioned. Among the several kings, one can read the names *Drest, Drust or Drostàn*. More interestingly, these names were alternated by kings called Talorc, a name only found among the Celt. One of these kings, who ruled over the Picts from around 780 to 785, was known as *Drest filius Talorgen*. Consequently, despite the difference in the spelling of the two names, Bédier assumed it is plausible that *Drest filus Talorgen* and *Trystan ab Tallwch* were the same person.[26]

According to him, another detail that suggests the Celtic genesis of the legend is provided by some toponyms. In fact, in some geographic descriptions of Great Britain, Scotland was organised in four distinct parts: *Albania* located in the North-West, Galweya in the South-West, Loonia in the South-East and Moravia in the North-East.[27]

Each of these place names has been found in the versions of Tristan. For instance, *Albania* has been identified with the territory of Almain mentioned in *Sir Tristrem*.[28] *Galweya* (Galloway) corresponds to the reign of Gavoie, *Loonia* (Lothian) to Loonois and *Moravia* (Moray or Murray) to Morois, where Tristan was exiled.

Consequently, the scholar assumes the most ancient core of the legend has as protagonist a Pictish hero, whose primitive name was likely to have been

[25] Bédier, 1905, pp.106-107; Loth, 1913, p.374.

[26] Bédier, 1905, pp.107-108.

[27] Bédier, 1905, pp.108-109.

[28] Fennell, 2000, pp.120-121.

*Drostàn, son of Talorc*. In addition, the settings of his story corresponds to the territories of Lothian, situated on the border between England and Scotland and Murray in the North of Scotland.[29]

A second significant influence was provided by the Welsh culture. As proved by the phonetic transformation of the name of the chief character, *Drostàn* became *Drystan* in Welsh. Moreover, another Welsh contribution was represented by the presence of King Marc. In *The Life of Saint Paul Aurelien*, the saint, who used to live in Great Britain, refers to a king whose name is Marc and Bédier believes he governed Cornwall.[30] It is likely that in Cornwall circulated a legend of Marc with horse ears, due to the fact that in most Celtic languages Marc means *horse*. Therefore, there is a significant chance that the Welsh introduce this character in the legend.[31]

Another leading character appears to be added in the story thanks to the Welsh: Iseult. Her name can be encountered in the *Mabinogion*, in which she is identified both as Marc's wife and Tristan's lover. The spelling of her name was Essyllt. However, the scholar Loth believed her Welsh name was transformed in Iselt and Iseut thanks to the French influence.[32]

Despite the fact that some critics support the theory that the relationship between Tristan, Iseult and Marc is not a Welsh addition to the tale, Bédier is not of the same opinion. He concludes these characters were part of the tale from the very beginning because the name of Tristan's father, Talorc, has been preserved and the relationship between husband-wife-lover

[29] Bédier, 1905, pp.108-110.

[30] Le Grand, 1901, p.90.

[31] Bédier, 1905, p.111.

[32] Bédier, 1905, pp. 112-113.

possesses archaic traits, which suggests an evident Welsh influence.[33]

To conclude, it seems evident that the Welsh adopted a Pictish hero, known as Drostán and interwove his life to the one of King Marc of Cornwall and his wife. However, some elements that Paris pinpoints as the Celtic and mythological core of the tale are rejected by Bédier.

For instance, he discredits two of the focal points supported by his predecessor. He does not consider Tristan a solar deity nor does he confirm an absolute resemblance between the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur and Tristan's legend. [34]

Bédier carries out his own research that, in many instances, confutes the various traits identified as Celtic by Paris. As a matter of fact, he recognises as Celtic the following aspects: the resemblance between King Marc and Midas, Tristan's ability to imitate singing birds, his infallible arc, Tintagel, the enchanted castle,[35] the messages he writes for Iseult on wood sticks, and finally, Tristan dressed up as a swineherd.

There is hardly any doubt that these elements constitute an important base for the later development of the tale. Nevertheless, Bédier concludes that both Celtic and Welsh traits co-live in the tale of Tristan and Iseult. In addition, he also suggests the relevance of the influence of the Norman culture.

This theory seems to be corroborated by the presence of both proper and place names deriving from five different populations. According to the scholar, the employment of names coming from different languages

[33] Bédier, 1905, pp.114-116.

[34] Bédier, 1905, pp.130-140.

[35] Bédier, 1905, p.143; Paris, 1900, p.132.

demonstrates the complexity of the development and transmission of this tale. [36]

Both Paris and Bédier address that only the presence of the three leading characters Tristan, Marc and Iseult was a Celtic invention, whereas the main theme of the legend, their adulterous love, cannot derive from the same cultural background.[37]

As a matter of fact, the relevance of marriage drastically changed with the advent of Christianity, which considers this bond as sacred and unbreakable. On the contrary, marriage and adultery were seen under a completely different light by the Celt. From the chapter 28 of the second book of *The Laws of Howel the Good* emerges that marriage was seen as a divestment and adultery could be solved through pecuniary indemnities.[38] Therefore, only the parental ties between Tristan and Marc are Celtic. The intrigue that constitute the foundation of this renowned adultery has to belong to a Christian environment, in which the status of marriage retained a significant social relevance.[39]

Golther further distances himself from Paris' *romantic* theories and radicalised Bédier's study.[40] According to him, there are only two episodes influenced by the Celtic culture, corresponding to the fight between Tristan and Morholt and Iseult's healing ability.[41]

The first episode is recited in every version of the story and deals with the

[36] Bédier, 1905, pp.117-130.

[37] Paris, 1900, pp.134-140; Bédier, 1905, pp.162-163.

[38] Wade-Evans, 1909, p.224.

[39] Bédier, 1905, p.166.

[40] Benozzo, 1997, p.107.

[41] Golther, 1887, pp.2-11, Golther, 1907, p.23.

conflict between Cornwall and Ireland. Tristan confronts the King of Ireland's brother-in-law, Morholt, to release his uncle's from paying a human tribute to the Irish reign. Consequently, the German scholar believes that the confrontation between Tristan and Morholt mimics historic events occurred between the Picts and the Irish. As seems to be confirmed by their legends, which transmitted analogous events.[42]

Despite the contrast between the hero and the giant, Golther supports the idea that the copious sea journeys undertaken by Tristan and the healing of his wound by Iseult constitute the primitive core of the tale. Moreover, he states that the healing of the hero represents the closure of the most ancient Celtic core of the legend.[43]

The second significant input is provided by the tale of the lady with Golden hair since the character of Iseult seems to be comparable with the protagonist of this popular Indo-European tale. According to the legend, a hero travels in order to find the future wife of a king, whose hair has to correspond to the one brought to the sovereign by a swallow.[44] Consequently, the diverse traditions, which reinterpret this myth, associate Tristan, with the character of the hero, Marc, to the king and Iseult, to the maiden with golden locks.[45]

A third fundamental contribution is also supplied by the myth of Paris and Oenone, with whom the two lovers can be associated. Similarly to Tristan and Iseult, Paris and Oenone fell in love with each other after she treats his wound. Despite advising him of the fact that he will suffer a deadly injury during the Trojan War and she will be the only one able to save him, he

[42] Golther, 1907, p.17.

[43] Golther, 1907, p.23.

[44] Golther, 1907: pp.16-17.

[45] Benozzo,1997, p.110; Golther, 1907, p.4.

leaves for the battle. Unfortunately, Oenone's prediction is accurate. Paris pleads for her help, which she initially refuses because in the meanwhile he married Helena of Troy. Upon hearing her refusal, Paris dies and so does she, when she discovers that her beloved has passed away.[46]

One should notice there is a parallelism between the characters of the classical mythology and Tristan, Iseult and Iseult of the White Hands. As a matter of fact, Helena can be identified with Iseult of the White Hands, married by Tristan, only because of her name.

Consequently, three different layers are intertwined in Iseult's character: she is the healer typical of the Celtic tradition, the fair lady with Golden hair and a nymph from the classical myth of Paris and Oenone. Besides, these three levels, provided by different cultures, are enriched by elements belonging to the Norman and more generally medieval tradition of the 11th and 12th centuries.

Similarly to Golther, Panvini highlights the relevance of the Norman contribution. According to the Italian scholar, the tale experienced both an insular and continental phases, in this order. [47]

In its most ancient one, the Pictish, Cornish and Welsh cultures provide a foundation to the story, which was later spread on the other side of The Channel in Armorica and North-West of France, where the contamination with contemporary elements occurred.[48]

Firstly, the Pictish contribution is provided through the name of the hero and his fight with Morholt, which reflects the historical contrast between the

[46] Golther, 1907, pp.23-25; Benozzo, 1997, pp.110-111.

[47] Panvini, 1951, pp.30,56.

[48] Panvini, 1951, p.71.

Celts and the Irish.[49]

Secondly, the figure of King Marc is implemented thanks to the Cornish culture. As seems to be demonstrated by the fact that he ruled over Cornwall and several legends and chronicles that circulated about him.[50]

Finally, the Welsh elements are embodied in the characters of Iseult and Tristan, whose names are mentioned in *Mabinogion*. Moreover, the relationship of Marc, Tristan and Iseult seem to have an insular provenance as well. [51]

Panvini attributes these details to the most ancient core of the tale, which according to his study, developed in the insular context and was later enriched by others receiving cultures.

He opposes himself to Bédier and Golther's consideration of marriage. As illustrated above, these academics believe that the Celts viewed this tie as merely economic. On the contrary, Panvini highlights that marriage must have had a significant role due to the fact that Tristan and Iseult swallowed a love philtre, whose effect overpowered their morals and somewhat justified their adulterous relationship.[52]

Once the tale arrived in Armorica, more characters were implemented. Tristan started being identified as the son of Rivalen, a continental Breton man. Moreover, the figures of Iseult of the White Hands, Hovel of Carhaix' daughter and Kaerdin, Perenis, Gondoain are added.[53]

[49] Panvini, 1951, p.20.

[50] Panvini, 1951, p.17.

[51] Panvini, 1951, pp.17-27.

[52] Panvini, 1951, pp.19-25.

[53] Panvini, 1951, pp.34-35,117.

The legend is forwarded in the North of France, where according to Panvini it experiences contamination with classical myths. When it reaches Normandy thanks to the errant Breton minstrels, it spreads across the Anglo-Norman courts and returns to Britain, enriched by French and Armorican inputs.[54]

In the second half of the 20th century, De Mandach was another scholar who focused his study on the Celtic provenance of the tale. By examining in depth the geography of the romance and its onomastics, he matches some of the place names mentioned by Béroul to Cornwall, and most relevantly, he attemptes to establish Tristan's identity.[55]

He bases his research on the hero's identity on a tombstone, once known as *Long Stone*, and now renamed *Tristan Stone*, after the inscription bearing the name *Drustanus* has been noticed.

According to the academic, the proper name in the first line of the inscription corresponds to the Welsh *Drystan* and the French *Tristan*.[56] The second line identifies *Drustanus* as *Cunoworis filius.* Cunoworis was the King of Dumnonia, which corresponded to Devon and Cornwall, in the 6th century. Moreover, the character of King Marc seems to have inhabited the same area, Lantien, in the same period of time.[57]

As already mentioned, Golther highlights that Isuelt's golden hair represent her most noticeable trait. The third inscription on the gravestone,

[54] Panvini, 1951, pp. 36-37.

[55] The place names that were matched with Cornwall correspond to Lantien, Tintagel and St.Samson.

[56] De Mandach, 1978, p.227.

[57] De Mandach, 1978, pp.227-230. In the *Eceter Domesday Book* (1086) this specific area is named Lantien, epithet employed by Béroul to identify an area ruled by King Marc.

corresponding to *Domina Clusilla,* seem to reveal through a Celtic word that Iseult had blonde hair.

In fact, *Clusilla* could also correspond to the Irish toponyms, which identifies a location situated seven miles away from The Tara Hill, where Iseult was supposedly from. The toponym, composed by *cluain-*, which means meadow and the suffix *-silla*, yellow, yellowish. Therefore, the village of *Clusilla* meant yellow meadow.[58]

Nevertheless, *silla* could also be employed to describe golden hair. Consequently, de Mandach assumes that Iseult's name derived from *silla* preceded by the determinative article, either *i* (Celtic) or *e* (Cimrisch). Because of the apocope, the name would have become *I-sill* or *E-sill* in the 6th century and resulted in *Ísil* or *Ésil* due to an accent shift in the 10th century. The lack of the final *t* is also attested in Thomas' version of Tristan, Ysol.[59]

Consequently, de Mandach assumed that *Clusilla* and Iseult could share the same identity. Both because of their provenance and their distinctive trait: their blonde hair.

To conclude this paragraph on the origins of the legend, I would like to provide two less explored theories that attribute to Tristan and Isuelt's tale an extremely diverse provenance.

On the one hand, the study of Gallais provides a completely different interpretation to the legend of Tristan and Iseult. He relates it to the Persian tale of *Vis and Rāmin,* an eastern story is preserved in an 8400 verses

[58] De Mandach, 1978, p.194.

[59] De Mandach, 1978, pp.239-240.

romance, transmitted through a later version of the 11th century.[60]

Gallais identifies the King of Persia, Moubad, his brother, Rāmin and Vis, the king's future wife, respectively with Marc, Tristan and Iseult. The adulterous relationship is in both tales justified due to the presence of a magical object, which corresponds to a talisman in the Persian tale and to a *boire amoreux* in the Celtic one.[61]

Moreover, the Persian love triangle results even more close to the Celtic one, when the character of Gol is introduced. Despite being in love with other women, both Rāmin and Tristan respectively marry Gol and Iseult of the White Hands.[62]

Gallais believed that the Persian model became a source of inspiration in the West thanks to the Arabs, whose culture was influenced by the Persian thanks to minstrels, such as Rahaman of Cordoba in the 11th century.[63]

On the other hand, another interesting parallelism was proposed by Martin, who identified some similarities between Tristan and Iseult and the Germanic Sigurdh found in the *Volsungsaga* and the *Poeatic Edda*.[64]

From his study emerged that the focal traits of the stories correspond and the only different aspect is the function of the philtre, which alters Sigurdh's memory. [65]

[60] Gallais (1974). This thesis was inspired by the essay of H.ETHÉ entitled *Verwandte persische und okzidentalische Sagenstoffe* (1872). See also Benozzo, 1997, p.122.

[61] Gallais, 1974, pp.112, 120-122.

[62] Gallais, 1974, p.103.

[63] Benozzo, 1997, pp.120-121.

[64] Martin, 1981, pp.3-36.

[65] Martin, 1981, pp.3-36.

The correspondence between these two tales primarily regards the characters roles: the hero corresponds to Tristan-Sigurdh, the king that sends the hero to look for his wife to Marc-Gunnar, the fair lady to Iseult-Brynhild, and finally, the lady that the hero marries to Iseult of the White Hands-Gudrun.

The objective of this paragraph was to demonstrate that matter of the origins is necessarily linked to the one of circulation. As a matter of fact, the comparison of diverse Indo-European traditions proves the connections among myths and legends and their *mise en roman.*

The similarities do not only concern episodes or expedients, but also the role of the leading characters. As exemplified by the presence of three recurring figures, which embody courage, sovereignty and fecundity: Tristan, Marc and Iseult, Sigurdh, Gunnar and Brynhild; Ramin, Moabad and Vis.

Despite the fact that most scholar identify the Celtic inputs as "the most prolific and vociferous", the next paragraph will focus on the development of the legend in Europe, specifically in the Norman, Middle English and German cultures.[66]

### 1.2 The European reception of *Tristan and Iseult*

The following sections will focus on the European diffusion of the legend of Tristan and Iseult. A Story, which has become one of the most complex subjects of interest in medieval philology, due to its considerable number of adaptations.

This section of the chapter provide an overview of the European versions in order to better comprehend their development on both a continental and insular level. Although my research will focus on the Anglo-Norman,

[66] Shirt, 1980, p.153.

Middle English and Middle High German reworkings, which correspond to the three dominant traditions compared in my dissertation.

As already mentioned, before focusing on these specific traditions, I do consider worthwhile to list the most ancient texts still available nowadays:

1. The fragmentary Anglo-Norman romance of Thomas of Brittany, written around 1170-75. It probably counted around 20000 verses of which only 3144 remained;
2. The fragmentary romance of Béroul composed at the end of the 12th century, which includes 4485 verses;
3. Marie de France's Breton Lai *Chevrefoil* of 118 lines from the second half of the 12th century;
4. The brief Norman tale of the *Folie Tristan de Berne* (572 verses);
5. The contemporary tale of *Folie Tristan d'Oxford* (998 verses);
6. The vast compilation of *Prose Tristan* initiated by Luce del Gat and completed by Helie de Boron from the first half of the 13th century;
7. The 158 verses of *Tristan Rossignol* inserted in the collection *Donnei des Amanz* written at the end of the 12th century;
8. The 1524 verses of *Tristan menestrel* probably the continuation of Perceval by Chrètien de Troyes attributed to Gerbert de Montreuil first half of 13th century;
9. The German romance of Eilhart von Oberg, composed around 1170, whose verses have been preserved in 3 manuscripts for a total of 1000 verses;
10. The fragmentary romance of Gottfried von Strassburg from first half of the 13th century, which has less than 20.00 verses and lacks the ending. In fact, thanks to the contribution of Ulrich von Tuerheim and Heirich von Freiberg and their *fortsetzungen*, Gottfried's romance was provided with a conclusion;

11. The episodic tale of *Tristan als Mönch* composed by 2705 verses in the 13th century;
12. The *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar,* a prose text composed by Friar Robert in 1226 dedicated to King Haakon V of Norway;
13. *Sir Tristrem* a 3343 romance in Middle English which lacks its ending and composed in the first half of the 13th century;
14. The chapters 63 to 67 of the *Tavola Ritonda* a chivalric prose narration in Italian from the 14th century;

Interestingly, the abundance of variants is acknowledged even by Thomas of Brittany, who in his verses affirms the redactions are "mult divers", alluding to the multitude of stories about Tristan that circulated at his time.[67]

In fact, one should not forget the texts just mentioned are followed by many more, the study of which falls outside the scope of the present analysis. However, I believe it is significant to address the variety of adaptations, to provide a more comprehensive picture of its diffusion. For instance, it is supposed that even the illustrious Chrétien de Troyes had composed a tale about "roi Marc et d'Ysalt la blonde", as he mentions it in the fifth verse of *Cligès*.[68] Consequently, even the indirect references are valid and increased the circulation of one of the most troubled love stories of the Middle Ages.[69]

Both direct and indirect traditions attested the significant role played by Tristan and Iseult in medieval literary culture. The impact their story had can clearly be proved by the various retellings of their ill-fated love, which

[67] Gambino, 2014, p.134.

[68] De Troyes in Gardiner, 2006, p.10.

[69] Varvaro, 1967, p.16. See the article *Les allusions à la légende de Tristan dans la littérature du moyen âge* by Léopold Sudre to have a more detailed overview of the indirect tradition on Tristan and Iseult.

initially prospered in the British Isles, France and Germany, to then spread across Europe, such as in Italy and Scandinavia. [70]

The evident liveliness of the legend caused the Italian scholar Varvaro to assume that:

> "Ci fu, certo, un primo poema, [...]esso dovette servire da esempio e modello per gli altri, ma la tradizione era li, attingibile a tutti, viva di una sua interna complessità: ogni poeta poteva imitare i predecessori ma anche rifarsi ai giullari o alla saga o alle tradizioni." [71]

Frappier seems to be of the same opinion since he assumes that there must have been an archetype that was employed as a model by the authors of the texts mentioned above. However, he disagrees with Bédier on the matter of authorship and dating of the said archetype.

Frappier does not believe a single "homme de génie" could have composed the original source text. Consequently, he is equally incapable to affirm with certainty when it was composed. On the contrary, Bédier states that this primary text was produced by a sole author in the 12th century.[72]

The hypothesis of a common archetype is even embraced by Golther, who identified this primary model as *Ur-Tristan*. Even though he does not provide any piece of evidence to corroborate his theory, the German scholar believed that there must have been a model from which all the European texts originated.[73]

The lack of documentation to prove the existence of a universal source

[70] Grimbert, 1995, p. xiii.

[71] Varvaro, 1967, p.57.

[72] Frappier, 1963, p.258; Bédier, 1905, p.186.

[73] Golther, 1907, p.3.

proves the archetype theory to be indemonstrable. Despite the various endeavours to reconstruct the stemma codicum using textual criticism, as intended by Lachmann, the analysis of the various adaptations appear to contradict this hypothesis.[74]

It is obvious that Tristan's versions originated from diverse and at times conflicting sources. Both the written and oral transmissions are the result of a process of rework of similar episodes belonging to a quite stable plot. Therefore, rather than having an *Ur-Tristan* from which the vibrant tradition we know today flourished, it seems more likely to have originated thanks to the folklore surrounding these two characters.[75]

Similarly to Bédier, Varvaro highlights how this oral legend became literature in the 12th century. Nevertheless, the Italian scholar does not consider plausible the existence of a common model as the only literary source employed to produce one of the numerous works mentioned above. According to him, the archetype could be a text that poets could favour, but this does not mean it completely erased their awareness regarding the multitude of existing witnesses of the story.[76]

As discussed in the previous paragraphs, scholars' opinions on the matter of the origins and archetype has the tendency to differ considerably. However, most academics seem to agree with Frappier's on the subdivision of the versions into two categories. He established there were a *version commune* and *courtoise* of the texts produced between the 12th and the 13th centuries. According to him, this distinction is necessary to highlight how:

[74] Varvaro, 1967, pp.22-27.

[75] Varvaro, 1967, pp.55-58; Gambino, 2014, pp.6-7.

[76] Varvaro, 1967, pp.57-58.

> De l'une à l'autre [versions], il se produit une transformation d'ordre psychologique et moral qui fait passer Tristan et Iseut d'un amour fatal à un amour courtois. [77]

The terminology employed to define this dichotomy varies according to the scholar. For instance, Payen refers to the branches as *épique* and *lyrique* and Schach as *Thomas and Béroul branch*.[78] For convenience's sake, I will employ Frappier's classification throughout the rest of this dissertation.

The oldest and most relevant witnesses that preserve the first two written versions of Tristan both belong to the Anglo-Norman tradition and were written by Thomas of Brittany and Béroul in the last third of the 12th century.[79] According to Frappier's analysis, these two authors produced two source texts that inspired their later adaptations in various European cultures.

On one hand, to the *version commune* are ascribed *Tristan et Yseut* by Béroul, *Tristrant* by Eilhart von Oberg and the *Folie of Berne*.

On the other, *Tristan et Yseut* by Thomas of Brittany, *Tristan* by Gottfried von Strassburg, the *Folie d'Oxford*, the *Tristrams Saga* by Friar Robert and the anonym *Sir Tristrem* belong to the *version courtoise*.

According to Gallagher, the chief factor that contributed to this neat distinction is the style and purpose of the texts.

He attributes to the adaptations of the *version commune* a more direct narrative style, enriched by active scenes and more intimate references. In addition, these texts seem to have as target an audience of listeners.

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[77] Frappier, 1963, pp.255; 265.

[78] Fennell, 2000, p.17.

[79] Gambino, 2014, p.5; Halverson, 1983, p.271.

On the contrary, the so-called *version courtoise* is more focused on the court and especially the psychology of the hero and the heroine of the story, who overthink both their decisions and the consequences of their actions. Resulting in a deep introspection of the leading characters of the tale.[80]

Halverson assents with Varvaro on the archetype theory, which he calls the original "Tristan myth". Despite noticing the inconsistences in the hypothesis of a common source, he studies the *commune* and *courtoise* dichotomy.

From his analysis of Béroul and Thomas' narrations, he came to similar conclusions to Gallagher. Halverson highlights the importance of action in Béroul's work. Moreover, he addresses its "vigorous, passionate" and barbaric nature. Another significant detail is supplied by the characters. Despite the fact that they lack individuality, the author seem to be involved in their adventures. Thomas, on the other hand, focuses more on the characters' psychology and thought process rather than their acts. In addition, the reader perceives his narrative voice throughout the romance.[81]

Not only the narrative style and characters' introspection are to consider valid elements of distinction, but also the effect caused by the ingestion of the love potion drank from the lovers during their journey from Ireland to Cornwall. As a matter of fact, the two branches present this expedient in two distinct manners.

On the one hand, Béroul identifies the *boire d'amour* as the sole cause of their fatal love. Before drinking the philtre, Tristan and Iseult did not develop any feelings for each other. On the contrary, the princess of Ireland resents

[80] Gallagher, 2013, p.xii.

[81] Halverson, 1983, pp.271-273.

