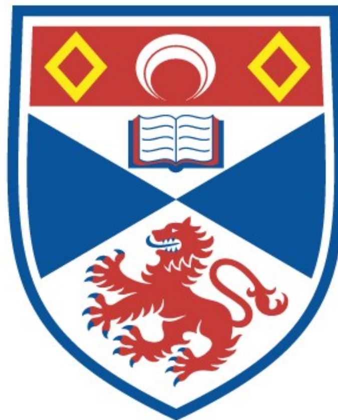
IMAGES OF ADULTERY IN TWELFTH AND THIRTEENTH-CENTURY OLD FRENCH LITERATURE

April Harper

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews



2003

Full metadata for this item is available in
St Andrews Research Repository
at:
http://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/

Please use this identifier to cite or link to this item:
http://hdl.handle.net/10023/14654

This item is protected by original copyright

Images of Adultery in Twelfth and Thirteenth-Century Old French Literature

April Harper

This thesis is submitted in requirement for the degree of Ph. D. at the University of St Andrews on 9 April 2003.

ProQuest Number: 10166177

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS
The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript
and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed,
a note will indicate the deletion.

ProQuest 10166177

Published by ProQuest LLC (2017). Copyright of the Dissertation is held by the Author.

All rights reserved.
This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code
Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 – 1346

Th

E440

Declarations

I, April Harper, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 100,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is a record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

7 April 2003

I was admitted as a research student in October, 1998 and as a candidate for the degree of Ph. D. in October, 1998; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 1998 and 2003.

7 April 2003

I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of Ph. D. in the University of St Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

7 April 2003

In submitting this thesis to the University of St Andrews I understand that I am giving permission for it to be made available for use in accordance with the regulations of the University Library for the time being in force, subject to any copyright vested in the work not being affected thereby. I also understand that the title and abstract will be published, and that a copy of the work may be made and supplied to any bona fide library or research worker.

7 April 2003

Abstract

This thesis examines literary images of masculinity and femininity, their function and depiction in marriage roles and homo-social relationships in the context of crisis: wifely adultery. The study is heavily reliant upon vernacular texts, especially Old French works from the twelfth and thirteenth century including works from the genres of romance, lais, fables, and fabliaux. Latin works including *historia* and prescriptive texts such as customaries, penitentials, etiquette texts and medical and canon law treatises are also used to contextualise themes in the Old French literature.

The introduction summarises modern literary and historical criticism concerning sexuality in the Middle Ages. It then discusses the influences of the Church, philosophy, medicine, natural theory and society on medieval definitions of sexuality to contextualise the literature which is focal to this thesis.

The following four chapters each consider a single character in the adulterous affair: the adulteress, the husband, the lover and the accuser. The literary images of each character are analysed in detail revealing the diversity of depictions between and also within genres. This enables the identification of medieval sexual constructs, challenging some previous critiques of representations of sexuality in the Middle Ages.

The final chapter explores the language by which the sexual act is presented. Furthermore, it shows how language is used and occasionally abused in committing, prosecuting and evading punishment for adultery and how it can be wielded as a weapon of women.

Through the focus of a body of literature rich in depictions of sexuality, this thesis questions the misogynist overtones often attributed to medieval literature. The diversity of images shows that the literature illustrates a wide range of opinions and ideas reflective of the complexity of sexuality in medieval society.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my supervisor, John Hudson for his invaluable support over the last four years. Other members of the Department of Medieval History at St Andrews have also given of their time, providing advice and guidance, particularly Rob Bartlett and Simone Macdougall. For their help in teaching me Old French and for specific language advice I would like to thank Clive Sneddon and Norris Lacy. Several others have also contributed greatly to my research and their assistance has made the process not only easier but more enjoyable – I would therefore like to thank the librarians of the Bibliothèque Nationale and the British Library and above all, the secretaries of the Department of Mediaeval History, Anne Chalmers, and Berta Wales who has been an inspiration and who, in particular, has given support and guidance far exceeding any secretarial duties. I would like to thank Bob and Julie Kerr – my fairy-godpeople – whose quiet strength and support and unexpected help and generosity saw me through difficult times impossible to enumerate. During the course of my Ph. D., I have been privileged to be part of an active and close postgraduate community: I am thankful to all its members, in particular Angela Montford, Björn Weiler, Caroline Proctor, Sumi David and Lindsay Rudge. I would like to thank Michele Mason for long talks, her friendship and her ability to make me smile and Brian Briggs for the good times, bad times and back again. Finally, I would like to thank those people who have constantly come to my aid and given unwavering support by rescuing hard drives, giving advice and offering their support over cups of coffee, pints of Guinness, around campfires, atop Munroes and in canoes: David Green, Iona McCleery and Kris Towson. For peppercorns of knowledge and understated but immeasurable generosity, I would like to thank Angus Stewart. It remains to thank one person in particular – Sally Crumplin. It strikes me that during the course of writing a work that focuses on themes of distrust and betrayal, I have been given the gift of unwavering, unconditional trust, faith and support. For this and all else, I thank her.

This thesis is dedicated to my father. He would have claimed not to have understood it, on account of its lack of engine, gears and grease and yet he did all that was in his power to make sure that I could attain my goal, providing endless faith, support and love. I hope that in some way the completion of this work proves that his faith and years of hard work were not in vain and that I am as proud of him and all he did as he was of me.

Table of Contents

List of illustrations i

List of abbreviations ii

Introduction 1

- Historical and Social Context 8
- Prescriptive and Proscriptive Texts 15
  - The Church 15
  - Medicine and Natural Philosophy 24

Chapter 1: Adulteresses 31

- I. The Adulteress and Courtly Love 31
  - Guinevere 32
  - The Adulteress in *Guigemar* 64
  - The Adulteress in *Yonec* 66
- II. The Adulteress and Uncourtly Romance 68
  - Iseult 70
  - The Adulteresses in *Ignaurés* 91
  - The Adulteress in *Tydorel* 92
- III. The Image of the Adulteress in Admonitory Texts 93
  - Warnings of Vices and Flaws 94
  - The Duplicity of Women 103
  - The Morals 110

Chapter 2: Husbands 113

- I. Victims 114
- II. Villains 124
- III. Hybrids 130
  - Arthur 130
  - Mark 143

Chapter 3: Lovers 158

- I. The Famous 160
  - Tristan 160
  - Lancelot 180
- II. The Named 205
  - Equitan 205
  - Guigemar 207
  - Ignaurés 208
  - Walter 209
- III. The Unnamed 211
- IV. The Unseen 212
- V. The Unreal 214

Chapter 4: Accusers and Accusations 218

I. The Rejected Would-Be Lover 219
Morgan. 220
Meleagant. 222
Besille. 224
II. The Rival. 225
Agravain. 225
The Barons. 226
Audret. 227
Lamorat. 228
III. The Greedy and the Troublemakers 229
The Forester, the Spies and the Dwarf. 229
Fairies. 230
Members of the Household 231
IV. Coerced and Commanded. 232
V. The Husband. 233

Chapter 5: The Language of Adultery 241

I. The Language of Sex. 242
II. The Use and Abuse of Language in Adultery. 249

Conclusion. 269

Appendix I. 274

Appendix II. 295

Bibliography. 306

List of illustrations

Cover page . . . . .Venus Venerated by Six Legendary Lovers. Birth tray made in Florence, c. 1400. Paris, Musée de Louvre.

Page 1 . . . . Mark in a tree watches Tristan and Iseult. End of an ivory casket made in Paris, c. 1320. London, British Museum.

Page 30 . . . . A lover 'dies' in his lady's arms. Illuminated capital in the *Chansonnier* manuscript, thirteenth century. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS fr. 854, fol. 121v.

Page 113 . . . . 'The lai of Aristotle'. Bronze made in the Netherlands c. 1400. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Page 158 . . . . The first kiss of Lancelot and Guinevere. From the *Lancelot-Graal* c. 1300. New York, The Pierpont Morgan Library, MS 805.6, fol. 67r.

Page 218 . . . . 'How Material Things are Made'. From Bartolomeus Anglicus, *Livres des Propiétez des Choses*, Paris, c. 1400. Wolfenbüttel, Herzog-August-Bibliothek 1.3.5.1., Aug.2 fol. 146r.

Page 241 . . . . Lancelot and Guinevere joined in bed. From *Lancelot-Graal*, Artois, c. 1320. London, British Library, Add. MS 10293, 312v.

List of Abbreviations

ANTS	*Anglo-Norman Text Society*
AUMLA	*Journal of the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association* (Christchurch, 1953-).
Charrete	Chrétien de Troyes. *Le Chevalier de la Charrete,* ed. and trans. W. Kibler (New York, 1981).*
CSEL	*Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*
Curtis	Curtis, R., *The Romance of Tristan* (Oxford, 1994).
Eichmann	Eichmann, R., and J. Du Val, eds., *The French Fabliaux: BN MS. 837*, 2 vols (New York, 1985).*
EHR	*The English Historical Review*
FB	*La Folie Tristan* (Berne), ed. and trans. S. N. Rosenburg (Woodbridge, 1998).*
FO	*La Folie Tristan* (Oxford), ed. and trans. S. N. Rosenburg (Woodbridge, 1998).*
Hatto	Hatto, A.T., *Gottfried von Strassburg: Tristan. With the Surviving Fragments of the Tristran of Thomas* (Harmondsworth, 1960; reprinted 1965 and 1967).
Lancelot	Lacy, N. J., et al., trans. *Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation,* vols 2-3 (New York, 1993).*
Mort	Lacy, N. J., et al., trans. *Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation,* vol. 4 (New York, 1995).*
NRCF	*Nouveau Recueil Complet des Fabliaux*, eds W. Noomen and N. van den Boogaard, 10 vols (Van Gorcum, 1983-1997).
PL	*Patrilogia cursis completus, series latina,* ed. J-P. Migne (221 vols; Paris, 1844-64).
Quest	Lacy, N. J., et al., trans. *Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation,* vols 2-3 (New York, 1995).*
RS	Rolls Society

SCH	*Studies in Church History*
Sommer	Sommer, H. O., ed., *The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances Edited from Manuscripts in the British Museum,* 8 vols (Washington, D.C., 1908-1916. Reprint: New York, 1969).
TrB	Béroul *Tristran*, ed. and trans. N. J. Lacy et al, *Early French Tristan Poems*, vol 1 (Woodbridge, 1998).*
TrM	*Tristan Menestrel,* ed. and trans. K. Fresco, *Early French Tristan Poems*, ed. N. J. Lacy, et al., vol 2 (Woodbridge, 1998).*
TrP	*Le Roman de Tristan en prose*, ed. R. Curtis, 3 vols (Leiden, 1963-1985).
TrR	*Tristan Rossignol,* ed. and trans. K. Fresco, *Early French Tristan Poems*, ed. N. J. Lacy, et al, vol. 2 (Woodbridge, 1998).*
TrT	Thomas, *Tristran*, ed. and trans. S. Gregory. *Early French Tristan Poems*, ed. N. J. Lacy, et al. vol. 2 (Woodbridge, 1998).*

*Both the Old French and English translations are derived from these facing page editions. Outside these works, Old French text will be cited, including volume and chapter/verse/line numbers, alongside the source of the translation, for example: *TrP* II:123; Curtis,456. Translations not derived from the facing page texts noted above (*TrB, TrT, TrM, TrT, FO, FB, Charrete, Lancelot, Queste, Mort*) and those not accompanied by a cited translation source, as indicated in the above example, are my own.

Introduction

Mark in the tree watches Tristan and Iseult: end of an ivory casket made in Paris, c. 1320
London, British Museum

Introduction

In Béroul's *Tristan* the reader encounters three pivotal episodes in which King Mark is led to disbelieve his suspicions that his nephew, Tristan, and wife, Iseult, are having an adulterous affair. The first of these episodes occurs at night in the garden where the lovers have planned a romantic tryst. Made aware of the couple's plans through the work of a spy, King Mark arrives early and climbs the tree under which the lovers meet, in order to catch them *in flagrante delicto*. Unaware that the lovers have caught sight of his reflection in the water and are conscious of his presence, Mark watches as his wife and nephew stage a mock argument in which they profess their innocence and then part without physical contact. Mark returns to his court under the new assumption that the lovers are indeed innocent and his barons' accusations are unfounded. The second episode takes place after the lovers, fleeing Mark's wrath after being caught together, escape into the forest of Morrois. Alerted to their exact location by a forester, Mark intends to surprise the lovers as they sleep. However, upon finding the lovers clothed and Tristan's sword lying between them, a gesture he understands to be a symbol of chastity, he erroneously concludes that there is no sinful element to their relationship and again departs under the belief that he has been wrongly counselled by his barons. The third scene of deception is perhaps the most famous of all: Iseult's equivocal oath. Forced to undergo trial by oath in front of the combined courts of King Mark and King Arthur in order to answer a new barrage of accusations concerning her adulterous affair with Tristan, Iseult hatches a complex plan. She chooses the Mal Pas, a meadow that can only be reached by traversing a muddy swamp, as the location of her trial. Unable to cross the swamp safely on foot, Iseult commands a 'leper', who is in fact her lover whom she has disguised for the occasion, to carry her across on his back. Thus, when questioned by King Arthur as to the nature of her relationship with Tristan, she honestly, though somewhat equivocally, states that no man has been between her thighs save her husband and the leper who carried her, diffusing a possibly damning moment with a cunning half-truth and a joke. Mark is, for a third time, persuaded that his wife is innocent of the barons' accusations.

Mark's experiences are similar to those of the reader who attempts to understand or draw out any aspect of historical 'truth' from medieval literature. The search for information is subject to a variety of impediments and distractions including the limits and tropes of differing genres, the bias of authorial intent, and the inexorable chronological distance from the works. Thus, the degree to which a representative image of any facet of life in the Middle Ages can be accurately extracted from literature becomes debatable. How, then, does one go about extracting the 'truth' these texts contain concerning life and, specifically for this study, sexuality in the Middle Ages? What pitfalls await? Are we, like Mark in the tree, believing what has been staged for us? Are we, like Mark in the forest, interpreting a symbol erroneously, or possibly seeing what we subconsciously want to see in a situation or text? Or are we, like Mark at Mal Pas, beguiled by or satisfied with only an element of a far more complex truth?

Literature from the high Middle Ages is often ascribed a misogynist tone in its depiction of love and sex as impractical or crude. It is not until the fourteenth, fifteenth and even sixteenth centuries that authors such as Chaucer, Bocaccio and Shakespeare are credited with the creation of three-dimensional female characters and exploration of human sexuality, sex roles and ideals of femininity and masculinity. The purpose of this thesis is to look at the large amount of secular literature of the Middle Ages, specifically from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and evaluate the depictions of sex and sexuality found therein in order to determine the veracity of the accusations made against the portrayal of sex and sexuality in the Middle Ages.

The lens through which this study of sexuality in literature is focused is that of wifely adultery, an advantageous setting for several reasons. First, adultery is by far the most common scenario through which sex is depicted and/or discussed in the literature. Second, adultery is a forum in which many characters play a part, allowing the examination of the wife both inside and outside her marital role as well as an analysis of other figures, such as the lover and accuser whose portrayals provide insight into concepts such as masculinity on a larger scale. Third, the popularity of these Old French texts and their wide geographical and chronological dissemination shows them to be representative of the concepts, ideals and stereotypes held by the

society which produced them, facilitating not only the deduction of social constructs from literature, but the identification of sexual constructs as well. Finally, it is in response to Gaston Paris' nineteenth century criticism of Chrétien de Troyes' *Charrete* in which he defined the expression of sexual love found therein to be inherently illicit that modern scholarship began to focus on the representation of extra-marital sex and love in literature.[1] While diverse schools of thought were formed regarding the veracity of Paris' claims and the nature of this illicit love, all have continued to approach the literature or the images within through isolation of genre, of person or of gender, at the expense of the whole. It is important to see the depth and diversity present within these works and understand the impact of the images on later literature and ideals of sexuality, masculinity, femininity and marriage.

To avoid the pitfalls experienced by King Mark it is necessary to incorporate all genres of the literature in the period including prose and verse romance, fables, lais and fabliaux.[2] Before examining the sources, it may be helpful to consider how these texts and their depictions of sexuality have been interpreted and how critics of the works have fallen victim to or answered the challenges typified by the example of King Mark.

These questions and subsequent criticisms have been addressed at all areas of scholarship focused on sexual behaviour as depicted in medieval secular literature since Gaston Paris first published his seminal article in 1883.[3] In it, he first described and codified a specific form of sexual behaviour that he described as '*amor corteois*'.[4] Paris' opinion that literature was an accurate reflection of medieval society, and

[1] G. Paris, 'Lancelot du Lac: le conte de la *Charette*', *Romania* 12 (1883), 459-534 at p. 518.
[2] For a full list of titles and definitions of genre, authorship and dating of these works see Appendix I. Note that in addition to authorship and dating, Appendix II also provides place of composition, manuscript references and a brief synopsis of all fabliaux containing wifely adultery and used within this thesis. It will no doubt be noticed that the troubadour lyric has not figured in this study. While much excellent work is currently being produced on the genre, especially on the work of female *troubairitz*, the genre falls mainly outside the period here under observation. Though one of the forefathers of the genre, Guihelm IX, Count of Poitou and Duke of Aquitaine, was active in the twelfth century, the majority of surviving works date from the very late thirteenth century into the fourteenth. A partial consideration of the works and the images provided therein would not be representative to the genre and therefore, they have not been included, except for comparative purposes in this work. For an introduction to the genre and authors, see S. Gaunt and S. Kay (eds), *The Troubadours* (Cambridge, 1999).
[3] Paris, 'Lancelot', pp. 459-534.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 518.

specifically that '*amor corteois*' was a practiced form of sexual conduct, was reasserted in the 1930s by C.S. Lewis in his *Allegory of Love*[5] and in the 1940s by Denis de Rougemont in his examination of *Love in the Western World.*[6] This eroticised view of the Middle Ages was challenged in 1961 with the publication of John F. Benton's article, 'The Court of Champagne as a literary center', which provides a detailed historical account of life at the court of Champagne.[7] Benton showed that historical evidence in no way supports the theory that '*amor corteois*' or 'courtly love' was ever practised, and refuted the existence, as proposed by Paris and Bedier, of so-called 'courts of love' in which noble ladies would pronounce judgement on sexual or erotic matters.

In 1962, the year after Benton's revolutionary article was published, D.W. Robertson put forth an approach to medieval literature that has been termed a 'hermeneutic of suspicion'.[8] Reduced to its bare elements, his theory argues the premise that no literary text means what it says. Therefore medieval romance must not be concerned with relating a sexual experience or message but, through the Augustinian interpretation of literature that Robertson employs, he concludes that the texts must be interpreted as a statement of God's love and charity.[9] Robertsonian analysis is often linked to the New Criticism which likewise held that medieval texts did not transparently refer to any aspect of life in the Middle Ages, but required deeper analysis and criticisms to uncover the truths hidden within the texts.[10] Psychoanalysis became a much-used tool in such criticism. Freudian interpretations, though quite common, were not the limit of the psychoanalytical approaches used. For example, the psychoanalytical writings of Lacan and Cholakian have contributed greatly to literary New Criticism, though often at the expense of history as their approach denies the impact and relevance of individual texts' historical context. They

---

[5] C.S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (Oxford, 1936).
[6] D. de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World* (Princeton, 1956).
[7] J. F. Benton, 'The Court of Champagne as a literary center', *Speculum* 36 (1961), 551-91.
[8] D.W. Robertson, *A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives* (Princeton, 1962).
[9] Robertson's complex theory owes much to Augustine's *De doctrina Christiana* in which he asserts that anything in a text that 'does not literally pertain to virtuous behaviour or the truth of faith . . . [must be] taken to be figurative'. The reader must scrutinize the text 'until an interpretation contributing to the reign of charity is produced' (ed. W.M. Green, vol. 80 (New York, 1963), III.15.23.
[10] For this approach read W. J. Spurlin and M. Fisher (eds), *The New Criticism and Contemporary Literary Theory: Connections and Continuity* (New York, 1995).

instead argue that the psychic subtext of literary works is universal and constant and thus the historical context of the production of the works is of secondary importance.[11]

The approach of rhetoricians likewise rejects the importance of historical context and information contained in these works by arguing that the text must be viewed as art created for the sake of art or, as Peter Allen asserts, that these works do not comment on love or sex, but are exercises in turning love into art.[12] Allen, along with poststructuralists such as Dragonetti and Zumthor has also been quick to point out Ovidian overtures and intertextualities in medieval texts. Julia Kristeva's work likewise explores the connections between Ovid and his medieval adapters, using a combination of psychoanalytical and philosophical analyses of primarily 'courtly love' literature.[13] Her conclusion is that love as depicted in these works is a narcissistic exercise, ' a love centered in the self although drawn toward the ideal Other'.[14] The object of such love is not concerned with the real woman but is a reflection of itself: the male lover's fantasy. Kristeva's feminist commentators, and indeed Kristeva herself, have noted that such a theory is a decidedly masculine interpretation of the literature in which the lady who is adored by her lover becomes 'little more than a pretext, a means of shoring up the male poet's ego. She is dissolved into the poet's obsession with his own performance'.[15]

Not only have the sexual relationships in these works become subject to diverse interpretations, so has the image and role of the woman. Feminist criticism has attempted once again to re-evaluate the question of accurate historical representation and to some extent to restore the female character who has been lost in the narcissistic or post-structural approach to medieval literature. Feminist criticism has and is producing valuable insights and theories concerning the portrayal and

[11] See R. Cholakian, *The Troubadour Lyric: A Psychocritical Reading* (Manchester, 1990), pp. 182-3 and Jacques Lacan, 'Seminar XX: God and the jouissance of the woman', in *Female Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne,* eds J. Rose and J. Mitchell (NewYork, 1981).
[12] See P. Allen, *The Art of Love* (Philadelphia, 1992), p. 3 and L. Mackey, 'Eros into logic: the rhetoric of courtly love', in *The Philosophy of (Erotic) Love,* eds R. C. Solomon and K. Higgins (Lawrence, 1991), pp. 336-351 at p. 242.
[13] J. Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, trans. L. S. Roudiez (New York, 1987).
[14] *Ibid.*, pp. 59 and 116.
[15] L. Finke, 'Sexuality in medieval French literature', in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality,* eds V. L. Bullough and J. A. Brundage (New York, 1996), pp. 345-368.

function of the female characters in these texts. Recently, critics studying the role of aristocratic women in Medieval French literature have broadly fallen into two camps. The first see the large role women play and the introduction of 'courtly love' as a feminisation of medieval culture, filling a need unmet by the masculine demands of a 'feudal' society.[16] The second camp applies a Lacanian criticism, seeing courtly love as 'a fraud' or an artistic 'way of coming off elegantly from the absence of sexual relations'.[17] Eve Sedgwick's groundbreaking work, 'Between men: English literature and male homosocial desire' has inspired several critics to argue that romantic love is a form of male competition in which women are defined exclusively through their sexuality and act as sexual pawns or currency between men.[18] Many feminist critics have followed in this vein, or in reaction to it, and instead of viewing the female body as the fantasy or currency of a masculine society, they have interpreted the female body as a powerful symbol for that society itself with the physical boundaries of the woman reflecting the social and moral boundaries of it. Thus, for this group of critics, the misuse of the female body or female speech is an indication of social breakdown or chaos.[19]

With these literary criticisms in mind, the question remains how should a literary historian approach medieval texts? How does one avoid the pitfalls of some of these theories that would lead the historian in the footsteps of King Mark, interpreting all one sees as truth as Gaston Paris and his followers once put forth, or denying entirely the possibility of societal and sexual 'truth' as put forward by The New Criticism and its various factions. How is one to avoid the fabrication or misunderstanding of symbols as exhibited by the king in the forest and by some

[16] See J.Kelly, 'Did women have a renaissance?', in *Women, History and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly* (Chicago, 1984) ed. Joan Kelly, pp. 19-50 and C. Bogin, *The Women Troubadours* (New York, 1980).

[17] Lacan, *Seminar XX*, p. 141.

[18] See L. Finke, 'Towards a cultural poetics of the romance'*Genre* 22 (1989), 109-27; E. Vance, 'Love's concordance: the poetics of desire and joy of the text', *Diacritics* 5 (1975), 40-52; E. Vance, 'Chrétien's *Yvain* and the ideologies of exchange', *Yale French Studies* 70 (1986), 42-62; and S. Aronstein, 'Prize or pawn? Homosocial order, marriage and the redefinition of women in the *Gawain Continuation*', *Romantic Review* 82 (1991), 115-26.

[19] See L. Lomperis and S. Stanbury, *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature* (Philadelphia, 1993); Jane E. Burns, *Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia, 1993); J. E. Burns, 'Knowing women: female orifices in the Old French fabliaux', *Exemplaria* 4 (1992), pp.81-104; *Constructing Medieval Sexuality*, eds K. Lochrie, P. McCracken and J. A. Schultz (Minneapolis, 1997) and P. McCracken, *The Romance of Adultery: Queenship and Sexual Transgression in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia, 1998).

modern critics? Or like Mark at the Mal Pas, how does one avoid seeing what one chooses to see instead of, or at the expense of, other information contained in the text – a trap that is most often a result of taking one's own preconceptions or agenda into one's reading. Finally, how as historians can we be sure that we are not blinded by the discovery of a particular piece of information or that we are not only re-marking popular territory? In either case, one ignores important information regarding the complex roles and dependency of interrelationships for the sake of establishing an empirical or essentialist reading or inflating a single element of 'truth' to the point of ignoring the whole.

This thesis in no way seeks to negate the contributions of any aspect of literary criticism to the understanding of medieval literature. But by choosing not to employ extremes of subscribing to a single theory or discounting all avenues of literary criticism this study will instead employ aspects of all these theories in its exploration of medieval literature. Feminist theory in particular has been invaluable for the attention it has brought to the depiction of women in literature and as a catalyst for gender studies. It has not only facilitated the examination of femininity, but enabled the important study of masculinity as well. However, in their analysis of the use and portrayal of women in medieval literature, critics using a feminist or gender theorist approach have, when addressing adulteresses, removed these women from the context of the adulterous triangle in which they are presented. The triangle, however, is the forum in which the woman is portrayed and in which her character was created to participate. By removing a literary figure from the context of the conflict and trying to look at him/her outside of the terribly complex triangle they are a part of, much important information is lost or possibly erroneously interpreted. To this end, this thesis will examine each member of the adulterous triangle, wife, husband and lover, in context and in relationship to the other members. It will also analyse the roles of those individuals who facilitate or expose the crime in order to discover what information these texts have yet to reveal regarding marriage roles and portrayals of male/female sex roles.

Historical and Social Context

Before examining the images of adultery in literature, it is necessary to discuss briefly the immediate environment from which these texts emanate. The impact upon literature and in some cases by literature on the courts of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the role of courtly love and chivalry and the opinions of important spheres of medieval life, for example medicine and religion will be discussed to provide contextualisation for the literary works here examined.

While the writings of the Middle Ages in general are often criticised for their androcentricity, the twelfth and thirteenth centuries provide many examples of powerful and influential women, both real and fictional. It is notable that the Anglo-Norman Old French works herein examined, that present one aspect of women's power in this period, their sexuality, should be written contemporary with so many examples of female political, professional and personal power. It is the era of Queen Margaret of Scotland, Empress Matilda, Matilda of Boulogne, Eleanor of Aquitaine, and Blanche of Castile.[20] These were women who took a keen interest in affairs of state, defied convention and influenced society, politics and the church through their actions and patronage.[21]

It is a time period that also sees women increasingly acting as patrons, authors and as key figures within the works themselves. Women's patronage, especially of literature, played a large part in the renaissance of the twelfth century and a large part in the style and direction of the literature.[22] This is evident in Chrétien de Troyes' *Chevalier de la Charrete*, the opening lines of which attribute both the *sens* and *matière* or 'meaning' and 'source' to his patroness, Marie de Champagne, daughter of Eleanor of Aquitaine.[23] The anonymity of the majority of the works of the period

[20] For discussions of queenship and female power in the Middle Ages, see the articles in M. Erler and M. Kowaleski (eds), *Women and Power in the Middle Ages* (Athens, GA, 1988); L.O. Fradenburg (ed.), *Women and Sovereignty*, (Edinburgh, 1992); T.M. Vann (ed.), *Queens, Regents and Potentates*, (Dallas, 1993); J.C. Parsons (ed.), *Medieval Queenship* (Stroud, 1994); J. Carpenter and S. B. Maclean (eds), *Power of the Weak: Studies on Medieval Women* (Urbana, 1995); A.J. Duggan (ed.), *Queenship in Medieval Europe* (Woodbridge, 1997).
[21] J. Carmi-Parsons, 'Of queens, courts and books: reflections on the literary patronage of thirteenth century Plantaganet queens', in *The Cultural Patronage of Medieval Women*, ed. J. McCash (Athens, 1996), pp. 175-201.
[22] For a historical study of the subject, see K. Holzknecht, *Literary Patronage in the Middle Ages* (London, 1966), pp. 74-90.
[23] Marie's role in the creation and direction of the work, especially the introduction of Lancelot as the queen's lover has been the topic of considerable debate. For an excellent introduction to the question, see J. Frappier, 'Le prologue du *Chevalier de la Charrette* et son interpretations', *Romania* 93 (1972), 337-79.

makes ascertaining both authorship and patronage difficult and at times impossible, though there are some examples, including those of Chrétien, and Marie de France whose fables were dedicated to her patron, Count William and whose collection of lais were dedicated to an ambiguous '*nobles reis*', who was probably Henry II of England.[24]

The subject of patronage raises the question of audience. While these texts were once thought to be class specific, the courtly romances appealing to courtly society, and earthier tales, such as the fabliaux appealing to an earthier, lower element of society, a wider reading of the works led critics such as Charles Muscatine to successfully challenge such theories.[25] Evidence against a class reading included the existence of various incarnations of the pieces, such as the Tristan legend which exists in part or whole in the form of long prose romances, shorter verse versions, lais and is even alluded to in fabliaux. A similar example is the *Chastelaine de Vergi* which exists in lyric, lai and verse romance.[26]

There is evidence in the prologues of several poets' works that their repertoire spanned many genres, but perhaps the best evidence comes from contemporary sources such as a play list from the court of Conrad II (d. 1039) asking for epic poems, lais and fabliaux to be delivered to his courtly audience.[27] The experience of a troubadour visiting a Norman court also helps dispel the myth that courtly audiences were only interested in courtly romances and epics and also provides some interesting information regarding the gender of the audiences for these works. He states,

Ja mais non er cortz complia
on hom non gab ni non ria:
cortz ses dos
non es mas parcs de baros.
Et agram mort ses faillia
l'enois e la vilania
d'Argentos
mal gentils cors amoros
e la doussa cara pia
e la bona compaignia

[24] The identities of 'Count W. ' and the king to whom Marie dedicates her works are explored in G. Burgess' introduction to Marie de France, *Lais* ed. A. Ewert, (London 1944; 2001), pp. v-viii. For an examination of patronage as a cultural phenomenon reflecting and reinforcing gender related and social ideologies in Norman society, see L. Finke, 'The magical mistress tour: patronage, intellectual property and the dissemination of wealth in the *lais* of Marie de France', *Signs* 25 (2000), 2, 479-503.
[25] C. Muscatine, *The Old French Fabliaux* (New Haven, 1986).
[26] *La Chastelaine de Vergi*, ed. and trans. L. Arrathoon (New York, 1984).
[27] See below, p. 247.

el respos
de la Saisam defendia

[A court where no one laughs or jokes is never complete; a court without gifts is just a paddock full of barons. And the boredom and vulgarity of Argentan nearly killed me, but the lovable, noble person, the sweet, kind face, the good companionship and conversation of the Saxon lady protected me.[28]]

The inclusion of this lady in the audience is not an isolated experience. In fact, there is no evidence that these texts were written by, written for or performed for a sex specific audience. A twelfth century critic of fanciful literature, Denis Piramus, commented in his *Vie de seint Edmund le rei* that Marie had earned great praise for her work that was appreciated by 'counts, barons and knights who loved to have them read again and again', but were also especially appealing to the ladies who 'listened to them joyfully for they were just what they desired'.[29] The popularity of these texts motivated authors of other genres, most notably *historia*, to include the *topoi* of romance and epic including battle scenes, romantic affairs, miracles and elements of the other-worldly into their works to make them more appealing to a wider audience. For example, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* became a best seller, extremely popular with the nobility.[30]

Did the popularity of these works stem from the ideal imagery they put forth or from their accurate representation of courtly life and love? Recent scholarship suggests that it may, in fact, be due to both. While Benton has shown in his research that courtly society and love as defined by Gaston Paris was not an actual practice in the medieval court, romances, such as Chrétien's *Charrete* were, as Stephen Jaeger notes in his research, 'if not a mirror of chivalric ideals . . . then certainly a model'.[31] The descriptions, whilst idealistic, served a didactic purpose to teach or impress upon members of the court the behaviour and trappings of ideal courtly life. For example,

[28] R. Harvey, 'Courtly culture in medieval Occitania', in *The Troubadours*, eds Simon Gaunt and Sarah Kay (Cambride, 1999), pp. 8-27 at p. 8.

[29] Denis Piramus, *La Vie de seint Edmund le rei* ed Florence Leftwich Ravenal, Bryn Mawr College Monograph Series, 5 (Pennsylvania, 1906) lines 35-48. See Appendix I for complete discussion of Piramus' criticisms of Marie de France.

[30] The wide array of literature enjoyed and patronised by both sexes and various social classes is illustrated by the example of Walter Espec, lord of Helmsley in Yorkshire (d. 1153). Though he acted as patron of Ailred of Rievaulx, he also enjoyed history and *chansons de geste* and borrowed Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia* from Robert of Gloucester. He later loaned the copy to a lesser noble, Ralph fitz Gilbert who then lent it to his wife Constance. See A. Gransden, *Historical Writing in England, c. 550-1307* vol. 1 (London, 1974), pp. 187-188.

[31] C. S. Jaeger, *The Origins of Courtliness: Civilizing Trends and the Formation of Courtly Ideals 939-1210* (Philadelphia, 1985) p. 242.

evidence regarding the relationship between the dissemination of texts, such as those of Chrétien, and the progression of the tournament from an unorganised mêlée in the twelfth century to a formal courtly ceremony by the fifteenth century supports the claim that chivalric literature came to define chivalric life.[32]

In his work, Richard Kaeuper likens chivalry to a steel cable made up of many strands, only one of which is courtly love.[33] The introduction of this strand to the chivalric ideal was begun by Chrétien in his *Charrete* in what Maurice Keen describes as 'a direct translation of the courtly love ethos into the realm of chivalric action'.[34] It is Lancelot's love for Guinevere that motivates him to engage in chivalric pursuits and adventure, thus courtly love becomes the driving force for chivalric action. Chrétien's work became the foundation of later Arthurian romance through imitation and, as in the case of the Vulgate Cycle, through direct lifting and incorporation. As a consequence, Keen notes, 'Arthurian romance became the chief vehicle yoking together the . . . conception of the ennobling power of love with the chivalrous conception of the nobility of martial prowess and of acts of valour'.[35]

A balance between the demands of Love and those of chivalric society was not always easily maintained, as to prove one's loyalty to a lover often necessitated the forsaking of many chivalric ideals, most notably one's honour. This struggle to achieve or regain that balance in all its complexities was the motivating force behind much of the literature here examined and a large amount of secondary scholarship as well. While the definition of 'chivalry' has sparked much debate, '*amor corteois*' or 'courtly love', has, as one critic notes, 'caused nothing but trouble' for readers and critics who have attempted to reach a unanimous agreement as to its meaning and correct usage.[36] Yet it remains impossible to discuss the literature of the period

---

[32] See J. Leyerle, 'Conclusion: the major themes of chivalric literature', and L.D. Benson, ' The tournament in the romances of Chrétien de Troyes and *L'Histoire de Guillaume le Marecal'*, in *Chivalric Literature: Essays on Relations Between Literature and Life in the Later Middle Ages,* eds L. D. Benson and J. Leyerle (Michigan, 1980), pp. 131-46 and 1-24 respectively. See also L. Muir, *Literature and Society in Medieval France: The Mirror and the Image* (London, 1985) and A. Putter, 'Knights and clerics at the court of Champagne: Chrétien de Troyes' romances in context', in *Medieval Knighthood V Papers from the Strawberry Hill Conference, 1994*, eds S. Church and R. Harvey (Woodbridge, 1995), pp. 243-66.

[33] R. Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe* (Oxford, 1999), p. 309.

[34] M. Keen, 'Chivalry and courtly love', *Peritia* 2 (1983), 149-69 at 152.

[35] *Ibid.*, p. 153.

[36] For definitions and discussions of chivalry and its relationship to courtly love, see Kauper, *Chivalry and Violence*; R. Barber, *The Knight and Chivalry,* 2nd ed. (Woodbridge, 1995); Georges Duby, *The Chivalrous Society,* trans. C. Postan (London, 1977); M. Keen, *Nobles, Knights and Men-at Arms in the Middle Ages* (London, 1996); *Chivalric Literature*, eds L. Benson and J. Leyerle (Kalamazoo, 1980).

without discussing the background of the ideal and defining how the term 'courtly love' will be used in this study.

In his 1883 article on the representation of love in Chrétien de Troyes' *Chevalier de la Charrette*, Gaston Paris stated the principle characteristics of the kind of love therein presented:

> 1. It is illicit and furtive. Similar relations between husband and wife are inconceivable; the lover's constant fear of losing his mistress, of not being worthy of her, of displeasing her in anything whatsoever, cannot be reconciled with tranquil and open possession. It is to this ever-retractable gift of herself, to the immense sacrifice that she has made, to the risk that she continuously runs, that the lady owes the superiority that the lover acknowledges in her.
> 2. Because of this, the lover is always in a position of inferiority before his lady, in trepidation which nothing can reassure, in a constant tremble, although he may nevertheless in every encounter be the bravest of warriors. She, by contrast, whilst truly loving him, behaves capriciously towards him; often unjust, haughty and disdainful, she makes him feel all the time that he may lose her and that, at the slightest breach of the code of love, he will in fact lose her.
> 3. In order to be worthy of the affection he seeks or has already received, he fulfills every feat of prowess imaginable, and she for her part dreams always of making him a better man, of making him more 'worthy'. Her apparent arbitrariness, her fleeting moments of harshness, normally have this end, and are no more than the means of either refining his love, or exalting his courage.
> 4. Finally, and this sums up all the rest, love is an art, a science, a virtue which has its rules just like chivalry or courtliness, rules which are grasped and applied better the more progress has been made, and from which there must be no default on pain of being deemed unworthy.[37]

Heavily influenced by Paris and Joseph Bédier's later rephrasing and reiteration of Paris' ideas,[38] C.S. Lewis introduced the term 'courtly love', his translation of *amor courteois*, into English in his 1936 work, *The Allegory of Love* in which he described the qualities of this phenomena as, 'humility, courtesy, adultery and the religion of love'.[39] *Amor courteois* or 'courtly love' ceased to imply a kind of love influenced by the language and values of a courtly context and became instead an indivisible term for a rigid, uniform code applied to medieval literature. The problems inherent in such an inflexible interpretation soon became apparent and by the mid 1950s growing dissent emerged amongst critics and scholars concerning the accuracy of the term.

---

[37] Paris, 'Lancelot', pp. 518-19. Translated by D. Burnley, *Courtliness and Literature in Medieval England* (London, 1998), p. 148. See above, p. 3.

[38] J. Bédier, ' Les fêtes des mai et les commencements de la poésie lyrique au Moyen Âge', *Revue des deux mondes* (1896), p. 172.

[39] Lewis, *Allegory*, p. 2.

The definition and idea of 'courtly love' came under attack on many grounds but primarily for its inaccuracy. The inaccuracy was found in its definition and in its use as a term itself. Paris concluded that the love was without exception illicit; Lewis likewise defined it as adulterous in its essence and yet upon examination there emerge a number of cases, including such works as Marie de France's *Lanval, Deux Amanz* and *Le Fresne,*Chretien de Troyes' *Erec, Yvain* and *Cligés* in which a narrative with all the trappings of a 'courtly love' romance existed outside an adulterous context. Impossible to dismiss, these works were instead absorbed into the core of 'courtly love' texts, forcing the definition of 'adultery' to incorporate all pre-marital, extra-marital, sexual and non-physically consummated acts of love.

Adultery likewise became a 'catch-all' phrase for discussing the inaccessibility of a female lover, a quality central to her depiction. Love is a literary theme with a predictable course; the skill of the author lay in the revelation and fulfilment of that love. The inaccessible nature of the female lover is used by the author, however unconsciously, to delay just such revelation and consummation of the affair, ensuring a narrative length adequate to enable further plot development and character refinement as well as making room for scenes of courtly life and entertainment such as tournaments, quests and feasting, necessary to entertain the mixed audience of the court. One way of assuring the inaccessibility of the female lover was to cast her as a married woman. Not only would her married status render her unattainable, thus provoking the lover's need to prove himself worthy and refine his love through various tests and trials, but it also served to provide further plot intrigue as the lovers attempted to circumvent the husband's authority and attention in order to fulfil their desires. It was not necessary, however, to cast the female lover as a married woman in order to achieve this distance, nor was it overwhelmingly commonplace to do so. The popularity of the tales in which adulterous love was presented, coupled with the generalised, all-encompassing definitions of medieval love and adultery as found in the writings of Paris and Lewis have lent too much weight to the argument that all courtly love was adulterous. Instead, it must be recognised that adultery, like the portrayal of the female lover as a member of a higher social class or even a fairy creature, was one way to provide conflict in the tale in the obstacle of physical

separation between the lovers that was necessary for the development and detail of the story.

The vagary of the term is not the only criticism to be considered here, but perhaps more importantly one should consider the origins and the dating of the phrase. The term *amor corteois* was found to be missing entirely from the literature of the period and regions from which these works originated and was instead, an imposed term borrowed from almost two centuries later.[40] Such inaccuracies led some critics to search for a contemporary term and thus the use of *fin amor* became popular in the backlash against 'courtly love'.[41] The new terminology did not solve old problems and soon *fin amor* was found to be just as heavily laden with inaccuracies, as the term was found in contemporary texts to express ideas not only of sexual love, even an adulterous love, but was also used to describe the love and trust between friends,[42] as an expression of regard and sympathy[43] and even in the description of the charity of God.[44] Thus the term *fin amor* was found to be no more satisfactory a label than its predecessor was. In the title of Francis Utley's 1972 article on the subject of this debatable terminology is raised the question 'Must We Abandon the Concept of Courtly Love?'[45] Though Utley leaves the posit open ended, this thesis will answer a qualified 'no'. This work does not seek to abandon the concept, but to use a balanced view of the term 'courtly love' much akin to that expressed by David Burnley in his work on the subject wherein he defines 'courtly love' as

> one specific set of circumstances selected from the conventional literary elaboration of a fundamentally psychological conception of the nature of courtliness, and of the conditioning effects of that nature on the experience of love . . . it is a complex of philosophical doctrines, social aspirations and literary techniques.[46]

While this thesis agrees with many of Paris' observations, I would present them as *topoi* rather than as a uniform code of 'courtly love', and certainly not as

[40] See N. B. Smith and J. T. Snow, 'Courtly love and courtly literature', in *The Expansion Transformations of Courtly Literature*, eds N.B. Smith and J.T. Snow (Georgia, 1980), pp. 3-16.
[41] See M. Lazar, *Amour courtois et Fin' Amors dans la littérature du xiie siècle* (Paris, 1964).
[42] *Floriz and Blauncheflour*, 951-6
[43] *St. Patrick's Purgatory*, 337-42
[44] *Carmen de Creacione Mundi*, 993-6.
[45] F. Utley, 'Must we abandon the concept of courtly love?', *Medievalia et Humanistica* 3 (London, 1972), 299-323.
[46] Burnley, *Courtliness,* pp. 171-4.

historically representative of the actual practice or common perception of love in the twelfth century. The term is herein interpreted as a literary device and reflective of many of the values echoed within courtly romance, utilising images and language of lord/vassal relations and religion and possibly even representative of the fantasies enjoyed by the courtly audience.

Prescriptive and Proscriptive Texts

The context afforded by an examination of the spheres of religion and medicine provides further valuable insight into the images of sexuality presented through literature. In these two areas there is a wide variety of prescriptive and proscriptive texts addressing sexuality in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that provide definitions of the physical, sexual and psychological differences between men and women. They also explain both theological and scientific theories of the origin of sexual desire and the appropriate expression and possible pitfalls of that desire. The variety of works include etymologies, treatises of canon and secular law, medical and philosophical texts and confessors' manuals.

The Church

In a discussion of the Church's role in the definition of sexuality and its influence in the images conveyed in literature it is necessary to explore the nature of that influence and then examine the depictions of sexuality and of women, through the biblical examples and guidance offered by the church in the form of penitentials, ecclesiastical law and writings.

The Church's influence in literature and sexuality is often described as misogynist.[47] When discussing the misogyny of such texts or of the Church in general, however, it must be remembered that opinions vary along a wide spectrum and according to a great many individual personalities within the Church. There were many leading churchmen who did not balk at association with women, who not only

[47] See J. Murray, 'The Absent penitent: the cure of women's souls and confessors' manuals in the thirteenth century England', in *Women, the Book and the Godly*, eds L. Smith and J.H.M. Taylor (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 13-26; R. H. Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago, 1991).

counseled, but befriended and interacted with women and believed those in Holy Orders to be capable of spiritual and physical sexlessness. [48] However, there were many who, unconvinced of the possibility of such a separation, no doubt felt vindication when such contact with women produced scandals such as the infamous case of the nun of Watton.[49] For often the opinion of women was more akin to that related in the *Consuetudines* of Guigo, written in 1128, in which he states:

> 'We absolutely forbid women to enter our enclosure, knowing that neither the sage, nor the prophet, nor the judge, nor the host of God, nor the sons of God, nor even the first man formed by the hands of God, were able to escape the flattery and deceit of women . . . it is not possible for a man to hide a fire in his breast, so that his clothes do not burn or walk on hot coals without burning the soles of his feet, or touch pitch without being stained'. [50]

Robert Bartlett finds similar misogynist rhetoric in a comparison of Osbert of Clare's *Life of Ethelbert* and Gerald of Wales' rewriting of this *vita*. Bartlett pairs Osbert of Clare's account of Ethelbert's thoughts on marriage with those of Gerald's:

Osbert:

> The king, therefore, yielded to their advice and, although virgin innocence pleased him more than married chastity or the union of wedlock, he nevertheless bent a favorable ear to his magnates' wish and, in the hope of producing an heir, applied himself with good grace to the task of taking a bride... Also, he had heard that at the first creation of the heavens and the earth, God created male and female and blessed

[48] E.g. St Godric of Finchale and St Edmund were both popular healing saints of women. Anselm exalted marriage and often preached on both fidelity and love (*Vita Anselmi,* 55-56). He did not shun the company of women but both associated with them, as is shown by the reciprocal visit of Ida of Boulogne with whom he stayed on his way to England in 1093 (*Historia Novorum*, pp. 28-29), his hospitality to many women who both visited and stayed at Bec with their husbands (*Vita Anselmi*, pp. 99, 100-101), and was deeply interested in aiding them spiritually as illustrated by the number of letters he wrote to women totalling 72 of his 329 letters. See S. Vaughn, 'Anselm and women', *Haskins Society Journal* 2 (1990), 83-93. Osbert of Clare and Gilbert of Sempringham likewise communicated with women and supported holy women. See *The Book of St. Gilbert,* ed. and trans. R. Foreville and G. Keir (Oxford, 1987). Even the once notorious misogyny of some saints, such as Cuthbert has recently been questioned and a more balanced view has been put forward. See V. Tudor, 'The Misogyny of Saint Cuthbert', *Archaeologia Aeliana* 5 (1984) 157-167.

[49] The infamous case of the nun of Watton who is impregnated by a lover and who then, after enduring physical punishment by the other nuns, is delivered of her child by the Virgin Mary is preserved in Ailred of Rievaulx, *Sermo II de Oneribus* (*PL*, 195, cols 789-96). See also L. Eckenstein, *Women under Monasticism* (Cambridge, 1996) p. 219 and B. Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertine Order c. 1130-1300* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 33-38.

[50] *'Mulieres terminos intrare nostros nequaquam sinimus, scientes nec sapientem, nec prophetam, nec judicem, nec hospitem Dei, nec filios, nec ipsum Dei formatum manibus protoplastum potuisse blanditias evadere vel fraudes mulierum . . . nec posse hominem aut ignem in sinu abscondere, ut vestimenta illius non ardeant, aut ambulare super prunas plantis illaesis, aut picem tangere nec inquinari'* *PL* 153, col 681.

> them and said, "Go forth and multiply. . . ." The glorious athlete of God did not refuse to bow beneath the yoke of this holy contract, although he would prefer the pure glory of his flesh to be protected without loss by the unstained linen of uncorrupted virginity.[51]

Gerald :

> He had, since childhood, a fixed and deeply rooted wish to preserve his vessel in all cleanliness and sanctification, to dedicate the virginity of his body to God in expectation of a hundredfold reward; so, as much and as long as he could, he refused, deferred, and denied [their request]. For he had read and learned from both ethical and theological writings how great are the burdens of marriage and how great the domestic bitterness, trouble, and anxiety inherent in the privacy of the marriage bed. For he had read of the absurdities of foolish women, the loathing of the ugly, the haughtiness and the pride of beautiful and wellborn women, adultery, uncertainty about offspring or even clear certainty that offspring were by another, anger, quarrels, deep jealousies, and suspicions. He had read these things and concluded that hearts ruled by such feelings had trouble and no peace. But as their pressure upon him grew and grew and they gave him no respite, ... he eventually decided to yield to their wishes (moved largely by the need for an heir).[52]

Gerald markedly changed both the characterisation and plot to illustrate his opinion of the loathsome nature of women – an opinion possibly influenced by his own experience as the grandson of the adulterous Princess Nesta.[53] The misogyny of some canon law and hagiographical writing such as Gerald's no doubt influenced the secular literature of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Although the writers who attempted some form of spiritual equality in their writings and practices represented an arguably smaller faction within the church, their work does illustrate a great diversity in the interpretation of women and their sexuality. No unanimous decision was established regarding women, their influence over men, their origin, definition or role.

Depictions of women within religious texts further illustrate the diversity and often the dichotomy of their portrayal as both the helpmates and the undoers of men – at once God's gift and the instrument of the devil. The immoral influence Eve passed on to all her daughters was a topic of repeated interest and writing. The opinion of many in the church was simply that women could not be trusted.[54] It was a perfect

[51] R. Bartlett, 'Rewriting saints lives: the case of Gerald of Wales', *Speculum* 58 (1983), pp. 598-613 at p. 603.
[52] *Ibid.*
[53] See *Brut Y Tywysogion*, ed. J. W. ab Ithel, *RS* (London, 1860), pp. 84-86; Gerald of Wales, *De Rebus a se Gestis*, in *Opera Omnia*, ed. J.S. Brewer, vol. I, *RS* (London, 1861), pp. 21,58, 60.
[54] See C. Frost, 'The attitude to women and the adaptation to a feminine audience in the *Ancrene Wisse*', *AUMLA: Journal of the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association*, 50 (1978), 235-50.

woman who had caused the fall of all mankind and the Bible contained numerous examples of what calamity could be caused by imperfect women such as the lustful wife of Potiphar, the wheedling Delilah and the greedy Jezebel.[55] Many of these women's stories were to become literary motifs as seen in the depiction of Guinevere in *Lanval* who, like the wife of Potiphar, cries attempted rape when her own advances are refused.[56] There is the example of Bisclavret's wife who wears him down by her incessant pleading to reveal his secret, much in the style of Delilah begging Samson for the secret of his strength and the character of the seneschal's wife in *Equitan* who, like a greedy Jezebel, hungry for power, attempts murder.[57]

It is interesting to note in opposition to these examples of faithless women, the increased popularity of perhaps one of the most cherished saints of the twelfth century, the Virgin Mary. The popularity of female saints, due in part to the growth of the cult of the Virgin, increased immensely in the twelfth century. [58] The popularity of the Virgin Mary is often interpreted as a form of misogyny itself as her image denotes that the only acceptable, wholly positive model of a woman is a chaste one. Though it is a valid concern, this mysogynist reading does not account for the rise in popularity of other female saints in this period across Europe, especially the popularity of married and other maternal saints.[59]

While extremes in the depiction of femininity are apparent, it is perhaps more balanced to say that, rather than providing the ends of a spectrum within which all women fit, these examples act as independent points between which the pendulum of male opinion swung. There is evidence of secular authors attempting to reconcile these views, to enable a woman to be at once Eve and Mary, as seen in the closing of the creation fabliaux *Du Con qui fu fez a la besche*, wherein the author demands

[55] Genesis 39:7-20; Judges 6:4-21; I Kings 21:1-26.
[56] *Lanval,* lines 316-329.
[57] *Equitan*, lines 212-236.
[58] D. Weinstein and R. Bell, *Saints and Society: the Two Worlds of Western Christendom 1000-1700* (Chicago, 1982) ; for a discussion of Weinstein and Bell's study see A. Kleinberg, *Prophets in their Own Country* (Chicago, 1992), pp. 13-15. See also B. Ward, *Miracles in the Medieval Mind* (Pennsylvania, 1982), chapter 8, p. 133, n. 5 and especially Bartlett, *England,* p. 469 for discussions of the popularity in the cult of the Virgin Mary from the twelfth century onwards, the origin of the cult in France and translation of the works into Old French in the twelfth century.
[59] See A.B. Mulder-Bakker, (ed.), *Sanctity and motherhood: essays on holy mothers in the Middle Ages*, (New York, 1995), especially A . Petrakopoulos, 'Sanctity and motherhood: Elizabeth of Thuringia', pp. 259-96 and C.W. Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, 1991).

respect for women, but blames them for the downfall of men. Though he states that the woman 'shall have nothing bad said about her', he notes that her genitalia 'has destroyed many good men'.[60] By separating the woman from her sex a balance was created in which the Mary could be separated from the Eve.

Still, there existed a certain uneasiness surrounding this dual personality and the possibility of a lasting separation between these opposing forces, even, interestingly, when discussing holy women.[61] The late thirteenth century *Ancrene Riwle,* written to guide female recluses, warns of even maintaining heterosexual friendships as the temptation for women would be too great. Interestingly, the Rule states that the anchoress herself would be at fault for raising such thoughts in a man. Even if she were able to resist such fleshly desires, if the man she inspired to lust should yield to temptation with another, she would still be responsible. The Rule cites two Biblical examples of women who inspired such desire to their own detriment and that of others – Bathsheba[62] and Dinah.[63] The rule even cautioned the recluse to be careful in her confessions so that her 'temptations of the flesh' would not excite a young priest to sin.[64]

Confessors' manuals or penitentials of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries echo the Rule's concern regarding the possible enticing effects of a woman's confessions.[65] The genre often explores or promotes occasionally conflicting ideas of masculinity and femininity and ideas of propriety in the interaction of the sexes. Within the penitentials, women are frequently praised for their piety, as a German Franciscan noted, 'You women go more readily to church than men do, speak your prayers more readily than men, go to sermons more readily than men' and, as Peter Biller notes in his research, appear to have gone to confession more as well.[66]

---

[60] '*Ja Dieux ne li face pardon qui d'eles dira fors que bien/ Mes maint preudomme en sont destruit'*, *Du Con qui fu fez a la besche*, lines 76-77 and 80.

[61] See *Aelredi Rievalensis Opera Omnia I*, ed. A. Hoste and C. H. Talbot, Corpus Christianorum: Continuatio Medievalis (Turnhout, 1971), p. 638.

[62] II Samuel 11:1-12:23.

[63] Genesis 34:1-29.

[64] *Ancrene Riwle,* trans. M. B. Salu (London, 1955), pp. 23-25, 27, 51, 152.

[65] To a degree, the terms 'penitential' and 'confessors' manuals' are interchangeable, though penitentials could, as is here illustrated, contain philosophical and theological ideas and debates that were less common in confessors' manuals which were smaller, sometimes only brief tracts and served as an aide at hand for the confessor confronted with an unusual or previously unencountered situation.

[66] P. Biller, 'The common woman in the western church in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries', in *Women in the Church*, ed. W. Shields and D. Wood, SCH 27 (1990), pp. 127-57 at p. 140.

Women's confessions were viewed in a variety of ways depending upon the text and the tradition it drew upon. Always noted was the danger of sexual entanglement in hearing a woman confess, especially to sins of the flesh. Confessors were often admonished to hear women's confessions in public rather than behind a curtain. A distance of thirty feet from other parishioners was advocated as appropriate in order that the confession could be 'seen but not heard'.[67] Sexual tension could even influence a woman's willingness to confess to a man, prompting some manuals to remind the confessor to 'persuade her not to be ashamed to confess, for she is confessing not to a man but to God'.[68]

Within the penitentials, which often list interrogation procedure by profession or social status, women and men receive equal treatment and representation in *exempla*; the only case in which a sex difference is noted is in the case of an abbess, as her profession is a singularly female one. Aside from this exception, secular women were only considered separately from men in matters of sexual sin. The lack of specific address throughout the penitentials outside of sexual matters has contributed to the argument that interprets these texts as misogynist. It may simply be that for the physician of the soul, as the confessor is often depicted, the treatment of the patient, in line with Pauline theology, does not need to be gender specific as the soul is neither male nor female. Only in cases of sexual sin, in which the vessels differ, is special mention made of women in opposition to men. While possibly occasionally practiced thus, such ideology and treatment were indeed rare, as Jacqueline Murray notes in her work on the subject.[69] Few Church fathers were willing to agree with Paul's assertion for the spiritual equality of all believers.[70] Augustine noted that woman was made not in the physical image of God, but only resembled her creator in that she possessed a rational soul.[71] The contradictions between 'spiritual equality and physical inferiority' in women were all but impossible for Jerome to reconcile and hence he put forth that a 'holy woman would shed her sex

[67] *Counsils and Synods: with other documents relating to the English Church 2,* eds F. M. Powicke and C. R. Cheney, part I, 42- 43 (Oxford, 1964).
[68] Raymond of Peñafort, *Summa de poenitentia et matrimonio*, III.xxxiv.30 (Rome, 1603), p. 465b.
[69] Murray, 'The absent penitent', pp. 13-25.
[70] 'There is neither Jew, nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus'.- Galatians 3:28.
[71] Augustine, *De genesi ad litteram* III.xxii; CSEL 28.1, p. 89.

and become a man'.[72] This 'weighting of the sexless soul toward an increasing male definition' led to what Murray has termed, a 'gendered soul'.[73] Evident in the writings of Thomas Aquinas, this idea that the soul developed better in a male body had permeated the theological and philosophical roots of the Church.[74]

This ideology was to have many ramifications in the numerous penitential *exempla* and manuals. While the main purpose of these texts was to teach one how to hear confession, they provide a valuable window into the prescriptive and proscriptive codes of morality and sexuality. They reveal much regarding actual sexual practice and attitudes towards sexuality not only in the description of acceptable activity, but also by the inclusion of deviances from those norms that it was believed the confessor would encounter. The portrayal of women within the penitential texts is androcentrically sexualized. Women are spoken of in a 'tripartite division' according to their sexual status as virgin, matron or widow, though as Murray notes in her study of fifteen manuals from England and Northern France in the thirteenth century, even this distinction all but vanishes in many texts or exists only to determine the seriousness of a man's sexual sin. A man guilty of illicit sexual activity was asked whether his partner had been a nun, a virgin, a married woman or a widow in order to assess whether he was guilty of sacrilege in the case of a nun, incest, adultery or simple fornication.[75] In the case of defiling a virgin, added clauses are often found detailing monetary restitution due the girl's father now that she had been irreparably damaged or, most commonly, the regulation that the girl be married at once to her partner or given over to a religious house. One text dispenses with the formality of such grouping altogether, referring to the man's extra-marital sexual partner only as *meretrix* or 'prostitute', regardless of her occupational, social or marital status.[76]

---

[72] '*mulier esse cessabit, et dicetur vir'*, Jerome, *Commentarius in Epistolam ad Ephesios* III.5; *PL* 26, col. 567.
[73] J.Murray, 'Gendered souls in sexed bodies: the male construction of sexuality in some medieval confessors' manuals' in *Handling Sin: Confession in the Middle Ages*, eds P. Biller and A.J. Minnis (Woodbridge, 1998), pp. 77-93.
[74] K. E. Børresen, *Subordination and Equivalence: The Nature and Rôle of Woman in Augustine and Thomas Aquinas,* trans. C.H. Talbot (Washington, 1981). In pages 339-41 Børresen notes that the entrenchment of the androcentric ideology of the soul was so pervasive that by the time Aquinas' writings in the thirteenth century, it was amazing that he could consider the equivalence of women's spirituality at all.
[75] The *Paris Penitential* differs in that it includes nuns, as the brides of Christ as married women and thus condemns men who have sexual relations with nuns as adulterers. The man must perform the same penance as all adulterers; no additional penance for her status as a nun is given. See P. J. Payer, *Sex and the Penitentials: The Development of a Sexual Code 550-1150* (Toronto, 1984), p.21.
[76] J. Goering, 'The *Summa de penitentia* of Magister Serlo', *Medieval Studies* 38 (Toronto, 1976), pp. 1-53.