Tristan for having murdered her uncle, Morholt. Consequently, the philtre has a dramatic function and represents an external factor needed to exonerate them from any social and moral guilt. The lack of genuine love is attested by the limited effects of the potion. When it vanishes, the once lovers seem to wake up from their torpidity and manage to return to their lives.[82]

On the other hand, Tristan and Iseult are tied by a deep bound even before sailing towards Cornwall. Therefore, the function of the philtre in Thomas' version acquires an extremely diverse meaning. Despite the fragmentary nature of his Anglo-Norman romance, it is possible to reconstruct the course of events that lead Tristan and Iseult to fall in love with each other through adaptations belonging to the same branch. From these texts emerge that their love is an aware choice. Their willingness and awareness causes them deep suffering whenever they have to spend time apart. In this specific case, the love potion is just a material factor. It does not provide them, as it did in the *version commune*, any moral alibi. They willingly choose to be together and followed their hearts in spite of the immorality and judgement.[83]

The aim of this chapter was to present the complex baggage of the legend of Tristan and Iseult. As described in the first section, the matter of the origins has been explored by various scholars and the same attention has been paid to the reception of the versions of the romance in Europe. In my opinion, the overview of these two aspects is fundamental to adequately appreciate this intricate fatal love.

The fascination produced by a tale with a Celtic core instilled by mythological and Norman elements is indisputable and has been conquering

[82] Halverson, 1983, pp.273-285; Frappier, 1963, pp.266-273.

[83] Frappier, 1963, pp.273-280.

readers since the Middle Ages.

As highlighted above, the next chapters of my dissertation plan to target some of the works ascribed to the *version courtoise* to unveil the diverse approaches to the story, which occurred in Thomas' version and in *Sir Tristrem.*

However, I believe it is necessary to dedicate the final paragraph of this chapter to the genre of the romance to which the texts of the *courtoise* branch belong. In particular, I will focus on the Middle English Romance since the insular context adopted this genre after the Norman Conquest in 1066.

In addition, I preferred to implement the comparison between the Anglo-Norman and Middle English adaptations with the Middle High German romance composed by Gottfried from Strassburg. As a matter of fact, the fragmentary nature of Thomas' text does not allow to produce an exhaustive comparison with the highly reformulated Middle English poem. Consequently, the work of the German author, whose narrative and style are more similar to Thomas', acts as a bridge between the Anglo-Norman and Middle English translations.

### 1.3 The Romance and the acquisition of the genre in the insular context

The year 1066 represents an extremely significant moment of English history since the Norman Conquest inaugurated a new era for the British Isles. The foreign hegemony put an end to the isolation of the insular reality, which came into contact with the Norman culture and became a member of the most multilingual and multicultural territory in Western Europe.[84]

The impact of the Conquest completely modified the political, social and

[84] Crane, 1999, p.35; Schofield, 1906, p.5.

cultural asset of England. As a matter of fact, during the Late middle Ages, France was "the supreme arbiter" of Europe.[85] Consequently, the primacy of French culture represents one of the reasons why England experienced such an intense exchange and was extremely influenced by it after the Conquest in the 11th century.[86]

English literature was particularly affected by the foreign domination. The insular literature had developed its own identity even before the coming of the Normans. In fact, the literature of the Anglo-Saxons was remarkably significant, especially for its works in prose.[87] Nevertheless, the Norman Conquest induced a new stimulus to the insular country and inaugurated an era of extraordinary intellectual productions thanks to the acquisition of a new genre: the romance. A genre, which according to both Schofield and Krueger, is the most characteristic and influential secular literary production of the European Middle Ages.[88]

The word *romance* derives from the expression *mettre en romanz*, which was employed to indicate the translation of texts into vernacular French. As a result, several vernacular works were identified as *romans* due to the language employed in their translation.[89] Initially in England, the term was used to distinguish the native language from the Anglo-Norman of the invaders. Nonetheless, from the 13th century the term acquired a new acceptation, corresponding to a fictitious narrative.[90]

[85] Schofield, 1906, p.4.

[86] Liddiard, 2017, p.106.

[87] Schofield, 1906, p.2.

[88] Schofield, 1906, p.145; Krueger, 2000, p.1.

[89] Finlayson, 1980, p.46.

[90] Finlayson, 1980, p.46.

The varied spectrum of these narratives, bearing common characteristics, can be organised into categories based on the setting and the presence of certain characters. In his *Chanson des Saisnes,* Jean Bodel suggests that:

"N'en sont que trois materes a nul home entendant / De France, et de Bretaigne, et de Rome la grant."[91]

According to the poet, romances could be classified into themes. Consequently, he identified three matters: the Matters of France, Britain and Rome. Nowadays, this 12th century nomenclature is still employed to provide a description of romances based on the geographic location and characters. The Matter of France corresponds to the myths developed in the French court of Charlemagne regarding the king himself, his knights and vassals. The Matter of Britain is the body of literature that deals with King Arthur, his knights and their deeds. Finally, the Matter of Rome deals with events and characters from the antiquity.

Differently from nowadays literature, in the Middle Ages originality was not a required trait. On the contrary, the most popular tendency was to be inspired by other works. As exemplified by romances, whose content was based on the reshape of renowned stories belonging to diverse traditions. Consequently, translation was fundamental to enrich English literature. In fact, after an initial phase characterised by suppression and avoidance of the native culture, translation was necessary to allow it to re-flourish.

Quand li Norman la terre pristrent
Les grans estoires puis remistrent
Qui des Engleis estoient fetes,
Qui des aucuns ierent treites,

[91] Guiette, 1967, p.1.

Pur la gent qui dunc diverserunt
E les langages si changerunt.
Qui mult sunt de plusurs années
Com est le Bruit, com est Tristram.[92]

The reinterpretation and adaptation of already written texts highlights another peculiarity of medieval romances, the lack of importance of authorship. Most works cannot be attributed to any authors due to their anonymity. In fact, only few of the writers mentioned their names in the prologue or epilogue of their texts. This indicates the content of the stories was more relevant than authorship.[93]

Another significant trait of this genre is its 'transmissive' nature. Quoting Krueger its "evolution is one of translation and transformation, adaptation and refashioning", which depends on a "fertile intertextual and intercultural exchange."[94] In fact, the transmission of the matter treated in romances circulated beyond the border of single countries and resulted from the combination of cross-cultural elements of interest.

The authors of romances reference diverse elements of their own culture, but are also affected by external inputs. For instance, these works benefit from the mixture of sources such as contemporary chronicles, Latin and Greek mythology, folklore, epics and religious works. In fact, the fascination with the genre is enclosed in the ability of writers to interweave the old and the

[92] Weiss,Fellows, Dickson, 2000, p.32. The extract from *Waldef* was translated by me. **Translation:** When the Normans conquered the land, they refused the great stories created by the English that no one treated at that time. The people changed and so the languages, but afterwards many translations were made, appreciated by many, as occurred for Bruit and Tristan.

[93] Schofield, 1906, p.6.

[94] Krueger, 2000, p.1.

new to render their production suitable for "the sentimental, moral, and political concerns of their audience." [95] As proved by the fact that the same characters, themes and motives entertained diverse European audiences from France, England, Germany, Italy and The Netherlands to Spain, Portugal, Greece and Scandinavia. Their wide diffusion attests that the appeal of the heroes and heroines' adventures was endless and the Middle English romances are no exception, since they are mainly based on the Anglo-Norman ones.[96]

Schofield highlights that this genre flourished among the Anglo-Normans. Nevertheless, the favourable conditions of the Norman settlement and their naturalisation in England increased the new comers' interest in the past of their new home. In fact, the daily-intercourse between Normans and the natives allowed the further development of the genre.[97]

The transmission of Anglo-Norman romances in Middle English was probably intended for "an audience which did not read French at all".[98] If the Anglo-Norman romances written on the 12th and 13th centuries were aimed at a gentle audience, the Middle English public seems to have been different. According to Crane, Middle English romances did not developed in the royal courts of England. Consequently, the audience extraction was more likely to be bourgeois and peasant rather than from the nobility or the clergy, who still tended to favour the employment of Anglo-Norman as a "language of culture."[99] Nonetheless, their main objectives of the Anglo-Norman and Middle English romances were similar. Romances acted as a form of

[95] Krueger, 2000, p.3.

[96] Finlayson, 1980, p.50.

[97] Schofield, 1906, p.116.

[98] Finlayson, 1980, p.51.

[99] Crane, 1986, pp.23-24.

entertainment but also as didactic works. This genre offered a diversion and allowed to enjoy the pleasure of the imagination, but it also had an ideological function, which allowed the diffusion of medieval values.

The ill-fated love story of Tristan and Iseult perfectly summarises the characteristics of the genre and proves the importance held by romances in the Middle Ages.

As a matter of fact, the first two extant written sources of the romance were composed in an Anglo-Norman dialect by Béroul and Thomas of Brittany. Their redactions attest that the love story of Tristan and Iseult was exposed to the Norman influence and also enriched by external inputs coming from diverse traditions. Thanks to the reshaped retellings of the Anglo-Norman romances in the *commune* and *courtoise* versions, the *matière* was transmitted in Europe allowing their adulterous love to become one of the most renowned in the history of the Middle Ages.

# Chapter 2

## *Tristan and Ysolt* by Thomas of Brittany

The Anglo-Norman version of *Tristan* composed by Thomas of Brittany dates back to the end of the 12th century.[100] This fragmentary romance in verse has been preserved in only ten disconnected fragments belonging to six different manuscripts.[101] The extant six discontinuous passages amount to a total of 3298 verses. They should correspond to around one-sixth of the original poem since it has been estimated that the complete tale would have counted around 12000 or 13000 verses.[102]

Nevertheless, "l'injure faite à Thomas par les temps" can be rectified through later rehashes inspired by his text.[103] In fact, the Anglo-Norman poem of Thomas became the source text from which diverse European traditions developed. His romance belongs to what scholars define *courtoise* tradition, in which the passionate love and sorrow felt by the leading characters are the focus of the narration.[104]

To the same tradition belong the Middle High German *Tristan und Isolt* written by Gottfried von Strassburg between 1200 and 1210. An extended

[100] Bédier, 1905, pp.55, 189; Golther, 1907, p. 164; Frappier, 1963, p.259; Benskin, Hunt, & Short, 1992, p.289); Fennell, 2000, p.10.

[101] Gambino, 2014, p.11.

[102] Fennell, 2000, p.10; Gambino, 2014, p.11; Lecoy, 1988, p.379); Lupack, 1994, p.143; Schofield, 1906, p.202.

[103] Bédier, 1902, p.149.

[104] Gambino, 2014, p.11; Frappier, 1963, pp.255, 259.

version inspired by the Anglo-Norman romance, which counts 19.548 verses. Despite being exhaustive, Gottfried's poem abruptly stops when Tristan marries Iseult of the White Hands, probably because of the author's death. Consequently, it is possible to draw a comparison between the source text and its translation only partially. Nevertheless, Gottfried's version appears loyal to the one of his predecessor "Thomas von Britanje".[105]

Another faithful translation of Thomas' work was produced by Friar Robert in 1226. His Old Norse saga, *Tristrams Saga ok Ísöndar*, was composed in honour of King Hákon IV, King of Norway.[106]

Finally, the latest poem belonging to the *courtoise* branch was compiled in Middle English by an anonymous author at the end of the 13th century. The verses of *Sir Tristrem* are preserved in a *codex unicus* contained in the Auchinleck manuscript.[107]

The numerous translations belonging to diverse European traditions bear testament to the fact that the legend of Tristan spread across the continent and was well known. However, the manuscript tradition of the source text of the *courtoise* tradition results incomplete. Scholars have attributed the lack of extant witnesses of Thomas' romance to the fact that during the 12th century the Anglo-Norman audience preferred the prose versions of Tristan's story, which affiliated the hero to King Arthur and his knights.[108]

[105] Gambino, 2014, p.11; Frappier, 1963, p.259; Halverson, 1983, p.272; Bédier, 1905, p.76-77; Vetter, 1882, pp.31-32.

[106] Gambino, 2014, p.11; Frappier, 1963, p.259; Halverson, 1983, p.272; Bédier, 1905, pp.42, 65-66; Vetter, 1882, pp. 29-31.

[107] Gambino, 2014, p.11; Frappier, 1963, p.259; Halverson, 1983, p.272; Bédier, 1905, pp.86-87; Vetter, 1882, p.32.

[108] Gambino, 2014, p.12.

Consequently, the precious codices in which Thomas' version was preserved were likely to have been dismembered and employed for the binding of other manuscripts. Only in the first half of the 19th century, the first fragment of the romance re-emerged thanks to the intervention of Francisque Michel, who rediscovered Thomas romance and published a fragment of the story that belonged to his friend Francis Douce in 1835. A couple of years later, he also edited two more fragments from the Sneyd and three from the Strassburg manuscript.[109]

## 2.1 The Manuscript tradition of Thomas of Brittany's romance

From their first publication in the first half of the 19th century, the six manuscripts that contain the ten fragments of the Anglo-Norman version of the romance bare the name of either their first owner or of the repository where they were collocated. As emerges from the following list:

- *Carlisle ($C^{arl}$)*: Carlisle, Cumbria Record Office: Holm Cultram Cartulary. Fragment of 154 verses, compiled in third quarter of the 13th century;
- *Cambridge (C)*: Cambridge, University Library, Additional, 2751 (3). Fragment of 52 verses, composed in the end of 13th century;
- *Sneyd 1 ($Sn^1$)* & *Sneyd 2 ($Sn^2$)*: Oxford, Bodleian Library, French d. 16. These fragments count respectively 888 and 825 verses and were both written in end of the 12th or beginning of 13th century;
- *$Torino^1$* & *$Torino^2$*, Archivio dell'Accademia delle Scienze di Torino. Two fragments of 256 verses from the second half of the 13th century;
- *$Strasbuorg^1$*, *$Strasbourg^2$* & *$Strasbourg^3$*, Bibliothèque universitaire. The four 13th century folios were destroyed by a fire in 1870;
- *Douce (D)*: Oxford, Bodleian Library, Douce d.6. Fragment compiled in the

[109] Gambino, 2014, p.12.

middle of the 13th century;

Not only do all these manuscripts date back to the 13th century, but also they present common linguistic features. In fact, the language employed in all of them, except the Cambridge manuscript, is an Anglo-Norman dialect, spoken in England and Western France.[110]

These fragments preserve six relevant, but disconnected episodes:

| **Episode** | **Fragment** | **Verses** |
|---|---|---|
| The journey of Tristan and Iseult to England | Carlisle | 1-154 |
| The garden scene | Cambridge | 1-53 |
| The marriage between Tristan and Ysolt of the White Hands | Sneyd[1] | 1-888 |
| The statues | Torino | 1-256 |
| The Queen's cortège | Strassburg[1] | 1-68 |
| The end of the romance | Douce | 4-1824c |
| | Sneyd[2] | 1055-1823 |
| | Torino[2] | 1-258 |
| | Strassburg[2] | 225-232, 351-424 |
| | Stassburg[3] | 521-590 |
| The longer ending | Sneyd[2] | 1824-1880 |

[110] Gambino, 2014, p.14.

### 2.1.1 The plot

The extant ten fragments belonging to the six manuscripts listed above allow the partial reconstruction of Thomas' version of the tale.

Unfortunately, from the legend compiled by the Anglo-Norman author survived only one episode from its beginning and some others from its last quarter. As a matter of fact, the events that should have occupied the first 3000 verses are missing. There is no fragment regarding Tristan's childhood, his return to his motherland, the meeting with his uncle Marc, his adventures in Ireland, the murder of Morholt, and his ship journey with Ysolt towards Cornwall.

The first episode is narrated in the Carlisle fragment:

I) The 154 verses of the Carlisle fragment immediately follow the episode in which Tristan and Ysolt accidentally drunk the love philtre. Ysolt confesses to Tristan to feel an inexplicable discomfort. Due to her pun, her lover does not comprehend the reason behind her feeling under the weather. The employment of the word *lamer* confuses him to the point that he does not know if he should attribute her malaise to the sea (*la mer*), being seasick (*l'amer*) or their love (*l'aimer*). However, they both declare their feelings and decide to abandon themselves to their passion. Once they docked near Tintagel, King Marc's castle, Ysolt respects her promise and marries Marc. Nevertheless, she begs Branguain for help on her first wedding night. Her servant has to substitute her, so that her spouse does not realise she is not a virgin.

After this episode there should have been around 4000 verses narrating the lovers' adventures and issues encountered because of their immoral love. The next episode of Thomas' legend is in the Cambridge fragment:

II) Tristan and Ysolt withdraw from their social life and hide in the forest, where Frocin, King Marc's dwarf, finds them. He catches them while they have fallen asleep in each other's arms and informs his king. After seeing that

scene, Marc has enough evidence to execute them. He decide to go back to his court to find some more witnesses. Tristan wakes up, hears about his plan and realises the only choice he has to save their lives is to flee. Ysolt grieves his sudden departure and gifts him her ring, a token of her unconditional love.

Between this episode and the incipit of the Sneyd[1] fragments, Gottfried von Strassburg's version and *Sir Tristrem* allow us to reconstruct the events that follow. Tristan heads to Normandy, Germany, Spain and Brittany. Once he arrives there, he meets Kaherdin and Ysolt of the White Hands, respectively the son and daughter of the Duke of Brittany. The hero interprets the meeting with another Ysolt as a sign and decides to marry her, despite always loving the "real" one.

III) Tristan complains about the sorrow caused by the unconditional love he feels for Ysolt. He is destroyed by the thought of her having a legitimate husband. Consequently, he believes the only solution he has is to marry Ysolt of the White hands because of her name and her beauty. However, on their first wedding night he loses the ring gifted to him by his true love and realises he made a mistake. Consequently, he deliberates that he will not consume their marriage and blames his abstinence to a wound. In the meanwhile, Ysolt suffers because she has not heard from Tristan in a long time. Until, one day, Cariado, one of her suitors, informs her about the wedding that occurred in Brittany. She rejects him and once alone, wallows in her misery.

The next episodes are preserved in *Sir Tristrem*. Tristan triumphs over the giant Moldagog and builds the statues of Ysolt and Branguain in a cave near the just conquered castle. The Turin fragment begins when Tristan converses with the statue of his beloved.

IV) Tristan communicates the pain caused by the immense affection that links him to Ysolt with her statue and begs for her pardon. Thomas intervenes to illustrate how everyone suffers: Marc loves Ysolt, but her heart does not

belong to him. Ysolt was forced to marry and live with Marc, a man she does not love. Tristan is unable to be with the woman who he really desires and regrets his hasty marriage. Finally, Ysolt of the White Hands loves her husband, but her feelings are not reciprocated. Her frustration grows to the point that she confesses to have never being touched by Tristan to her brother, Kaherdin.

Kaherdin confronts Tristan on this matter and the latter confesses his true feelings for Ysolt. In order to better explain his situation, he shows his brother-in-law the cave with the statues of his beloved Ysolt and her servant Branguain. Kaherdin is stroked by Branguain's beauty. Consequently, they decide to return to Britain to be with the women they adore.

V) The Strasburg[1] fragments opens when Tristan and Kaherdin arrive in Britain in the same city where Marc is staying. They hide behind an oak to spy on the royal cortège, just to have a glance at the beautiful Ysolt.

In between this episode and the conclusion preserved by five witnesses, Kaherdin meets Branguain and falls in love with her. However, the heroes' stay in Britain is quite short since they have to escape when their enemies find them. One of them is Cariado, who starts the rumour about Kaherdin fleeing to avoid to fight him.

VI) In the conclusion of the romance, Branguain is extremely disappointed by Kaherdin's coward behaviour. Tristan disguises himself as leprous to see his beloved and interact with her. Once again he has to hide, but manages to spend one last night with Ysolt to then return to his legitimate wife in Brittany.

Tristan and Kaherdin realise they need to go back to Cornwall, when they discover that Ysolt is wearing a leather cilice as punishment. Once they arrive, they partake in a tournament, where Kaherdin demonstrate his worth by murdering Cariado, who slandered him. Their stay is quite short; once they return to Brittany the statues of their beloved are their only source of solace.

Tristan is hunting when he meets another knight, Tristan le Naim, who begs for his help, the giant Estult l'Orgillius has kidnapped his lover. Tristan accept the challenge and supports the knight in the fight. Despite winning against the giant, Tristan le Naim dies and our hero is majorly injured. No one manages to cure his wound and Tristan realises that the only one that could save him is Ysolt. He asks Kaherdin to go on a mission to find her and bring her to him. He provides his brother-in-law with precise instructions, he has to raise a white sail if Ysolt is on board of his ship or a black one if she is not. Kaherdin is successful and manages to conduce Ysolt to Brittany. Nevertheless, the jealous Ysolt of the White Hands recognises his ship and when Tristan asks her about the colour of the sail, she lies and declares it is black. The hero calls the name of his beloved for the last three times and dies believing she refused to succour him. When Ysolt lands she is given the sad news and dies at his side.[111]

### 2.1.2 The manuscript descriptions

#### I. The Carlisle fragment ($C^{arl}$): Carlisle, Cumbria Record Office: Holm Cultram Cartulary, ff. 1-286.

The Carlisle fragment consists of 154 octosyllabic verses. It was originally written down on a single leaf, which was cut in half to form two flyleaves and employed in the binging of legal documents. The trimming of the folio caused the loss of both the beginning and the ending of the only extant episode of Thomas' version belonging to the incipit of Tristan's adventures.[112]

Its verses were composed in an Anglo-Norman dialect by an insular hand in

[111] For clarity, I compiled the summary based on the episodes preserved in the ten extant fragments of Thomas of Brittany's romance.

[112] Benskin, Hunt, & Short, 1992, pp.290-291; Gambino, 2014, p.33.

the end of the 13th century. The fragment consisted of a single leaf with two columns of 40 lines on each side. However, because of the bad state of the manuscript not only its beginning and ending are missing, but also six verses of the extant 154 verses (vv.18-19; 35-36; 55-56).[113]

The fragment was damaged when cut in half and employed as a flyleaf, while preserved in the cartulary of the Cistercian Abbey of Holm Cultram, located near Carlisle, England. Nowadays, it has been transferred to the Cumbria Record Office in Carlisle.[114]

## II. The Cambridge fragment (*C*): Cambridge, University Library, Add. 2751 (3)

The witness, which preserves the verses of the Cambridge fragment (C), is a leaf of 52 verses (1-52). It was discovered in the Cambridge University Library "détaché et confondu avec une foule de feuillets de vélin dépareillées" and published by Hersart de la Villemarqué in the *Archives des missions scientifiques et littéraires* in 1856.[115]

The fragment belonged to a parchment codex of the end of the 13th century. It is a single leaf of 13x12cm, whose bottom has been trimmed, causing some damage to at least three of its verses. Despite containing 26 verses on each side, scholars believe the leaf originally had at least 29. Another interesting detail that emerges from the analysis of the language employed is the lack of major Anglo-Norman traits, which are recurrent in all the other fragments of

[113] Gambino, 2014, p.33.

[114] Benskin, Hunt, Short, 1992, p.291.

[115] Vetter, 1882, p.4.

*Tristan* by Thomas.[116]

## III. The Sneyd fragments (*Sn[1] and Sn[2]*): Oxford, Bodleian Library, French d.16 ff. 4-17 (Sneyd[1], ff.4-10, 888 vv.; Sneyd[2], ff.11-17, 825 vv.)

The two Sneyd fragments are among the most ancient witnesses of Thomas' romance. They bear the name of their first noted owner, the Reverend M.W. Sneyd, who purchased them from a notary in Venice in 1836.[117]

They count respectively 888 and 825 verses. Moreover, the verses of Sneyd[2] correspond to the content of the Douce fragment (1047-1818), discussed below.[118] According to some scholars, in between the two Sneyd fragments there is a *lacuna* of around 12 or 14 folios.[119]

It is likely that both fragments belonged to a now lost manuscript that contained the complete story of *Tristan* by Thomas since they were compiled by the same hand.[120] From the analysis of their orthography emerges that these verses are composed in an Anglo-Norman dialect either of the end of 12th or beginning of 13th century. As exemplified by the employment of *u* instead of *o* and the reduction of *ie* to *a*.[121]

Nowadays, the Sneyd witness has 14 leaves in total, formed by seven parchment leaves folded in half. Its verses are organised in two columns of

[116] Bédier, 1905, pp.1-2; Gambino, 2014, p.41.

[117] Bédier, 1905, pp.2-3; Gambino, 2014, p.45.

[118] Vetter, 1882, p.12.

[119] Bédier, 1905, pp 1-2; Gambino, 2014, p.45.

[120] Vetter, 1882, p.12.

[121] Michel, the first publisher of the fragment, states that its date of composition corresponds to the incipit of the 13th century, whereas Vetter attributes it to the end of the 12th. Bédier, 1905, pp.2-4.

32 rhyming couplets and presents some peculiarities such as decorated initials and a miniature representing Ysolt playing the harp (f.10*r*).[122]

## IV. The Turin fragments (*T*[1] *and* *T*[2]): Torino, Archivio dell'Accademia delle Scienze, Mazzo 813, fasc. 43.

These witnesses were propriety of "un egregio e dotto gentiluomo" from Turin, who allowed Francesco Novati to transcribe them in 1886.

A year later Novati, published a modern edition containing the two fragments and a philological and literary introduction.[123] The Turin fragments re-emerged in the second half of the 20th century, when their parchment leaves were discovered in the Archivio dell'Accademia delle Scienza, Turin.[124]

The parchment leaf of 23x16 cm is folded in half forming two folios, in which the text has been organised in two columns of 64 verses. Amounting to a total of 256 verses for each fragment, $T^1$ preserves the verses from 941 to 1096 and $T^2$ from 1256 to 1518. According to Novati, between the two fragments there should have been two folios containing around 840 verses.[125]

The manuscript to which the fragments belonged was probably composed in the second half of the 13th century and could be the copy of a continental Anglo-Norman manuscript. The copyist's handwriting is regular, but quite complex to decipher due to his tightness. Moreover, there is no striking evidence attesting the employment of an Anglo-Norman dialect. According

[122] Gambino, 2014, p.45.

[123] Bédier,1905, p.4; Gambino, 2014, p.81.

[124] Gambino, 2014, p.81.

[125] Bédier,1905, p.5; Gambino, 2014, p.81.

to Novati, the language employed was continental French since despite coping an Anglo-Norman manuscript the scribe was also influenced by his own language. Moreover, it seems likely that the manuscript to which they originally belonged was dismembered in Northern Italy in the 14th century.[126]

## V. The Strasbourg fragments (*Str¹*, *Str²* *and* *Str³*): Strasburg, Bibliothèque du Séminaire protestant.

The three Strasburg fragments were published by François Michel in the first half of the 19th century. Similarly, to the Cambridge and Turin fragments, they were glued on the inner side of the cover of a manuscript preserved in the Strasbourg library. Consequently, when detached from their support they were damaged to the point that the text legibility of some of their verses is compromised. Thanks to Michel's endeavour, they were transcribed and published in 1839, before being destroyed by a fire during the Franco-Prussian war.[127]

According to their modern editor, the Strasbourg witnesses "faisaient partie d'un manuscript […] d'une écriture du XIIIe siècle dispose sur deux colonnes, portant 50 vers chacune." He also added "dans les quatre feuillets que nous avons sous les yeux il y a cinq miniatures," whose craftsmanship is not particularly exquisite. Despite the short length of the text, the dialect employed has been ascribed to the Anglo-Norman branch. [128]

Another peculiarity concerns their content. Only episode of the cortège contained in Str[1] is unique, whereas the passages from the now lost Str[2] and

[126] Bédier,1905, p.6; Gambino, 2014, p.81.

[127] Bédier,1905, pp.6-7; Gambino, 2014, p.95.

[128] Bédier,1905, p.7; Gambino, 2014, p.95

Str$^3$ correspond to some of the verses transmitted through the Douce manuscript (D).[129]

## VI. The Douce fragment (*D*): Oxford, Bodleian Library, Douce d.6, ff. 1-12.

The Douce fragment owes its name to the antique dealer, Francis Douce. The manuscript, now preserved in the Bodleian Library, was composed in England in the second half of the 13$^{th}$ century and bears Anglo-Norman traits.[130]

It is formed by 22 leaves. The first 12 folios (1-12*c*) preserve the conclusion of *Tristan*, immediately followed by the *Folie Oxford* (12*d*-19*a*) and two brief Anglo-Norman texts. The ending of Tristan is organised in two columns of 39 verses each. In spite of the lack of miniatures, there are several red and blue initials.[131]

As mentioned above, the conclusion of the poem has been transmitted by five diverse witnesses for a total of 1880 verses. Nevertheless, the Douce fragment is the most comprehensive, counting 18626 verses (vv.4-1824). On the contrarty, the Turin$^2$ fragment preserves vv.1-258, the Sneyd$^2$ vv.1055-1880, Strasburg$^2$ vv.225-230, 351-424 and Strasburg$^3$ vv. 521-590. Interestingly, the first three verses of the conclusion (vv. 1-3) are missing from the Douce fragment, but present in the Turin$^2$, and vv.1824-1880 are only found in Sneyd$^2$. As a matter of fact, after the verse 1823, the Douce manuscript has an abrupt ending of only three verses. Scholars attempted to

[129] Bédier,1905, p.7; Gambino, 2014, p.95; Vetter, 1882, p.14.

[130] Bédier,1905, p.7; Gambino, 2014, p.99; Vetter, 1882, p.14.

[131] Bédier,1905, pp.7-8; Gambino, 2014, p.99.

explain the authorial choice by suggesting the copyist disliked the unusual *salut,* present in the more comprehensive conclusion of 56 verses of the Sneyd[2], and simply decided to cut it short.[132]

## 2.2 Author

The matter of the identity of the author of *Tristan* is still an open debate. The only aspect that seems to be certain is his name, Thomas, reported by the author himself in his Anglo-Norman tale; it is also present in the Middle English and Middle High German translations inspired by it.[133]

In the extant fragments of the source text of the *version courtoise*, the author's first name is mentioned twice. The first attestation can be found in the Douce fragment (*D*), in which he refers to himself in the third person and claims he is going to demonstrate that Tristan sent Kaherdin to England, not Guvernal (D, vv.870-872).[134] According to the author, his version is the most logical due to the fact that everyone could recognise Triastan's servant at Marc's court and the dying hero needed someone who could persuade Ysolt to leave the palace without raising any suspicions.

The author mentions himself once again in the longer ending of the poem transmitted in the second fragment of Sneyd[2]. In the epilogue of the romance, Thomas addresses himself to his audience and announces the end of his work by biding lovers and dreamers farewell. In his *autonominatio*, he reminds his readers that his main objective was to provide a model of the tale, which he narrated respecting the previous traditions.[135]

[132] Bédier,1905, pp.8-9; Gambino, 2014, p.99; Vetter, 1882, p.4.

[133] Bédier, 1905, pp.37-38; Gambino, 2014, pp.18-19.

[134] Gambino, 2014, pp.135-136.

[135] Gambino, 2014, pp.175-177.

Moreover, the Douce fragment seems to provide another relevant detail to establish the provenance of Thomas. The author is likely to have belonged to the Anglo-Norman cultural circle since he dedicated some words to praise London. He enriches his *descriptio loci* by implementing to it some details that perfectly reflect the status of London in the 13th century. Moreover, it does not seem plausible that he was from continental France since he defines Normandy as *terre estrange*. [136]

Thomas was also believed to be the author of the Anglo-Norman poem by the translators who reworked his version of the legend and transformed it to suite the Middle English and Middle High German audience. In fact, both *Sir Tristrem*'s author and Gottfried von Strasburg allude to his name in their verses.

In the specific case of *Sir Tristrem,* the mention of a certain Tomas in various stanzas of the romance opened a rather complex debate on his identity. Some critics assume he is the main narrator of the tale since he quotes himself multiple times along the narration.[137] Nonetheless, it appears impossible to establish whether the writer who composed *Sir Tristrem* is providing the audience his own name or the name of the Norman author, Thomas of Brittany, from which he found inspiration to compile his Middle English version of *Tristan*.[138]

According to Sir Walter Scott, the first modern editor of the Middle English romance, Thomas is the author of the *Sir Tristrem*. The English scholar

[136] Gambino, 2014, pp.156-157; 162.

[137] Gambino, 2014, pp.90-91; 234-235.

[138] Ackerman, 1959, pp.514-516.

believes he employed an expedient, when he affirms to have encountered a certain Tomas in Erceldoune, who informed him of the tale in detail.[139] As a matter of fact, he identifies Tomas with Thomas of Erceldoune, also known as The Rhymer. A poet and clairvoyant, who resided in Erceldoune, town situated in the County of Berwick, Scotland.[140] Scott considers The Rhymer the first Scottish poet who composed *Sir Tristrem,* his only work, around 1250.[141] A romance that was not a product of his own imagination, but rather a retelling of "a much higher antiquity."[142] However, most scholars have nowadays dismissed this position. Instead, they interpret the direct allusion to this name as authorship evidence.[143]

The name of Thomas is also mentioned twice in the version by Gottfried von Strassburg. The German author explains he found inspiration from Thomas von Britanje's version of the story since this expert author was the only one who narrated it properly. Consequently, Gottfried followed the steps of a master of the art of narrative to produce his own version, in which he was concerned with the rightful investigation of the source and the proper narration of events.[144]

Another interesting aspect is revealed through the words that Thomas himself employs to discuss about love. From the analysis of multiple verses emerges that the matter of love seems completely foreign to him. He avoids at all costs expressing his own judgment on the secular world of feelings. In

[139] Gambino, 2014, pp.66-67.

[140] Scott, 1804, pp.iv-v.

[141] Scott, 1804, pp.vii-ix.

[142] Scott, 1804, p.xxii.

[143] Crane, 1986, pp.188-192; Gambino, 2014, p.19).

[144] Gambino, 2014, p.19; Stevens, Wisbey, 1990, pp.86-88.

fact, on multiple occasions, the author affirms his incapability of judging the human spirit and its sudden changes. He goes as further to declare that his inability to express his opinion on these situations derives from not having experienced them.[145] Consequently, it has been estimated that he could have been a cleric, in spite of the lack of evidence supporting this theory.[146]

Moreover, many scholars suggest Thomas composed Tristan for the Angevin court, more specifically in honour of Henry II and his wife Eleanor of Aquitaine. Nonetheless, the pin pointed similarities between some events of the romance and the Anglo-Norman court or the praise of London are not substantial evidence to attest the direct connection of the author with the courtly environment. The vast reign of the Angevin sovereigns, included England, Normandy, Anjou, Maine, Touraine, Aquitaine, Poitou, and Auvergne, which deeply interconnected France and England. The vastness of the kingdom and the interest on the continental territories prevented the King from focusing on England, in spite of living there for half of his reign. In addition, the low consideration in which English culture was held, seem to discredit Thomas' alleged literary patronage at their court. Nevertheless, Crane suggests the likelihood that Thomas drew some inspiration from the texts complied by courtly Norman poets.[147]

### 2.3 Date of composition

Another uncertain aspect regarding the romance of Thomas of Brittany is its date of composition. This is an issue discussed by multiple scholars, which attempted to establish an *ante* and *post quem* time limit to the Anglo-Norman

[145] Gambino, 2014, pp.57, 87, 89,154-155.

[146] Bédier, 1905, pp.43-45; Gambino, 2014, p.19; Stevens, & Wisbey, 1990, p.88.

[147] Crane, 1986, pp.134-146, Gambino, 2014, pp.19-20.

redaction based on its translations, manuscripts and content.

The Anglo-Norman *Tristan and Ysolt* represents the first written witness of the unconditional love story, which has been ascribed to the so-called *version courtoise* of the Tristan cycle. Consequently, its compilation has to precede the Middle High German rehash of Gottfried von Stassburg produced in 1210 and Friar Robert's Old Norse saga, 1226. Moreover, its manuscript tradition corroborates this theory due to palaeographic evidence attesting the Sneyd fragments were compiled at either the very end of the 12th century or the beginning of the 13th.[148]

Moreover, Wace's *Roman de Brut* and Chrétien de Troyes' *Cligès* help in the process of establishing the period in which the Anglo-Norman romance was compiled.

On the one hand, the text composed by Wace around 1155 seem to constitute a source of inspiration for Thomas. The most evident similarity is provided by the passage narrating about the fight between King Arthur and Riton, the proud giant, who collected the beards of kings he killed to make a coat out of them. This giant appeared for the first time in Wace's work and later in various Arthurian romances, including Thomas'.[149] The main difference in the Anglo-Norman version is his name, modified to Orguillus, to highlight his arrogance. Moreover, Thomas retelling of Wace's episode is enriched by a number of details and is longer than the original.

[148] Gambino, 2014, p.20.

[149] Bédier, 1905, pp.50-55; Gambino, 2014, pp.20-22; Golther, 1907, pp.164-165.

***Roman de Brut***

**(vv.11960-95)**

*Riton* avoit *tant roi conquis*
*et venqu et ocis et pris,*
*de lor barbes q'ot escorcies*
*ot unes piax* aparillies;
piax en ot fait à afubler,
mult devoit on Riton doter.
Par grant *orgoil* et *par fierté,*
avoit al *roi Artus mandé*
que la siue *barbe escorçast*
et *bonement* li envoiast;
Et si com il *plus fors* estoit,
et il plus des altres valoit,
*la soie barbe onoerroit,*
et *à ses piax orlé* feroit.
Et se Artus contredisoit
ce que Riton li requerroit,
cors à cors ensamble venissent,
et sol à sol se *combatissent*;
et li quels qui Tautre *ociroit*
ou qui vif *vaincre* le poroit,
*la barbe eust,* preist les piax,
*et feist un orle et tassiax*.
*Artus à lui se conbati*
el mont d'Araive si 'l venqui;
*les piax et la barbe escorça ,*
onques puis Artus ne rova
gaiant qui fust d'itel valor
ne dont il eust tel paor,
Mais icist mult *plus fort* estoit ,
et mult graingnor vigor avoit

***Tristan and Ysolt***

**(Sn[1] vv.662-728)**

La u il ocist le jaiant,
Le nevod a *l'Orguillos Grant,*
Ki d'Africhë ala *requere*
*Princes e rois de tere en tere.*
*Orguillus ert hardi e pruz,*
Si se cumbati a trestuz;
Plusurs *afola* e *ocist*
E les *barbes des mentons prist*;
Une pels fist de barbes granz,
Hahuges e bien traïnanz.
Parler oï del *rei Artur*
Ki en tere out si grant honur
*Tel hardment et tel valur,*
Vencu ne fut unc en estur:
A plusurs combatu s'esteit
E trestuz vencu les aveit.
Qant li jaiant icest oï,
*Mande lui cum a sun ami*
Qu'aveit *unes noveles pels,*
Mais *urle i failli e tassels,*
De barbes as reis, as baruns,
De princes d'altres regïuns,
Qu'en bataillë aveit conquis
U par force *en estur ocis,*
E fait en ad tel garnement
Cum de barbes a reïs apent,
Mais quë urlë encore i falt;
E pur ço qu'il est le plus halt,
Reis de la tere e de l'onur,
A lui a mandé pur s'amur
Qu'il face *la sue escorcer*

que onques Riton n'en ost jor,
quant il fust de graingnor vigor,
et plus oribles et plus laiz,
plus hisdos et plus contrefaiz,
au jor que *Artur le' conquist*
el mont St Michel oil *I'ocist*. [150]

*Pur haltesce a lui emveier*,
Car si grant honur li fera,
Que sur les autres la metra.
Issi cum il est reis haltens
E sur les altres sovereins,
Si volt il sa barbe eshalcer,
Si pur lui la volt escorcer;
Tuit desus la metra as pels,
Si em fra urlë e tassels;
E s'il emveier ne la volt,
Fera de lui que faire solt:
*Les pels vers sa barbe metrat,*
*Cuntre lui se combaterat,*
E *qui veintre puit la bataille,*
Ambeduis les ait dunc sanz faille.
Quant Artus oït icest dire,
El cuer en out dolur e ire.
Al jaiant dunc cuntremandat
Quë enceis se combaterat

[150] The text of the *Roman de Brut* by Wace was transcribed in Gambino's edition of Tristan. Gambino, 2014, p.21.

The following translation is based on Light's translated edition of *Roman de Brut.* Wace, 1999, pp.127-128. **Translation**: This Riton in his day made war upon diverse kings. Of these some were slain in battle, and others remained captive in his hand. Alive or dead, Riton used them despitefully; for it was his wont to shave the beards of these kings, and there with a cloak of furs that he wore, very rich. Vainglorious beyond measure was Riton of his broidered cloak. Now by reason of folly and lightness, Riton sent messages to Arthur, bidding him shave his beard, and commend it forthwith to the giant, in all good will. Since Arthur was a mightier lord and a more virtuous prince than his fellows were, Riton made covenant to prefer his beard before theirs, and hold it in honour as the most silken fringe of his mantle. Should Arthur refuse to grant Riton the trophy, then nought was there to do, but that body to body they must fight out their quarrel, in single combat, alone. He who might slay his adversary, or force him to own himself vanquished, should have the beard for his guerdon, together with the mantle of furs, fringes and garniture and all. Arthur accorded with the giant that this should be so. They met in battle on a high place, called Mount Aravius, in the Far East, and there the king slew Riton with the sword, spoiling him of that rich garment of furs, with its border of dead kings' beards. Therefore, said Arthur that never since that day had he striven with so perilous a giant, nor with one of whom he was so sorely frighten. Nevertheless, Dinabuc was bigger and mightier than was Riton, even in the prime of his youth and strength. For a monster, more loathly and horrible man, than the devil Arthur killed himself that day, in Mont St. Michel, over against the sea, never slew a giant so hideous and misshapen.

Que de sa barbe seit rendant
Pur crime cume recreant.
E qant li jaianz cest oï
Que li reis si li respondi,
Molt forment li vint dunc requere
Tresquë as marches de sa tere
*Pur cumbatrë encontre lui*.
Ensemble vindrent puis andui
E la barbë e les pels mistrent.
Par grant irrur puis se requistrent.
Dure bataille, fort estur
Demenerent trestuit le jor.
Al *demain Artur le vencui*,
Les pels, la teste li toli.
Par proeise, par hardement
Le conquist issi faitement.[151]

[151] The verses of the Sneyd[1] fragment are transcribed in Gambino's edition. Gambino, 2014, pp.71-74. I personally translated the Anglo-Norman verses into modern English.

**Translation**: She ignores that he is in Brittany, and still believes him in Spain, where he killed the giant, the nephew of the Great Proud who came from Africa to challenge to princes and kings from country to country. The Proud was reckless and valiant, and fought them all; he killed or injured many men and tore their beards from their chins. He made a large coat of these beards, very wide with a train dragging on the ground. He had heard of King Arthur whose kingdom was so powerful and whose courage and valour were such that he proved to be invincible: he had fought many fights without ever being defeated. When the giant learned about him, he sent Arthur a friendly message in which he bragged to him about his brand new coat, which was missing the hem and the buttons, made with the beards of kings, princes and barons of many countries; whom he surpassed in battle and assassinated. He made a coat worthy of these royal beards that only lacked the hem. Because Arthur was the greatest of all and reigned over a very vast empire: he kindly asked him to have his chin shaved and to send him his beard for his glory; he himself agreed to honour him by putting Arthur's beard above the others. Since he was a prestigious king, superior to all he wanted to glorify his beard, if he gave it to him. He would have put it on top of the coat to make its hem and buttons; but if he refused to send it to him, he was going to suffer the fate of the others: he bet his mantle for his beard, so that the winner will win the beard and coat. Hearing this message, Arthur felt a violent fury. He replied to the giant that he accepted the fight and would not give up his beard, for that would be an act of terrible cowardice. When the giant heard his message, he came to challenge him with extreme arrogance at the very borders of his kingdom to challenge him in a duel. They then clashed; the beard and the coat were at stake. The struggle was extraordinarily violent. They fought with rage all day. The next day, Arthur was victorious. He took his coat and his head. His prowess and courage earned him this brilliant victory.

On the other hand, *Cligès*, composed by Chrètien de Troyes around 1176-77, echoes a crucial episode of Thomas' romance. According to scholars, this resemblance can provide evidence that proves that the Anglo-Norman text was compiled before *Cligès*. In fact, the leading characters use the same *jeu de mots* to describe the unsettling feeling of falling in love. It is very likely that Ysolt's pun, involving the words *mer*, *amer* e *lamer*, has inspired the renowned French author who employed it in the same manner as in the Carlisle fragment. Consequently, Chrétien de Troyes mimicking one of the most relevant episodes of Tristan and Ysolt's love story signifies that he was familiar with Thomas' work.[152]

| ***Cligès*** | **Tristan et Ysolt** |
|---|---|
| **(vv. 541–63)** | **(vv. 39–58)** |
| La reïne garde s'an prant | Si vus ne fussez, ja ne fusse, |
| Et voit l'un et l'autre sovant | Ne de *l'amer* rien ne seüsse. |
| Descoler et anpalir | Merveille est k'om *la mer* ne het |
| Et sopirer et tressaillir | Que si *amer* mal en *mer* set, |
| Mes ne set por coi il le font | Et que l'anguisse est si *amere*! |
| Fors que por *la mer* ou il sont. | Si je une foiz fors en ere, |
| Espoir bien s'an aparceüst | Ja n'enteroie, ce quit." |
| Se *la mers* ne la deceüst. | Tristan ad noté chescun dit, |
| Mes *la mers* l'angingne et deçoit | Mes ele l'ad issi forseveé |
| Si qu'an *la mer l'amor* ne voit, | Par '*l'amer*' que ele ad tant changee |
| Qu'an *la mer* sont, et *d'amer* vient, | Que ne set si cele dolur |
| Et s'est *amers* li *max* ques tient. | Ad de *la mer* ou de *l'amur*, |
| Et de ces trois ne set blasmer | Ou s'ele dit *'amer'* de '*la mer'* |
| La reïne fors que *la mer*, | Ou pur '*l'amur'* dïet *'amer.'* |
| Car li dui le tierz li ancusent, | Pur la dotance qu'il sent, |
| Et par le tierz li dui s'escusent, | Demande si la..l. prent |

[152] Bédier, 1905, pp.50-55; Gambino, 2014, pp.20-22; Golther,1907, pp.164-165; Perrotta, 2016, pp.164-188).

Qui del forfet sont antechié.
Sovant conpere autrui pechié
Tex qui n'i a corpes ne tort.
Einsi la reïne molt fort
*La mer* ancorpe et si la blasme;
Mes a tort li met sus le blasme ,
Car *la mers* n'i a rien forfet.[153]

Ou si ja grante ou s'el s.st
.....
Par tant ql voir le..te,
Car deus mal i put l'en sentir,
L'un d'*amer*, l'autre de puïr."[154]

Despite the fact that some scholars, such as Rottinger and Loth, believe Thomas' work was compiled in the first half of the 12th century due to linguistic and stylistic choices, the most plausible period of compilation can be established thanks to the two works cited above.[155] Thanks to the similarities encountered among Tristan by Thomas, Wace and Chrétien de Troyes poems is seems likely to postulate that his Anglo-Norman work was composed between 1155 and 1170.[156] According to Gambino, some modern stylistic elements corroborate the plausibility of this theory. The Italian scholar identifies features like the recurrent employment of monologues, the

[153] The following translation is based on Gardiner's translated edition of *Cligès.* Gardiner, 1966, pp.15-16. **Translation:** The queen watches them, and sees the one and the other often lose colour and grow pale, and sigh and shudder; but she knows not why they do it, unless it be on account of the sea on which they are sailing. Perhaps, indeed, she would have perceived it if the sea had not mislead her; but it is the sea which baffles and deceives her, so that amid the seasickness she sees not the heart-sickness. For they are at the sea, and heart-sickness is the cause of their plight, and heart-bitterness is the cause of the malady that grips them; but of these the queen can only blame the sea; for heart-sickness and heart-bitterness lay the blame on the seasickness, and because of the third the two who are guilty get off scot-free. He who is guiltless of fault or wrong often pays dear for the sea and blames it; but wrongly is the blame laid on the sea, for the sea has done therein no wrong.

[154] The verses of the Carlisle fragment are transcribed from Gambino's edition. Gambino, 2014, pp.35-6. I personally translated the Anglo-Norman verses into modern English. **Translation:** If you were not here, I would not ever have been and I would not have known anything about lamer (bitterness/love). It is unusual that people do not hate the sea when they know that at sea there is such bitter ill and that its anguish is so bitter! If I can ever get out of it, I'll never go back in, I think." Tristan has listened to every phrase, but she confused him by playing with "lamer", which she has rung such changes that he does not know if that pain she had was from the sea or from love, or if she was saying "bitter" about "the sea" or is saying "love" is "bitter."

[155] Bédier, 1905, pp.45-55.

[156] Bédier, 1905, pp.55; Gambino, 2014, pp.20-22; Golther, 1907, pp.164-165.

intense dialogues and the *entrelacement* of diverse temporal and spatial references, as evidence attesting that Thomas poem was compiled in the second half of the 12th century.

## 2.4 Language

Most scholars identify Thomas' romance as an Anglo-Norman composition plausibly compiled in England in the second half of the 12th century. The three chief factors that lead to this assumption are the language, the style of the fragments and some statements made by the author himself. Each fragments bears phonetic and linguistic traits that can be ascribed to the Anglo-Norman dialect, with only one exception, the Cambridge fragment. According to Bédier, two of the most relevant phenomena attesting the employment of the Anglo-Norman dialect: the recurrent elision of the unstressed *e* in hiatus position and the rhymes in which the declension is not compulsory.[157] In addition, Paris highlights that the "embarrassé et souvent obscur" style employed, is typical of insular romances where intimate feelings are explored.[158] As mentioned in a previous paragraph, the poet's own words attest his familiarity with England. His praise of London, described as a lively trading centre, and his familiarity with the language corroborate the hypothesis that Thomas was actually an insular writer who considered continental France a *terre estrange*.[159]

[157] Bédier, 1905, p.39.
[158] Paris, 1900, p.158.
[159] Crane, 1986, p. 146.