Murray finds that women appear within the penitentials almost exclusively in discussions of *luxuria,* the sacrament of marriage or in passages relating to the sixth and ninth commandments. For example, in Peter of Poitiers' *Summa de confessione,* women are mentioned eleven times in total, six of which are found in the discussion of sins of the flesh.[77] Though women were perceived to be dangerous in both body and soul, their role in sex was seen as passive, the act itself was entirely male focused and male dominated. Men 'know women', 'have women', 'deflower them', 'use them', 'abuse them', 'use them in manners against nature', 'join with them', or 'approach them'. The only sexually active portrayal of a woman is found in a single manual that claims women 'corrupt men' if they accomplish their seduction through 'sorcery'. Sex is something men do to women. Peter of Poitier reinforces this idea when discussing sexual activity that is deemed contrary to nature including a brief explanation of appropriate sexual positions. Women's passivity in the sexual act is essential. Any acts of dominance, such as engaging in the female superior sexual position was considered a deviancy equal to oral, anal or other extra-vaginal sexual activity.[78] Peter goes so far as to claim that the practice of the unnatural, female dominated position was one of the causes for the flood.[79] This passivity is also inherent in the definition of adultery as put forth in the penitential texts, the most frequent of these expressions described the act as 'being with another's wife', or 'the violation of another man's bed'.[80] Singularly, the thirteenth-century penitential, *Cum ad sacerdotem,* includes the possibility that a woman might approach a man with adulterous intentions in mind.[81]

Ecclesiastical punishment and penances for adulterous wives varied greatly. They included execution, excommunication, public humiliation, if the crime had been made public, and possibly divorce, if the husband demanded a separation. Should the crime remain unknown outside the confessional, the wife could be given a private

---

[77] Murray, 'Gendered souls', p. 83.

[78] '*Quinta est peccatum contra naturam quod fit duobus modis. Quandoque enim est contra naturam quo ad modum ut cum mulier supergreditur vel cum fit bestiali modo opus illud, tamen in vase debito. Quandoque vero est contra naturam quantam ad substantiam cum quis procurat vel consentit ut semen alibi quam in loco ad hoc a luxuria'.* W. Peraldus, *Summa de vitiis et virtutibus* 'De luxuria' Schlägl 12 f 8vb as cited in P. Payer, *The Bridling of Desire: Views of Sex in the Later Middle Ages* (Toronto, 1993), p219, n. 67. See also Gratian, *Decretum* in Albert the Great, *Opera Omnia* (Münster, 1952), 35.2/3.11.

[79] Murray, 'Gendered souls', p. 85.

[80] Ibid. For examples also see *Summa cum ad sacerdotem,* ed. J Goering and P. Payer in *The Summa Penitentie fratrum predicatorum*: A Thirteenth Century Confessional Formulary, *Medieval Studies* 55 (1993) pp. 1-50.

[81] *Cum ad sacerdotem* p. 31.

penance. The movement from harsh to relatively lenient penalties for adulterous wives has been seen in recent scholarship as a chronological and geographical trend as later penitentials ceased to rely so heavily on early and Celtic material which advocated severe treatment. However, it was explained by the authors of the penitentials themselves as a necessary move to encourage any who had committed a crime to come forward for reconciliation rather than to risk divine punishment due to fear of corporeal harm or shame.[82] Likewise, it was noted that publicising a private affair often created more problems than it resolved, especially if the husband of the wandering wife was not aware of her indiscretions.[83]

Unlike civil law, ecclesiastical law did see a man's sexual indiscretion as a sin for which he too was given penance according to the status of the woman he had engaged with, nun, married woman or virgin, and according to his own status, as one early twelfth-century canon illustrates:

> If a bishop commits adultery with another's wife, he shall do penance for twelve years, three of these on bread and water, and is to be deposed; a priest, for ten years, three of these years on bread and water, and is to be deposed; a deacon and a monk, for seven years, three of these on bread and water, and is to be deposed; a cleric and a layman, for five years and two of these on bread and water. The aforementioned are to be deprived of communion. After the penance has been completed, they are to be reconciled to communion, for they shall never approach the priesthood.[84]

The underlying misogyny of the majority of these texts is apparent in the harsher punishments meted out to adulteresses than to adulterers, the language used to describe both women's sexuality and their part in the sex act, as well as in the casting of their role as pollutants, seducers and prostitutes. While some penitentials do attempt to give a degree of equal treatment to adulterers, the inequality in the punishments, penances and portrayals are difficult to reconcile with those meted out to women guilty of the same crime.

The influence of Christianity on secular literature of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries was manifest in a variety of ways. The popular fables, most lais and many fabliaux were written in a form or in a similar style to didactic religious texts

[82] See Burchard of Worms, canon 105; Bartholomew of Exeter, 'on Magic', p. 349 and The Milan Penetential, 'On the Sixth Commandment', p. 367 in J. T. McNeill and H. M. Gamer, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance: A Translation of the Principal 'Libri Poenitentiales'* (New York, 1990).

[83] See Murray, 'Gendered souls', p. 90 and Payer, *Sex and the Penitentials*, p. 23.

[84] *Capitula iudiciorum* 7.3 as cited in Payer, *Sex and the Penitentials*, p. 23.

including plays and sermons which were often presented as exempla concluded with a tidy moral or proverb. Biblical themes and topoi such as the Grail became the subject of long prose romances. Christian heroes such as Galahad were invented and other famous characters, such as the young Lancelot, were reinterpreted, removed from their Celtic roots and transformed into Christ figures within romances. Biblical motifs were likewise applied to female characters though with varying degrees of mordacity and subtlety and notably without any edifying models.

Medicine and Natural Philosophy[85]

Many of the philosophies behind medieval medicine often compounded the belief in the intrinsic and often dangerous sexuality of women as found within ecclesiastical texts such as the *Ancrene Riwle* and the writings of churchmen like Gerald of Wales. Medical theory supported the case for female physical and occasionally moral inferiority and explained the female lustful appetite as necessary for her survival. Though subtle, this idea proved to be more pejorative and discriminatory than the religious theories which interpreted women's sexual impulses as part of the punishment of mankind meted out by God at The Fall.[86] For women, by their very definition were seen as imperfectly formed men. Their fragile state of being depended on the heat and moisture derived from sexual intercourse with men. Thus not only their inferiority to men, but their dependency on them for life itself, marked women as irrevocably and intrinsically subordinate, defective and parasitic.

While Vern Bullough notes that medieval medical theorists were, in general, less misogynist than their Greek forefathers, many of the underlying theories of medicine in the Middle Ages reflect the ideas of the ancients.[87] In order to discuss the effect these theories had upon literature in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries it is necessary first to discuss the opinion and theory present within these medical and philosophical texts.

---

[85] For an introduction to medicine in the Middle Ages see N. Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine: an Introduction to Knowledge and Practice* (Chicago, 1990); D. Jacquart and C. Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages*, trans. M. Adamson (Cambridge, 1988); L. I. Conrad, M. Neve, V. Nutton, R. Porter and A. Wear, *Western Medical Tradition 800 BC- AD 1800* (Cambridge, 1995).
[86] Genesis 3:16.
[87] V. L. Bullogh, 'Medieval medical and scientific views of women', *Viator* 4 (1973) 485-501 at 487. Also see J. Jouanna, *Hippoocrates' Woman: Reading the Female Body in Ancient Greece*, trans. M.B. Debvoise (London, 1998).

The cornerstone of medieval medicine was the humoural theory as put forth by Hippocrates (*c.* 460-370 BCE) and embraced by Galen.[88] The four humours of the body were related to the qualities of hot, cold, wet and dry. While each person had an individual inclination towards one of the humours, gender also helped determine one's humoural disposition. Men were inclined toward the hot and dry while women were seen as fundamentally cold and wet.[89] Aristotle (*c.* 384-322 BCE) extrapolated from this premise when discussing reproduction to conclude that the male seed, possessing heat was the active key to life while the woman's role was passive in supplying the matter for the semen to act upon. Following upon this, Aristotle thereby concluded that the active force of the male seed would produce a perfect copy of the force and result in a male child; hence it was a defect in that seed that would result in a female child.[90] Female biological inferiority was further compounded by models Aristotle found in nature, illustrating that as the male of each species possessed greater size, skill and dominance than the female, male superiority was both a fact and the will of nature.

Diversity of opinion regarding the nature of women was great and Aristotle's theory was not without opponents such as Soranus (*f.* 98-138 CE) who argued in his *Gynecology* that the only difference between men and women was in their reproductive organs. Several twelfth and thirteenth century clerical authorities, such as Thomas Aquinas and medical writers such as the Muslim physician Averroes likewise took issue with Aristotle's premise not only on medical grounds but also because it negated God's authority by questioning the perfection of his creation.

The theory that women were, in effect, incomplete or malformed males did persist in both ecclesiastical and medical arenas as previously discussed in the debate over the gender of the soul and as shown by both the works of Pliny the Elder (*c.* 23-79 C.E.) and Galen (*c.* 130-200 C.E.) that purport the idea of women being 'inside-out'

---

[88] Though Aristotelian doctrine was often chosen over Hippocratic teachings, the theory of the four humours did pass on into medieval medicine. See Bullough 'Medieval medical', p. 191 and Siraisi, pp. 70-77.

[89] Hippocrates, *Regimen*, trans. W.H.S. Jones (London, 1967) vol. 4, p. 265.

[90] Aristotle, *Historia Animalium*, trans. D. W. Thompson, in *The Works of Aristotle*, vol. 4 (Oxford: 1910), p. 608. Though this work was not translated in Latin until the early thirteenth century and thereby would not have been available in the early Middle Ages but would have been accessible during the period under consideration in this thesis.

men.[91] This idea of a woman being an 'inside-out' man became so popular that often her own reproductive organs were not given unique terminology, but, in the case of the ovaries, were referred to as 'female testes'. Following this ideology, it was commonly held that if a woman were to spread her legs too far apart, she may have her sexual organs fall out and become a man; in fact, Pliny himself records several of these instant sex changes.[92]

When applied to adult sexuality, the humoural theory further reinforced the idea of women's moral and physical inferiority based on the effects of their cold and wet nature which led them to crave the heat of men, gained through sexual intercourse.[93] This physical craving also explained the rapacious lust of women. This craving, manifest in sexual desire, became synonymous with femininity as shown in Isidore of Seville's (560-636 CE) *Etymologies*. Here, he discussed the origins of the word *femina*, holding that 'Others think that *femina* is derived by a Greek etymology from 'fiery force', because she lusts so strongly, for the female is much more sensual that the male, among women just as among animals. Hence, love beyond all measure among the ancients was called 'womanly love', '*femineus amor*'.[94] It is interesting to note, however, that women do not tend to suffer from 'love-sickness' in either medical or literary texts; rather, excessive love is depicted within most medical texts and indeed literature as a male affliction.[95]

Women's sexuality did, however lead to other mental and physical illnesses caused by the wandering womb as first described by Plato (427-347 BCE). According to this theory a womb that had become dry, most commonly through lack of sex or orgasm through which the woman would receive the moisture needed, would leave its

[91] It must be recognised, however, that Galen had a much more positive view of women's sex, sexuality and role in reproduction than did Aristotle. Galen developed the idea that women had a seed of their own and were not mere vessels for receiving the man's seed. This implied, however, that to get pregnant women had to feel pleasure which impacted on medieval discussions of rape and prostitution. Galen also differed from Aristotle in his explanations for gender differentiation and the fact that children could take after either parent.
[92] Bullogh, 'Medieval medical', 492.
[93] Galen heavily subscribed to this theory and advocated sexual intercourse and even masturbation in order to warm the woman and help her alleviate the buildup of seed within herself which could cause illness. Such buildup was of special concern for widows and virgins, including nuns. See Bullough, 'Medieval Medical', p. 495.
[94] Isidore of Seville, *The Medical Writings: An English Translation with an Introduction and Commentary,* ed. and trans. W. D. Sharpe, *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society,* n.s. 54, pt. 2 (1964), p. 50. Isidore's etymologies were preserved and quoted often, appearing in several medical collections and encyclopaedias of the thirteenth century including the *Speculum Naturale* of Vincent of Beauvais. See V. L. Bullough, 'On being male in the Middle Ages', in *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages,* ed. C. A. Lees (Minneapolis, 1994), p. 33.
[95] See M. Wack, *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages: the Viaticum and its Commentaries* (Philadelphia, 1990). Also note that of the female lovers analysed in this study, only Iseult suffers from 'lovesickness'. See below p. 78.

place and begin to move through the body, becoming responsible for a great many illnesses. These maladies could be both physical and psychological, including hysteria and melancholia, and could cause various other diseases as it choked off different organs while roaming through the caverns of a woman's body.[96]

Interestingly this condition implies responsibility and possibly blame on the part of the husband. It is his inability to fulfil his wife's sexual needs that leads to her illness; her diagnosis is a physical sign of his incompetence as a lover, perhaps even leading to accusations of impotence or slurs on his own sexuality. However, providing the heat and moisture required for his wife's health and the preservation of his own honour placed the husband in a difficult and possibly life-threatening position. Sperm was often believed to be a non-renewable physical resource, the origins of which were debated. One of the most widely circulated theories was that of Hippocrates who proposed that 'The sperm of the human male comes from all of the fluid in the body: it consists of the most potent part of this fluid, which is secreted from the rest. . . this fluid is diffused from the brain. . . through the spinal marrow'.[97] With every seminal emission the man loses more of this precious fluid and as Hippocrates goes on to note, is 'weakened by its loss'.[98] Sex could be fatal. Disturbing stories of excess circulated, as Albert the Great relates a case wherein a certain monk died after having 'desired' a beautiful woman seventy times before matins was rung. The autopsy that was carried out revealed a brain that had shrunk to the size of a pomegranate and the complete loss of both eyes. It was concluded that coitus 'drains above all the brain'.[99] As a man's body cooled and dried with age, such fluid became preciously rare. The man was, by losing his heat, becoming feminine. Like a woman then, he would crave the warmth of sex and though women were considered to be humourally cold, a young woman, according to some medical authorities, could possess enough heat due to youth to warm up the ageing man.[100]

---

[96] While Galen refuted this idea, his anatomical knowledge was unique and as his anatomical works were not translated until the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, the idea of the wandering womb continued as shown in its inclusion within the *Gynecology* of Trotula. See *The Trotula: a Medieval Compendum of Women's Medicine*, ed. and trans. M. Green (Philadelphia, 2001). See also M. H. Green, *Women's Healthcare in the Medieval West* (Aldershot, 2000).
[97] Hippocrates, *Hypocratic Writings*, ed. G.E.R. Lloyd, trans. I.M. Lonie and G. Baader (London, 1983), p. 317.
[98] *Ibidem.*
[99] Jacquart and Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine*, p 55.
[100] See Roger Bacon, 'The errors of the doctors according to Friar Roger Bacon of the Minor Order', ed. and trans. M.C. Welborn, *Isis* 18 (1932), 26-62 at p. 53.

Though medical opinion on the topic was diverse, most authorities deemed it foolish to expend what remained of one's life energy in such a manner. The fool becomes the image of the old man who pursues a young woman for sexual intimacy. This image is portrayed in the thirteenth century Old French *Lai of Aristotle* in which the aged philosopher, hoping to win the affections of the king's lover willingly submits to being saddled and rode about the garden like a horse. We read,

> *Bien fait amors de sage fol*
> *puis que Nature le semont,*
> *que tout le meillor clerc du mont*
> *fet comme roncin enseler,*
> *et puis a .IIII. piez aler*
> *a chatonant par desus l'erbe.*
>
> [Love makes a fool of a wise man, for Nature made the best scholar in the world get saddled like a packhorse and then go on all fours scampering across the grass.][101]

Sexual activity belonged to the heat and passion of youth. An old man who continued to pursue the games of youth was referred to as 'a hundred year old child'[102] or a fool. Medicine condemned him for wasting his remaining life energy in a pursuit at which it was noted he could no longer excel. As Phillipe of Navarre wrote, an old man's desire to make love was 'a wish without need or capacity': *'de volanté sanz besoing; la volantez i est, li pooirs n'i est mie'* [103]

The impact of these theories on literature is evident in the portrayal of ageing husbands who are discussed at length in the second chapter of this thesis. Jokes and narrative overtures towards these ideas reveal not only knowledge of these medical theories concerning sex and definitions of masculinity and femininity in differing levels of society but also illustrate how mysteries concerning female sexuality and sexual impulse became fears or confusion. Such misunderstanding and fear becomes the foundation of jokes and stories as in the fabliaux *La Sorisete des Estopes*, wherein the husband's ignorance of his wife's sexual anatomy allows him to be cuckolded.[104]

While medicine attempted to define what is 'female', it could not explain 'woman'. It could not grasp her unpredictability, reveal the mysteries surrounding her

---

[101] *Li lais d'Aristote,* lines 447-52; Eichmann, I:111.
[102] S. Shahar, *Growing Old in the Middle Ages* (London, 1997), p. 77.
[103] Phillipe de Navarre, *Les quatre ages de l'Homme,* ed. M. de Fréville (Paris, 1888), p. 95.
[104] *La Sorisete des Etopes*, lines 36-55.

physiology and sexuality.[105] Women's bodies, illnesses, and psyche, remained unknown rendering the husband unsure of his role and fearful of his possible failure to fulfil it. This definition of 'woman' is what literature would attempt to address. However, the frustration it too encountered in attempting to come to that definition is evident in the majority of texts here examined as the authors try to reconcile 'the Mary' with 'the Eve' and attempt to understand the psychological and physical mystery that was woman .

The fantasies, ideologies and opinions concerning definitions of femininity, masculinity and sexuality that medicine, the Church and society believed in no doubt influenced the literature of the period and are often reflected in the themes and motifs artists employed when crafting their works. However, just as there was no single image of femininity or female sexuality emerging within any of these areas, so a divergent picture of the topic is found within the literature of the period. By analysing each work and its portrayal of sex roles and sexuality it is possible to come up with a fluid rather than a static picture or definition of what literary sources reveal concerning marriage and sex roles and relationships as seen through the marital crisis of wifely adultery.

[105] Even when dissection began in the late thirteenth century, very few female corpses were available. See Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine*, pp.86-97 and N. Siraisi, *Taddeo Alderotti and His Pupils: Two Generations of Italian Medical Learning* (Princeton, 1981), p. 113.

Chapter One:
Adulteresses

Lover 'dies' in his lady's arms: *BN* fr. 854, fol. 121v

Bien est voirs que molt se foloie qui de fame garder se painne – son travail i pert et sa painne qu'ainz la pert cil qui plus la garde que cil qui ne s'an done garde.

[It is quite true that a man is crazy to take pains to watch over a woman – his efforts are all in vain. And the man who makes the greater effort loses his woman more quickly than he who does not bother.]

– Chrétien de Troyes, *Chevalier de la Charrete*, lines 4758-4762

Adulteresses

Wifely adultery has been studied as an aspect of the genre of romance, of queenship, of power and of femininity. Within each of these discussions, however, adultery remains a peripheral subject, incidental to other issues rather than the central focus on which to study both the contemporary viewpoint of these women and the act of adultery. It is the purpose of this chapter to provide an analysis of the image of the adulteress and her crime as portrayed in all genres of literature and across all social classes, taking into consideration the adulteress' physical and psychological description as well as the motive, method and repercussions of her crime. It will also show how her character and actions are heavily dictated by the intentions of the author and form through which he or she chose to convey their story. This final point of consideration is vital as the author's purpose in relating the tale has a great bearing on the depiction of the four main characters: the wife, the husband, the lover and, if present, the accuser. The adulteresses will be analysed, therefore, not by genre but according to authorial intent here presented in three categories: the portrayal in courtly love, the narrative account of an affair and those texts written with didactic or admonitory aspirations.

I. The adulteress and courtly love

The image of the adulteress in texts in which the overrriding purpose is the portrayal of courtly love share several characteristics, some of which are illuminated by Gaston Paris' description of the courtly lady lover including her inacessibility and her nobility. However, even in this seemingly static courtly environment is found a great diversity in the treatment of the adulteress and her portrayal. These women differ in their motives, their actions, their treatment of their lovers and in their rôles played in both the origin and conclusion of their affairs. Four women fall into this category: Guinevere, the unnamed lover of Guigemar, and the mothers of Yonec and Tydorel.

Guinevere

It is only fitting that a discussion of adulteresses in literature should begin with perhaps the most famous of unfaithful wives, Queen Guinevere. Adultery has, it appears, always been related to her character since our first glimpse of Guinevere in the Welsh sources of the eleventh century. John Rhys, a pioneer of Arthurian studies whose theory of Celtic influence still pervades much of later Arthurian criticism, describes the early Welsh estimation of Guinevere's character as a woman 'naughty young and more naughty later'.[1] Although he posed the question as to how Guinevere acquired her notoriety, he provided no answer. In his work, he appeared more interested in Guinevere's possible descent as a Celtic or near-Eastern goddess than as a complex literary character in her own right. It is remarkable that though adultery has been inextricably linked to her character, both in fact and fiction, as found in the eleventh century triads[2] and Geoffrey of Monmouth's twelfth century *Historia*[3], so little attention should be given this characterization of the queen. Little has changed in the study of Guinevere since Rhys' writings in the late nineteenth century, for more attention has been, and is still being, devoted to her possible Celtic past than to her actual character or her crime.

Despite the considerable research devoted to the theory, Guinevere's Celtic history remains almost entirely speculative, composed primarily of possible and often hotly debated links to various named and unnamed fairies. Some Celticists have argued that Guinevere's character is an expansion or variation of the common fairy theme in which the fée materialises in order to have sexual relations with a mortal and afterwards disappears. In this vein of interpretation it is Guinevere's mortality which eventually damns her and destroys the world in which she lives as she is unable to abandon her lover or his world and return to her own. She therefore faces

[1] J. Rhys, *Studies in the Arthurian Legend* (Oxford, 1891), p. 50.
[2] The triads are lists surviving in written form from the early eleventh century, though recent scholarship argues a long oral tradition predating the written form. They are thought to be mnemonic devices for bards, of characters somehow related, for example in a single story or by an individual attribute or action grouped by threes. The triads give no lengthy description of the characters, only their relation to one another such as the group in which Guinevere is cast, 'the most faithless wives of Britain' (80), or occasionally a few words describing their actions or relation to another character. See R. Bromwich (ed.), *Trioedd Ynes Prydein: The Welsh Triads* (Cardiff, 1961).
[3] Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Historia Regum Britanniae*, ed. and trans. Neil Wright (Cambridge, 1991).

consequences of her illicit love from which her previous immortality had made her exempt.[4] As fascinating as such a theory may be, there are no surviving texts nor evidence in extant works which allude to such an origin. While there exist some two dozen characters, mainly fairies and other-worldly women, who have variations on the name 'Guinevere', including one Irish princess by the name of Finnaber, the daughter of Queen Madb, none of these characters seem to share any common episodes or *topoi*, history or even personal characteristics with Arthur's Queen. Unlike Morgan le fée, whose Celtic roots reveal much of the motive and personality of her character in the later twelfth and thirteenth century texts, such a quest for Guinevere turns up very little personal history and reveals nothing by which exploration of her character in these twelfth and thirteenth century texts is aided. It is more important then for this study of her character's portrayal and motivation not to become engrossed in the Celtic sources, but to consider the background and depiction of the queen as given within the texts and by contemporary chroniclers in their works.

Due to their terse nature the Welsh *Triads* reveal little of the history or characterisation of the queen. However, they do state Guinevere to be the daughter of the giant Gogfran or Ogrfan.[5] This tradition continues into the late fourteenth century as illustrated by the passing reference in an unnamed poem by Davydd ab Gwilym to the passion of Melwas (Maleagant) for 'Giant Gogfran's daughter'.[6] In a contemporary anonymous couplet there is reference to a 'Gwenhwyfar, ferch Ogrfan Gawr', (Guinevere, daughter of Ogrfan the Giant), and in a fourteenth century manuscript of the *Brut Y Brenhinedd*, the Welsh translator has added to Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia* that Guinevere is the daughter of 'Ogrvan gawr' (Ogrvan the giant).[7]

The first non-Welsh source to address Guinevere's ancestry is Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*. Either Geoffrey did not know the Welsh tradition of her paternity or, as is more likely, found it distasteful. Whatever the underlying reason, he does not comment on Guinevere's father or his identity,

---

[4] K. Webster, *Guinevere: A Study of Her Abductions* (Massachusetts, 1951), pp. 5-24.
[5] Bromwich, *Trioedd Ynes Prydein*, no. 80.
[6] J. Rhys, *Studies in the Arthurian Legend*, p. 65.
[7] J. Rhys, *Studies in the Arthurian Legend*, p. 49; *Brut Y Brenhinedd: Cotton Cleopatra Version* (Cambridge, 1937), p. 163.

choosing instead to focus on her maternal ancestry from which he derives for the queen a more respectable lineage as a descendant of a noble Roman family. He relates that it was in her maternal uncle, Duke Cador of Cornwall's household that she was educated and raised. Through the Duke's friendship with Arthur she was introduced to her future husband. Interestingly, it was Cador's son, Constantine, whom Arthur, according to Geoffrey, appointed as his successor.[8] This version of Guinevere's ancestry is continued in Wace's retelling in French of Geoffrey's history, and Laȝamon's expanded translation into English of Wace.[9] Interestingly, the Welsh *Brut* follows the tradition of claiming a noble Roman lineage through Guinevere's maternal line but compromises by inserting 'Oguran the Giant' as her father.[10]

Within the thirteenth century *Lancelot* text we are informed that Guinevere is the daughter of King Leodegan. It may well be that the French form of the name is a corruption of the Welsh 'Oguran' or 'Ogrfan' with the definite article *le* as the prefix '(Le) odegan', in a style similar to the giant of the Tristan legend who is always known as 'le Morholt'. Thus emerges the little evidence we have for the family of the queen as written in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries: it appears that her father was a giant who, under the influence of chivalric society, was transposed into a king; her mother according to the Vulgate was a woman of good sensibilities (*moult boine dame et de moult sainte vie*) and of noble Roman stock. [11]

Uniquely for such an important character, there is very little reference to Guinevere's physical characteristics. While all of the texts here used to examine the image of her - Chrétien's *Chevalier de la Charrete*, Marie de France's *Lanval*, both the *Cor* and *Mantle* lais and the Vulgate - state that she is beautiful, there is no detailed physical description of the queen.[12] Such an omission appears odd in light of the detailed descriptions of other women within these texts and within other works by

[8] Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Historia*, 9:179.

[9] The matrilineal descent of Guinevere is also included in other major English chronicles including those of Robert of Gloucester (c. 1290), Peter Langtoft (c. 1307), Thomas Castleford (1327), Robert Mannyng (1338) and carrying on into the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

[10] While Geoffrey's work was first translated into Welsh about the year 1200, the Cotton Manuscript herein referred to dates from the fifteenth century and thus preserves evidence that regardless of the disuse of Guinevere's paternal ancestory in the English sources, the tradition of Guinevere's giant father survived and was undoubtedly known long after his original introduction in the eleventh century *Triads*. See Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Historia Regum Britanniae*, 7:302.

[11] Sommer, VI:354.

[12] For a full discussion of the authorship, dating and texts see Appendix I.

the same authors[13] and in vivid contrast to the lengthy description given of her lover, Lancelot.[14] The queen's eyes are often referred to as bright, or reflective of her mood for when she is angry, 'they blaze', but their colour is never revealed. Likewise, though her hair is treated with devotion as a relic by Lancelot in Chrétien's *Charrete*, the audience is never told its colour.[15] The only hint the audience is ever given concerning the Queen's appearance occurs at her own wedding as described in the Vulgate. Seated next to her cousin, also named Guinevere, the author reveals that the women, who look very alike, differ only in that 'King Arthur's betrothed was a little taller and darker than the other Guinevere; she was better spoken, for of all of the ladies of the world, she was the best trained in eloquence and speech, and her hair grew much thicker, but in every other way they were so much alike that people could hardly tell one from the other, unless it was a lucky guess'.[16] It is a deliberately vague and hazy picture of the queen, the rationale of which can only be hypothesised.[17] Interestingly the only source to attempt a more definite description of the queen is Gerald of Wales in his *Speculum Ecclesiae* in which he claims that in the grave of Arthur at Glastonbury was found a braid of a woman's blonde hair.[18] Gerald's text, however, did not enjoy a wide dissemination and appears to have been unknown or disregarded by the authors of the corpus of Arthurian literature in this period.[19]

---

[13] *Erec* lines 1474-1483, *Yvain* lines 2434-2439,
[14] Sommer III:34.
[15] This is a point of some contention between scholars of Old French. The work describes the hair in lines 1414-15 as '*si biaux, si clers et si luisanz* [beautiful, light and shining]' and 'shines more brilliantly than gold which has been refined a hundred thousand times' (lines 1488-1494). While many have understood these passages to imply that the queen was blonde, the Old French does not specifically assign the colour gold to her hair, but appears to be discussing its shine which is similar to the luster of gold. The Vulgate's claim that the queen's hair is darker than her cousin's could then indicate darker blonde or brunette tresses. In support of the latter however, it must be acknowledged that intense detail, such as thickness of hair as noted in the Vulgate description is not unusual and thus lustre could be understood to exist separately from colour. This work does not attempt to reconcile either view, but merely to emphasise the unique treatment of the queen's physiognomy within the texts, which this ambiguity and dispute further highlights.
[16] *Lancelot* I:287; Sommer II:217.
[17] It is possible that ideas of beauty had become so standardised that the description of the queen as beautiful would provide a universally understood image of a blonde haired, grey-eyed woman, with a rose and milk complexion and shiny, high forehead, as found in descriptions of other beauties, including Enide, Iseult, Le Fresne, and Silence. It must be noted, however, that the authors did describe the physical attributes of these women and thus did not feel that the term 'beautiful' alone described their heroines' appearance.
[18] Gerald of Wales, *Speculum Ecclesiae* II. 8-10.
[19] Gerald himself complained of the too small number of people reading his works in the twelfth century and indeed, there is only one extant copy of his *Speculum Ecclesiae* (BL Cotton Tiberius B.XIII). There is great debate over the possibly disingenuous discovery of the grave and remains found at the supposed unearthing of Arthur's tomb in the twelfth century. See L. Thorpe's appendix 3 in his translation of *Gerald of Wales, The Journey Through Wales/ The Description of Wales* (London, 1978).

It is also notable that working against tradition, the authors have portrayed the love of an older woman. Though the age difference is only implied in many of the texts, the Vulgate text openly states that she was fifty years old, some ten to fifteen years older than her lover, when she and Lancelot resumed their affair on his return from the Grail Quest.[20]

Very little of Guinevere is revealed through her physical description; only rarely is she further understood by her actions and yet her character remains one of the richest depictions not only of adulteresses or women but of all characters in medieval literature. Just as the authors of these texts seemed to agree on or adhere to a *topos* in order to blur any tangible, physical description of the queen, so there is evident a virtually universal trend to allow the queen a unique privilege: to reveal herself, not by narrative comment or only through the eyes and words of other characters, but through her own dialogue. As illustrated in the description of her at her wedding, the queen speaks. In fact, she had been trained in rhetoric and was considered to be the best-spoken woman in the world.[21] Speech is an intrinsic aspect of this character; through it are revealed the nuances, strengths and failings of her character.

The first encounter with the queen is by no means flattering. The earliest of the works to mention the queen is, arguably, Marie de France's lay, *Lanval.*[22] This work is most assuredly concerned with the theme of 'courtly love' yet Guinevere is cast not as the leading lady, but occupies the rare role of the villain. Here Guinevere is cast as a variation of the 'Potiphar's wife' motif in which a married woman attempts to seduce a reluctant young man; when scorned and denied his affections, she makes false accusations of sexual trespass against him, inciting her husband's rage.[23] This is the only portrayal of Guinevere as an unsuccessful lover or a wanton woman. Catching sight of Lanval, Guinevere calls her ladies to sit with her in the garden. Here Guinevere is seen performing a familiar role that she occupies throughout the texts, that of stage director. Guinevere manipulates the situation to her advantage, moving the action from the castle to outdoors so that she may encounter Lanval in the

---

[20] Sommer VI: 205, MSS M and C.
[21] *Lancelot* I:287; Sommer II:217.
[22] See Appendix I on the difficulties of dating of Marie's works.
[23] See also the case of another would-be-adulteress in *La Chastelaine de Vergi.*

semi-privacy of the garden. Finding him alone, the queen approaches and offers him her love, which is refused on the basis of it being an affront to the honour of her husband the king. And it is here, in her reply, that Guinevere's villainous characteristics reminiscent of the kind of cruelty and vengefulness often associated with Morgan le fée, appear:

> *Lanval, fet ele, bien le quit,*
> *Vus n'namez gueres cel delit;*
> *Asez le m'ad hum dit sovent*
> *Que des femmez n'avez talent.*
> *Vallez avez bien afeitiez,*
> *Ensemble od eus vus deduiez.*
> *Vileins cuarz, mauveis failliz,*
> *Mut est mi sires maubailliz*
> *Que pres de lui vus ad suffert;*
> *Mun escïent que Deus en pert!*[24]

> ['Lanval, she said, I well believe you do not like this kind of pleasure. I have been told often enough that you have no desire for women. You have well-trained young men and enjoy yourself with them. Base coward, wicked recreant, my lord is extremely unfortunate to have suffered you near him. I think he may have lost his salvation because of it!']

After this attack on his character, including an accusation of homosexuality, the queen retires to her chamber claiming that it was Lanval who had made sexual advances toward her and she who suffered slanderous accusations for her refusal of his love. While the actions of the queen here are reminiscent of a spoilt child, the ramifications of her claim are not in any way weak or childish as Arthur, enraged by his wife's words, demands that Lanval explain himself or face burning and hanging.

While the queen's speech is powerful, her silence proves almost as deadly. It is a shadow cast over the rest of the work and although the queen is never heard from again, her silence is a threat as the audience progresses through the work, wondering where and when she will act. Interestingly, several critical analyses of the queen describe her as 'gloating' or 'revelling'[25] in the background of Lanval's trial and yet no mention is made of such action within the text. The only mention of the queen after her initial speech is a passage of four lines informing the audience that she is

[24] *Lanval* lines 277-286.

[25] G. Zeigler, 'The Characterisation of Guinevere in English and French Medieval Romance' (Unpublished Ph. D. thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1975) p. 34.

impatient to hear the outcome of the barons' verdict on the trial.[26] Why therefore has her role become inflated in secondary analyses? It is, perhaps, proof of a character already so powerful and intriguing that the audience does not forget her in her verbal or physical absence and no matter how vague a description the authors wish to supply, the reader or hearer of the lay has a definite mental image of the queen throughout the work from her unique and powerful speech.

In Chrétien de Troyes' *Lancelot*, Guinevere's absence is again powerfully felt. Absence is a powerful motivator within the work as it is Lancelot's non-appearance which enables Maleagant to abduct the queen. Conversely, it is the queen's absence, first through her abduction and later in her self-imposed withdrawal when she refuses to see Lancelot at Bademagu's castle, which motivates Lancelot, and therefore the story.[27]

In Guinevere's physical absence, she is kept foremost in the audience's thoughts through Lancelot's devotion to her. Religious devotion to one's lover, one of the *topoi* mentioned by Paris as characteristic of *amor courteois,* is replete throughout the work.[28] Chrétien borrows heavily from Christian religious images in his portrayal of Lancelot's adoration of Guinevere as witnessed in his description of Lancelot's discovery of the queen's hair comb and his subsequent treatment of the 'relic':

> *Et cil, qui vialt que le peigne ait,*
> *li done et les chevox an trait*
> *si soëf que nul n'an deront.*
> *Jamés oel d'ome ne verront*
> *nule chose tant enorer,*
> *qu'il les comance a aorer*
> *et bien cent mile foiz les toche*
> *et a ses ialz at a sa bouche,*
> *et a son front et a sa face.*
> *N'est joie nule qu'il n'an face:*
> *molt s'an fet liez, molt s'an fet riche.*
> *An son sain pres del cuer les fiche*
> *entre sa chemise et sa char.*

> [He was willing to let her [the maiden] have the comb but removed the hair first, careful not to break a single strand. Never will the eye of man see anything so highly honoured as those strands which he began to adore, touching them a hundred thousand times to his eyes, his mouth, his forehead and his cheeks. He showed his

[26] *Lanval* lines 545-6.
[27] *Charrete* line 3945.
[28] See above, pp. 11-12.

joy in every way and felt himself most happy and rewarded. He placed them on his breast, near his heart, between his chemise and his skin.][29]

Guinevere is later depicted as both confessor and redeemer of Lancelot when she at last speaks to Lancelot after his attempted suicide:

A po la mort ne m'an donastes,
ne je n'oi tant de hardemant
que tant com or vos an demant
vos en osasse demander.
Dame, or sui prez de l'amander,
mes que le forfet dit m'aiez
dom j'ai esté molt esmaiez'.
Et la reïne li reconte:
'Comant? Don n'eüstes vos honte
de la charrete, et si dotastes?
Molt a grant enviz i monastes
quant vos demorastes deus pas.
Por ce, voir,ne vos vos je pas
ne aresnier ne esgarder',
'Autre foiz me doint Dex garder',
fet Lanceloz, 'de tel mesfet;
et ja Dex de moi merci n'et
se vos n'eüstes molt grant droit.
Dame, por Deu, tot orandroit
de moi l'amande an recevez;
et se vos ja le me devez
pardoner, por Deu sel me dites'.
'Amis, toz an soiez vos quites',
fet la reïne, 'oltreemant:
jel vos pardoing molt boenemant'.

['You nearly caused my death, and then I had not confidence enough to dare ask you, as now I am asking you. If you would tell me my lady, what crime has caused me such distress, I am prepared to atone for it at once'.

And the queen told him: 'What? Were you not ashamed and fearful of the cart? By delaying for two steps you showed your great unwillingness to mount. In truth, it was for this that I did not wish to see you or converse with you'.

'In the future, may God preserve me', said Lancelot, 'from such a crime; and may He have no mercy on me if you are not completely in the right. My lady, for God's sake, receive my penance at once; and if ever you will be able to forgive me, for God's sake, tell me so!'

'Dear friend, may you be completely forgiven', said the queen, ' I absolve you most willingly'.][30]

The queen is subsequently described as a saint, the only one in which Lancelot places his faith.[31] Chrétien further expands the religious aspect of their love by

[29] *Charrete* lines 1457-1469. For hair as a relic and the reverential treatment of hair in contemporary hagiography see Reginald of Durham, *Reginaldi Monachi Dunelmensis Libellus de admirandis Beati Cuthberti virtutibus*, ed. J. Raine, *Surtees Society* 107 (London, 1835), p. 57.

[30] *Charrete* lines 4476-4500

[31] *Charrete* line 4653

somewhat blasphemously describing the 'martyrdom' Lancelot suffers when leaving her side the morning after their sexual encounter.[32] Guinevere's control over Lancelot is complete, as shown by his willingness to endure shame by losing a tournament on her command.[33] Here Guinevere, who had absolved Lancelot of his sin of placing honour above love, tests the sincerity of his penance by questioning his readiness to forsake the demands of chivalric society once more for her love. An interesting circular pattern is illustrated here, illuminating the difficulties that the merging of the ideals of *amor courteois* and chivalry present. For while the queen must be sure that Lancelot's loyalty is to her above all, as proven by his willingness to forfeit chivalric honour, Guinevere is the queen and hence is deserving of the best lover whose worth is established by his honour and esteem within the society he must scorn for her sake. The queen must walk a fine line between testing her lover and ruining him.

These attributes however - her power over Lancelot, her beatified status – actually reveal more about Lancelot than Guinevere; it is a perception of the queen through her lover's eyes and how she functions in his quest to become the epitome of chivalric society and a courtly lover. The function of her character here is to test, measure and reward Lancelot. Indeed, her adultery is not viewed as a crime, but as a just reward for Lancelot's rehabilitation and is curiously never mentioned again.[34] In the restraints of these duties, Guinevere's character is quite static and stereotyped and yet, while the audience is not privy to the gamut of her emotions, we are periodically afforded fascinating glimpses into a far more complex character.

While Guinevere does act as a typically harsh and demanding courtly lady in both the testing and chastising of her lover, there is both a tender and human aspect to her love of Lancelot. This is no better revealed than in the scene in which the false rumour of Lancelot's death reaches the queen. Guinevere blames herself and her actions for bringing about Lancelot's death, realising that it was only to rescue her that he came into the land of Gorre, and that it was her own refusal to speak to him that had driven him away to his death. Guinevere does not make a public spectacle of her grief, but mourns Lancelot in private:

---

[32] *Charrete* line 4689.
[33] *Charrete* line 5725.
[34] The lack of further accusation of the queen's adultery beyond the interrogation of Kay is discussed below, p. 223.

Puis dit a li meïsme an bas,
por ce pesance avoir an doi
que de boivre ne de mangier
ne la covient jamés proier
se ce est voirs que cil morz soit
por la cui vie ele vivoit.
Tantost se lieve molt dolante
se la table, si de demante
si que nus ne l'ot ne escoute.
. . . mes ainz se confesse a li sole,
si se repant et bat sa colpe,
et molt se blasme et molt s'ancolpe
del pechie qu'ele fet avoit
vers celui don ele savoit
qui suens avoit esté toz dis,
et fust ancor se il fust vis. . .
Sa crualté, sa felanie
la fet molt tainte et molt nercie,
. . . Toz ses mesfez ansanble aüne
et tuit li revienent devant.

[Then she said to herself in a low voice, so she would not be overheard, that it would not be right to ask her to eat or drink again, if it were true that he for whom she lives were dead. She arose from the table at once so she could vent her grief and not be heard. . . she confessed in conscience, repented and asked God's pardon. She accused and blamed herself for the sin which she had committed against the one whom she knew had always been hers and who would still be, if he were alive. Her lack of compassion, the betrayal of her love. . . she counted each of her unkindnesses, and recalled them all to mind.][35]

Realising that her joke *(feire a gas)*[36] has cost Lancelot's life, Guinevere sets out upon a self-imposed penance in order to punish herself for her crime. This campaign of personally prescribed penance is revisited in the Vulgate version of the legend both in its incorporation of this scene and in the *Mort Artu* when, after escaping death at the stake, Guinevere reflects that her current position as an outcast from her husband's court is due to the sin of going to bed with a man other than her husband, and imposes a two year penance upon herself to abstain from making love with Lancelot.[37] The realisation of her mistakes and, indeed, of her sins, her feelings of heartfelt guilt and assumption of all blame for the situation in which she finds herself, is a mark peculiar to Guinevere. Indeed it stands out in vivid contrast to adulteresses such as Iseult, who will be discussed later herein.

[35] *Charrete* lines 4171-4195.
[36] *Charrete* line 4205.
[37] Sommer IV:72.

In the *Charrete,* Guinevere thrice directs the plot and/or action of the work; first in her whispered plea to an unknown 'amis': *se le seüssiez, ja ce croi ne l'otroiesiez que Kex me menast un seul pas'* / 'if you knew, I think you would never permit Kay to lead me even a single step away'.[38] Thus through her disclosure of this mysterious character's existence and his implied strength and ability to save her from her fate, she has, in two lines of dialogue, firstly removed the hope of finding a champion from Arthur's court to make way for Lancelot's introduction and secondly, changed the audience's focus and the setting of the tale from Arthur's court to the unknown, mysterious often other-worldly realm of the forest. This change of setting accomplishes on a grander scale what Guinevere attempts to enact in the seduction scene in *Lanval*: a visual and physical distance from the power and authority of Arthur, a place where her crime has less or possibly no consequences for her or her lover, and neither tarnishes nor casts question on her husband's honour.

Her second act as stage manager in Chrétien's work is found in her organisation of the love scene in which she sexually rewards Lancelot. While Lancelot merely expresses his wish that they could be together privately, it is the queen who actually arranges the tryst:

Et la reïne une fenestre
Li mostre a l'uel, non mie au doi,
Et dit: "Venez parler a moi
A cele fenestre anquenuit
Quant par ceanz dormiront tuit,
Et si vanroiz par cel vergier.
Ceanz antrer ne herbergier
Ne porroiz mie vostre cors;
Je serai anz et vos defors,
Que ceanz ne porroiz venir.
Ne je ne porrai avenir
A vos, fors de boche ou de main;
Mes. . . I serai por amor de vos.
Asanbler ne porrïens nos,
Qu'an ma chanbre devant moi gist
Kex li seneschax, qui lenguist
Des plaies dom il est coverz.
Et li huis ne rest mie overz,
Einz est bien fers et bien gardez.
Quant vos vandroiz, si vos gardez
Que nule espie ne vos truisse.

[38] *Charrete* lines 209-211.

> [The queen indicated a window to him with a glance, not by pointing. 'Come through this orchard when all within are asleep', she said, 'to speak with me at this window tonight. You cannot get in or stay here; I shall be inside and you without, since you cannot pass within. Nor shall I be able to approach you, except by words or with my hand; but for love of you I will stay there. . . We cannot come together because Kay the seneschal, suffering from the wounds that cover him, sleeps facing me in my room. Moreover, the door is never left open, but is always locked and guarded. When you come, be careful, lest some spy see you.][39]

Later, when Lancelot boasts that he will break the bars that separate the lovers, Guinevere again stresses the need for caution and makes the final arrangements of the tryst wherein she will return to bed and await him there, so should Lancelot make too much noise or be otherwise discovered, no one might suspect such an affair had been planned.[40]

The third instance of Guinevere directing the action in the work is found in her interference in Lancelot's penultimate battle with Maleagant. Here her cue is brief; she directs him simply to do his worst.[41] While this scene lacks the physical detail and strategizing evident in other episodes which she directs, Guinevere's few words carry an immense weight, for this is both Lancelot's final test to prove his repentance and loyalty to the queen and also to prove his worthiness to be her lover.

Scenes directed and manipulated by Guinevere are common throughout the Vulgate as well, but are not limited only to the judging of, or arrangement of trysts with Lancelot. Guinevere also plays cupid and directs trysts for other lovers as well, most notably for the Lady Malehaut and Galehaut whom she creates as a couple to keep Lancelot and her company.[42] Guinevere also manipulates court politics on several occasions, far surpassing her role as advisor or intercessor.[43] In her attempt to reconcile Lancelot and Arthur after the False Guinevere, her cousin who has bewitched the king, is revealed, the queen organises an elaborate production in order to make Lancelot appear reluctant to accept the king's apology and thus save face. In this play within a play, Guinevere runs through Lancelot's part with him in the

---

[39] *Charrete* lines 4506-4527.
[40] *Charrete* lines 4605-4632.
[41] *Charrete* line 5645.
[42] *Lancelot* II:147-149; Sommer III:268-9.
[43] See P. Strohm, 'Queens as intercessors', in idem, *Hochon's Arrow: the Social Imagination of Fourteenth-century texts* (Princeton, 1992), pp. 95-119 and J. Carmi Parsons, 'The intercessionary patronage of Queens Margaret and Isaella of France', in *Thirteenth Century England* VI, ed. M. Prestwich, R. Britnell and R. Frame (1997), pp. 145-156.

fashion of a stage director, instructing him 'do not do his bidding as soon as he asks you: leave time for me to entreat you, and Galehaut and then all the barons. I want you to be unbending at first! Do not yield until Galehaut and I have fallen at your feet, and then all the knights and ladies and damsels. At that point, go up to my lord, kneel before him, and agree to do as he wishes'.[44] Guinevere then gives each actor in her drama – herself, Galehaut and Lancelot - their physical positions to take up within the hall and makes sure, one final time before entering the king's audience that everyone knows his cue.

Guinevere also manipulates her would-be-lover Mordred in a similar fashion. Alone, without Arthur or Lancelot's protection, and faced with a forced marriage to her step-son, Guinevere directs that the tower be stocked with food, supplies and soldiers. She directs her household that, should anyone ask, they must say she is preparing for her wedding feast. Guinevere, the able director and actress, again dupes her audience, for Mordred believes her excuse and is caught unaware when she then seals up the tower and attempts to outlast his assault and evade capture.[45] Guinevere's last act of direction is found in her final encounter with Lancelot. When Lancelot, after learning of Arthur's death, is lead to an abbey and discovers the queen, who has taken the habit, he begs her to reconsider and take her place as queen over all the land. She refuses and in her final direction, advises Lancelot to turn away from the court and seek out a hermit to be his companion and spend the rest of his life in the service of God.[46]

Another interesting characteristic of Guinevere is her prowess as a lover, a characteristic more commonly discussed in the analysis of the male lover. Though explicit descriptions of love making outside the fabliaux are rare, within the two verse romances of *Lanval* and *Charrete* and in the prose Vulgate, Guinevere is depicted as an experienced and, if not openly aggressive as shown in her propositioning of Lanval, certainly as a dominant lover. While the narrator in Chrétien's work declares that he will not reveal all the details of the lovers' encounter, claiming, *des joies fu la plus eslite et la plus delitable cele que li contes nos test et cele* / [The most delightful

[44] *Lancelot* II:280; Sommer IV:86.
[45] *Mort* 137; Sommer VI:322-3.
[46] *Mort* 158; Frappier pp. 264-266.

and choicest pleasure is that which is hinted, but never told],[47] he does supply a great deal of detail that illustrates Guinevere in an active and dominant sexual role. In the description of the lovers' first night together, the author describes Guinevere's actions thus:

Et la reïne li estant
Ses braz ancontre, si l'anbrace;
Estroit pres de son piz le lace,
Si l'a lez li an son lit tret;
Et le plus bel sanblant li fet
Que ele onques feire li puet
Que d'Amors et del cuer li muet.
D'Amors vient qu'ele le conjot. . .
Or a Lanceloz quanqu'il vialt,
Qant la reïne an gré requialt
Sa conpaignie et son solaz,
Qant il la tient antre ses braz
Et ele lui antre les suens.
Tant li est ses jeus dolz et buens,
et del beisier et del santir,
Que il lor avint sanz mantir
Une joie et une mervoille
Tel c'onques ancor sa paroille
Ne fu oïe ne seüe.

[The queen stretched out her arms toward him, embraced him, hugged him to her breast and drew him into the bed beside her, gazing as gently at him as she knew how to gaze, for her love and her heart were his. She welcomed him out of love. . . Now Lancelot had his every wish: the queen willingly sought his company and comfort, as he held her in his arms and she held him in hers. Her love-play seemed so gentle and good to him, both her kisses and caresses, that in truth, the two of them felt a joy and wonder, the equal of which had never yet been heard or known.][48]

Chrétien is not alone in casting the queen in this dominant role; Guinevere's sexual prowess and command are a facet of her character in the Vulgate as illustrated by the couple's very first kiss. Galehaut attempts to convince the queen to kiss Lancelot who has been stunned into silence and immobility by her mere presence. The queen replies

De coi me feroie ore proier fait ele plus le veul que vous ne li. Lors se traient tout iii ensele et font samlant de conseillier. Et la roine voit que li cheualier nen ose plus faire si le prent par le menton et le baise deuant galahot asses longement.

['Why should I need to be urged', she asked, 'I wish it more than you or he'. Then all three drew together, as if they were conferring. Seeing that the knight

[47] *Charrete* lines 4682-4684.
[48] *Charrete* lines 4654-4679.

> [Lancelot] dared do no more, the queen took him by the chin and gave him a prolonged kiss in front of Galehaut.][49]

Though the narrator of the Vulgate follows the convention of most courtly romances, as defended by the narrator of the *Charette,* in not providing a sexually explicit account of lovemaking, it is notable that Guinevere, very much in the role of Eve offering the forbidden fruit, initiates the first sexual encounter between herself and Lancelot. It is an important point, but seldom commented upon, that Lancelot was, until this encounter, a virgin. Guinevere is not just a more experienced lover, she is the *only* experienced lover in this union. The caresses and play that Lancelot enjoys so much in her arms are not the product of a long-term relationship between the lovers but are skills she has learned in sexual encounters with another man – her husband! Lancelot, however, does not appear to be concerned nor jealous of Arthur and Guinevere's sexual relations and for her part, the queen 'has become so overwhelmed by him and his love, that she did not see how she could ever do without him'.[50] And Guinevere makes immediate arrangements for Lancelot's return to her bed the next night. Guinevere retains her sexual control over Lancelot throughout the work, as shown most obviously in her direction to him following her expulsion from court after the arrival of the False Guinevere wherein she orders him:

> *Que vous des or mes ne me querrois nul compaignie ne mes de baiser et dacoler si il uos plest que uos ne le facies por ma proyere. Mais ceste compaignie vous tendray tant com ie seray en ceste point et quant ien auray lieu e tens et uostre uolentes sera uos auroya uoluntiers le sorplus.*
>
> [To seek no more of me from now on than a kiss or an embrace, if you like, unless at my invitation. This much of me , though, you will have as long as I stay here; and when I find the time and the place are right and you are willing, I will gladly let you have the rest.][51]

Though very much in control of her lover, the Guinevere of the Vulgate is rarely in control of her emotions or her desire, as shown in her inability to end the affair on three separate occasions. The demanding figure of Chrétien's queen is replaced by a more vulnerable and arguably more human character. The reasoning

[49] *Lancelot* II:146; Sommer III:267.
[50] *Lancelot* II:228; Sommer III:412.
[51] *Lancelot* II:275; Sommer IV:72

behind the change has been hypothesised to be the result of a growing awareness of the secular history of Arthur and his court as promoted in works such as Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia* which cast Guinevere as the tool of destruction.[52] The author(s) of the Vulgate were then forced to write a more complex and flawed character of the queen, making her a woman worthy to be loved by the two best men in the world and yet imperfect in order to set the cycle of destruction in motion. The change in the queen's character has also been attributed to the form of the work as a prose rendition allows more room for artistic flexibility and growth of characters than does verse. Whatever the impetus for the change may have been, be it historical awareness, an aspect of the genre or actual authorial intent, the result is a loosening of many of the restrictions on Guinevere as listed in Paris' description of a courtly lover. She is softened in her superiority to Lancelot and is afforded a humanity not previously enjoyed, as illustrated by moments of grief or concern for Lancelot's well being, her occasional verbal blunders and most notably in her sense of humour. [53]

Guinevere's ability to laugh and joke is almost singular among the cast of the Vulgate Cycle. For example, when Lancelot falls into a lover's trance in an episode taken to the comic extreme and allows himself to be captured by a dwarf and almost drowns when his horse wanders into a river, Guinevere shares in the laughter:

> *la roine sen rist moult et chil qui loient . . . ele lesgarde et puis si dist a monsignor Yvain basset cis cheualiers ne samble mie estre sages/*
>
> ['The queen found it all very funny and so did everyone else within earshot. . . she glanced at him, then whispered to Sir Yvain, 'This knight doesn't seem very smart'.][54]

A second example of the queen's keen sense of humour is displayed in her wit when Arthur questions Gawain as to what he would give to have Lancelot's company. The king's nephew replies that he would forsake his masculinity and wish *'estre la plus bele damoisele del mont saine et haitie par couent que il ma mast sor toute rien'* / 'to be the most beautiful maiden in the world, happy and healthy, on condition that he would love me above all others'. When the king asks the same question of the queen,

---

[52] See V. Guerin, *The Fall of Kings and Princes* (Stanford, 1995).

[53] See Chapter 5 on the language of adultery for Guinevere's near-revelations and other verbal blunders that threaten to expose her affair.

[54] *Lancelot* II:111; Sommer III:204-5.

she replies, *'mesire Gauuain i a mis quanque dame i puet metre ne dame ne puet plus offrir'*/ 'Sir Gawain has proposed all that a lady can give, and a lady can offer no more'. Then they all begin to laugh.[55] Guinevere alone of all the characters within the work shares the emotions of the audience: she laughs when they do, she understands the comedy of the situation as they do. She shares humour with the audience and it provides a realistic humanity to her image, an extremely attractive aspect of her character. The only exception to this almost universal portrayal of Guinevere as a good, or at least likeable character is Marie de France's *Lanval* in which she is cast as a wanton and a villain. However, even within this work, there are shown to be knights who would defend her. Though the brevity of the work does not allow the reader to determine whether the knights' loyalty to her stems from her manipulation of them, from genuine admiration, or from their own sexual desire for a relationship with her, it remains that she is not, even as a villain, an entirely unloved or reprehensible character.

Above all these facets of her image, the most striking aspect of this adulteress is that she is not only an arguably good and attractive person, she is also, apart from her adultery, a good wife! Guinevere fulfils her queenly role as the king's advisor and intercessor, she is seen as an able and mature counsellor and is loved by her people, all of which are commented upon not only in the works to address her as an adulteress, but are common to virtually every work that addresses her character.[56]

The rarest attribute of this adulteress is that, unlike Iseult and almost all of the adulteresses that will herein be examined, Guinevere loves her husband. Her thoughts are with him and his wounded nephew Gawain when she rebukes the Lady Malehaut for thinking of romance at a time of war, declaring

> *Ie ai asses a penser d'autres choses car messires li rois est en auenture de perdre anqui toute sa terre et toute sonor. Et mes nies gist chi tex contrees com vous poes veoir si voi tant de meschief que ie nai ore talent des grans aatines que ie soloie faire ne des enuoiseures.*

---

[55] *Lancelot* II:140; Sommer III: 253-254.

[56] For Guinevere's role as advisor see *Erec,* lines 99-104, *Lancelot* II:280; Sommer IV:86-87. As an intercessor see *Lancelot* II:85; Sommer III:160, *Lancelot* II:133; Sommer III:233, *Lancelot* II:169; Sommer III:307. *Charrete* lines 115-154. As a counsellor see *Lancelot* IV: 8; Sommer VI:17, *Lancelot* II:147; Sommer III:267, *Mort* 131; Sommer VI:307, *Charrete* lines 5359-5414, *TrP* II and III: ff 569-640. On her relationship with her people see *Charrete* line 198, *Lancelot* II:229; Sommer III:413.

['I have many other things on my mind, for today my lord the king is in danger of losing all his land and all his honor. And my nephew is lying here in such a state as you can see, and I see so much misfortune that I no longer have any desire for great challenges of entertainments the way I used to'.][57]

Indeed in the final battle between Arthur and Lancelot's kin, her thoughts are again with her husband and her duty as queen to protect his lands in his absence and in the interests of his possible heir, Gawain. For she instructs her messenger to go to Gaul and bring word of Mordred's treachery to the king and his nephew and only on the condition that both are dead, should he seek Lancelot to help her preserve the kingdom and herself from the usurper Mordred.[58] Her evasion of Mordred is proof that she is not merely a wanton woman, and also evidence of her concern for Arthur's honour which she realises will be destroyed should Mordred rape her.[59]

Just as Guinevere realises that any relationship with Mordred would greatly injure Arthur's honour, so she acknowledges that her continuing affair with Lancelot is an affront to it and for this she feels guilty[60] and constantly berates both herself and Lancelot '*por qui iauoie tant fait que por lamor de lui auoie ie honi le plus preudome del monde'* / 'for whom my love made me shame the most worthy man in the world'.[61] Guinevere's feelings of guilt motivate her to periods of self-imposed penance and she even attempts to end the adulterous affair with Lancelot.[62]

Though Arthur is not always a sympathetic or an entirely blameless character himself, Guinevere, outwith her adulterous affair, never fails to treat him with respect. She remains silent following his capture in an ill-fated adulterous affair of his own[63] and when she is unfairly put aside at the arrival of the False Guinevere, she makes certain that no vengeful knight acts to harm the impostor and, by extension, the king.[64] Guinevere even forgives the king, though he himself admits he cares more for the impostor than for his wife,[65] that he has shown remarkable gullibility when duped by the False Guinevere and even ordered the true Guinevere's mutilation and death at

[57] *Lancelot* II:131; Sommer III:232.
[58] *Mort* 137; Sommer VI:327.
[59] *Mort* 145; Sommer VI:348.
[60] *Lancelot* II:275; Sommer IV:72.
[61] *Mort* 99; Sommer VI:220.
[62] *Lancelot* II:275; Sommer IV:72; *Mort* 91; Sommer VI:21.
[63] *Lancelot* II:227; Sommer III:412.
[64] *Lancelot* II:264; Sommer IV:50.
[65] *Lancelot* II:279; Sommer IV:85.

the stake.[66] Perhaps the most moving proof of Guinevere's love for her husband is in her mourning of him. Upon hearing a rumour, albeit false, of Arthur's death, Guinevere is entirely overcome with grief:

> *Mais la royne fait duel sour tous lez autres si senfrema en une chambre que nus ne le puisseceoir et crie si haut que elle fu bien entendue en la sale ha lasse fait elle or est toute cheualerie et tote ioie perdue si dist ceste parole plus de vij fois en un tenant et a chascune fois se pasmoit . . . por ce fait elle quil est encore vis fai iou cest duel pour sauoir se diesx le me rendroit. Et sachies qu'il ne fait pas plaindre a moi seulement mais a tous les autres. Et si ne mesmerueil fors de ce non comment ioie porra iamais estre meuee en commune cheualerie apres la mort dun si predomme comme il estoit.*
>
> [But the queen grieved more than anyone else. She locked herself into a little room where no one could see her and cried out in a voice that could be heard in the great hall, saying, ' Dear Lord God, now all prowess is gone and all joy turned to sorrow!' She said those words at least seven times and she fell into a swoon each time . . . It is because I am convinced he is dead', she answered, ' that I am grieving like this, hoping that God will perhaps soon give him back to me; I know God has often listened to greater sinners than I am. But, you know, his loss is to be lamented, not only for himself but for the woe it has brought to everyone else as well . . . The only thing that makes me wonder is how kings and knights could feel any happiness after the death of so great a man'.][67]

Ultimately, the stress and passion of her fervent prayers for both Arthur's and Lancelot's souls take their toll upon the queen's health so that she lives only a year after entering an abbey upon Arthur's death.[68]

It is a curious paradox that summarises the queen's life, for while Guinevere is seen to be, with the exception of her sexual transgression, a good and loving wife to Arthur, she is also portrayed as a good lover to Lancelot. As a lover, Guinevere could be demanding and jealous, as illustrated both by her reactions to Lancelot's affair with Elaine and in her utter rejection of him after seeing him wear the sleeve of another woman in the tournament in Winchester.[69] She is also capable of great love and tenderness. This is shown not only in her physical love making, which is both 'gentle' and 'pleasing',[70] but also in her concern for both of their reputations as illustrated in the midnight rendezvous first portrayed in Chrétien's *Charrete* and repeated in the Vulgate. She takes pains to be sure she and Lancelot are not discovered together and cautions Lancelot as to the dangers and risks he may

---

[66] *Lancelot* II:268; Sommer IV:56.
[67] *Lancleot* II:266; Sommer IV:52.
[68] *Mort* 158; Frappier, 266.
[69] *Mort* 109; Sommer VI:246.
[70] *Charrete* lines 4654-4679; *Lancelot* II:146; Sommer III: 267.

encounter coming to her room, urging him to be prudent and stealthy in his approach.[71] Evidence of her concern for their reputations is also shown in Guinevere's staunch refusal to openly profess her love for Lancelot, despite Galehaut's urging, when she firmly states after realising they may be watched, that '*Del baisier fait ele nest il mie ore liex ne tans*' / ['This is neither the time nor the place for kissing!'][72]

Guinevere is also depicted as a healer of her lover, caring for his wounds as shown after the battle of Saxon rock wherein she embraces the wounded Lancelot and declares that she could heal him before the next day, if he had no mortal wound.[73] Guinevere's abilities as a healer, a trait common to several of the women in these texts, are shown not only in the care of her lover, but also in her tender ministrations to the wounded Gawain.[74] However, what makes Guinevere's care of Lancelot truly unique and powerful evidence of her love for him is found in her treatment of Lancelot during his period of madness. Her care for her lover's person extends beyond healing his physical wounds; to care for Lancelot's mental health and comfort, Guinevere puts herself in grave physical danger to calm the violent knight who has attacked both his dearest friend Galehaut and even attempted to stone the Lady Malehaut. Despite his madness and violence, the queen never rejects her lover. Instead, she shows great tenderness in caring as much as possible for his comforts by extinguishing the lights of the chamber which he claims hurt his eyes, bathing him, staying by his side night and day and attempting to soothe his troubled mind. When finally cured of his madness, Lancelot, deeply ashamed of his behaviour, approaches the queen to beg forgiveness. Here is revealed a very tender and honest aspect of her character akin to that which is shown in her moments of grief or self-reflection when she states:

> *nen aies ia garde iax dols amis que si voirement mait diex vous estes plus sires et plus seurs de moi que ie ne soie de vous et tous seurs en soies. Car ie ne lai mie emprins a ore seulement. Mais a tos les iors que lame me sera el cors sans partirs.*

---

[71] *Charrete* lines 4506-4527.
[72] *Lancelot* II:146; Sommer III:263.
[73] *Lancelot* II:226; Sommer III:409.
[74] *Lancelot* II:131; Sommer III:232.

> [Do not be concerned dear friend, for – may God truly help me – you are more my master and more certain of me than I am of you, and so you should be, for I haven't taken this upon myself for the present alone, but for all the days that my soul remains within my body.][75]

While the queen's love for Lancelot brings out many of her finer qualities, her desire for him proves to be her undoing. The self destructive nature of her love for Lancelot is perhaps first seen in the increasing indiscretion exercised in their lovemaking. While in the *Lancelot* Guinevere closely guards the secretive nature of her relationship with Lancelot, refusing to bestow a single kiss in case it may be witnessed, it is in the opening pages of the *Mort Artu* that the reader is told that the queen and her lover are acting with so little discretion that their affair has become common knowledge among the members of the household. Such flippant disregard for reputation and secrecy stands in sharp contrast to the shrewd and careful persona of the queen in the early days of the affair as depicted in the *Lancelot.*

Her personal relationships and friendships likewise suffer from her desire. One of the greatest strengths of the queen is her care for and by Arthur's court. The queen's relationship with the knights of her husband's household is indicative of both deep respect and loyalty. When faced with charges of murder after unknowingly giving a knight a poisoned piece of fruit, when accused of imposture and even when charged with adultery and treason, the queen's deep bonds of friendship and loyalty with many of the knights move several to defend her, even against their lord. Guinevere is a loyal friend a caretaker of the knights of her household and yet her craving for Lancelot moves her to violate even this bond in which she had never previously wavered. For contrary to her word to Galehaut, her friend who had supported her against all accusations of imposture and had given her his lands and countless hospitalities, she breaks her promise never to deprive him of Lancelot's company. Consumed by her craving for Lancelot's presence, she implores him to stay with her *'Mais ce dist ele si bas que galaos ne lo[i]t mie. Car trop en fust dolans'* / ['though she said this so softly that Galehaut did not hear it, for he would have been deeply saddened by it'].[76] Galehaut soon realises the powerful pull of Guinevere's

[75] *Lancelot* II:232; Sommer III:419.
[76] *Lancelot* II:228; Sommer III:411.

love for Lancelot and her inability to keep her promise.[77] Thus he confesses to Lancelot before their parting that

> *Si me criem que iou ne vous perde par tamps et que on ne nous face departir ou par mort ou par autre chose et sachies se madame la royne eust aussi boin cuer enuers moi comme iou ai enuers li elle ne me tolsist ia vostre compaignie. . . car elle a plus kier que sez cuers en soit a aise que autres et si me dist elle ia que elle ne sen pooit consirer et iou men sui bien apercheus. Si voel bien que vous sachies que lues que ie perdrai vostre compaignie de li siecles perdra la moie.*
>
> ['I am very much afraid that I will lose you soon, afraid we will be parted by death or some other separation. I'll tell you too, that if the queen were as kindhearted towards me as I have been toward her, that she wouldn't strip me of your companionship . . . Still, I mustn't blame her if she wants to please her own heart more than another's; she even told me once that you cannot be generous with something that you cannot give up. And I have realised as much. So I want you to know that when I lose you, the world will lose me'.][78]

The absence of his dearest friend eventually deprives Galehaut of all joy and when he hears of a rumour that claims Lancelot is dead, he himself dies of a broken heart.[79]

Another indication of the queen's unravelling control over her actions is evident in her language. Known for her role as intercessor and counsellor, the queen's most valuable talent is her skilful use and manipulation of language, and yet this attribute begins to show signs of decline as well. The first occasion of a slip of language actually occurs within the *Charrete* – a piece in which Guinevere is portrayed in her most controlled and controlling form. And yet in her first speech she betrays her love for another in her whispered plea to the unknown *amie*. Her second slip occurs near the conclusion of the work, the two episodes of indiscretion and near discovery neatly bookending the poem. Here, it is after Lancelot's return from imprisonment when he arrives to fight his final duel with Maleagant that the queen almost gives away her desire for Lancelot, not with words, but with her body language. Chrétien writes that *'Si est voir, ele an est si pres/ qu'a po se tient – molt s'an va pres – que li cors le cuer ne sivoit'.* [In truth she was so near him that she could scarcely restrain – and nearly didn't – her body from following her heart to him.][80] Within the Vulgate, scenes of the queen's unintentional disclosure of her feelings or her affair, both in physical and verbal slips, pepper the text rather than framing it as they do in Chrétien's work.

---

[77] *Lancelot* II: 142; Sommer III:263.
[78] *Lancelot* II: 244; Sommer IV:8.
[79] *Lancelot* II: 332; Sommer IV:154-155.
[80] *Charrete* lines 6827-29.

Shortly before her first meeting with Lancelot, it is her over-exuberance when arranging the details of the plan with Galehaut that attracts the attention and hence the discovery of her love by the Lady Malehaut.[81] Later, what may be meant as clever puns or *double entendres* take on a dangerous edge of truth as seen in Guinevere's public acknowledgement of the debt owed by her people and king to Lancelot for his help in the battle against the Saxons and the Irish and for rescuing the King. Concluding her speech before all the court, including several who are aware of her adulterous love for the young knight, she states, '*Por lamour monseignor et la moie honnor que vous aues hui maintenue vous otroi iou mamor et moi si com loial dame le doit donner a loial cheualier'* / [For the love of my lord and my honour which today you have upheld, I grant you my love and myself, as a loyal lady must reward a loyal knight'].[82] Similarly, when defending herself against accusations of adultery brought by a servant of Morgan le Fée, the queen embarks upon an eloquent speech extolling the values of Lancelot that declines into a passionate diatribe and her eventual disclosure of the truth of her relationship with Lancelot.[83] A similar revelation of the affair is hidden in her joking with Arthur and Gawain in which she agrees with Gawain that to keep Lancelot's companionship she would become his lover. This passage reveals a darker edge to the queen's humour, a private amusement in flaunting her actions to the audience and mocking the king. It is a flirtation with a dangerous game in which the queen is not usually depicted playing. Here too then we see the bizarre effect the queen's love and desire for Lancelot has upon her character: moving her to lie, break oaths and forsake friendships and even revel in and joke about her infidelity. The audience is not alone in realising the destructive quality of Guinevere and Lancelot's love. Lancelot's kinsmen, Hector and Lionel admit to the unhealthy nature of the relationship. After cursing the day Lancelot met the queen, they decide to seek out Lancelot and

> *'nous le poions mener el roialme de gaule onques si boine oeure ne fu faite. Car adonques seriemes nous a ese et en repos se nos la le teneons et il se pooit tenir de madame la roine'*

---

[81] *Lancelot* II:142; Sommer III:263

[82] *Lancelot* II:237; Sommer III:427-428.

[83] *Lancelot* II:324; Sommer IV:142.

['take him to the kingdom of Gaunes or Benoic, for that will be the best thing we have ever done, for then we will be at peace if he can live without the queen'.][84]

Ultimately, of course, Lancelot cannot give up Guinevere and for all her attempts to give up the affair, neither can she. In this failure, Guinevere's character is not unlike the tragic heroes of classic literature – entirely redeemable characters save their one fatal flaw which brings out previously unseen weaknesses and results in their ultimate undoing. It is not without reason that Frappier and others have described Guinevere's ultimate understanding of her role in the tragedy as a moment of 'Jocastan-like horror', for Guinevere has truly become a tragic heroine, outwardly perfect and yet horribly flawed, whose own downward spiral echoes in microcosm the downward spiral and failings of the court and society she lives in.[85]

Regardless of her weaknesses, Guinevere is never, except in *Lanval*, made out to be the villain of the legend. Yet, while she is never personally condemned by the authors, her adultery is never condoned. Indeed, there exists a sharp contrast between the adulteress and her crime which is variously described and/or depicted as '*hunie*/shame' in *Lanval* and throughout the Vulgate, and as '*tex leidure ne tiex torz*/ 'a base and blameworthy act' in *Charrete.* [86] While it was within the husband's right to kill his wife for her infidelity, as Arthur attempts in both the *Lai du Cor* and *Mantel,* the prescribed punishment for a queen caught engaging in adultery was death by burning. The narrator of the *Mort Artu* explains the appropriateness of this punishment: '*quar roine sacree et enointe qui ainsi honnist son seignor doit de tel mort morir* / 'for since queens have been consecrated, that is the only appropriate death for one who has committed a traitorous act'.[87]

The sexual violation of the queen, whether with or against her consent, was considered an insult to the king's honour as shown in Guinevere's plea for Arthur to rescue her from Mordred wherein she states, *'il la heit si mortelment quil la fera hounir del cors [se il pooit] si i aurois grant honte'* / 'and he [Mordred] hates her so

[84] *Lancelot* IV:101; Sommer VI:224.
[85] See Zeigler, *Characterization*, p. 137.
[86] *Lanval* line 316; *Charrete* lines 4864-65.
[87] *Lancelot* IV:122; Sommer VI:279. Similarly, in the sentencing of the queen found in the False Guinevere episode, it was decreed that since she had worn her crown unwarrantedly, her head would be shaved and because she had received unction in her hands, the skin of her palms and fingers would be stripped of their skin. See Sommer IV:58.

desperately that he will defile her body, and you'll be disgraced by that'.[88] Regardless of intent, any form of extra-marital sex was considered treason on the queen's part and hence rendered her worthy of death, as illustrated in the queen's terrified confession to her cousin before the battle on Salisbury Plain. Here she states her fear that she will not survive, no matter who the victor of the battle should be, for Mordred's anger at being spurned was so great he would surely kill her and indeed, should Arthur return alive, he would not believe that she had not been raped and his honour lost:

> *'il ne pora croire en nule maniere que mordres ne ma conneue charnelment por la force quil a mise a moi auoir. Si sai vraiment quil mochira si tost comme il me pora tenir as mains'.*
>
> 'he will never believe that Mordred didn't sleep with me, considering all the force he used in trying to get to me, and so I know the king will kill me as soon as he gets his hands on me'.[89]

While her affair with Lancelot reveals many of her weaknesses it is only here that the audience learns of Guinevere's greatest fear – that of the jealousy of men, for that jealousy is deadly. She is not, of course, alone in that fear. Guinevere's consternation, that whoever emerges victorious from the battle, Mordred or Arthur, will turn his anger upon her and destroy her, closely echoes Iseult's similar fear as expressed in her dream of two lions who wait to devour her, symbolising the destructive jealousy and power of her husband and her lover.

Guinevere, however, escapes punishment in all of the works to address her, even in Marie's *Lanval* in which she quietly fades out of the plot as the story shifts focus to the reunion of Lanval and his fairy lover. Within the *Charrete,* Guinevere's escape from punishment is attributable to the work's focus not as a narrative of an adultery, ironic as this may be since the lover's tryst is the scene which is most often identified with this work. It is instead the story of the redemption of Lancelot as a 'courtly' lover – a position that he gambled when he momentarily placed the shame of riding in a cart ahead of his devotion for the queen. This work is not intended to function as a diary of an adulterous affair, as many of the works in the Tristan legend appear to be, nor was it meant to examine the very real implications of adultery as

[88] *Lancelot* IV:145; Sommer VI:348

[89] *Lancelot* VI:147; Sommer VI:354.

found in the *Mort Artu* and several of the fabliaux which will be later examined. This is, though not exclusively, an exercise in courtly love, shown in the language and actions of veneration expressed and exhibited by Lancelot towards Guinevere, in her testing of Lancelot's penance and even in the form in which the author chose to convey the work.

Chrétien's *Charrete*, like many of his other works, is written in a bipartite form: a narrative consisting of two major parts hinged at a crucial turning that functions as both the conclusion of the first half and the introduction of the second. [90] This central point is not the scene of the sexual consummation of the affair, which one might expect if the author's intent had been solely to reunite the lovers. Instead, it is the scene of Guinevere's rebuke of Lancelot. The first half of the work was devoted to building Lancelot's reputation, focusing on his achievements and establishing his prowess. With Guinevere's censure is introduced Lancelot's shame: his momentary hesitation to place honour above love. The second half of the narrative is focused on Lancelot redeeming himself and proving his wish to place his love and devotion to Guinevere above glory. In this setting, the sexual fulfilment of the relationship serves as a reward for Lancelot's rehabilitation as a devoted lover.

The adultery itself is committed in a realm of fantasy and like the mysterious Sword Bridge, the magically cloaked lions and bewitched beds and flaming lances Lancelot encounters in this otherworldly setting, seems out of place and somehow irrelevant in Arthur's kingdom. Indeed, the accusation of adultery that was the initial reason for the battle between Maleagant and Lancelot is not repeated in Arthur's court. When battle is resumed at the finale of the piece, it is the issue of a bruised ego, not the queen's innocence, which is at stake as Maleagant attempts to reinstate the honour he had lost to Lancelot on the battlefield when his father was forced to beg the queen to stop the initial trial by combat in order to spare his son's life.

Within the *Cor* and *Mantle* lais, it is by her own wit and the convincing arguments of others that Guinevere is saved. In *Cor*, when the magical drinking horn overturns on Arthur, thus proclaiming him to be either a cuckold or a jealous man, the king immediately assumes the former and attacks the queen. Restrained by his

[90] See especially *Erec* and *Yvain.*

nephews, Arthur is persuaded by Yvain that the queen is guilty only of a few fanciful thoughts, as are all women: '*Kar n'i est femme nee que soit espousee qui n'yet pensé folie*' [There isn't a woman born who is married who doesn't have light thoughts.][91] Guinevere quickly turns the tables by reminding Arthur that the horn will reverse on the drinker should her husband be a cuckold or exceedingly jealous. The queen admits to giving a favour to a young knight who sought her love: a double entendre that may not have gone unnoticed with an audience of the mid thirteenth century who would have been aware of Guinevere's adulterous affair, as presented by Chrétien and also within the Vulgate and possible other orally transmitted stories and non-surviving texts.[92] Her point is made, the failure of the test is put down to Arthur's jealousy, and Guinevere escapes punishment for her infidelity. In a very similar test found in the *Mantle* text, the queen is asked to try on a beautiful robe in front of the court. Unknown only to Guinevere, the robe, given Arthur by a mysterious bearer of gifts, possesses the ability to determine the faithfulness of the wearer and will fit only a true wife or lover. Once the queen touches it, the garment shrinks to an appallingly small size, angering the king.[93] However, the queen, realising the nature of the test, quickly suggests that all the women of the court try it on. As the garment shrinks when touched by all but one of the ladies of the court, though none to the extent experienced by the queen, the test is passed off by the queen as a very bad joke upon the jealous husbands of the court, and the men agree. In some versions of the lais the robe has a *deus ex machina* property of dispelling sorrow and all soon forget the test and their anger.[94] In other versions, the court disregards the test as a bad joke sent by an ill-willed fairy, possibly Morgan le fée.[95] In all traditions of the *lais*, Guinevere escapes punishment.

Within the Vulgate cycle, the queen faces many instances and forms of accusation and yet escapes punishment on all accounts by her wit and with the help of others. When confronted by a messenger of Morgan who presents a false story of

[91] *Cor* lines 309-311.
[92] See Appendix I.
[93] *Mantle* lines 283-435.
[94] C.T. Erickson's edition of *Le Lai Du Cor (ANTS:* 1973), p. 7, fn 3 contains an excellent comparison of French and continental versions of the *Mantle* tradition. See also F. Wulff, 'Le conte du mantel, texte français des derniers années du xii siécle', *Romania* XIV (1885), 345-80.
[95] See pp.220-222 for a complete history of Morgan as the 'ill-willed fee' of these lais and her role as an accuser of Guinevere.

Lancelot's abandonment of the queen, Guinevere openly attests to Lancelot's fine virtues and hence her respect for him, denouncing the message as a lie.[96] Here the queen cunningly disguises her love for Lancelot as the love any queen, indeed, any member of the court should have for so valiant a knight and subtly reminds her husband of the debt he owes his faithful knight who rescued him from prison after the battle of Saxon Rock. Her argument is so convincing that Arthur declares that he believes the queen and '*cil qui sont mi ami que iou voldroie miex quil vous eust a femme prise par si que iou eusse a tous iors samor et sa compaignie et par si quil vous pleust*' / 'he would gladly have seen Lancelot marry her, provided he were his companion all his life and would not die young'.[97] Arthur is not, however, willing to honour such bold claims, for when he discovers by means of Agravain's treachery that Guinevere has been unfaithful, it is only by the physical intervention of Lancelot in rescuing the queen from the stake that she escapes punishment for her crime. In addition to Lancelot's physical rescue, the queen depends on the aid of the Pope to salvage her marriage, which he does, insisting that Arthur, upon threat of excommunication, take back his wife whom he has unlawfully attempted to execute without actual evidence or trial.[98]

However, while Guinevere escapes punishment for her crime, she in no way avoids the far reaching implications and effects of her adultery, for the damage to Arthur's honour has been done. Regardless of how many times he is moved to accept or forgive his wife or how many times she avoids condemnation through wit or technicalities and is 'found' to be innocent by outside parties, Arthur, like the audience and indeed many of the barons at court, realises her guilt and the affront to his honour is both a deep and lasting mark. Lancelot's display of loyalty to the queen in aiding her escape results in the destruction of the love and friendship between the knight and the king and results in Lancelot's exile and eventual war between the kin of Lancelot and the king.

In analysing Guinevere as an adulteress, one arrives with a complex and at times conflicting image rather than a concise and singular picture. It is obvious that

[96] *Lancelot* II:324; Sommer IV:141.
[97] *Ibid.*
[98] *Mort* IV:131; Sommer VI:307

she is far more than a displaced fairy of Celtic origin or a stereotype of the 'courtly' lady. Frappier was so convinced by the portrayal of Guinevere that he concluded she was modelled on a real woman due to the author's sensitivity to character.[99] In this vein, critics applying a realist approach to the literature have argued the case of allegory, insisting that Guinevere was based on Eleanor of Aquitaine or perhaps on her daughter, Marie of Champagne, though such theories are now largely doubted.[100]

Extrapolating from a variety of critical approaches, several very interesting and certainly not mutually exclusive hypotheses concerning her character and function can be made. Perhaps the most obvious interpretation of the image of the queen, especially as depicted in the *Charrete*, is Guinevere as the personification of love. Indeed, the fickleness of love and that of Guinevere, the attacks Lancelot endures from both love and Guinevere as well as Guinevere's other-worldly perception that somehow allows her to know the offence Lancleot has made against love by his momentary hesitation to board the cart all support this reading of her image within the *Charrete.* Utilizing all of the texts to address the queen, however, several broader theories may be taken into consideration. Applying a psychoanalytical reading to the texts, it may appear that Guinevere is not an individual woman but stands as the representation of both the fantasies and fears of all men. She is every lover and every wife, the fantasy of young men as the attractive, powerful older woman and the fear of aging husbands who may not be able to hold the attraction of or authority over their wives. The anxiety of ageing husbands who have taken on younger wives is a motif that will be revisited in all genres and studied in more depth in the following chapter when discussing the role of husbands in their wives' indiscretions.[101] As this symbol of fear and desire, it is perhaps fitting that she have no detailed description in order to represent each man's fantasy or wife.

Adding to the representational view that psychoanalysis affords, Robertsonian criticism with its theological and particularly Augustinian viewpoint might stress that this combination of anxiety and desire for Guinevere is reflective of, or indeed possibly an allegorical reference to, the original fantasy and fear of men – Eve. In her

---

[99] J. Frappier, *Amour Courtois et Table Ronde* (Geneva, 1973).
[100] See R. Tuve, *Allegorical Imagery* (Princeton, 1966).
[101] See below, pp. 108-110.

Eden of Camelot, with her seemingly perfect husband, it is Guinevere, cast as Eve, who commits a great sin which dooms her perfect world. She, like her foremother, exposes the weaknesses of the men and of her society that the men fully explore to their own downfall. Like Eve, she is portrayed with emotive humanity as a woman caught in a downward spiral, aware of her guilt and her part in the destruction of her world and yet unable to atone fully for her sin or repair the damage done.

Post structuralists and many feminist critics might instead argue that Guinevere is not intended to represent every woman, nor is she allegorical; in fact, she is not a woman at all. She is instead a literary device, a mechanism by which the weaknesses of men are exposed. She exposes Agravain's jealousy of Lancelot's prowess and his favoured status with the king and is the means by which Gawain, who throughout all the texts here considered has shown himself a model of virtue, has his fatal desire for revenge revealed. She is the flaw of Lancelot that renders him impure and keeps him from his destiny to find the Grail and is, therefore, the reason Galahad must be born. Only Guinevere can put Arthur in a position of torn loyalties by placing Lancelot and the King's nephews at odds. It is her crime that exposes the king's ultimate weakness: his immoderate, almost blind devotion to his knights. This is first illustrated in his refusal to see Lancelot's betrayal of his honour until his shame was universally known, and second, in his willingness to support his nephew Gawain's war of personal vengeance at the cost of his own kingdom and life.

In a similar vein, The New Criticism might support the theory that the legend is not about a love triangle at all, but the battle for Camelot that Guinevere personifies. It is she whom Arthur, Lancelot, Maleagant and even Mordred in the various branches of the legend, fight to gain control of or possess. It is she around whom events in the story pivot, and around whom loyalties divide. And ultimately, just as no man inherits or ultimately claims Camelot, so no man truly possesses Guinevere. She is, in effect, an unholy Grail whom men quest for, die for but never attain. It is interesting, if we were to believe Gerald of Wales' account of the discovery of her tomb, that Guinevere continues to evade the grasp of men even in

death, for when the greedy monk reaches for the queen's braid, it crumbles leaving him with only a handful of dust.[102]

In line with Sedgewick's study of women as currency in a courtly setting, a fifth theory regarding the queen may be put forth that would show that while regarded as the epitome of femininity, Guinevere is really a measuring devise of masculinity.[103] For while Arthur is in control of his kingdom and exhibiting masculine authority and requisite prowess, Guinevere is a faithful wife. Yet when his actions are juxtaposed against those of Lancelot, weaknesses in the king's authority and masculinity are exposed. For example, his failure to win his battle with Galehaut, exposes Arthur's martial weakness, his readiness to commit an adulterous affair with the Maiden of Saxon Rock reveals a moral weakness, his gullibility and naivété are illustrated as he is lured into captivity by her and by his willingness to believe the false Guinevere and later fall under her spell.[104] In contrast are Lancelot's strengths which are most often paired with illustrations of Arthur's weaknesses or flaws. His prowess is exhibited in repeated winning victories in tournaments, successful quests and through his peerlessness on the battlefield where he is single handedly able to turn the tide of battles by his presence, as shown in the war with Galehaut.[105] His success as a faithful and able lover is also repeatedly illustrated, often in direct comparison to Arthur's failures or embarassments. This is no better illustrated than in the Vulgate Cycles description of Arthur's capture by the maiden of Saxon Rock. In the same evening Arthur is taken captive and cuckolded. His own affair dissolved into a humiliating arrest, he must rely on his wife's lover to rescue him.[106] Likewise, in the *Charrete*, it is when Arthur admits his inability to challenge Maleagant and gives up the queen that Lancelot enters, proving his masculinity through a variety of martial tests, taking over Arthur's role not only as saviour, but possessor of the queen.[107] The possession of Guinevere acts as a measuring device of the masculinity of these men as proven by their martial and sexual prowess. As Arthur's weaknesses are exposed, so

[102] See above, p. 35.
[103] See Introduction, p. 6.
[104] *Lancelot* II:127-139; Sommer III:228-264; *Lancelot* II:226-236; Sommer III:404-426; *Lancelot* II:245-248; Sommer IV:10-17.
[105] *Lancelot* II:127-138; Sommer III:228-261.
[106] *Lancelot* II:234-236; Sommer IV:424-426.
[107] *Lancelot* II:227-230; Sommer III:404-410.

his control over Guinevere's fidelty loosens almost in direct correlation with the extent of his masculine failings.

Each hypothesis contains a viable analysis of Guinevere's image, yet it must be recognised that none of these theories are necessarily mutually exclusive. Guinevere is often simultaniously a fantasy, a fear, a symbol, a stereotype and yet a convincingly real woman. Much of the variance in the portrayal of her character can be attributed to differing genres and authorial intent in each work. The focus in works such as the *Charrete* and the Vulgate is upon the lover, Lancelot, rather than the queen. It is his biography, adventures, development and rehabilitation with which the author is primarily concerned. The queen's character functions solely as a means to provide the conflict from which the story and the hero grow. Thus her role as one of many possible symbols and/or a fantasy of men is easily understood. Yet in all the texts there is an attempt, in varying degrees, to explore both the motive and intent of her crime, a discussion of mitigating circumstance, her personal failings, guilt, penance, revenge and even cruelty. To ignore the often poignantly detailed description of the queen, her crime and emotions by subscribing to just one of these hypotheses rather than weighing the evidence of all of them is indeed limiting. The detail afforded in these texts allows the queen's character to move far beyond a stock motif, becoming the convincing real woman of Frappier's analysis. Her portrayal thus gives the historian a great deal of information regarding definitions of femininity in the Middle Ages, female extra-marital sexual activity and the role of women in both society and marriage. Guinevere is a fantasy, a fear, a symbol of her society but perhaps she is also a symbol of adulteresses. It is only fitting that this study begins with perhaps the most famous adulteress in medieval literature, but Guinevere's fame is not the chief factor in choosing her character to open the discussion of the identity, motives, description and use of the adulteress in literature. The study of Guinevere is an exploration in microcosm of many of the *topoi*, motifs, characteristics and various portrayals that will be discussed in the following discussions of other adulteresses, the portrayal of their characters, bodies, actions, psyche and roles within marriage and society.

The adulteress in Guigemar

Perhaps the most striking characteristic of the adulteress in Marie de France's *Guigemar* is her lack of a name. This anonymity is common to the majority of works here examined, Guinevere and Iseult being the only named exceptions. It in no way implies a secondary or subordinate role for the adulteress, as it must be noted that few, if any male characters are named within the majority of texts. Of the rare few works that do name any of the participants in the adulterous triangle, it is the male lover, not usually the wife or husband, who is most commonly named. This trend is especially apparent in the genres of courtly romance and the *lais*. As the focus of the majority of these works is the development or the history of the lover, it is not surprising or inappropriate that he be named above the other characters. What is interesting, however, is the very little impact anonymity has upon the wife's character. While unnamed husbands often shrink into caricature, the adulteress loses very little of her character's depth when unnamed.[108] In her anonymity, sometimes her silence and even in her absences as shown by Guinevere in both *Lanval* and the *Charrete,* the power and presence of the adulteress is keenly felt. Indeed, she often emerges as the most detailed, usually sympathetic and most developed character within the cast. The adulteress depicted in Marie de France's *Guigemar* is no exception.

She is introduced as a woman '*de haut parage, franche, curteise, bele et sage'/* ['of high birth, noble, courtly, beautiful and wise'],[109] contrasting with her husband who is described as '*gelus esteit a desmeasure kar ceo purportoit sa nature, ke tutli veil seient gelus mult hiet chascun kë il seit cous tels est de eage le trespas /* ['exceedingly jealous, as befitted his nature, for all old men are jealous and hate to be cuckolded, such is the perversity of their age'.][110] It is significant that she is here both introduced and set into opposition with her husband in the same breath, her good qualities juxtaposed with her husband's perversity. The contrast of the length and depth of the husband's and wife's descriptions must also be noted. While the

---

[108] See below, pp. 117-118, 125.
[109] *Guigemar* lines 211-213.
[110] *Guigemar* lines 213-217.

husband, 'old and jealous as all men are', exists as a two-dimensional stereotype of his sex and age-group, the wife is given a family background, a physical description and a psychological profile detailing her nobility, wisdom and 'courtliness'. Marie defines 'courtliness' within her works by the terms *largesse*, encompassing ideals of generosity and hospitality, and *curteisie,* which connotes images of both physical and verbal grace, empathy, and pity.[111] All of these qualities are exhibited by the young wife, especially in her treatment of Guigemar whom she rescues, cures of his illness and makes her guest in her prison-like chamber by the sea in which her jealous husband has sequestered her.

As the two become lovers, the sinful element of their crime is not discussed. In the year and a half during which the affair continues undiscovered, the lovers themselves never speak of the inherent wrong of their actions, nor does the narrator ever describe their actions in a pejorative sense. Their love and loyalty to one another when fashioning tests to identify one another should they be separated, she by tying an intricate knot in his shirt and he by buckling an unbreakable belt around her waist, stands in sharp contrast to the cruelty of her husband and the betrayal of their secret by the cunning chamberlain. When informed of his wife's indiscretion, the jealous husband breaks down the door of his wife's chamber and gives orders to kill Guigemar.[112] The wife escapes corporal punishment for her crime, but as her lover is sent to sea, presumably to his death, she is locked in a dark marble tower where she begins to waste away over the next two years of captivity. One day, while looking for a means to end her life and torment, the wife finds the door to her tower unlocked and rushes to the sea intent on drowning herself, only to find the same magical ship that had borne away her lover now waiting for her.[113] Upon landing in a new country she is soon captured by the lord Meliduc who informs her of Guigemar's presence in that land and ultimately unites the lovers, though unwillingly.[114]

The first, and possibly most interesting aspect of this tale is the ambition of the female lover to seek out the male lover in a reverse of the common rescue motif in which the male lover is often presented with an arduous task or journey to rescue the

[111] *Eliduc* lines 132-136; *Lanval* lines 230-231.
[112] *Guigemar* lines 576-619.
[113] *Guigemar* lines 655-690.
[114] *Guigemar* lines 852-882.

lady. While Guigemar does ultimately resort to warfare to eliminate his rival,[115] Meliduc, it is his lover who takes on the initial quest of escaping her jail and setting sail to a distant land to find her love, who, in two years has not attempted any rescue of her. The second interesting aspect of the wife's character is her loyalty which compliments her bravery and determination as shown in her quest and is depicted in sharp contrast with the inconstancy of Guigemar upon their reunion. While she all but faints upon first sight of him, her lover does not recognise her and doubts her identity when confronted by her, claiming '*Bien sai que ceo n'est ele mie; Femmes se resemblent asez* / ['I know it cannot be she; women often look alike'.][116] The female lover again takes on the traditional role of the male lover in performing a decisive task, here the untying of the impossible knot in his shirt, in order to prove her identity to her lover. A mark of the author's wit and perhaps an episode of good humoured satire on the courtly love *topos*, this momentary world-upside-down motif does reveal the adulteress to be a woman of great personal strength and a lover of undying, and occasionally superior loyalty and character.

The adulteress in Yonec

The adulteress featured in Marie's *Yonec* is likewise unnamed and is given a very similar background to the female lover in *Guigemar*. She too, '*de haute gent fu la pucele, sage, curteise e forment bele* / [came from a good family, she was wise and gracious and very beautiful'.][117] As her aged husband wished to have a family, he married the girl, yet his jealousy of her beauty moved him to sequester her from potential lovers by locking her in a great tower. While Marie does not give the man's exact age, only referring to him as '*Mut fu trespassez en eage'* / [very far along in years'],[118] he is unable, possibly because of his advanced years or due to impotence, to impregnate his wife, though they have been married for seven years. Allowed no family, no friends, not even the chance to hear mass, and given only her sister-in-law

[115] *Guigemar* lines 848-852.
[116] *Guigemar* lines 778-779.
[117] *Yonec* lines 21-23.
[118] *Yonec* line 17.

for company, the wife sinks into a deep depression that ravages her beauty.[119] At this point, a mysterious man who is able to take the form of a hawk in order to gain access to her tower window begins to visit her and soon the two become lovers.[120] The wife is betrayed, however, by her own happiness and the recovery of her beauty, the husband discovers her affair and has sharp spikes placed at the window ledge to kill the hawk/lover as he attempts to enter the woman's bedchamber.[121] The husband's plan succeeds and the fairy lover, mortally injured, returns to his mystical land, followed by his lover, who, like Guigemar's lover, takes action to free herself from her prison and unite with her lover.[122] Here, in his other-worldly realm, the female lover makes two discoveries of special importance to this discussion. First, she learns she is pregnant with a son who will someday avenge his true father's murder.[123] Second, is the gift of a magical ring that will keep the husband from remembering the affair or doubting the child's legitimacy. Thus, through mystical means, the adulteress eludes punishment for her crime, a crime she admits would merit her death.[124] And though her husband could claim her life for her crime, her adultery is viewed not as treachery, but both as natural and indeed God sent, as seen in her prayer at the opening of the work in which she laments:

> *Mut ai sovent oï cunter*
> *Que l'em suleit jadis trover*
> *Aventures en cest païs,*
> *Ki rechantouent les pensis:*
> *Chevalers trovoënt puceles*
> *A lur talent gentes e beles,*
> *E dames truvoënt amanz*
> *Beaus e cuteis, [pruz] e vaillanz,*
> *Si que blamees n'en esteient,*

---

[119] *Yonec* lines 60-104.
[120] *Yonec* lines 105-223.
[121] *Yonec* lines 225-332.
[122] *Yonec* 334-362.
[123] Of all the adulteresses, only two become pregnant from their illicit affairs. While this may illustrate the sexual potency of the lover over the husband, especially in this instance where the author has made a point of stressing the age of the husband and his seven year attempt to have an heir, it remains a rarely used authorial tool for such comparison. It is tempting to explain this rare pregnancy as a natural development under a female author. For as a woman, Marie would have been well aware that sexual intercourse was rarely unaccompanied by pregnancy and may have not felt the same taboos or discomfort a male author might have experienced in discussing the illegitimacy of an heir and the total duping of a husband. Whatever the subtler reasons for including the pregnancy, it does remain pivotal not only to enable the deceased knight eventual vengeance upon the cuckolded husband when his son fulfils prophesy and kills the old man, but also to provide the quasi-mystical story of the hero Yonec's parentage.
[124] *Yonec* lines 410-414.

Ne nul fors eles nes veeient.
Si ceo peot estrë e ceo fu
Si unc a nul est avenu,
Deu, ki de tut ad poësté,
Il en face ma volenté!

[I've often heard that one could find adventures in this land that brought relief to the unhappy. Knights might find young girls to their desire, noble and lovely; and ladies find lovers so handsome, courtly, brave and valiant that they could not be blamed, and no one else would see them. If that might be, or ever was, if that has ever happened to anyone, God, who has power over everything, grant me my wish in this.][125]

Not only is she not to be blamed of adultery, coming as it does from a prayer seemingly answered by God, but neither is she to blame for her role in the murder of her husband, who is depicted as a '*fous*/mad', '*crient tuz jurs estre trahiz*/out of his senses with jealousy',[126] so cruel he was thought to be '*baptiziez al flum d'enfern*\baptised in a river of hell'.[127] The murder of this man who was cruel to his wife and in a cowardly fashion killed her lover appears to be proper revenge and proof of the female lover's life-long loyalty to her mysterious lover rather than the machinations of a lusty or evil wife - a *topos* that will later be examined in the didactic works.[128]

II. The adulteress and uncourtly romance

The intent of the author writing a courtly romance shaped how the adulteress was depicted in that genre, as an often sympathetic character and both the object of the male lover's religious devotion and the means of his refinement. Paris' observations regarding the lovers engaged in courtly love emphasise this refinement and the tools the female lover uses to accomplish it, namely her 'capricious behaviour', the retracting of herself from the male lover's presence or touch, his religious devotion to her and his need to prove himself constantly to establish his worth as a lover. While these aspects are certainly not presented here as hard and fast rules, they do represent a certain standard of behaviour that is found within the majority of 'courtly' romances, but not within the lais of *Ignaurés* or *Tydorel* and certainly not in the Tristan corpus. This statement is understandably controversial,

[125] *Yonec* lines 91-104.
[126] *Yonec* lines 71-73.
[127] *Yonec* line 88.
[128] See below, pp. 103-4.

especially regarding the Tristan corpus and stands in opposition to Renee Curtis' claim that all the surviving texts of the Tristan legend can be included in the genre of 'courtly love' romance. The rationale for not including the discussion of Iseult and the adulteresses of these two lais within the analysis of the 'courtly' adulteress does not question whether the tales belong to the genres of lais and romance, but whether the love affairs described within these works can be considered 'courtly'. The works are set within the environment of king's courts and the trappings of court life are certainly included within them: battles, tournaments, feasts, hunting and even the daily activities of the review of judicial cases, letter writing, court finance and evening amusements such as chess or the playing of music. However, as discussed in the definition of courtly love, the subject matter of illicit love written in a highly developed style does not indicate that a work is representative of the 'courtly love' genre. The works here considered are missing several key elements to be considered as courtly for the purposes of this study. First, they are focused not on the redemption or maturation of the male lover nor on his need to prove that he is worthy of his lady's love, but are instead narratives of affairs. The female lover is not a sympathetic character beyond what is necessary to keep the audience intrigued with the outcome of events. She is not a relic, a saint nor an icon of her lover's religious love, but the object of his very physical attentions. These are not stories of the perfecting of one's love, but are instead tales made from the suspense of the events around obstacles impeding the lovers from the physical consummation of their affair. The works are undeniably romances, but both the subject and the characters prove to be far from 'courtly' and therefore portray both the crime and members of the triangle in a very different light from those depicted engaging in 'courtly love'.

Iseult

Like Guinevere, Iseult possesses an unquestioned Celtic origin. Though the legend cannot be traced to an extant Celtic source, there is overwhelming evidence pointing to such a derivation. Firstly, Iseult and her fellow characters Mark, Tristan, Brangain and Gorvenal all have names of Celtic origin. Second, almost all action, with the

exception of Tristan's adventures in the Prose *Tristan* with the knights of the round table on their quest for the Holy Grail, takes place in Celtic regions such as Ireland, Cornwall, Brittany and Wales. And thirdly there arise several episodes common to virtually all texts, labelled as 'primitive episodes' by Curtis, which appear as somewhat misplaced or oddly incongruent in the French texts, but are made clear when understood from a Celtic context. [129] The most famous of these passages is the episode in which the dwarf reveals to the barons that Mark has the ears of a horse. While there is undeniably a similarity here between Mark's horse-like ears and both the Midas myth and a cuckold's horns, the episode is better understood as a pun in Celtic, the language of the earlier works in the legend, as *marc* means 'horse'. And finally, one must also add to this evidence of a Celtic origin the inclusion of Iseult, her lover and husband within the Welsh Triads.[130]

Listed in the Triads along with Guinevere as one of the 'most faithless wives of the island of Britain',[131] Iseult's adultery appears always to be closely linked with her character. Indeed, unlike Guinevere, no existing text portrays Iseult outside the context of her adulterous relationship with her husband's nephew. It is interesting to note that though her companions in the triad, 'Penarwan, the wife of Owain, Bun, the wife Fflamddwyn and Guinevere (Gwenhwyfar), wife of Arthur', are listed in reference to their husbands, Iseult (Essyllt) is listed not as wife of Mark (March) but as Tristan's mistress. By the early thirteenth century, then it appears that the story of the affair had become widely known and the lovers inextricably linked with each other in the audience's mind.

Just as her name has become synonymous with the adulterous relationship, so it also evokes a definite image of this adulteress. In contrast to Guinevere, whose

[129] *The Romance of Tristan*, ed. and trans. R. L. Curtis (Oxford, 1994), p. ix. See also G. Schoepperle, *Tristan and Isolt: A Study of the Sources of the Romance,* vol. II (London, 1913), pp. 283-287.

[130] While the only extant copy of the Triads is dated to the thirteenth century, Rachel Bromwich and Roger Loomis have, independently of each others work, shown evidence of the Tristan legend existing pre-1000 CE in the British Isles, possibly dating to the reign of King Drust c.780 whose known escapades, especially his relationship with the King of Ireland's daughter, correspond closely to many episodes included in the later Tristan legend. Loomis also points to three instances of children being named Tristan in Brittany before the year 1050 which may provide evidence of the popularity of the tale in that region as well. See R. Bromwich, *Trioedd Ynys Prydein* (Cardiff, 1961) p. 329 and R. Loomis, 'Problem of the Tristan legend. Bleheris, the Diramiud parallel, Thomas' date', *Romania* 53 (1927), 82-324 at 96-7.

[131] Bromwich, *Triads,* 80.

physical description is left almost entirely to the imagination and fantasies of the audience, Iseult's physical attributes are often commented upon, serving as an epithet and in several of the texts as a means of differentiating the Queen Iseult or Iseult la blonde from Iseult des blanches mains.[132] Iseult's blonde hair is mentioned forty seven times within the eight texts here studied: Béroul's *Tristan,* Thomas' *Tristan*, the prose *Tristan*, *Tristan Menestral, Tristan Rossingnal,* the *Folie Bern,* the *Folie Oxford* and Marie de France's *Chèvrefeuille.*[133] Her body is well formed[134], her eyes are grey,[135] her skin pale and clear[136] and her cheeks are rosy and bright.[137] When first she meets Tristan, Iseult is only twelve years old and yet is already described as the epitome of beauty.[138]

Iseult is given a noble birth. From her earliest mention as a quasi-historical figure , she is depicted as a princess, the daughter of Cynan Tyndaethwy.[139] Later, in legend, her father is named as King Anguin of Ireland.[140] Her mother, also named Iseult, is depicted as a great healer who teaches her daughter this skill. [141] Unlike the women of the previously discussed romances, however, the queen's abilities often appear to be more akin to sorcery than medicine as she makes a potent poison for her brother, the giant Morholt, who threatens Mark's people, and also brews the fateful potion that mistakenly unites the lovers on their voyage to Cornwall.

---

[132] R. Bromwich notes in her work on the prosopography of the Welsh Triads that the epithets of both Iseults may in fact be the results of poor translation from the original into French. The original *Essyllt vyngwen (meinwen) ac Essyllt uyngul (mynwgl)* translated as 'Iseult the slender-fair' (a common epithet given to young girls by the bards Bromwich has studied) and Iseult 'fair-neck' but in mistranslation, taking the Welsh *mein* to be the French *mains*, one woman becomes Iseult les blanches mains, a mistake evidenced in other similar translations from Welsh sources as shown in the case of the French *Carados Briebras* (Carados Short-Arm) from the Welsh *Carados Vreichvras* (Carados Strong-Arm). And by misinterpreting *myn* (neck) to be *mwng* (hair), Iseult the 'slender –fair' becomes Iseult la blonde. See Bromwich, p. 349.
[133] See especially *TrB* lines 1156, 2888, 3532, 3639, 4250, 4426, *FB* line 497, *TrP* I: 310, 313, 479, 481, 482.
[134] *TrT* line 793.
[135] *TrB* line 2888.
[136] *TrB* lines 1947, 2605, 3911, *TrT* 197, 1685, 126, 176
[137] *TrB* lines 3909-11.
[138] *TrB* lines 837, 1150, *TrP* 310.
[139] Early versions of the Gwynnedd dynasty geneology name Essyllt as an heiress of Cynan Tindaethwy and later refer to her as 'princess'. Her name was long commemorated by bards as representing one of 'only three instances in which the descent of Gwynedd went by the distaff'. (See *Early Welsh Geneological Tracts,* ed . P.C. Bartrum (Cardiff, 1966) 90-1 (27c) and *The Arthur of the Welsh,* ed. R. Bromwich (Cardiff, 1991).
[140] *TrP* II:483
[141] *TrP* I:310-312.

Iseult herself is a powerful healer, even at such a young age. In recounting their first meeting, Tristan declares that *'Me randistes et sauf et sain; auttres de vos n'i mist la main. Del velin del cruiel sarpent me gareïstes sanz mehain*/ ['You nursed me back to health; no one else was of any help. You cured me, with no ill effects, of that cruel dragon's poison'.][142] The Prose *Tristan*, commenting on Iseult's curing Tristan of the poison ironically brewed by her mother, describes her skill in more depth:

> *Cele savoit de cirurgie et de medecines a merveilles, et conoissoit la force et le pooir de totes les herbs. Ne il n'estoit ou monde plaie si estrange, ne si merveilleuse bleceüre do not ele ne cuidast bien a chief venir, et torner la a garison. . . Ele a sa plaie regardee, ele met teles herbes sus qui vaudront si com ele cuide. . . chascun jor se prenoit garde la demoisele de li, et mist en la plaie ce qu'ele cuidoit que mieuz i vausist. Mes il ne faisoit s'empirer non de jor en jor. Quant Yselt voit ce, ele en est tote esbahie, si que ele en maudit son sens et son savoir, et dit bien tot apertement qu'ele ne set riens de ce do not ele cuide plus savoir que feme qui soit ou monde. Et quant ele s'est une grant piece maudite et avilliee, ele regarde la plaie une autre foiz; et quant ele l'a bien regardee, tot maintenant li chiet ou cuer que cele plaie fu entoschiee, et c'est une chose qui ne la lesse mie garir. Se ill i ot entoschement, de ce le garra ele bien . . . Lors le fait aporter au solail por plus clerement veoir. Et quant ele l'a bien regardé, ele dit a Tristan: Or voi je bien qui vos a destorné a garir tant longuement. Li fers d'ou vos fustes navrez fu envenimez. Deceü ont esté tuit cil garir vos devoient, car il ne se prenoient garde de cest entoschement. Or l'ai veü, la Dieu merci, si vos tornera a garison, se Dieu plest; de ce soiez tot asseür'.La damoisele quiert et porchace por l'entoschement oster ce que ele cuide que mieuz i vaille.Et ele s'entremet tant, et tant i met sa cure, que ençois que dui mois furent passé fu il ausi sains et ausi hestiez com il avoit esté plus.*
>
> [She was remarkably knowledgeable about cures and medicines, and knew the strength and effectiveness of all the herbs. There was no injury in the world so strange and no wound so unusual which she was not sure she could deal with successfully and heal. . . she examined his wound, she applied such herbs as she thought would be beneficial to him . . . each day took care of him and dressed his wounds as she saw fit. But his condition only grew worse from day to day. Iseult was greatly dismayed when she saw this, and cursed her sense and knowledge, saying openly that she knew nothing about what she thought she knew better than any woman in the world. When she had cursed and maligned herself for quite a while, she had another look at the wound; and after she had examined it closely, it suddenly struck her that the wound might be poisoned, and this was why it had not healed. If it was a question of poison, she could cure him of it easily enough . . . Then she had Tristan carried out into the sun so that she could see more clearly and when she had taken a good look, she said to him: ' Now I understand what prevented you from recovering for so long. The lance-head which wounded you was poisoned. All those who tried to heal you were deceived, since they failed to notice the poison. Now by the grace of God I've seen it, rest assured that I'll cure you with his help'. The young girl sought and procured what she felt would be most effective for drawing out the poison. And when she had extracted it, she did her best to bring him back to health. She took such pains and nursed him so devotedly that before two months had passed he was as fit and well as he had ever been.][143]

---

[142] *FB* lines 403-406.

[143] *TrP* I: 310-315.

Iseult's detailed treatment of her patient is in keeping with the anti-fantastical tone of the Prose *Tristan* . The effect of the passage is to lend an image of experience, knowledge and expertise to her character to the extent that when her skills are called upon again to cure Tristan of his madness and again in his final hour when dying from the strike of a poisoned spear, the audience knows her to be capable of curing her lover. [144] This depiction of Iseult as a knowledgeable and mature figure stands at odds with her image within the rest of the prose work and indeed against the immature image of her that pervades the other works which address her character as well.

Though it may not be an entirely fair comparison to contrast the image of Iseult with that of Guinevere, it is nevertheless a natural tendency and one that we can be reasonably sure a medieval audience might have made or would have been able to do quite easily due to the wide dissemination and popularity of the tales. Aside from her adulterous affair, Guinevere was portrayed as an able and respected queen. The image of Iseult is quite different, as she cuts a strikingly immature figure. While Guinevere was both a good wife and a good queen, Iseult emerges as neither. Some of the immaturity may be attributed to youth. While Guinevere has been portrayed as a mature woman in her early fifties, Iseult, as attested to in several of the works, is only thirteen years old when married to Mark, '*si n'avoit ele pas encores quatorze ans d'aaige*'.[145] The age difference between Mark and Iseult, more than a generation, is remarked upon in the Prose *Tristan* by all those in attendance at the wedding.

> *Toz li regarz des dames et des chevaliers est sor Yselt. Et puis regardent Tristanz est dejoste Yselt, et se li uns est biax, encors est li autres plus. Et li plusor quant il les ont assez regardez dient que merveilles a fait Tristanz quant il a Yselt livree a son oncle; mieuz s'acordassent ensemble et par biauté et par aaige, et se Diex eüst esté veüz en nule terre com cist fust. Ensi disoient li plusor.*
>
> [All the ladies and knights gazed at Iseult. And then they looked at Tristan, who was beside her. If one was beautiful, the other was even more so; and many people remarked when they had looked at them for a while that it was a wonder Tristan had handed Iseult over to his uncle; they were more suited to one another as regards their beauty and their age. And if God had allowed them to be joined together, it would have been the most wonderful wedding which one could ever have seen in any land. That is what most people said.][146]

---

[144] *TrP* III:180d ; *TrT* lines 2523-3124, *TrP* III: f.266b
[145] *TrP* I:310.
[146] *TrP* II:485

While it was by no means unusual to find a substantial age difference between a husband and wife, the similarity in age between the lovers acts as an additional bond between them and, conversely, as a distancing force between Mark and his wife – one he cannot overcome.[147]

Again, in sharp contrast to Guinevere, there are no scenes in any of the extant works in which Iseult acts in her role as queen: she does not act as intercessor nor is her advice ever sought. Interestingly it is she who petitions Guinevere for advice in the prose version of the legend. In describing the pains Iseult takes in preparing her letter to Arthur's queen, the author of the Prose *Tristan* relates:

> *En tel maniere com je vos cont passe la roïne celi jor, et la nuit autresi, et totevoies pense a cez letres coment ele les puisse mieuz dire, car a si sage dame come ele est ne veust ele pas envoier letres s'eles ne sont tres bien dites. A l'endemen se lieve auques matin com cele qui n'avoit mie dormi tote la nuit, et fait vuidier sa chambre de totes ses demoiseles por mieuz penser a ses letres. Et tant i pense qu'ele les faites a sa volenté et escrites ensi com je vos di au mieuz et au plus doucement qu'ele set.*
>
> [Queen Iseult spent that day as I have told you, and the night as well, and all the while she pondered on how best to write this letter, for Queen Guinevere was such a wise lady that she did not want to send her a letter which was not very well expressed. Next morning she got up early, not having had any sleep that night, and asked all the maidens to leave the room so that she could concentrate on her letter. She thought about it at great length until she composed it to her satisfaction and wrote it to the best of her ability in her most polished style.][148]

Within her letter, Iseult petitions Guinevere for her advice on the grounds of her intelligence, experience and success as a lover. Complaining that love has betrayed her, Iseult confesses with no little envy that unlike herself, Guinevere is the mistess of love: '*Vos avez dou tot amors en vostre men; ensi com vos plest en ovrez . . . et a qui amors a plus hautement et enterinement guerredoné son service*' ['you are completely in control of your love; you deal with it as it pleases you . . . and you have been most nobly and fully rewarded by love for your service'.][149] Here in her nervousness, her care in her writing, even in her penmanship, is shown Iseult's inexperience and youth. The contents of her letter contrast her own situation with Guinevere's, revealing Iseult's relationship with Tristan to be an immature and indeed almost amateur copy

---

[147] See below, p. 125 for an analysis of the effects of substantial age difference in marriage partners and a discussion of the *senex* motif.
[148] *TrP* II:571
[149] *TrP* II:572

of Guinevere's relationship with Lancelot. Iseult blames Tristan and even Love itself for her anguish, denouncing it as a fickle master that betrays those who wish to serve it and yet she realises that Guinevere has somehow mastered Love and her lover. Iseult's reverence for Guinevere's authority in love, her plea for Guinevere to instruct her, to teach her how to become a successful courtly lover like herself, are traits reminiscent of a child or adolescent wishing to emulate the behaviour and actions, to achieve the fame and status of a role model. It is particularly interesting to see here a young adulteress choosing an older, successful adulteress as an archetype. Adulteresses are not uncommon within the text: the unfaithfulness of Tristan's stepmother and both of Argan's wives is revealed,[150] yet the appeal to Guinevere is the first time a hierarchy of sorts is established within this group of women. In establishing this order of rank, however, Iseult has revealed her weaknesses, namely her immaturity and lack of authority and has shown her station to be unequal to that enjoyed by Arthur's queen.

Though the images of Iseult are diverse, several commonalities in depiction can be seen, especially in the portrayal of her negative qualities. Each text in the legend shows, albeit through different attributes or actions, that as a wife and indeed as a person, Iseult cuts no more appetising a figure than she did as a queen. She is entirely lacking in charity as pointed out by Brangain, in Thomas' *Tristan* who is alerted to the disguised Tristan's presence by the queen's sudden and uncharacteristic giving of alms to the poor: in this instance the giving of a small ring to the 'leper' Tristan.[151] In both Béroul's and the Prose *Tristan* she is given to selfishness and indulgence as shown most clearly in her speeches in the forest of Morrois. In the prose account, Iseult at first refuses Tristan's suggestion that the lovers live in the forest stating:

> *Ce nos en ceste forest demoriens en tel maniere com vos devisiez, ne vos est il avis que nos avriens perdu tot le monde? Nos ne verriens ne dame ne chevalier ne gent ne envoiseüre; nos avriens le monde perdu, et li monde nos.*
>
> [If we were to remain in this forest in the way you describe, wouldn't we be deprived of the whole world? We would see no ladies and no knights, no people and no entertainments: we would have lost the world and the world would have lost us.][152]

[150] *TrP* I:244, III:148b
[151] *TrT* lines 1839-41
[152] *TrP* II:550

Similarly, in Béroul's version, Tristan worries that Iseult will abandon him in the forest in order to regain her position and comforts at court.[153] His fears are realised when the effects of the potion begin to fade and he hears Iseult complaining:

> *Lasse, dolente, porqoi eüstes vos jovente? En bois estes com autre serve, petit trovez qui ci vus serve. Je suis roïne, mais le non en ai perdu . . . Les damoiseles des anors, les filles as frans vavasors deüse ensenble o moi tenir en mes chanbres, por moi servir, et les deüse marïer et as seignors por bien doner.*
>
> [Alas, miserable woman! How you have wasted your youth! You are living in the forest like a serf, with no one to serve you here. I am a queen, but I have lost that title . . . I should have around me well-bred young women, the daughters of worthy vassals, to serve me in my chambers, and I should arrange their marriages and give them to noble men.][154]

Perhaps her greatest acts of selfishness, though, are found in her dealings with her loyal servant, Brangain. After losing her own virginity to Tristan, Iseult has Brangain placed in Mark's bed on the wedding night in order deceive him into believing it is his bride whom he has deflowered.[155] When Brangain believes Iseult to have attempted to pimp her once again, this time to the knight Kahedin, Iseult's concern is not to comfort her only friend or even set matters straight, but to look to her own welfare to ensure Brangain does not reveal Iseult's adulterous affair to the king in retaliation for the wrong the maid believes has been done her. Iseult's selfish concerns that in her pain and anger Brangain will leave her service and no longer act as a comforter to the queen are evident in her reply. It is of great interest to note not only the selfish motive behind her words, but also to note the manipulative, taunting and even threatening nature of them:

> *Brengvein, membre vus de mun pere*
> *Ede la priere ma mere?*
> *Si vus me guerprisez ici*
> *En terre estrange, senz ami,*
> *Que frai dunc? Coment viverai?*
> *Car comfort de nuli nen ai . . .*
> *Mult en est al quer anguissee*
> *Od ço qu'ele est de li iree;*
> *Prés del quer ses ires li venent . . .*
> *Brengain qui mun estre savez,*
> *Se vus plaist, hunir me poez;*
> *Mais ço vus ert grant reprover,*

[153] *TrB* line 1654

[154] *TrB* lines 2201-2216

[155] *TrT* line 1274, *TrP* II:486.

Quant vus m'avez a conseiler,
Se mun conseile mun segrei
Par ire descovrez al rei.
De quei serez vus avancee
Quant vers lu rei ere empeiree?
Certes, el men empirement
Nen ert le vostre amendement
Mais, si par vus sui avilee
Mains serez prisee e amee
E perdu en avrez m'amur
E l'amisté de mun seingnur.
Quel semblent qu'il unques me face,
Ne quidez qu'il ne vus en hace:
Emvers mei ad si grant amur
Nus n'I porreit metre haür;
Nuls ne nus poreit tant medler
Que sun cors poust de mei sevrer.
Mes faiz put aveir contre quer,
Mei ne puet haïr a nul fuer,
E mes folies puet haïr
Mais m'amur ne puet unc guerpir;
Mes faiz en sun cuer haiïr puet,
Quel tallent qu'ait, amer m'estuet.
Unques a nul qui mal me tint
Emvers lu rei ben nen avint.

[Brangain, do you remember my father, do you recall my mother's request of you? If you abandon me here in this foreign land, without a friend, what shall I do? How shall I live given that there is no one to comfort me? . . . She was sorely grieved at heart and, at the same time, angry with Brangain. Anger beset her heart . . . Brangain, you who know about my way of life, you are in a position to shame me, if such be your wish. But you will be greatly blamed, since you function is to council me, should you disclose my secret thoughts and doings, out of anger to the king. What good will it do you if I am calumniated to the king? Be sure your star will not rise as mine wanes. Rather, if my name is blackened by you, you will be less esteemed and loved for it, and you will have lost both my love and the affection my lord bears you. Whatever his attitude might be towards me, you must not imagine he will not hate you for it: his love for me is so full that nobody could add hatred to it; nobody could set strife between us to the extent that he could bring himself to part from me. He may dislike the things I do, but in no way can he hate me; he may well hate my foolish ways but he could never forgo his love for me. His heart may well hate the things I do, but, willy nilly, he cannot but love me. Never did anyone disparaging me to the king gain any profit thereby.] [156]

Though Arthur's knights, who come to her assistance, are led to believe Iseult to be '*la bele franche au chief bloi, ou il n'a point de mautalent*' / ['the beautiful, blonde noble woman in whom there was no ill will'],[157] the audience and her fellow characters see quite a different image. In addition to her selfishness Iseult can be rude without provocation, even to her lover. When Tristan returns with the head of

[156] *TrT* lines 1344 –1487.
[157] *TrB* lines 3352-3.