# Chapter 3

## *Sir Tristrem*
## In the context of the Auchinleck Manuscript

The romance of *Sir Tristrem,* composed by an unknown author late in the 13th century or at the beginning of the 14th century, preserves in its verses the earliest and only Middle English witness of the intricate love story of Tristrem and Ysonde.[160]

Most scholars agree in ascribing this text to the *courtoise* strand of the Tristan cycle. Consequently, it is believed that *Sir Tristrem* directly derives from the Anglo-Norman poem of Thomas of Brittany.[161]

Nevertheless, at times, the fragmentary nature of Thomas' narrative, which presents several *lacunae*, can prevent a straightforward comparison between the two. In fact, scholars estimate that almost 10.000 verses are missing from the Anglo-Norman source texts and that its reconstruction is solely possible thanks to the Middle English, Middle High German and Scandinavian adaptations.[162]

What also has been highlighted by several scholars is the fact that the Middle English version has been "garbled and condensed," alluding to the concise narration and the inferiority of *Sir Tristrem* compared to its

[160] Lupack, 1994, p.144; Putter, Jefferson, & Minkova, 2014, p.73.

[161] Lupack, 1994, p.144; Fennell, 2000, p. 48; Rumble, 1959, p.221; Putter, Jefferson, & Minkova, 2014, p.73; Frappier, 1963, p.259.

[162] Gambino, 2014, p.11; Lupack, 1994, p.144.

twelfth-century Norman source text.[163] Bédier negatively refers to its "extrême brièveté" alluding to the fact that the condensation of the events and soliloquies, present in Thomas' version, impoverished *Sir Tristrem*.[164]

Rumble, on the contrary, disagrees with the French scholar. According to him, the changes made in the Middle English poem aimed at rationalizing and moralizing both characters and events to better suit the taste of the English audience.[165] Consequently, this romance could be seen as a document which targets a public who could appreciate "the length and thematic presented simply and directly."[166]

Despite these considerations, the relevance of *Sir Tristrem* is indisputable, especially thanks to its first modern editor, Walter Scott, who edited the text and published it in 1804. Another interesting aspect is represented by its collocation. *Sir Tristrem* is preserved in *codex unicus* in one of the most illustrious anthologies of Middle English literature: the Auchinleck manuscript.

### 3.1 The Auchinleck Manuscript

*Sir Tristrem* was transmitted in "the beautifully written and illuminated parchment"[167] of the Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Adv[ocates'] MS. 192.1, manuscript most commonly known as Auchinleck Manuscript. Name deriving from its donor, Lord Auchinleck, who ceded it to the Advocates Library of Edinburgh in 1744.[168]

[163] Lupack, 1994, p.144; Rumble, 1959, p.221); Schoepperle, 1913, p.68.

[164] Bédier, 1905, p.88.

[165] Rumble, 1959, pp. 224-228.

[166] Pickford, 1973, p. 228.

[167] Schofield, 1971, p.14.

[168] Lupack, 1994, pp.143-144; Fennell, 2000, p.48; Bliss, 1951, p.652, Fein, 2014, pp.3-4.

This parchment codex was probably produced in or in the proximity of London in the first half of the 14th century, most likely during the decade corresponding to 1330-1340.[169]

The good quality vellum preserves 44 texts, written on 334 leaves measuring 19x25cm.[170] Moreover, the codex is divided into gatherings, for a total of 46 booklets surviving. The majority of the texts are organised in double columns of 44 lines each, an extremely helpful detail for reconstruction purposes.[171]

Even though the manuscript is in good conditions, signs of vandalism and mutilation are displayed throughout its leaves. As indicated by the missing gatherings, cut out folios and especially miniatures. In fact, at least 14 leaves have been extracted, as indicated by the number of stubs found in it. Moreover, 10 extra folios have been detached and are currently preserved in different university libraries. Four folios are in Edinburgh University, four more in St Andrews and the remaining two at the University of London.[172]

Originally, miniatures preceded each text contained in the Auchinleck manuscript, with the exception of items 2, 4 and 6. However, they were the most damaged since the majority has been excised, producing a

[169] Loomis, 1942, pp.595-627; Bliss, 1942, p.652, Pearsall& Cunningham, 1977, pp.viii-xvi.

[170] Wiggins, the Auchinleck manuscript: Physical make-up (2003). The number of folios changes according to the scholar. Shonk, Wiggins, Pearsall and Cunningham, Fennell set its number to 331, whereas Loomis and Bliss to 334. Shonk, 1981, p.5, Wiggins, The Auchinleck manuscript: Physical make-up (2003), Pearsall & Cunningham, 1977, p.xi, Fennell, 2000, p.48, Loomis, 1942, p.605, Bliss, 1951, p.656.

[171] Shonk, 1985, pp.72, 77; Fennell, 2000, p.49; Wiggins, the Auchinleck manuscript: Physical make-up (2003).

[172] Wiggins, The Auchinleck manuscript: Physical make-up (2003), Lupack, 1994, p.144; Pearsall & Cunningham, 1977, p.xi; Fein, 2014, p. 4.

significant series of lacunae, in the incipit and closure of most texts. As a matter of fact, only four miniatures are still inside the leaves of what was once a quite visually appealing codex.[173]

As it stands, the manuscript contains 44 distinct texts of different lengths and ranging from different genres. The romances are the most relevant ones since the collection preserved in the Auchinleck Manuscript is quite remarkable.

As a matter of fact, out of the 44 extant texts, 18 are romances amounting to around 75% of the manuscript. Not only did the romances transmit stories of English, French, Arthurian and antiquity heroes, but also eight of them are *codex unicus* and the remaining are all preserved in their most ancient copy, excluding *Floris and Blancheflour*.[174]

Consequently, it seems evident that the Auchinleck manuscript is unique and relevant for a series of factors.

Firstly, the codex appears to have been quite renowned even in the centuries that immediately followed its production, as attested by multiple allusions that mention it. For instance, the *Chronicle* of Robert Mannyng or the *Middle English Mirror*.[175]

Secondly, most scholars regard it as the first survived example of an English book production, which was both secular and had commercial purposes.[176]

[173] Wiggins, the Auchinleck manuscript: Physical make-up (2003), CIPOLLA (2014: 43).

[174] Pearsall & Cunningham, 1977: viii.

[175] Putter, Jefferson, & Minkova, 2014, p.73.

[176] Wiggins, The Auchinleck manuscript: Physical make-up (2003), Loomis, 1942, p.597, Shonk, 1985, p. 89.

Thirdly, this manuscript is the largest collection of Middle English verse texts and does not contain texts that employ French or Latin. In addition, in spite of the various themes discussed, there is no mention to recipes, remedies or prognostications, that one expects to find in miscellaneous codex.[177]

Consequently, as perfectly summarised by Pearsall, the manuscript distinguishes itself due to "its early date, […] the range, variety and intrinsic interest of its contents, and in the evidence it provides for English poetry, of book-production and readership in the period before Chaucer."[178]

### 3.1.1 Date

The Auchinleck manuscript is likely to have been composed in the first half of the 14th century between 1331 and 1340, as proved by palaeographical evidence, the style of its extant illuminations and some internal references.[179]

As a matter of fact, the manuscript itself reveals interesting pieces of evidence regarding its dating. The most relevant historical events mentioned are contained in Item 40. According to Scott, the first editor of *Sir Tristrem*, the anonymous *Short English Metrical Chronicle* (Item 40) results to be extremely helpful to establish the period of the manuscript. In this text, the death of King Edward II is mentioned and a prayer was dedicated to his son, the future Edward III, whose coronation occurred in 1327.[180]

[177] Wiggins, The Auchinleck manuscript: Importance (2003).

[178] Pearsall & Cunningham, 1977, p.viii.

[179] Wiggins, the Auchinleck manuscript: Physical make-up (2003).

[180] Wiggins, the Auchinleck manuscript: Physical make-up (2003), Turville-Petre, 1996, p.111.

Despite the plausibility of this date, Turville-Petre noticed another relevant detail transmitted by the chronicle: the siege of Nottingham Castle, which occurred in October 1330. Consequently, it is more plausible that the manuscript started being composed after 1327. More precisely, in the decade corresponding to 1330-1340.

### 3.1.2 Provenance

Despite the lack of direct evidence, the place of production of the Auchinleck Manuscript is generally identified with London. In the 14th century, this city was becoming "an economic, social and literary centre."[181] Consequently, it is highly probable that a secular manuscript, like the Auchinleck, was manufactured there. This hypothesis that seems to be confirmed, due to both the dialect employed by its scribes and the collaborative nature of its production.[182]

Loomis firstly promoted the theory that links the provenance of the Auchinleck Manuscript to a London bookshop. According to the scholar, this manuscript could only have been produced in a secularised scriptorium where a team of professional scribes composed and translated texts from different traditions.[183]

Despite the absence of records to prove that the Auchinleck manuscript was actually produced in London, several scholars have corroborated this theory. In fact, it is believed that even its owner resided in the city.[184]

For instance, Hanna has also supported the London based scriptorium theory. In his work, he highlights the presence of a distinctive "Northern

[181] Tout in Loomis, 1942, p.601.

[182] Wiggins, the Auchinleck manuscript: History and owners (2003).

[183] Loomis, 1942, pp.595-627.

[184] Hanna, 2005, p.126.

influence", which was enriched by the influx of the cosmopolitan environment of London. Therefore, the scholar states that this manuscript should be considered "as a self-conscious heralding of a new centre."[185]

The 'bookshop' theory was even accepted by Robinson. Nevertheless, she contested to Loomis the fact that the Auchinleck manuscript was a unitary project from the beginning. She speculated that the codex was initially purchased in gatherings and later bound together into what we know now as a volume.[186]

However, Shonk called this position into question. By studying the titles, the formant of the pages, the organisation of the manuscript and its catchwords, he concluded that the Auchinleck manuscript was the result of a well-thought editorial and commercial project co-ordinated by one of its scribes.[187]

Wiggins, who believes it was a commercial project, also sustained the London-based production of this expensive manuscript. In addition, he concludes that the attention to details could suggest a specific purchaser commissioned it.[188]

Despite not having identified this individual, Pearsall and Cunnigham assume he was "a private reader", probably someone who aspired to enhance their social status, such as a "wealthy merchant." In addition, in their introduction to the manuscript, they support their colleagues' opinion, which ascribes this production to a lay bookshop or

[185] Hanna, 2005, pp.126, 130.

[186] Robinson, 1972, p.120.

[187] Shonk, 1985, pp.90-91; Shonk, 1981, p.1.

[188] Wiggins, the Auchinleck manuscript: History and owners (2003).

scriptorium.[189]

### 3.1.3 The scribes

Most scholars recognise the Auchinleck manuscript is a collaborative project and are aware that several scribes worked as a team to produce it. In fact, it seems that the codex was copied by a team of scribes who co-operated to complete this business-related project. Because of its nature and redaction, it is unlikely that it was a monastic production, as proposed by Scott.[190] Consequently, it is assumed that it was commercial project probably addressed to a lay audience and purchaser.

The exact number of scribes varies depending on the scholars. In the first modern edition of *Sir Tristrem*, Scott believed the manuscript was compiled by "a distinct and beautiful hand."[191] Wiggins, Pearsall and Cunningham, and Bliss believe the codex resulted from the collaboration of six scribes, whereas Robinson and Hanna promote the theory that sets their number to five. They justify their position by affirming the various similarities found in the handwritings of Scribe 1 and Scribe 6 prove that they were the same person. [192]

Moreover, both the ink and the ruling system result consistent throughout the codex. Every scribe employed a similar shade of brown ink to copy its texts and rule the leaves to be more precise. The ruling was made with ink and by each scribe who was the composer of the quire. Therefore, if one of the copyists substituted the other who previously ruled the booklet,

[189] Pearsall & Cunningham, 1977, pp.vii-viii.

[190] Scott, 1804, p.cviii.

[191] Scott, 1804, p.cvii.

[192] Fein, 2014, p.5, Wiggins, the Auchinleck manuscript: Physical make-up (2003), Pearsall & Cunningham, 1977, p.xv, Bliss, 1951, pp.652-654), Robinson, 1972, pp.128-131, Hanna, 2000, pp. 92, 95.

he needed to adapt his style of handwriting to the pre-established folio layout. Except for these similarities, the anonymous copyists' handwritings present distinctive features.[193]

Scribe 1 is generally agreed to be the master who compiled and edited the texts since he copied about 70% of the manuscript. Moreover, he is likely to have "assumed many of the 'editorial' duties for the book" and been "last person we know of to have worked on the book before it was bound."[194] Consequently, he might have been the owner of a shop in direct contact with the purchaser of the manuscript.[195]

Scribe 2's handwriting was described by Bliss as "formal, almost liturgical", whose most unique feature was the serpentine vertical of IP and the preferred wide ruling system.[196]

Scribe 3's book-hand was studied in two different perspectives. On one hand, it is described as an early form of Anglicana Formata. On the other, Bliss points out the likelihood of a Chancery influence, proved by "the length of f, r and long s."[197] These details could reveal that this copyist had both a Chancery background and that he may have become part of this project as a secondary occupation. Consequently, this perspective seems to rule out the possibility that the Auchinleck Manuscript was produced in a monastic environment, as supported by Scott.

Scribe 4 is of little importance since he only wrote article 21, *A List of*

[193] Wiggins, the Auchinleck manuscript: Physical make-up (2003).

[194] Shonk, 1985, p.87.

[195] Shonk, 1991, p.108, Shonk, 1985, p.88.

[196] Bliss, 1951, pp.657-658.

[197] Bliss, 1951, p. 653, Shonk, 1985, p.74.

*Names of Norman Barons*.

Scribe 5's handwriting proves the most intricate and difficult to read and in Bliss' words is "very ugly and disjointed."[198]

Scribe 6 employs an overall very similar style to Scribe 1. Nevertheless, diverse orthography systems and styles of single letters distinguish them and proves that each has his own identity.

Another relevant element mentioned by Shonk when attributing the different identities of each book-hand is the employment of catchwords. Out of the 37 found in the codex, 36 were written by Scribe 1 and one from Scribe 4.[199] Catchwords were usually written on lower right-hand corner of the verso side of the last folio of each quire, another proof that this was a collaborative project. In fact, these words linked Scribe 1's booklets to the others and could prove that he was both the co-ordinator and the final editor of the project.[200]

### 3.1.4 Signatures and the first attested owner: Lord Auchinleck

Not only the identity of the commissioner has never been unveiled, but also those of the several names written on its margins and blank spaces.[201]

For instance, there are five signatures on the f.183r, which date back to the 14th and 15th centuries, corresponding to:

- William Barnes
- Richard Drow (?)

[198] Bliss, 1951, p.653.

[199] Shonk, 1985, p.84, Wiggins, the Auchinleck manuscript: Physical make-up (2003).

[200] Shonk, 1985, p.73, Wiggins, the Auchinleck manuscript: Physical make-up (2003).

[201] Wiggins, the Auchinleck manuscript: History and owners (2003).

- William Dro...
- Anthony Elcocke
- John Ellcocke

In addition, in the leaf f.107r eight names, all belonging to the Browne family, were copied by the same hand:

- Mr Thomas Browne
- Mrs Isabell Browne
- Katherin Browne
- Eistre Browne
- Elizabeth Browne
- William Browne
- Walter Browne
- Thomas Browne

Other names were added in the post-medieval period.[202] However, neither the identity of the commissioner, nor the one of these names have been discovered. There is only one exception corresponding to the most common name employed to identify the manuscript.

The Auchinleck Manuscript was named after Alexander Boswell of Auchinleck, its first attested owner. Lord Auchinleck came into possession of this volume when he managed to save it from the hands of "a professor of Aberdeen University who had been tearing out leaves to make covers for notebooks."[203] Afterwards, he donated it to the Advocates' Library in Edinburgh, where it remained until 1925, when it

[202] Wiggins, the Auchinleck manuscript: History and owners (2003).
[203] Johnston, 1964, p.179; Fennell, 2000, p.48.

was relocated in the National Library of Scotland.[204]

### 3.1.5 The content of the Auchinleck manuscript

This next paragraph aims at providing the contextualization of *Sir Tristrem* inside the manuscript, which preserves the only extant copy of the Middle English romance.

I do believe it is necessary to provide the full list of the texts present in the codex both to understand the editorial aims of its compilers and to investigate *Sir Tristrem*'s background.

The following numbered list is based on Wiggings' digital facsimile of the manuscript and displays the 44 items still present in the codex.[205] It is necessary to point out that neither the numeration nor the list take into account the lost items.

1 The Legend of Pope Gregory (ff.1r-6v)

f.6Ar / f.6Av (thin stub)

2 The King of Tars (ff.7ra-13vb)

3 The Life of Adam and Eve (E ff.1ra-2vb; ff.14ra-16rb)

4 Seynt Mergrete (ff.16rb-21ra)

5 Seynt Katerine (ff.21ra-24vb)

6 St Patrick's Purgatory (ff.25ra-31vb)

7 þe Desputisoun Bitven þe Bodi and þe Soule (ff.31vb-35ra stub)

8 The Harrowing of Hell (ff.?35rb-?37rb or 37va stub)

9 The Clerk who would see the Virgin (ff.?37rb or 37va stub-38vb)

10 Speculum Gy de Warewyke (ff.39ra-?48rb stub)

[204] Fennell, 2000, p.48; Lupack, 1994, p. 144); Pearsall & Cunningham, 1977, p.vii.

[205] Wiggins, the Auchinleck manuscript: Physical make-up (2003).

11 Amis and Amiloun (ff.?48rb stub-?61va stub)

12 The Life of St Mary Magdalene (ff.?61Ava stub-65vb)

13 The Nativity and Early Life of Mary (ff.65vb-69va)

14 On the Seven Deadly Sins (ff.70ra-72ra)

15 The Paternoster (ff.72ra-?72rb or ?72va stub)

16 The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin (?72rb or ?72va stub-78ra)

17 Sir Degare (ff.78rb-?84rb stub)

18 The Seven Sages of Rome (ff.?84rb stub-99vb)

Gathering missing (c1400 lines of text)

19 Floris and Blancheflour (ff.100ra-104vb)

20 The Sayings of the Four Philosophers (ff.105ra-105rb)

21 The Battle Abbey Roll (ff.105v-107r)

f.107Ar / f.107Av (thin stub)

22 Guy of Warwick (couplets) (ff.108ra-146vb)

23 Guy of Warwick (stanzas) (ff.145vb-167rb)

24 Reinbroun (ff.167rb-175vb)

Leaf missing.

25 Sir Beues of Hamtoun (ff.176ra-201ra)

26 Of Arthour & of Merlin (ff.201rb-256vb)

27 þe Wenche þat Loved þe King (ff.256vb-256A thin stub)

28 A Peniworþ of Witt (ff.256A stub-259rb)

29 How Our Lady's Sauter was First Found (ff.259rb-260vb)

30 Lay le Freine (ff.261ra-262A thin stub)

31 Roland and Vernagu (ff.?262va stub-267vb)

32 Otuel a Knight (ff.268ra-277vb)

Many leaves lost, but some recovered as fragments.

33 Kyng Alisaunder (L f.1ra-vb; S A.15 f.1ra-2vb; L f.2ra-vb; ff.278-9)

34 The Thrush and the Nightingale (ff.279va-vb)

35 The Sayings of St Bernard (f.280ra)

36 Dauid þe King (ff.280rb-280vb)

37 Sir Tristrem (ff.281ra-299A thin stub)

38 Sir Orfeo (ff.299A stub-303ra)

39 The Four Foes of Mankind (f.303rb-303vb)

40 The Anonymous Short English Metrical Chronicle (ff.304ra-317rb)

41 Horn Childe & Maiden Rimnild (ff.317va-323vb)

Leaf missing.

42 Alphabetical Praise of Women (ff.324ra-325vb)

43 King Richard (f.326; E f.3ra-vb; S R.4 f.1ra-2vb; E f.4ra-vb; f.327)

Many leaves lost.

44 þe Simonie (ff.328r-334v)

The first section of the anthology opens with 10 items belonging to the religious genre. Five more devotional texts were copied in between the first two romances: *Amis and Amiloun* (item 11) and *Sir Degare* (item 17). *The Seven Sages of Rome* (item 18), a collection of moral and edifying stories, precedes the famous romance of *Floris and Blancheflour* (item 19) and follows *Sir Degare* (item 17). Finally, the short moral poem of *The Sayings of the Four Philosophers* (item 20) and a list of names (item 21) concludes the first section of the volume.

The central section begins with five romances: *Guy of Warwick I* and *II* (item 22 and 23), *Reinbroun* (item 24), *Sir Beues of Hamtoun* (item 25), and the less known *Of Arthour and of Merlin* (item 26). These are followed by three more religious texts: *þe Wenche þat Loved þe King* (item 27), *A Peniworþ of Witt* (item 28), *How Our Lady's Sauter was First*

*Found* (item 29). Furthermore, there are four our more short romances *Lay le Freine (item 30)*, two Charlemagne romances: *Roland and Vernagu* (item 31) and *Otuel a Knight* (item 32), and a tale of *Kyng Alisaunder* (item 33). Three more devotional items are employed to separate the romances just mentioned and the next two, corresponding to *Sir Tristrem* (item 37) and *Sir Orfeo* (item 38). This booklet ends with another religious text *The Four Foes of Mankind* (item 39).

Three historical texts introduce the last and final section. These are: *The Anonymous Short English Metrical Chronicle* (item 40), *King Richard* (item 43), and *þe Simonie* (item 44), the last surviving item of the codex.[206]

The codex presents itself as a "mixture of secular and religious material."[207] In spite of most of the volume being occupied by a large selection of unique romances, there is a significant selection of devotional material, collocated at the beginning of the manuscript and throughout the codex.[208]

Turville-Petre summarises this arrangement stating that it was:

> Loosely organized by grouping works by topic, with saints' lives and other religious poems placed at the beginning, most of the romances and tales in the middle section, and historical and political poems at the end.[209]

The organizational system of the manuscript follows a moderately

[206] For a more detailed catalogues of the items contained in the Auchinleck manuscript, I suggest reading the dedicated chapter written by Sir Walter Scott. Scott, 1804, pp.cviii-cxxvii.

[207] Shonk, 1985, p.72.

[208] Turville-Petre, 1996, p.133.

[209] Turville-Petre, 1996, p.113.

recurrent scheme, which alternates religious and historical texts to romances. Despite the lack of a specific thematic arrangement in each fascicle, both Mordkoff and Pearsall recognise "some integrity of content". As a matter of fact, each booklet treats diverse themes such as the story of English and Norman heroes, love, and religion.[210]

The mixture of these three genres might have been caused by two main factors: a commercial and editorial one. On the one hand, the presence of texts belonging to three diverse genres could have been a request from the commissioner himself.[211] On the other hand, it is plausible that each of them retained a specific role in the volume. For instance, the consistent number of religious texts could provide readers with moral guidance and an occasion to reflect. Romances had a double role. They were employed as entertainment and as means to promoted moral and social values. Consequently, historical items offer a setting and context for the action and teachings that occur in romances.[212]

The co-presence of three genres, the employment of vernacular English and the preservation of several *codex unicus* render the Auchinleck Manuscript an extremely valuable source of English culture. In fact, its content composed in in Middle English has laid the foundation of "a shared concept of England" created through its present and past. This is the reason why Shonk attributes to the Auchinleck manuscript the edifying title "handbook of the nation."[213]

[210] Mordkoff, 1981, pp.14-5; Pearsall & Cunningham, 1977, p.ix.

[211] Shonk, 1985, p.90.

[212] Turville-Petre, 1996, p.112.

[213] Turville-Petre, 1996, p.112.

### 3.1.6 *Sir Tristrem* in manuscript context

The verses of the Middle English romance *Sir Tristrem* (item 37) are transmitted through the parchment leaves of the renowned Auchinleck manuscript, or National Library of Scotland, Advocates' MS.19.2.1, in which this tale occupies almost two gatherings.[214] Its narration begins on the 42nd (f.281r) and concludes in the middle of the 44th (f.299v).[215] Nevertheless, due to some vandalism both its incipit and ending have been compromised.

As most of the texts preserved in the manuscript, *Sir Tristrem* lacks its original title, miniature and ending because of the excision of the miniatures that decorated the first leaf of each text.[216] In fact, the folio 289ra, in which both the introductory miniature and the original title were supposedly collocated, is also missing some words of the first verse. Moreover, the scribe has also deliberately omitted two verses after v. 79, without leaving any space in the manuscript.[217]

Nevertheless, thanks to the fixed layout of the gatherings, made of two columns of 44 verses each, it is possible to assume that around 132 verses are missing from its ending.[218]

Scribe 1, responsible for copying seventy per cent of the manuscript, decided to follow the recurrent scheme employed throughout the codex and opened the 42nd gathering with what Shonk describes as a "major

[214] Cipolla, 2014, p.42.