Denoalen, one of the barons who was intent upon exposing the lovers, Iseult interrupts Tristan's victory speech with a dismissive, '*ge q'en puis?*' / ['what is that to me?'][158]

Iseult's emotions can be intense and erratic.[159] She twice takes on bouts of madness – a *topos* usually experienced by the male lover, and exhibits violent rage, to the point that the narrator is moved to declare '*Mult par est femme de grant ire!*' / 'What an extraordinary anger can possess a woman!'[160] Most disturbing are the scenes exhibiting Iseult's capacity to inflict shocking violence and cruelty. From a very early age this trait is apparent in her character as shown in her attempted murder of Brangain, whom she fears will someday divulge her secret, exposing her crime.[161] Such violence is not isolated however, as shown in her attack on the dwarf who attempts to impede a midnight rendezvous between the lovers:

> *Ysoud en ad al quer errur:*
> *La palme leve par vigur*
> *E tele buffe al neim dona*
> *Ke quatre denz li eslocha,*
> *E si [li] dit od murne chere,*
> *'Soude[e] aiez de chamberere!'*

[Iseult was filled with anger: she raised her hand and struck the dwarf such a sharp blow that she knocked out four of his teeth, and she said disapprovingly, 'There's a chambermaid's salary for you!'][162]

Brangain insists that Iseult has been wicked since childhood, but that, '*Plus empire qu'ele ne solt* [sic]. *de sun curage est empeire[e]* / 'She is getting worse than she ever was. Because her moral fibre is impaired'.[163]

Perhaps one of the most distasteful of all the queen's qualities, however, is her inability to take responsibility for her own actions. And in this way, Iseult stands in stark contrast to Guinevere, who won the audience's sympathy for having noted her own guilt, felt shame for it and even went so far as to impose a self prescribed penance for her crime. Iseult blames Brangain, Gorvenal and even Tristan for her

---

[158] *TrB* line 4438.
[159] *TrT* line 933; *FO* lines 320, 372, 382, 550.
[160] *FO*, line 446; see also *FO* lines 410, 445, 593; *FB* lines 9-11, 210.
[161] *TrT* line 1283, *TrP* II:487.
[162] *TR*, lines 159-164.
[163] *TrT* lines 1509-1535; *TrT* lines 1629-30. My translation varies from Gregory's who has rendered the Old French as 'There is a moral flaw within her heart'.

involvement in the affair, never acknowledging her own guilt or part in the crime.[164] She is an accomplished liar, a skill even her husband remarks upon.[165] She is a perjurer and mocks God by violating her twice confirmed oath to refuse Tristan's love and company and by her actions at her trial at Mal Pas where, by a cunning ruse, she is able to truthfully, if somewhat equivocally reply that only her husband and the leper, whom the audience knows is the disguised Tristan, had ever been between her legs.[166]

This is not the first occasion that Iseult shows a keen ability to act, though it is her most complex performance in which she acts as stage manager[167] and author of the plot, actress and even a makeup/costume designer as she instructs her messenger to inform Tristan of her plan:

Di li que il set bien un marchés,
Au chief des planches, au Mal Pas;
G'I sollé ja un poi mes dras.
Sor la mote, el chief de la planche
Un poi deça la Lande Blanche,
Soit, revestuz de dras de ladre;
Un henap port o sai de madre
(un bocele ait dedesoz),
O coroie atachié par noz;
A l'autre main tienge un puiot,
Si aprenge de tel tripot.
Au terme ert sor la mote assis:
Ja set assez bociez son vis;
Port le henap devant son front,
A ceus qui iluec passeront
Demant l'aumosne sinplement.
Il li dorront or et argent:
Gart moi l'argent, tant que le voie
Priveement, en chanbre coie'.

['Tell him that he is familiar with a marsh and the approach to the bridge, at Mal Pas, where I once soiled the hem of my dress. He is to be on a small hill by the bridge, just this side of the White Heath, dressed in leper's clothes; he should have with him a leper's wooden goblet with a bottle beneath, attached to it by a long leather thong. In his other hand he should have a crutch. And here now is our scheme: He will be sitting on the hill at the appointed hour. Have him make his face appear tumorous and hold the goblet in front of him; from those who pass by he is to ask for alms – nothing more. He is to keep the money for me, until I see him alone in a private room'.][168]

[164] *TrT* line 1579, *TrB* line 2205, *TrP* II:447, III: 878; *TrP* II: 447, III:878; *TrT* line 1399, *TrB* line 3290.
[165] *TrP* II:516.
[166] *TrT* lines 1501-1507; *TrB* lines 3916-4218.
[167] See above, pp. 1 and 42.
[168] *TrB* lines 3298-3312

Iseult thoroughly enjoys her role, revelling in her vengeance as she sees her enemies, the barons, swindled out of their money, belongings and even clothes, by the disguised Tristan, and made to wallow in the mud of the marsh she has chosen as the site of her trial. Her attempt to enact poetic justice upon her accusers is accomplished publicly as those who wished to tarnish her reputation are themselves, quite literally, soiled.

The tryst under the tree, an episode common to almost all versions of the legend, displays her talent for acting again when she spies King Mark high in the tree under which the lovers had arranged to meet.[169] By taking an immediate aggressive tone in her speech with Tristan, rebuking him for asking to speak to her, she alerts her lover to the threat of detection.[170] In the prose work, her acting skills are called upon again when Audret, Tristan's jealous cousin, places scythes near the queen's bed to injure Tristan and prove beyond a doubt his cousin's illicit affair with the queen. When the queen realises that Tristan had been injured and bled in her bed, she employs immediate, if somewhat drastic measures to cover her lover's tracks:

> *Et la roïne descent de son lit et se fiert tout a escient es fauz si qu'ele est navree durement. Et ele se refiert arrieres en son lit, et s'escrie quanque ele puet: 'Aide! Aide! Brangain, vien hastivement, car je sui morte!'*
>
> [The Queen got out of bed and deliberately knocked herself against the scythes so that she was severely wounded. Then she plunged back into her bed and cried out as loudly as she could: 'Help,! Help! Brangain, come quickly, I'm hurt!'][171]

Iseult's performance is successful, though dangerous as the audience and undoubtedly she too is aware that the trap was laid not only by Audret, but with the approval of her husband whom she now places in the difficult position of being aware of her adultery but unable to prove it. Mark's unvoiced fury at being made a public fool is obvious and one must question the wisdom of Iseult's actions in stoking an already burning fire of hatred and shame.

Iseult proves herself to be an able actress and a quick thinker in matters of deception though her plans are not always well thought out or, as shown in the

---

[169] See p. 1.
[170] *TrB* lines 6-97, *TrP* III: 38c-260b
[171] *TrP* II:532

episode of the scythes, the most intelligent course of action. While a fast thinker, Iseult is not an original one. For example, in the lay *Chevrefeuille,* it is her intuitive recognition and quick response to Tristan's signal that enables the two to share a brief moment together in the shelter of the woods.[172] However, within each work, there are scenes of varying length and importance that do portray her as vapid, tempting some critics to comment upon her fatuity at length, notably P. Gaffney's article 'Iseult la (dumb) Blonde'.[173] These episodes are peppered throughout the prose and verse versions of the legend, including scenes in which Iseult dangerously, and occasionally foolishly, provokes Mark's wrath further or in which she engages in laughable behaviour, such as found in the prose work when she attempts suicide but misjudges the necessary height of the window and lands merely bruised on the ground at Mark's feet.[174] Two particular moments of almost obstinate slow-wittedness are fully expanded and explored in the two *folies* in which Iseult's inability to recognise her disguised lover forms the basis of the works. Both of the works detail an episode in which an exiled Tristan disguises himself as a fool in order to gain admittance to King Mark's court and see the queen. In both episodes, however, the queen, unlike the episode given in the *Tristan Minstrel* or *Chevrefeuille* does not see through his disguise. Desperate to make himself known to the queen, Tristan begins to detail his affair with the queen, often verging on the dangerous in his speech when telling of events known only to the lovers and King Mark. Iseult, in both texts, does not respond to his clues, even when he reveals secrets known only to the two of them, such as the existence of a philtre that doomed them to this affair.[175] Obviously, Iseult's non-comprehension of Tristan's story is intended for comical reasons and serves as the engine for the plot: the length of the poem is entirely dependent on the amount of time it takes her to recognise Tristan.

Much more is revealed in this portrayal however, than the queen's gullibility or a chauvinist depiction of female inconstancy. When listening to the 'fool' recount his affair with the queen, Iseult bursts into a fit of rage.[176] When quieted by the king

[172] *Chèvrefeuille*, lines 55-61.
[173] P. Gaffney, 'Iseut la (dumb) blonde', *Romania* 113 (1995), 401-420.
[174] *TrP* III:836
[175] *FO* line 473-476.
[176] *FO*lines 320, 372, 410; *FB* lines 9-11, 210.

however, Iseult takes on the manner of a sulky child, pulling her cloak over her head to hide her blush.[177] The Oxford text shows that upon obtaining leave of the room, Iseult bursts into a fit of grief and outrage in her private quarters as she relates the experience to Brangain. At this point, Brangain realises that the fool must be Tristan in disguise but Iseult refuses, saying:

> *'Ne l'est, Brengain, kar cist est laiz*
> *E hidus e mult cunterfaiz;*
> *E tristan est tant aliniez,*
> *Bels hom, ben fait, mult ensenez'.*
>
> [He is not, Brangain! The man is ugly and hideous and all deformed. Tristan is slender and well-built, an elegant, well-bred man.][178]

Iseult's staunch refusal to consider the fool's possible identity as that of her beloved Tristan has been defended by those who argue that Iseult's memories are too sacred to her to allow the fool a place therein and thus her almost obstinate gullibility is rational.[179] However, her actions are also indicative of a superficiality and immaturity that are consistent with the queen's portrayal throughout the corpus of works. The Iseult of the *Folies* is much more reminiscent of Béroul's Mark who is unable to see beyond surface impressions, accepting as fact the fictive performances staged for his benefit. Cast as audience instead of her usual role of actress and stage manager, Iseult seems awkward and frightened. It is more plausible an excuse that Iseult, given to powerful emotional upset as established in the *folies* and remaining texts, and deeply disturbed by the fool's words, is too confused and distressed to be able to see through Tristan's disguise or identify her lover by those clues one would assume a lover to remember: his eyes, his voice, or his words.[180]

The cruelty of Tristan's speech must here be commented upon. It is a dark and humourless game, whereby he tortures an obviously distraught Iseult. While Iseult may often appear in a negative light, it must be noted that she never mistreats her lover. While his cruelty may seem out of place, Tristan's amazement at her inability to see through his thin disguise is understandable. It is only when Tristan's

[177] *FO* line 382, *FB* line 210.
[178] *FO* lines 577-580.
[179] Gaffney, 'Iseult', p. 406.
[180] *FO* lines 834-840. See below, pp. 165-167 for a discussion of Tristan's character and below, pp. 253-263 on the uses and abuses of language within the legend.

dog, Husdent, hears his mater's voice and recognises him, unlike his lover, that the queen believes the fool to be Tristan. Tristan's rebuke of the queen is understandable as he remarks with shock:

> *'Yseult, melz li suvient*
> *Ke jo.1 nurri, si l'afaitai,*
> *Ke vus ne fait, ki tant amai.*
> *Mult par at en chen grant franchise*
> *E [at] en femme grant feintise'.*

> [Iseult, he remembers how I raised him and trained him better than you remember how much I loved you. What noble loyalty a dog can show and what duplicity a woman.][181]

Thus the qualities of Iseult: her immaturity, superficiality, selfishness, predisposition towards anger, violence, emotional outbursts and lack of judgement are summarised within these individual episodes. And while such incredulous naiveté may be to a degree inflated in order to prolong the story, it must be noted that it was Iseult, of all figures, who was chosen to display such a quality. That it is believable of her character in all its diverse portrayals shows yet another contrast between Iseult as a heavily flawed figure who behaves in an uncourtly fashion and Guinevere, who for all her sense of humour and even for her faults, never becomes comical.

A comparison with Guinevere is again tempting when reviewing Iseult's attempt at matchmaking as illustrated in Béroul, Thomas and the prose renditions of the tale. While in the forest she longed for the company of young women whose marriages she could arrange, our one glimpse of Iseult's matchmaking skills shows her to be a poor mediator.[182] Instead of successfully matching Kahedin with Brangain and establishing a pair of lovers to be friends and cohorts to her and Tristan in their affair, as Guinevere successfully matched the Lady Malehaut to Galehaut, Iseult finds herself facing an irate handmaid on the verge of giving up her secret to the king. On the mistaken understanding that Kahedin had fled in battle, Brangain believes Yseult to have once again been attempting to manipulate her heart along with her body as she makes reference to Iseult's past use of Brangain's virginity to mask the loss of her own.[183] Far from establishing a kindred couple for her and Tristan to

[181] *FO* lines 934-938.
[182] *TrB* lines 2201-2216.
[183] *TrT* line 1275.

enjoy themselves with, Iseult is left alone and friendless to attempt to protect herself and her adulterous relationship.

It is the lovers' struggle to be together physically and sexually that guides the legend in all its forms. It is not surprising, then, that Iseult is cast as an intensely sexual figure rather than a religious icon or unattainable goal as often found in the texts devoted to 'courtly love'. Iseult is not merely sexual but is often depicted as wanton in her acts and desires. Not only is she openly called such, but revealed to be lecherous by her actions as well.[184] On her wedding night the Prose *Tristan* depicts her longing for her life at sea and in the giant's tower where, '*la ou ele avoit Tristan, son ami, a sa volenté, qu'ele fust en Cornoaille venue por estre avec le roi Marc'* / ['she could do as she wished with Tristan, her beloved, than have come to Cornwall in order to be with King Mark'.][185] Sexual desire consumes the lovers, love-play fills their days when in exile and becomes their reason for living.[186] When apart, the lovers often arrange trysts, that, as in the case of the meeting under the laurel-tree, are occasionally thwarted, but for the most part are successful, at least in the goal of sexual fulfillment, as shown in the episodes of the flour on the floor and the scythes by the bed. The lovers are so successful at circumventing Mark's traps that when Tristan is able to sleep with Iseult despite all Mark's efforts, including locking her in her chambers and even placing her within a fortified tower, the king appears to give up. While together in Mark's court, Tristan and Iseult behave with alarming indiscretion as shown in the barons' accusation that,

> *Qar, en un gardin, soz une ente,*
> *Virent l'autrier Yseut la gente*
> *Ovoc Tristran en tel endroit*
> *Que nus hon consentir ne doit;*
> *Et plusors foiz les ont veüz*
> *El lit roi Marc gesir toz nus*
>
> [They had seen the fair Iseult with Tristan, in a garden, under a grafted tree, in a situation that no one should tolerate. And several times they had seen them lying completely naked in King Mark's bed.][187]

[184] *TrT* lines 1412, 1536.
[185] *TrP* II:485.
[186] *TrP* II:553.
[187] *TrB* 589-594.

Mark's bed presents a curious, if uncomfortable aspect of Iseult's sexual conduct. Not only does she feel comfortable entertaining her lover there, she freely enjoys herself with her husband there as well. Though the prose *Tristan* and Thomas' poem emphasise that Iseult's willingness to have intercourse with her husband is to keep him from detecting her affair, the prose explicitly describes their bed as a place of '*joie*';[188] Thomas' narrator declares Mark to find her '*bele et maniere*' / 'pleasant and welcoming'.[189] Her willingness to give herself to both men was a trait many in the audience no doubt found as disturbing as did Chrétien, who was urged to write the anti-Tristan work *Cligés* in response, illustrating an appropriate and courtly way to manage an affair.[190]

In addition to physical acts of sex, the lovers are also surrounded by sexual metaphor and symbolism. The two images most often pointed to within the *Tristan* texts are that of the hawthorne tree encircled by the honeysuckle vine and that of the ring. The tree and vine that lends their name to Marie de France's episodic work, *Chèvrefeuille,* is perhaps the most obvious metaphor for the lovers, who, like the two plants cannot live without each other's physical presence. Together they thrive, but apart they wither and die. The second image of the ring is slightly more subtle and occurs throughout most of the works.[191] Of all the allusions to rings and ring imagery, the most poignant reference is undoubtedly Mark's discovery of the lovers in the bower when, shielding Iseult's delicate skin from the burning sun, he catches sight of his wedding ring on her hand:

> *L'anel du doi defors parut:*
> *Souef le traist, qu'il ne se mut.*
> *Primes i entre il enviz;*
> *Or avoit tant les doiz gresliz*
> *Qu'il s'en issi sanz force fere;*
> *Molt l'en sot bien li rois fors traire.*

[188] *TrP* 486
[189] *Chèvrefeuille* line 152
[190] Although it makes for an interesting comparison with the Tristan legend, the affair described in *Cligés* is not herein considered as it is not adulterous per se as the marriage is never consummated.
[191] Much work has recently been done regarding the image of the ring within the Tristan legend and this thesis does in no way mean to address all nuances of the symbol, nor does it attempt to improve upon the work published on this *topos*, rather the image of the ring is here discussed as an illustration of Iseult's strongly emphasised sexuality within the legend. See Shigemi Sasaki, 'Anel et Seel: de Béroul et du *Lancelot* au *roman de Tristan en Prose* in *Miscellania Medievalia: Melanges offerts a Philippe Ménard*, ed. C. Foucon (Paris, 1998), pp. 15-34 and J. Martindale, 'The sword on the stone: some resonances of a medieval power symbol', *Anglo-Norman Studies,* xv (1993), pp. 199-242.

> [The ring was visible on her finger; he pulled at it very gently, without moving her finger. Originally it had been very tight, but her fingers were now so thin that it came off effortlessly. The king was able to remove it without difficulty][192]

No doubt intended bawdy jokes and sexual puns aside, this scene is important for what it represents – the loss of sexual control of Mark over his wife. Just as the ring has grown loose on her hand, so his authority over Iseult has loosened. Conversely, it is when Tristan, newly married to Iseult of the White Hands, finds his gaze lingering at a ring the queen has given him that her sexual authority prevails. Forced with the visual representation of each Iseult, a wedding ring on one hand, a token from the queen on the other, Tristan is faced with a choice between his partners. Therefore, for both men, the sexual image of a ring becomes the image for Iseult and the success or failure to secure their sexual privilege with, and authority over, her.

Whilst the faults and vices of the queen have been described at length, it is not an entirely pejorative image that pervades the legend. The prose account is the most favourable to her character, revealing a more loving and loveable image of the queen as evident in her compassion for Kahedin who threatens suicide if his love is not reciprocated. Though Iseult's lie that she does indeed care for the knight backfires as Tristan hears of her supposed love and accuses her of infidelity, her intent shows a heart capable of great kindness to temper the image of cruelty given in her dealings with Brangain.

In striking opposition to her selfishness and love of luxury is the episode in which Tristan gives Iseult a dog named Petit Crû upon whose collar is a bell that when rung will make her forget her sorrow. This uncharacteristic act of deep, heartfelt tenderness on Tristan's part is met with an equally unusually selfless act of Iseult's as she tears the bell from the collar, breaking its spell in order for her to share her lover's pain as he leaves her side.[193] Thomas' poem also contains a similar passage in which, after learning of Tristan's loneliness and sorrow experienced in exile without her, Iseult takes on a private penance, not in redress for her sins but to identify with her lover:

> *Pur ço que Tristran veit languir,*
> *Ove sa dolur vult partir;*

[192] *TrB* lines 2043-2047.
[193] Hatto I:217-31

Si cum ele a l'amur partist
Od Tritran, qui pur li languist,
E partir vult ove Tristran
A la dolur e a l'ahan.
Pur lui s'estent a maint afeire
Qui a sa bealté sunt cuntraire
E meine en grant tristur sa vie. . .
Vest une bruine a sa char nue;
Iloc la portoit nuit et jur,
Fors quant culchot a sun seignur.

[Because she could see Tristan languishing, she wanted to share his grief; just as she shared in love with Tristan, who was languishing for her, so she wished to share with Tristan in the pain and the suffering. For his sake she gave herself up to many things which put her beauty at risk and led a life of great sadness . . . She put on a leather corselet against her bare flesh, keeping it there by night and by day, except for when sleeping with her husband][194]

Iseult's devotion to Tristan here takes on an almost religious tone as she takes on penitential garments and deprives herself of any luxury, including the happiness provided by the quasi-mystical bell of her little dog, Petit Crû. The lovers appear caught in the world-upside-down motif in which Iseult takes on the role of the male lover who must undergo trials and tribulation to prove his worthiness as a lover. The Prose *Tristan* dabbles in this motif as well by depicting Iseult caught in a lover's madness – the affliction most common to the male lover.

Iseult's most redeeming moment occurs in the final episode when word is brought to her of Tristan's mortal injury inflicted by Mark. Her less desirable characteristics may be forgotten in lieu of the image of her loyalty as she abandons her life at court and struggles against nature itself to reach her lover's side. In Iseult's race to cure Tristan of the poison, the narrator reminds the audience of her only previous display of maturity and selfless behaviour as a healer. In his final verses, Thomas depicts a defeated Iseult kneeling over the body of her lover whom she was too late to save. Rather than return to court and to Mark, Iseult lays down with her lover and dies of a broken heart.[195] The Prose *Tristan* allows the queen to reach her lover's side before his death, but likewise does not allow the queen time to heal her lover. Loyal to the end, Iseult keeps watch at his side until the poison claims Tristan's life. She honours his final wish to die in her arms as he honours her wish to die with

[194] *TrT* lines 2017-2032.
[195] *TrT* lines 3112-3124.

him, using the last of his strength to crush her to him, stopping her heart with the force of his embrace.[196]

If Iseult herself often appears a contradictory enigma capable of the greatest sacrifices and at the same time savage cruelty, intense loyalty and great betrayal, it is perhaps fitting that her guilt and crime are equally ambiguous in nature. In analysing the depiction of her crime one must address the existence and curious nature of the love potion and its weight when measuring the lovers' accountability for their actions. According to the Prose *Tristan*, while feelings of attraction were present between the two, Tristan's sense of honour prevented him from taking any further action. The effect of the philtre appears to have instantaneously sparked the attraction between the two, dooming them to an eternally forbidden love. The narrator is very clear in his assertion that Tristan and Iseult cannot be held responsible for their actions. In fact, he states:

> *Entre li et Brangain en seront encolpé, et bien en doevent estre achoisoné li dui; cil qui del boivre ne sevent riens n'en doevent mie estre blasmé*
>
> [He [Gorvenal] and Brangain would be held responsible, and it was only right that they should bear the blame; it was not the fault of Tristan and Iseult who knew nothing of the drink.][197]

Throughout the text, the narrator reiterates his accusation of blame against Gorvenal and chiefly Brangain.[198] Under the influence of the potion, there can be no free will and hence the lovers appear to be innocent of the intent of their crime.[199]

The innocence of the lovers is called into question, however, when analysing the other works within the corpus that depict the potion as having a limited effect upon the lovers, its power dwindling after approximately three years. While Iseult continues to blame Brangain for her own guilt in the crime,[200] with the added limitation of the potion's powers her accusations ring somewhat hollow. While the potion may account for the initial attraction and subsequent acts of adultery, after the lovers feel the effects of the potion begin to wane while in exile in the forest of

[196] *TrP* III:260-263.
[197] *TrP* II:447.
[198] *TrP* III:876-7.
[199] On the role of free will and opposing moralities present within Béroul's *Tristan*, see T. Hunt, 'Abelardian ethics and Béroul's *Tristan*', *Romania* 98 (1977), pp. 501-540.
[200] *TrB* lines 2205, 2207; *TrT* lines 1475, 1579.

Morrois, they do not cease their physical relationship. When free will is restored to the lovers, though they are innocent of intent in their crime, they are guilty of continuing the sin in the eyes of the court, the hermit Ogrin and possibly the audience. Most importantly, Iseult is aware of her crime and its bringing about Mark's dishonour and shame, which would appear as a confession of sorts. [201]

The narrator, especially of the Béroul text, often attempts to represent God as being on the lovers' side through their frequent invocation of his name in their oaths,[202] by his own assurances that God has acted in their favour, enacting miracles and saving them '*si con li plot*/according to his will', and through the insistence and observations of fellow characters.[203] Despite the narrator's efforts to prove the couple's blamelessness and favour with God, the hermit Ogrin urges them to repent of their sin which he depicts as being '*orible et lait*/horrible and ugly'. It is interesting at this point to note how Iseult phrases her response in declaring to Tristan :

> *Sire, Jesu soit gracïez,*
> *Qant degerpir volez pechie!*
> *Beaus amis douz, se ja corage,*
> *Vos ert venuz de repentir,*
> *Or ne peüst mex avenir.*
>
> [Sir, thanks be to God that you wish to repent of your sin! Dear friend, if you have in you a sincere desire to repent it could not come at better time.][204]

The one-sidedness of the repentance leaves one wondering if it has indeed come at just the right time, for while Tristan expounds in soliloquy on the sin of sleeping with his uncle's wife, it is her former lifestyle, which Iseult is heard to be mourning and is eager to return to. Iseult is never depicted as repentant, in fact, she goes so far as to assert that she never regretted her relationship with Tristan.[205]

As payment for her crime, the different works within the legend prescribe a variety of punishments. The most common penalty for adultery within the corpus of texts is burning, a fate she evades when rescued by her lover, or in the prose account, by his loyal fellow knights.[206] Béroul's text portrays the most brutal punishment

---

[201] *FB* line 9-11.
[202] *TrB* lines 32,198, 220.
[203] *TrB* lines 371-2, 1022.
[204] *TrB* lines 2263-2272.
[205] *TrB* lines 2326.
[206] *TrP* II:548; Curtis, 160.

meted out for adultery when Mark is tempted by the leader of a leper colony to turn his wife over to them in order to satisfy their rapacious desires, of which the man assures the king no woman could survive for more than a day.[207] The Prose *Tristan* avoids such a disturbing scene and instead depicts Mark, after subsequent failures to keep Iseult from Tristan, locking her in her room and when that too fails, sealing Iseult within a heavily guarded tower.[208] Thomas' text includes perhaps the most interesting punishment prescribed by Brangain who suggests that Mark '*Le nés vus en deüst trencher u altrement aparailer que hunie en fusez tuz dis*' / ['ought to have cut off your nose or found some other way to deal with you so as to disgrace you all the days of your life'].[209]

The Tristan story lends itself to a *roman a tiroirs* or accordion like structure in which episodes, such as the episodic lay and folies may be inserted or removed. It is also a cyclic piece in which the lovers struggle to come together, are discovered and separated only to struggle once again to be together. As Iseult's punishment must determine the end of the work, so her escape facilitates the cycle to begin anew. While all failed attempts to expose the lovers contain an element of real or attempted public humiliation, it is interesting to note that at the conclusion of the surviving works, there is ultimately no public punishment. The lovers are made to die, but on their own terms with dignity and in a style congruous with the story of a tragic love, allowing the lovers to prevail in death in a manner that a public execution would defeat. And the audience does want to see the lovers prevail. Despite her personal failings and weaknesses and even her darkest actions, the audience remains supportive of Iseult if for nothing else because of the weak and villanious actions of her husband. While we may not care for her wantonness, her lies or her immaturity, her savage and often selfish behaviour, Mark's foulness far surpasses hers and thereby poisons the audience toward him. He is not an attractive man, uncle or husband and it remains difficult not to understand Iseult's motives, enhanced or not by the potion, in choosing a better man for a lover than she was given for a husband.[210]

---

[207] *TrB* 1165-1196.
[208] *TrP* II:555; Curtis, 170.
[209] *TrT* 1542-4. The cutting off of an adulteress' nose as punishment for her crime is a motif that will be returned to in the discussion of Marie de France's *Bisclavret*, see p. 105.
[210] See below, pp. 143-155.

The adulteresses in Ignaurés

The twelve adulterous wives depicted in *Ignaurés* are likewise 'uncourtly' lovers. The narrator describes them as each being the wife of a noble, '*bele*/beautiful', '*gente*/noble' and of '*haut parentage*/high lineage'.[211] Adjectives commonly associated with the courtly lover, '*gent*' or '*courtesie*' are, however, missing from their descriptions.[212] Instead, the main character, an adulteress named Loisignol, is described as a forceful gossip, always ready to speak her mind.[213] It is her desire to boast the best lover that initiates a game in which each woman will discuss their lover's merits. Idly and with no thought or concern for their own or their lovers' reputations, the eleven other women reveal the identity of their lovers to Loisignol who in turn exposes the fact that they have all been deceived by the same man. The lover's sin is not in putting honour above love, but in having too many sexual partners.[214] Ignaurés is not given a chance to redeem himself but is set upon by the women who are intent upon killing him. Loisignol's fear of losing such a handsome lover motivates her, however, to give her Ignaurés the chance to choose one lover over all the others rather than die. It is interesting to note that it the women here who take on the traditional male lover's role in proving their worth and vying for the affection of their lover. When she is chosen above all the other women Loisignol flaunts her success and subsequent love-making daily and in such a reckless fashion that she alerts the attention of a spy who in turn tells the husbands of their wives' indiscretions. Like Iseult, it is only at her lover's death that Loisignol and the other lovers of Ignaurés redeem themselves. The husbands, who have murdered and dismembered Ignaurés, serve a banquet for their wives consisting of the lover's penis and heart. When the women realise what they have eaten they choose to starve themselves to death in mourning their murdered lover.[215]

The adulteress in Tydorel

---

[211] *Ignaurés* lines 6-11.
[212] See above, pp. 34, 64, 166.
[213] *Ignaurés* line 45.
[214] See below, p 190.
[215] M. Jaey, 'Consuming passions: variations on the eaten heart theme', in *Violence Against Women in Medieval Texts*, ed. A. Roberts (Gainsville, 1998), pp. 75-96.

The lay of *Tydorel* is often regarded as reworking, and in the opinion of many scholars, an inferior imitation of Marie de France's *Yonec*.[216] While both texts include the arrival of an other-worldy lover, a pregnancy and subsequent birth of a son who is accepted as legitimate by the wife's husband, the texts vary greatly in their depiction of the characters and nature of the affairs presented.[217] The first difference between the courtly adulteress in *Yonec* and the adulteress in this text, is the motive for her affair. The wife, a queen of one of the kings of Brittany, is perfectly happy in her marriage to her noble husband, with the sole exception that they have been childless for ten years.[218] After enjoying herself in the garden one day, the queen falls behind the others of her party and, tired from her outing, falls asleep under a tree in the garden with her maid servant. She is awakened by a mysterious man who professes his love to her and after revealing his other-worldly nature, proposes to be her lover. The queen accepts his offer after he reveals that they will have two fine children together. Her aim in engaging in the affair is not only the conception of children, for the narrator reveals that the two continue their affair for many years.[219] The queen is not depicted as a good wife, a good lover nor as a good queen. She continues her affair despite the kindnesses of her husband until the eventual death of her lover whom she took no action to save, and places an illegitimate child upon her husband's throne. In comparison to the image of the courtly adulteress depicted in *Yonec* who is a victim of an abusive husband and goes to great trouble and personal risk in order to reunite with her lover, the wife in *Tydorel* emerges as a decidedly 'uncourtly' lover.

III. The image of the adulteress in admonitory texts

Within this category of works several lais, fables and the fabliaux are included. The divergent images of the adulteress in these texts all serve to advise and

[216] See Francis Dubost, 'Yonec, le vengeur, et Tydorel le veilleur', in '*Et c'est la fin pour quoy sommes ensambles' : hommage à Jean Dufournet. Littérature, histoire et langue du Moyen Age*, 3 vols (Paris, 1993), I, pp. 449-67.
[217] While Frappier has studied the hero, elements of the other world, the secret of the affair, the scene of the initial tryst and the passge of time within the work, no attention has been given to the character of the adulteress in any secondary study to date. See J. Frappier, 'A propos du lai de Tydorel et de ses éléments mythiques', in *Histoire, mythes et symbols: études de littérature française*, (Geneva, 1976), pp. 219-244.
[218] *Tydorel* lines 4-16.
[219] *Tydorel* lines 144-159.

warn of the duplicity of women and the flaws and vices of men which could lead a wife to commit adultery. Teaching by example and through humour not only aided the popularity of these works, but made them effective, didactic tools. A belief that their works were such implements for instruction is frequently expressed within the texts, especially within the fabliaux, where the authors sometimes exalt, sometimes defend their work, for its ability not only to entertain, but also to instruct. For example, the author of *De la dame que se venja du chevalier* relates the dual purpose of fabliaux in the prologue of his work:

> *Les Plusors por essample prendre,*
> *Et les plusors por les risées*[220]
>
> [Some [fabliaux] are to be taken as examples
> and many for the sake of laughter]

All of the texts considered in this thesis contain didactic elements in their attempt to illustrate courtly ideals of behaviour, devotion and chivalry, the effects of personal flaws and moral vices, or to comment upon human nature and universal truths, or relate moralistic messages. While these elements are present in all works, they are not always the author's main concern or intent behind his or her composition of a work. Those works that possess instructional or advisory aspects as subsidiary facets to a story are more accurately examined in previous sections that address the authorial intent behind their creation, such as the illustration of courtly love or the narration of an affair. Only those texts with a stated or heavily implied admonitory purpose are considered here.

The majority of the works in this section, especially the fables and many fabliaux, contain a directly stated moral, most often presented in a concluding couplet to the work. Infrequently however, the moral is found within the text, usually in the introduction and is occasionally reiterated or referred to in the conclusion of the piece. Upon initial inspection, the moralistic messages of these texts may seem to carry misogynist sentiments with images of lusty and deceitful women. Yet when viewed together, they provide a much deeper analysis of the act of adultery, illustrating a

[220] *De la dame qui que se venja du chevalier* lines 4-5.

great diversity among the adulteresses themselves, their situations and their motives for committing their crimes.

The thirty-seven works included here present adulterous women varying in age from the mature, possibly middle aged to the very young.[221] They are the mistresses of priests and the wives of knights, squires, rich vassals, bourgeois, craftsmen, farmers, millers, herdsmen, blacksmiths, seneschals, parsons, merchants, moneychangers and peasants.[222] It is a group of women diverse in age, social and economic standing, united only by their crime and the author of each work's intention to convey a moralistic message through the depiction of this crime. Rather than grouping these women by age, social or economic group, as these comparisons yield little information and certainly very little relevant contrast, they are here grouped thematically, according to the didactic message put forth by the authors.

The first thematic division that must be made is the separation of the images of those women whose adultery is made possible by, or is in response to, the vices of their husbands from those which depict a wife's adultery as evidence of women's duplicitous, greedy and lusty nature.

A. Warnings of vices and flaws

Under this heading are included jealousy, brutality, greed, pride and general stupidity, one or a combination of which are exhibited by the husband of the adulteress in these texts. Cases of wifely adultery as a punishment for a husband's shortcomings are seen to fall into roughly three groups: those works that show adultery as a response to or retaliation for the husband's vices or failings, those that warn of other vices or personal faults that can blind a husband to his wife's indiscretion and those works that seek to illustrate how a husband himself may put his wife and his honour in danger's path by placing her in the way of temptation or sexual violence.

[221] See *Le chevalier qui fist sa fame confesse* and *Gombert et les deux clercs; Baillet* and *La feme qui cunquie son baron.*

[222] *Du bouchierd'Abeville; Le chevalier a la robe vermeille, Le prestre ki abevete, le chevalier qui recovra l'amor de sa dame, Bisclavret Le dame qui se venja du chevalier, Le chevalier qui fist sa dame confesse; La dame qui fist trois tors enter le moustier; Aloul; Les brais au cordelier, La saineresse, Le Bourgoise d'Orliens; La sorisete des Etopes;Le meunier et les deux clercs; Le vilain de Bailluel; Le fevre de Creeil; Equitan; Du bouchier d'Abeville; L'enfant qui fu remis au soleil, Du cuvier; Les deux changeors;* Fable 44, Fable 45, *Estormi.*

i. Adultery as a response to a husband's vices or flaws

Jealous husbands are common within and outside the admonitory texts as shown by the author of the *Cor* in his portrayal of Arthur who, upon discovery of his wife's infidelity through the horn test, flies into a jealous rage and attempts to stab his wife in front of the court. Arthur, nevertheless, remains a sympathetic character due to the fact that his jealousy at this point appears understandable, as he has been shamed in front of his entire household, and partly because such jealousy is not a previously witnessed or common aspect of his character. Many other husbands are not portrayed in such a kind light. Though Marie de France does not state that jealousy is the actual impetus for her heroines to commit adultery, in Guigemar and Yonec, their lonely, love deprived state does make the adultery understandable and perhaps places them in a vulnerable state.[223] While these texts may provide subversive didactic counsel against jealousy, there also exist several specifically didactic warnings against unwarranted and excessive jealousy, perhaps best shown in two fabliaux: *Le prestre comport* and *Aloul.* In both these tales, it is the husband's jealousy that prompts his wife to seek retribution against him through sexual infidelity. Though in the case of *Aloul*, the wife is eventually raped as opposed to willingly taking on a lover, she initially sets out to cuckold her husband due to his unjust suspicion and false claims of her infidelity, as the narrator makes perfectly clear in his opening verse:

> *Alous garde sa fame com jalous.*
> *Male chose a en jalousie!*
> *. . . Or a Alous assez a fere*
> *s'ainsi le veut gaitier toz jors.*
> *Or escoutez comme il est lors.*
> *Se la dame va au moustier,*
> *Ja n'I aura autre escuier*
> *Comment qu'il voist, se Aloul non,*
> *Qui adés est en soupeçon*
> *Qu'ele ne face mauves plet.*
> *La Dame forment desplest,*
> *Quant ele premiers l'aperçoit.*
> *Lors dist que s'ele nel deçoit,*
> *Do not sera ele molt mauvais*

[223] See above, pp. 64-68.

> *. . . Molt het Aloul et son deduit*
> *Ne set que face, ne comment*
> *Ele ait pris d'Aloul vengement*
> *Qui le mescroit a si grant tort*

> [Aloul guarded his wife like a jealous man. This jealousy he had was bad! . . . Now Aloul had more than enough to do if he wanted to be always watching her like that. Now listen how it went for him then: If his lady went to church, she would never have any other escort, no matter how it happened, except Aloul, who was always suspicious that his wife might be making some evil assignation. This greatly displeased the lady when she first noticed it. Then she said that if she didn't deceive him, she would be counted very unworthy. . . She very much hated Aloul and his loving and didn't know what to do or how she might take vengeance on Aloul, who was so unjustly suspicious of her.][224]

Again, to reiterate her motive for deceit, the wife declares to the priest who has raped her and whom she has agreed afterwards to take as her lover, that '*a deux ans qu'Alous me tient en tele destrece, qu'ainc puis n'oï joie ne leece, et si est tout par jalousie*' / ['for two years, Aloul has kept me in such misery, that never since have I had joy or delight and it is all because of his jealousy'].[225]

Jealousy is sometimes paired with a characteristic brutality that alone, or coupled with a husband's excessive envy, also prompts a wife to commit adultery as a response to her ill treatment. Physical violence against wives is not uncommon and is depicted in several forms, as retaliation for crime and as unwarranted violence. Beating is the punishment most often meted out against unfaithful wives when discovery of their crime is made or when it is supposed, as depicted in *Guillaume au facon* wherein a suspicious husband threatens his wife thus:

> *Vos me tenez por fol, par m'ame.*
> *Et por musart et por noient,*
> *Quant ge ne vos fier maintenant*
> *D'un baston parmi les costez*

> [You take me for a fool, by my soul, and an idiot (possibly cuckold) and for nothing as I do not trust you now, I will beat you with this heavy stick about your sides.][226]

When the husband of the adulteress of *Les Tresces* discovers his wife's transgression, he reacts with even more venom: *'Onques mais n'ot si grant talent de feme laidir et*

---

[224] *Aloul* lines 14-39; Eichmann I:163.
[225] *Aloul* lines 112-115; Eichmann I:167.
[226] *Guillaume au facon* lines 546-549. Interestingly Kibler translates this passage with quite a bit more detail, stating: 'Lady you will make a fool of me if I do not take this heavy stick I have in hand and beat you until you cannot stand and bruise your sides and back and head'.

debatre com il avoit de cele batre' / ['Never had he a greater urge to harm and beat a woman than he did to beat this one'].[227] The husband straps spurs to his feet and begins to viciously kick and beat the woman whom he believes to be his wife until she is half-dead and he has become physically exhausted.[228] However, shortly thereafter, he is whipped into a second fury by her moans and cries, at which time he cuts off her hair and throws her out of the house.[229] This extreme reaction is not met with pejorative comment by fellow characters or the narrator. Physical violence in response to wifely sexual transgression remains acceptable, even expected, as expressed by wandering wives through all the genres here examined.[230] Rather, it is the unwarranted abuse of a woman in both Marie de France's *Laustic* and the fabliau *La feme qui cunquie son baron,* that prompts her to commit adultery or allows the audience and narrator to excuse her actions.

Marie carefully points out that her lovers have not yet physically consummated their love, but meet nightly by their shared gate to speak and to exchange gifts.[231] Though the narrator states the wife would willingly commit adultery with her lover if the opportunity would present itself, she is not perceived as a wanton and emerges as a quite pitiable character after her husband reveals his disturbing malice. When the wife confesses the joy she receives from the song of the nightingale she listens to at night, her husband busies his household in trapping the bird and when successful, feigns to present it to her and instead breaks its neck and throws it at her, spattering her breasts with its blood and robbing her of her one small joy.[232]

---

[227] *Les tresces,* lines 188-230.

[228] In addition to the physical beating the woman endures, the author may also be alluding to a scene of marital rape due to the double entendres present in the vocabulary he chooses to use when describing her treatment, namely the riding motif, reinforced by use of spurs, etc. The use of the verbs *boute* and *saiche* which though they do mean 'to beat', are most often found used as more colourful, though crude and occasionally violent descriptions of sexual intercourse. Another double entendre is found in his use of the verb *laidir* which can mean maltreat but has connotations of dishonouring and ravashing. (See Chapter 5 on the language of the sexual act.) Finally, the author compares the activities of the wife who is being cared for by her lover and the stand-in who is being cared for by the angry husband. This comparison may only be to heighten the contrast between a plesurable and unpleasurable evening, but may also be comparing pleasurable love making to rape. No other husband within any of these texts uses marital rape as a punishment against his wife for sexual indisretion.

[229] *Les tresces,* line 230.

[230] See above, pp. 58-59.

[231] *Laustic* lines 77-78.

[232] *Laustic* lines 113-119.

The wife in *La feme qui cunquie son baron* is portrayed as a young woman, too young for her husband's use, the narrator informs the audience.[233] She is *'biele et gente'* but has been married to a physically repulsive, jealous older man who beats her repeatedly.[234] It is this abuse that has turned her against him and prompts her later disobedience. Yet the moral is not drawn against women and their craftiness, but against the husband. We know from the opening lines that the man is an ugly creature who was able to marry the beautiful girl only because he was rich. The moral is directed against him for having thought that his money could buy the affections of a girl far too young for him and whom he treated vilely.

ii. Adultery that is undiscovered due to the husband's vices and/or failings

The second group of admonitory texts that warn against a husband's flaws or weaknesses show how a husband's qualities, such as greed and naivété, can be used by the wife to mask other, more serious problems, namely her infidelity.

Greed is a vice common to many characters in the fabliaux, though it often serves as an oblique moral to the tale, drawn from a secondary point within the narrative. For example, in *Le chevalier a la robe vermeille*, the wife of a knight is able to explain her lover's forgotten garments and horse by passing them off as gifts from her rich brother to her husband. His greed overwhelms his scepticism and the wife and lover escape discovery. Though the moral to the tale ends with sarcastic advice that a husband *'doit bien croire sans contredit tout ce que sa fame li dit'* / ['must truly believe without contradiction everything that his wife tells him'], it holds the greedy husband responsible for his own duping by declaring that *'que de floie s'entremet qui croit ce que de ses iex voie'* / ['Anyone who believes what he sees with his eyes is committing folly'].[235]

The largest group of works in this category warns against the blinding power of naiveté and general stupidity or gullibility, advocating that a man must practice shrewdness in order to discourage or discover his wife's intentions. The reader or

[233] *'Qu'ele fu trop iovene a son oeus'*, line 7.
[234] *La feme qui cunquie son baron* line 9.
[235] *Le chevalier a la robe vermeille* lines 308-312; Eichmann I:161.

listener is often warned not to deceive himself as the foolish husbands in the texts do, The morals are all similar to those expressed in *Le prestre qui abevete* in which a husband is made to believe he has hallucinated seeing his wife in the arms of a priest or *Le vilain de Bailluel* who is convinced by his wife that he has died and watches her make love to the priest who has come to administer the Last Rites:

> *Ensi fu li vilains gabés*
> *Et decheüs et encantés*
> *Et par le prestre et par son sans. . .*
> *Dist on encor: Maint fol paist duis*
>
> [That's how the peasant got confused, befuddled and bewitched, by the priest and his own senselessness. . . It is often said: Many a fool is fed by God.][236]

> *C'on doit por fol tenir celui*
> *Qui mieus croit sa fame que lui.*
>
> [He must be taken for a fool, who better believes his wife than himself.][237]

One of the most entertaining and perhaps most obvious examples of gullibility within the texts is that of the husband in *La sorisete des estopes* who is persuaded by his wife that her genitalia, which she refers to as 'a mouse', has gone missing. The fool spends the first night of their marriage searching for the creature while his wife entertains the village priest. Though the conclusion of the piece warns that women are craftier than the devil once they set their mind to mischief, the author places responsibility on the husband's duty to be on guard against such wiliness.[238]

However, despite a husband's best efforts to avoid the trap of gullibility, it is not always possible to outfox one's wife. These descendants of Eve are not bested easily. [239] To this category must be added the caution to husbands not to attempt to become too cagey or indeed to attempt to outwit or deceive one's wife. No better example is found than the tale of *Le meunier d'Arleux.* Determined to deceive his wife, the miller and his servant Mouset, who promises his master a pig if he can share in the evening's activities, plan to force themselves upon the young Marie.[240] The

---

[236] *Le prestre qui abevete* lines 79-84.
[237] *Le vilain de Bailluel* lines 115-116.
[238] *La sorisete* lines 213-224.
[239] *La saineress* lines 115-116; Eichmann II:111.
[240] *Le meunier d'Arleux* lines 1-41.

husband's seemingly flawless plan is discovered by his wife who trades places with Marie in the bedchamber and enjoys not only her husband's energies, making love five times that night, but also the affections of the servant Mouset who likewise performs five times with his master's wife.[241] When the miller's wife declares that he has never performed so well, he recognises the full extent of his victimisation: he has lost out on sleeping with a beautiful young girl, caused his wife to be furious with him and cuckolded himself all for a pig. No action is taken against the wife for her part in the cuckoldry of her husband and indeed the judge and the narrator of the tale both conclude that the pathetic miller has been justly dealt with.[242]

iii. Adultery provoked by the husband

The third group of didactic texts warns against a husband's actions rather than aspects of character which could result in inciting lusty thoughts in his own wife, or prompting another man to commit adultery with her. One of the most common warnings to husbands is to avoid placing one's own wife in the way of temptation. Though acting occasionally as a secondary moral to the piece which may be concerned primarily with the topic of the dangers of greed or revenge, as seen in the fabliaux *Estormi, Du Segretain au du maine* and *Constant du Hamel*, wherein husbands put their wives up to committing adultery or seducing wealthy priests or rivals in order to deprive them of their moneybags, husbands do also occasionally plant the inspiration to commit adultery in their wives' minds. An example of such foolhardiness is found in *Le fevre de Creeil*. Here a blacksmith, awed by the size of his apprentice's penis, cannot help from repeatedly mentioning the phenomenon to his wife.[243] Though the woman declares she wants nothing of it, the husband, who is certain his wife will betray him if given the chance, devises a plan to test her. Rather than obey her wishes to be silent on the matter, the husband torments her daily with talk of the marvel until one day his speech so enflames her, that she seeks out the apprentice and persuades him to have sex with her.[244] The narrator concludes that a

[241] *Ibid.* lines 223-285.
[242] *Ibid.* lines 403-414.
[243] *Le fevre de Creeil*, lines 63-77; Eichmann I:137.
[244] *Ibid.*, lines 90-145; Eichmann I:137.

smarter husband would have chased away 'the wolf' from 'the livestock' instead of waiting for a woman's nature to prevail.[245] Though none of the wives in this category completes the sexual act due to the timely interference of their husbands, the moral of the works remain similar, that no good can come from placing a wife in temptation's path.

The second way in which a husband can act as the instigator of his wife's adultery is by choosing a wife who is too young. It is interesting to note that a young wife's adultery, in the case of her being married at a very young age or to a much too old man, is presented as the husband's fault. It is not specified in these brief texts if it is due to his inability to satisfy her sexually or due perhaps to the lustiness of youth, but the crisis brought about by wifely adultery in the case of a 'December/May' marriage is not portrayed as the transgression of the wife, but rather the foolhardiness of a man who thinks his money will buy him the affections and loyalty of a pretty young girl. Again, this transgression is often oblique, as in the case of *La fame qui cunquie son baron*. Though the narrator makes clear that the wife commits her sin in retaliation for her physical mistreatment, he mentions on several occasions that the man was able to marry the girl only because of her father's greed of the man's wealth and that she was far too young for him.[246] The wife also makes the crude, though somewhat revealing joke that while her husband uses his fingers to plug the holes in the casks of his expensive wine, which she has cunningly drilled, she will go upstairs, where her lover is secretly waiting, to find a 'plug that fits'.[247] Here it seems the husband's inability to satisfy his wife contributes to her transgression.

Marrying too young and too beautiful a girl is given as the primary fault of Baillet, who, though an honest cobbler, makes this fatal mistake.[248] His wife comes to her marriage innocent of any adulterous intentions but later falls under the spell of a lecherous priest.[249] The young wife in *Auberee* is given to an older man who offers a higher price to the poor girl's family than her lover can. Thus the husband, by marrying so far out of his own peer group, incurs the wrath of the young suitor and

---

[245] *Ibid.*, lines174-175; Eichmann I:141.
[246] *La fame qui cunquie son baron,* lines 1-17.
[247] *Ibid.* line 64.
[248] *Baillet* lines 1-7.
[249] *Baillet* lines 7-8.

the knowledge that his wife loves another from the beginning of the marriage. *Auberée* is not an isolated example of this kind of rivalry. Elements of the theme are found within Marie's *Guigemar* and it is the central driving force for the lovers in *Milun* who attempt to reunite after the girl is married by her greedy father to a rich old man while her lover is overseas, making a name and fortune for them both.[250]

The final way in which a husband may provoke his wife's adultery is by provoking her rape. As shown in Guinevere's terrified plea to rescue her from Mordred, a husband's honour suffers equally from a wife's rape or a consensual liaison.[251] Indeed there is little room for intent in the majority of these works as also illustrated in *Aloul,* when the wife is raped and is later accused of whoring by her husband.[252] Rape in the majority of the works here analysed is a response to an action of the husband of the victim. The *Bouchier d'Abeville* seduces the mistress of a parson and has relations with his servant in order to punish the miserly host.[253] Similarly, in *Le meunier et les deux clercs* the poverty stricken clerks are robbed of their grain and their horse by the greedy miller and return his malice by stealing back their property and tricking both his wife and daughter into having sex with them.[254]

B. The duplicity of women

The second thematic division addresses those texts that portray the motivation for a wife's adultery as originating in her very nature as a woman and hence as a libidinous and duplicitous creature.

i. Women motivated to commit adultery due to sheer lust

Lust is one of the greatest motivators among women who commit adultery. The emphasis on the female sexual appetite is one of the most persistent topics in the fabliaux, and indeed is mentioned frequently even among the more courtly texts,

[250] Interestingly Marie reinterprets the theme in *Le Fresne,* reversing the roles as due to her own poverty, Le Fresne's lover is married instead to a young woman from a wealthy family.
[251] *Mort* 145; Sommer VI:348.
[252] *Aloul* lines 98-147; Eichmann I: 167.
[253] *Du Bouchier d'Abeville* lines 394-405; Eichmann II:17.
[254] *Le Meunier et les deux clercs* lines 313-321.

exemplified by the opening of the *Mort Artu*'s depiction of Guinevere's sexual appetite, or by the lengths to which Iseult would go to be with Tristan. While there are some admittedly crude and unsympathetic treatments of female sexual desire, most regard her insatiability as a natural state, in accordance with medieval cultural, theological and medical/philosophical thought. Though perhaps sexist and even occasionally misogynist in their conclusions, the authors waste little ink in defaming the female sex, but rather spend their energies warning husbands of the inevitable. As Yvain notes in his defence of the queen and all the women of the court who have failed the test of fidelity presented in *Cor*, there is not a woman born who has not had 'light thoughts'.[255]

Thoughts, however, are hardly where most wives in the didactic works cease their dalliance. Indeed many are portrayed as turning their vice into a veritable skill, as is the wife of a certain bourgeois in *Des braies au cordelier,* who is,

Qui molt sage et cortoise
Molt savoit d'engin et d'aguet:
A feme, qui tel mestier fait
Et qui veut amer par amors,
Covient savoir guenches et tors,
Et engien por soi garantir.
Bien covient que sache mentir,
Tele eure est, por couvrir sa honte.
La Bourgoise do not je vous conte
Fu bien de cel mestier aprise,
Comme cele qu'amors ot mise
Et molt énlacie en ses laz.

[A very wise and courtly woman who knew a lot about deceit and cleverness. A wife who carries on that way and who wants to love romantically needs to know tricks and turns and cunning to keep herself safe. She really has to know how to lie in order to cover up her shame. The wife I am telling you about was well skilled in this business, like a woman whom love had taken and bound up in its snares.][256]

Hainaut, the wife of another bourgeois depicted in *Le clerc qui fu repus derriere l'escrin,* appears no less practised in her craft, as her lusty evening ends by her husband chasing not one, but two of her lovers out the door. Like the wife in the previous tale, she too is depicted as being a slave to her love, or perhaps more accurately to her lust that holds her in its snares.[257]

[255] *Cor* lines 309-311.
[256] *Des braes au cordelier* lines 7-19; Eichmann I:202-219.
[257] *Le clerc qui fu repus derriere l'escrin* line 10: 'K'amours le tenoit en ses las'.

Another repeat offender is found in the violent fabliaux, *Le prestre crucefie*. Indeed this wife of a crucifix maker had made such a habit of straying, *'si comme avoit acoustumé'*,[258] that her husband could perceive her intentions merely by recognising the way in which her face lit up at the mention of his going to market. Interestingly, however, the moral of the tale does not comment upon the wife's lust, nor does it make any remark regarding the duplicity of women in general as might have been expected. Instead, the conclusion of the piece is a warning to priests never to allow themselves to love another man's wife, for fear of losing their life or testicles.[259] Womanly lust is almost universally treated with humour, even when punished by violence. It is portrayed as fact, an inevitable evil, inseparable from her sex, and it is often the husband or lover who bears the blame or scorn for his stupidity or overconfidence in his ability to capitalise or reign in such lust.

ii. Women motivated by greed

In contrast to lust, greed, as practiced by both men and women, is heavily punished within these admonitory texts.[260] A woman who uses adultery to satisfy her material desires, especially in the fabliaux, is met with sore disappointment and is often a victim of dupery herself. Such is the story of *Le bouchier d'Abeville* in which the parson's mistress agrees to sleep with the butcher in exchange for a prize sheep skin – a gift which he has also offered to the servant girl whom he also convinces to have sex with him and which he has offered to the parson for the price of three sous, leaving all three to discover the truth in a vicious fight over the skin.[261]

Disappointment, however, is often the lightest sentence given in this *topos*. In the *Lais* of Marie de France, much harsher punishments are meted out to wives who use their bodies to satisfy their greed, especially to escape or improve their present position. Bisclavret's wife, appalled at learning that her husband is a werewolf, agrees to accept the advances of a neighbouring knight who has long pursued her in exchange for his help in her plan to rid herself of her husband by stealing his clothing

[258] *Le preste crucifie* line 19; Eichmann II:63.
[259] *Ibid.* lines 93-100; Eichmann II:67.
[260] See below, p. 124 for a discussion of greed in the depiction of the husband as villain.
[261] *Le Bouchier d'Abeville* lines 327-557; Eichmann II:15.

while he is in wolf form and thus eternally robbing him of his chance to return to his human form. The truth of her actions is later revealed when, appearing before Arthur's court with her new husband, Bisclavret, who has acted as the king's loyal pet, bites off her nose. After being tortured, the wife reveals her treachery and is exiled.[262] Interestingly, Marie adds an extension to the woman's sentence by revealing that not only must she bear physical disfigurement and live in exile, but that all her daughters born from this adulterous relationship will be born without noses as well. Marie does not comment as to the meaning of this added punishment. It may be that it was to remind all of the mother's sin or possible render the daughters themselves undesireable and possibly unmarriable.[263] This punishment, the attack on Bisclavret's wife and her exile are noted by the narrator as retribution not so much for the wife's adultery, but for her violation of her husband's trust and her sabotage of his humanity in her greedy attempt to escape her position.[264]

Though lacking the fantastical element of werewolves and magical charms, the story of *Equitan* likewise relates a violent end for a wife who uses her sexuality to seduce the king and secure a place for herself as queen upon the death of her husband, the seneschal, whom she conspires to boil to death in his own tub.[265] Her duplicity is turned against her however, when her husband discovers her plan and throws her into the bath prepared for him. Here again, it is the woman who is to blame, as the opening lines reveal: '*femme espuse ot li seneschals, dunt puis vient el païs granz mal[s]*' / ['the seneschal had a woman who was to bring great misfortune to the land'].[266] The moral focuses not on the woman's lust, but instead warns of evil rebounding upon those who seek another's misfortune.

---

[262] *Bisclavret* lines 261-315.

[263] It is possible that instead of or in addition to being a form of enduring public humiliation, the loss of a nose was meant to render the trespassing woman entirely undesirable to men, in effect denying her what she so obviously valued most. Supporting the notion that the mutilation of a woman's face would act as sexual repulsion, Roger of Wendover cites the example of a group of nuns who, when faced with the possibility of being raped by an invading party mutilated themselves by cutting off their own noses and lips to deter the men's lust. See Roger of Wendover, *Flowers of History: Comprising the History of England from the Descent of the Saxons to AD 1235*, trans. J. A. Giles 2 vols, *RS* (London, 1848) 1:191-192.

[264] *Bisclavret* line 102.

[265] *Equitan* lines 237-262.