[215] Fennell, 2000, p.48.

[216] Its first modern editor, Sir Walter Scott, attributed the title Sir Tristrem to the text. Scott, 1804.

[217] Fennell, 2000, p.49.

[218] Fennell, 2000, pp.49-50.

poem", *Sir Tristrem*.[219] Romance followed by another text of the same genre *Sir Orfeo* and a short moral filler poem *The Four Foes of Mankind*, which concluded the 44th gathering. Therefore, the codex displays "definite signs of planning."[220]

In spite of the possible independence in the production of the single gatherings, it seems evident that at its basis there is a "predetermined design."[221] Consequently, Evans asserts the three texts that occupy the gatherings 42nd to the 44th form a well-thought and pre-planned "booklet."[222]

Considering that the English version of the Tristan tale is only preserved in a *codex unicus* in the Auchinleck manuscript, I do believe it interesting to focus on the components of said "booklet" in order to understand the context in which the romance of interest was inserted and produced.

### 3.1.7 The gatherings 42nd, 43rd and 44th

The storyline of the English hero Tristrem forms a "booklet" together with *Sir Orfe*o, a lay-like romance, and *Four Foes of Mankind*, a religious poem that filled the conclusion of the gathering.[223]

The romance of *Sir Tristrem* is followed by the one narrating the story of *Sir Orfeo* a King in England and talented harpist. His life is distraught when his wife, Heurodis, is kidnapped by the fairy king. After her kidnapping, he spends years wandering in the forest until one day he sees

[219] Shonk, 1985, pp.73, 76-77.

[220] Shonk, 1985, p.77.

[221] Shonk, 1985, p.77.

[222] Evans, 1995, p.96.

[223] Evans, 1995, p.96.

his beloved with her abductor. He manages to enter in his castle pretending to be a minstrel and enchant the King with his music. The latter allows him to choose a reward for his talent and the hero chooses his wife, with whom he returns to his kingdom where he is re-crowned, while the harpers of Britain write a lay in his honour.

Whereas the religious reflections contained in *The Four Foes of Mankind* a filler text of the booklet, warn the readers about the dangers of the World, the Devil, the Flesh, and Death.

It is highly probable that due to the high degree of "editorial planning", the proximity in which these texts are found is relevant to comprehend the reason behind their meaning and placement.[224]

As a matter of fact, it is possible to draw a comparison between *Sir Tristrem* and *Sir Orfeo* starting from their copyist. Among the six designated Scribes that compiled the codex, Scribe 1 was the composer of these three fascicles.[225]

The lack of their original titles caused by the excision of the illustrative miniatures has been compensated by the attribution of new modern ones. In the specific case of *Sir Tristrem* and Si*r Orfeo*, their titles perfectly summarise the focus of both romances: their leading male characters. Both heroes were known by the English audience who was familiar with their stories since they are retellings of well-known tales. Despite the fact that both heroes' lives would lose meaning if deprived of their beloved Yseult and Heurodis, neither of them are the focal point in the narrations. For instance, in *Sir Tristrem* the female character supposed to be his

[224] Loomis, 1942, p.607, Shonk, 1985, p.77.

[225] Shonk, 1985, pp.76-77.

counterpart is only mentioned in line 1256.[226] Similarly, in *Sir Orfeo*, his wife is not a relevant presence in the storyline.

In addition, both heroes display significant connections with England and the English court. On the one hand, Tristrem is the long-lost nephew of King Marc of England, who treats him like a son. Despite his restless existence and the consistent amount of travels that bring him all across Europe, his life probably ends in England after being mortally wounded. On the other hand, Orfeo is presented as the King of Winchester, in England.

In his research, Evans recognises other interesting connections between the romances, which could explain the editorial choice of placing the texts in the order found in the manuscript.

According to the Evans, *Sir Tristrem* and *Sir Orfeo* are "abduction narratives", based on the deceit of Yseult and Heudonis' abductors. Thanks to their shrewdness and their musical talent, Tristrem and Orfeo persuade their enemies to accept their services in exchange of a prize.[227]

In the Middle English version of Tristan's tale, Tristrem, disguised as minstrel, deceives King Marc and manages to win Ysolde by playing his harp. Similarly, the disguised Orfeo frees his wife from her abductor thanks to his musical skills. The rash promises made by the two Kings cause them to lose the object of their interest, the heroes' lovers.

These episodes relevel another connection between the two leading male characters: they are both skilled harpers. They both choose to save their beloved women through their musical talent, the harp. The most common

[226] Fennell, 2000, p.142.

[227] Evans, 1995, p.96.

instrument employed by minstrels when narrating romances.[228]

Ultimately, the lay form of *Sir Tristrem* and *Sir Orfeo* could have been another significant factor in the making of the booklet. Both romances can be considered lay narrations, in which the presence of God and religion is only partially in the picture, even in situations where the religious moralization is expected.[229] For instance, one of the major themes of both texts is absolute love. The chief difference between the two relationships resides in the extramarital nature of Tristrem and Yseult's relationship, whereas Orfeo and Heudonis' is marital.

Nevertheless, in *Sir Tristrem*, there is no condemnation of their adultery. Despite the non-moral nature of their affection, the presence of God is only in the background. In fact, the hero invokes him only in moments of need, mainly to find strength and to express his gratitude when he triumphs over his enemies.[230] The immortal nature of Tristrem and Yseult's love is only redeemed by Tristrem's abstinence. The hero chooses chastity and refuses to concede himself to his wife, Yseult of the White Hands. [231]

The closure of the booklet is established by the moral poem *Four Foes of Mankind*, text copied by Scribe 1 and placed at the very ending of gathering 44th. From an editorial perspective, this poem presents some anomalies in comparison with most texts copied by the same hand. According to Evans, the lack of an introductory miniature and title

[228] Evans, 1995, pp.96-97.

[229] Evans, 1995, p.97.

[230] The main instances in which the hero invokes and thanks God are the battles. See vv. 1462-63; 2351-52; 2780-81; 3320-3. Fennell, 2000, pp.154, 209, 235, 276.

[231] Gambino, 2014, p.231.

represent a piece of evidence that proves that it was a filler text, which provided a religious reading to the previous component of the booklet.[232]

In fact, the moral poem warns its readers of the ephemeral nature of human existence threatened by the *four foes*. Instead of being controlled by these four enemies, humans should only strive for salvation, as highlighted in the closing lines of the poem.[233]The corruption of spirit experienced by humanity provoked by "the world, the flesh, the devil and death" should, in fact, be avoided at all costs. [234]

These teachings seem to show that the real and metaphorical struggles overcome by Tristrem and Orfeo symbolise their fight against evil forces present on earth. Their happiness achieved on earth is always temporary and corrupted by the devil. As attested by the constant difficulties they have to face. Moreover, the poem also seems critical on the matter of passionate love, a critique often moved against the *fine amor* presented in romances.

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[232] Evans, 1995, p.97.

[233] The closing sentences of the religious text highlight the human need to avoid the enemies and find salvation in the course of their brief existence.

The Four Foes of Mankind, vv. 108-12:

In world whare þou wendes,

No wat gat þatow gas,

Þis four er redi on þi pas.

Now haue y founden þi fas,

Finde tow þi frendes.

The following translation was done by Professor Leo Carruthers. Carruters, n.d.

**Translation:** Wherever thou wander in the world,/ Nor whatever way thou goest,/ These four are watching thy every step./ Now that I have found thy foes,/ Find thou friends for thyself.

[234] Evans, 1995, p.97.

### 3.1.8 Language

Among the various relevant features displayed in the Auchinleck manuscript emerges the use of Middle English throughout the codex. This characteristic attests the development of the vernacular English language, which around the 14th century began to play a significant role in the literary field. The items preserved in the manuscript are all composed in English, despite the fact that the manuscript production of that time favoured the employment of French and Latin.[235]

As previously discussed, most scholars believe that the Auchinleck manuscript was a lay and commercial project based in London.[236] Furthermore, Vogel advanced the hypothesis that both the composer and the copyists of the manuscript were Londoners.[237]

Particularly interesting in this respect is the analysis carried out in *A Linguistic Atlas of Later Medieval England* since the scribes of the Auchinleck manuscript were extensively examined and described through linguistic profiles.[238] The focus of this research was on Scribes 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6, Scribe 4 was excluded due to lack of material. In fact, palaeographical evidence attests that he only copied item 21, *A list of names of Norman barons*.[239]

From the *Atlas* emerges that Scribe 1 (LP 6519), the main copyist and editor of the volume, complied the text in the borders of London in the county of Middlesex. Scribe 3 (LP 6500) wrote in a London dialect,

[235] Wiggins, The Auchinleck manuscript: Importance, 2003; Shonk, 1985, p.89; Shonk, 1981, p.93.

[236] Wiggins, The Auchinleck manuscript: History, 2003; Loomis, 1942, p.595; Hanna, 2005, p.126.

[237] Vogel, 1941, 543, Loomis, 1942, p.624.

[238] Wiggins, The Auchinleck manuscript: Importance, 2003.

[239] Wiggins, The Auchinleck manuscript: Importance, 2003, Bliss, 1951, pp.652-654.

Scribe 5 (LP 6510) in an Essex dialect, Scribe 2 (LP 6940) employed a mixture of Gloucestershire and Worcestershire dialects and finally, Scribe 6 (LP 7820) a Gloucestershire dialect.[240]

The analysis of the sole copyist's dialect features corroborates the hypothesis theorised by most scholars. Nevertheless, some academics support the idea that four items out of the 44 "retain features of northern or north midlands dialect", one of which corresponds with *Sir Tristrem*.[241]

### 3.1.8.1 The dialect of *Sir Tristrem*

The Northern origins of Sir Tristrem were supported since the romance was published in its first modern edition in 1804. According to Scott, it was originally compiled by a Scottish author, Thomas of Erceldoun.[242]

The following modern editions by Kölbing and Mcneill comply with Scott and defended its Scottish provenance. Mcneill states, "the language of the poem is such as was written towards the close of the thirteenth century in the north of England and the south of Scotland."[243] Their hypothesis was mainly based on the unclear first stanza of the romance, the Northern appearance of certain rime-words and their phonology.

The prologue of *Sir Tristrem* mentions both Erceldoun and Tomas, which retain a relevant role in the study of the language of the romance:

[240] Benskin, Laing, Karaiskos, & Williamson: An Electronic version of A Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English, 2013; Wiggins, The Auchinleck manuscript: Importance, 2003; Putter, Jefferson, & Minkova, 2014, p.76.

[241] Turville-Petre, 1996, p.114.

[242] Scott, 1804: lvi, Lupack, 1994, p.145.

[243] Kölbing, 1882, pp.lx-lxi; Mcneill in Pickford, 1973, p.223.

I was a[t **Erceldoune**,] [244]
Wiþ **Tomas** spak y þare;[245]
Þer herd y rede in roune
Who **Tristrem** gat & bare,
Who was **king** wiþ croun
& who him forsterd ȝare
& who was bold baroun,
As þair elders ware,
Bi ȝere,
**Tomas** telles in toun
Þis auentours as þai ware.[246]

Thomas the Rhymer, also known as Thomas of Erceldoun, was a poet and prophet who is said to have foresaw the death of Alexander III, King of Scotland. He was originally from Erceldoun, a town situated in Scotland, in which the narrator of *Sir Tristrem* affirms to have been informed about the adventures of the hero.[247]

Nevertheless, more precision in the study of the characteristics of Middle English has caused Vogel to dismiss the theory that ascribes *Sir Tristrem* to a North and Scottish compilation. On the contrary, the academic highlights, the likelihood that the Auchinleck main scribe (Scribe 1, LP 6519) and complier of *Sir Tristrem* came from the South

[244] Erceldoune corresponds to a village in Berwickshire, Scotland.

[245] The identity of *Tomas* referred to here is Thomas of Erceldoune.

[246] Fennell, 2000, pp.66-67. This extract was translated by me. Translation: I have been to Erceldoun,/ where I spoke with Tomas: recounted in a poem/ Who conceived and bore Tristrem, who was crowned king/ and who willingly brought him up,/ who was a bold baron/ as his ancestors,/ from year to year/ Tomas narrates/ these events.

[247] Putter, Jefferson, & Minkova, 2014, p.74.

of the British isle.[248]

Vogel's study of the phonological and morphological features in *Sir Tristrem* attests that in spite of the presence of some features that can be classified as northern, the remaining are not.[249] In order to explain the presence of such elements, the scholar identifies them as dialectal borrowings made from the composer. As a matter of fact, he believed the poet was based in the South, probably in London, and could have had some knowledge of the Northern dialects and literary traditions.[250]

Lupack agrees with Vogel's vision on the matter of the language. Although the scholar does not deny that there are some words retaining Northern features, he does not consider them enough evidence to assert the romance is a Northern production.[251]

In recent years, Vogel theory has been corroborated by Hanna, who highlights the undoubtable ties that link *Sir Tristrem* and the commissioner of the manuscript to North of England. However, the scholar believes that the compilation of the codex occurred in London. Similarly, Higgins recognises the Auchinleck manuscript as a "Northern book, copied and compiled in London for a regional client who brought the manuscript home with him." [252]

[248] Vogel, 1941, p.542.

[249] Vogel, 1941, pp.540-542. Vogel identifies as Northern features in *Sir Tristrem*: the abbreviated forms *ta* and *tan* as the past participle of take, and the retention of OE ā.

[250] Vogel, 1941, pp.543-544, Putter, Jefferson, & Minkova, 2014, pp.75-77.

[251] Lupack, 1994, p.145.

[252] Higgins in Fein, 2014, p.108.

# Chapter 4

# Descriptive Translation Studies and Medieval Translation

The long established practise of translation has always played a fundamental role in interhuman communication. From the ancient times until the modern days, it has allowed the contact between cultures, languages and texts by bringing "the original across".[253] Yet until the second half of the 20th century, translation was not considered an academic discipline.[254]

Moreover, the normative and prescriptive approach to translation did not allow the development of adequate frameworks to study medieval rewritings, characterised by a high degree of instability and intentional modifications. Nonetheless, after a series of effective reconsiderations, translation started being viewed as an interdisciplinary area of research. This shift in perspective allowed to study the translated texts though a Descriptive Approach focused on understanding the reasons behind changes caused by the diverse contextual dimension in which the translators operated.[255]

## 4.1 Descriptive Translation Studies

The year 1972 marks the beginning of the revolution of the discipline of translation. Thanks to the paper of the Dutch scholar, Holmes, in which he expressed the necessity to deal with the "the complex of problems clustered round the phenomenon of translating and translations": Translation Studies

[253] Lefevere, 1992, p.2.

[254] Munday, 2001, pp.7-17.

[255] Bampi, 2018, pp.284-5.

were born.[256] The choice of this terminology is attributed to Lefevere, who wished to synthetize the importance of focusing on both the "production and description of translations." Thanks to their intervention, translation started being considered an independent scholarly discipline for the first time.[257]

From the 1980s, this innovative perception of translation paved the way to a prolific international debate and modified how translation was viewed in various fields.

For instance, in education. The Grammar Translation Method was adopted to study of the grammar structures of classical and modern languages from the second half of the 19th century. However, thanks to the academic investigation in the field of translation, it was substituted by more effective Communicative Approach, which promoted a more authentic learning exploiting the human predisposition to learn languages. [258]

Nonetheless, one of the most interesting changes caused by the development of this new discipline was the fact that translation stopped being considered a replica of the original text negatively evaluated if too distant from the source text.

On the contrary, both Holmes and Toury theorised that the goals of the Descriptive Translation Studies were to examine the product, its function in the recipient sociocultural situation and the process that lead to the changes made during the translation.[259]

The multi-perspective of this theory, combined with the cooperation of

[256] Holmes, 1988, p.67.

[257] Djordjević, 2000, pp.7-8.

[258] Bassnett, 2002, p.12.

[259] Bassnett, 2002, pp.7-8.

diverse disciplines such as history, sociology, linguistics, and literary studies, allowed a more comprehensive perspective on how a source text is transferred from its original culture to a new target one.

This diametrically diverse approach to translation highlights the flaws of the obsolete and "sterile" *word-for-word* translation, which has been opposed to the *sense-for-sense* one from the ancient times by authors of the calibre of Cicero and Horace.[260] As expressed by the opposition between interpreter (literal translator) and orator in Cicero's *De optimo genere oratorurm*:

> And I did not translate them as an interpreter, but as an orator, keeping the same ideas and forms, or as one might say, the 'figures' of thought, but in language which conforms to our usage. And in so doing, I did not hold it necessary to render *word-for-word*, but I preserved the general style and force of the language.'[261]

On the one hand, the *word-for-word* or literal translation, employed even in the Grammar Translation Method, sees translation as the formal equivalent of the original. Translation has to be a faithful transposition of its source text from a content, lexical and grammatical point of view. Privileging a high degree of uniformity and adherence.

On the other hand, the *sense-for-sense* or free translation favours a more dynamic approach to translation, which does not prioritise the literal rendering of the source text. In fact, in the specific case of the interlingual translation, the *sense-for-sense* approach indicates the process of conveying the meaning of the source text written in the original language into a target text with a different one, to render it comprehensible for the new target

[260] Djordjević, 2000, p.8.; Munday, 2001, pp.7-17; Steiner, 1998, p.319.

[261] Cicero (46 BCE/1960 CE: 347-73). Cicero's extract was translated by Robinson. Robinson, 1997, p.7.

culture.[262]

Nonetheless, when considering Translation in the Middle Ages this binary opposition is not applicable since, with the exception of the Holy Scriptures, authours viewed translations as a "creative process that involves rewriting."[263] In fact, their translations did not tend to aim at the achievement of a formal or meaning equivalent in their target culture. On the contrary, medieval translators had the tendency to rewrite and manipulated the source texts from a linguistic, socio-culural and historical point of view to favour their reception in their receiving culture.[264]

Consequently, the Descriptive Approach of Translation Studies can be adopted to analyse medieval translations, thanks to the shift in the objective of translation itself. Instead of the perfect transposition of the source text into a new target language, this new approah focused on "understanding of the processes undertaken in the act of translation" that allowed the target culture to accept and appreciate the translated text.[265]

As mentioned above, in Translation Studies the focus was not on the perfect reproduction of the linguistic aspects or meaning of the source text into the target one. This caused the discard of both the *word-for-word* and *sense-for-sense* approaches to translation, in favour of the study of translation as a semiotic process, which promotes the adaptation and consequent reformulation of values and beliefs, expressed through linguistic items in the original text into the ones of the target culture. Lefevere summarises this concept stating that:

[262] Jakobson, 1959, p.233; Munday, 2001, pp.4-5.

[263] Bampi, 2017, p.165.

[264] Copeland, 1991, pp.51-52; Lefevere, 1992, p.1.

[265] Bassnett, 2002, pp.44-45.

> "Translation is, of course, a rewriting of an original text. All rewritings, whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and a poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way. Rewriting is manipulation […] and […] can introduce new concepts, new genres, new devices and the history of translation is the history also of literary innovation, of the shaping power of one culture upon another".[266]

Therefore, once the ideology that promoted translation as a loyal transposition of the original was dismissed, it was possible to have a more broad approach to its analysis.

Scholars, such as Benjamin and Derrida, also highlight how translation does not aim at imitating its original, since it is "neither an image nor a copy" and does not "reproduce, does not restitute, does not represent" the meaning of the original.[267] On the contrary, translation is a semiotic process, which reshapes the original and provides it with a new life, an afterlife. As suggested by Benjamin:

> A translation issues from the original-not so much from its life as from its afterlife. For a translation comes later than the original, and since the important works of world literature never find their chosen translators at the time of their origin, their translation marks their stage of continued life.[…] Translations that are more than transmissions of subject […]. In them, the life of the originals attains its latest, continually renewed, and most complete unfolding.[268]

[266] Lefevere, 1992, p.2.

[267] Derrida, 2007, p.212.

[268] Benjamin, 2002, pp.254-55.

The reconceptualization of translation that followed the advent and development of Descriptive Translation Studies provided a new approach to this discipline, which started being considered a complex semiotic phenomenon.

Once viewed as a normative process that allowed the transposition of an equivalent text form the original language to the new one, translation was interpreted as a part of receiving culture only from the second half of the 20th century. The shift of perspective allowed the admission of diverse degrees of rewriting caused by the need of a text to be received by a new audience. The reshape of a text that occurs in translation provides it with a new life, a new essence that enriches the original and allows it to be appreciated in the receiving culture.

### 4.2 Descriptive Translation Studies applied to the practise of translation in the Middle Ages

The incipit of the chapter highlights how the Middle Ages were a time in which translation contributed to the development of vernacular literatures.[269] Translation at that time was characterised by the intentional reshape and modification of the source texts that allowed the transmission and promotion of "the heritage of ancient authors."[270] As attested by the specific example analysed in this dissertation. According to Djordjević, the genre of romance was always affected and "reinvigorated by "translation", in the wide medieval sense of rewriting and reinventing stories for different tastes, audiences and periods".[271]

[269] Bampi, 2017, p.164; Copeland, 1991, pp.37-8; Zohan.Even, 2000, p.192.

[270] Djordjević, 2000, p.9; Gaunt, 2012, p.246.

[271] Djordjević, 2000, p.5.

This was possible because modern concepts such as originality, authority and ownership cannot not be applied to medieval literature.[272] As highlighted by Foucault:

> "The weakness of the role bestowed on the author – or rather on the author-function – is crucial if one want to analyse the attitude of the copyist towards his model, and of the translator towards the source text. For some types of text the absence of ʿauthorial labelsʾ represented a justification, or even an instigation, to rewrite the text".[273]

Another aspect to take into account when analysing medieval translations is the importance of the source culture. Folena distinguishes two types of translations: the *vertical* and *horizontal*. Respectively referring to the translation from a prestigious language, such as Latin, into a vernacular and to a translation occurred within languages with a similar rank, two vernaculars, such as Anglo-Norman and Middle English.[274]

In the case of a vertical translation, the translator attempts to faithfully reproduce its source text, as exemplified by religious texts. On the contrary, *horizontal* translations were more inclined to resort to *imitatio*, which once again indicates how the in the Middle Ages "originality of material was not greatly prized". On the contrary, the author's skills were expressed in the act of reshaping the text through themes and ideas considered acceptable by his audience.[275]

As a matter of fact, with the exception of the Holy Scriptures, translators had the tendency to reshape and modify the original text in order to allow the

[272] Bassnett, 2002, p.53.

[273] Foucault, 1969, p.77.

[274] Folena, 1973, pp.12-13; Bassnett, 2002, p.59.

[275] Folena, 1973, pp.65-66; Bassnett, 2002, pp.59-60.

receiving culture to appreciate it. In the translation of secularised text in vernacular languages, the principle of adequacy was replaced with the once of acceptability. Meaning that the author concern lied on the norms adopted by the target culture, rather than the ones of the source one.[276]

Consequently, the essence of medieval translation is the legitimization of numerous adaptations, variants that modified the source text in order to produce an acceptable translation for the receiving culture. Generally, the main narrative characteristics of the text were maintained, but innovations were always implemented in the process of translating. The manipulation of the original depended on the translator himself and the socio-cultural background of his target culture.

Over the last 25 years, Descriptive Translation Studies have provided scholars an adequate, multi-disciplinary framework to understand the changes undergone by the translated text to be accepted by the receiving culture.[277]

In the past, the typical discrepancies between source and target text caused scholars to consider medieval translations unworthy of being studied, edited and published as late as 1970's.[278] This negative judgment was mainly caused by the lack of a methodological framework that contrasted the prescriptive approach and the norm that only accepted the literal translation.

However, the Descriptive Approach has contributed to the rethinking of translation as a semiotic process. A process, whose main concern was not the condemnation of textual manipulation, so recurrent in medieval

[276] Toury, 1995, p.57; Bampi, 2017, p.166.

[277] Bampi, 2017, p.164; Copeland, 1991, pp.64-66.

[278] Djordjević, 2000, pp.10-11.

translation, but rather the comprehension of the changes undergone by the target text. As a matter of fact, Djordjević highlights how translation transmits the source text through "another linguistic medium, one that […] belongs to another audience, […] with a different cultural background and therefore with a different set of cultural expectations too". [279]

In the specific case studied in this dissertation, the intricate socio-linguistic and socio-cultural crisis deriving from the Norman Conquest in 1066 had a significant impact on the translations from the Anglo-Norman to the Middle English. Thanks to the support of Translation Studies the choices, modalities and reasons behind the modifications of the source text are contextualised and explained.[280]

Consequently, because of its adaptability, I will attempt to apply the Descriptive Translation approach to analyse and compare some of the extant passages preserved in the Anglo-Norman version of *Tristan* by Thomas, which were translated in the Middle English version, *Sir Tristrem*. Attributing the reshape of the Middle English translation to a deliberate decision of the unknown author, who distanced himself from the 'original' Anglo-Norman text due to the necessity of adapting his translation to a new audience, who would not have been able to comprehend nor appreciate Thomas' romance.

[279] Djordjević, 2000, p.13.

[280] Bampi, 2017, pp.164-65.

# Chapter 5

## The comparison between

## *Tristan* by Thomas of Brittany and *Sir Tristrem*

In this chapter, I will compare three crucial episodes from *Tristan* by Thomas of Brittany and *Sir Tristrem* in order to identify similarities and divergences between the two traditions. [281] As a matter of fact, given that the Anglo-Norman romance has been identified as the model from which the Middle English version was translated, it is significant to highlight what the English author changed in order to produce an acceptable text for his receiving audience.

Before moving to a closer comparison of the two romances, one should address the fact that *Tristan* by Thomas is preserved in a fragmentary tradition. Therefore, the comparison between the Anglo-Norman source text and its Middle English rewriting can be, at times, complex. This is the reason why I felt compelled to employ a third source, corresponding to the Middle High German text written by Gottfried von Strassburg. Despite the fact that even this adaptation lacks its ending, the German author's

[281] For clarity purposes, I am going to employ the following editions of *Tristan* by Thomas, *Sir Tristrem* and Tristan by Gottfried throughout this chapter. For Tristan by Thomas: Gambino, F. (2014). *Tristano e Isotta di Thomas*. Bologna: Mucchi. For *Sir Tristrem*: *Sir Tristrem-La storia di tristano in Inghilterra* (2000). In Fennell C. (Ed.). Milano: Luni. For Tristan by Gottfried: Schulz, M. (2017). Gottfried von Strassburg: "Tristan". Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler Verlag.
In addition, the English translation of the extracts employed for the comparison was done by me based on the translations of the editions mentioned in this footnote.

stylistic and narrative choices tends to be more in line with the ones of the Anglo-Norman author.

As a matter of fact, one of the main distinctive features that differentiates the Middle English translation from its source text is the length. *Sir Tristrem* condenses entire episodes, monologues and reflections in only a few stanzas, counting less than 4000 verses, whereas it has been estimated that Thomas' complete version originally had around 13000. Therefore, the present-day mediaeval scholars have not received the Middle English abridged version very favourably and considered the Anglo-Norman much finer. According to Crane, the *extrême brièveté* to which Bédier alludes, caused *Sir Tristrem* to lose its meaning without gaining a new one.[282] Moreover, most critics highlight how the omission of "debates and soliloquies characteristic of the original" resulted in a "much coarsened version of its subtle and moving original, significant chiefly because it preserves, however inadequately, the lost episodes of its source."[283]

Nonetheless, scholars like Rumble and Pickford, interpret these changes as intentional and necessary to conform to the taste of the English audience.[284] Consequently, the different treatment of the subject reflects the intention of an author who produced a translation with a specific society in mind. The reduction of courtly passages, long psychological reflections and the forthrightness of the narrative style of *Sir Tristrem* are necessary reformulations. As a matter of fact, one should always

[282] Bédier, 1905, p.88; Crane, 1986, p.195.

[283] Crane, 1986, p.195; Loomis, 1942, pp.595-627; Lupack, 1996, pp.49-62; Hardman, 2005, p.85.

[284] Pickford, 1973, p228; Rumble, 1959, p.222.

remember that each alteration occurred in the translation process was done to appeal to a new target audience. In this specific case, the author of the Middle English romance aimed at producing a comprehensible poem for a non-French speaking public interested in Tristan's adventures rather than "the psychological intricacies of a system of courtly love".[285]

It appears evident that Thomas of Brittany's extended romance was aimed at a sophisticated courtly audience. In his verses, the four leading characters profusely express their feelings and inner tribulations in long monologues, whose psychology in many cases is also commented by the narrator himself.[286] As exemplified by the first 648 verses of the Sneyd[1] fragment, analysed below, in which the Anglo-Norman writer describes the reflections of the hero on the marriage with Ysolt of the White Hands.

The treatment of the adulterous love is diametrically different in *Sir Tristrem*. The unknown author does not seem to focus too much on the concept of love explored by Thomas. Despite the fact that he clearly found a source of inspiration in the Anglo-Norman work, he also reinterpreted it in a completely different key. As he admits in the following verses:

**ST, vv.397-400**

| | |
|---|---|
| Tho Tomas asked ay | *Then Tomas asked* |
| Of Tristrem, trewe fere, | *about Tristrem, true companion,* |
| To wite the right way | *to know it the right way* |
| The styes for to lere. | *And learn the ins and outs of his story.* |
| Of a prince proude in play | *The story of a prince proud in the* |
| Listneth, lordinges dere. | *battle, listen, noble lords!* |
| Whoso better can say, | *Whoever can tell it better,* |
| His owhen he may here | *May say what he has to say* |
| As hende. | *courtly.* |
| Of thing that is him dere | *The thing dear to him,* |
| Ich man preise at ende. | *Everyone should praise at the end.* |

[285] Pickford, 1973, p.228; Rumble, 1959, pp.223-24.

[286] Rumble, 1959, p.222.

What emerges from the Middle English adaptation is that its reshape was necessary to appeal to a less cultivated public whose interest was aroused by external action and not so much by courtly love. According to Rumble, the process of reformulation focuses on the rationalisation and moralisation of episodes and characters and reflects the author's intention to produce a coherent version that the English audience could appreciate. Each episode translated from Thomas to *Sir Tristrem* presents evidence of alterations, usually to create a more enjoyable text, but also to render each incident more credible and consistent with the changes adopted in the Middle English adaptation.

Consequently, *Sir Tristrem* can be seen as a "social document" that with "its fresh retelling of a great story, presented simply and directly" allowed the less cultured English audience to appreciate and be exposed to a French work that otherwise would not have been intelligible.[287]

### 5.1 The philtre and the marriage between King Marc and Ysolt

The extant first episode of *Tristan* by Thomas of Brittany that can be compared to *Sir Tristrem* is contained in the Carlisle Manuscript ($C^{arl}$). This witness is composed by 154 verses in an Anglo-Norman dialect dating back to the end of the 13$^{th}$ century.

This episode describes the journey that will lead Yseult from Ireland, her motherland, to England. As one can read in *Sir Tristrem*, Tristan returns to Ireland to ask the hand of Yseult for his uncle, King Marc, which he obtains because he manages to defeat a dragon that is devastating her country (ST, vv.1416-19). However, on their homeward journey Tristan and Iseult drink by accident the love potion prepared by the Queen for her

[287] Pickford, 1973, p.228.

daughter and King Marc and fall in love with each other. Once they arrive in England, Yseult has to marry Marc, but she cannot distance herself from Tristan, the man she truly loves.

## I. Avenging Moraunt

The Carlisle fragment ($C^{arl}$) opens with a scene in which the two lovers have already drunk the love potion. Iseult is in Tristan's ship on the high sea ($C^{arl}$, v.5) and calls herself a coward (*laschesce*, C, v.9) for not having killed Tristan to avenge her uncle, Morholt, whom he previously murdered ($C^{arl}$, vv.8-10).[288]

**$C^{arl}$, vv.8-10**

| | |
|---|---|
| '...e fu merveille | *And it was a miracle* |
| ... ne vus ocis | *I didn't kill you-* |
| ... **laschesce** ne fis | *If I had not been a coward* |
| ... [**m]on [on]cle vengé ëusse** | *I would have avenged my uncle.* |

A similar conversation occurs in *Sir Tristrem* (ST, vv.1563-1617). However, the assassination of Moraunt is not mentioned during their journey to England, as it occurs in the verses of the Carlisle manuscript, but rather it precedes their journey.

In the Middle English romance, Yseult notices a resemblance between Tramtris, her music teacher, and Tristan while he is having a bath to heal his wound (ST, vv.1552-64). Her suspicion is well founded and confirmed when she realises that Tristan sword misses a splinter,

[288] Each tradition refers to the Queen of Ireland's brother, whom Tristrem murders in a combat to end the demand for a human tribute to the King of Ireland, in a different manner. In the Anglo-Norman tradition, he is known as Morholt, in the Middle High German one as Morolt and in the Middle English as Moraunt. There is no extant fragment narrating about the tribute in Thomas' romance. However, in *Sir Tristrem* and Gottfried's versions the tribute has to be sent every four years (ST, vv.945-946; GVS, vv.5942-65).

which corresponds to the one extracted from the deceased body of her uncle. This discovery outrages her and instils in her the desire to murder him (ST, vv. 1563-73).

**ST, vv.1563-73**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Ysonde briȝt of hewe** | *Iseult, fair of face,* |
| **Þouȝt it Tramtris ware.** | *thought he was tramtris.* |
| **His swerd, sche gan it schewe,** | *She examines his sword* |
| **& broken hye fond it þare**; | *and discovers that it is splintered.* |
| Out of a cofer newe | *From a shining box,* |
| Þe pece sche drouȝ ful ȝare | *she takes a splinter* |
| & sett it to þat trewe. | *and fits it into that sword exactly.* |
| **It nas lasse no mare,** | *It was neither smaller* |
| **Bot riȝt.** | *or larger, a perfect fit.* |
| **Þo þouȝt Ysonde wiþ care** | *Then Iseult decided, with anger,* |
| **To sle Tristrem þe kniȝt.** | *to slay Tristrem, the knight.* |

While the enraged Yseult is about to attack Tristan, she is stopped by the Queen, who does not believe her (ST, vv.1579-80). However, when Yseult proves her that the splinter found in her uncle's body corresponds to the one missing in Tristan's sword; their common thirst for revenge takes over (ST, vv.1585-95).

**ST, vv.1585-95**

| | |
|---|---|
| Tristrem, þis þef is he, | *This is Tristan the thief,* |
| Þat may he nouȝt forlain; | *there is no doubt,* |
| Þe pece þou miȝt her se | *you can see the splinter here,* |
| Þat fro mi nem was drain. | *Which was extracted from my uncle.* |
| Loke þat it so be, | *Look at the correspondence, compare* |
| Sett it euen ogain.' | *them again!"* |
| **As quik þai wald him sle** | *They want to kill him immediately,* |
| **Þer, Tristrem, ful fain;** | *Tristrem, for real:* |
| **Soþ þing,** | *they would have slain him in the bath,* |
| **In baþ þai hadden him slain,** | *were it not for the King* |
| **No were it for þe king.** | |

One of the most interesting aspects of the stanza above is contained in the last two lines in bold, the Queen and her daughter feel compelled

not to kill Tristan since only the King is entitled to execute such an act of justice (ST, vv.1594-95).

Interestingly, the Middle High German romance presents the same series of events. Isolt is the one who discovers the identity of the murderer of her uncle because she finds the missing splinter, while Tristan is having his herbal bath (GVS, vv.10076-86). She unveils Tramtris' identity to her mother, who initially does not believe her. Once her daughter proves she is telling the truth and attempts to kill him, the Queen stops her (GVS, vv. 10181-95). Nevertheless, the reason why she does so is diametrically different from the one in *Sir Tristrem*. In in the Middle English version, the Queen needs the approval of the King to murder Tristrem, whereas Gottfried's character states that Tristan is under her protection, therefore, her daughter has to spare him (GVS, vv. 10198-200).

Moreover, in the Middle High German romance, Isolt despises Tristan and refuses to be consoled by him even when they are travelling to England. In fact, she mentions the murder of her uncle once again, as it occurs in Thomas (GVS, vv. 11577-9; $C^{arl}$, vv. 8-10).

It is quite complex to compare these episodes due to the fact that Thomas text is not complete. Nonetheless, I do believe that the Middle High German translation is fundamental to reconstruct the Anglo-Norman romance. As a matter of fact, the Anglo-Norman, Middle English and Middle High German adaptations are all ascribed to the so-called *courtoise* tradition since the anonymous author of *Sir Tristrem* and Gottfried von Strasburg both employed the Anglo-Norman poem composed by Thomas' as a model for their

adaptations.[289]

It seems plausible that the splinter episode was part of Thomas' text and that it was then reformulated in the Middle High German and Middle English traditions. The condensation of events in *Sir Tristrem* is a typical trait of this romance. Nevertheless, the Middle English poem preserves the essential traits of this scene. One of the most interesting details revealed by the English translation is the function of the King in the justice system. In fact, the Queen and her daughter cannot murder Tristrem to avenge Moraunt because only the King and his men could execute him.

Furthermore, the omission of Yseult's rancour, while she is on the high sea with Tristrem, might indicate that she had already developed some feelings for him. Unlikely his Anglo-Norman predecessor, the Middle English author is aware of the fact that his audience is not interested in the lengthy descriptions of the *fine amor* of the lovers. Consequently, his reformulation conformed to the taste of a public who preferred to be less exposed "with the problems of love" and reflects the necessity of exploiting the lovers' affection to set the action in motion.[290] Moreover, the change in focus from love to the social context in which *Sir Tristrem* was transmitted also promotes "the conservative and hierarchical structure of a male-oriented society" and the supremacy of the sovereign typical the medieval English society.[291]

[289] Frappier, 1963, p.255.

[290] Crane, 1986, p.195.

[291] Rikhardsdottir, 2012, p.107-108.

## II. The Love Philtre

In the Anglo-Norman *Tristan*, the verses in which the main characters drink the love potion are missing. In fact, in the opening scene of the Carlisle fragment, the lovers are likely to have just ingested the love potion. Nonetheless, an episode from the conclusion of the tale, preserved in the Sneyd[2] fragment (Sney[2], vv.1217-1234), directly refers to the love potion.

When the wounded Tristan begs Kaherdin to go to England, find Ysolt and bring her to Brittany to heal him, he also mentions the potion they swallowed by accident on the ship. Moreover, he addresses the fact that this event marked the beginning of their sorrow and death sentence.[292]

**Sn[2], vv.1228-34**

| | |
|---|---|
| Quant ele jadis guari ma plaie, | *When she healed my wound,* |
| Del **beivre qu'ensemble beümes** | *The beverage we shared together by* |
| **En la mer** quant suppris en fumes. | *accident in the sea.* |
| **El beivre fud la nostre mort**, | *That drink was our death,* |
| Nus n'en avrum ja **mais confort**; | *We were not able to recover from it.* |
| A tel ure duné nus fu | *In the moment in which it was given* |
| **A nostre mort l'avum beü.** | *to us, we drank our death.* |

Despite the conciseness of the Middle English version, the reader is informed of the most salient events regarding the making and swallowing of the philtre. The Queen of Ireland prepares the infamous *boire amoreux* and entrusts it to Brengwain, Yseult's fair servant, who should give it to her daughter and King Marc on their wedding night (ST, vv. 1644-50).

[292] Gambino, 2014, pp.149-150.

**ST, vv.1644-50**

| | |
|---|---|
| Her moder about was bliþe | *Her mother was content* |
| & **tok a drink of miȝt**, | *and took a powerful philtre,* |
| Þat loue wald kiþe, | *that induces love,* |
| **& tok it Brengwain þe briȝt** | *she entrusted it to Brengwain,* |
| To þink | *the fair* |
| **'At er spouseing aniȝt** | *"During the wedding night give it to* |
| **ȝif Mark & hir to drink.'** | *drink to Marc and to her."* |

In the Middle English version, the scene of the accidental drugging is included (ST, vv. 1661-72). The virtuous Yseult asks Brengwain for something to drink. Unfortunately, her distracted servant offers her and Tristrem the love potion, which is given by The Fair to the hero first. Once they drink it, the narrator alludes to the tragic destiny the philtre will cause to Tristan and his beloved, echoing the verses from the Sneyd[2] fragment mentioned on the previous page (Sn[2], vv.1228-34).

**ST, vv. 1661-68**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Swete Ysonde þe fre** | *The sweet and virtuous Iseult* |
| **Asked Bringwain a drink.** | *Asked Brengwain for a drink.* |
| Þe coupe was richeli wrouȝt, | *The cup was rich well decorated,* |
| Of gold it was þe pin; | *the lid made of gold;* |
| **In al þe warld nas nouȝt** | *there is nothing alike the potion* |
| **Swiche drink as þer was in.** | *in the world.* |
| **Brengwain was wrong biþouȝt**, | *Brengwain is distracted,* |
| To þat drink sche gan win | *she went and took that beverage* |
| & swete Ysonde it bitauȝt; | *and gave it to the sweet Iseult;* |
| **Sche bad Tristrem bigin**, | *she invites Tristrem to begin.* |
| To say. | *Their love will not be broken* |
| **Her love might no man tuin** | *Until the day of their death.* |
| **Til her ending day.** | |

Moreover, the Middle English text implements another character who enjoys the potion with the lovers, a dog, named Hodain (ST, vv.1673-76).

**ST, vv.1673-76**

| | |
|---|---|
| An hounde þer was biside | *There was a dog with them,* |
| Þat was ycleped **Hodain**; | *his name was Hodain;* |
| Þe coupe he licked þat tide | *now he licks the cup* |
| Þo doun it sett Bringwain; | *when Brengwain put is down.* |

From the comparison of the romance of *Sir Tristrem* and the one of Gottfried von Strassburg emerges that most of the details of the episodes correspond. The Queen of Ireland makes the powerful philtre, which will be the cause of the sorrows and joy, life and death of those who drink it and Brengwain make the lovers drink it by accident.

Nonetheless, *Sir Tristrem* modifies some relevant details of this episode: who asks for the drink, who drinks first and the presence of Hodain. As mentioned above, in the Middle English version, Yseult demands Brengwain to bring her something to drink and she let Tristan ingest it first and his dog Hodain also tastes it. On the contrary, the Middle High German version contains the exact opposite chain of events: Tristan is the one who asks Brengwain for a drink and let his soon to be lover drink it first.

These changes might indicate that the author of the Middle English romance hints at the possibility that Yseult was interested in Tristrem even before drinking the potion. In the Middle High German tradition, Tristan's sorrow was alleviated by the presence of Isolt even before the accidental drugging (GVS, vv.11558-61) and the hero is the one who asks for something to drink. On the contrary, in *Sir Tristrem* there is no allusion to any significant interaction between them before their journey to England. However, Yseult notices that Tristrem is fatigued from rowing and asks her servant to bring her a beverage, which she

offers him first. Consequently, it seems plausible that the cares she reserves to him might symbolise the blossom of a love that will become incontrollable once they both share the drink, that turns out to be the powerful love potion.

The Middle English author tends to discard the majority of supernatural elements employed in the Anglo-Norman source text. For instance, he never mentions Peticru, the dog able to heal Ysolt's sorrows thanks to a magic bell hanging from his collar. Nonetheless, in *Sir Tristrem*, the hero has a loyal companion, Hodain. The dog's unusual faithfulness seems to be justified by the fact that he licked the cup containing the love potion. This amplification offers a comic relief and lightens a moment that marks the beginning of both an absolute and ill-fated love.

### iii. Ysolt's confusing *jeu de mots*

In spite of the lack of the crucial scene of the drugging in the Anglo-Norman version, the Carlisle fragment preserves one of the most famous dialogues of the romance, which has also been translated in the Middle High German version. On the contrary, once again the author of *Sir Tristrem* does not explore the feelings of the two leading characters in depth. He condenses the events that succeed the drinking of the philtre in only two stanzas, in which the renowned love dialogue between the lovers has been omitted.

In Thomas' version, the lovers are on the high sea conversing when Ysolt expresses her anguish by playing with three homographs: *lamer*, *l'amer* and *la mer*. Words with a Latin etymology, respectively deriving from *amarus* (bitter), *amare* (love) and *mare* (sea), which

dates back to Plautus.[293] This extremely clever *jeu de mots*, "in all probability Thomas' invention", summarises the unsettling feeling produced by their impossible love.[294]

**C[arl], vv.39-43**

| | |
|---|---|
| Si vus ne f[u]ss[ez], ja ne fusse,<br>Ne de **lamer** rien [ne] sëusse.<br>Merveille est k'om **la mer** ne het<br>Qui si **amer mal en mer** set,<br>E qui l'anguisse est si **amere**! | *If you were not here, I would not ever have been and I would not have known anything about lamer (bitterness/love).*<br>*It is unusual that people do not hate the sea when they know that at sea there is such bitter ill and that its anguish is so bitter!* |

Despite her attempt to explain to Tristan her *lamer* feeling, he does not fully comprehend if this state is caused by the sea (*la mer*), or by their love (*l'amer*). The hero simplifies the polysemy employed by his lover to *amer* and *la mer*, similarly to what occurs in both *Sir Tristrem* and *Tristan und Isolt*.

**C[arl], vv. 46-52**

| | |
|---|---|
| Tristran ad noté [ch]escun dit,<br>**Mes el l'ad issi forsvëé**<br>Par « **lamer** » que ele ad tant changé<br>Que ne set si cele dolur<br>Ad de **la mer** ou **de l'amur**,<br>Ou s'el dit «**amer**» de « **la mer**»<br>Ou pur « **l'amur** » diet « **amer** ».<br>Pur la dotance quë il [s]ent,<br>Demande si **l'a[mur]** li prent<br>Ou si ja grante ou s'el s'[a]s-t [ient]. | *Tristan has listened to every phrase,*<br>*But she confused him*<br>*By playing with "lamer",which she has rung such changes*<br>*That he does not know if that pain*<br>*She had was from the sea or from love,*<br>*or if she was saying "bitter" about "the sea"*<br>*or is saying "love" is "bitter."*<br>*The uncertainty he was feeling*<br>*Made him wonder if she was taken by love*<br>*And if she was is yielding to it or refraining.* |

Once again, Ysolt's is ambiguous, she declares that her feeling under the weather does not correspond to be sea sick, but rather to the bitterness of their love, feeling to which Tristan relates (C[arl], vv. 59-

[293] Gambino, 2014, p.36.
[294] Schulz, 2017, p.89.

70).

**C$^{arl}$, vv.59-63**

| | |
|---|---|
| Ysolt dit : ' [C]**el mal** queje sent<br>Est **amer**, **mes ne put nient** :<br>Mon quer angoisse e près le tient.<br>E tel **amer de la mer vient** :<br>Prist puis que \je çâen]z entray. ' | *Ysolt said, "The illness I feel*<br>*is bitter, but not putrid at all;*<br>*It torments my heart and holds it tight.*<br>*This bitterness comes from love– It took*<br>*hold since I embarked on it."* |
| Tristran respont : ' Autretelay :<br>Ly miens mais est del vostre estrait.<br>L'anguisse mon quer **amer** fait,<br>Si ne sent pas **le mal amer** ;<br>**N'il ne revient pas de la mer,**<br>**Mes d'amer ay ceste dolur,**<br>**E en la mer m'est pris l'amur.**<br>Assez en ay or dit a sage. ' | *Tristan replied, "I have a similar one:*<br>*my illness derives from yours.*<br>*Torment makes my heart bitter,*<br>*and I do not feel this illness bitter*<br>*Nor does it come from the sea*<br>*rather from loving I have this pain, And*<br>*on the sea love seized me.*<br>*Now I have said enough for whom is*<br>*able to comprehend."* |

In *Sir Tristrem* this episode is abridged and does not explore in such depth the emotional attitude of the two lovers. This reformulation can be attributed to both the lack of interest in courtly love and especially to the difficult rendering of the Anglo-Norman *jeu de mots* in Middle English. The same issue was encountered by Gottfried von Strassburg, who, instead of omitting the scene, opted for a similar play on the word *lamer*, which he transformed in *lameir* in his the Middle High German translation.[295]

After asking Brengwain, something to drink, the audience is informed that the servant inattentiveness causes them to drink the love potion, which puts a forever lasting spell on them (ST, vv.1661-62). Moreover, Tristrem's loyal dog represents a Middle English amplification of the narrative (ST, vv.1673-76).

[295] Hasty, 2003, pp.76-77.

Differently from Thomas of Brittany, the author of *Sir Tristrem* never implements to his romance dialogues between the two lovers, in which they confess their feelings to each other. Nonetheless, both poems offer a similar vision of love. Love will always be linked to sorrow. Tristan and Ysolt will never be able to achieve a state of pure happiness. The unconditional love that links them is both a blessing and a curse. In fact, both versions link love to pain. As one can read in the verses below, Tristan and Iseult enjoy their intimacy but they are unable to experience joy without anguish. As highlighted in the verses when they succumb for the first time to their uncontrollable passion while on their journey to Cornwall:

**C[arl], vv. 82-88**

**Tuz lur bons font privément**
E lur **joie** e lur deduit,
Quant il poënt e jur e nuit.
**Delitable est le deport**
Qui da sa dolur ad confort,
**Car c'est costume d'amur**
**De joie aveir apés dolur.**

*They enjoyed their passion privately*
*with joy and pleasure,*
*Day and night as often as they could.*
*Delightful is pleasure for whom finds*
*comfort to pain;*
*It is always like so in love*
*Joy follows pain.*

**ST, vv.1677-80**

**Þai loued al in lide**
& þerof were þai **fain**;
**Togider þai gun abide**
**In ioie & ek in pain[…]**

*They love each other's with fervour and feel a great joy: they stay together in joy and painé[…]*

**ST, vv.1684-88**
Tristrem in schip lay
With Ysonde ich night;
Play miri he may
With that worthli wight
In boure night and day.