[266] *Equitan* lines 29-30.

iii. Adultery motivated by women's predisposition and love of trickery

As daughters of Eve, perhaps the best tool women display in these texts is an inborn skill for deceit and trickery. The connection between the first woman and these descendants is often commented upon, as shown in the conclusion of *La Saineress*:

> *Mes il n'est pas en cest païs*
> *Cil qui tant soit de sens espris*
> *Qui mie se peüst guetier*
> *Que fame nel puist engingnier,*
> *Quant cele, qui ot mal es rains,*
> *Boula son seignor premarains.*
>
> [There is no man in this country so well endowed with sense that he can keep watch enough that a woman couldn't deceive him, since she who had the loin-ache deceived her husband first.][267]

The narrator declares any man to be a fool who would claim a woman could not deceive him or that he could somehow guard against deception, as the husband in his tale boasted he was able to do.[268] It is his claim that acts as a challenge for his own wife who, determined to prove him wrong and exercise her skill at trickery, successfully fools him by disguising her lover as a female medic who has come to investigate a bout of loin gout and freely enjoying his company while her husband waits downstairs.[269]

The wife of *La Bourgoise d'Orliens* likewise expands her trickery due to her husband's actions. When she discovers her husband's plan to impersonate her lover and expose her adultery, she turns the tables from victim to become the duper herself, as she informs the household that a man with amorous intentions waits for her in the bedroom and has the men beat her husband, whom they believe to be a would-be-lover, while she entertains herself with her real lover downstairs. Her trickery motivates the narrator to comment in an aside to the audience, that '*Fame a trestout*

[267] *La saineress* lines 111-115; Eichmann II: 107.
[268] *Ibid.* lines 2-3.
[269] *Ibid.* lines 37-48. Eichmann has translated '*goute es rains*' as 'loin-gout', though as Dr. Simone Macdougall has pointed out, '*rains*' may equally refer to the kidneys or back ache and would, in fact, be a far more likely medical malady. The effect would be the same as it would place the woman on her back and add to the sexually implicit joke.

passé Argu; par lor engin sont deceü li sage des le tens Abel'/ ['A woman got the best of Argus; wise men ever since the time of Abel have been fooled by their trickery'].[270]

There is no better example of women's love of trickery, however, than the tale of *Les trois dames qui troverent l'anel.* The story is presented as a contest arranged by three women who find a ring one day and decide that the ring shall go to the victor – she who can deceive her husband best in order to be with her lover.[271] That trickery and adultery is what their minds first come to in attempting to settle ownership of the find, speaks greatly of the author's opinion of the nature and natural inclinations of women. The contest is a true battle of wits, a popular theme within the fabliaux. The first wife tonsures her husband and has him believe he has taken vows. The second, whom the narrator claims is full of tricks, attempts to best her companion by making the townspeople believe her husband has gone mad and tying him up, thus freeing her for her pleasures.[272] The third, not to be outdone, fools her husband into marrying her to her own lover.[273] Rather than pass judgement upon the three, the narrator leaves it to the audience to decide the winner of the contest.[274] The frequency of games or contests illustrates an appreciation for wit that is often displayed by the wife in masterminding her escape from punishment. As illustrated by *La saineress* and the *Bourgoise d'Orliens*, the story begins with the image of a marriage in crisis or in a struggle for power and concludes, by means of the dupery of the husband with an improved marriage, a satisfied husband and a wife who has secretly affirmed her power.

iv. Women punishing lovers

Women punishing their lovers is a motif that is more commonly found within the courtly romances and longer verse works previously examined.[275] Often, such cruelty is to rehabilitate a fallen lover or to make one prove his worthiness. Particularly within the fabliaux, a much wider spectrum of faults can lead a lover to

---

[270] *La Bourgoise d'Orliens,* lines 85-87; Eichmann, II:29.
[271] *Les trois dames qui trouverent l'anel* lines 1-8.
[272] *Ibid.* lines 9-108 and 109-201.
[273] *Ibid.* lines 201-265.
[274] *Ibid.* lines 266-278.
[275] See above, p. 40: the case of Guinevere.

perform penance. Though a burlesque of a courtly tale in itself, *Guillaume au facon* is perhaps most closely related to the courtly works as it shows a lover, at first rebuked for his affection, prove his loyalty to his lady even upon threat of death, thus assuring her of the seriousness of his love and his ability to take care of her and their secret.[276]

Other works are less courtly in their nature. In *Les deux changeors*, the wife threatens to expose her adultery to her husband as vengeance for her lover scaring her one night when, as a dangerous prank, he covered her face and boastfully allowed his best friend, her husband, to view the naked body of his new girlfriend.[277] Boasting and crudity often act as the impulse for punishment as the lover in *La dame qui se venja du chevalier* discovers when he slips into unwanted, crude pillowtalk one evening, asking her, '*Madame, croitriez vos nois?*/Madame, will you crack nuts?'[278] In vengeance, the woman invites her lover to her house and once she has him in her bed, threatens to expose their liaison to her husband who demands entry to the room. Through a spectacular display of wit, the wife appeases the husband, hides her cowering lover, yet continues to torture him as he must witness her make love to her husband, repeating the same pillowtalk that earned him his punishment.[279]

Stories of punished husbands and lovers are common throughout these texts and yet there remains only one tale of a lover punishing a wife: *Le chevalier qui recovra l'amor de sa fame*. Here, perhaps is a response to the *topos*, a lesson for women not to be so hasty when judging the loyalty or worth of a lover. Within the text, a lover awaits his lady by a tree, but she is so long delayed and he so tired from the tournament he has participated in that day that he falls asleep against a tree where his furious lady finds him.[280] She at once abandons him, but he is not to be so easily shaken off nor reproved and follows her to her bedroom where he poses as a ghost of a knight accidentally killed by her husband in the tournament. He persuades the husband that he will not cease to haunt them until his wife forgives him for a trespass

[276] *Guillaume au facon* lines 503-528.
[277] *Les deux changeors* lines 61-106.
[278] *La dame qui se venja* line 23.
[279] *Ibid.* lines 125-201.
[280] *Le chevalier qui recovra l'amor de sa fame* lines 96-152.

he committed earlier. The husband forces his wife to forgive the man and the wife is duly censured for her hasty actions.[281]

v. Women assisting women: a community of adulteresses

One of the more interesting warnings against female duplicity comes as a warning against the solidarity of the female community. While many texts express this fear as a subtle undertone, others address it more explicitly such as depicted in the relationship between an unfaithful wife and her good friend from whom she has borrowed a tub in the tale *Le cuvier.* Upon her husband's untimely return, the wife successfully hides her lover under the overturned tub but is almost exposed when her friend sends word that she needs her tub back. The friend, however, understands the cryptic message the wife sends in return and helps not only to cover over the wife's secret, but serves her friend well by smuggling the lover out of the house as well.[282]

A precedent for such assistance is found outside these admonotory texts as well. Within the lay of *Guigemar*, it was the female lover's maiden companion who helped conceal her friend's crime. Within the Tristan legend, it is traditionally Brangain, Iseult's loyal companion, who goes as far as to sacrifice her own virginity to hide Iseult's crime. Within the prose work, it is another adulteress, Queen Guinevere who comes to Iseult's aid, this time through written encouragement.

It is not only friends who help, but even mothers who are seen to aid their daughters in their crime, as shown in *La sorisete des estopes* in which the mother keeps the foolish husband busy searching for the 'mouse' to give her daughter enough time to enjoy herself with the village priest.[283] In *Auberée*, this interest in helping another woman meet with her lover is not depicted as a mutual desire when the old seamstress helps a young man kidnap his former lover, who is now happily married to another, and rape her.[284] Though the old woman shows remarkable skill in covering the woman's absence and in reuniting her with her husband, such a work shows a darker side to the community. It is interesting to note that the narrator concludes with

[281] *Ibid.* lines 186-246.
[282] *Le cuvier* lines 107-150.
[283] *La sorisete des Etopes* lines 56-87.
[284] *Auberee* lines 93-140.

the moral that few women misbehave with their bodies unless because of some other woman and that is the path if someone wishes to seduce a chaste, pure and clean woman.[285] This final example remains the only one of its kind and must be regarded as somewhat of an oddity, perhaps even a response to the *topos*.

C. The morals

While many of the concluding morals of these works prove helpful in reiterating a wife's motive, in supplying a judgement of her character or commenting on women in general, it is interesting to look at the morals themselves and their relationship to the stories they conclude. Though many appear closely linked to the text they discuss, there also emerges an odd trend of what at first appear to be highly inappropriate conclusions for the story related. For example, we find in a two-part moral to *Le chevalier a la robe vermeille,* the sarcastic conclusion that a man *doit bien croire sanz contredit tout ce que sa fame li dit'* / ['must truly believe without contradiction everything that his wife tells him'].[286] Many of the texts here portray tales of wifely wit and humour, often at the expense of husbands who are depicted as ugly, brutal, greedy or otherwise distasteful characters. Interestingly, these conclude with sexist, disparaging remarks on women, such as the conclusion to *Les deux changeors* in which the text expresses obvious sympathy with the shamed wife and illustrates perfect justice in the exchange of a fright served for a fright given, and yet concludes by stating that *'quar qui fet a feme un mal tret, eleen fet X ou XV ou XX'* / ['Because for every dirty trick a man plays on a woman, she plays ten or fifteen or twenty].[287] Others warn of female sexual appetite, of their relationship to the devil or to Eve and of their smooth speech and quick wit. Upon examination, however, most of the antifeminist conclusions are appended to tales that actually celebrate female ingenuity.

Such a contrast between the stories themselves and the morals they advocate at their conclusion at first presents a difficult contradiction to reconcile, especially when

[285] *Ibid.* lines 651-653.
[286] *Le chevalier a la robe vermeille* lines 311-312; Eichmann, I:161.
[287] *Les deux changeors* lines 286-287; Eichmann, p. 207.

using these texts to examine the role and image of the adulteress. Do we as readers understand the image of the adulteress as the witty protagonist as the body of the text portrays her, or as the devilish antagonist that the final couplet would lead us to believe she is? The answer to this question can only be found by assessing the entire collection of these admonitory works. What we find is that roughly a quarter of these texts include a moral that is consistant with the images put forth in the body of the text. Within the fabliaux in particular, there is very little connection between the plot and moral. In fact, some manuscript versions of the same tale provide different morals, for example: *Auberee* and *La Bourgoise d'Orliens*. An Augustinian or Robertsonian approach to this literature would clearly illustrate that these texts were, whatever their method of expression, working to illustrate a higher meaning. Charles Muscatine hypothesises that this disjointure is symbolic of the tolerance for a looser connection between ideas that he argues is a common trait in much medieval literature and is possibly due to the audience's familiarity with sermons, fables and religious moralistic teaching.[288] Indeed it is also possible that some morals may merely have been tacked on to keep what might only be considered a dirty joke acceptable in larger circles, or were seen as a tidy way in which to end a piece of work.[289] What this contradiction reveals most for this examination is that there was great diversity in opinion as to what made an adulteress, who she was, what motivated her and, for the audience, advice on how to avoid imitating behaviour that could lead to instigating or committing such a crime.

Under a thin veil of sexism are tales of intriguing and likeable women who play a vital, often starring role in expressing the most overt moralism of the fabliaux, that of irony, the irony of surprise, of reversal or of justice that is fashioned by chance or oneself.

The works discussed in this chapter are not a series of commentaries on the evils of a sin. They are tales of marital and social crisis, explored in all its vagaries and its effects upon social and personal roles, as well as a commentary on how those roles in turn prompt, shape and effect the crime itself. Here have been analysed the

---

[288] Muscatine, *Fabliaux*, p.102.
[289] *Ibid.*

motives for wifely adultery, whether it be for love, lust, revenge or malice, the means by which she carries out her crime, and the repercussions of it, ranging from a physical beating, the loss of a child, or the destruction of a world. The following chapters will continue to explore the curious relationship between all members of the adulterous triangle that shapes how each instance of adultery and each character is portrayed. For to explore the role and image of an adulteress, one must acknowledge that she does not commit her crime alone. First to be examined is the role of the husband, for as discovered in the discussion of these women, much of their portrayal and our reaction as the audience to them and their adultery stems not so much from their own personality, but from the personality and actions of their husbands. Cast as either villain or victim, the husband's character in this love triangle shapes how the wife is portrayed, how the act of adultery will be judged, and reveals how the demands of masculinity and the husband's inability to fulfill them, leads to the introduction of a man who can – the lover.

Chapter 2:
Husbands

The Lay of Aristotle: Bronze made in the Netherlands c. 1400.
New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

'Fetes li tost espouser fame si l'aurez dont si bien honi c'onque ne fu si maubailli!'
[Make him marry a wife and you will have him so ruined that he was never so bad off in his life].

- *Du Vallet aux .XII. Fames,* lines 38-40.

Husbands

The cuckolded husbands included in this study range from across the social spectrum, including farmers, merchants, bourgeois, knights and even kings. While only one of the cuckolds, Bisclavret, is given the title role of a work, the husbands of adulterous wives include not only the nameless and occasionally faceless men of the fabliaux, fables and some lais, but also men such as Arthur and Mark, kings whose role as cuckold rivals, and sometimes even eclipses their fame as kings. It is not his title or fame that influences the portrayal of the husband. Rather his role as victim or villain determines whether his wife's adultery is justified and whether or not she escapes punishment. In the depiction of the husband's actions and character are also found interesting glimpses into authorial and societal definitions of masculinity, male sexuality and a husband's role in marriage and society.

Victims

The term victim here refers to those husbands who, though depicted as loving, often doting, and in all cases trusting of their wives, have been betrayed. Of the two fables which detail accounts of adultery, both depict the husband as victim.[1] Four out of the eight lais here considered[2] and seventeen of the thirty-five surviving fabliaux,[3] which depict adultery, also depict the husband as a victim of his wife's actions. It is interesting and perhaps significant to note that, in these circumstances, it is the wife, not her lover, who is cast as the villain or antagonist of the work, establishing wifely adultery as an inter-marital conflict, rather than removing it to an extra-marital, masculine competition. Two excellent examples of this conflict are found in Marie de France's *Bisclavret* and *Equitan.* In the first lai, a nagging wife, disturbed by her husband's unexplained frequent absences from her, succeeds in prying from him his

[1] *La Femme et son amant* (Fable #44); *Encore la femme et son amant* (Fable #45).
[2] *Equitan, Bisclavret, Tydorel* and *Mantel.*
[3] *Baillet, Les braies au cordelier, Le chevalier qui fist sa fame confesse, Le chevalier qui recovra l'amor de sa dame, Le clerc qui fu repus derriere l'escrin, Connebert, De cuvier, La dame qui se venja du chevalier, Guillaume au facon, Le povre clerc, Le prestre crucifie, Le pretre et le mouton, Le prestre qui abevete,La saineress, La sorisete des Etopes,Les trois dmaes qui troverent l'anel, Le vilain de Bailluel.*

terrible secret that he is actually a werewolf and must at the full moon abandon his clothing and roam the forest as a beast.[4] After discovering her husband's true identity, Bisclavret's treacherous wife grants her love and body to a neighbouring knight who had long pursued her, in return for helping rid her of her now unwanted and repulsive husband.

> *De l'aventure se esfrea.*
> *En maint endreit se purpensa*
> *Cum ele s'en puïst partir;*
> *Ne voleit mes lez lui gisir.*
> *Un chevalier de la cuntree,*
> *Que lungement l'aveit amee*
> *E mut preié' e mut requise*
> *E mut duné en sun service –*
> *Ele ne l'aveit unc amé*
> *Ne de s'amur aseüré –*
> *Celui manda par sun message,*
> *Si li descovri sun curage.*
> *'Amis', fet ele, 'seez leéz!*
> *Ceo dunt vus estes travaillez*
> *Vus otri jeo sanz nul respit:*
> *Ja n'i avrez nul cuntredit;*
> *M'amur e mun cors vus otrei,*
> *Vostre drue fetes de mei!'*
> *Cil l'en mercie bonemont*
> *E la fiance de li prent;*
> *E el le met par serement.*
> *Puis li cunta cumfaitement*
> *Ses sire ala e k'il devint;*
> *Tute la veie kë il tint*
> *Vers la forest li enseigna;*
> *Pur sa despuille l'enveia.*
> *Issi fu Bisclavret trahiz*
> *E par sa femme maubailiz.*

> [She was greatly alarmed by the story, and began to consider various means of parting from him, as she no longer wished to lie with him. She sent a messenger to summon a knight who lived in the region and who had loved her for a long time, wooed her ardently and served her generously. She had never loved him or promised him her affection but now she told him what was on her mind. 'Friend', she said, 'rejoice without further delay I grant you that which has tormented you; never again will you encounter any refusal. I offer you my love and my body; make me your mistress'. He thanked her warmly and accepted her pledge, whereupon she received his oath told him of her husband and what became of him. She described the path he took to the forest and sent him for her husband's clothes. Thus was Bisclavret betrayed and wronged by his wife]. [5]

---

[4] *Bisclavret* lines 80-102.

[5] *Bisclavret* lines 99-126; Burgess, 69.

Bisclavret is portrayed as a good man; he was a man greatly praised, a '*beaus chevalers et bons esteit*'[6] who conducted himself nobly, acted as his lord's closest advisor and was loved by all his neighbours. But despite this, he is soon betrayed by his wife whom he loved and trusted with his secret.[7] In contrast to Bisclavret's irreproachable conduct, his wife is guilty of double treachery in betraying both her husband's secret and his trust in her sexual fidelity. By placing the husband in opposition to such a powerfully malevolent antagonist, one who would not only violate vows of fidelity but would go so far as to sabotage a good and worthy man's human existence, the husband emerges as a sympathetic, righteous and admirable figure. These qualities make his later vengeance upon his wife by biting off her nose in front of the court and hence making her admit her treachery, not the actions of a vindictive or abusive husband, but a warranted form of poetic justice.

The husband in *Equitan* is similarly described as a '*bon chevaler, pruz e leal.*'[8] He is not only brave and loyal, but acts as an administrator and governor of the kingdom in the absence of its king who is far more interested in sport and hunting.[9] He is betrayed by his wife who, wishing to improve her station, has become the mistress of the king. Determined to be queen, the wife arranges the murder of her husband whom she plans to boil to death in his bath.[10] Plans are foiled, however, when the seneschal arrives home early to find the king *in flagrante delicto* with his wife. As the befuddled king mistakenly jumps into the boiling bath that had been intended for the seneschal and dies, the lovers' plan becomes clear and the seneschal in turn takes hold of his wife and throws her into the bath to die the gruesome death she had planned for him.[11] While markedly more violent and horrific than the punishment Bisclavret's wife endured, the death of the seneschal's wife is equal to her proposed crime. The lack of any other violence or abuse by the husband maintains his sympathetic character for the audience and makes what could be a scene of horror, an almost comic scene of poetic justice.

---

[6] *Bisclavret* lines 16-20.
[7] *Bisclavret* lines 20-79.
[8] *Equitan* line 22.
[9] *Equitan* lines 13-28.
[10] *Equitan* lines 131-262.
[11] *Equitan* lines 263-307. For boiling as punishment for attempted murder in the context of possible adultery, see John Hudson, *The Formation of the English Common Law* (London, 1996), pp. 59-60.

Being a sympathetic, righteous and admirable figure is integral to the husband's success. The degree to which the audience supports the husband depends on the presence and strength of all three of these attributes. If just one should waiver or be lacking, sympathy responds accordingly; the victimised husband possessing these qualities is depicted as a betrayed hero, whereas without them, he becomes the tool of humour rather than the tool for justice. Though he never loses his status as a wronged man, various degrees of victimisation of character become evident.

While the courtly sentiment of the lais does not allow room for such farcical characterisation, the fabliaux proves to be an excellent forum in which this form of victimised husband thrives. As previously noted, there are seventeen surviving fabliaux that depict the flawed, though not villainous, husband. All are similar in their depiction of the husband and in their general plot line depicting the wife's struggle to be with her lover which necessitates the successful duping of her husband. This is most often accomplished by capitalising on his greatest flaw or weakness. In the *Chevalier a la Robe Vermeille,* a wife exploits her husband's greed for finery, enticing him to believe that her rich lover's horse and clothing which he has hastily left behind upon the husband's premature return are actually presents from her brother.[12] Thus the materialistic husband is deceived. While the wife is not exonerated from her crime by the author, neither does he deliver any punishment. The husband's sin of *luxoria*, which the author is keen to note, seems to strike a balance with his wife's lusty misdeeds. Instead of a physical punishment at the conclusion of the piece, a warning is given instead against submitting to one's selfish desires as they blind one to what is under one's very nose.[13]

The variations in the role of victim degrade within the fabliaux from those less admirable characters to the purely comical and pitiable fool. Sympathy here does not infer nobility. More often than not, the husband is portrayed as being little brighter than the village fool and in *La sorisete des Etopes* that is exactly what he is: '*Un uilain sot*/an ugly simpleton'. [14]

[12] *Chevalier a la robe vermeille* lines 106-139.
[13] *Ibid.* lines 307-312.
[14] *La sorisete* line 1.

The foolish or ignorant peasant has very little in common socially, intellectually or personally with the noble Bisclavret and the deceived seneschal and yet they share many similarities. For one thread that unites this diverse group of victimised husbands is their implicit trust in their wives. Their role is as a warning to, and perhaps as an expression of underlying fears of the male members of the audience concerning the power and cunning of women.

Each of the texts devoted to the depiction of the husband as victim contains a moral at its conclusion, a didactic lesson for the audience to glean.[15] The messages presented in the *Lais* of Marie de France present general moral advice, summarised by pithy proverbs such as that of *Equitan* in which she warns, *'Tel purcace le mal d'autrui dunt le mals [tut] revert sur lui'*/ ['Evil can easily rebound on him who seeks another's misfortune'].[16] Marie's advice is not particular to the gender of her audience, as she claims that '*Ki bien vodreit reisun entendre, ici purreit ensample prendre*' ['anyone willing to listen to reason could profit from these cautionary tales'].[17] In contrast, the fabliaux contain pointed advice from a male perspective that is frequently misogynist. For example, in summary of the story of the foolish husband in *La sorisete des Estopes*, the author concludes that women are diabolic in nature and unbeatable in their duperies and recommends to all husbands to pay close attention and be constantly on guard.[18] The author of the *Vallet aus .XII. fames* declares at the conclusion to his work that any one who believes his wife will have nothing but pain and sorrow.[19] The few works that attempt to address women more positively, do so only by separating the woman from her sex. This objectification of the female genitalia makes it, rather than the woman herself, the object of fear, violence and hatred.[20]

A pervading sense of fear is found in many of these texts, even, to an extent in Marie's two works. Why were the authors and presumably the audience fearful? Why were female treachery and female sexuality emphasised? Was this fear rational? While the impact of church theology and medical and natural philosophy can explain

[15] See above, pp. 93-112.
[16] *Bisclavret* lines 309-310; Burgess p. 60.
[17] *Bisclavret* lines 307-308.
[18] *La sorisete* lines 213-224.
[19] *Vallet* lines 60-66.
[20] See above, p. 18.

these fears to a degree, a psychological and anthropological approach to the fearful image of the husband, as shown in many of these texts, explains much of the possible origin of that fear.

For while the evidence of the external influences of the Church and of medicine, illustrated in the morals of such works as *La saineress* and *Du con qui fu fez a la besche,* did little to assuage the fears of a husband and, arguably, did much more to perpetuate his confusion and apprehension, perhaps the most powerful force for generating the fear we find in these literary texts comes from the male psyche itself. While a purely psychoanalytical reading of these texts is limiting, the inclusion of this kind of criticism is appropriate as the authors portray cuckoldry as both physically and emotionally related to a man's anxieties regarding his masculine identity and potency.[21] Public sexual betrayal is often a form of public ridicule of the husband, for in losing sexual control of his wife he has also lost his potency as a man. Unable to protect his sexual claim over his wife, the husband is made to feel emasculated, not only sexually, but martially and even socially in comparison to the superior powers of the lover.[22]

The husband, as portrayed in literature, medicine and theological writings, finds himself in a curious dilemma. The demands of masculinity as shown in these works dictate that the man shows potency, often depicted as martial or sexual prowess, and yet the demands of marriage often work to the opposite, in effect feminising the husband by his domesticity and monogamy. There is a constant struggle then to fulfil the requirements of both stations, to be able to answer in the

[21] For a contemporary example of the psychological effect of a wife's adultery on a husband, see the example of Robert de Beaumont and his adulterous wife Elizabeth de Vermandois as depicted by Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, ed and trans D. Greenway (Oxford, 1996), p. 598.

[22] In her work on Kleinian psychology as applied to cuckolded husbands, Alison Sinclair asserts that such 'acts of betrayal in maturity will arguably thus carry powerful resonances of the original discomfort experienced in the Oedipal triangle. . . thus the boy who first fears that he will be made to lose his future potency through being vengefully castrated by his father in retaliation for his attachment to his mother. . . will again fear becoming less potent when placed in conflict with a successful lover'. Though this thesis does not attempt to apply a strictly Freudian approach to the subject of infidelity or sexuality, it is perhaps appropriate to note that certain Freudian scenarios, such as the 'Oedipus complex' do apply remarkably well to many medieval texts, especially the Vulgate cycle in spite of the stark differences in both family structure and gender roles between 12th century society and Freud's time. See S. Freud, *Contributions on the Psychology of Love II* (1912) and 'Medusa's Head' in *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* ed. J. Strachey (London, 1953-74), xviii, 273-4, A. Sinclair, *The Deceived Husband: A Kleinian Approach to the Literature of Infidelity* (Oxford, 1993) and Guerin, *Fall.*

affirmative the question that arises, 'Is it possible to be a husband and a *man*?' Such a struggle is found in several works, such as *Yvain* and is the central theme and plot of Chrétien de Troyes' tale of *Erec and Enide* as a husband attempts to retain his martial potency against accusations of softness and, in effect, femininity. Though Erec proves himself still to be in possession of the masculinity required to remain admirable in his society, he has, as do all husbands, placed himself in a vulnerable position by marrying. Consequently, he must constantly prove his masculinity and struggle against the feminising effects of marriage. A very fine line emerges for the husband to walk, one from which a wife's sexual trespass can easily cause him to topple, for adultery on the part of a wife is a failing on the part of the husband. It is a failing to satisfy or to control and therefore the husband fails not only in the eyes of his wife, but in the eyes of all men.

Though this fear is found in husbands of all social levels and age groups, the fear is greatest of all among the ageing. The psyche of the ageing male was plagued with fears of powerlessness. As Shulahmith Shahar notes in her work on ageing in the Middle Ages, old age became the great equaliser as 'the old body was one and the same throughout the social strata'.[23] Indeed, descriptions of the old, whether of peasants or nobles were alike, characterised by white hair or baldness, weakness of sight, fragility of body and indeed sometimes of mind. Old age not only affected a man's nobility, but attacked his masculinity as well. According to the humoral theory, old age dried the body and with the slowing down of the bodily processes, so a loss of heat incurred.[24] Cold and wet were the marks of a woman's body. Hence, with age came an inevitable feminisation. While many ageing men in literature communicate these tendencies to different extents, perhaps the most famous example of the loss of masculine fire and the feminisation that insues is the Fisher King. Maimed, impotent and ageing, the king's heat and power wane, as reflected even in nature as his land, once fertile and prosperous, withers and dies.[25]

Without the physical ability to prove one's masculinity through martial, or sexual prowess, or with the signs of that ability waning, an ageing husband placed

---

[23] Shahar, *Growing Old*, pp. 36-37.
[24] See above, p. 27
[25] *Perceval* lines 2998-3421, 3466-606, 3654-67, 4652-83, 6372-80, 6413-19.

himself in a vulnerable position, especially when one considers the often large age gap between husbands and wives. Though first marriages were often between persons of roughly equal age, high rates of female mortality, especially when in early childbearing years, often meant remarriage or a series of remarriages at a later age for many husbands. Likewise, betrothal of young girls to older men was not uncommon, even as first marriages, as is shown by the royal marriages of the Empress Matilda, betrothed at the age of eight and married at the age of twelve to the German Emperor Henry V aged twenty eight, and the marriage of Henry III's sister, the princess Eleanor, aged nine, to William the Marshal, twenty five years her senior; William left her a widow at sixteen years of age. The threat of a nine or twelve-year-old girl's sexual demands or power may have been negligible, though the descriptions of the seductive power of the twelve-year-old Isabelle of Angouleme may prove there were exceptions.[26] As is also shown by the above examples, many men did not have to fear the repercussions of the large age gap between themselves and their young wives as they were to die, most often in battle or from disease, in their own sexual and physical prime. There were, however, many examples both literary and real of the threat a young wife presented to an ageing man: Robert de Beaumont's wife, Elizabeth de Vermandois, a wife forty years her husband's junior, left him shortly before his death for the young William de Warrenne.[27] Princess Joan, illegitimate daughter of King John, was married to the Welsh Prince Llywelyn ap Iorwerth, her senior by at least thirty years, who was to discover her in the arms of William de Braose, a young knight he had held captive in his home.[28] Such examples were enough to keep the threatening spectre of these young women's sexual demands and power hovering perhaps too close for many older men who found themselves in a similar situation, married to women in the bloom of their sexuality and in control of households of young and increasingly powerful young men. The threat is not only one of possible sexual infidelity, but of a loss of power, respect and authority for the ageing husband, already at a crucially pivotal point in his life. It is not surprising therefore, that we

[26] See Roger of Wendover, *Flores Historiarum,* I:191-193 and Vincent, N., 'Isabella of Angoulême: John's Jezebel', in *King John: New Interpretations,* ed. S. D. Church (Woodbridge, 1999), pp. 165-219.
[27] Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, p. 598.
[28] See *Brut Y Tywysogian*, 1231.

find cautions in many etiquette and medical texts against inviting such trouble into one's life in old age. [29]

The old husband earns the scorn of society for his lack of sense in both risking his life and his honour and for violating a social taboo as is shown by his frequent vilification in the literary texts of the period. The old husband is often depicted as greedy, though this characteristic is more commonly found in portrayals of villainous husbands than in victims.[30] He may even keep his typically young and beautiful bride confined or imprisoned within a fortress or tower. Such a portrayal was an echo of the feelings of some who viewed his act of remarriage to a young woman as one of selfishness. Many authors reflected similar feelings in their works. For example, the aged husband in *Yonec* is depicted as impotent and his marriage to the young woman seems a useless endeavour and even wasteful. The husband in *Guigemar* likewise fails to produce an heir with his wife and fate removes her not only from him, but from another inappropriate suitor, Meliduc, until she is reunited with her lover – a proper match in social status and age.

Shahar notes the peculiar rise of a particular phenomenon that occurred mainly in Western Europe during this period called the *charivari*, defined as a 'raucous band of percussive instruments with a yowling chorus'.[31] She notes that it became customary for the young men of a village to hold such a *charivari* under the window of an old man or widower who was about to remarry. Shahar describes this custom as 'a hostile ritual, a form of controlled aggression, directed at those who violated certain communal rules'.[32] While Shahar argues that much of this aggression was the result of the economic concerns of the children of the widow or widower from a previous marriage, she also points to the effect such a marriage might have on the community and the effects on the young men who then become the sexual rivals of the husband within that community. The ageing husband in this situation has reintroduced himself into a limited community of unattached possible sexual partners. His economic independence and stability afford him an advantage in finding a partner from the

[29] See above, p. 28
[30] See below, pp. 98, 113.
[31] Shahar, *Growing Old*, p 80.
[32] *Ibidem*

limited pool of young women over whom the young, single men were already engaged in competition.

Such an intrusion no doubt triggered much hostility, exacerbated by its seemingly unnatural and wasteful spirit. As intercourse was chiefly for the purpose of begetting offspring, as firmly stated by Augustine in his argument for the ban of contraception, the Church could claim, as put forth by Gratian, that 'Those who copulate not to procreate offspring but to satisfy lust seem not to be so much spouses as fornicators'.[33] Such a union was seen as unnatural, forbidden even in the laws of Alfonso X of Castile-Leon, as he noted there was little chance of procreation and an even smaller chance of love between the marriage partners.[34] Though not prohibited by Anglo-Norman law, marriage between old men and young women was nonetheless occasionally depicted as a disgusting abomination, a crossing of the species.[35] The ageing husband found little if any support from the medical or religious communities and instead found himself being portrayed more often than not as a repulsive figure that awakened anxiety in the young with his grotesque and humiliating image. Old men were depicted as both pathetic and ludicrous in their attempts to retain their authority and power over their wives. Undignified, their literary counterparts were seen as ugly, hairy, sometimes deformed creatures who coughed, spat and grumbled.[36] No longer able to wield masculine weapons of physical confrontation against their rivals, they utilised the weapons of the weak - manipulation and deceit. Such a depiction was not unique to the twelfth and thirteenth century but was a motif that had been used since antiquity, commonly referred to as the *senex* motif found frequently in Latin works such as Plautus' *Auluaria* or Menander's *Aspic* and in the writings of the Greek authors, Aristophanes and Euripides.[37]

A psychological reading of these texts has lead some critics to believe that such portrayals of the ageing husband were a method to instil fear in men, a subtext of the failure of masculinity in their society or perhaps a form of 'Freudian slip revealing

---

[33] Jacquart and Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine,* p. 90.
[34] Alfonso X, el Sabio, *Las siete partidas*, ed. R. Burns, trans. S. Parsons Scott (Philadelphia, 2001), P.II, tXX, ley 2, p. 69. See Shahar, *Growing Old*, p. 79.
[35] Eustache Deschamps, p. 117.
[36] Shahar, *Growing Old,* pp. 47 and 71.
[37] See R. Finegan, *Women in Aristophanes* (Amsterdam, 1995) and N. S. Rabinowitz, *Anxiety Veiled: Euripides and the Traffic of Women* (London, 1993).

the underlying truths of the nature of masculinity'.[38] It is a convincing argument that claims that many of these texts did function in part as a safety valve – a way for men to voice safely and perhaps find some humour and camaraderie in their fears, thus reiterating the medieval premise that literature should both teach and entertain. The didactic focus of the works was to show how an individual could come to ruin through an unaddressed character flaw. In the examples of the victimised husbands, the most common flaws were implicit faith in one's wife or household, naiveté, and a lack of determination. Many of these flaws, exaggerated to the point of comedy, are penalised by the wife's treachery, but could equally be capitalised upon by others, especially those individuals the victim views as harmless or inferior, as illustrated in several of the fabliaux, such as *Gombert et les deux clercs* and *Le meunier et les deux clercs* wherein a too-trusting host is robbed, or in *Le bouchier d'Abeville* in which a priest is tricked into giving up one of his own sheep.

Villains

If one of the lessons that the tales of the victimised husbands was to impart to men was a healthy fear of the power and possible duplicity of others, and especially of women, then the lesson of the villainous husband would be a warning against becoming irrationally obsessed by such fear. As these tales reveal, such intense fear, jealousy and distrust of one's wife often becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy rather than a protection. The wives, often abused or unjustly treated as prisoners within their homes, or even in remote, isolated compounds, become willing participants in adulterous affairs that promise much needed attention and/or freedom.

In the analysis of victimised husbands, there was shown to be a diverse group of men, from the noble to the foolish, who won the audience's support based on the presence of one or more sympathetic qualities of innocence, righteousness and admiration. In discussion of the villainous husband, it is the distinct lack of these qualities that alienates the audience and allows all support to be given to the wives and/or lovers. The extent to which the opposite qualities of jealousy, deceitfulness and

[38] Sinclair, *Husbands,* p. 17.

greed are present within the characters of these husbands determines the measure of the audience's apathy or hatred of his figure. As previously discussed, the villainous husband is often presented as an old, often ugly, excessively jealous man who, through neglect or abuse often drives his wife to make a cuckold of him. A particularly appropriate example of just such a depiction is found in the fabliau *La feme qui cunquie son baron* in which a beautiful young wife is married to a particularly abusive, physically repulsive old man.[39] In an effort both to avenge her suffering and experience the pleasure she has missed, the wife takes on a young lover. When the husband returns from his errand early one day however, the young wife flees into the cellar where she cunningly overturns and uncorks a cask of her husband's wine, stopping the hole with her thumb.[40] She cries for help and her husband rushes to find her trying to stop the leak. In a scene replete with sexual overtones and double entendres, the wife suggests that he use his thumb to stop up the hole while she searches for the right plug.[41] And thus, she is able to finish her lovemaking upstairs where her lover still waits, with no risk of interruption. The wife's bawdy joke that she must go find 'a plug that fits' again supports the argument that an ageing husband and a young wife are a physically inappropriate and unsatisfying match.[42] The author's disclosure of unwarranted physical abuse of the wife combined with the *senex* motif used at the beginning of his tale automatically sets the audience against him, making his wife's treachery, if not a fitting punishment, then an excellent and well-deserved prank.

Sexually, physically and emotionally abusive husbands are not uncommon in these works. While most authors have little difficulty portraying a physical beating of a woman by a non-villainous husband in retribution for her shaming him by her adulterous act, unwarranted abuse is not often condoned and is one of the characteristics of the villainous husband. For example, the beatings of the young wife in *la feme qui cunquie son baron* prove to be a powerful impetus for her to pay back her husband with shame.[43] The spiteful action of the husband in Marie de France's

---

[39] See above, p. 98

[40] *La feme qui cunquie son baron* lines 35-47.

[41] *Ibid.* lines 48-64.

[42] *Ibid.* line 64..

[43] *Ibid.* lines 1-12.

Laüstic who, out of sheer malice, wrings the neck of his wife's beloved nightingale and throws its dead body at her, splattering her with blood, immediately casts both the wife and her gentile lover in a sympathetic light.[44] The sexual pimping of the husband in the fabliaux *Estormi,* who forces his wife to seduce three priests so he may rob them of their gold while they are otherwise busy likewise strips the husband of his honour more so than the sexual dalliance of his wife could ever begin to do.[45] The violent and unsavoury actions of these men are often joined with the *senex* motif, effectively removing all audience sympathy from the husband as well as pardoning the wife in her decision to take a lover. These men represent the lowest end of the spectrum of villainous husbands.

The villain is not always characterised as a physically abusive man. The most common depiction of the villainous husband is of a man given to often eccentric jealousy and guilty of marrying in old age - an offence against both convention and nature. In Marie de France's *Yonec*, the husband, whom we are told is a very old man, takes a beautiful young wife to beget an heir. Jealousy inspires him to seal her up in a tower with only his unwed, elderly sister as company.[46] Likewise, the husband in another of Marie's lais, *Guigemar*, is described as

Li sires ki la mainteneit
Mult fu velz humme e femme aveit,
Une dame de haut parage,
Franche, curteise, bele e sage;
Gelus esteit a demesure;
Far ceo purportoit sa nature.
Ke tut li veil seient gelus –
Mult heit chascun kë il seit cous –
Tels [est] de eage le trespas.
Il ne la guardat mie a gas.
En un vergier suz le dongun,
La out un clos tut envirun;
de vert marbre fu li muralz,
Mult par esteit espés e halz;
N'i out fors une seule entree,
cele fu noit e jur guardee.
De l'altre part fu clos de mer;
Nuls ne pout eissir në entrer. . .
La fu la dame enclose e mise
Une pucele a sun servise
Li aveit sis sires bailliee,

[44] *Laüstic* lines 121-156.
[45] *Estormi* lines 67-68.
[46] *Yonec* lines 11-36.

Ki mult ert franche e enseigniee. . .
Uns vielz prestres blancs e floriz
Guardout la clef de cel postiz;
Les plus bas membres out perduz:
Autrement ne fust pas creüz

[A very old man whose wife was a lady of high birth. She was noble, courtly, beautiful, and wise, and he was exceedingly jealous, as befitted his nature, for all old men are jealous and hate to be cuckolded. Such is the perversity of age. He did not take lightly the task of guarding her. In the garden at the foot of the keep was an enclosure, with a thick high wall made of green marble. There was only a single point of entry, guarded day and night. The sea enclosed it on the other side, so it was impossible to get in or out . . . In this room the lady was imprisoned. To serve her, the lord had provided her with a noble and intelligent maiden, who was his niece and . . . An old priest with hoary-white hair guarded the key to the gate; he had lost his lower members, otherwise he would not have been trusted].[47]

Despite all the precautions taken by both these husbands, their wives eventually encounter young men whom they take as lovers. Interestingly, both lais unite the young lovers by means of magic. The wounded Guigemar discovers a fantastical boat which takes him to the young wife's isolated compound, and the lover of the young bride in *Yonec* is himself a king of a fairy kingdom and visits his lover in the form of a bird in order to reach her in her tower.[48] Fate has taken a role in both these tales to correct what was once perverse and unnatural. Divine interference does not always aid lovers and some decide to take matters into their own hands. An example of such is found in Marie's lai *Milun.* The tale opens with the two young lovers facing the problem of pregnancy out of wedlock. Milun decides to send his lover to his sister to give birth in secrecy while he goes abroad to seek fame and money as a mercenary in order to marry the girl and claim his son.[49] While he is gone, the girl's father marries her off to an older, wealthy nobleman.[50] When Milun returns he discovers his loss and is forced to bide his time until an opportunity arises to be with or speak to his beloved. Tired of waiting, Milun, with the support of his now grown son, sets out to murder the husband.[51] Providentially, word reaches him that the man has died of natural causes and he quickly sets out to marry his now wealthy widow-lover.[52] Such a tale may have instilled fear into the hearts of many older husbands in the audience, but would indeed satisfy the dreams of the younger

[47] *Guigemar* lines 209-258.
[48] *Guigemar* lines 150-208 ; *Yonec* lines 105-144.
[49] *Milun* lines 1-122.
[50] *Ibid.* lines 123-52.
[51] *Ibid.* lines 469-502
[52] *Ibid.* lines 503-532.

men there who were seeking just such an inheritance of pleasure and stability that marrying a wealthy widow or heiress would provide.

A husband's excessive jealousy can trigger a violent response in others. In *Milun* it motivated the young lover to contemplate murder. In the fabliau *Aloul*, the old husband's excessive jealousy over his wife, not even allowing her to go to church without him at her side, sets up a challenge or power struggle between himself and several young men, culminating in the rape of his wife by the local priest, the only man with access to her.[53]

It is most interesting that of the forty two cuckolded husbands of the *lais*, fables and fabliaux that are here examined, one resists categorisation. The husband of *L'enfant qui fu remis au soleil*, stands out for the difficulty one has in deciphering his role. The tale relates the story of a merchant's wife, who when left alone for a long period of time, falls in love with a young man and eventually becomes pregnant.[54] She is deserted by her lover and, in fear of her husband's righteous anger, attempts to convince him that their child was a gift from God who allowed her to conceive miraculously from the falling snow one night when she was especially grieved at his absence. The husband agrees it is a miracle, but harbours doubt in his heart.[55] One day, when the child is older, he takes the boy with him on a long business journey to a foreign land. There he sells the boy to fellow traders and returns to his wife alone. When asked as to their son's whereabouts, he replies,

> *Dame, selonc ce que l'en voit*
> *doit cascuns le siecle mener;*
> *quar en trop grant duel demener*
> *ne peut il avoir nul conquest.*
> *Savez vous que avenu m'est*
> *enz el païs ou j'ai esté?*
> *Par un chaut jor el tens d'esté,*
> *ja estoit miedis passez,*
> *et li chauz ert molt trespassez,*
> *lors erroie je et voz fiex,*
> *lez moi. . .*
> *deseure un mont qui tant fu hauz;*
> *li solaus, clers, ardanz et chauz,*
> *sor nous ardanz raiz descendi,*
> *que sa clarté chier nous vendi,*
> *que vos fil remetre covint*

[53] *Aloul* lines 24-99.
[54] *L'enfant qui fu remis au soleil* lines 1-18.
[55] *Ibid.* lines 46-55.

> *de l'ardeur qui soleil vint.*
> *A ce sai bien et aperçoif*
> *que vostre filz fu fez de noif,*
> *et por ce pas ne m'en merveil,*
> *s'il est remis el chaut soleil.*
>
> [Lady, each person ought to get along in the world according to what he sees, for in too much mourning there can be no gain. Do you know what happened to me in the country where I have been? It was a hot day in summer, a little past noon, and the heat was excessive. There I was wondering with your son beside me. . . Upon a very high mountain; the sun, clear, burning and hot, sent down such burning rays upon us that its brightness made us pay dearly, because your son was forced to melt from the heat that came from the sun. From this I really see and understand that your son was made out of snow, and, therefore, I am not surprised if he melted in the sun].[56]

Mortified, the wife realises that the husband has known of her treachery all along. Several unique aspects of this story make it difficult to categorise. At first, the husband would appear to be a victim. His wife, caught in her treachery appears to have duped him by an impossible tale that he seemingly accepts. He is here depicted in much the same way as the husband of *La sorisete*, who goes looking for his wife's misplaced genitalia under baskets and in the field while the wife, her lover and the audience have a bit of fun at his expense. However, the wife is not portrayed as the lusty fabliaux adulteress. Rather the beginning of the story more closely resembles a lai.[57] The husband has abandoned his wife who has fallen in love, not merely lust, with another man who again abandons her. Here he more closely resembles the classic villainous husband. His final horrific deed of selling his wife's son is abuse on the grandest level. There is no humour in this tale. The moral at the end is merely that the wife got what she deserved for deceiving and hurting her husband so badly, but unlike all the other works here considered, there is no victor in the act of vengeance. While the husband does not earn the audience's sympathy, he likewise does not earn their hatred, or perhaps, he actually earns them both, for what is presented is a rounded though extremely brief description of a husband who is both villain and victim. It is not a *topos* often seen in the shorter works, especially the fabliaux, as often the limitations and nature of the genres do not allow for deeper character development that the sheer length of the prose and longer verse works permit, and so instead standard motifs or characters are used. This one work acts as a

---

[56] *L'enfant qui fu remis au soleil* lines 114-134.
[57] See Appendix I for definitions of genre.

bridge between the often one-sided portrayal of the husband in the short works and the more complex and arguably more realistic portrayal in the lengthier works of a deceived husband who is both villain and victim.

Hybrids

The two husbands in particular who have been developed as this hybrid of motifs, both victim and, to varying degrees, villain, are perhaps the most famous cuckolds of medieval and indeed all western literature, the Kings Arthur and Mark. Both characters have been addressed in both longer verse and prose works wherein they enjoy this duality of characterisation, and in shorter works, such as the *Folies de Tristan*, the lais of *Cor* and *Mantel,* and Marie de France's *Chevrefoil.* Interestingly, in these shorter works, the two men are portrayed only in their villainous forms, lending strength to the argument that it is the genre that determines the extent of this dual characterisation rather than a question of authorial skill.

Arthur

It may at first seem unthinkable that King Arthur should ever be cast as a villain and indeed that is not the premise of this discussion. Rather what will be shown is the effect the subtle use of several qualities usually attributed to the villain, including rash behaviour, violence and powerlessness or defeat, has upon the depiction of an otherwise victimised husband.

Like his wife, Arthur's character in the lais is depicted as less than noble. In both lais to treat his character, *Cor* and *Mantel,* his wife's adultery is exposed in front of his court by means of magical gifts: in *Cor,* a magical horn from which only the husbands of faithful wives or lovers of faithful mistresses who are not themselves jealous can drink successfully, and *Mantel* in which a magical cloak which will only fit a loyal lover or wife. Interestingly, the test of *Mantel* does not include the second clause relating failure to a husband's jealousy as well as to a wife's infidelity. Arthur himself seems to have forgotten that proviso, for when the vessel spills, he leaps up and physically attacks Guinevere in front of his court, until physically restrained by Gawain and soothed by Yvain.

Li rois Arzurs le prist,
A sa bouche le mist,
Kar beivre le quida;
Mes sour lui le versa
Countreval dek' as pez
En fu li rois irrez.
Dist Arzurs, 'Ore est pis.'
Un canivet ad pris;
El quer souz la peitrine
Vout ferir la reïne,
Quant le toli Gauwain,
Kadoains e Iuwain,
Entre eus treis e Giflet
Houstent le canivet.
Hors des poinz li ousterent;
Durement le blamerent.[58]

[King Arthur took it [the horn] and put it to his mouth, thinking to drink, but it overturned, spilling as far down as his feet. The king was furious. 'That bodes ill', said Arthur. He grabbed a knife, wishing to strike the queen in the heart under her breast when, in an attempt to disarm him, Gawaine, Cadwan and Yvain, the three of them together with Giflet, hit the knife away, greatly reprimanding him].

The attack on Guinevere is much more reminiscent of a scene one would find in the fabliaux where physical beatings are common payment for a wife's infidelity and yet also indicate a certain degree of inadequacy on the part of the husband who must strike out at the woman in the absence or in fear of the lover. The heroic Arthur cast as a weak, belligerent husband presents a satirical element and again emphasises the 'world upside down' motif seen in works such as Chrétien's *Chevalier de Charrette*, in which characters of authority often find themselves powerless. There is no nobility to the character of Arthur as husband in this work; rather he emerges as the lowest level of villain - a common wife-beater. It is only in the lengthier works to address both these men that we find a more balanced view of the king.

Analysis of King Arthur's image and role as a husband is only possible in works dating from the beginning of the twelfth century. Prior to Chrétien's *Le Chevalier de la Charrete,* Arthur is known only in his capacity as king and knight maker.[59] There is no mention of his character as husband until Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*. It is within this work that the first stone is

[58]*Cor* lines 291-306.
[59] See B. N. Sargent-Baur, 'Dux Bellorum/Rex Militum/Roi Faineant: The Transformation of Arthur in the Twelfth Century', in *King Arthur: A Casebook,* ed. E. D.Kennedy (New York, 1996), pp. 29-44 and E. Peters, *The Shadow King: Rex Inutilis in Medieval Law and Literature, 751-1327* (New Haven, 1970), pp. 170-209.

cast against Guinevere's character when she is accused of collaborating with her nephew to seize power from her husband. Though the tale is probably a borrowed seasonal myth or abduction motif from the Celtic sources,[60] Geoffrey has added a peculiar twist by relating that when informed of her nephew's likely defeat, she 'was forthwith smitten with despair, and fled from York unto Caerleon, where she purposed thenceforth to lead a chaste life among the nuns, and did take the veil of their order'.[61] The 'despair' exhibited by the Queen implies an active involvement with her abductor and her flight becomes a confession of guilt for both bigamy and treason. It is quite likely that the germ of her bad reputation was planted here by Geoffrey who needed a cause for the fall of a ruler as extraordinarily distinguished as Arthur. As Parry and Caldwell argue in their study of Geoffrey's work, 'A hero as great as Arthur could not be conceived as failing except by treachery, and so Geoffrey introduced Mordred', and thus made the king a cuckold.[62] Arthur is not, however, fully thrown into his role as cuckold in an adulterous triangle until Chrétien's writing some thirty years later in the *Chevalier de la Charrete.* From that moment on, however, Arthur's personal life would far eclipse his public one.

Though perhaps not yet popular as the husband of the adulterous Guinevere, Arthur was no stranger to the medieval audience. In fact, as shown in Geoffrey's work, the audience were well aquainted with his persona in the twelfth century and indeed he is accepted as an established powerful figure in the very Welsh triad in which we first learn of Tristan and Iseult.[63] There is reason to believe that Arthur was perceived as an historical figure as early as the sixth century in the writings of Gildas.[64] He had attained almost mythological status by the time of the writing of the *Historia Brittonum,* possibly in the ninth century, where his deeds as *dux bellorum,*

---

[60] See Appendix I.

[61] Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Historia Regum Britanniae,*(xi, 1).

[62] J.J. Parry and R. A. Caldwell, 'Geoffrey of Monmouth', in *Arthurian literature in the Middle Ages* ed R. S. Loomis (Oxford, 1959), p. 85.

[63] This is triad no. 26 in Peniarth 16 collection. For a complete study of these manuscripts, see J. Rhys and J. Gwenogvryn Evans, *Text of the Mabinogion from the Red Book of Hergest (*Oxford, 1887), p. 307 and R. Bromwich, 'The Welsh Triads', *Arthurian literature in the Middle Ages* ed R. S. Loomis (Oxford, 1959), pp. 44-51.

[64] Gildas, *De Excitio et Conquestu Britanniae*, ed. and trans. M. Winterbottom, *Gildas: The ruin of Britain and other works* (London, 1978; 2002), pp.13-79. For debate concerning the genesis of the Arthur legend, see E. Faral, *La Légende Arthurienne* (Paris, 1929) and P. Korrel, *An Arthurian Triangle* (Netherlands, 1984).

his religious piety and martial prowess are incomparable and earn him a hero's status. [65] The impact of historical texts upon the literary works to address Arthur's character was the establishment of a framework detailing the events of Arthur's life, both his rise and his eventual downfall by means of his son/nephew Mordred's treachery and his wife's infidelity. Thus the writers were able to enjoy freedom of style and variation of theme but within an established plot. Similar to the Tristan legend, the *roman a tiroir* or 'chest of drawers' narrative form was employed in order to allow insertion of new independent episodes or deletion of minor, non-plot related ones within a structure with definite parameters. In this type of structure subtler devices of repetition, comparison and gradual revelation of character must be used in order not to change or challenge accepted history and to keep the characters within their roles in order to maintain the previously established plotline's function. Such a task entails keeping the lover, wife and husband all in sympathetic balance, never allowing one to dip too dangerously low or one to emerge at too great a height that would endanger the audience's sympathy for the others. Despite the stricture imposed, the same tools, the same motifs used in each of the previous case studies analysed are implemented here with the necessary subtlety and timing to manipulate the character of the king within the tight confines of the rather rigid tale.

The first work to introduce Arthur as a husband in an adulterous triangle is Chrétien de Troyes' mid-twelfth century work *Le Chevalier de la Charrete.* It was not Chrétien's intention in his work to narrate the destruction of Arthur's kingdom by the lovers' treachery. He clearly states in the introduction to his work that it is a romance that he intends to tell, a tale of courtly love the meaning and matter of which have been given him by his patroness, Marie, Countess of Champagne:

> *Puis que ma dame de Champaigne*
> *vialt que romans a feire anpraigne*
> *je l'anprendrai molt volentiers. . .*
> *Del Chevalier de la Charette*
> *comance Crestiens son livre;*
> *matiere et san li done et livre*

[65] The dating and authorship of the *Historia Brittonum* remains highly debated. For a comprehensive study of the work and its dating see J. D. Bruce, *The Evolution of Arthurian Romance* (Baltimore, 1923), pp. 6-9; F. Lot, *Nennius et l'historia Brittonum: étude critique, suivie d'une édition de diverses versions de ce texte* (Paris, 1934). For recent views, see D. Dumville, 'Nennius and the *Historia'*, *Studia Celtica*, 10-1 (1975-6), 78-95 at 94 and idem.,'The Historical Value of the *Historia Brittonum*', *Arthurian Literature* 6 (1986), pp.1-26.

> *la contesse, et il s'antrement*
> *de panser si que rien n'i met*
> *fors sa painne et s'antancion.*
>
> [Since my lady of Champagne wishes me to begin a romance, I shall do so willingly. . . About the Knight of the Cart; the source and the meaning are furnished and given him by the countess, and he strives carefully to add nothing but his effort and diligence].[66]

Avoiding the inherent risk to Arthur's authority and character that an affair between the queen and Lancelot in Camelot would create, as seen quite clearly in the Tristan/Mark/Iseult triangle, Chrétien locates the bulk of the narrative, including the scene of the adulterous affair, away from Arthur's court, in the mysterious land of Gorre, a kingdom outside the laws and authority of Logres and hence the perfect setting for a tale concerned with the theme of extra-marital love without social dishonour. This removal, however, also limits the contact between Arthur and the audience, his role as husband only making rare appearances at the beginning and end of the piece. Yet what we see of his character here reveals much concerning his newly displayed private persona as husband and man rather than knight-maker and illustrates the qualities later authors of the Prose Lancelot developed to help shape and provide momentum for the fatal Arthur/Guinevere/Lancelot triangle.

At the opening of the tale, the reader is introduced to a court in disarray, quite unlike the harmony portrayed in Chrétien's *Erec*. The action unfolds on Ascension Day when Arthur's court is assembled to feast at Caerleon. The meal is interrupted however, by the arrival of the evil knight Maleagant who openly challenges the king in front of his household.[67] While the reader of Arthurian romance would perhaps expect such an adventure to begin thus, what follows is a radical departure from the expected *topos*. What Chrétien here presents in such a characteristic setting, is a world of inverted loyalties and authority in which, from the opening episode, the reality presented is the exact opposite of the reality the reader expects. This reversal, often referred to as a 'world upside down' *topos*,[68] is first revealed in Maleagant's opening speech to Arthur in which he performs gross breaches of etiquette and honour:

---

[66] *Charrete* lines 1-28.
[67] *Charrete* lines 44-79.
[68] See E.R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages,* trans. W. R. Trask (London, 1953), pp. 94-98, and D. J. Shirt '*Le Chevalier de la Charette*: A World Upside Down?', *Modern Language Review* (1981), 801-822.

Atant ez vos en chevalier
qui vint a cort molt acesmez,
de totes ses armes armez.
Li chevaliers a tel conroi
s'an vint jusque devant le roi
la ou antre ses barons sist;
nel salua pas, einz li dist:
Rois Artus, j'ai en ma prison
de ta terre et de ta meison
chevaliers, dames et puceles;
mes ne t'an di pas les noveles
por ce que jes te vuelle randre,
ençois te voel dire et aprandre
que tu n'as force ne avoir
par quoi tu les puisses avoir.
Et saches bien qu'ainsi morras
que ja aidier ne lor porras.

[There appeared before them a knight, who came to court equipped and fully armed for battle. Outfitted in such a manner, the knight came forward to where the king was seated among his barons. Instead of the customary greeting, he declared: 'King Arthur, I hold imprisoned from your land and household knights, ladies and maidens; I do not tell you this because I intend to return them to you; rather I wish to tell and inform you that you have neither wealth enough nor power by which you might assure their release. And know you well that you will die before you are able to aid them'].[69]

Immediately striking is the language used here. Maleagant speaks to Arthur in the informal *tu* form of the second person singular pronoun; this is a familiarity not even permitted or exercised in the speech of those closest to the king, including his beloved nephew, Gawain nor his queen and therefore is shocking in the speech of an unknown knight. Secondly, the very challenge he sets forth to the court is worded as a threat, addressing as no other romance had before, Arthur's own mortality when Maleagant declares: 'And know you well that you will die before you are able to aid them'. What is perhaps most shocking of all, however, is Arthur's reaction to such an ignominious threat, for Arthur not only accepts this treatment, but acknowledges this defeat and challenge to his power and authority with surprising meekness.[70] Following this encounter, Kay capitalises on the king's largesse and demands that Arthur grant his request which is later revealed to be the opportunity to face Maleagant as court champion. The image of Arthur here is that of a man incapable of exercising power or authority and is, for the first time, depicted much in the same fashion as the other cuckolds here analysed. Indeed, in this opening passage Arthur

[69] *Charette* lines 44-60.
[70] *Ibid.* lines 61-64.

expresses several traits consistent with the image of victimised husband. First, his inability or lack of desire to confront Maleagant is consistent with the image of the ageing man who cannot defend his honour against a younger rival. This image is further solidified by Maleagant's comment regarding Arthur's mortality which not only implies that the king is powerless to fulfill his responsibility to protect his people but also credits such inability to Arthur's advanced age and challenges his immortal image. Second, Arthur's reckless largesse offered to Kay is typical of the foolish or naive husband, traits never before attributed to the king, proving harmful to his character as his foolish generosity costs him his wife. Unable to take back the boon he has granted Kay without further breach of his honour, Arthur is forced to watch as his queen is led away into the forest by the seneschal, whom all at court realise will fail in his challenge of the foreign knight. Interestingly, Guinevere's actions are respectful and blame appears to fall not upon the king, but upon Kay who is decried as being proud, rash and mad.[71] Aside from a whispered prayer to her lover whom she affirms would never have let these events transpire,[72] she in no way rebukes her husband. In fact, both queen and lover never express the least amount of hostility or disrespect towards Arthur. Rather, all such feelings are instead directed at Maleagant, the aspiring lover. Chrétien does not pursue explicit criticism of Arthur beyond these opening scenes and indeed restores Arthur's honour at the conclusion and turns the 'upside down' world back aright. The king is here presented in a more favourable light, his court is again splendid, and he is seen aiding to settle the dispute between Lancelot and Maleagant and is referred to again in the proper *vous* by Maleagant in their second meeting.[73] It is most interesting to note that while Arthur's initial weaknesses are made clear and have some negative effects upon his honour, the greatest besmirchment of his honour, his wife's infidelity, is never used against him and in fact, is never mentioned again within the text. This silence helps illustrate that Chrétien's focus in the work was the exploration and definition of a courtly love relationship, not a tale of Arthur's shame or downfall. The narrative progresses to a crescendo which is not the revelation of Guinevere's infidelity or a confrontation

[71] *Charrete* line 187.
[72] *Charrete* lines 209-211.
[73] *Charrete* line 6163.

between husband and lover, but Lancelot's evolution as a courtly lover; his final transformation is rewarded by the physical consummation of the love affair.[74] As shown, Chrétien's distancing of the affair from Arthur's court not only preserves Arthur's honour, but discourages any criticism of the lovers' actions. By not mentioning the affair outside its context, it too becomes relegated to the shadowy fantasy kingdom of Gorre and thus has no place in Arthur's kingdom. And yet, while it is appropriately forgotten within the narrative, this affair must have been foremost in the minds of Chrétien's audience. What Chrétien accomplished in his work was revolutionary; he, if only briefly, made Arthur mortal, weak and, however noble, a cuckold. Whatever his intentions, Chrétien's work established a lead that later writers were only too eager to adopt and further develop.

The authors of later works, especially the thirteenth century Vulgate Cycle, continue to explore Arthur's character and establish his image not through his actions or narrative asides, but like the *Charrete*, expose his victimous and villainous attributes through his relationships with his family and household. Arthur is introduced in the Vulgate as the centre of a splendid Easter court, acting as gracious host over a tournament and feast. His hospitality, already widely praised, is extended not only to the physical care of his large court and guests, but he attends to their emotional comforts as well. He carefully seats the winner of a joust at his own table, not directly across from the king himself, as this would intimidate the knight, but just to the side of centre and alone on his half of the table, to encourage all to talk with the young man, rather than limit him to the men seated at his side.[75] This interest in his knights is one of the most characteristic qualities of Arthur. His role as a knight-maker and loyal liege lord is magnified greatly in the cycle which casts him as a father figure for his knights. This image is enhanced both by the simple fact that virtually all contact and relationships are with people of a younger generation and by his tender ministrations to his knights. It is not unusual to find instances of Arthur gazing proudly upon a fine young knight in a fatherly fashion or boasting on behalf of one of his knights.[76] This role as a father-figure is unique to Arthur out of all the

[74] *Charrete* lines 4499-4532.
[75] Sommer III:107-111.
[76] Sommer III: 108.

husbands here analysed. It is not only interesting, but perhaps significant that Arthur should not only act as father to his knights but is a father, to not only Mordred, but to several bastard sons. Impotence is the mark of the cuckold and in his role as father to natural and 'adopted' sons, Arthur distances himself from one powerful weakness associated with the betrayed husband and hence retains his masculine authority.

It is in this fatherly role, however, that Arthur's greatest weaknesses are exposed. Arthur's extensive, and at time excessive, largesse is consistent with the image of a doting father, but is not the mark of a wise king. Arthur is capable of foreseeing disastrous or dishonourable consequences of actions, as clearly shown when he meets the Wounded Knight and refuses to let any member of his court accept the knight's challenge because he realises that no one could fulfil the knight's terms without enduring shame or death.[77] However, when granting boons to his 'sons' Arthur displays much less wisdom and foresight. Two outstanding examples of such instances of rash and regrettable largesse are in the form of grants made to two of his favourite members of the household, his nephew Gawain and his seneschal, Kay. Borrowed from Chrétien's *Charrete,* the episode in which Kay executes his reckless and somewhat devious plan to win back the prisoners of Maleagant by further risking the queen's liberty is only made possible by Arthur's wish to appease him and hence naively grant him any favour he should ask, without stipulation.[78] The ill-conceived promise leads not to honour or freedom for the prisoners, but to the queen's abduction by the victorious Maleagant, to Kay's near mortal wounding and imprisonment and, most significantly, to Arthur's shame. Arthur's grant to Gawain leads not only to shame, but the eventual destruction of the Round Table. Motivated by immeasurable grief for his brothers, whom Lancelot's men have mistakenly killed in the rescue of the queen from her execution, Gawain begs Arthur to make war on the sons of Ban.[79] It is a mistake Arthur only realises too late in the final battle, where he reproves his nephew, declaring:

> *Gauuain vos maues tel chose fait emprendre ou vous naurois ia honor. Cest de la guerre que nos auons commenchie encontre le parente le roi ban. . . Iou vous di bien que nos i porons plus [tost] perdre que gaaignier. . . Ore doinst diex quil ne vos*

[77] Sommer III:119-131.
[78] Sommer IV:157.
[79] Sommer VI:290.

en meschie. Car certes ie noi onques mais si grant paor de mescheance comme ie ai orenedroit. Car ie voi par decha le tort et par dela droit.

['Gawain, you have led me to undertake something from which we can derive no honour; I'm talking about the war that you've begun against the kinsmen of Ban. . . I'm telling you we have more to lose than to gain here. . .Now may God grant that tragedy not befall us, because I've never feared a disaster as much as I do now, seeing that right is on their side and wrong is on ours'].[80]

This granting of Gawain's request for vengeance is representative of the king's greatest weakness - Arthur's myopic love for Gawain for whom he risks his kingdom and life. While Gawain does reciprocate this love, acting as Arthur's right hand at court, attempting to rescue the queen from Kay's botched challenge, fighting at the king's side in battle, and attempting to shield his uncle from the emotional pain and shame of his wife's affair, in the end, his selfish desires surpass his regard for his uncle as he relentlessly pushes Arthur into an unwinnable war.[81] Arthur's attachment to his nephew remains his most intense bond, proving even stronger than his love for himself or his wife.[82] Indeed, Gawain's death almost proves fatal to Arthur. We find,

Moult est li rois Artus corecies de ceste morte. Et tant en a grant pesance quil ne seit quil doie dire. Si se pasme tant souent que li baron en ont grant doutance quuil ne mure entre lor mains. . . Tot le ior fu li d[u]els el chastel si grans que len noist pas dieu tounant.

[King Arthur was very distraught over this death, and he felt so much anguish that he did not know what to say. He fainted from grief so often that his barons were afraid he would die in their arms. . . All that day, the grief in the castle was so great that God's thunder could not have been heard][83]

Arthur's heavy reliance on Gawain and indeed on all his knights is symptomatic of another of his great weaknesses, his lack of spirituality. Although one finds Arthur presiding over a splendid Easter court at the beginning of the tale, he is not presented as a spiritual character. He regularly hears mass as early as possible, not for any spiritual means, but in order to participate in the hunt.[84] Later he suffers moral castigation from a wise man who denounces him as 'the worst of all sinners'

[80] Sommer VI:328-337; Lacy IV:138-141.
[81] Sommer VI:247-259; Sommer IV: 159; Sommer III:153 and 293-307; Sommer VI:269.
[82] Sommer VI:328-337 and 355. Arthur's willingness to put aside Guinevere is shown not only in the False Guinevere episode (Sommer IV:72-86) but is also evident in his response to the Queen's plea for help when faced with rape and possible forced remarriage to Mordred wherein the king marches back to face his son, not to avenge the queen's honour or guarantee her safety, of which he never enquires, but to reclaim his kingdom. Sommer VI:348-355.
[83] Sommer VI:356-7; Lacy IV: 148.
[84] Sommer III:119.

for neglecting his God-given kingdom, ignoring his role as impartial judge and failing to protect the poor and weak in favour of his court and pleasures.[85] Ultimately the most poignant of rebukes comes from the Grail Maiden who brings news of the Grail's arrival in Arthur's court declaring it to be 'the greatest honour ever to befall a knight of Brittany', and in the same breath turns to Arthur and declares, 'yet it will not be for you, but another'.[86] Unlike Lancelot who had been considered worthy of the Grail until he lost his chastity in his adulterous affair with the queen, Arthur had never been considered for the honour. Arthur is lacking an entire spiritual dimension. Throughout the Vulgate, and especially within the *Queste*, there is a growing tendency to judge characters not only on a chivalrous but on a spiritual plane as well. Those, like Lancelot, who fail in this spiritual arena are debarred from realising their highest human potentials. Here also is Arthur's greatest failing. By relying on human support instead of spiritual sustenance, the great king has cut himself off from an unwavering source of power and instead finds himself alone, his power and prestige greatly diminished without his knights and the society of the Round Table. It would seem appropriate if he, like Guinevere or Lancelot, ended his days in a holy life, reflecting on the spiritual matters he had neglected in his youth. Arthur's character is consistent, though, and there is no last minute conversion to a spiritual life. Arthur finds motivation in revenge rather than repentance and embarks on a suicidal mission to destroy Mordred.

Thus far Arthur's failings have been the shortcomings of a king and a man, not so much as a husband. Arthur's degeneration as a husband is a long and carefully-controlled process marked by three crucial episodes that function to both degrade Arthur's character and advance Guinevere's commitment to Lancelot. The first of these stages begins in the Galehaut war. Though Guinevere and Lancelot are by this time strongly attracted to one another, they have not yet consummated their love and Arthur has done nothing to spoil his marital happiness. It is not until confronted by the wise man on the third day of the battle that the author(s) brings to light Arthur's martial and moral failings. Arthur's troops are outnumbered, demoralised by the appearance of the seemingly invincible red knight who fights for Galehaut, and begin

[85] Sommer III:214-224.
[86] Sommer VI:11.

to desert Arthur, who is powerless to stop them.[87] Not only does Arthur emerge as Lancelot's martial inferior, he also becomes Lancelot's spiritual inferior with the appearance of the wise man who accuses the king of leading a slothful life of luxury at the expense of the poor and helpless, abusing his kingdom and people thereby earning the enmity of God. This double humiliation is the first serious blow to Arthur's character, followed quickly by another attack on his character, this time on his masculinity and prowess as a lover. Shortly after the battle of Saxon Rock Arthur succumbs to the charms of the young Saxon maiden, Gamille.[88] The author here pairs the development of Arthur's relationship with Gamille with that of the growing love between Lancelot and Guinevere. The result is disastrous. For while Lancelot and the Queen display a refined love capable of exalting them to their personal best, Arthur's actions are lustful and degrading. He is motivated by sexual intercourse rather than love, acts not with a lover's discretion but stupidity which leads to his imprisonment as he falls into Gamille's trap. Caught with both his guard and pants down, Arthur is incapable of defending himself when surprised in his lover's bed by forty of her household knights and must await rescue from his wife's lover.[89] Arthur is shown to have a debased and shameful concept of love and though provenly not impotent, he is shown here to be incompetent.

The third episode, that of the 'False Guinevere' is Arthur's greatest betrayal of his wife when once again Arthur is duped and imprisoned by a woman, this time led to believe she is his actual wife. This deception is not made through magic, but through flattery of Arthur's sexual prowess and nightly consummation of the relationship that eventually leads Arthur to forget the true Guinevere and believe the ruse of the impostor.[90] Arthur's character is further degraded at Guinevere's prejudiced trial when he refuses to recognise or hear the knights and members of the household who would take an oath to the Queen's legitimacy, thus ignoring his duty to act as a fair and impartial judge.[91] Arthur, who is now being drugged and bewitched with spells, cannot be held entirely accountable for his next action, which

[87] Sommer III:220.
[88] Sommer III:408.
[89] Sommer III:410-414.
[90] Sommer IV:50.
[91] Sommer IV:56.

is to call for the Queen's execution and yet the cruelty of the punishment he devises is shocking in its violence. Persuaded by his knights not to end the true Queen's life, he instead agrees to her public humiliation and mutilation, having her head stripped of hair and her hands and fingers stripped of skin.[92] Such a reaction is, perhaps reminiscent of the terrible fury of King Mark, who runs to hand over his wife to her would-be rapists and murderers after a similarly unfair trial.[93] Perhaps it is to salvage Arthur's character from the same fate as Mark's that the author(s) of the cycle have very carefully included in Arthur's case the existence of a mind-altering potion and witchcraft; never again does the audience experience such cruelty in his character, though the efficacy of such a potion and Arthur's complete blamelessness come into question when we learn that his love for the false Guinevere outlasts her exposure as a fraud and even her death.[94] Arthur's character is soon rehabilitated, partially through the exploration of Lancelot's weaknesses and sin in the *Queste* and by the treatment he is given by the author(s) of the *Mort* who, though not ignoring his weaknesses, attempt to show Arthur in a dignified light. His court is restored to its former brilliance and he is once again shown to be an impartial judge as he presides over Guinevere's murder trial.[95] Within the *Mort*, there appears a conscious effort to distance Arthur from the weak figure cast in the *Lancelot* and from any accusations of villainy. This attempt is most obvious in the episode of the Queen's condemnation, a scene borrowed almost completely from the Tristan legend in which the lover escapes capture, leaving the Queen to face her physically abusive captors alone. The subtle differences between Arthur and Mark's actions and reactions within this framework provide the former a means by which to stay in the audience's sympathy while the cruelty and violence of the latter forever alienate him from the reader. We find first that Arthur is not present at Guinevere's capture and therefore is not aware of and does not participate in the physical abuse of the Queen as did Mark. Second, he does not ignore Gawain's advice because, like Mark, he is blind with rage, but because he is deep in thought and simply does not hear his nephew. Third, after seeing the Queen

[92] Sommer IV:57.
[93] See below, p. 150.
[94] Sommer IV:57. For a discussion of the effects of a potion and exculpation from blame for one's actions while under the influence of magic/drugs, see Hunt, 'Abelardian Ethics', 501-40 and below, pp. 164-165.
[95] Sommer VI:247-252.

weeping bitterly, Arthur is not motivated to inflict further damage, but instead cannot conceal his grief and asks her to be taken away.[96]

The treatment of Arthur's character in the *Lancelot* leaves the audience with the impression that Arthur, an unspiritual, at times weak and incompetent man is not worthy of Guinevere. It is the job of the *Mort* then to rehabilitate his character. And though as a king and a man he does enjoy a stronger character within the final work, as a husband, Arthur's character changes little. He shows more concern for his knights than for his wife, cares more for revenge than her safety and honour and is quick to put her aside whether for other lovers or in the name of adventure, convenience or revenge. His treatment of Guinevere always stands in stark contrast to the unwavering devotion shown her by Lancelot. And though perhaps husbands do not have to prove themselves according to the demands of courtly society in the same fashion as lovers must, the author(s)' constant pairing of Lancelot and Arthur's relationships and abilities does place the two men in opposition to each other. It is a comparison in which Arthur proves inferior and though he possesses far too many admirable qualities to ever be considered wholly a villain, his weaknesses and failings make his wife's dalliances not only possible, but forgiveable.

Mark

The image of Mark in the shorter works, both the *folies* and Marie's *Chevrefoil*, is that of the jealous fool. He is angry, outraged and shamed at having been cuckolded, yet impotent to take action against Tristan who, by natural prowess and the strength of allies, is a far more powerful force than the king.[97] When Tristan, determined to see Iseult again, dresses himself as a fool and enters Mark's castle, it is the king, rather than Tristan who appears to be the idiot. Under the thin guise of Tantris the fool, a play on the name 'Tristan' that he must explain to the king, he recounts all of his moments of passion with the queen, some of which are common knowledge, but dangerously he includes in his tale the king's discovery of the lovers in the bower, a moment known only to the three members of the adulterous triangle.[98]

[96] Sommer VI: 277-284.
[97] *FB* lines 5-25; *FO* lines 159-167; *Chevrefoil* line 11.
[98] *FB* lines 180- 182.

The members of the court echo the fears of the audience when they begin to whisper, *'Mien esciant, tost avandroit/Que mes sires cel fol crerroit.'* / ['If you ask me, the king may yet take this fool seriously!'].[99] Yet Mark laughs and, the fool's performance concluded, has his horse made ready for the afternoon hunt. The reader is left to question whether this episode is to be understood as evidence of Mark's gullibility or of his cowardice. While Mark has been shown to be easily fooled, it would likewise be in keeping with his character to believe that he did realise he was being confronted by his rival and chose to turn a blind eye to the confrontation rather than once again reveal his weakness and inability to stop Tristan from gaining access to the queen.

The image of King Mark as illustrated in these shorter works, is one of a jealous fool plagued by naiveté and occasionally cowardice. Though his character is addressed in three lengthy works in the period here considered, Béroul's *Tristan,* Thomas' *Tristan* and the Prose *Tristan*, it is interesting to note that his character does not vary greatly from that portrayed in the shorter poems. Mark emerges in these works as an extremely problematic figure composed of seemingly contradictory values. Later adaptors of the tale note his predispositon to violence and anger that have always, it appears, been integral to his image; for example, Gottfried von Strassburg describes him as 'A royal cuckold given to black fits of rage'.[100] However, he also exhibits qualities of the victim whose trust and confidence have been eroded, leaving him to grasp at half-truths and lies. As Hatto claims in his study, Mark is 'one who was forever in doubt because he could find no proof by which to convict his dear ones'.[101] Mark is indeed capable of both great violence and great pity and charity.

Until recently critics were satisfied to discuss only the villainous qualities of the king and there is much evidence to support such a point of view.[102] First, Mark is weak: he is a weak man, a weak king and a weak husband. In all three texts this is presented as perhaps his greatest failing. Ironically, it is Mark's weakness in being unable to conquer the Morholt and rid his kingdom of the tribute that has been

[99] *FB* lines 248-249.
[100] Hatto, p. 27.
[101] *Ibidem*
[102] See T. Kerth, ' Marke's royal decline', in *Gottfried von Strassburg and the Medieval Tristan Legend*, ed. A. Stevens and R. Wisbey (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 105-116.

imposed upon it by the king of Ireland that sets in motion the chain of events in which Tristan rises to fame and honour and eventually encounters Iseult while seeking a cure for his poisoned wound inflicted in the battle.[103]

Mark's weakness as a king is most evident in his dealings with his barons. The surviving fragment of Béroul's text opens with Iseult bemoaning her husband's gullibility wherein she declares *'mais l'en puet home desveier, Faire le mal et bien laisier. So a l'on fait de mon seignor'* / ['but a man can be misled and made to do wrong and abandon good. That is what they have done to my husband'].[104] Both Béroul and the Prose *Tristan* show Mark to be incapable of standing up to his barons outwith a few outbursts of rage. Instead, he is pressured into exiling Tristan and subjecting Iseult to a public trial. [105] In the Prose *Tristan* , it is the barons who demand Iseult to be thrown to the lepers to be raped.[106] Mark acknowledges his failure, stating that, '*Li fel ne criement mes ma gerre. Il m'ont asez adesentu, et je lor ai trop consentu.*' / [the villains no longer fear my power. They have pushed me too far and I have given into them too often].[107] And though Mark vows to take action against the traitors, his action is one of weakness if not cowardice, for instead of exacting a punishment himself, he sends for his exiled nephew to return and avenge his honour.[108] It is a role Tristan adopts frequently for not only does he save his uncle's kingdom from the shame of its tribute to Ireland, but also saves his uncle's personal honour when Mark loses Iseult to kidnappers not once, but twice. When Mark, in a seemingly magnanimous gesture, foolishly grants an errant knight named Palamedes anything he may desire, he finds himself having to turn over his wife. Unable to challenge the knight himself or to find a champion at court to battle for the queen, Mark sends for his nephew to come to his rescue. If the audience has at this point grown tired of the ineffectual and short-sighted king relying on Tristan to deliver him from countless episodes of self-inflicted peril, then they are certainly not alone, for Tristan himself rebukes the King for his foolishness, declaring in front of the court:

[103] *TrB* lines 135-144; *TrP* , sections 295-309.
[104] *TrB* lines 89-91.
[105] *TrB* lines 3055-3100.
[106] *TrP* II:545.
[107] *TrB* lines 3190-3193.
[108] *TrB* lines 3196-3200.

'Oncle, vez ci la roïne. Vos la donastes de legier, et je l'ai conquise a grant poine. Une autre foiz la gardez mieus, se vos amez l'onor de vos et de tote Cornoaille!'

['Uncle here is the Queen. You gave her away very lightly, and I've won her back with great difficulty. Another time take better care of her if you are concerned about your own honour and that of all Cornwall!'][109]

Such a scene would be shocking in any other court and would most likely be followed by the imprisonment or death of such a bold and disrespectful knight who dared address his sovereign so. It is further evidence here of the reversal of roles that has occurred within the work, the utter weakness of Mark that not only must he rely on Tristan to restore his honour, but must endure his rebuke as well for he is powerless to stand against his nephew.

Mark's weakness as a king and hence his heavy reliance upon Tristan makes his weakness as a husband all the more difficult to combat, for just as Mark cannot exercise authority over his barons, so he cannot maintain control over his family. Despite all his many efforts, Mark is never able to keep Tristan from Iseult. Not only must he swallow his pride and show Tristan hospitality, including access to his chamber and hence his wife, when he is in need of Tristan's martial skills and prowess. But also, even when at odds with his nephew, Mark is unable to entirely sequester the queen. Driven to extremes, Mark goes so far in the prose rendition of the tale as to seal the queen in a tower at Tintagel. Yet it is only too soon that a messenger brings him a report of Tristan's presence there.

Mes il est d'autre par iriez mout durement de ce que mesire Tristanz a esté en Tintaiol, et il ne le savoit. Il ne puet estre, ensi com il meïsmes pense en son coriage qu'il n'oit parlé a la roïne priveement. Mout est honiz et avillez de cesti fait li rois Mars. Il ne set mes qu'il doie faire, car il cuidoit de verité que la roïne fust si bien gardee que mesire Tristanz en nule maniere ne poïst la venir que li rois Mars ne le seüst. Et quant il est venuz parmi totes les guardes qu'il avoit mises, il ne set mes qu'il doi faire. Il ne voit mes en quel maniere sa guard li puisse valoir quant mesire Tristanz i pot venir parmi totes les guardes qu'il avoit mises.

[But he was very upset that Tristan had been in Tintagel without his knowing it. It was highly unlikely, so he thought to himself that Tristan had not slept with the Queen, and King Mark felt shamed and humilated thereby. He no longer knew what to do: he had truly thought that the queen was so well guarded that it would have been impossible for Sir Tristan to get in without his knowing it. And since he had gained entry despite all the guards he had placed there,he no longer knew what to do.

[109] *TrP* II:512; Curtis, 125.

> he could not see the point in vigilance anymore, since Sir Tristan was able to get in despite all the guards he had placed there].[110]

Mark's confinement of Iseult in a tower is reminiscent of the villainous husbands of the shorter lais and fabliaux. Like these jealous men, Mark becomes obsessed with monitoring his wife's movements. Within the Prose *Tristan* , Mark is also regularly seen eavesdropping on her conversations and on the songs with which she consoles herself in her lover's absence.[111] He sets tests and traps to catch his wife and nephew including a horn test, similar to that used by Arthur in *Cor*, which Iseult and all women in the court fail.[112] Both in the prose work and Béroul's poem, Mark makes use of spies - Frocin the dwarf and his nephew Audret - to try to catch Tristan in the queen's bed. And in perhaps his most famously ludicrous scene in both works, Mark is depicted hiding in a laurel tree in order to catch the lovers in the act, illustrating the lengths to which his obsession has driven him.

While Thomas, Béroul and the prose work depict the king perched upon a branch to spy on his wife, the prose work includes two additional scenes of comic weakness and cowardice. While hunting, Mark becomes separated from his men and completely loses his way in the forest. Seeing a strange knight in the distance, the king, fearful of his nephew, believes it to be Tristan drawn to his location by the horn he had been sounding repeatedly for help, and hides in a nearby deserted house. He then eavesdrops on the conversation of the knight, whom he discovers is Kahedin, as he is joined by another knight who is revealed to be Palamedes, the one-time abductor of Iseult. The cowardly king listens at the door for any mention of his nephew, but is suddenly given to a coughing fit and the two knights find him. He then puts on a great show of sleeping, pretending to snore loudly, but does not fool the knights who threaten and frighten the king after recognising him. Too cowardly to respond to their challenges, the king is eventually released and returns to his court.[113]

The second scene depicts Mark, together with virtually all of his knights, setting forth to attack Tristan whom he has been informed lies with his wife at that very moment. Bursting into the room, backed by his knights the king cries:

---

[110] *TrP* II:844.
[111] *TrP* II:870.
[112] *TrP* II:513.
[113] *TrP* II:902-915.

'Prenez le moi, le traitor, et gardez qu'il ne vos eschap, car jamés n'avroie joie.' Et Tristanz dit adonc : 'Oncles, ne faites pas vostre gent ocirre, car se Diex me conseust, se il se moevent, il n'en eschapera un sol qu'il n'i muirent tuit. Mes vos qui traïtre m'apelez' se vos avez cuer, venez moi maintenant prover de traïson.' Li rois Mars, qui redote Tristan sor toz les homes dou monde et qui voit que nus de ses homes ne se muet por chose qu'il li die, est si esbahiz qu'il ne set qu'il doie dire. Et Tristanz por li espoenter lesse corre l'espee nue. Et quant li rois voit venir l'espee, il n'a pas tant de hardement qu'il l'atende, car il set bien que toz li mondes nel garantiroit de mort se Tristanz le pooit ataindre, et per ce s'en torne il fuiant de la chambre. Mes Tristanz qui mout estoit iniax le fiert dou plat de l'espee a descovert parmi la teste si durement que li rois vole a terre toz estanduz, et cuide bien estre feruz a mort. . . quant il fu venuz d'estordison et il senti qu'il ot esté feruz dou plat de l'espee, il se relieve honteus durement de ce qu'il avoit esté honiz, et por neant.

['Seize this traitor and take care that he doesn't escape you, otherwise I would never be happy again'.

Tristan then said: ' Uncle don't make your men die! If they move, so help me God, every single one of them will be killed. But you who call me a traitor, come and prove it here and now if you have the courage'.

King Mark feared Tristan more than anyone else in the world, and when he saw that none of his men was prepared to move, whatever he said, he was so dismayed that he did not know how to reply. And Tristan, in order to frighten the king, thrust forward his naked sword towards him, and the king, seeing it coming, was too cowardly to wait for it, since he knew full well that the whole world would not protect him from death if Tristan could reach him; and for that reason he fled from the room. But Tristan who was very agile struck him so fiercely with the flat part of the blade on his bare head that the King flew to the ground and lay there full length, thinking he had received a mortal blow. . . and when he recovered from his shock and realised he had been struck with the flat part of the sword blade, he rose to his feet very ashamed at having been thus humiliated, and for nothing].[114]

Cowardice, the manifestation of Mark's weakness is another of the king's signature qualities as shown in this passage. Cowardice is illustrated in the physical comedy of the setting itself depicting Mark, surrounded by all his armed knights bursting into a bedroom to confront a half naked man. Mark's next actions are strikingly reminiscent of those of a fabliaux cuckold. As the unarmed and presumably undressed Tristan reaches for the only weapon at hand – the king's sword hanging by the bed - and challenges the king, Mark promptly turns tail and flees, only to be humiliatingly struck on his bare head by the flat of his own sword. While entertaining, this scene proves to be perhaps one of the most seriously damning of Mark's character, for under the comic surface, a far more serious struggle of power, authority and masculinity is played out. First, Tristan has gained access to the queen,

[114] *TrP* II:514-516; Curtis, 128-129.

calling into question Mark's ability to control his own household. Secondly, the affair is made public as Mark must appeal for aide to confront his nephew, revealing his own lack of martial authority before his men. Thirdly, when confronted by his uncle and an impressive body of armed household knights, Tristan draws Mark's sword. The connotations of this action are powerful. Tristan's seizing of Mark's sword represents the climax of what until this point was a piecemeal conquest of the king's power and authority. The sword, as sexual symbol and token of authority and masculinity, is a fitting emblem to illustrate the extent to which Tristan has usurped the King's role in taking his honour, power and even his wife. Tristan's refusal to kill the king is not based on respect for his sovereignty but on pity, as he declares it would be too easy and hence dishonourable. The only other time the reader has witnessed Tristan refuse battle is with a social inferior; Mark is here included in a group that until this point was made of only squires and shepherds.[115] It is Mark's very masculinity and worthiness as a ruler that are here called into question. Mark's answer, unfortunately, is to flee.

It is a blend of such cowardice with a capacity for shocking cruelty that best defines this side of Mark's character. It is difficult to determine what catalyst will trigger a fit of bestial anger in the king rather than move him, as in the above examples, to cowardice and flight. The Prose *Tristan* attempts to resolve this irregularity in his character by linking the violence with his weakness, showing some of his most violent and villainous actions and thoughts to have been instigated by jealous and evil advisors. Béroul, however, does not attempt to reconcile these aspects of Mark's character, but instead enjoys the added tension his unpredictability imparts on both his character and the plot. While instances of Mark's cruelty are liberally peppered throughout each of the texts, his most infamous episode of malice is the proposed punishment of the lovers. Dramatic differences in the treatment of Mark's character motive and actions are found between the depictions of the lovers' capture and attempted punishment in the prose work and Béroul's poem.

Béroul's poem provides no excuse for Mark's actions other than his own bestial rage. It is an attribute of the character that the author explores to its very

[115] *TrP* IV:fos 173d-175a of *BN* 750.

depths, creating a perfectly villainous half of Mark's split personality. It is an image that is so strikingly and disturbingly evil that when contrasted with the depiction of Mark in the later prose work, one cannot help but wonder if the author of the latter work fashioned his character in reply, attempting to transform a husband given to 'black fits of rage' into a more courtly image of kingship, albeit flawed; from a man of rash action, to one given to long soliloquy and ponderance. Indeed, there is very little of Béroul's Mark in the king of the prose work. Mark has taken an active part in attempting to trap the lovers by enlisting the services of a dwarf who, in order to provide physical and undeniable proof of the illicit love affair, has secretly spread flour over the floor of the king's bedroom to reveal Tristan's footprints as he approaches the queen's bed in the night. When the lovers' tryst is revealed, the king displays none of the pity or love shown in the prose account. Though his people beg him not to have the lovers burned, he reponds angrily:

> *'Par cel seignor qui fist le mont,*
> *Totes les choses qui i sont,*
> *Por estre moi desherité*
> *Ne lairoie nes arde en ré.*
> *Se j'en sui araisnié jamais,*
> *Laisiez m'en tot ester en pais'.*
>
> ['Even if I should be disowned by the Lord who created the world and everything that is in it, I will not fail to have them burned on a pyre. Maybe I will be held accountable for it later, but leave me in peace now'].[116]

Mark's cruelty here surpasses that of any other villain. He allows the queen to be brutalized in her arrest despite Tristan's pleas for her safety, has her bound so tightly that she bleeds freely, refuses to give a trial, thus refusing his duty as king to provide justice and in refusing his seneschal's request for the queen's guardianship, he shows a striking lack of largesse.[117] In contrast to the Mark of the prose work, the villain here goes to great lengths and often in opposition to the wishes of his men. Mark actually runs to give her over to an excess of one hundred lepers intent on satisfying themselves sexually with her. Almost giddy with cruelty, Mark ignores Iseult's pleas to be burned rather than endure this sickening fate.[118] The king's rage

[116] *TrB* lines 889-894.
[117] *TrB* lines 1070-1074, 1082-1083.
[118] *TrB* lines 1155-1230.

here is inexcusable in the eyes of his people as well as the audience. In this display of violence and cruelty Mark's character loses not only the support of his people and his seneschal, but also authorial sympathy which is transferred to the abused lovers.

The Prose *Tristan* relates that the capture of the lovers was due to the jealousy of a spurned young woman who had sought Tristan's love. Realising that Tristan was already the lover of the queen, the embittered maiden urges Audret, Tristan's cousin and sworn enemy, to aid her in a plan to expose the lovers.[119] Waiting until Tristan was asleep in the queen's bed, Audret and a band of knights enter the chamber and capture both Tristan and the Queen.[120] While Mark acknowledges his love for both of them, he also openly states that he must punish them or risk further shame.[121] He is deterred from his plans to have the couple burned to death by his barons who argue that Iseult should be handed over to the lepers.[122] Mark reluctantly agrees and later regrets his decision:

> *'Et quant li rois Mars en voit ensi aler Tristan, le meillor chevalier del monde, et Yselt, la plus bele dame qu'il onques veïst, it se fiert en sa chambre et s'emferme leanz, et fait le greignor duel del monde, et dit a soi meesmes que ores est il li plus mauvés rois qui onques portast corone quant il en tel maniere fait morir son neveu qui de bonté de chevalerie avoit passé toz cez qui onques entrassent en Cornoaille. Mout se demente li rois Mars et mout maudit Audret et toz cez qui onques li avoient doné conseil de faire prendre son neveu, car encores vausist it mieuz qu'il eüst la roïne Yselt qui li mesel'.*
>
> ['When King Mark saw Tristan, the best knight in the world, being led away like that, and Iseult, the most beautiful lady he had ever seen, he rushed into his room and shut himself up in there, beside himself with grief, and said that he was the most worthless king ever to have worn a crown, since he had in this way caused the death of his nephew whose prowess had surpassed that of all the knights who had ever entered Cornwall. King Mark lamented bitterly, and cursed all those who had ever advised him to have his nephew caught, for he would have preferred to have kept Iseult for himself rather than let the lepers take her].[123]

Here the depiction of Mark is again that of a weak, rather than a violent man, easily pressured by his barons into handing his wife over to the lepers. Mark does not preside at the execution, but rather hands the entire matter over to his nephew Audret. At the conclusion of the scene Mark sequesters himself in his room filled with sorrow

[119] *TrP* II:540.
[120] *TrP* II:541-543.
[121] *TrP* II:545.
[122] *TrP* II:543.
[123] *TrP* II:545.

and not a little jealousy at the thought of the lepers now having possession of his wife. The tone at the conclusion is in keeping with the *senex* motif previously discussed. It is an ironically childish jealousy, usually depicted in ageing, powerless husbands, over the wife as a possession that must be shared.

Interestingly, while the prose work does attempt to salvage some sympathy for Mark's character by forcing the jealous barons, in particular Tristan's cousin Audret, to shoulder some of the blame for Iseult's punishment, the work does not at any time attempt to expunge the capacity for cruelty from the king's character. Rather, it displays such cruelty as the expression of Mark's pent up fears and frustrations. Mark's cruelty serves as bookends for the work with scenes of rage and violence against those who would expose his weaknesses. Mark, at the start, treacherously kills his younger brother Perneham who had criticised his weakness in continuing to give the Irish their tribute,[124] and at the end stabs Tristan in the back for repeatedly shaming him and calling attention to his inadequacies.[125]

While he possesses the capacity for horrific evil, Mark is also capable of great kindness. No matter how abominably he has behaved, he nevertheless emerges as a somewhat sympathetic character in all the works. More than any other character here considered, Mark possesses what can only be described as a split personality, both villain and victim; in the case of Béroul's poem it is the extreme of both forms. For just as Mark showed every trait of a villainous husband, so he also exhibits characteristics common to the victimised man including the qualities of pity, charity, a naive belief in the loyalty of others and an almost endless ability to forgive.

Such forgiveness is often interpreted as cowardice or an unstated condoning of the illicit relationship between his wife and nephew. The barons of Béroul's text repeatedly accuse him of this, declaring that Tristan and Iseult's relationship is:

> '*savoir le puet qui c'onques veut et nos nu volon mais sofrir. . . qar bien savon de verité que tu consenz lor cruauté et tu sez bien ceste mervelle.*'
>
> ['obvious to anyone who cares to look, and we will no longer tolerate it. . . because we know for a fact that you are fully aware of their crime and that you condone it'].[126]

---

[124] *TrP* II:243.
[125] *TrP* IV:fos 260b of *BN* 757.
[126] *TrB* lines 608-617.

Mark, however, appears to be astonished at the news. His reaction may register as a weak attempt to conceal the truth that he is aware of the affair, showing that his greatest fear is not being made a cuckold, but his inability to stop the illicit relationship. However, such a reading does not acknowledge Mark's subtle underlying desire, prevalent throughout the work, to desperately want to believe in his wife's and nephew's innocence and loyalty. His relief when he, though mistakenly, believes in the scene staged for him under the laurel tree is powerful enough to move him to tears.[127] His desire to disbelieve even the proof he has seen with his own eyes is so strong that at Iseult's trial he is moved to make a public declaration of his faith in her.[128] Perhaps the best example of this quality is in his discovery of the lovers in the forest of Morrois. His willingness to believe in the lover's innocence in light of the couple's past actions reveals a pitiable benevolence in the king's heart that his tender thoughts and actions following the discovery continue to explore:

De fole amor corage n'ont.
N'en ferrai nul. Endormi sont:
Se par moi eirent atouchié,
Trop par feroie grant pechié;
Et se g'esvel cest endormi
Et il m'ocit ou j'oci lui,
Ce sera laide reparlance.
Je lor ferai tel demostrance
Ançois que il s'esvelleront,
Certainement savoir porront
Qu'il furent endormi trové
Et q'en a eü d'eus pité,
Que je nes vuel noient ocire,
Ne moi ne gent de mon enpire.
Ge voi el doi a la reïne
L'anel o pierre esmeraudine;
Or li donnai (molt par est buens),
Et g'en rai un qui refu suens:
Osterai li le mien du doi.
Uns ganz de vair ai je o moi,
Qu'el aporta o soi d'Irlande.
Le rai qui sor la face brande
(Qui li fait chaut) en vuel covrir;
Et, qant vendra au departir,
Prendrai l'espee d'entre eus deus
Dont au Morhot fu del chief blos.

['They have no illicit intent. I will not strike either of them. They are asleep: if I even touched them, it would be terribly wrong, and if I awakened him and he killed me, or I him, people would condemn me. I will leave them proof before they

[127] *TrB* lines 258-284, *TrP* III:fos 38c- 42b.
[128] *TrB* lines 4260-1.

> awaken so they will know beyond a doubt that they were found asleep and that someone took pity on them. For I certainly do not want them to be killed, either by me or by any of my subjects. I see on the queen's finger her fine emerald ring. I gave it to her, and it is very valuable. I have another one which was once hers: I will take mine from her finger. I have with me a pair of fur gloves which she brought with her from Ireland; I will use them to block the ray of sunlight falling on her face and making her hot. And when it is time to leave, I will take from between them the sword with which the Morholt was beheaded'].[129]

Though his actions are possibly representative of the kind of naiveté so common in the victimised husband, what this passage also illustrates is the great charity of which Mark is capable. The tenderness shown in the placement of the glove to shield Iseult's fair skin from the burning sun seems at dramatic odds with the actions of the man who would have had his wife raped to death by a leprous hoard. The extremes present in his character have often stimulated controversy, as not a few critics have refused the idea of Mark being able to simultaneously display such cruelty and such kindness. Instead, they have retained the image of Mark as villain and thereby interpret the images in this passage, the sword, the ring and the glove, not as tokens given in exchange denoting friendship, but as objects representative of the ties, between husband and wife and vassal and lord, that have been broken by the adulterous affair.[130] It is a convincing argument and especially in the hands of an author as skilled as Béroul, such a complex layering of symbols is probable, however, so is the crafting of such a complex and multi-faceted character as King Mark's, capable of great rage and compassion. To appreciate this episode, common to the majority of the extant works in the legend, only for its symbolism is to ignore a large part of the king's character, for it is not an isolated occurance of his kindness. In Béroul's poem, the thought of all Tristan has done for him motivates Mark to weep and proclaim, however ironically, that he wishes all he possesses to be shared by Tristan.[131] In the prose work, Mark weeps over the wounds Tristan has endured in battle with the Morholt, and later such love and gratitude moves Mark to declare Tristan as his heir.[132]

---

[129] *TrB* lines 2013-2055.

[130] See W. C. MacDonald, 'King Mark: Gottfried's version of the Ovidian husband-figure', *Forum for Modern Language Studies* (1978), 255-267 and M. Batts, 'The role of King Marke in Gottfried's *Tristan* – and elsewhere', in *Gottfried von Strassburg and the Medieval Tristan Legend*, eds A. Stevens and R. Wisbey, *Arthurian Studies* 23 (1990), pp. 117-126.

[131] *TrB* lines 487-495.

[132] *TrP* I:285 and 486.

Interestingly, Iseult, the recipient of his most vicious cruelty, is also the one to whom he extends the most kindness. When asked to take back his wife who had been living in exile in the forest with his nephew, Mark replies to the chaplain to make haste with the letter granting her reconciliation for as he says, 'she has suffered too much in her youth'.[133] In the prose work, it is to ease Iseult's suffering and sorrow over the loss of her lover, for which Mark is certain she will die, that he sends for her friend Dinas to comfort her.[134] While such kindness is striking, perhaps the most moving display of the king's pity is found in his treatment of Tristan's dog, Husdent. Showing the ease with which Mark moves from villain to victim, Béroul describes a moving scene only 200 lines after illustrating the king's brutality in handing Iseult to the lepers, in which the king takes pity upon Tristan's dog who has gone mad in his master's absence by releasing him to rejoin his master and ease his suffering.[135]

While the breaks or incongruity in character not only between texts, illustrating diversity, but within a single text may not have appeared as striking or troublesome to a medieval audience, the complexity and extremes of Mark's character, his *demesure* must have been clear. Mark's character, remarkably consistent throughout the legend, is perhaps best explained as a split personality. He is an intelligent man, though easily duped; he is capable of great compassion and charity and yet gives no second thought to appalling acts of cruelty and violence. As the texts, especially Béroul's reveal, he is an un-courtly king and husband of an un-courtly queen who is engaged in the most un-courtly of romances. Indeed, Mark often appears more closely linked to the cuckolds of the fabliaux than his contemporary and peer, King Arthur. However upside down his world may appear though, he and the audience are reminded that he is not only a husband, but a king. While the infidelity of the wife of a common man may make him the object of ridicule in his village and perhaps cost him the respect of those around him, the stakes are much higher when the wandering wife is the queen and the cuckolded fool is the king. Mark's ability to rule, the authority he holds over his barons and indeed the legitimacy of the royal heir can be questioned by Iseult's infidelty. Mark's actions

---

[133] *TrB* lines 2642-2644.
[134] *TrP* III: 940.
[135] *TrB* lines 1446-1473.

may be extreme, but are found to be in proportion to the challenges to his rule that his wife's adultery represents. The duality of his personality reflects the multiplicity of his roles as uncle, husband and king. Mark's reactions are those of an indecisive man and an embarrassed king and he behaves as an insulted sovereign and a betrayed husband might be expected to, for though Mark is capable of forgiveness, he is never shown to be tolerant of treachery. Unaware of the existence or the power of the potion, Mark must root his action not in knowledge, but in distorted truths as he charts a path between advisors, rumours and the attempted retention of his royal honour. What may pass for indulgence is best explained as Mark's wish not to draw attention to his weakness and shame and not to make himself vulnerable to the growing power and demands of his jealous barons.

While other hybrid husbands such as Arthur enjoy a more stable role, their foibles and strengths measured out carefully to keep the balance of the triangle from swinging wildly, the extremes found in Mark's characterisation in each of the texts from this period causes enormous upset of sympathy within the adulterous triangle of the romance. An attempt to redeem the uncourtly, almost schizophrenic depiction of the king was not made until Eilhart's reworking of the legend in which he attempts to cast the king as a remourseful, holy penitent and the redeemer of Tristan and Iseult.[136] It would appear that later authors were uncomfortable with the conclusion of the twelfth and thirteenth century writers that Mark should remain the most villainous victimised husband of the high Middle Ages.

Conclusions

The characterisation of the husband is pivotal to the success or condemnation of the lovers by their audience. The vilification of the husband, while perhaps serving an additional didactic purpose in providing a negative example for husbands to learn by, is the primary literary tool by which the author is able to tip the triangle's balance, and hence audience sympathy in favour of the lover. This vilification is accomplished through the use of one or more literary or social motifs, including the *senex* motif with its connotations of jealousy, weakness and impotence, the introduction of spousal

[136] W. MacDonald, 'King Mark, the holy penitent', in *Zeitschrift für deusches alterum und deutsche literature,* ed. Franz Worstbrack (Stuttgart, 1991), pp. 393-418.

abuse or neglect or the magnification of one of the husband's sinful qualities (i.e. wrath, greed, laziness).

The victimisation of the husband likewise shifts the balance, but in the husband's favour. The victim, though occasionally presented as the loveable fool, is more often than not characterised as a man of noble character whose one flaw, if any, is in placing too much faith and trust in his wife. And while these two characterisations of the husband are necessary to establish the tone of the work in question, they prove more valuable for the insights they give into the medieval perceptions of masculinity and the window they provide into the marriage relationship itself. In the study of the husband we also become privy to some of his greatest fears and/or anxieties concerning women. Though these are often expressed through stereotypes and generalisations (the lustful, insatiable wife or the untrustworthy, impenetrable camaraderie of women), they are expressive of the very real concerns of the average husband who may have felt feminised by marriage and its inherent domesticity.

There is a wide variety of husbands included here who together create a complex and diverse picture of the cuckold. He is not only a villain or a victim, though these categories are perhaps best for expressing the most obvious division of the men in their narrative and moral role, but he is also an old man, a young man, a king, a commoner. He is cruel and abusive, he is kind and trusting. Each of these different husbands, often supporting several of these roles simultaneously, carries with him different strengths and weaknesses that affect how he and the audience react to his wife's misdeed.

Chapter 3:
Lovers

The first kiss of Lancelot and Guinevere: from *Lancelot Graal* c. 1300
New York, The Pierpont Morgan Library, MS 805.6, fol. 67r.

'Si bele dame tant mar fust, s'ele n'amast u dru eüst! Que devendreit sa curteisie, s'ele n'amast de drüerie'.

['How sad if such a beautiful woman were not in love or had no lover! How could she be a truely courtly lady if she had no true love?']

- Marie de France, *Equitan,* lines 79-82.

Lovers

While the characters caught in an adulterous affair are often referred to as a 'triangle', the symbiotic relationship that exists between the characters of the husband and wife, each influencing the depiction of the other in equal proportion, is not applicable to the character of the lover. A more accurate representation of the situation might be the analogy of a see-saw with the husband and wife at each end. In this analogy the lover functions as the pivot point, able to move the advantage slightly to one end or the other but is certainly not as actively influenced or influential as the opposing ends are to each other. The lover, when present in the work, will illume the husband, for good or bad, exposing his faults or reinforcing his nobility through the lover's display or possession of the opposite actions or qualities.

A love triangle or see-saw is by its very nature an unstable entity. The union of three persons of different social class, power and loyalties is precarious and almost universally ill fated as the author, often by use of one or more standard motifs, tips the scale either in favour or against the adulterous affair. The most common of these tools or motifs used in favour of the lover is either the virtual absence of the husband in the narrative plot, thus effectively erasing him from the audience's mind or, if the husband is present within the work, the portrayal of his character as odious, tyrannical or simply stupid. The character of the lover in such tales is then given a lengthier role and magnified in nobility of character and prowess of action. Likewise, if the author wishes to tip the scales in the husband's favour, the same techniques are employed to the opposite result. By depriving the lover of a name or, in some works, of any action or presence, the focus of the drama shifts from the adulterous affair to the relationship between the husband and wife. If the lover is given any substantial role within such texts, it is often as the fool who, in the conclusion of the work, is seen running for his life or emasculated. This emasculation is often metaphorical through defamation of character, usually by being depicted as a coward, but also can be literal emasculation through castration.[1]

[1] For instances of castration or threats of castration see *TrB* lines 275-280, *Aloul* lines 708-710 and 812-822, *Le Preste Crucefie* lines 53-92 , and *Connebert* lines 219-275.

When analysing the image and role of the lover, a sharp division appears between those men whose names have become bywords for the ideal lover, such as Lancelot and Tristan, and those men who slip into anonymity, including those who never make an actual appearance. The lover's depiction as hero or fool is often linked to the genre of the work. While the courtly romances, such as the prose Lancelot and Tristan or Chrétien de Troyes' *Charrete*, in which the bias is obviously towards the lover, depict a husband absent or detached, the opposite is found in the fables and fabliaux in which the lover is almost never named and in some cases never appears. For the most part, these connections between genre and the extent to which the character of the lover is emphasised or neglected hold true. However, owing to the wide variety of authors of varying skill, ability and intent, the character of the lover is hardly stock or predictable.

The Famous

Tristan

Of all lovers in medieval literature, Tristan has both the longest tradition and widest fame and is arguably one of the most complex portrayals of a lover within the works here considered.[2] Much of that complexity is universal to all Tristan texts and is due in large part to the relationships with, and loyalties to, the other members of the triangle. Tristan is not only a knight in King Mark's court, but also his nephew and possibly the heir to the throne due to Mark's childless state.[3] He is also the lover of

---

[2] See Appendix I for the dating and origins of the Tristan legend. Tristan legends have been found in Celtic, Anglo-Norman, English, Norse, German, French, Serbo-Russian, Spanish, Italian and Persian works. See R. Curtis, *The Romance of Tristan*, (Oxford, 1994), p. xxx and S. Gregory, *TrT*, p.8.

[3] Maternal uncles functioning *in loco parentis* are a common theme in courtly literature, the most famous perhaps being the relationship between Roland and Charlemagne in the *Song of Roland* or that of Arthur and his nephews, especially Gawain. The normal uncle/nephew relationship often takes a tragic and twisted turn when sexualised, as in the case of Arthur who is at once father and uncle to Mordred, the man who will deprive him of his kingdom, wife and ultimately his life, or in the case of Mark and Tristan, who will rob his uncle of his wife, honour and, unintentionally, of his authority. The relationship between maternal uncle and nephew depicted in literature and through evidence of royal uncles' roles in the training of their nephews, especially in Anglo-Norman society, may have roots in matriarchal Celtic society. Both J. Fraser and T. Garbàty argue, in their analysis of the uncle/nephew bond in medieval society, that such a strong bond is often evidence of a matrilineal society or one in which confidence of paternity is low. Such common use of the motif may then be a surviving thread of the undisputed Celtic origins of the Arthur and Tristan legends. See T. J. Garbàty, 'The uncle-nephew motif: origins and development', *Folklore* 88 (1972), 367-384.

his uncle's wife, the Queen Iseult. He is guilty not only of treason through his adultery with the queen, but of incest by violating his uncle's bed, therefore betraying Mark as both vassal and kinsman. The relationship between the lover and the husband is further convoluted with every added detail of this legend. Tristan is invariably cast in the role of court champion and national saviour. Through Tristan, Mark's kingdom is liberated and it is only through Tristan that Mark gained his bride. Yet for all his prowess as a knight and his position within the court, Béroul's Tristan is remarkably powerless. He is landless, kinless with the exception of his uncle whom he is betraying, virtually friendless and penniless. Conflict and duality, themes central to Tristan's portrayal in all the versions of the legend, are most keenly emphasised and explored in Béroul's work. The fragment begins in the midst of the episode of the tryst beneath the tree, with a reiteration of these contrasts in Tristan's speech to the queen. After begging the queen to intercede on his behalf with the king, Tristan describes his pitiful situation wherein he is no longer allowed in the king's chamber or queen's presence.[4] In a soliloquy after the departure of the queen, he goes on to bemoan his fate as a penniless, landless exile of use to no one.[5] In this speech is the introduction to the theme of duality that Béroul develops on multiple levels to surround his protagonist with conflict. The situational duality in which Tristan finds himself - at once saviour and exile - is expanded into a duality of appearance versus reality which affects language, action and symbols.[6] Not only is Tristan, as lover, portrayed in emotional and personal conflict, everything around Tristan turns to conflict as well, as Béroul's text in title, setting, action and plot all become a reflection of Tristan.

In the tale there exist two contrasting settings in which the action takes place: the court and the woods. Tristan is portrayed as master of both. The court, in theory, should be the domain of the king, a reflection in miniature of his power and position throughout his kingdom. And while the stock motifs of courtly life, including hunts, tournaments and feasts are to be found, what is portrayed in the text is anything but a

---

[4] *'Puis que chanbre me fu veee; Ne puis ne poi a vos parler', TrB* lines 104-105. See above, p. 43, fn. 43.

[5] *TrB* lines 238-250.

[6] The duality of language is a topic in Béroul's Tristan which is worthy of study in itself and is discussed at length in this thesis in chapter five.

stock setting, for what appears is a court upside down in which the vassal, not the lord, reigns, controlling the hearts of the people and the heart and body of the queen. The setting is at once typical of the romance and yet filled with imagery and motifs of fabliaux, lending a duality to the interpretation of the setting. For example, there is both the setting and metaphor for the hunt in which Mark leaves the castle to hunt game, leaving his rival, Tristan free to pursue his own hunt for time with the queen. Similarly, there is the recurring setting of the royal bedchamber – a symbol of promotion and trust for Mark, a means of rendezvous for Tristan. In each, Tristan becomes the victor of the greater prize.

The scene of exile in the forest of Morrois again carries seemingly contradictory connotations centred around and reflecting the dual nature of the lover who is at this point exile and at the same time master of the forest. Béroul makes clear the couple's suffering, repeatedly making such statements as, '*ainz, puis le tens que le bois furent deus genz itant de tel ne burent*' / 'Never, since they came to the forest, had two people tasted such sorrow'. [7] We are told they have grown pale and weak and yet the only hardships appear to be the lack of servants and finery that Iseult mourns for in her soliloquy.[8] In fact, what the reader finds is an almost Edenic existence in which the couple live sheltered in bowers of leaves and flowers, living off the plentiful game Tristan and his dog, Husdent, kill.[9] Just as Tristan had become an intimidating foe to his opponents in court, so he also has become a force to be reckoned with in his new domain of the forest. In his outlawed state[10] Tristan loses no power or prestige and has won both the people's loyalty and fear, for just as the narrator tells us of the people's outcry against the punishment of the lovers,[11] so we are also told of both the barons' and common people's fear of pursuing Tristan into the forest. Counselling Mark after the escape of Tristan, King Dinas warns Mark:

> *Sire, Tristran est eschapez;*
> *Les plains, les bois, les pas, les guez*
> *Set forment bien, et molt est fiers.*

[7] *TrB* lines 1787-1789.
[8] *TrB* lines 2201-2204.
[9] This ambivalence is common to other romance depictions of the forest. See *Erec* lines 2784- 4646.
[10] The use of the term *outlaw* is here intended to reflect the medieval legal definition of 'one who has been removed from the protection of the law' rather than the romantic connotations the word was later given to describe the motif of the 'gentleman-bandit'.
[11] *TrB* lines 1078-1079.

> *Vos estes onvle et il tes niés:*
> *A vos ne mesferoit il mie.*
> *Mais vos barons, en sa baille*
> *S'il les trouvout, nes vilonast,*
> *Encor en ert ta terre en gast. . .*
> *Ainz en avra encor grant luite.*
>
> ['Sir, Tristran has escaped. The plains, the forests, the trails, and the fords – he knows them all well, and he is to be feared. You are his uncle, he your nephew. He would never harm you; but if he had your barons in his power, or if he assaulted them, your land would be ravaged. . . No, there will be serious trouble'].[12]

The three barons are also apprehensive, knowing that Tristan was free and that he was lying in wait for them.[13] Even the common people are shown to have a healthy respect for Tristan's anger:

> *Poor ont tuit par la contree.*
> *La forest est si esfreee*
> *Que nus n'i ose ester dedenz.*
>
> [Everyone in the country was terrified. The forest was so feared that no one dared enter it].[14]

Tristan's martial prowess is highlighted during this time in the forest and is heavily contrasted with the fearful inactivity of the king and his barons. Not only is the lover capable of protecting himself and his companions, he invents a new, superior bow to display his hitherto unmentioned prowess at archery.[15]

The theme of duality also affects the representation of objects surrounding the lover; the most obvious of which is his sword. Emblem of his knighthood, the tool by which he became both saviour of Mark's country, and by which he was identified by and ultimately won Iseult becomes, during the period of exile, a tool by which he chops wood to create a home and hearth for himself and his lover. This change in use has often been regarded as a fall from station and from grace, or as a move towards penance.[16] However, when one considers the ambiguities, dualities and narrative interlacing that characterise Béroul's work, it appears unlikely that the sword represents any single stable symbol. Rather, it is an amorphous symbol representing a multitude of objects, ideas and aspects of Tristan's character and his relationships

---

[12] *TrB* lines 1101-1118.
[13] *TrB* line 1124.
[14] *TrB* lines 1747-1749.
[15] *TrB* lines 1753-1773.
[16] See J. Fisher, 'Tristan and courtly adultery', *Comparative Literature* 9 (1957), 150-164.

with both Mark and Iseult. The sword's use and symbolism shifts to adapt to the specific need at hand. It is the method by which Tristan keeps Iseult. He wins her by the sword, feeds and protects her by the sword when in exile, ensures her safety by his enemies' fear of his sword, and avenges himself and Iseult upon the barons by the sword at the end of the Béroul fragment. A symbol of power and virility, the sword is also misunderstood as a symbol of innocence: Mark's faulty interpretation of its function when separating the lovers in their bower, similar to his equally faulty interpretation of Iseult's oath in the Mal Pas, saves the lovers' lives. By interpreting their union as chaste, Mark no longer pursues his husbandly right of vengeance, but decides to leave his sword in place of Tristan's and replaces his ring with the queen's.[17] The exchange of swords and rings is representative of the pervading dual symbolism within the work and dual interpretation.[18] The tokens of friendship the king leaves are interpreted as a threat, an intrusion of his power, represented by his sword, and a taking of power, a rejection of the bond between Mark and Tristan by the king's removal of his nephew's sword. The sexual symbolism of the sword and ring add an additional layer of interpretation to the exchange. The lovers misunderstand Mark's actions to represent his reassertion of power as king and his sexual role as husband. It is misunderstood to be a re-entry into the position Tristan has illicitly assumed, a forceful symbol of his reclaiming his sexual rights by placing this token of his power between the lovers in the symbol of their own sexual union, their bed. Though this episode is devoted to the misunderstandings of action and symbol, it also begins to reveal a deeper level of duality that concerns morals and intent.

Nowhere in the Béroul manuscript is there evidence that Tristan regrets his relationship with Iseult, nor is there any indication the lovers will cease their illicit meetings. In fact, we find quite the opposite as after the potion wears off: Tristan and Iseult continue their lovemaking and hence necessitate the trial by oath at Mal Pas. Interestingly however, Tristan declares himself innocent of a treacherous love and regrets having ever shamed his uncle. Tristan's loyalty to Mark seems contradictory to all his actions until one considers the aspect of intent, as argued by Tony Hunt in

[17] *TrB* lines 1994-2013.

[18] See M. Brockington, 'The separating sword in the Tristan romances: possible Celtic analogues re-examined', *Modern Language Review* (1996), 281-300.

his article, 'Abelardian Ethics and Béroul's *Tristan*'.[19] Hunt argues that the impression of duality within Béroul's work is 'a permanent coexistence of opposing ideas', regarding the understanding of the lover's passion as either '*bone amor*' or '*fole amor*'.[20] Hunt argues that the lovers act with a benignity toward Mark that denies any malice in their love, a position this thesis will argue against later, and that the presence of the potion removes guilt by denying their free will to commit the crime. Therefore, their love is in fact an innocent, *bone amor*, further contrasted by the ill-motivated and often selfish advice and actions of the barons and the occasionally disturbingly malevolent or violent actions of Mark himself.[21] Here again is a seemingly contrary juxtaposition of morals as the adulterous lover is portrayed as morally superior while the wronged husband is depicted as morally decrepit and unjust.

Such a motif is more common to the fabliaux than romance, but is often sampled and used by authors of various genre. Béroul, however, never lets his characters or his audience dwell long on dark or negative actions or thoughts and the character of Tristan is not without some humour. In fact, it is by borrowing another motif from the fabliaux that Béroul crafts this new dimension of the lover's character, that is by depicting him not only as morally superior, but as wittier than the consistently duped husband. Mark has been deceived repeatedly in the work, as shown in the tryst under the tree episode, but nowhere else is the lover's wit as pronounced as in the scene introducing that of the ambiguous oath where Tristan, disguised as a leperous beggar, awaits his lady and passes his time begging the noble guests, including King Arthur and Mark, for items of clothing, food and coin. Tristan singles the king out and calls to him for alms. Mark gives the disguised Tristan his cap to protect him from the weather, an ironic symbol of protection unknowingly given to the man he hunts, and begins to talk to him asking,

> '*Dom est tu, ladres?*' *fait le rois.*
> '*De Carloon, filz d'un Galois*'.
> '*Qanz anz as esté fors de gent?*'
> '*Sire, troiz anz i a, ne ment.*
> *Tant con je fui en saine vie,*

[19] Hunt, 'Abelardian Ethics', pp. 501-54.
[20] Hunt, p. 501
[21] See above, pp. 149-152 and *TrB* lines 1190-1234.

> *Molt avoie cortoise amie.*
> *por lié ai je ces boces lees;*
> *Ces tataries plain dolees*
> *Me fait et nuit et jor soner*
> *Et o la noisë estoner*
> *Toz ceus qui je demant du lor*
> *Por amor deu le criator'.*
> *Li rois li dit, 'Ne celez mie*
> *Coment ce te donna t'aimie'.*
> *'Dans rois, ses sires ert meseaus,*
> *O lié faisoie mes joiaus,*
> *Cits maus me prist de la comune.*
> *Mais plus bele ne fu que une'.*
> *'Qui est ele?' 'La bele Yseut:*
> *Einsi se vest con cele seut'.*

> ['Where are you from Leper?' asked King Mark.
> 'From Caerleon, the son of a Welshman'.
> ' How long have you been an outcast from society?'
> 'Truthfully, sir, three years. While I was healthy, I had a most courtly lady. Because of her, I now have these ugly sores, and thus I have to use this rattle day and night, making noise that startles those from whom I ask something for the love of God the Creator'.
> The king said, 'Tell me how your lady did this to you'.
> 'Good King, her husband was a leper; I made love to her, and I contracted the disease from our union. But there is only one woman more beautiful than she'.
> 'Who's that?'
> 'The beautiful Iseult! She even dresses as the other one does'].[22]

While the king laughs off Tristan's remark as the ramblings of a madman, the audience and the lovers understand the humour and underlying truth of the jest. There is also, perhaps, an underlying cruelty to the prank: its boldness verges on the brash, its pointed edge verges on the malicious. Soon though, the audience is given a visually comic episode perhaps to distract them from this unsettling aspect of the lover's personality as Tristan hams up his portrayal of a crippled, leperous beggar who staggers under the weight of the queen he has been commanded to carry to safety over the mire of the marsh.[23]

Until this point, the work has been analysed as a romance inverted into a kind of fabliaux. It is perhaps testimony to the skill of Béroul as a poet that just as he was able to transform the romance, so he then turns the fabliaux –like tale around again to further develop the character of the lover by creating a somewhat sober underlying tone to his situation. Béroul manages this by using the familiar fabliaux motif of a

---

[22] *TrB* lines 3749- 3776.
[23] *TrB* lines 3840-3879.

struggle between sexual power and impotence, but inverts this motif and uses it against the lover. For the majority of the piece, Tristan has been depicted as both the sympathetic and comic centre of the work. And yet, by the end of the surviving text, a dual image of Tristan can be drawn: Tristan the powerful versus Tristan the impotent. Impotence, usually a characteristic associated with the cuckolded husband, especially in the fabliaux, aptly describes Tristan's fate. It is ironic perhaps that Tristan's sexual potency has rendered him socially impotent – impotent as a knight, incapable of fulfilling his duty to Mark as either kin or vassal, unable to protect Iseult from shame or danger, unable to secure any stable future and, ultimately, incapable of being a part of his society. It is this dual image of virility and powerlessness that characterises the lover in Béroul's work.

In Thomas' work, contemporary to Béroul's, Tristan is not presented as the penniless, friendless, solitary figure of Béroul's work, but as lord of a castle and lands in Brittany, and befriended by fellow knight and brother-in law, Kaherdin. The lover in Thomas' poem is very much the focus of the work. Interestingly, in light of the 591 lines of dialogue commanded by Tristan, King Mark's voice is only heard in 10, Iseult's in 248. Thomas' work has often been regarded as a 'courtly' version of the tale.[24] As illustrated first by his portrayal of Iseult, such a description is occasionally faulty and as will be shown here, when analysing the actions of the lover, becomes highly doubtful.[25]

The first and most striking feature of Tristan as portrayed by Thomas is his deep reflection and introspection as first witnessed in his complaint when exiled:

> *Ysolt, bele amie,*
> *Molt diverse [la] nostre vie.*
> *La nostre amut tant se desevre*
> *Qu'ele n'est fors pur mei decevre:*
> *Jo perc pur vos 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 pez consirer*
> *Que deduit e joie n'aiez*
> *E que tuiz voz buens ne facez.*
> *Pur vostre cors su jo em paine,*

[24] See Curtis, p. xii-xiv.

[25] See above, p. 75.