*Tristrem lays with Yseult*
*In the ship each night;*
*Delighted he makes love*
*With that worthy maiden*
*Day and night in the chamber.*

As previously mentioned, Thomas' pun is reproduced in the Middle High German adaptation of Gottfried von Strassburg. Despite the impossibility of reproducing the same *jeu de mots* employed by

Thomas in his mother tongue, Gottfried opted for modifying the word *lamer* in *lameir*. In his version, Tristan is not puzzled by the concept expressed by Isolt, he immediately grasp the triple meaning she attributed to this word (bitterness, love and being sea sick) and the sorrow it implies (GVS, vv. 11985-95).

**GVS, vv.11985-95**

| | |
|---|---|
| Der Minnen vederspil Îsôt, | *And Isolt, Passion's accipiter* |
| «**lameir**» sprach sî «daz ist mîn nôt, | *She said "**lameir**", that is what* |
| **lameir daz swaeret mir den muot,** | *troubles me so, **lameir is making me** |
| **lameir ist, daz mir leide tuot.»** | ***so sad, it is lameir that hurts so bad**."* |
| dô sî **lameir** sô dicke sprach, | *Hearing **lameir** repeatedly,* |
| er bedâhte unde besach | *he began to deliberate* |
| anclîchen unde cleine | *and consider with much care* |
| des selben wortes meine. | *What this word might mean.* |
| sus begunde er sich versinnen, | *On the one hand, he knew,* |
| **l'ameir daz waere minnen,** | ***lameir could mean "love,"*** |
| **l'ameir bitter, la meir mer.** | ***but also "bitter," and la meir the sea.*** |

The fact that the author of *Sir Tristrem* opts for the omission of the exquisite *jeu de mots* conforms to his direct and rational narrative style and to the impossibility of reproducing it Middle English. The dialectic structure of the Anglo-Norman romance, in which the thought process of the hero is analysed in detail, is substituted by short reflections in the Middle English verses employed merely to introduce action. Consequently, this omission could be seen as both a simplification to produce a text that his audience could comprehend and as an attempt to combine love with action, rather than psychological reflection.

### iv. The journey to Cornwall

Tristan and Ysolt succumb to their love while on the ship which will conduct them to Cornwall, where The Fair will marry King Marc. This episode is quite similar in both the Anglo-Norman and the Middle

English traditions, although the latter reformulated some details concerning the journey.

According to Thomas, their navigation was quick and at full sail ($C^{arl}$, vv.92-93). Consequently, when the crew reached England, Tristan was disappointed because he would have liked to spend more time with his beloved who was destined to his uncle ($C^{arl}$, vv.94-100).

On the contrary, in *Sir Tristrem*, the reader is informed that the wind is not favourable (ST, vv.1653-54) and that the crew interrupts the navigation for two weeks, so that Tristan and Iseult can enjoy their company for as long as possible (ST, vv.1695-98).

**$C^{arl}$, vv.92-93**
La haute mer a plein siglant
**Vers Engleterre a plein tref**.

*Sailing over the smooth high sea,*
*towards England at full sail.*

**ST, vv. 1653-54**
A winde oȝain hem blewe
**Þat sail no miȝt þer be.**

*A headwind was blowing;*
*the sails could not be crowded on.*

**$C^{arl}$, vv.94-100**
Tere ont veüe cil de la nef;
Il en sunt tuit lié e joius
Fors sul Tristran l'Amerous,
Car s'il alast par son voleir;
Mielz en ama[s]t Ysolt en mer,
Ses enveisures demener.

*Those on the ship saw the land– They were all happy and joyful except for Tristan, the Lover, for if it was for him,he would not have wanted to see it,he would rather have kept loving Iseult at sea and carried on with their pleasure.*

**ST, vv. 1695-98**
Tvai wikes in þe strand
No seyl þai no drewe;
Into Jnglond
A winde to wille hem blewe.

*For two weeks in the see sails were not crowded on; then a good wind leads them towards England.*

This episode is followed in both versions by the presence of a young man who recognises Tristan's ship, finds King Marc, brings him the news of their arrival and is invested knight by him ($C^{arl}$, vv. 104-112;

ST, vv.1699-1703). Thomas' description of the events that followed the communication of their arrival is more detailed. In fact, he specifies that the King welcomes them ashore, summons the noblemen and marries the beautiful Ysolt on the same day, whereas in *Sir Tristrem* the reader is just informed of the fact that Marc and Yseult got married that day ($C^{arl}$, vv.113-118; ST, vv.1704-05).

| **$C^{arl}$, vv.113-118** | **ST, vv. 1704-05** |
|---|---|
| Encontre vie[n]t tresqu'el rivage,<br>Pus mande pur tut son barnage.<br>Ysolt devant a [menant vait]<br>E quanque estut pur<br>ho[nwr fait] ;<br>**Esposé l'ad par grant [baldur],**<br>**E deduient soi tut [le jur]**.<br>Ysolt esteit de gran[t saveir],<br><br>*He goes to meet them at the shore, then sends for all his lords. He leads Isuelt before [them];he does what is proper to [honor her];he has married her with great [display], and they enjoy themselves all [day].* | **Ysonde briȝt of hewe**<br>Þer **spoused Mark þe king**.<br><br>*Yseult of the Fair face marries Marc, the King.* |

The reformulation produced in the Middle English romance about the journey is minimal, but portrays a different approach to love. As per usual, Thomas highlights the effect that the journey has on the hero's feelings and the sorrow produced by the awareness that once they arrive in England Ysolt has to marry Marc. On the contrary, the insular author focuses always on the action that in this case is initiated by love itself. The uncontrollable passion overtakes the hero's sense of duty. Instead of bringing to his uncle the woman he will marry, Tristrem prefers to stall their navigation for two weeks just to spend as much time as possible with his lover.

### v. The first wedding night

The following episode is probably one of the most relevant in the whole romance. Iseult servant's, Branguain, proves her fidelity by accepting to substitute her during the first night of marriage with King Marc, since the Queen had already lost her virginity with Tristan.

In *Tristan*, Branguain is persuaded by the sly Iseult, who implores her in tears ($C^{arl}$, vv.119-129). The author of *Sir Tristrem* is more concise. According to his version, Brengwain does what she is expected to, she sleeps with Marc after having drunk the philtre, element that is not mentioned in the original Anglo-Norman source (ST, vv. 1708-19).

| **$C^{arl}$, vv.119-27** | **ST, vv. 1708-19** |
|---|---|
| **Ysolt esteit de gran[t saveir],** | **Brengwain** wiþouten lesing |
| Es chambres vient [cuntre le seir] ; | Dede as hye had þouȝt; |
| Dan Tristran la tien[t par la main]. | Sche tok þat **loue drink** |
| A conseil apelent Br[anguain] : | **Þat in Yrlond was bouȝt**. |
| Tendrement plorfe Ysolt e prié] | For Ysonde to þe king |
| Que cele nuit ly fac[e aie] | Brengwain to bed was brouȝt |
| Vers le rey en lu [de reine] | Þat tide; |
| Pur ce qu'il la siet a [meschine] | Mark his wille wrouȝt |
| N[ë] ele n'est mie p [ucelé]. | On bed Brengwain biside. |
| *Yseult was very clever, she went to her bedroom with Tristan. They call [Branguen] into counsel, she weeps tenderly, [asking her] to [help] her tonight with the king by taking [her] place because he knows her to be [a virgin].* | *Brengwain, without making any mistakes, does what she is supposed to do; she takes the love philtre, given to her in Ireland. She is conducted by the king, in place of Iseult, in the chamber: Marc takes pleasure with her in bed.* |

In both versions, after the sexual act between the King and the servant, Yseult takes Bergwain/Branguain's place ($C^{arl}$, vv. 146-48; ST, vv.1718).

| **C[arl], 146-48** | **ST, v.1717-18** |
|---|---|
| Quant Ii **reis ot [tut sun bon fait]**,<br>Branguain est del [lit sus levee],<br>**E la reïne i es[t entree]** | **When Mark had tint his swink**<br>**Ysonde to bed ȝede.** |
| *When the king had finished, Branguen [got out of the bed] and the queen [got in].* | *When Marc has wasted his energy, then Yseult goes to bed.* |

Nevertheless, in the Anglo-Norman version the Queen does not fully trust her servant and stays behind the door to make sure not to be betrayed by her. In this version, Ysolt fears her servant will reveal to Marc the truth only to take her place (C[arl], vv.140-145).

Similarly, Yseult displays lack of trust in the Middle English version. After exploiting her servant on her first wedding night, the Queen decides to hire two foreign squires to kill her (ST, vv. 1737-38).

| **C[arl], vv. 140-45** | **ST, vv. 1737-38** |
|---|---|
| En molt grant **angu[isse** est Ysolt] :<br>Quide que **la veill[e traïr]**<br>**E vers le rey de[scoverir],**<br>**Que tant li plaisen[t li délit]**<br>**Que guerpir ne v[oldra le lit]** ;<br>Molt est près d'ilue[c en aguait], | Now thenketh **Ysonde to slo**<br>**Brengwain and hir to spille**.<br><br>*Now Yseult wants to slay*<br>*Brengwain, she wants to kill her.* |
| *Ysolt was very worried- she thinks she will [be betrayed by her] and tell the king; because she is enjoying herself she will not want to leave the bed. She waited close by.* | |

It seems plausible that this resolution was also made in the original text by Thomas. In fact, the Middle High German text reports that the distrustful Isolt fears to be reported by her servant (GVS, vv.12702-

08) and deliberates that the sole option she has is to murder Brenguain (GVS, vv. 12713; 12722-23).

Once Ysolt takes her place in her husband's bed, both in the Carlisle manuscript and *Sir Tristrem* there is the reference to a beverage the married couple is supposed to consume. In Thomas' version, King Marc drinks wine that obfuscates his mind to the point that he does not realise he is making love with another woman ($C^{arl}$, vv.149-51). In *Sir Tristrem*, Yseult is the one who asks for something to drink (ST, v.1719). However, the audience is informed she does not drink, because her love for Tristrem did not need to be fuelled. In addition, the newly married couple does not seem to consume their wedding (ST, vv.1722-1727).

**$C^{arl}$, v.149**
Après **le vin** o [vec li jut]
*After the wine*

**$C^{arl}$, vv.150-51**
**Issi k'onques ne [s'aparçut]**
**Quë autre fut [de la premiere]** ;
Trove la de [bele maniere]
Si li mostré [molt grant amur],
Si grant joie, [si grant dulçur] ...

*Marc sleeps with Ysolt, he never notices that she is different. He finds her just as compliant, he shows her his affection, he takes such great joy in her.*

**ST, v. 1719**
Of **Yrlond hye asked drink**,
*Iseult asks for the drink,*

**ST, vv. 1722-27**
Þerof hadde sche **no nede,**
Of non maner þing
Oȝain Tristrem, in lede,
As þo;
No miȝt no clerk it rede,
Þe loue bitven hem to.

*She hands him the goblet, she places it next to her, she does not need it, it is not necessary at all to enhance her love for Tristan; what is certain is that no poet would be able to narrate about the love between those two.*

This episode, preserved in both versions, reveals new aspects of the Queen's personality, she is cunning and manipulative. As demonstrated by the main divergence between the two traditions at the

end of the substitution scene: the replacement of the wine, mentioned in Thomas' work, with the love philtre in *Sir Tristrem*.

In fact, in the Anglo-Norman tradition the wine has the function of confusing the King to the point that he does not realise that another woman is in his bed. On the contrary, the author of the Middle English text highlights the negative traits of Yseult's personality when she asks for the love potion and allows her husband to drink it. The fact that she only pretends to ingest it with him might be interpreted as her attempt to blind her husband with the power of the philtre only to her advantage, so that she would be able to enjoy Tristrem's company without raising any suspicions at court.

## 5. 2 The garden scene

The second extant episode of Thomas' *Tristan* preserved in the Cambridge fragment (C) is also present in *Sir Tristrem*. In both traditions, the lovers hide in the forest, a *locus amoenus* where they retrieve from their courtly life just to enjoy their company. However, their idyllic life immersed in nature is ended when the king's dwarf catches them *in flagrante* and reports them to Marc.

### I. The lovers in the forest

Even though the sequence of events occurring in the forest are similar in both versions, the unknown author of *Sir Tristrem* reformulates and abridges the episode. He omits exploring in more depth the character's feelings and Ysolt's final love declaration.

In both adaptations, Tristan and Yseult are hiding in the forest and King Marc finds them with the help of his dwarf (C, vv. 1-7; ST,

vv.2575-85).

**C, vv.1-7**

**Entre ses bras Yseut la reïne**.
Bien cuidoient estre a seur;
Sorvint i par estrange eur
**Li rois, que li nains i amene**.
Prendre les cuidoit a l'ovraine
Mes, merci Deu, bien demorerent
Quant aus endormis les troverent.

*Between his arms the queen Iseult. They believed they were safe;* u*nfortunately, the king arrived, brought there by the dwarf. He thought he would took them by surprise, but thank God (he did not), they hesitated when they found them asleep.*

**ST, 2575-85**

So bifel bidene
Opon a somers day:
Tristrem & þe quen
Stalked to her play.
**Þe duerwe hem haþ sene**,
To Mark gan he say
'Sir king, wiþouten wene,
Þi wiif is now oway
& þi kniȝt;
Wende fast as þou may,
Oftake hem, ȝif þou miȝt.'

*Everything occurred on a summer's day. Tristrem and the queen walked cautiously and loved each other's. The dwarf saw them and referred it to Marc: « Sir King, your wife is away with your knight, without a doubt. Go there as fast as possible and overtake them, if you can.»*

As one can read from the extracts above, King Marc discovers that the pair is together with the support of a dwarf and wishes to overtake them to be able to punish them. The main difference is that in Thomas' version Tristan and Yseult are asleep, whereas in the Middle English version the lovers are caught while they are sleeping together, they are both awake and immediately realise their lives are in danger.

After having witnessed that the two lovers are together, the King is aware that he needs to find other witnesses to prove their guilt. Consequently, he decides to go back to his palace to call some of his men to testify against them.

**C, vv.8-13**

Li rois les voit, au naim a dit:
**« Atendés moi chi un petit;**

**ST, vv. 2586-87**

**Mark King after ran;**
**That <u>thai</u> bothe ysé.**

**En cel palais la sus irai,**
**De mes barons i amerrai.**
**Verront com les avon trovez;**
**Ardoir les frai, quant ert provez. »**

*The king saw them and told the dwarf : « Wait for me here, I will return to the palace up there to bring my barons here. They will see how we found them, I will burn them at the stake, when I obtain the proves. »*

*King Marc runs away, so they [could]see them.*

In *Tristan* by Thomas, the author both specifies that the king has to find witnesses and that he wants to burn them at the stake (C, vv.8-13). In *Sir Tristrem*, the event is summarised very briefly. The reader is only informed of the fact that King Marc returns to the palace, so that they, probably a subject pronouns to refer to his knights, could see the two lovers together (ST, vv.2586-87; 2606-07).

In the Anglo-Norman version, Tristan wakes his lover up and realises that the only choice he has is to exile himself. Not only does he think about his own safety, but also he desires to do what is best for Ysolt. The sorrow and the pain that leads to this choice are unspeakable, he is aware that leaving his lover's side means accepting to live a miserable life. Moreover, he prays Ysolt not to forget him and before his departure, he kisses her goodbye. Although this choice and the feelings he expresses in these verses are also mentioned in *Sir Tristrem*, one cannot help to notice that the hero of the Middle English versions appears more afraid of death (ST, vv. 2595-97) than to part ways with his beloved Yseult.

| **C, vv.17-36** | **ST, vv. 2588-2600** |
|---|---|
| **Tristram se dreche** et dit : "A ! las ! | Tristrem seyd than, |
| Amie Yseut, car esvelliez : | "Ysonde, schent er we |
| Par engien somes agaitiez ! | For thoughtes that we can, |

Li rois a veü quanque avon fait
Au palais a ses omes vait;
Fra nos s'il puet, ensenble prendre
Par jugement ardoir en cendre.
**Je m'en voil aller, bele amie,**
**Vos n'avez garde de la vie**
Car ne porez estre provee
..... [lacuna: 3 verses]
Fuir deport et querre **eschil**,
Guerpir joie siouvre peril.
**Tel duel ai por la departie**
**Ja n'avrai hait jor de ma vie.**
Ma doce dame, je vos pri
**Ne me metez mie en obli** :
En loig de vos autant m'amez
Comme vos de près fait avez.
Je n'i os, dame, plus atendre;
**Or me baisiés au congié prendre**. »

*Tristan got up and said « Alas! Yseult, my love, wake up! We were caught. The King saw what we did and went to his palace to call his men. If he can, he will capture us together and will burn us at the stake. I have to go, my love, do not fear for your life, they do not have any proves against you […] escape from happiness to exile. Leave joy for risk. I feel so much pain; I do not believe I can be happy ever again. My sweet maiden, I pray you, do not forget me; love me from far away as much as you did when I was close to you. Madame, I cannot wait any longer, just give me a good bye kiss. »*

For hole no may it be."
**Nas never so sori man,**
**Tristrem than was he,**
**That hende.**
"**For dout of deth y fle**,
**In sorwe and wo y wende.**

"**Y fle for dout of deth**;
Y dar no leng abide
**In wo mi liif to lede**
**Bi this forestes side.“**

*Tristrem then said «Yseult, we are lost! We can think about this as much as we want, there is no way to redeem ourselves. Never a man has been this sad, as Tristem the Valiant, is now. «I am escaping because I fear death; I am running away in pain and sorrow! I am escaping because I fear death; I do not dare to stay any longer, to live in pain in this forest! »*

Another major divergence is represented by the absence of lengthy love declarations enriched by a high emotional charge. The author of *Sir Tristrem* either completely ignores them or reformulates them by condensing the concepts expressed in Thomas' poem in only a few verses. For instance, the female character of Yseult is rarely given a voice in the Middle English version. On the contrary, her interventions are more frequent and lengthy in the Anglo-Norman one. For instance,

after hearing that her beloved has to exile, she comforts him by saying that distance will not affect their unbreakable love.

**C, vv. 37-51**

De li baisier Yseut demore
Entent les dis et voit qu'il plore;
Lerment si oildu cuer sospire
Tendrement dit : "Amisbel sire
Bien vos doit menbrer de cest jor
**Que partistes a tel dolor.**
**Tel paine ai de la desevranche**
**Ains mais ne sui que fu pesanche.**
**Ja n'avrai mais amis deport**
**Quant j'ai perdu vostre confort**
**Si grand pitiéne tel tendrour**
**Quant doi partir de vostre amor**;
Nos cors partir ore convient
Mais l'amor ne partira nient.

*Yseult waited to kiss him, she listened to him and saw him cry, with her eyes full of tears, she sighed with tenderness and said: « My Love remember this day in which you left in pain. What a great pain is to be separated, I have never suffered this much. Love, I will never experience joy if I loose your comfort, neither compassion or tenderness if I loose your love, our hearts are departing but our love never will.*

Finally, when the moment of separation comes, Yseult gifts Tristan her ring in both adaptations. This object symbolises their unconditional love and Yseult's fidelity. Moreover, the queen's ring, and what it embodies will affect Tristan life when he decides to marry another woman.

**C, vv.51-52**

Nequedent cest **anel** pernés :
**Por m'amor, amis,le gardés.**

*Take this ring, keep it as a sign of my love.*

**ST, vv.2601-02**

A **ring** Ysonde him bede
To **tokening at that tide.**

*Yseult gave him a ring as a token at that time.*

The lack of other verses from the Cambridge manuscript leaves the reader in the dark regarding what occurs in the Anglo-Norman tradition. However, by reading another stanza of *Sir Tristrem* we are

informed of the fact that Tristan hides in the forest and witnesses the King coming back with his knights, who find the queen on her own.

**ST, vv. 2603-12**

He fleighe forth in gret drede
**In wode him for to hide**
Bidene.
To seken him fast **thai** ride;
**Thai founden bot the Quene.**
**Tristrem is went oway**
As it nought hadde ybene.
**Forthi the knightes gan say**
**That wrong Markes had sen.**
For her than prayd thai
**That Mark forgaf the Quene.**

*He flees in pain to hide in the forest, they come to capture him, but find only the queen. Tristrem has gone away, as nothing ever happened, so the knights affirm that the king must be mistaken. They intercede for her, so that Marc forgives her.*

In this stanza the identity of the *thai*, firstly encountered in line 2587, is finally revealed since the author mentions that the King's men arrive in the forest with him only to find Yseult by herself. That is the reason why they intercede in the dispute and advise the King to forgive his wife and readmit her at court.

The same episode was inserted in the Middle High German translation. In the specific case of Gottfried's romance, the King questions Brengwain about the whereabouts of his wife and finds her in the arms of his nephew (GVS, vv.18178-96), employing the same formula found in Thomas.

**C, v.1**

**Entre ses bras Yseut la reïne**

*Between his arms the queen Ysolt*

**GVS, v. 18195-7**

**wîp unde neven die vander**
**mit armen zuo z'ein ander**
gevlohten nâhe und ange

*He found his wife and nephew locked in each other's arms in very close embrace*

Nonetheless, the German author modifies the course of events presented in the Anglo-Norman source text. Instead of witnessing a

scene in which the lovers are asleep on the same bed (C, v.7), the King catches the lovers *in flagrante* (GVS, vv.18197-207), as it occurs in *Sir Tristrem* (ST, vv.2579-85). In the light of what the King has witnessed, he decides to summon a council in charge of pronouncing the judgment on the matter, as the law of the land required (GVS, vv.18241-44). Interestingly, this detail is maintained in both the original text of Thomas (C, vv.9-13) and in *Sir Tristrem* (ST, v.2587), demonstrating that to condemn an adultery in both Continental and Insular Europe even the King needed witnesses.

Similarly to Thomas' romance Tristan is the one that realises his uncle saw them (GVS, vv.18245-49). However, in Gottfried's reworking the hero blames Isolt's servant since she should have advised them if anyone was coming (GVS, vv.18250-51).

As in the versions previously commented, Tristan is aware of the fact that the only option he has to save both their lives is to flee. Gottfried allows the ill-fated lovers to declare their feeling before parting ways, as it occurs in Thomas' version. Tristan expresses his love, prays his beloved not to forget him and asks for one last kiss (GVS, vv. 18266-85). Isolt attempts to reassure him and states that their lives are intertwined to the point that the memory of him could never fade, she also entrusts him with her ring, a token of loyalty and love, and gives him a final kiss (GVS, vv. 18286-385).

| **C, vv.51-52** | **ST, vv.2601-02** | **GVS, vv.18307-09** |
|---|---|---|
| Nequedent cest **anel** pernés :/**Por m'amor, amis,le gardés.** | A **ring** Ysonde him bede/To **tokening at that tide.** | und nemet hie diz **vingerlîn**./**daz lât ein urkünde sîn/der triuwen unde der minne.** |
| *Take this ring, keep it as a sign of my love.* | *Yseult gave him a ring as a token at that time.* | *Here, take this ring of mine. Let it always certify our loyalty and our love.* |

The episode transmitted through the Cambridge fragment shed some light on some significant features of courtly love: the noble affection that links Tristan and Ysolt, their feelings expressed in long love declarations and Tristan's chivalric willingness to live a life in sorrow to preserve the one of his beloved. Consequently, the reformulations adopted by the Middle English author were necessary to represent a less courteous love, more valuable to the English public. As proved by the forced farewell in Thomas and Gottfried's versions.

In all three adaptations, Yseult donates her ring to Tristan, a symbol of love and fidelity (C, vv.51-52; ST, vv.2601-02; GVS, vv.18307-09). However, only in the Anglo-Norman and Middle High German traditions the leading characters' love declarations, kiss and ring exchange enrich the goodbye with an aura of solemnity typical of a wedding ritual.[296]

On the contrary, the reformulation provided by Middle English text does not do any justice to the metaphorical union described in the previous versions. Rather than focusing on the emotional charge of their goodbye, the concise translation prioritises the haste provoked by the fear of being executed. Consequently, the anguish of the separation is overshadowed by the hero's concern, which does not allow the readers to fully empathise with the lovers.