Li reis sa joië en vos maine:
Sun deduit mainë e sun buen,
Ço que mien fu orë est suen.
Ço qu'aveir ne puis claim jo quite,
Car jo sai bien qu'el se delite;
Ublïé m'ad pur suen delit.
En mun corage ai en despit
Tutes altres pur sule Ysolt!
E rien comforter ne me volt,
E si set bien ma grant dolur
E l'anguisse qu'ai pur s'amur,
Car d'altre sui molt coveité
E pur ço grifment anguissé.
Se d'amur tant requis n'esteie,
Le de [sir] milz sofrir porreie,
E par l'enchalez quid jo gurpir,
S'ele n'en pense, men desir.
Quant mun desir ne puis aveir,
Tenir m'estuit a mun pueir,
Car m'est avis faire l'estot:
Issi fait [cil] ki mais n'en pot.
Que valt tant lunges demurer
E sun bien tuit diz consirer?
Que valt l'amur a maintenir
Dunt nul bien ne put avenir?
Tantes paines, tantes dolurs
Ai jo sufert pur ses amurs
Que retraire m'en puis [jo] bien.

[Iseult, fair love, our lives are poles apart. The life of love we lead is so different that, for me, love is but a delusion. For you I renounce all joy and delight, yet you have them by day and by night. The life I lead is one of great sorrow, but yours is given to the pleasures of love. All I do is to long for you. whilst you cannot help but have your joy and delight and the pleasures of love to the full. My body aches for yours, while the king takes his pleasure with you: he has his pleasure and delight, what once was mine is now his. I renounce all right to what I cannot have – I know that she takes her pleasure and, in her pleasure, has forgotten me. I spurn all others in my heart for Iseult alone, and yet she does not wish to give me any comfort, though knowing full well the great pain and distress I suffer for love of her: it is because I am much desired by another that I am sorely plagued. If I were not so solicited to return this new love, I could better bear the longing I feel for Iseult. And yet, my wife's pursuit of me might make me forget my longing for Iseult, if she fails to heed me. Since I cannot have the object of my longing, I can but take what is in my grasp, and that, I think, is what I must do, as do all who have no other choice. What is the point of such long delay, why forever go without one's pleasure? What point in persisting with a love which can bring no return? The grief and pain I've suffered already for her love are such that, surely, I am justified in severing the tie].[26]

This beginning of Tristan's inner debate over marriage with Iseult of the White Hands introduces the lover as a man torn between his head, his heart and his hormones. For while in his speech Tristan goes on to describe his almost telepathic connection to Iseult, declaring that his heart would know if she had spurned him, and

[26] *TrT* lines 57-98.

recalling fondly the fact that they had borne so much together, their bodies tormented by love, the element of the physical is never far withdrawn.[27] Tristan is a jealous lover, scared not only that Iseult has abandoned their love and returned to her husband, but worried that she has taken another lover.[28] In order to empathise with the queen, Tristan himself takes a bride to whom he cannot bring himself to make love. The narrator describes the situation not as a love triangle, but a foursome of grief and jealousy. It is interesting that Thomas portrays all four characters as equal in pain and misery. In fact, of all the participants in this struggle, it is Tristan's wife, Iseult of the White Hands, who most elicits the narrator's pity, and not, for all his dialogue or self-pity, Tristan. Despite Thomas' claim that he knows nothing of the female psyche, he creates a surprisingly believable, very human character in Iseult with whom the audience must sympathise to a degree. That Thomas frequently and strongly focuses his audience's pity toward the wronged wife, a character seldom seen or heard from in the literature or law of the period, rather than Tristan for whom the story is named and who is, undeniably, the focus of the tragedy, is a curious, though unsolvable point of interest. It does, however, call into question the assumption that Thomas was as ignorant a clerk as he professed to be, and many of his critics have continued to promote him as, in the matters of love and women. Professor M. D. Legge once declared of Thomas' omission of sentimental physical descriptions, that 'for all the interest he takes in images, Thomas might have been blind'.[29] In fact, as Legge goes on to comment, touch and hearing are the only senses to play a vital role in the work. However, it is Tristan's blindness, not Thomas' that is found in the poem. Tristan's love for the queen is an undeniably physical love. He pines for the sound of her voice and her touch. He goes so far as to craft statues of her and of Brangain in order to talk, weep, berate and complain to his former companion and lover. In this odd and somewhat unsettling series of episodes Tristan is portrayed in an extremely visual image in his heretical religious reverence for Iseult. Like a Madonna, Iseult, carved in stone, stands above Tristan as he pours out his grief and prayers to her, and yet the element of the sexual is never far off, for soon Tristan is not

---

[27] *TrT* line 118.
[28] *TrT* lines 995-1000.
[29] M. D. Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature and its Background* (Oxford, 1963), p. 53.

only revering his saviour, but making physical love to the statue, both alone and in the company of his companion Kaherdin.[30]

Obsessed by the physical and the sexual, consumed by the intensity of his grief and longing, Tristan is blind to the pain of his wife. Tristan is undoubtedly the centre of the work, but when searching for the courtly hero of the piece it is Iseult of the white hands who alone fulfils the role. The poem is a romance with a very distinct difference from its peers in that the courtly lover is not the young knight, but rather is his wife. Two distinct forms of love are illustrated by Tristan and Iseult of the white hands. While Tristan displays his religious devotion to the queen, mourning his loss and keeping his erotic vigils at his shrine, it is his wife who displays the inner qualities, the silent, intangible characteristics of courtly love, for she has entered into love of free will and continues her devotion with no hope of physical requital. She loves for love's sake and hence her jealousy and revenge are not hailed as evil, as are the barons and accusers of both Thomas and Béroul's works, but is depicted as almost justified or, at the very least, understandable.

The briefest work to address Tristan is Marie de France's lai of *Chèvrefeuille.* Written in the second half of the twelfth century and therefore roughly contemporary with Thomas and Béroul, Marie's lay is proof not only of the popularity of the Tristan legend but illustrates the malleable nature of the texts and legend. Due to the episodic and cyclical nature of the storyline, an author could compose an entirely new scene which could fit into virtually anywhere in the work or stand alone as a brief tale told to an audience already familiar with the framework of the legend.

Marie opens her work with the image of Tristan wasting away in exile from Mark's court. Though the king's character is absent from the piece, it is his desire to hold court at Tintagel that makes the rendezvous of the lovers possible. Tristan, hearing of the queen's trip to meet her husband, carves a message on a branch, a trick he has employed before to catch the attention of the queen.[31] When the queen catches sight of the cue, she asks her party to rest, during which time she meets her lover and they have opportunity to make love and discuss Tristan's return to Mark's grace and court life. The passage concerning the message is difficult to understand. While one

---

[30] *TrT* lines 2160-2169.

[31] *Chèvrefeuille,* line 59.

would assume that Tristan had, as Marie first describes, only written his name upon the branch, what follows is a long aside of some twenty-five lines, a quarter of the whole work, dedicated to a simile likening the lovers to the symbiotic relationship between a honeysuckle and hazel tree which live peacefully together until torn apart after which both wither and slowly die. Critics have long argued whether or not the entire passage was written upon the branch or whether one is to interpret this as a narrative digression or character soliloquy.[32] Perhaps the final lines of the passage, *'bele amie, si est de nos; ne vos sanz moi, ne ge sanz vos'* / 'my beloved, so it is with us; neither you without me, nor I without you',[33] are our clue, that Marie, like Thomas has developed the character of Tristan as reflective more than active, given to periods of introspection and long internal dialogue. Again, the element of the sexual is never far removed as the lovers enjoy themselves first in the forest, before their conversation and plan are discussed.[34] Tristan happily returns to Wales where he composed this lay and awaited his welcome back to his uncle's court.[35] The lover here is portrayed in a courtly fashion with no echoes of fabliaux or obvious negative criticism on the author's part. Tristan is characterised by his usual cleverness and long-suffering as he awaits every opportunity for stolen moments with his mistress.

The *Folie de Berne* and the *Folie d'Oxford* have subtle differences in their approaches to the character of Tristan, the *Berne* following the terse, witty, complex style of Béroul and the *Folie d'Oxford* making use of a much more descriptive style with an intensely long monologue reminiscent of Thomas' version of the legend. Yet the ultimate depiction of the lover is quite similar. He is full of cunning and unashamed to assume any role in order to accomplish his goal not only to see Iseult, but to gain sexual access to her. As Tristan takes on the role of the fool, he is careful not to overlook any small detail. The *Folie d'Oxford* describes his elaborate preparations including the use of a native potion to darken his skin, the cutting of his hair into the shape of a cross, his attempts at humour and the extent to which he

[32] See K. Busby, 'Ceo fu la summe de l'escrit (Chevrefoil line 61) again', *Philological Quarterly* 74 (1995), p. 1-12.
[33] *Chèvrefeuille* lines 78-9.
[34] *Chèvrefeuille* lines 92-94.
[35] *Chèvrefeuille* lines 95-107.

assumes madness. For example, when confronting the assaulting villagers, he deliberately strikes back in an ineffectual, comic fashion:

> *Il lur tresturne mult suvent.*
> *Estes ki li gete a talent:*
> *Si nus l'asalt devers le destre,*
> *Il turne e fert devers senestre.*
> *Vers l'us de la sale apruchat,*
> *Le pel el col dedenz entrat.*
>
> [He turned to them a number of times to see one or another attacking him; if the attack came from the right, he turned and struck back to the left. He reached the entrance to the great hall and, carrying his stick on his shoulder, went in].[36]

What is remarkable about Tristan's portrayal in these two texts is his boldness of speech and dangerous sense of humour as he relates intimate details of his affair with the queen in full audience of the court. In a passage reminiscent of the dangerous humour exemplified in Béroul's episode at the *Mal Pas,* Tristan alludes to incidents Iseult no doubt remembers, of which several, including the tryst under the tree, Mark is also quite aware.[37] And while Mark seems to laugh off the remarks of the fool, just as in Béroul's text he laughs and abandons the leper Tristan, one is left to wonder at both Mark's naïveté as well as Tristan's common sense. Tristan is here portrayed as a man willing to be reckless to attain his goal and perhaps knowing his adversary's weakness too well. Tristan emerges as victor of the risky business, attaining both emotional and physical relief in his lover's arms at the conclusion of both poems.

A very different Tristan is depicted in the thirteenth century Prose *Tristan,* probably written between 1230 and 1235 by two men claiming authorship who may have worked together, or in succession, to produce the massive work of some 500 folios.[38] If Béroul was a storyteller, and Thomas was a psychologist, then the author(s) of the Prose *Tristan* is perhaps best described as a realist, for it is not only in length and form that the prose work differs from its verse companions, but in the strikingly different use of detail, the omission of all fantastical elements and a superimposed logic that pervades the work. This emphasis on reason is first made clear in the

---

[36] *FO*, lines 255-260. The image of the medieval madman is almost always of one dressed in tatters, wielding a stick or club and eager for a fight. See P. Ménard, 'Les Fous dans la société médiévale', *Romania* 98 (1977), 433-59.

[37] *TrB* lines 3761-3776.

[38] See Appendix I.

reworking of an episode common to both Béroul's and Thomas' texts relating the flight of Tristan and the rescue of Iseult from the stake. Like its companion texts, the prose work depicts Tristan, on his way to a fiery death escaping his escort and ultimately leaping out of the church window to the gorge below in a desperate attempt to escape while in the meantime his lover, the queen, is given to the lepers. Here, the author breaks from tradition and describes the rescue of the queen not by her lover, but by four of Tristan's companions and his loyal squire. He relates a two day long rescue attempt by Tristan's loyal friends and fellow knights who journey below the rock from which he has taken his now famous leap, to pluck him from the bank where he is hiding from Mark's forces. Tristan's legendary leap, depicted in the verse legends as a miraculous feat, here is also tempered with reason as one of the rescuing knights discovers that the spot in the sea into which Tristan has leapt is extremely deep and calm and we are told that *'que nus hons qui fust de grant cuer et de grant force, et qui bien seüst noer sailloit de ci. . . s'il n'en porroit tost eschaper'* / ['any man who had great courage, and great strength and was a good swimmer . . . would have a good chance of surviving'].[39]

Another of Tristan's Herculean feats that is greatly modified is the tale of Tristan's victory over a dragon that had rampaged the King of Ireland's lands, the reward for which was the granting of Iseult's hand in marriage for his Uncle Mark. The author of the prose work has eliminated this fantastical episode. Tristan instead wins Iseult by serving as the King of Ireland's champion in a trial by combat to free the king from blame in the accidental killing of a foreign knight during a tournament.[40]

Tristan's prowess is not diminished by this insistence on grounding his deeds in reality. Akin to the verse forms of the legend, Tristan's image is still that of the saviour of his uncle's land from the threat of the Morholt and court champion, beloved by the people, both noble and common. He is of royal blood, a king in his own right and Mark's pronounced heir, as well as being an artist who both plays the

[39] *TrP* II:548; Curtis, 160. On Tristan's leaping skills, see Schoepperle, vol. II, pp. 283-287.
[40] *TrP* I:401.

harp with remarkable skill and composes several lays.[41] He occasionally exhibits characteristics of a courtly lover, assigning himself to be Iseult's knight after she grants him her love,[42] a motif that often emerges as the knight, brought low by love's demands, pledges a kind of courtly fealty to his queenly mistress.

Tristan is portrayed as an intelligent man, even in his youth, surprising all with his foresight and deep thought and winning praise from his father, his tutor, foreign kings as well as the people.[43] Interestingly, this is a contrary image at times when compared to not infrequent moments of rash action, pride and refusal to accept warnings. While Tristan won high regard for his merciful dealings with his murderous stepmother and King Faramon's voraciously amorous daughter, he does not exhibit such restraint or wisdom in his dealings with the queen.[44] Shortly after Iseult's rescue from Palamedes, Tristan is found to be standing by a window in the palace, chatting with the Queen in the sight of everyone.[45] Such lack of discretion proves to be his undoing as it has aroused the suspicions of his cousin Audret who follows the couple to the queen's room and leads King Mark in his discovery of the lovers. Even upon the point of discovery though, Tristan relies more upon his skill and strength to save him, rather than his common sense, for when told of the king's arrival and warned by Governal that Mark was armed and coming for him, Tristan does not head the warning to run or hide, but boasts that Mark would *'ne sera ja tant fox qu'il m'asaille por neant, car il set bien que je sai faire'* / 'never be so foolish as to attack me; he's well aware that I know how to defend myself'.[46] Such boldness repeatedly gains Tristan his uncle's enmity and constantly places him and his lover in danger. Tristan does not see himself as a criminal nor does he seem to interpret his actions as treasonous or even wrong. In fact, the author stresses Tristan's blamelessness on more than one occasion, reminding the audience that it was

---

[41] The composition of lais appears to be a motif the author enjoys employing as Iseult composes several in honour of her grief at the loss of Tristan due to his madness and for her own failed attempt at suicide. Later we are witness to Kahedin, Arthur, Guinevere and the entire court of Logres likewise trying their hands at it as well. See Curtis, *Tristan,* p. 258, 276, 325.

[42] *TrP* I:357.

[43] *TrP* I:244.

[44] *TrP* I:258; *TrP* I:278.

[45] *TrP* II:513.

[46] *TrP* II:515.

Governal and Brangain who are responsible for the misdirected love potion. The two confess their mistake on several occasions claiming that they alone are to blame:

> *'Brangain, fait il, honi somes. Malement avons ovré. Nostre mesconoissance a honi Tristan et Yselt, se Diex nel fait'. 'Coment? fait ele. Dites moi que ce est'. Et li li mostre le vessel ou li boires amorous estoit. 'De celi, fait il, lor avons nos doné a boire, si les avons trahiz vilement. A force estoit qu'il s'entreaiment. Malement avons esploitié'.*[47]
>
> ['Brangain, we're in trouble. We have done a terrible thing. Our mistake will be the ruin of Tristan and Iseult, unless God intervenes'.
> 'How?' she asked. 'Tell me what this is all about'.
> And he showed her the vessel which contained the philtre.
> 'This is what we have given them to drink! We have betrayed them cruelly. Now they cannot help loving each other. We have acted wrongly'].

Nowhere does Tristan take responsibility for his love or actions and in fact often reminds both audience and his companions of Governal's guilt. However, Tristan is not depicted as a coward for blaming his squire for his misfortunes. The mention of Governal and Brangain's guilt appears to be for the benefit of an audience that may have held reservations as to Tristan's worth as a knight and hero given his disloyalty to his king. The narrator emphasises in the summary of the episode that it was only right that they [Governal and Brangain] should shoulder the blame; that it was not the fault of Tristan and Iseult who knew nothing of the drink.[48] The *Prose* author spent much effort in attempting to recreate Tristan as a courtly lover. His disloyalty to Mark is only expressed in his adulterous affair with Iseult. He makes no move, as Mark fears, to convince King Arthur to march against his uncle and, in fact, Tristan continues to act as court champion and protect his uncle's realm.[49]

Tristan is often compared to Lancelot, not only for his adulterous relationship with his queen, but for his beauty, valour, prowess and skill as a knight. Indeed, Tristan assigns himself a lineage in which he falls as successor to famous lovers including,

> *Assalon li biax, qui avoit biauté outre mesure, qui fu filz le roi David, en morut; Sensons li forz en fu deceüz mout malement; et Salemons li saiges; et Achilles li Grex, li bons chevaliers, qui en son tens ot los et pris de chevalerie assez plus que je n'ai en moi; Mellins meesmes en morut, qui plus savoit que toz li mondes. . . je qui riens ne vail au pris qu'il valurent, ne devroie pas etre granment plainz, enz me devra torner a honor quant je lor sui compainz de ceste aventure.*

---

[47] *TrP* II:447.
[48] *TrP* II 447.
[49] *TrP* IV: fos 180d of BN 750; *TrP* IV: fos 173d-175a of BN 750.

> [Absalom the Fair, King David's son, who was extremely handsome, also died of love; Samson the Strong was deceived by it most treacherously; so was Solomon the Wise and Achilles the Greek, the brave knight who in his time was more illustrious than I am. Merlin himself died of it, even though he knew more than anyone else in the world. . . I should not be pitied, but it should be considered as a mark of honour that I shall be their companion in this misadventure].[50]

Tristan here catalogues his attributes in summary, namely, his handsomeness, his strength, his wisdom and his fame as a warrior. In this exegesis Tristan alludes to men who not only possess these attributes, but have in common one possession that proves to be their undoing – a dangerous lover.[51] And yet, like the lovers in his self-proclaimed pedigree, he does not free himself from his love and welcomes any hardship that would allow him to attain the love of his lady. It is interesting, however, that the author of the prose work does not make Tristan prove such a claim. For while Tristan confesses to Iseult that he loves her more than his armour, shield or indeed the world itself,[52] the prose *Tristan*, in sharp contrast to Lancelot and the accounts of his own deeds in the verse versions, is not forced to become overly base in his love. He flees with Iseult into the woods not to live in a bower, but a cottage with his squire and a handmaiden for the queen. He procures his charger and hound from King Mark and eventually begins to hunt. Again, the sense of urgency and fear are absent in the episode. Tristan freely sends Governal to Mark to ask for his animals and begins to hunt, not so much out of necessity, but '*son deduit*/for his delight'.[53] Tristan establishes a courtly setting even in exile where he and Iseult construct a game whereby he brings home his quarry and she rewards him sexually for his deed. The audience is told that, 'in this way Tristan enjoyed and amused himself'.[54] Gone is the solitary figure and fearful exile in this depiction of the lover. Tristan is never alone but is surrounded by friends and loyal knights. Even in his madness he is not alone,

---

[50] *TrP* II:539.

[51] This passage appears to have been directly lifted from the *Queste del Sainte Grail* which preceeds the Prose *Tristan* by at least five years in which Lancelot is give exactly the same pedigree, yet the connection between these men and their very dangerous lovers is made. The purpose of the passage in the *Queste* is to highlight Lancelot's moral failings and direct him toward penance. It is interesting and perhaps significant that the moral overtones of the piece have not been sampled as well as the text. It is tempting to point to this omission as endorsement of Tristan's actions on behalf of the author.

[52] *TrP* II:.550.

[53] *TrP* II:553.

[54] *TrP* II:553.

but seeks the companionship of shepherds.[55] And, though they abuse him, he, even in his deranged state, does not break the rules of chivalry by attacking those of inferior status. Tristan is accorded the honour of becoming a knight of the round table and even rescues Arthur from certain death in the Forest of Darvances.[56]

However, the author has not constructed a completely flattering portrayal of the lover. He is not only fickle but his love is the product of jealousy and competition. Only after noticing that his arch rival in feats of knightly honour and prowess has fallen in love with Iseult does Tristan turn his attention to the princess. The author describes the moment clearly:

> *Tant regarde Palamedes Yselt que Tristanz s'en aperçoit, et bien conoist a son semblant qu'il l'aime de tot son cuer. tristanz avoit mout avant regardee Yselt, et mout li plaisoit, mes son cuer n'i avoit pas mis dusqu'a l'amer granment. Et neporquant, puis qu'il vit que Palamedes i entendoit si merveilleusement qu'il dit ou il morra ou il l'avra, Tristanz redit a soi meïsmes que ja Palamedes por pooir qu'il ait ne l'avra. S'il est ons chevaliers, si soit; il en a d'ausi bons par le monde. Et il meesmes, qui estoit bien gariz, dit qu'il fera autretant d'armes en un jor com fist devant hier Palamedes.*
>
> [Palamedes gazed at her [Iseult] so much that Tristan noticed it and realised from his behaviour that he loved her with all his heart. Before that Tristan had often looked at Iseult and she pleased him very much, but not in a way which made him fall in love with her. However, when he saw that Palamedes was so infatuated with Iseult, that he said he would die if he did not have her, Tristan for his part said that Palamedes would certainly never have her if he could help it. Palamedes might be a dauntless knight, but there were others equally brave in the world. He himself, once he had completely recovered, would prove himself as valiant in one day as Palamedes had done a short while ago. Thus pride and arrogance took hold of Tristan for love of my lady Iseult.][57]

Later, Tristan's fickle nature again surfaces when he ponders marriage to Iseult of the White Hands, for, unlike Thomas' Tristan, this Tristan does not entertain marriage in order to better understand what his lover must endure, but rather does so in order to forget rather than empathise with the queen. For he

> *'lesse l'une Yselt por l'autre, et cuide bien oblier l'amor de l'une por l'amor de l'autre. . . ensi pense Tristanz et ensi vet porpensant encontre l'amor de la roïne Yselt'.*

---

[55] *TrP* IV:fos 173-4d of *BN* 750.

[56] The prose version here digresses from the main theme of the lovers fate and turns instead to Arthurian adventure in the style of the Lancelot-Vulgate Cylce. As Tristan sets sail for Cornwall after his marriage, he is told that King Arthur has gone missing in the Forest of Darvances. In fact, the king has been bewitched by a treacherous maiden and is saved by Tristan only moments before he is to be decapitated by the maiden's knights. *TrP* III:819-825.

[57] *TrP* I:329; Curtis, 46.

> ['left one Iseult for the other, and believed he could forget his love for one by his love for the other. . . such were Tristan's thoughts and that is how he planned to free himself of his love for Queen Iseult'].[58]

This is not the first time Tristan has used another woman to help him forget Iseult. The author of the prose work details several of Tristan's affairs, including trysts with other married women, for example the beautiful daughter of a noble count who was newly wed to a knight from Logres. King Mark falls in love with the woman and lusts after her with all his power but is unable to persuade her to give him her consent, only to find out it has been given to Tristan. For his part, Tristan returns her love and *'ama li sanz faille si durement qu'il ne li sovient mes d'Yselt la Bloie. Il met Yselt arrieres dos et oblie dou tout por ceste'* / ['loved her so much that he no longer thought of Iseult the Blonde. He put Iseult out of his mind and forgot all about her on account of this lady'].[59] While Mark cuts a pitiable picture of a lover when compared to Tristan in this episode, it must also be noted that Tristan himself, though successful in his quest for the girl's consent, is less than a model figure of courtly love when compared to his former image.

The character of Tristan in the prose work is a much more sombre portrayal than the verse versions, especially when compared to the almost burlesque portrayal chosen by Béroul. In the prose, Tristan gives in to comedy only once. Shortly after Iseult had been rescued from Palamedes who had by ruse won her from her king, she and Tristan began their love affair again only to be caught in a trap by the king. Tristan, leaps to defend himself with his uncle's own sword. Knowing no one can protect him from Tristan, Mark turns to run away. The episode relates:

> *Mes Tristanz qui mout estoit iniax le fiert dou plat de l'espee a descovert parmi la teste si durement que li rois vole a terre toz estanduz, et cuide bien estre feruz a mort . . . quant il fu venuz d'estordison et il senti qu'il ot esté feruz dou plat de l'espee, il se relieve honteus durement de ce qu'il avoit esté honiz, et por neant.*
>
> But Tristan who was very agile struck him so fiercely with the flat part of the blade on his bare head that the King flew to the ground and lay there full length, thinking he had received a mortal blow. . . King Mark had remained amongst his men, and when he recovered from the shock and realised he had been struck with the flat part of the sword blade, he rose to his feet very ashamed at having been thus humiliated, and for nothing.[60]

---

[58] *TrP* II:561; Curtis, 177.
[59] *TrP* I:356; Curtis, 56.
[60] *TrP* II:516; Curtis, 130.

The image of the dumbstruck Mark lying on the floor, a victim of his own fear and cowardice is the only real moment of comedy within the work and is, and significantly so, a moment depicting Tristan's prowess and largesse coupled with an unflattering portrayal of the king. Serving not so much as comic relief in response to the tension of the scene, but to highlight the king's inadequacy, the episode serves to elevate the character of Tristan and place him in direct contrast to the cowardly king who has so often plotted his nephew's death. Time and time again Tristan triumphs over the king until he appears unstoppable. The author declares after Tristan's successful manipulation of truth in the episode concerning the tryst under the tree that Tristan, was lord and master of both King Mark and Queen Iseult. In fact, Tristan had replaced Mark not only in his authority over his wife, but over his country as the narrator continues to note that he was so feared in Cornwall that all his commands were carried out.[61] Feared by one and all, Tristan seems to have finally gained the upper hand and it is only through a cowardly action, the stabbing of Tristan in the back with a poisoned lance, that Mark is able to rid himself of his nephew.

In comparing the Prose *Tristan* to the verse renderings, perhaps the greatest distinction in the treatment of the lover is made not in his exploits or actions, but in the author's refusal to allow Tristan to forsake his station for love. While the Tristan of Béroul is content to live outwith society and endure degradation for the love of Iseult or even for her amusement, there is progression away from the common and uncourtly in the other works which can be seen first in Thomas' inclusion of the character Kaherdin and this companionship of a fellow knight for Tristan, often in place of his loyal squire, Governal. Most notably in the prose work, Tristan is rarely outside courtly society, often trading one court for another in times of trouble rather than fleeing into a wilderness exile. The author's attempt to ground the tale in reality has resulted in the unreal portrayal of the lover. For instead of exhibiting any of the raw sexual motivations, farce or earthy humour common to the other versions of the legend, the authors have elevated his actions and portrayed his emotions through mediums such as the composition of lais rather than through quick action, narrative

---

[61] *TrP* IV:fol. 46b of *BN* 757.

asides or even soliloquy, removing much of the passion and humanity that are otherwise characteristic of Tristan.

Lancelot

The first extant work to introduce Lancelot as the lover of Guinevere does not bear his name in the title, and, in fact, keeps the reader in suspense regarding his identity for almost exactly half the work.[62] Lancelot's character is introduced in Chrétien's work, *Charrete*, in the midst of an odd, almost comic scene as Gawain, in pursuit of the queen who has been abducted by the evil Maleagant, encounters an errant knight in the forest. The image of the lover here is as a frantic, unknown knight in reckless pursuit of the queen. Bursting into the clearing on a horse bathed in sweat, the unknown knight asks Gawain to trade or sell one of his fine warhorses :

Mes cil, cui granz besoigne en est,
n'ala pas querant le meillor
ne le plus bel ne le graignor,
einz monta tantost sor celui
que il trova plus pres de lui,
si l'a maintenant eslessié.
Et cil chiet morz qu'il a lessié,
car molt l'avoit le jor pené
et traveillié et sormené.
Li chevaliers saz nul arest
s'an vet poingnant par la forest,
et messire Gauvains aprés
lo siut et chace com angrés
tant qu'il ot un tertre avalé . . .
Et quant il ot grant pieve alé,
si retrova mort le destrier
qu'il ot doné au chevalier,
et vit milt grant defoleïz
de chevax et grant froisseïs
d'escuz et de lances antor.
Bien resanbla que grant estor
de plusors chevaliers i ot. . .
N'i a pas granmant aresté,
einz passe outre grant aleüre
tant qu'il revit par avanture
le chevalier tot seul a pié,
tot armé, le hiaume lacié,
l'escu au col, l'espee ceinte.
Si ot une Charrete atainte.

---

[62] *Charrete* line 3606.

> [But the unknown knight, who was in desperate need, did not take the time to choose the better, or the more handsome, or the larger, rather, he leapt upon the one that was nearest him, and rode off at full speed. And the horse he had been riding fell dead, for that day it had been overridden and exhausted, and had suffered much. The knight galloped straight away back into the forest, and my lord Gawain followed after him in pursuit until he reached the bottom of a hill. After he had ridden a great distance, Gawain came upon the warhorse that he had given the knight. It was now dead. Gawain saw that the ground had been much trampled by many horses and strewn with many fragments of shields and lances. There were clear signs that a pitched battle had been waged there between many knights; Gawain was bitterly disappointed not to have been present. He did not tarry long, but passed quickly beyond until by chance he caught sight of that same knight, now alone and on foot, although still fully armed – with helmet laced, shield strung from his neck, and sword girded. He had overtaken a cart].[63]

Lancelot bears little resemblance to any of Chrétien's former heroes. Unlike Erec, Yvain and Cligés, Lancelot is given no family lineage, has no social dimension to his background, no ties to any court and, most notably, he is unknown to Arthur's court. A sharp division between the worlds in which the action of the tale occurs and that in which Arthur rules is established at the onset of the tale in Guinevere's plea to an unknown 'friend', in which she whispers under her breath, 'Ah my beloved, if you knew, I do not believe you'd ever let Kay lead me even a single step away'.[64] While some translations render the French *amis* as 'friend' or 'beloved', it is obvious that Guinevere is lamenting for her absent lover, one who, unlike her husband, could refuse Kay's demand.[65] As if summoned by the queen's unspoken plea, Lancelot who has been absent from the narrative, emerges from the forest, a literary symbol itself of mystery and otherworldliness, in a powerful explosion of action, defying the tradition of romantic narrative by not beginning his quest from Arthur's court. From his introduction onward, the story is Lancelot's; Arthur and his court immediately vanish, only to make a few rare and brief appearances throughout the work and then mainly as tools in which to advance the plot.

It is interesting that, despite the sharp differences between the worlds in which Lancelot and Arthur operate, the lover is not set up as an anti-Arthur but as perhaps a

---

[63] *Charrete* lines 257-320.
[64] *Ibid.*
[65] One manuscript, the Guiot text (*BN* 794) reads '*rois*' for '*amis*' and therefore portrays Guinevere's appeal to her husband instead of an unknown lover. As both J. Frappier and V.Guerin note in their works, this reading is solitary and illogical as Guinevere has no need to whisper an appeal to her husband who is present and does indeed know that she is being led away. See Guerin, pp. 90-93.

pseudo-Arthur. Traditionally the common Celtic abduction story or *aithed*, tells the tale of a mysterious stranger who 'typically claims a married woman, makes off with her through a ruse or by force, and carries her to his otherworldly home. Her husband pursues the abductor and, after triumphing over seemingly impossible odds, penetrates the mysterious kingdom and rescues his wife'.[66] During Chrétien's lifetime, such abduction stories were still being written: the *Life of St. Gildas* by Cardoc of Llancarvan, written *c.*1150, contains a tale in which Guinevere is carried off by a villain named Melwas, lord of the Land of Summer, to a city of glass where, after many trials, she is rescued by her husband, the king.[67] Several works likewise depict Gawain in the husband's traditional role of the saviour, though admittedly Gawain is never sexually motivated nor sexually rewarded by Guinevere. In fact, no element of a physical relationship between the queen and Gawain exists in any of the tales. Possibly in line with this tradition, it appears in the initial verses that Gawain will be the champion of Chrétien's work as well, since he sets out to find the queen. It is not until much later in the work, after Gawain and Lancelot meet and then part that Lancelot, still nameless, encounters the monk who reveals to him and the reader that it is Lancelot's, not Gawain's, destiny to be the liberator of the queen and other prisoners.[68]

The tone of the work has a decidedly otherworldly feel to it, with Lancelot as centre of all fantastic action. Against the background of a forest, the reader follows the lover from his mysterious arrival through a series of mystical trials. As Karin Boklund asserts in her article on the use of space within courtly romances, the forest functions as an 'anti-court' which both represents and contains the unknown and the deceptive.[69] Most deceptive of all are the appearances of numerous characters. And while Lancelot himself meets with various elusive characters, most often in the form of mysterious maidens, he himself is perhaps the most deceptive of all. Throughout the work he is identified as both a villain and a coward, due to his ride in the cart, which only the audience, Gawain and Guinevere know him not to be. In fact, the title

---

[66] Kibler, *Charrete* p. 10.
[67] Caradog of Llancarfan, *Vita S. Gildae Auctere Cartatoco,* ed. J. Stevenson (London, 1838).
[68] *Charrete* lines 1899-1909.
[69] K. Boklund, 'On the Spatial and Cultural Characteristics of Courtly Romance', *Semiotica* 20 (1977), 1-37.

of the work, *Le Chevalier de la Charrete,* identifies him by this misrepresentation. His lack of a name for the first half of the piece contributes to this sense of ambiguity and the overall mystery of the unknown found within the forest; such a setting with a protagonist of this type is therefore perfect for the impending set of trials the hero will face which are themselves laden with mystery and deception. The first of these trials is that of a perilous bed in which he risks his life while spending the night at a mysterious maiden's castle with Gawain on their first night travelling together. Informed that only the most worthy may lie in the bed, Lancelot proves his worthiness as well as his prowess and agility when,

> *A mie nuit de vers les lates*
> *vint une lance come foudre,*
> *le fer desoz, et cuida coudre*
> *le chevalier parmi les flans*
> *au covertor et as dras blans*
> *et au lit la ou il gisoit.*
> *En la lance un panon avoit*
> *qui estoit toz de feu espris;*
> *el covertor est li feus pris*
> *et es dras et el lit a masse.*
> *Et li fers de la lance passe*
> *au chevalier lez le costé,*
> *si qu'il li a del cuir osté*
> *un po, mes n'est mie bleciez.*
> *Et li chevaliers s'est dreciez,*
> *s'estaint le feu et prant la lance;*
> *enmi la sale la balance.*
> *Ne por ce son lit ne guerpi,*
> *einz se recoucha et dormi*
> *tot autresi seüremant*
> *com il ot fet premieremant.*

> [Just at midnight a lance like a bolt of lightning came hurtling at him point first and nearly pinned the knight through his flanks to the coverlet, to the white sheets, and to the bed in which he was lying. On the lance was a pennon that was all ablaze; it set fire to the coverlet, the sheets, and the entire bed. The iron tip of the lance grazed the knight's side; it removed a little skin, but he was not actually wounded. The knight sat up, put out the flames, then grabbed the lance and hurled it to the middle of the hall. Yet in spite of all this he did not get out of bed; instead he lay back down and slept just as soundly as he had before].[70]

Not only does the action become more mysterious, but the lover himself begins to be portrayed as a somewhat mysterious, almost otherworldly figure. Not only is he capable of dodging the deadly, magical lance, but peacefully returns to sleep! He performs feats of superhuman strength in raising the prophetic coffin lid

[70] *Charrete* lines 514-534.

that the reader is told can only be removed by seven strong men, survives the crossing of the mystical sword bridge and ultimately reveals that he wears a magical ring given him by the 'Lady of the Lake' which reveals all enchantment to him. [71] Evelyn Mullaly has commented at length on the mystical qualities of the work and Lancelot's unique character, interpreting the element of the fantastic as a form of safety device within the text. While Lancelot, as lover is inevitably set up as rival to Arthur for the physical love of Guinevere, the separation from Arthur's realm, even from the real world, deprives that rivalry of any social dimension. Lancelot has no social ties within the text, no family, no other earthly obligation except to the queen. Their adulterous union takes place within the mysterious kingdom of Gorre long after Arthur has dropped out of sight and in circumstances where it is portrayed not as treason or a lustful act, but as 'the merited reward for an incomparable service'.[72] Arthur has vanished and Lancelot and Guinevere are now in a remote country governed by laws that do not pertain to the kingdom of Logres and cannot be broken, as seen in Arthur's silent acceptance of the prisoners' plight at the beginning of the work. Arthur has no power or presence in this kingdom which becomes the perfect setting for the tale concerned with the theme of extra-marital love without social dishonour. While the romance is primarily interested in the development of this affair, the story is not content merely with the reunification of Lancelot and Guinevere and the sexual fulfilment of their love. Unlike Béroul, Chrétien is not so much concerned with the drama and action of two lovers attempting to couple as often as possible, but rather with the redemption of Lancelot – his rehabilitation as a courtly lover and his atonement for his momentary hesitation to place love above honour in delaying but two steps from climbing aboard the cart, a symbol of shame, in order to find his lover.

Lancelot's courtliness is illustrated not only by his bravery and martial prowess but by his devotion to his lover. Such religious adoration is first seen in his discovery of Guinevere's comb which he is depicted as handling like a relic:

> *les chevox an trait*
> *si soëf que nul n'an deront. . .*
> *qu'il les comance a aorer*

---

[71] *Charrete* lines 1897; *Charrete* lines 3125-3132.

[72] E. Mullaly, *The Artist at Work: Narrative Technique in Chrétien de Troyes* (Philadelphia, 1988) p. 160.

et bien cent mile foiz les toche
et a ses ialz et a sa boche,
et a son front et a sa face

['first removing the hair, being careful not to break a single strand. . . he began to adore the hair, touching it a hundred thousand times to his eye, his mouth, his forehead and his cheeks'].[73]

This adoration is again illustrated at Lancelot's departure from Guinevere when first Lancelot approaches his lady to confess his sin after performing a kind of penance in his public shame of the queen's refusal to see him and subsequent separation from her. After being absolved of his sin and rewarded in the queen's bedchambers, Lancelot is shown to *'a soploié a la chanbre et fet tot autel con s'il fust devant un autel; puis s'an part a molt grant angoisse'* / ['bow low before the bedchamber, as if he were before an altar. Then in great anguish he left'].[74] It is interesting that like Tristan, Lancelot professes his devotion to his lady in religious terms, but unlike Tristan, his devotion does not develop into an uncomfortable obsession, for while there is a strong element of the sexual within Lancelot's adoration, it is not as extreme nor as excessive as the image of Tristan in the prose narrative, crafting his Madonna-like statues in the forest and making love to them as a form of recreation.

Lancelot is, in his devotion to love, also willing to humiliate himself, shunning the demands of honour in respect to the demands of love. The author reminds his audience that,

Molt est qui ainme obeïssanz
et molt fet tost et volentiers
la ou il est amis antiers
ce qu'a s'amie doie plaire.
Donc le dut bien Lanceloz faire,
qui plus ama que Piramus,
s'onques nus hom pot amer plus.

['One who loves totally is ever obedient and willing and completely does whatever might please his sweetheart. And so Lancelot, who loved more than Pyramus, if ever a man could love more deeply, must do her bidding'].[75]

Chrétien, who so clearly defines the rules by which Lancelot is governed as a courtly lover, also feels free to point out the humour in some of its conventions.

---

[73] *Charrete* lines 1458-1465.
[74] *Charrete* lines 4716-4719.
[75] *Charrete* lines 3798-3804.

Twice Lancelot is saved from ill-conceived suicide attempts. Once as Guinevere passes from the view of his window and as he can no longer see her, he attempts to throw himself from the window. Gawain catches him half way out the casement and manages to drag him back into the room, declaring *'Merci, sire, soiez an pes! Por Deu nel vos pansez jamés'* / 'For pity's sake, sir, calm down! For the love of God, never think such foolish thoughts again'.[76] The second attempt follows Guinevere's refusal to see him after he rescues the prisoners. He ties his belt to the pommel of his saddle and fashions a noose for himself. Those riding with him merely assume he has fainted and only after they attempt to rehorse him do they realise what he has attempted and cut him loose. Instead of killing himself, our hero merely renders himself voiceless for a time.[77] Lancelot is often depicted in trance-like moments of thought, not all of them suicidal, but equally ill-fated, such as when, after parting from Gawain and on his way to the Sword Bridge, Lancelot is depicted,

> *Et cil panse*
> *con cil qui force ne defanse*
> *n'a vers Amors qui le justise;*
> *et ses pansers est de tel guise*
> *que lui meïsmes en oblie;*
> *ne set s'il est, ou s'il n'est mie;*
> *ne ne li manbre de son non;*
> *ne set s'il est armez ou non,*
> *ne set ou va, ne set don vient.*
> *De rien nule ne li sovient*
> *fors d'une seule, et por celi*
> *a mis les autres en obli;*
> *a cele seule panse tant*
> *qu'il n'ot ne voit ne rien n'antant.*
>
> [Lost in thought, a man with no strength or defence against love, which torments him. His thoughts were so deep that he forgot who he was; he was uncertain whether or not he truely existed; he was unable to recall his own name; he did not know if he were armed or not, nor where he was going nor whence he came. He remembered nothing at all save one creature, for whom he forgot all others; he was so intent upon her alone that he did not hear, see or pay attention to anything].[78]

Lancelot soon returns to the present with a shock as he is toppled into a cold stream, his lance and shield flying in all directions. Love apparently rendered Lancelot deaf as well as blind, for he neither saw nor heard three warnings from a

[76] *Charrete* lines 571-3.
[77] *Charrete* lines 4288-4310.
[78] *Charrete* lines 711-724.

fellow knight and guardian of the stream that his horse entered and was therefore suddenly reacquainted with reality when dispatched into the icy water.[79] In addition to such ill-fated emotional states, Lancelot is also depicted performing comically improbable feats such as his night in the perilous bed in which he dodges the lance in his sleep and, reaching for a bedside pitcher, extinguishes his flaming sheets to resume peaceful sleep.[80] Perhaps his greatest or worst moment of love inspired comic prowess is described in his initial confrontation with Maleagant in which, at first sight of Guinevere, high in the tower above the battlefield, Lancelot defends himself behind his back so that he does not have to turn and face his opponent and divert his eyes from the queen.[81] And while the reader may in fact have laughed at Lancelot's absurd actions, the lover is never mocked for the underlying strength and skill he displays in such confrontations, for it is his devotion and prowess that ultimately saves the prisoners and queen. Indeed, through the comedy emerges an image of the lover that is in stark contrast to the portrayal of psychological ugliness and ill motive that is personified in Maleagant, who, by his own father's admission, would have long before raped the queen and had been slowly poisoning the wounds of Kay as he lay dying in the queen's chambers.[82] Maleagant is described as one who *'n'onques de feire vilenie et traïson et felenie'* / ['who never tired of baseness, treason, and felony'], and as the psychological negative of Lancelot, *'tex chevalier . . . se fel et deslëaus ne fust mes il avoit un cuer de fust tot sanz dolçor et sanz pitié'* / ['a knight that . . . had he not been treasonous and disloyal, one could not have found a finer knight; but his wooden heart was utterly void of kindness and compassion'].[83] Unlike Maleagant, Lancelot's willingness to do battle is not for personal honour or gain, but to prove his loyalty to the queen who controls his destiny. For it is Lancelot's repentance and redemption as a lover which serves as the key theme to the work. It is most fitting then, that it is Guinevere who first names Lancelot. It is not until the hero is facing battle with Maleagant, the evil knight who has captured Queen Guinevere and holds her captive with a large group of prisoners from Arthur's kingdom of Logres, that the queen,

[79] *Charrete* lines 746-768.
[80] *Charrete* lines 514-534.
[81] *Charrete* lines 3700-3709.
[82] *Charrete* lines 4031- 4034.
[83] *Charrete* lines 3151-3153, 3162-3167.

begged by her lady in waiting, reveals the mysterious knight's identity, naming him for the first time in the work.[84]

In the second half of the work, Chrétien portrays the lover as one of three points in a triangle of contrasts. The contrast between Lancelot and Maleagant as representations of good and evil in both intent and character has been made clear. Chrétien then takes the time to illustrate the relationship between father and son to depict images of good and poor rulership as well as wisdom and folly connected to old age and youth. What is interesting and perhaps significant for this analysis of the lover's depiction is the contrast that is then set up between King Bademagu, the benevolent father of the evil Maleagant, and Lancelot. The old king represents chivalric society, displaying qualities of largesse, wisdom and honour. An otherwise flawless example of chivalry, Lancelot is driven not by the rules of that society but by the demands of courtly love, in which to survive he must place love over his knightly honour and, in many cases, forsake the loyalties and demands of his society. Ultimately, it is this struggle with ideals of love and honour that Lancelot must resolve if he is to prove himself as a worthy lover for the queen. Lancelot lives, in effect, in two worlds. In reality he must live within the 'real' world in which he is valued and judged by both his skill and honour. In such a world, as a knight, he is undeniably the best, and therefore worthy of being the queen's lover.[85] Likewise, however, to be the queen's lover he must prove himself to be the best knight. By obeying the queen's command to do his worst in the battle, Lancelot proves his loyalty. He is then free to once again assert his right to his position as the best knight in the court. The work is presented through such cycles of shame and honour until ultimately, as in the final battle scene, the lover proves that he is capable of exhibiting both ideals simultaneously.

Chrétien's immensely popular romance was entirely absorbed into the next great work to address the lover's life and character, the Vulgate Cycle.[86] Lancelot is

---

[84] *Charrete* line 3661.

[85] He is tested by other women as well, for example the maiden he is made to sleep with who masterminds a false rape scene to test Lancelot's valour as a knight, pitting him, unknowingly, against knights of her household to defend her honour, before he is granted the honour of being her lover. *Charrete* lines 1058-95.

[86] See Appendix I for a discussion of the dating, authorship, background and dissemination of these texts.

introduced to the audience as a child, exceptional from birth in both appearance and skill. The author spends an unusually large amount of time in the description of the lover's physical attributes, describing him as '*si fu tant biax quil ne fu nus qui le vieist quil ne quidast quil fust de grignour eage la tierche part que il nestoit. . . si estoit sages et entendans et legiers et outre che que enfens de son eage ne doit estre'* / ['so beautifully developed that everyone seeing him thought he was a third again older than his real age. . . better behaved and more intelligent and agile than a child of his age was expected to be'].[87] Furthermore, *'que tout chil qui le veoient quidoient que che fust vns des gentiex hommes del monde. Et pour voir si estoit il'* / ['everyone who saw him thought he was one of the noblest and most refined beings in the world. And indeed, he was'].[88] Lancelot is meticulously described to the audience in a very lengthy passage from which a detailed image is created of a man we are told is the picture of beauty in his age, save one feature – his extraordinarily large chest. However, the author is quick to turn even this blemish of the lover's beautiful physiognomy to his benefit,

> *'Che fu la vaillans roine Genieure qui dist que diex ne li auoit pas donne pis a outrage de grant ne de gros ne despesse qui i fust. Car autresi estoit grans li cuers al endroit, si couenist que il creuast par estouoir se il neust teil estage ou il se reposast a se mesure'*
>
> [The worthy Queen Guinevere, who had more to say on the subject that others, said that God had not given him a chest in any way too big or deep or expansive, for it suited his great heart, which would have burst had it not been lodged in a large enough enclosure'].[89]

As a boy, Lancelot learns chess and backgammon faster than anyone can teach him and soon bests all his mentors.[90] The Lady of the Lake, functioning *in loco parentis* after abducting the boy from his grieving mother's side, has him trained in the knightly arts of riding, shooting and swordsmanship, at all of which he excels.[91] As in Chrétien's work, Lancelot begins his adventures as a nameless knight-errant. The motif of a quest for identity had grown common in twelfth-century romance, often in the form of a young knight attempting to make a name for himself through adventure, or an older knight reaffirming his reputation or authority. The author(s) of the

---

[87] *Lancelot* II:18; Sommer III:33.
[88] *Lancelot* II:18; Sommer III:34.
[89] *Lancelot* II:19; Sommer III:33.
[90] *Lancelot* II:18; Sommer III:33.
[91] *Lancelot* II:17; Sommer III:32.

Lancelot, however, added a new dimension to the motif in which the hero himself does not know his name until it is revealed to him following a feat of strength in raising an enormous metal slab that no man but the son of Ban could move.[92]

Though his identity is soon made known to Arthur's court through Gawain's relating of the tale, Lancelot goes to great lengths in order to preserve his anonymity, especially when engaging in battle or tournaments, by changing armour and shields. His motive for such action is revealed in his first extended speech with Guinevere in which he claims that it was to prove himself worthy of her, rather than to gain honour, that he took on these trials of strength and martial prowess.[93]

The sword is a powerful emblem in the work, a subject of multi-layered symbolism.[94] It is Guinevere who gives Lancelot this symbol of masculinity, she who in effect both literally and figuratively makes Lancelot a man. The sword is the tool with which Lancelot will prove his virility and worth as a lover, and thereby attain sexual maturity with the queen to whom he comes as a virgin.[95] The knighting ceremony itself reveals another symbolic function of the sword. The giving of a sword to the knight by his lord represented both the bond and the duty between the two men. Lancelot here exploits a 'loophole' that enables him to avoid much guilt and the charge of treason for his affair with the queen, for he has taken no oath of loyalty to Arthur, but instead to his wife whom he does serve admirably. In this way, Lancelot is able to be at once a good knight and a good lover without the conflicting loyalties that plagued Tristan's character.

Like Tristan, however, there is a duality in the character of Lancelot, though it functions not to impede his development as a knight or lover, but to enable him to fulfill the demands of both roles. The Lady of the Lake comments on this quality that she deems necessary for a truly great knight. She states that he is in possession of two hearts. One, she declares should be *'dur et serei autresi com aimant et lautre mol et ploiant autresi comme cyre caude'* / ['as hard and impenetrable as diamond, and the other as soft and pliable as hot wax'].[96] Lancelot shows himself to be in possession of

---

[92] Sommer III:150-153.
[93] *Lancelot* II:144-145; Sommer III:261..
[94] See above, pp. 163-164.
[95] See above, p. 46.
[96] *Lancelot* II:60;.Sommer III:115.

both these hearts, capable of fierce action and yet also of mercy and love. It is an interesting aspect of Lancelot's character that we find he is, according to his two hearts, both aggressive and shy. He is bold enough to defy powerful men and engage in battle against terrifying odds and yet becomes timid, almost childlike and at times even stupefied in his role as lover.

Lancelot's first encounter with Guinevere portrays the lover as a man caught within a trance that is only broken by her touch. Though finally able to speak, Lancelot is unable to answer the queen's questions as to his name and origins. The queen begins to suspect that it is her presence which has dumbfounded the boy and wishing to cause him no further anguish or arouse suspicion as to his feelings, she leaves the room commenting that the young man did not seem sensible to her and appeared ill bred.[97]

His second encounter proves only marginally less awkward as he again blushes and stumbles over his words of farewell, thrilled by the touch of her bare hand on his as the queen reaches to raise him to his feet.[98] Lancelot continues to be humble in the queen's presence as their paths cross and recross throughout the work. At times, this humility and timidity verges on the humorous and even the ridiculous, often leading to Lancelot's detriment, as illustrated in his conquest of the Dolorous Guard. Disguised by borrowed armour, he invites the queen within the castle, but becomes so enthralled by the queen's presence, that he does not notice the gate closing behind him, barring her entrance to the castle. Instead of winning her favour, he earns her anger.[99]

Lancelot's almost comic fixations lead not only to occasional folly, but very nearly cause his death on several occasions, including the comic suicide attempt borrowed from Chrétien's work, and a farcical episode, unique to the prose version, in which Lancelot agrees to accompany another knight on his adventure. After becoming separated from his companion, Lancelot encounters the queen who has been accompanying her husband on a hunt. The queen informs Lancelot that she has seen his fellow knight and urges Lancelot to travel quickly to catch him. However,

---

[97] Sommer III:126-127.
[98] Sommer III:131.
[99] Sommer III:162.

Lancelot has once again become entranced by her presence and does not notice that his horse, intent on a drink, has entered a fast moving stream in which it almost drowns.[100] Yvain reaches Lancelot just as the hero becomes totally submerged in the river. Aghast at what has happened, Yvain asks the drenched and dumbfounded knight his identity to which Lancelot, still spellbound replies, *'Sire, ie sui vns cheualiers qui abeuroie mon cheval'* / ['Sir I am a knight, and was watering my horse'].[101]

In addition to Lancelot's trances, the author(s) also depict the lover in the grip of another psychological manifestation of courtly love – madness. When faced with the threat of not seeing Guinevere again while in the Saxon prison, he becomes mad in his loss.[102] Whilst lovesick, Lancelot refuses to eat or drink and is given to frightening outbursts of rage and violence, often injuring his companions.[103] Released in a gesture of mercy by his captors who can no longer control him, it is only the queen who can quiet his rage, and ultimately, by following the instructions of the Lady of the Lake, is able to cure Lancelot and restore him to his former soundness of mind and physical strength.[104]

Lancelot, though at times comical, is hardly portrayed as a foolish lover. The role he most often assumes is saviour both of his queenly lover and perhaps most interestingly, of her husband the king. In addition to the incorporated Chrétien episode wherein Lancelot rescues the abducted queen from Malegeant's kingdom, he also serves as her champion in her defence against the claims of the 'false Guinevere'. While at first delighted that Arthur has been duped into abandoning his wife in favour of the impostor, Lancelot refuses to follow Galehaut's advice to ignore the queen's plea for a champion at her trial, for he realises that Guinevere will not be simply divorced and free to marry him, but may be put to death.[105] Lancelot renounces his seat at the Round Table, declaring Guinevere's sentence of mutilation and exile to be an outrage.[106] After a trial by combat in which Lancelot defeats three knights, Arthur

[100] Sommer III:302-303.
[101] *Lancelot* II:113; Sommer III:303.
[102] See above p. 51 and p. 176.
[103] Sommer III:414.
[104] Sommer III:417.
[105] Sommer IV:17.
[106] Sommer IV:60.

affirms his wife's innocence, but chooses to retain his new wife until, through divine intervention the false Guinevere is struck with a terrible malady and confesses her crime. It is interesting to note that when Arthur recalls Guinevere, Lancelot is virtually alone among those who think Guinevere should return to her husband. He declares, that *'qui vous loeroit le roy a refuser il ne vous ameroit mie . . . car vous estes espousee au roy artu si vous aura sil veult combien quil vous ait mesfait'* / ['whoever dissuaded the queen from returning to Arthur did not love her; Arthur was her husband, whatever he had done to her'].[107] Lancelot, unlike Tristan, is concerned more with what is right, than with his own desires. His continued affair with the queen can be viewed as a weakness then, rather than a wickedness, for Lancelot is aware that he is committing a crime and does not look for approval, especially the divine approval of an illicit love. In fact, both lovers acknowledge what they believe to be divine disapproval for their actions:

> *'nostre sire ne garde mie a la corteysie del monde kar cil qui est buens al monde est mals a dieu'*
>
> ['Our Lord pays no heed to out courtly ways, and a person whom the world sees as good is wicked to God'].[108]

While Lancelot, as Guinevere's knight and lover, may be expected to come to her rescue, it is most interesting that he continues to act in his role of saviour to the king as well. Lancelot acts as court champion, a valuable warrior who single handedly turns the tide of the Galehaut war and once again at the Battle of Saxon Rock, and three times rescues the king from imprisonment.[109] The most intriguing of the three rescues is found shortly after the battle of Saxon Rock. While Guinevere attempts to arrange a tryst between herself and Lancelot, her husband is busily arranging his own amorous affairs, for he has become infatuated with a maiden in a nearby castle whom he daily beseeches for her love.[110] His desire for her soon becomes so enflamed that the king loses his most courtly value of *mesure.*[111] The maiden finally approaches Arthur and asks him to spend the night with her in her

[107] Sommer IV:80.
[108] *Lancelot* II:275; Sommer IV:72 (MSS B&S).
[109] Sommer III:229-232.
[110] See p. 141 for a discussion of the impact of this affair on Arthur's character as a husband.
[111] Sommer III:407.

tower. Arthur soon sends word to the queen not to expect him that evening, which allows her own tryst to take place easily. Arthur's night does not, however, end as sweetly or peacefully as does Lancelot's; after making love to the lady, more than forty armed knights enter the room. Caught quite literally with his pants down, Arthur allows himself to be taken prisoner.[112]

Lancelot attempts a rescue, is captured himself but goes mad at the thought of losing Guinevere and is released, only to regain his senses and return to rescue the king. The capture of the king is not in any way a damning flaw of his character, for we find Lancelot and Gawain taken prisoner repeatedly throughout the cycle and in many forms of the legend with no blemish to their reputation or honour. What is interesting is the husband's reliance on his wife's lover for his freedom, not once, but three times. Lancelot has upstaged Arthur many times within the text, by his physical beauty, his loyalty to Guinevere at her trial in the 'False Guinevere' episode, and even on the battlefield. The author reveals that during their last battle, Lancelot had helped King Arthur remount three times for two of his horses were killed under him and the third fell and broke its neck. The king's men were so intent upon pursuing their enemy and taking prisoners that they had abandonned their king, leaving him perilously alone. Only Lancelot remained to guard the king.[113] As a lover, Lancelot is often given a nobility of character and a prowess that the king as husband lacks. But what is most interesting at this point are not Arthur's failings as a husband, but the unique situation of his character at this point as both lover and husband, a position unique both to this work and to all texts considered in this study. Lancelot and Arthur's struggle is not only that of a lover versus a husband, but functions as a struggle between lovers as well; it is a competition that Arthur loses again, for just as Lancelot has shown his superiority in virtually all comparisons, so he possesses a prowess as a lover to which Arthur cannot measure up. Twice within the *Lancelot* Arthur is humiliated as a lover. Firstly his lustiness and gullibility are revealed by his encounter with the maiden and secondly, by his relations with the false Guinevere he loses much honour and his reputation.[114] The role of a lover is not a common one for

[112] Sommer III:410.
[113] Sommer III:408.
[114] Sommer IV:71.

the king, and nor is it a successful one. He is portrayed as a gullible lover and often mistaken – his amorous adventures more often than not produce more folly than good. Perhaps the keenest example of his unsuccessful efforts at love is his seduction of his own sister, hence begetting Mordred who would, in turn, prove to be the costliest mistake of Arthur's life by bringing about the downfall of the Round Table and Arthur's own death. The portrayal of Arthur as a less than successful lover serves two purposes within the text. The first is to contrast with Lancelot as a successful and loyal lover elevating the illicit love and lover over the husband and his failed attempts. Secondly, it diminishes sympathy for the wronged husband, tipping the balance in Lancelot's favour. For Arthur has been depicted not as a doting husband, but as a man who is quite willing to put aside his wife for another and take on several lovers, including his sister, the wife of King Lot.[115] Here the husband is portrayed as being guilty of far worse sins than the lover. In contrast, Lancelot is a loyal lover. His only lapse is in his affair with King Pelles' daughter.[116] Even in this moment of indiscretion, Lancelot emerges virtually untainted as his disloyalty to the queen was the result of a ruse, magic and, as the narrator explains, was in accordance with divine will in the conception of the Grail hero, Galahad.[117]

The introduction of Galahad presents an interesting aspect of the lover as a father. Lancelot is one of only six lovers who become fathers.[118] At news of the child's birth, Lancelot becomes upset, remembering what happened at the castle.[119] Some years later, as Lancelot makes preparations to return to Camelot, King Pelles is advised by a knight to send Galahad to an abbey near Camelot in order that he will be able to see his father frequently.[120] Relocating Galahad nearer Camelot appears to have done very little though to encourage father/son contact, for not until the boy reaches the age of fifteen and is taken to Arthur's court to be knighted, do the two meet again.[121]

[115] Sommer II:129.
[116] Sommer V:111.
[117] *Ibidem.*
[118] Lancelot, Arthur, Uther, the hawk -lover of *Yonec*, fairy lover of *Tydorel* and the unnamed and unseen lover of *l'enfant qui remis au soleil* are the fathers of children begotten in adulterous liaisons.
[119] Sommer V:251.
[120] Sommer V:408-409.
[121] Sommer VI:3.

The *Queste* opens as father and son are reunited at the dubbing of Galahad, though once again, Lancelot does not recognise his son, even as he knights him. Though he notes the child's exceptional beauty and innocence and is sure these are signs that the boy will accomplish great things.[122] Lancelot never asks his son's name, but instead refers to him as *'biau sire/*good sir'].[123]

Everyone at court, including Guinevere, recognises the connection between Lancelot and Galahad, yet neither father nor son admits their relationship aloud. Lancelot is not, however ashamed of his son, as much later he describes the wonder that *'nostre sires a souffert que si haus fruis est issus de moi'* /['Our Lord allowed such a fruit to issue from me'].[124] However, a tone of bitterness accompanies his words as he expresses his disquiet that he should be allowed to fall into ruin or be judged as unworthy because of the sin of carnal love, when that sin was instrumental in the creation of Galahad. Such tone is altogether missing, however, in their last encounter together aboard the magical ship.[125] Lancelot weeps, kisses his son tenderly and begs Galahad to recommend him to God and to implore God on his behalf to both pardon and use Lancelot in his service. [126] This is a very humble picture of the lover and perhaps his progressive tenderness to his son is linked to a humbling and transformation of his own character within the *Grail* text, for the Lancelot who emerges within this section of the cycle is a man who has been knocked brutally from a pedestal of chivalry and has found himself berated by his social inferiors, dishonoured by God and surpassed by his son.