### 5.3 Tristan's marriage with Yseult of the White Hands

The next extant episode of Thomas' Anglo-Norman romance has been preserved in the 888 verses of Sneyd[1] fragment (Sn[1]). After a series of travels

[296] Schulz, 2017, p.156.

around Europe, in which the hero attempts to alleviate his sorrow by fighting as many battles as possible, he finally arrives to Brittany where he meets his future wife, Yseult of the White Hands.

### I. Alleviating the trauma of separation through knightly deeds

Even though Tristan's adventures following his exile present some divergences in the three tradition, it is possible to reconstruct them through the Anglo-Norman, Middle English and Middle High German texts. As mentioned in the previous section in *Sir Tristrem*, the hero does not immediately leave the forest; rather he decides to spend there one last night with his beloved. He then leaves Cornwall to head towards Spain, where he kills three giants (ST, vv.2628-29). Thomas also briefly reference this specific journey in its adaptation ($Sn^1$, vv.735), whereas Gottfried omits this visit in his version. After his adventures in the Iberian Peninsula, Tristrem pays a visit to Rohand's sons in Ermenie and finally, the hero reaches Brittany (ST, vv.2630-2641). In spite of the lack of an Anglo-Norman witness attesting his visit to Ermenie, Thomas confirms that the hero directs himself to Brittany ($Sn^1$, vv.736).

Similar journeys are also described in the Middle High German translation. However, Gottfried omits his stay in Spain and makes him visit Germany instead (GVS, vv.18443-54). Neither Thomas nor the unknown author of *Sir Tristrem* mentioned this kingdom, which was part of the Roman Empire. From there Tristan goes back to his land, in this case called Parmenie, where he meets Rual's sons and discovers that the loyal Rual and his wife are deceased (GVS, vv.18510-669). The death of his adoptive father and his wife Florate have been omitted in the Middle English Romance.

His last journey conducts him to the land where he will meet his wife. The dukedom in question bears diverse names. In the Anglo-Norman and Middle English, it is known as Brittany, whereas in Middle High German as Arundel (GVS, vv.18686-89). Nonetheless, the hero carries out the role of pacifier in both adaptations (ST, vv. 2641-44; GVS, vv. 18926).

In spite of the fragmentary nature of Thomas' romance, one of the most interesting aspects that emerges from the extant fragments is the lack of action in favour of inner debates and soliloquies.

On the contrary, the author of *Sir Tristrem* favours action instead on the static evaluation of the hero's internal struggles. As proven by the importance attributed to Tristrem's knightly deeds, which are a necessary passage for the English hero. In fact, Tristrem seems to need action in order to vent his frustration caused by his forced exile from England. The trauma caused from the separation from Yseult is not the only focus of the Middle English verses, as it is in the Anglo-Norman ones. As proved by the fact that, Tristan deals with pain by constantly analysing his position before resorting to action. On the contrary, the only remedy for Tristrem's anguish is committing to his knightly duties and behaving like a man that want to die in the battlefield (ST, vv.2619-27).

## II. Isolt of the White Hands

Tristan's knightly deeds conduct him to Brittany, in Thomas and *Sir Tristrem*, Arundel, in Gottfried's version. Once arrived in this land, the hero manages to suppress the conflicts and is proclaimed knight by the Duke, who offers him the hand of his daughter, Yseult of the White Hands (ST, vv. 2645-50). On the contrary, in Gottfried's

version, Isolt's brother Kaherdin is the one who encourages the union both because he notices a mutual interest between them and for political reasons (GVS, vv. 19088-89; 93-96).

| **ST, vv. 2647-50** | **GVS, vv. 19088-89; 93-96** |
|---|---|
| **He bede him**, withouten les,<br>**His douhter** that was bright<br>In land.<br>That maiden **Ysonde hight**<br>**With the White Hand.** | Vil schiere wart, daz Kâedîn<br>ir **zweier blicke wart gewar**, |
| *He offers him, without hesitation, his daughter that was the fairest of the land. That maiden was called Yseult of the White Hands.* | *It did not take Kaedin long to notice their exchange of glances.* |
| | ob s'ime ze herzen beclibe,<br>daz er si naeme und dâ belibe.<br>**sô haete ouch er mit ime verant**<br>**sîn urliuge über al daz lant**. |
| | *He might take her and remain, which offered Kaedin the prospect of Tristan's help in subduing and governing the whole land.* |

The events that lead to the unfortunate union of Tristan and Yseult are transmitted by all three versions. As per usual, the unknown composer of *Sir Tristrem* abridges the original episode and does not leave enough space to the inner tribulations of the hero. The Middle English romance just briefly hints to some of Tristrem's reflections on love, whereas the Anglo-Norman explores in depth the struggles that the confused hero has to face. Thomas resorts to long inner monologues in which the contrast between *amur* and *desir* is extensively discussed by the conflicted hero. Despite the incompleteness of Gottfried's version, probably due to the sudden decease of the author, the German adaptation maintains some of the key elements of the episode helpful in the comparison.

## III. The hero's reflections on marriage

The Sneyd[1] fragments opens with the narrator introducing the concepts of *voleir* and *desir*, respectively the desire for sexual intercourse and for emotional connection. Tristan is aware of the fact that he needs to change his will since he is unable to obtain what he desires, Ysolt the Fair ($Sn^1$, vv. 3-4). The first long monologue in which Tristan reflects on the key themes of this fragment- love (*amur*), desire (*desir, deduit, buen, talent, joie*), sorrow (*anguisse, dolur, paines*), willingness (*voleir*) and reason (*raisun*) - begins in verse 5. The hero employs an apostrophe to address his speech to Ysolt, his "bele amie" ($Sn^1$, v.5), and highlights the antithetical contrast between him (**jo**) and her (vos).

**$Sn^1$, vv.9-20**

**Jo** perc pur vos joie e deduit,
E vos l'avez e jur e nuit;
**Jo** main ma vie en **grant dolur**,
E vos vostre en delit d'amur.
**Jo** ne faz fors **vos desirer**,
E vos nel puez consirer
Que deduit e joie n'aiez
E que tuiz vos buenz ne facez.
Pur **vostre cors su jo em paine**,
Li reis sa joie en vos maine:
Sun deduit maine e sun buen,
Ço que **mien** fu ore est suen.

*I lose joy and pleasure because of you, and you experience both day and night;*
*I live my life in great pain and you live yours with the joy of love.*
*All I do is desiring you, and you keep thinking about pleasure and joy, satisfaction that you always look for.*
*I am consumed by the desire of your body, but the king finds his joy in your body now, he satisfies his desire, what used to be mine is now his.*

The anaphora of the subject pronouns identifying Tristan (**jo**) and Ysolt the Fair (vos) marks the disparity between them. According to the hero, the deprivation of *joie* and *deduit* (happiness and pleasure) leads him to live a miserable life. His suffering is intensified by the awareness that Ysolt's life is enriched by the love of her husband

Marc, who now owns what used to belong to him. Moreover, his encounter with another woman that could satisfy his *desir* leaves him, deeply distressed (*grifment anguissé* - Sn[1], vv.29-30).

The hero frustration is perfectly embodied by the antithesis of the terms *desir* and *poeir*. Tristan is conscious of the fact that he cannot obtain the emotional connection he desires:

**Sn[1], vv.35-6**

| | |
|---|---|
| Quant mun **desir** ne puis **aveir**,<br>Tenir m'estuit a mun **püeir**, | *Since I cannot have what I desire, I have to settle with what I can have.* |

Consequently, he debates whether he could betray his real love and satisfy his physical needs with the woman he met in Brittany, justified by the distance that divides him and The Fair and by her marital obligations (Sn[1], vv.87-95). Despite the hero's attempts to excuse his beloved, the thought of her loving Marc tortures him. His pain and suffering are described by the same expressions in the Sneyd[1] fragment and *Sir Tristrem*:

| **Sn[1], vv. 43-4** | **ST, vv.2667-8** |
|---|---|
| Tantes **paines**, tantes **dolurs**<br>**Ai jo sufert pur ses amurs** | Icham in **sorwe** and **pine**,<br>**Fer to hye hap me bro3t.** |
| *A lot of pain, a lot of sorrow, I have suffered because of her love* | *I am in sorrow and pain, this has brought me her love.* |

In addition, Tristan expresses this unspeakable pain with a formula that echoes Catullo's *Odi et Amo*, he wonders why men tend to hate what they used to love.

**Sn[1], vv. 127-8**

| | |
|---|---|
| Dunt vient a hume volunté<br>De **haïr** ço qu'il ad **amé**? | *Where does the willingness to hate someone you used to love come from?* |

His nobility of spirit soon helps him realise that he cannot hate someone who truly used to love him (Sn[1], vv. 150-3). His confusion seems to be dissipated by the end of his monologue. The only solution he finds to free himself by the chains of this unobtainable love is marrying another woman, identified as *la meschine* (Sneyd1, v.173; 205). According to him, marriage could help him to both comprehend how Ysolt the Fair forgot him and find the pleasure he desired.

**Sn[1], vv. 173-8**

| | |
|---|---|
| Jo voil espuser **la meschine**<br>Pur saveir l'estre a la reïne,<br>**Si l'espusaille e l'assembler**<br>**Me pureient li faire oblier,**<br>**Si cum ele pur sun seignur**<br>**Ad entroblïé nostre amur.** | *I am going to marry the maiden to know how the Queen feels, marriage and pleasure will make me forget about her, as she forgot about me because of her husband.* |

The exploration of the leading character's reflection is almost completely absent in the Middle English version. According to Crane, *Sir Tristrem*'s author has the tendency to condense and rationalise the events of the Anglo-Norman tradition into a few stanzas.[297] As exemplified by Tristrem's inner debate on whether or not he should marry Ysolt of the White Hands summarised in one stanza (ST, vv. 2663-73). In the specific case of the Middle English tradition, Tristrem attempts to justify his wedding with Yseult. He blames for his unhappiness Marc, who mistreated him and Yseult, condemns Yseult

[297] Crane, 1986, p.190.

since she causes him to suffer and mentions that their adulterous love was unacceptable for the Scriptures.

**ST, vv. 2665-71**

"Mark, mi nem, hath sinne;
Wrong he hath ous wrought.
Icham in sorwe and pine;
Therto hye hath me brought.
Hir love, Y say, is mine;
The Boke seyt it is nought
With right."

*"My uncle Marc has sinned: he wronged us. I am in sorrow and pain, because her love brought me to this state. Her love, I say, belongs to me; but the Book affirms it is not right."*

Even in the Middle English tradition, the contrast between love and desire is briefly hinted. In *Sir Tristrem*, his choice to marry another woman attests how Tristan surrenders to *voleir* and gives up on true love, compelled by external pressure, internal suffering and religious beliefs.

Another reason that induces him to consider the marriage with Ysolt of the White Hands is mentioned in both the Anglo-Norman and Middle English versions and corresponds mainly to her name. Feature that puts under great distress even in the hero of the Middle High German text (GVS, vv.18974-77, 18990-2).

**Sn[1], vv.197-8**

Car **Ysolt as Blanches Mains volt**
Pur **belté** e pur **nun d'Isolt**.

*He wanted Ysolt with the White Hands because of her beauty and her name.*

**ST, vv. 2772-3**

The **maiden more he sought**
For sche **Ysonde hight**.

*He attempts to spend time with her especially because her name is Yseult.*

As per usual, Thomas provides the most detailed explanation as to why Ysolt's name and her beauty charm the hero to the point of deciding to marry her. He acts out of *venjance* (Sn[1], vv.214). Once he accepts that he cannot satisfy his pleasure with his beloved, he notices Ysolt

of the White Hands, whom he solely appreciates for her resemblance to Ysolt the Fair (Sneyd1, vv.219-32). This explication is followed by an excursus in which the narrator expresses his opinion on the *changable* spirit of human beings, always attracted by what Thomas defines *nouvelerie* (Sn[1], vv.236; 255). State that produces a constant dissatisfaction. As proven by Tristan, whose case provides a great example of human inconstancy.

Although the hero is divided by indecisiveness regarding the matter of marriage, he spends his time courting Ysolt. In Thomas, he gives her kisses and caresses, whereas in Gottfried Isolt is the one who shows to be well disposed towards him (Sn[1], vv.365-8; GVS, vv. 19240-43).

Music plays a deceptive role in their courting both in the Middle English and Middle High German adaptations. The composition and performance of a song, dedicated to Yseult the Fair, are mistakenly considered a love declaration by the naïve young woman and the court.

**ST, vv. 2651-57**

Tristremes love was strong
On swete Ysonde the Quene.
**Of Ysonde he made a song**
**That song Ysonde bidene.**
**The maiden wende al wrong**
**Of hir it hadde ybene.**

*Tristrem's love for the sweet Yseult is strong. He made a song for her, Yseult sings it from the beginning to the end. The maiden erroneously thinks that the song is about her.*

**GVS, vv.19205-18**

**oft unde dicke ergieng ouch daz:**
**sô daz gesinde in ein gesaz,**
**er unde Îsôt und Kâedîn,**
der **herzog** und diu **herzogîn**,
**vrouwen** und **barûne**,
sô tihtete er schanzûne,
rundate und höfschiu liedelîn
und sang ie diz refloit dar în:
**«Îsôt ma drûe, Îsôt m'amîe,**
**en vûs ma mort, en vûs ma vîe!»**
**und wan er daz sô gerne sanc,**
**sô was ir aller gedanc**
**und wânden ie genôte,**
**er meinde ir Îsôte,**

*He often performed for them when they sat in company, he and Isolt and Kaedin, the duke and his duchess, ladies and*

*noblemen,improvising schanzune,rundate, and courtly tunes,ending always with the refrain, "Isolt ma drue, Isolt mamie, en vus ma mort, en vus ma vie!" Because he sang with such fervour it was only natural for all of them to suppose he meant by this their Isolt*

There is no extant fragment attesting that Thomas' source text attributed the same role to music. Nonetheless, the refrain of the lay mentioned in Gottfried's translation is also found in the Turin fragment of Thomas (T). Consequently, due to the word-by-word translation it is highly likely that a similar occurrence was also narrated in the Anglo-Norman romance.

| **GVS,vv.19213-14** | **T, vv.121-2** |
|---|---|
| "Isolt **ma drue**, Isolt m'**amie**,<br>**en vus ma mort, en vus ma vie**!" | La **bele** raïne, s'**amie**,<br>**En cui est sa mort e sa vie**; |
| *Beautiful Isolt, my love Isolt, in you I find my death, in you I find my life.* | *The beautiful queen, his lover, in whom he finds his death and life.* |

Their courting phase is ended when Ysolt's father approves their union (Sn[1], vv. 365-68; ST, vv.2659-62). In both tradition the wedding between the hero and Ysolt occurs. Nevertheless, the author of *Sir Tristrem* reformulates some details regarding this event and the first wedding night of the newly married couple.

In the Anglo-Norman tradition, the author provided more details. For instance, the reader is informed about the fact that a date is set, Tristan friends arrive at the court in Brittany, the rite celebrated by a chaplain and a big feast occurred after the ritual. On the contrary, in the Middle

English tradition there is no reference to the organization of the wedding. In fact, it seems that as soon as Tristrem accepts the Duke's proposal, the wedding is celebrated.

Moreover, their first wedding night also presents some relevant reformulations. In both traditions the hero comprehends he has committed a hasty choice when he notices that the ring he received from his true love slipped off his finger. However, this crucial event occurs in two diverse moments. On the one hand, the narrator of Anglo-Norman romance explains that the hero lost his ring while he was being undresses due to the tightness of his cuff ($Sn^1$, vv. 387-94). On the other hand, Tristrem's ring simply falls while the hero is about to enter the bedroom (ST, vv.2683-4).

**$Sn^1$, vv. 386-94**

E **Tristrans se fait despuillier**
Del **blialt** dunt vestu esteit;
Bien ert seant, **al puin estreit**.
**Al sacher del blialt qu'il funt.**
**L'anel de sun dei saché ont**
Qu'Isolt al jardin lui dona
La deraigne feiz qu'il i parla.

*Tristan is being undressed from the tunic he was wearing. The fit was good, but its cuffs were too tight. While he was being undressed, his ring slipped off his finger, that was the ring that Ysolt gave him in the garden when they last spoke to each other's.*

**ST, vv.2683-4**

**Tristrem ring fel oway**
**As men to chaumber him ledde.**

*Tristrem's ring falls while he is led by his men to the chamber.*

In both traditions, the hero's reactions correspond: the sight of this object fills his thoughts, in Thomas, and his heart, in *Sir Tristrem*, with anguish.

| **Sn[1], vv.395-8** | **ST, vv.2685-6** |
|---|---|
| **Tristran regarde, veit l'anel**<br>E entre en sun pensé novel;<br>**Le penser est grant anguisse**<br>Qu'il ne set que faire poïsse.<br><br>*Tristan looks and sees the ring, and a new thought discloses in his mind, a thought so distressing, that he did not know what he should do.* | **Tristrem biheld that ring;**<br>**Tho was his hert ful wo.**<br><br>*Tristrem looks at the ring; his heart is filled with distress.* |

The inner tribulations of the hero are voiced in two inner monologues. In Thomas' version, Tristan's reflections are presented in 150 verses. He blames his *fol corage* and volubility as the main causes of his marriage. Moreover, he is divided between keeping the promise of fidelity made to Ysolt and his marital obligations. If he succumbs to his *voleir*, he will betray Ysolt the Fair. However, if he does not he will not respect his duties as a husband. Despite his fear of being hated by his wife, he needs to be punished with abstinence (Sn[1], vv. 387-588).

The key points of the Anglo-Norman hero's reflections are maintained in *Sir Tristrem*, the hero blames himself for the separation with his beloved, whom he loves with all his heart and soul. Therefore, once he comes to terms with his own mistake he resorts to the same punishment. Nevertheless, the author of the Middle English romance reformulated Tristan's resolution and adds that Tristrem will respect his pact on the condition that his wife accepts it (ST, vv.2687-2705).

| **Sn[1],vv.573-4** | **ST, vv. 2698-2701** |
|---|---|
| **Chulcher m'en voil or en cest lit,**<br>**E si m'astendrai del delit.** | Tristrem to bedde yede<br>With hert ful of care. |

*I will lay down in this bed, but I will refuse to satisfy my lust.*

He seyd, "**The dern dede,**
**Do it Y no dare**."
The **maiden** he forbede
**Yif it hir wille ware.**

*Tristrem goes to bed with an anguished heart. He says (to himself) "I cannot consume the marriage!" If she agrees, he will abstain from her.*

The pain caused by abstinence (*paine l'astenir*) is particularly explored by the narrator of the Anglo-Norman romance, who employs once again the keywords of Tristan's first monologue to describe his conflicted feelings. In spite of the co-presence of both *desir* and *voleir* in the hero, he manages to employ his reason (*raison*) to control his carnal impulses (*voleir*) and in the end he chooses to be loyal to his love (*amur*). As a matter of fact, he realises the attraction he felt for his now wife was solely to satisfy the pleasures of his flesh and did not came from love.

**Sn[1], vv. 596-608**

La **raison** se tient a Ysolt.
Le **desir** qu'il ad vers la reine
Tolt le **voleir** vers la meschine;
**Le desir lui tolt le voleir,**
Que nature n'i ad **poeir**.
**Amur e raisun le destraint,**
E le **voleir** de sun cors vaint.
Le grant **amor** qu'ad vers Ysolt
Tolt ço que la nature volt,
E vaint icele volenté
Que senz **desir** out en pensé.
Il out boen **voleir** de li faire
**Mais l'amur le fait molt retraire.**

*The reason was loyal to Ysolt. The desire he had for the Queen erased the carnal lust he felt for the maiden; the desire erased the lust in him, and nature could not change his mind. Love and reason overtook him and triumphed over his lust. The great love he felt for Ysolt controlled his nature and won his impulses, which he generated without love. He wanted to sleep with her, but the strength of love detained him.*

Another divergence that differentiate the translation is represented by the role of the female figure. As already mentioned, in *Sir Tristrem*

her opinion seems to matter more. However, when rejected she is almost apologetic and promise her husband she accepts his condition (ST, vv.2702-06).

On the contrary, in Thomas, Ysolt is the one who takes the initiative ($Sn^1$, vv.589-92). Nonetheless, when her husband notices she is prudish, he exploits her uncertainty to his advantage. He lies about an injury and promises her they will be other occasions to consume their wedding. Ysolt's reply is similar to the one given by the Middle English character; she accepts his reluctance and worries about him. Renouncing to do anything that would hurt him.

The reformulation of this episode perfectly reflects the directness of the author of *Sir Tristrem* who rather than focusing on the complex introspection of the hero, presents its public with a *fait accompli*.[298] Instead of leaving space to Tristan's distressing reasoning, the Middle English author condenses 648 verses in just 32, in which the hero never actively reflects on the possibility of marrying Yseult nor explores what lead him to betray his true love.

Some thoughts come to his mind, but they are almost immediately followed by action, an antidote to sorrow. He decides he will marry Ysolt of the White Hands because of her name. When he makes this decision, their wedding is celebrated. The author of *Sir Tristrem* does not offer any description of the rite, whereas Thomas presents it with more attention to the details.

In both versions, once the hero is about to fully commit to his wife, Yseult's ring stops him and causes him to come to terms with the

[298] Symons, 2001, p.13.

mistake he made. Despite the fact that the heroes of both tradition decide to redeem themselves by practising sexual abstinence, this final resolution is the result of diverse thinking processes.

On one hand, Tristan almost overanalyses his decision in another soliloquy of 150 verses. On the other, Tristrem is in a similar emotional state but rather than sharing his internal psychology, he deliberates that his marriage is going to remain unconsumed. Differently from Tristan he does not invent an injury to escape his duties and partially considers what his wife has to say on the matter. Yseult's is given a voice. She excuses her husband and accepts his condition, as expected from submissive woman who observes her role in the patriarchal society.

## Concluding remarks

The main purpose of this work was to employ the Descriptive Translation Studies in the comparison of some of the most significant passages taken from the Anglo-Norman *Tristan* and the Middle English *Sir Tristrem*. Thanks to this dynamic approach, which considers translation as a complex semiotic process, the analysis of the translated Middle English romance does not focus on how well the unknown author reproduced Thomas' poem. On the contrary, the descriptive methodology allows to identify and motivate the reformulations produced in *Sir Tristrem* by taking into account the new target culture in which this translation was introduced.

*Sir Tristrem* survives only in the Auchinleck Manuscript, an anthology of Middle English texts probably copied in a London. The unknown author of the Middle English romance employed Thomas' Anglo-Norman poem as a model in the translation process and subjected it to a certain degree of modification, which altered some formal aspects of the original romance. Nonetheless, the narrative structure and the main events of the Anglo-Norman source text have been preserved in the Middle English adaptation. At a first glance, the latter might appear as a plainer version of its source text. However, one should not forget that the contexts of divulgation of the Anglo-Norman and Middle English texts differ.

The reformulations produced in the Middle English romance were necessary to conform to the taste of a less sophisticated public, who would not have been able to approach the Anglo-Norman poem due to a language barrier and a lack of interest in courtly love. As a matter of fact, it should be noted the theme of love, crucial in the Anglo-Norman poem, is peripheral in the

Middle English rewriting. It seems likely that the author of the Middle English romance considered long descriptions, inner soliloquies and dialogues about love tedious and unnecessary digressions. Moreover, he was probably aware of the fact that his audience would not have appreciated them. Consequently, the more direct and simpler style of *Sir Tristrem* might be seen as a compromise reached by its translator who wished to create an acceptable and comprehensible romance for his public. Therefore, to be consistent with his objective, he preferred to condense entire episodes of the Anglo-Norman tradition and capture their essence in fewer verses.

If Thomas and his audience wished to explore the psychology of Tristan and Ysolt, the unknown translator of *Sir Tristrem* did the exact opposite. The considerable reformulation of the verses, in which the Anglo-Norman leading characters express their feelings and deal with the sorrow caused by their love, testifies the lack of interest of the Middle English translator and his public on such matters. In fact, the abridgment of the lovers' reflexions and thinking processes can be attributed to the fact that the insular audience favoured a romance about the adventures of knights errant. As proved by Tristrem and Yseult's troubled love, which sets the action in motion and allows Tristrem to undertake numerous heroic deeds around European Kingdoms. Consequently, the choice of reducing such a fundamental features of the Anglo-Norman source text should not be seen as mere condensation or impoverishment, but rather as necessary to appeal, entertain and affect a different and less sophisticated audience.

To conclude, the Descriptive approach in the comparison of *Tristan and Ysolt* by Thomas and *Sir Tristrem* allowed studying the Middle English translation by focusing on the receiving audience. This shift in perspective was necessary to comprehend the reasons behind the several reformulations

made by the Middle English author, whose main objective was to produce an acceptable translation of a romance belonging to the Anglo-Norman tradition. Therefore, the reshape of Thomas' romance, known as *Sir Tristrem,* enabled the insular public to be entratained and exposed to a didactic and enjoyable poem, which they would not have been able to approach in its original form.

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