Lancelot's descent from grace begins with the public declaration by the Grail maiden that he is no longer the best knight in the world. [127] No longer the epitome of chivalry, soon he is bested by his son in combat, and is depicted unhorsed, defeated and so disgusted and angry with himself that he wishes to die.[128]

Lancelot's fall is not only that of an ageing father being surpassed by his son, for it is spiritual humility, rather than the humility of love, that the author(s) of the

[122] Sommer VI:3-6.
[123] *Queste* IV:3; Sommer VI:4.
[124] *Queste* IV:45, Sommer VI:99.
[125] Sommer VI:178.
[126] Sommer VI:178.
[127] *Queste* IV:7; Sommer VI:11.
[128] *Queste* IV:19; Sommer VI: 43.

Queste are determined that he must learn.[129] Interestingly, his most stinging rebuke comes not from a priest, the king or even an authority figure of the past such as his lover or the Lady of the Lake, but from an aged hermit. He compares Lancelot to the 'evil slave' in Jesus' parable of Matthew 25:19-30 who, entrusted with some of the master's gold buries it, rather than using it to his master's advantage, and withdraws from his lord in order to hide his theft. Likewise, the hermit chastises Lancelot, explaining,

> *'car qui ore regarderoit entercheualiers terriens il mest auis que il ne troueroit pas home a qui nostre sires eust done tant de graces com il ta preste. Il ta done biaute a comble. il te dona sens et discretion por sauoir bien et mal. Il tedona proeche et hardement. Il te dona boin eur et si bele grace si largement que tu es toudis venus au desus de ce que tu as commenchie. Toutes ces choses te presta nostre sires por ce que tu seroies ses cheualiers et ses serains. Et se nel te dona mie por che que toutes choses fuissent en toi peries mes acreues et amendees et to as este si mauuais serians et si desloiaus que tu en as guerpi por seruir son anemi qui tos iors a guerroie encontre lui tu as este le maluais sodoiers qui se part de son seignor si tost comme il a ses souldees receues et vient seruir a son anemi et lui aidie. . . ce ne feist nus hom a mon essiant quil eust aussi bien paie comme il te paia'*
>
> ['Anyone who surveys the knights on earth will find no one, it seems to me, to whom Our Lord has been so generous. He gave you exceptionally good looks. He gave you intelligence and ability to discern good from evil. He gave you prowess and courage. On top of that he gave you the good fortune to succeed in every undertaking. Our Lord endowed you with these qualities so that you might be his knight and servant. He expected that they would increase and bear fruit in you, not that you would let them perish. But you were such a bad and disloyal servant that you abandoned him to serve his enemy and fought consistently against him. You were the bad soldier who leaves his lord immediately after receiving his wages and goes to work for the lord's enemy. . . No one else who had received so much from God would have done this, in my view'].[130]

The hermit goes on to explain to Lancelot the words he had heard at the sighting of the Grail in which he was told by a mysterious voice that he was *'plus durs que piere plus amer que fust et plus des pris que figuiers'* / [' harder than stone, more bitter than wood, more naked and exposed than a fig tree'].[131] His heart, hardened by sin was harder than stone, his life, deprived of goodness by his sin and made bitter by lack of God in his life was in fact more bitter than wood and finally, in his harshest criticism, the hermit goes on to reveal to Lancelot how he is like the fig tree that the Lord found wanting of fruit, he is without kind thoughts or good will, *'vilain et ort et conchiet de*

---

[129] For information regarding the possible Cistercian authorship of the Vulgate Cycle, see Appendix I.
[130] *Queste* IV:23; Sommer VI:49-50.
[131] *Queste* IV:21; Sommer, VI:44.

luxure et desgarni de fueille et de flors cest a dire nu de toutes boines oeures', / ['vile and impure, sullied by debauchery and completely void of leaves and flowers, that is to say, of good deeds'].[132] It is his sin of adultery with the queen which so completely destroys Lancelot in God's eyes and for this sin he is punished time and time again: first chastised by the hermit and secondly by being humiliated by a squire, his social inferior. After leaving the hermit, Lancelot encounters a squire who berates him, declaring that,

> *'vous estre la flor de toute terriene cheualerie chaitis bien estes enfantosmes par cele qui ne vous aime ne prise se petit non ele vous a si atorne que vous en aues perdu la ioie des ciex et la compaignie des angeles et toute honor terriene et estes uenus a toutes hontes receuoir'*
>
> ['You were once the flower of earthly chivalry! Wretch! You are bewitched by a woman who neither loves nor values you very much. She has beguiled you into losing the joy of heaven, the company of angels and all earthly honour. Only humiliation remains for you'].[133]

Lancelot, instead of rebuking the squire for his speech or even expressing his anger, that the author of the *Lancelot* was so keen to exhibit, is instead filled with sorrow and leaves the squire quietly, in deep remorse and spiritual anguish. Lancelot's downfall is poetically summarised in the following passage in which another hermit describes how his values of virtue, patience, humility, justice, charity and chivalry were all undermined by his love for Guinevere.

At the bottom of his spiral into shame, Lancelot makes confession for the first time of his affair with the queen and then assumes the role of a penitent, wearing a hair shirt to remind him of his sin and swearing to never again have relations with the queen or any other woman.[134] The image of the lover in this section of the cycle is that of a humbled and honestly penitent man. The audience has no reason to doubt that Lancelot, who continues to dwell on his moral failings throughout the work, will continue to uphold his oath and will not succumb to the queen's adulterous love again. Yet, as the sequel to the work, the *Mort Artu*, begins, one finds that less than a month after his return to Camelot has gone by and Lancelot has given in to his desires once again.

---

[132] *Queste* IV:24; Sommer, VI:51.
[133] *Queste* IV:38; Sommer, VI: 84.
[134] *Queste* IV:23; Sommer VI:48.

The courtly theme of the *Lancelot* is renewed in the *Mort Artu* with very little reference to the *Queste,* though admittedly with a shadow cast over both the characters and the plot that Arthur's attempts to reanimate the court do little to disperse. Arthur himself admits that the adventures of the kingdom of Logres had been brought to a close.[135] It is not only the adventures of the knights of the Round Table that are over, as Arthur plainly sees, but indeed the end of Camelot and the very lives of most of its inhabitants, including the lover. While the work is entitled *The Death of Arthur*, it would, perhaps, be more appropriately named 'The Death of Lancelot', for just as the cycle began with his birth, so it ends, not with the death of the king, but with the death of the lover, Lancelot.

Lancelot's character in this work is recast as the lover of the queen, her saviour and champion. Many episodes and themes encountered in the previous two works of the cycle are duplicated, namely Lancelot's quest for anonymity, this time accomplished by feigning illness until the tournament party had left the castle and then rejoining it again in unknown armour, and as expected, winnning the day through his prowess on the field. However, unlike previous episodes in which Lancelot's identity is revealed often to the shock or praise of the king and his court or is kept secret to prove his worth to Guinevere, this time he is known. Lancelot has become lax in his disguise and makes the mistake of riding a horse recently given to him by the king. Arthur and his knights recognise Lancelot but decide to humour his attempt at anonymity.

> *puis quil se veut celer fait li rois or le fesons bien gardes que vous nel dijes a nul home que vous laues veu ne endroit de moi ie nen parlerai ia et ensi pora bien estre celes Car nus ne la veu fors nous ij*
>
> ['Since he wants to hide his identity', said the king', let's respect his wishes. Take care not to tell anyone that you have seen him here; and as for me, I'll say nothing about it. In that way it can remain secret, for no one but the two of us has seen him'].[136]

The image of Lancelot here is not that of a triumphant knight errant in disguise, but rather of a child caught in a game or the eccentricities of an old man, immersed in a delusion, being humoured by those around him. There is a morbidity prevalent

---

[135] *Mort* IV: 91; Sommer VI:201-213.
[136] *Mort* IV:93; Sommer VI:207.

throughout the work, a frustrating inability on Lancelot's part to regain his former self or rebuild his former world. It is as if each character is trying to recreate a moment now lost as their world is caught in a downward spiral in which each fault or weakness is brought out, revealed or mirrored by Lancelot's own decline.

Lancelot's disguise is not the only area in which he has become lax, for just as he was unable to disguise his intent at the tournament, so he has become unable to disguise his actions with the queen. As a lover, Lancelot has become indiscreet. Less than a month after his return from the Grail Quest, Lancelot has resumed his affair with the queen in a manner so reckless and obvious that it attracts the attention of Agravain, the king's nephew and jealous rival of Lancelot.[137] This desperation and lack of discretion is a new development in the character of Lancelot. Indeed, it is more in character with the image of the lover as exemplified in Tristan than in the previous characterisations of Lancelot. Lancelot and Guinevere's relationship has hitherto been depicted as a *bone amor,* a selfless union based on love rather than sexual fulfilment. Though admittedly the element of the sexual was not absent from the work, their bond was shown to be legitimate, even when sexual relations were denied or impossible.[138] This urge to couple as often as possible, and the lovers' indiscretion in doing so, is again evidence of the decline of the lover in his vigilance not only to elevate their love, but to protect his lover from shame or harm. There is a noted change in Lancelot's attitude that is perhaps best illustrated in the comparison of two episodes concerning the return of the queen to Arthur after being rescued by Lancelot from the threat of death. Once more it is a duplication, but with a twist. In the *Lancelot*, after learning the truth behind the traitorous Guinevere's identity, Arthur asked the queen to return from exile. Lancelot alone asserted that it was only proper to do so as Arthur was her husband, regardless of what had transpired.[139] In the *Mort Artu* Guinevere is once again reconciled to her husband after a period of exile, this time in response to being caught in a compromising situation with her lover. As Arthur's actions are based on conjecture rather than visual proof of the affair, the Pope declares the separation to be unscriptural and under threat of interdict, commands

[137] *Mort* IV:91; Sommer VI:204.
[138] See above, p. 41 for Guinevere's appeal to Lancelot to stop the affair for fear of God's judgement.
[139] See above, p. 193.

Arthur to take back his wife. Again Lancelot agrees to return the queen, but this time, not because it is right to rejoin the husband and wife, but for the preservation of her honour, and more importantly, to give credence to their false claim of innocence in the charge of adultery.[140] Interestingly, it is Lancelot who is depicted at fault, guilty of both deception and adultery as opposed to the passage from the *Lancelot* in which Arthur is depicted as governed by lust and easily misguided into folly. This is a very different image for the lover who, until this point, has been virtually incapable of doing wrong.

Authorial redemption and rescue of Lancelot's character were assured throughout the *Lancelot.* No matter what the crisis was, the lovers were guaranteed a positive outcome, even when at times only a *deus ex machina* intervention, usually in the form of the Lady of the Lake, could possibly save them.[141] In the *Mort Artu*, there is no magical intervention; in fact, it would seem that a negative force has taken hold of the piece, replacing what was implausible grace with an at times catastrophic misfortune as the lover and his world begin a descent into a spiral of destruction.

At first this descent is perceptible only in the details and aftermath of the episodes duplicated from the *Lancelot.* Lancelot is still depicted in his role of the champion and saviour, however, a decidedly sinister tone pervades the two episodes of salvation. The first depicts the queen once again brought up on false charges. However, this time, she is being tried for murder. The victim of a plot by the jealous knight Avarlan to rid himself of Sir Gawain, the queen unknowingly passed a poisoned fruit to Gaheris. Eating the fruit destined for Gawain, Gaheris dies immediately, though the queen is not formally accused of murder until Gaheris' brother Mador enters Arthur's court on his brother's behalf. Lancelot defends the queen against the charge that she knowingly killed Gaheris and triumphs. However, the fact remains that while the queen was not guilty of intentional murder, she was in fact the instrument that claimed the life of a knight of the Round Table, the first to die as a tragic scene of events begins to play out.[142] The second time Lancelot is called

---

[140] *Mort* IV:131; Sommer, VI:307.

[141] For instances of the Lady of the Lake intervening see the episode of Lancelot's madness wherein she supplies a magical cure (Sommer III:416) and the episode of the Joyeuse Guard in which she supplies Lancelot with the magical shields which ensure victory (Sommer III:145-147.)

[142] Sommer VI:247, VI:259-260.

upon to defend the queen it is again to defend her honour, though she is guilty of the crime. After being discovered together, the queen is sentenced to death by fire. Lancelot, followed by his kinsmen stages a dramatic rescue of the queen but is thrown into a pitched battle in which Agravain and Guerrehet are killed. Gaheriet, enraged at seeing his brothers struck down attacks Hector. Lancelot, not recognising his fellow knight and riding to the aid of his kinsman, strikes Gaheriet down, killing him instantly.[143] And so, from this moment on, Lancelot earns the enmity of his former companion Gawain whose brothers Lancelot and his family have killed.

In another duplication of episode, Lancelot is found wounded, after a tournament he has attended in disguise and at the mercy of an amorous maiden. Reminiscent of his encounter with the Lady of Malehaut, Lancelot is given shelter and care by the maiden of Escalot. He refuses her advances, just as he refused the persistant Lady of Malehaut's in the *Lancelot*. Loyally he resists temptation, but for the maid of Escalot, there is no substitute for Lancelot, as the Lady of Malehaut found in the person of Galehaut. Rather than settle for Gawain, the young woman chooses death. Heartbroken, she dies and has her body and a note borne by boat to Camelot, where the king and his court find her and her written accusation that she died pining for the love of Lancelot.[144]

Lancelot has always been portrayed as a lover caught between the values and ideals and chivalry and love, a man caught between loyalties, but until now, all such seeming contradictions were able to co-exist, supporting and feeding each, making it possible to serve both love of chivalry. In the *Mort Artu*, however, Lancelot is presented at a crossroads in which he must choose sides and values. His two worlds can no longer co-exist and there are grave repercussions for all his actions. Previously, he had been depicted debating the conflicting values of mercy and vengeance. When asked by a maiden to execute his fallen foe who had begged for mercy, Lancelot was torn between the demands of a conflicting set of loyalties to at once appease the maiden's desire and yet display chivalric mercy to the knight. By giving the knight another chance to defeat him, Lancelot was able to satisfy the demands of both people and values at work. However, in the *Mort Artu* no such

[143]*Mort* IV:122; Sommer, VI:277.
[144]*Mort* IV:114; Sommer, VI: 257.

balance can be found. In choosing to rescue Guinevere, Lancelot takes military action and is forced to kill those knights who challenge his loyalty to the queen. The price for such loyalty is war between his kin and Gawain's kin. By choosing his loyalty to love, Lancelot has both shamed and lost the friendship of the king and earns himself exile from Logres. Ironically, in choosing to defend Guinevere, Lancelot loses her, for after returning to Gaul, Lancelot is only to meet her again after the death of Arthur, when she has taken vows to ensure her safety from Mordred's sons.[145] Lancelot's final act within the work is spurred by his loyalty to his lover. Obeying Guinevere's wish to dedicate the remainder of his life to God, as she has done, to repent of their sins,[146] Lancelot takes priestly orders, performing his religious duties with a prowess formerly reserved for his deeds of knightly service:

> '*si demora lancelot laiens iiij ans en tel maniere quil nestoit nus hons nes qui tant peust souffrir paine ne trauail comme il souffroit de ieuner et de villier en proieres et en orisons et de main leuer*'
>
> ['For four years, Lancelot lived a life of fasting and vigils and constant prayers and rising at dawn – a life such as no other man could have endured'].[147]

Lancelot's character, as depicted in each of the four works, is difficult to reconcile. While Chrétien's poem, the *Lancelot* and the *Mort Artu* present the similar image of a lover attempting to reconcile the demands of courtly and chivalric society, the *Queste* is concerned with the lover's spirituality – a theme seldom commented on in any portrayal of a lover. The anti-courtly sentiment of the work seeks to negate Lancelot's courtly and chivalric achievements, depicting him as a fallen and defeated man rather than the hero of the work. Any interpretation of his character then relies heavily on how the Vulgate itself is defined as a work. If each work within the Vulgate was the work of a different author functioning under the guidance of a master architect, but each free to relate his own opinion of the lover, then three distinct images of the lover can be found – the perfect courtly lover, the weak man and finally, a Tristan figure such as envisaged by Béroul, reckless and sexual. However, if, as argued by Lot, the work is in fact, '*une tragédie en cinq actes*',[148] if it is a form of

---

[145] *Mort* IV:158; Sommer, VI:385.
[146] *Ibid.*
[147] *Ibid.*
[148] F. Lot, *Étude sur le Lancelot en prose,* (Paris, 1918) p. 74

debate, showing the equally destructive and equally faulty nature of both the values here studied, those of courtly love and of chivalric honour, then there is a unified, though multifaceted image of the lover.

Thorpe criticises the images of lovers in general for being 'at times, oddly cardboard'.[149] This static nature is not however typical of the lover or necessary but as Thorpe does not go on to analyse, is the result of the lover's obeying prescribed codes of courtly or chivalric conduct. Those lovers who do not follow such conventions, such as the Tristan of Béroul or even Chrétien's Lancelot, are portrayed as much more believable and in fact more sympathetically human. The times when Lancelot in the prose version is most animated and most real are times in which he deviates from prescribed models of the courtly lover or the chivalric hero, as shown in his bereavement over Galehaut's death, his heartfelt lamentation whilst alone on the magical boat as he mentally reviews his sins, the tender care he exhibits in his paintings while Morgan's prisoner and, ultimately, his righteous anger toward Mordred and his sons when he learns of Arthur's death. If anything, the work shows through the depiction of the lover that wholehearted service to one or the other value system leads to ruin and folly. It is only when caught in the middle, or acting on behalf of both value systems that Lancelot succeeds. It is interesting that so very much effort was expended on behalf of the authors, especially the writer(s) of the *Queste*, denouncing sinful love, and indeed, it would appear that his loyalty to that love was the downfall of Lancelot. Yet at the completion of the work, it is not Lancelot and Guinevere's love that has brought about the fall of Arthur's realm, but the demands of chivalry that ultimately undermine Camelot. Gawain's dogged desire for revenge, mandated by his honour, leads Arthur into war with Lancelot's kin. Arthur's inability to go back on his word without losing his honour keeps him at battle with Lancelot instead of focusing on the threat Mordred poses. Lancelot's loyalty to love above honour places him in an equally dangerous situation, where ultimately he must choose Guinevere's life over his companions' lives. It ultimately leads him into exile from the land he loves, but at the same time, has acted as the impulse which has enabled him to perform the deeds of glory for which he has gained fame and praise.

---

[149] Thorpe, p. 18.

Finally, it was the demands of love, not his own faulty desire which prompted him to turn his life to God and seek forgiveness. Though it may be difficult to find a victor at the end of the cycle, one would have to choose Lancelot, for in the end, he retains what he desired, to be Guinevere's friend and knight. The final image of the lover is that of victor; he is the lamented hero of the Joyous Guard, the loyal lover, and a successful penitent. In his death, he finally achieves the highest honours of each conflicting system of values with which he has wrestled, successfully and unsuccessfully, throughout his life.

The Named

Under this heading are included four men who, though not famous, are named within the work in which they appear, one commanding the title role. Notably, none of the works is a verse romance but they belong instead to the genres of lais and fabliaux. Outside the lengthy verse and prose romances there is distinct change in the depiction of the lover. While he is often a knight or even king, as is Equitan for example, social nobility and indeed nobility of character are not central to his depiction or role. The category of the named lover includes a most uncourtly king, two knights and a blacksmith's apprentice.

Equitan

Like Lancelot and Tristan, Equitan is a lover who commands the title role of a work. Marie de France's depiction of this kingly lover reveals a sexually driven man who is both traitorous and gullible. She begins her lay by comparing the characters of the lover, King Equitan, and the husband, his own seneschal. She writes:

> *Equitan fu mut de grant pris*
> *E mus amez en sun païs;*
> *Deduit amout e drüerie:*
> *Pur ceo maintint chevalerie.*
> *Cil met[ent] lur vie en nu[n]cure*
> *Que d'amur n'unt sen e mesure;*
> *Tels est la mesure de amer*
> *Que nul n'i deit reisun garder.*
> *Equitan ot un seneschal,*
> *Bon chevaler, pruz e leal;*
> *Tute sa tere li gardoit*
> *E meinteneit e justisoit.*

Ja, se pur ostïer ne fust,
Pur nul busuin ki li creüst
Li reis ne laissast sun chacier,
Sun deduire, sun reveier.

[Equitan enjoyed a fine reputation and was greatly loved in his land. He adored pleasure and amorous dalliance: for this reason he upheld the principles of chivalry. Those who lack a full comprehension and understanding of love show no thought for their lives. Such is the nature of love that no one under its sway can retain command over reason. Equitan had a seneschal, a good knight, brave and loyal, who took care of his entire territory, governing it and administering its justice. Never, except in time of war, would the king have forsaken his hunting, his pleasures or his river sports, whatever the need might have been]. [150]

Though Equitan is described as a courtly man, such qualities are not presented as positive.[151] Marie, having provided examples of chivalry and courtly love in works such as *Yonec* and *Guigemar*, has presented Equitan as a criticism of a character or perhaps of an element of society that has reinterpreted chivalry as 'pleasure and amorous dalliance'. The character of the king is governed by *démeasure,* or the lack of control and love of excess. His lust motivates him to pursue the wife of his own seneschal who, in contrast, is portrayed as a fiercely loyal and trustworthy man. He is easily manipulated by his ambitious lover who seeks to improve her station by murdering her husband and marrying the king. The king's lack of self control proves to be his undoing as he unwisely engages in spontaneous sex with the wife while they await her husband. When caught in the act by the husband, the king again displays a lack of good judgement and in fact, commits an act of cowardice by leaping into a deep tub in order to hide his shame. Unfortunately, the king hops into the very tub in which he was to have murdered the seneschal and he himself is scalded to death in the boiling water. Just as he made a foolish king, so he is depicted as a foolish lover, unable to exercise judgement and restraint, he placed himself in a vulnerable situation which caused him and his lover their lives.

Guigemar

In contrast to the character of Equitan, loyalty is the predominant characteristic of the lover, Guigemar. Guigemar is found aboard a ship, seeking a cure for a mystical

[150] *Equitan* lines 13-28.
[151] '*D'Equitan que mut fu curteis. . .*' Ewert, line 11.

injury no doctor is able to cure.[152] After being discovered and healed by the wife of a foreign lord, a jealous and distrustful man who has kept his wife a lonely prisoner in a secure enclosure, he falls in love with his saviour. What is interesting and quite distinct in the portrayal of this lover is his *measure*. Guigemar is cautious in his actions and, upon discovery, behaves without savagery, shame or cowardice.

Guigemar est en piez levez,
Ne s'est de nïent esfreez.
Une grosse perche de sap,
U sulient prendre li drap,
Prist en ses mains e sis atent;
Il en ferat aukun dolent:
Ainz kë il de eus seit aprimez,
Les avrat il tut maaimez.
Le sire l'ad mut esgarde,
Enquis li ad e demandé
Kë il esteit e dunt fu nez
E coment est la einz entrez.
Cil li cunte cum il i vient
E cum la dame le retient;
Tute li dist la destinee
De la bise ke fu nafree
E de la neif e de sa plaie;
Ore est del tut en sa manaie.
Il li respunt que pas nel creit
E s'issi fust cum il diseit,
Si il peüst la neif trover,
Il le metreit giers en la mer:
S'il guaresist, ceo li pesast,
E el li fust si il neiast.
Quant il l'ad bien aseüré,
El hafne sunt ensemble alé;
La barge trevent, enz l'unt mis.

[Guigemar stood up, quite unafraid. He seized a large fir-wood pole, used for hanging clothes, and waited for them, intending to make someone suffer: before any of his adversaries had got near him, he would have maimed them one and all. The lord looked at him intently, asked who he was, where he was from and how he had entered. Guigemar explained how he had arrived, how the lady had retained him, and all about the prophesy of the wounded hind, about the ship and his wound. Now he was entirely in the lord's power. The lord replied that he did not believe him, but if things were as he stated and he could find the ship, he would then put him out to sea. If he survived, he would be sorry, and if he drowned, he would be delighted. When the lord had given this assurance, they went together to the harbour, where they found the ship and put him aboard].[153]

---

[152] See L. Brook, 'Guigemar and the White Hind', *Medium Aevum*, 56 (1987) pp. 94 – 101. For a comparison to a similar episode in the Tristan legend see *TrP* I:310.
[153] *Guigemar* lines 593-619.

Instead of running away, Guigemar stands, ready to defend himself and his lover but also acts with prudence and does not wildly resort to bloodshed, but explains himself rationally to the lord. Guigemar never doubts the loyalty of his lady and accepts no lover until one arrives who can prove herself by removing a special knot that his beloved has previously tied in his shirt. By retaining these noble characteristics, the lover stands out in stark contrast to the jealous husband and, unlike Equitan, Guigemar's actions are not judged as base or malevolent. His happiness and eventual reunion with his lover are his reward for his *measure*, just as Equitan's death is depicted as equally fitting for his *démeasure*.

Ignaurés

In contrast to the bold and fearless character of Guigemar, the image of the lover *Ignaurés* is that of a reckless, cowardly and decidedly uncourtly lover. Ignaurés is first depicted as a lover of twelve women whom he claims he loves equally. It is not until the women find out that they share a common lover and threaten to murder the knight that he chooses the prettiest, Loisignol, to at last enter into a monogamous relationship with. His disloyalty and his lustiness stand in stark contrast to successful courtly lovers such as Lancelot and his image suffers greatly.[154] Ignaurés, like Equitan, shows striking *démesure* in his relationship with Loisignol. Ultimately their lack of caution when pursuing opportunities for lovemaking attract the attention of a member of the household who informs the husbands of all twelve wives of their cuckolding. Caught in *flagrante delicto,* Inaurés does little to escape, neither fighting back, nor attempting to protect the life of his lover or himself. He admits to his crime before he is even questioned and willingly allows himself to be imprisoned. Interestingly, the narrator never comments upon the character of the husband in this work. A comparison between the men is not needed to enhance the failings of the lover: Ignaurés' lack of martial prowess, of courage, of discretion or care for his and Louisignol's reputations or lives sufficiently deprecates his character. No lengthy description is given this lover and noticeably, no courtly or noble characteristics are assigned to him. His depiction is only as a '*iene omme*/young man', '*bele*/ handsome'

---

[154] *Ignaurés* lines 68-158. See also above, p. 190.

and '*plein desir*/filled with desire'. Ignaurés fate is as ignoble as his character. He is imprisoned for four days before being dismembered – his heart and penis served in a dish to all twelve wives he had taken on as lovers.[155] Though referred to as a '*bon cheualier*' in the final lines of the work, the figure of Ignaurés emerges as anything but 'good'.

Walter

Walter, an apprentice blacksmith in the anonymous fabliaux, *Du Fevre de Creeil,* holds a unique position as the only named lover in the canon of 106 surviving fabliaux. Unlike the other lovers in this category, Walter is not characterised by a depiction of his moral virtues or failings, but by an in-depth physical description:

Li vallés avoit non Gautiers.
Molt ert deboneres et frans,
les rains larges, grailes les flans,
gros par espaules et espés,
et si portoit du premier mes
qu'il coivient aus dames servir,
quar tel vit portoit, sanz mentir,
qui molt ert de bele feture,
quat toute i ot mise sa cure
nature qui formé l'avoit
Devers le retenant avoit
plain poing de gros et .II. de lonc:
ja li treus ne fust si bellonc,
pot tant que dedenz le meïst,
qu'aussi roont ne le feïst
com s'il fust fez a droit compas.
Et des mailliaus ne di je pas,
qui li sont au cul atachié,
qu'il ne soient fet et taillié
tel comme a tel ostil covient.
Tozjors en aguisant se tient
por retrere delivrement,
et fu rebraciez ensement
comme moines qui gete aus poires;
ce sont paroles toutes voires:
rouge comme oingnon de Corbueil.
Et si avoit si ouvert l'ueil
por rendre grant plenté de seve
que l'en li peüst une feve
lombarde tres parmi lancier
que ja n'en lessast son pissier,

---

[155] *Ignaurés* lines 12-14. The eaten heart motif is taken up and expanded into the early fourteenth century romance *Roman du Castelain de Couci* with the addition that it is the husband, not a spy, who acts as accuser. This motif is also found in several troubadour lyrics. Of special note are those of Guillem of Cabestany. See Gaunt and Kay, *Troubadours*, pp. 274-278.

de ce n'estuet il pas douter,
ne que une oue a gorgueter
s'ele eüst mengié un grain d'orge.

[The young man's name was Walter. He was very good-looking and honest, with wide hips, slender flanks and big and thickset shoulders, and he bore from the very beginning something that ladies need, because he had a very well-built prick, no lie, because nature, who had formed it, had put all her care into it. From the base it was a full fist in width and two in length; There was never a hole so oblong that, if he stuck it in, it wouldn't be made as round as if it were made with compasses. And I'm not saying that the balls, which were secured to his arse, weren't made and measured exactly as is fitting for such a tool. He always held it sharp to pull it back quickly, and it was then tucked up like the monk's robe when he throws at pears; this is the honest truth: it was as red as a Corbeil onion. And it had such a wide-open eye for letting out a great quantity of sap that a Lombard bean could be thrown down the middle of it without obstructing the piss (of this there must be no doubt) no more than a goose would be kept from swallowing if she had eaten a grain of barley].[156]

It is interesting that just as the prose Lancelot opened with a long and detailed description of the physical qualities that showed the lover to be destined for his role, so, in this earthy parody of the romance convention, Walter is portrayed as the physical ideal for his part in the bawdy tale of a man who tempts his wife with descriptions of his apprentice's large penis. Walter is not shown to be lusty himself or inclined to pursue an adulterous affair with his master's wife. Indeed, he only acquiesces to the idea when tempted by the amorous wife's offer of new clothing in exchange for his services. [157] Walter's character is not presented as an equal member of a love triangle, but serves to reaffirm the portrayals of the other characters: that the husband who feared his wife's lust would prevail over her loyalty to him is proven correct, as is the narrator who warns husbands never to be so foolish as to place their wife in temptation's path. The final glimpse of the lover is his departure from the house '*triste et dolenz*',[158] though one is not certain if his sadness is for the loss of his apprenticeship, of a sexual encounter or the boon in the form of new clothes. It is a superficial, base and strikingly different image of a named lover than any previously discussed and is more closely linked to the descriptions of the unnamed and unseen lovers that here follow.

[156]*Le Fevre du Creeil* lines 8-41; Eichmann II:135.
[157] Ibid. line 130; Eichmann II:139.
[158] Ibid. line 157; Eichmann II:141.

The Unnamed

The leap from the named to the unnamed shows a division in the depiction of the lover. In this category is a diverse group of men who are given roles of varying length, depth and impact but are united in their role as anonymous catalysts for conflict within the works in which they are depicted. Several lovers are given quite extended roles and even dialogue, though by no means is their speech in the proportion witnessed in the Tristan cycle. The priestly lover in the fabliau *Baillet*, for example, is given six lines of dialogue in Latin as he prays inside the meat safe in which he has hidden, hoping his brother will hear his cries and free him. Such speech is rare, however, and more often it is by narrative description of the lover's actions that the audience comes to know his character. Thus Marie de France's description of the lover in *Bisclavret* is brief: '*Un chevalier de la cuntree, que lungement l'aveit amee e mut preié' e mut requise e mut duné en sun service'* /'a knight who lived in the region who had loved her for a long time, wooed her ardently and served her generously'.[159] This nameless knight carries out his lover's plan to relieve her of her werewolf husband by taking his clothes, his one key back to the human world, and with Bisclavret conveniently absent, marries the lady. Marie reveals little else of the lover's character or background. Though his role in stealing Bisclavret's clothing and thus rendering it impossible for him to regain human form is both important and active, it is only after discovery of their treachery, that the nameless lover is again mentioned. Here his role is passive as he is sentenced by Arthur to accompany his new wife into exile. The anonymous knight becomes an afterthought in the conclusion, though interestingly, the most constant characteristic of a lover, namely sexual virility, is alluded to in the penultimate stanza: '*Cil s'en alat ensemble od li, pur ki sun seignur ot trahi. Enfanz en ad asés eüs. . .* / 'The man for whom she betrayed her husband went with her. They had many children'.[160]

In contrast to these examples are the majority of texts, especially fabliaux in which the lover is not heard from and may only briefly appear within the text. The shortest role occupied by a lover is found in Marie de France's fable *The Peasant who*

---

[159] *Bisclavret* lines 103-106.
[160] Ibid. p. 72.

saw another with his wife in which the lover's presence is only afforded one verse, *'Un autre homme vit sur sun lit od sa femme fist sun delit'.* / ['A man in his own bed he sighted who there with his own wife delighted'].[161] Many lovers are seen only briefly whilst escaping under tubs, beds or out of the window or on their way to hiding, in closets, workshops, meat lockers, behind screens or in the barn.[162] Often the appearances of the lover are concurrent with scenes of punishment. A lover's apprehension and subsequent beating or castration is often the first the audience sees of his character.[163]

The amount of dialogue, if any, and action that the lover commands varies in these works from two to thirty-six lines, as found in the thirty-five cases here included in this category.[164] These numbers are in stark contrast to the named lovers and especially so to the famous who, like Tristan, can command up to three times the dialogue of other primary characters. The disparity between the previously examined texts and those of this category clearly illustrates that once a lover loses his name, he loses his presence and dominance within the work. Though namelessness does not necessitate the tipping of balance in favour of the husband, it does exponentially reduce the amount of dialogue, action and importance of the lover within the piece.

The Unseen

The unseen lover – the lover who is never actually allowed to appear in body or voice on the literary stage – is a depiction of the lover almost exclusive to the fabliaux. While Chrétien's introduction to Lancelot's character began as a whispered plea to an absent *ami*, it stands alone in this one brief moment of the work as the only non-fabliaux to have such an unseen lover. Lancelot in Chrétien's work goes through a brief period as an unseen lover and then as an unnamed lover but such obscurity is a means to an end, rather than the summation of his character. It was his quest for a

[161] Marie de France, *Fables,* ed. and trans. Harriet Spiegel (Toronto, 1987), p.135, line 3.
[162] *Du cuvier, La dame qui se venja du chevalier, Le chevalier a la robe vermeille, Le clerc qui fu repus derriere l'escrin* (hiding place of the first lover in the closet), *Le prestre crucifie, Baillet, Le clerc qui fu repus derriere l'escrin* (hiding place of the second lover behind a screen), *Le povre clerc.*
[163] *Connebert, Le prestre crucifie.*
[164] Please see Appendix II for a synopsis of each of the fabliaux herein examined or referred to.

name and his secret identity as Guinevere's lover that mandated his anonymity, not a conscious effort on behalf of the author to exclude him from the work.[165]

The hidden lover is a very common motif, especially in the fabliaux. Quite often the lover is exposed through either the husband's awareness of his presence as illustrated in *Baillet* in which the lover, who has hidden in a meat chest is frightened into exposing himself, or unknowingly as depicted in *Le clerc qui fu repus derriere l'escrin* in which a husband's unintentional gesture towards the lover's hiding place frightens the man into exposing himself. The author further compounds the humour by having a second lover, frightened by the discovery of the first, likewise break from his hiding place in the cupboard and run away after the first.[166] However, many hiding lovers do remain unseen. For example, in both *La Bourgoise d'Orliens* and *La feme qui cunquie son baron* the wives are able to keep their lovers hidden in another room, unseen to the husband or audience, while they disable their husbands, the former is locked in a cupboard and the latter in the wine cellar. Lovers are likewise kept unseen under tubs and in barns.[167]

The rumoured or suspected unseen lover is likewise common; the search for which often sparks a humourous attempt by the husband to outwit his wife.[168] *Le chevalier qui fist sa fame confesse* depicts a husband, suspicious of his wife's sexual activity, disguising himself as a priest in order to hear his dying wife confess. While it appears that he will prevail after learning of his wife's five year affair with his nephew, his shrewd wife quickly guesses his game and exposes his identity, claiming her 'lie' was to punish him for attempting to trick her. The husband in *Le prestre et le leu* is not disuaded from his beliefs by his wife's protestations of innocence, however, and plans one of the few successful trappings of a lover by digging a pit in the path which his wife's lover uses to visit her. The priest remains hidden from the audience, husband and wife, who sends a serving girl to look for him. While the husband discovers the priest, whom he emasculates, the action takes place in the pit and remains literally hidden from view.

---

[165] See above, pp. 57 and 196.
[166] *Baillet* lines 55-93; *Le clerc qui fu repus derriere l'escrin* lines 126-148.
[167] *Du cuvier* and *Le povre clerc.*
[168] See above, p. 98.

The third type of unseen lover is one who is never present. Often, as illustrated in *La dame qui fist trois tours entour le moustier*, the lover and sexual act are located outside the home and visual space of the story. This does not mean however, that his presence is not felt or that he remains undiscovered, as shown in *L'enfant que fu remis au soleil* in which the lover, though never depicted in the work, leaves a powerful token of his presence in the form of an illegitimate child. The actions of the unseen lover had far reaching repercussions that led to the devastation of his lady love whose predicament and whose child remain, no doubt, as unknown to him and he is to the audience.[169]

The Unreal

Yonec / Tydorel

While the motif of the fairy lover is common in medieval literature, Marie's *Yonec* and the anonymous *Tydorel* are the only works of this period to assign an otherworldly lover to a woman.[170] In *Yonec*, the lover appears as an answer to the prayer of a jealous old man's beautiful young wife who sits sequestered alone in a tower. As soon as she finishes her appeal to God for a lover to ease her pain, a hawk flies into her tower and, taking the form of a man, professes his love and loyalty to her:

> *'Dame', fet il, 'n'eiez poür!*
> *Gentil oisel ad en ostur;*
> *Si li segrei [vus] sunt oscur,*
> *Gardez ke seiez a seür,*
> *Si fetes de mei vostre ami!*
> *Pur ceo', fet il, 'vienc jeo [i]ci.*
> *Jeo vus ai lungement amé*
> *E en mun quor mut desiré;*
> *Unques femme fors vus n'amai*
> *Ne jamés autre ne amerai.*
> *Mes ne poeie a vus venir*
> *Ne fors de mun païs eissir,*

[169] *L'enfant que fu remis au soleil*, lines 13-19.

[170] Chrétien de Troyes' *Yvain* and Marie's own *Lanval* are both examples of this motif wherein a fairy lover engages in a love affair with a knight. For an interesting analysis on the theme of the otherworldly (female) lover, see L. Harf-Lacner, 'Fairy Godmothers and Fairy Lovers', in *Arthurian Women: A Casebook*, ed. T. Fenster (New York, 1996), pp. 135-190.

Si vus ne me eüssez requis.
Or puis bien estre vostre amis!'

['Lady do not be afraid! The hawk is a noble bird. Even if its secrets remain a mystery to you, be assured that you are safe, and make me your beloved! This is the reason I came here. I have loved you a long time and desired you greatly in my heart. I never loved any woman but you, nor shall I ever love another. Yet I could not come to you, nor leave my country, unless you had wished for me; but now I can be your beloved!'] [171]

It is interesting that the fairy lover, who swears loyalty, has chosen the form of a hawk, a bird that mates for life, to make his visits to his beloved. He acts with great prudence and advocates moderation in their lovemaking, so as not to raise the suspicions of his lover's maid or husband.[172] In their initial meeting, the lover reveals his ability to predict future events by foretelling the treachery of his lover's sister-in-law and later, after he is mortally injured in a trap set by the jealous husband, informs his lover that she is pregnant with a child who shall avenge them.[173]

In *Tydorel,* the lover approaches the wife of a king of Brittany claiming, like the hawk king in *Yonec*, that he has long loved her. He takes her to his underwater realm in order to prove his identity to her, but like the hawk king, carries out his long term affair in the wife's earthly realm. He likewise possesses the ability to forsee the birth and future of the illegitimate children he will have with his lover, a son who will never sleep and a daughter who will marry a count.[174] While the wife offered no prayer for her lover, her previous childless state, the one complaint of her otherwise perfect marriage, is remedied. Like the lover in *Yonec*, the sea king continues his affair with the king's wife for an extended period of time until they are discovered. In this lay, however, the discovery and end of the affair are not linked to a jealous husband, but an accidental discovery by a poor vassal who was coming to ask his king for help. The sea king disappears from the story which goes on to relate the death of the king of Brittany and the rule of Tydorel, the sea king's illegitimate son.[175]

The hawk king and the sea king have here taken on the roles of both fairy lovers and fairy god-fathers – roles that when acted by women are kept distinct, as

[171] *Yonec* lines 91-134.
[172] *Yonec* lines 191-210.
[173] *Yonec* lines 327-436.
[174] *Tydorel* lines 137-148.
[175] *Tydorel* lines 176 onwards.

illustrated by Lancelot's asexual relationship with the Lady of the Lake, and Lanval's courtly love affair with his fairy mistress. It is this amalgamation of roles which makes this lover stand apart. The sea king arrives mysteriously as the wife sleeps, equating him with a dream world that a trip to his underwater kingdom does little to dispel, though it is intended to prove his existence to his sceptical would-be-lover who is sure she is dreaming. He is able to grant her unspoken wish for children, though this comes by no mysterious means and may, in fact, serve to illustrate his virility rather than his otherworldliness. While possessing elements of both fairy-lover and fairy-godfather, the image of the sea king is perhaps more mysterious that mystical.[176]

In comparison, the fairy king of *Yonec* answers the lady's prayer, granting her wish for a lover only upon the condition that they are not discovered. Unlike many gifts granted by other fairies, this grant carries with it a weighty repercussion upon dissolution of the wish. For not only will the lady lose her lover, he will lose his life should they be discovered. As a lover, he proves himself not only able, but superior to human lovers, for he is able to insure the safety of his lover and their son through a magic ring he bestows upon his lover. Though his death prevents him from having any role in his son's life, the fairy king makes provision for the boy's safety and leaves an inheritance, in the form of his sword, to aid his son in fulfilling his destiny.

This study of the image of the lover has established several distinctions first, in their relation to each other, assigning them to the categories of the famous, the unknown, the unseen and the unreal, and secondly, in their relation to the other characters within the text and influence in the events. A relationship is immediately evident between their influence and presence in a piece, forming a hierarchy at the top of which are the named and/or famous lovers, followed by the unnamed including the unreal, and lastly the unseen.

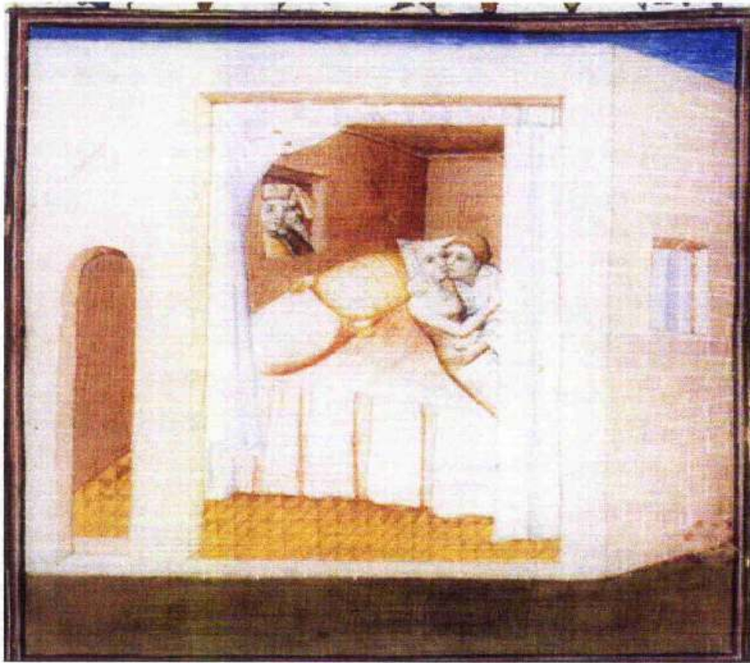
No unified image of the lover is presented. Rather, vague indications of what constitutes good and bad lovers are understood. Successful lovers are often presented as possessing qualities of largesse, *measure* and, as much as possible, provide

[176] *Tydorel* is often regarded as a poor imitation of Marie de France's *Yonec* in part due to the inability of the author to transform the lover into a male version of the standard female fairy-lover motif. See Appendix I.

protection for their lady lovers from scandal and harm. Unsuccessful lovers are depicted as brash, given to excess and without reason. Often these lovers incorporate into their adultery other, more heinous crimes, such as theft or murder, and are therefore doubly treasonous and detestable. It is interesting to note that included in the category of unsuccessful lovers are kings. The depiction of kings as lovers – Mark, Arthur and Equitan – all portray them as gullible fools who endure great shame and bodily harm from their foiled escapades.

The character of a lover can be used in a variety of ways and to a multitude of purposes. As a noble man, the lover can expose a corrupt and pitiful husband. As a reckless and often senseless character, he can be used to illuminate the reputable qualities of a husband. His presence, or lack thereof, can bring to light the intricacies and problems of a marriage or erase the husband from the minds of the audience. The lover is a powerful tool for reflection of a husband's characteristics and a symbol of masculinity and its fears. The lover's relationship with the husband and wife provides a great deal of insight into their characters and the conflict present within themselves and their marriage. The lover seldom experiences the directly proportional, see-saw-like relationship with either the husband, or the wife, that they have with each other in which a quality or action has the equal and opposite effect on the other's character. However, his relationship with the fourth member of the adulterous story, the accuser, reveals how the lover's character, actions and relationship with these persons can play a pivotal role in instigating an exposure or safeguarding the secret of his affair.

Chapter 4:
Accusers and Accusations



'How Material Things are Made', from Bartolomeus Anglicus, *Livres des Propiétez des Choses*, Paris, c. 1400.
Wolfenbüttel, Herzog-August-Bilbiothek 1.3.5.1., Aug.2 fol. 146r.

'Cel jur furent aparceü, descovert, trové e veü d'un chamberlene mal veisïe. . . ne pout dedanz la chambre entrer par une fenestre les vit'.

[That day they were perceived, discovered, found and seen by a cunning chamberlain. . . [who] unable to gain entry into the room, peeked through the window'].

-Marie de France, *Guigemar* lines 577-583.

Accusers and Accusations

This chapter will examine those who expose the lovers or make a charge of adultery and will also discuss the intent, nature and form of the accusations made. The roles of the accuser and the accusation are subjects that are relatively neglected in modern scholarship and yet are of pivotal importance within the works, not only for their use in plot development, but also as a means by which the husband's, the wife's but most importantly, the lover's strengths or weaknesses are revealed. In the following examination of the accusers their identity, background, motivation, portrayal, form of their accusation and ultimately their fates will be analysed, in light of their relationship with the main characters, especially the lover.

The role of the accuser was not limited to, nor dominated by one sex. In fact, of the sixteen accusers found within the corpus of texts here examined, the division is exactly even: eight female and eight male accusers. The men and women cast in this role are depicted as king's vassals, members of a household, including chamberlains and knights, close familial relations in the persons of sisters, nieces, and fiancees; there are gossiping neighbours and even fantastical creatures such as fairies and werewolves.[1] It is a diverse group both socially and in some cases even physically. Yet they are united in both their roles as antagonists and, with the exception of only two cases, their use of accusations of adultery as a means to address grievances with the protagonist.

This raises the question of an accuser's motive. In this obviously diverse group of people, it is their motive that is often the most powerful element of their characters and provides the best method of categorising, discussing and analysing the accusers as: rejected would-be lovers, rivals, greedy troublemakers, those who are coerced or commanded into their roles, and ultimately, the husband himself.

I. The rejected would-be lover

The first type of accuser is the rejected would-be lover. Here, there are three cases to examine, those of Morgan le fée, Maleagant and Bessille.

[1] *TrB* line 26; *Guigemar* line 51; *Charrete* line 92, *TrT* 127; *Yonec* line 89, *Charrete* line 106; *Bourgoise D'Orliens; TrP* II:152, *Le Fresne* line 61;*Cor* line 5, *Mantel* line13; *Bisclavret* line 63.

i. Morgan

Morgan is the most ubiquitous of all accusers, appearing in the Vulgate Cycle, the Prose *Tristan* and Thomas' *Tristan*. Her character has a long tradition within ancient Celtic mythology as a head of a magical sisterhood in which she may have enjoyed status as a priestess of a goddess and was possibly seen as the goddess' earthly manifestation. [2] Medieval authors, notably Gerald of Wales, were aware of Morgan's original divinity. [3] In his comparison of Welsh Arthurian material with non-Welsh sources, Lacy has discovered evidence to link Morgan with the river goddess Matrona. Her name and character, Paton convincingly argues, also suggests possible influence from the Irish battle-goddess Morrigan.[4] Her first introduction as Morgan or 'Morgen' is given in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini* in which she enjoys a role presiding over a sisterhood of nine who live on an enchanted island and receive the wounded Arthur whom they undertake to heal if he will remain with them long enough.[5] Such benevolence does not continue to accompany the image of Morgan in later works. Her character takes on a decidedly sinister quality in the Vulgate and all remaining works of the thirteenth century in which she appears. In all of these works she is depicted not as a mysterious healer or noble woman, but as a vengeful thwarted lover or a bad tempered fairy. Her bitterness and anger is explained first within the Vulgate *Merlin*. When her affair with Guinevere's cousin Guiomar is broken up by the queen, Morgan vows revenge and thrice attempts to seduce Lancelot away from the queen. [6] Spurned by Lancelot on all occasions, Morgan's anger becomes intense, motivating her to expose what she could not undermine.[7] No doubt influenced by this portrayal of Morgan, the Prose *Tristan* depicts her in the midst of a plot to expose the queen's affair through a chastity test by means of a magical horn from which no unfaithful wife may successfully drink. The

[2] This section is heavily indebted to a discussion with Prof. Norris Lacy concerning his active research in the subject.
[3] *Geraldus Cambrensis Opera*, eds J.S. Brewer, J.F. Dimock and G.F. Warner, vol. VIII, 1.20 and vol. IV, 2.8-10, *RS* (1861-91).
[4] L. Paton, *Studies in the Fairy Mythology of Arthurian Romance* (New York, 1960).
This connection appears to be the most convincing of all hypotheses regarding Morgan's origins due particularly to the repetition of episodes common to both the Celtic works to address Morrigan, primarily the *Saga of Cuchulinn* and to the depiction of Morgan in the Vulgate Cycle.
[5] Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Vita Merlini* in *La Légend Arthurienne: Études et Documents* 3 (Paris, 1929).
[6] *Merlin* II:311; Sommer IV:124.
[7] Sommer IV:151-152.

horn, destined for Arthur's court, is redirected and arrives at Mark's court instead. Here Morgan unwittingly facilitates an accusation against Queen Iseult and all the ladies of the court who are forced to drink from the horn and, like the queen, fail. The tense mood is lifted when the barons, who love their wives, refuse the king's demand to execute the unfaithful women, and declare the test invalid.[8]

Within the Vulgate, and primarily within the *Lancelot* and the *Mort*, Morgan's role as accuser is much more active and personal than depicted within the Prose *Tristan* and *Cor* texts. Determined to cause the queen grief, Morgan imprisons and attempts to seduce Lancelot on three different occasions.[9] Becoming more and more frustrated by both his loyalty to her mortal enemy, the queen, and by the embarrassing refusal of her own sexual charms, Morgan makes her first public accusation of the queen's adultery. During her second imprisonment of Lancelot, Morgan drugs him and is able to remove a ring given him by the queen which she then sends to court with a malicious message declaring Lancelot's supposed confession of his adulterous relationship with the queen. The queen defends herself admirably from such an accusation, however, and the court believes the message to be a lie. When Morgan hears of her plan's failure, she becomes incensed and vows to keep Lancelot for a very long time, not because she despised the knight, but rather because she hated the queen more than any other woman and hoped that Lancelot's imprisonment would drive the queen to such despair that she would either die or go mad.[10] Here, as within the *Merlin* text, we find Morgan's vengeful actions are in response to earlier offences made by the queen to Morgan and are therefore grievances unrelated to the Lancelot/Guinevere affair itself. The adulterous affair of the queen does, however, lend itself as ready ammunition against Guinevere in Morgan's battle for revenge.

In her third imprisonment of Lancelot, Morgan discovers the key to her final and most powerful accusation in Lancelot's paintings depicting his affair with the queen. While she does not make immediate use of this evidence, when fortune brings King Arthur to her lands she recognises her chance to shame the queen. Morgan is one of the few accusers who thinks carefully of the possible repercussions her

[8] *TrP* II:530-531.
[9] Sommer IV:118-124..
[10] Sommer IV:142, Micha I: XXIX.

accusation may have upon herself should Lancelot find out it was she who revealed the affair. This fear may, in fact, have a great deal to do with the form of her accusation. We find Morgan,

> *pensa moult la nuit al roi Artu. . . asses pensa a ceste chose la nuit sauoir mon sele li dira ou ele le laira. Car sele li dist ele est en auenture de mort se Lancelot le puet sauoir [quele li ait dit]. Et se ele li choile ele ne venra iamais en si boin point [comme ele est orendroit] de li dire. En cest pense demora ele tant quele sendormi.*
>
> [thinking intently about King Arthur. . . whether to tell him or remain silent. For if she told him, she would be placing herself in mortal danger should Lancelot ever find out; but if she concealed it she would never again have such a good opportunity to tell him. She continued to think about it until she fell asleep.][11]

Morgan arranges for Arthur to spend the night in the room in which Lancelot had depicted his adulterous affair in painted murals during his two year captivity. Thus she avoids a confrontation with the king and perhaps blame and possible physical retaliation from Lancelot by allowing Arthur to 'discover' the paintings himself. Morgan takes on the role of a caring sister, gaining Arthur's confidence and even his protection from Lancelot's possible revenge. She makes Arthur drag the details of the affair from her, while subtly encouraging him to take revenge upon the lovers to avenge his own shame.[12] Thus Arthur plays neatly into her plan whilst all the time believing it was his own honest revelation.

ii. Maleagant

A less considered accusation and much less perceptive accuser is found in the case of the second spurned lover, Maleagant. Like Morgan, Maleagant has a Celtic past alluded to in several early abduction tales in which he appears as the character Melwas, the would-be-lover of Guinevere.[13] This knight and abductor of the queen is found in both Chrétien's *Charrete* and in the Vulgate *Lancelot* which borrows this episode in its entirety. Maleagant's accusation stands out as the only false accusation to be born not out of slander or gossip, but out of the accuser's mistaken belief of its veracity. It is also the only accusation that contains an element of humour, for when Maleagant bursts into the queen's chamber to find blood on her sheets and accuses the

---

[11] *Mort,* IV:106; Sommer VI: 237.
[12] *Ibid.*
[13] See above, p. 33.

horribly wounded Kay of sexual trespass, the momentary tension is immediately dissipated and becomes comically ironic as Lancelot, whom the audience knows to have been the queen's actual lover that night, offers to defend her against accusations of adultery with Kay.[14]

Maleagant's fury and perhaps the impetus behind his zeal for shaming the queen stems from his own jealousy and embarrassment for not having been chosen as her lover himself, for he declares at his discovery,

> *Bien est voirs que molt se foloie*
> *qui de fame garder se painne –*
> *son travail i pert et sa painne. . .*
> *Molt a or bele garde feite*
> *mes pere qui por moi vos queite!*
> *De moi vos a il bien gardee,*
> *mes eniut vos a regardee*
> *Kex li seneschax malgré suen,*
> *s'a de vos eü tot son buen,*
> *et il sera molt bien prové.*
>
> [It is quite true that a man is crazy to take pains to watch over a woman – his efforts are all in vain. . .my father did a fine job of guarding when he watched you because of me! He protected you carefully from me, but in spite of his efforts the seneschal Kay looked closely upon you this night and has done all he pleased with you, which will be easily proved.][15]

Maleagant's accusation is born out of his wounded pride which is to suffer an even greater blow in his ensuing battle with Lancelot which his father calls off in order to spare his son's life.[16] Maleagant seems to have forgotten his quarrel with the queen and his unreciprocated sexual desires in light of this new affront to his manhood. Indeed, when Maleagant does reappear for his ultimate battle with Lancelot, this time in Arthur's court where such an accusation would have threatening consequences, the quarrel between the knights is clearly not concerned with Guinevere's supposed infidelity as no mention is made of it again. Rather the subject of the combat is the continuation of the original duel, the interruption of which had previously deprived Maleagant of honour and had shamed him by exposing his inferiority to Lancelot.

[14] *Charrete* lines 4780-4931; Sommer IV:204.
[15] *Charrete* lines 4758-4767.
[16] *Charrete* lines 5014-5015.

iii. Besille

The third accuser and would-be-lover is found in the Prose *Tristan* in the character of Besille. A young girl who has come to court from Cornwall, Besille falls in love with Tristan and asks him for his love. Tristan not only rejects her advances by ignoring her, but eventually rebukes her actions, calling her 'a foolish maiden', and hence earns her hatred born not only of a broken heart, but of public embarrassment as well.[17] Besille meets and falls in love with Tristan's cousin, Audret, who has been eager himself to reveal the queen's affair for very different reasons. Besille's chance to take revenge on Tristan comes when the king, suspicious of his nephew's actions has forbidden any man from entering the queen's chamber at night. Besille reveals to Audret her plan,

> *Audret, savez vos que vos ferez? Puis que Tristanz ne gist en la chambre, et la chambre sera close par devers le pal"es, je vos dirai par ou il vendra. Veez vos cele chambre qui est par devers ce jardin? Par la vendra il sanz dote, et montera par cel aubre a cele fenestre, et puis enterra en la chambre avec la roïne Yselt: autre voie ne pué il avoir.*
>
> ['Audret, do you know what you can do? Since Tristan will not be sleeping in the room, and the door leading to it from the palace will be locked, I can tell you how he'll get in. Do you see that room there which is facing the garden? That's the way he'll come without any doubt: he'll climb up that tree to the window and then go to the queen's bedroom; there's no other way'].[18]

Audret sets a trap with twenty armed knights and informs the king, who agrees to sleep elsewhere to encourage Tristan to visit the queen.[19] When Audret fails to capture Tristan, Besille, like Morgan, bides her time, keeping careful watch over the queen, awaiting another chance to expose the lovers. Her vigilance pays off when she again discovers Tristan in the queen's room and he is finally caught.[20] It is interesting that she does not begin the cry herself, but fearing Tristan's anger and possible physical retaliation for her discovery, reports to Audret what she has seen and allows him to make the accusation and capture. Although Besille does not make a public accusation, her actions, like Morgan's, facilitate the men in her plan to make an accusation.

---

[17] *TrP* II:533.
[18] Ibid.
[19] *TrP* II:534.
[20] *TrP* II:536.

II. The rival

The second type of accuser is the jealous rival. This group is entirely male and, unlike the rejected lovers, are not jealous of the queen's affections, but of the martial prowess of the lover and therefore find their motivation in bringing about his dishonour and/or death. Six such men are found within the texts: Agravain from the *Mort Artu*, the three barons of Béroul's *Tristan,* Audret and Lamorat from the Prose *Tristan*.

i. Agravain

At the opening of the *Mort Artu,* the narrator reveals that Agravain, one of Arthur's nephews, had never cared much for Lancelot. Until this point in the story Lancelot had acted so discreetly in his affair with the queen that no one had known of it. The author informs us, however, that

> *'se il sestoit deuant tenu sagement et si couertement [que nus ne sen estoit aperceus] il sen garda ore maluaisement [et se maintient si folement] que Agrauains li freres monsignor Gauuain qui onques ne lauoit ame clerement. Et puis se prendoit garde de ses erremens que nus autres et tant sen prinst garde que il sot vraiement que Lancelot amoit la roine de fole amor et ele lui. . . quant Agrauains sen fu aperchus de la roine [et de Lancelot] apertement si en fu moult lies et plus por le damage quil quida que Lancelot en eust que por le roi vengier de sa honte.*

> [Now he behaved so foolishly that it became apparent to Gawain's brother Agravain who had never liked him and who watched his comings and goings more attentively than any of the others. He watched him so intently that so he knew beyond any doubt that Lancelot and the queen shared an illicit love. . . when Agravain was certain about the queen and Lancelot, he was very happy, more for the harm that might befall Lancelot than for the possibility of avenging the offence to the king].[21]

Though Agravain's initial accusations made in private to the king are thought to be jealous lies, when he grows bolder, and when Lancelot's affair becomes more widely known, he again makes an accusation, though this time in public.[22] One day while Agravain, Gawain and their three brothers are discussing the affair, the king stumbles upon them. Though Gawain attempts to silence Agravain, and the other brothers attempt to dismiss their conversation as idle gossip, the king is not to be deterred and finally forces the information out of Agravain who this time makes his

[21] *Mort* IV:91; Sommer VI:205

[22] Sommer VI: 270.

accusation public, declaring that he had been reproving his brothers for allowing the affair to continue so long. When Arthur responds that Lancelot has always been a loyal knight, Agravain retorts that this loyal knight is so faithful that right now he is committing adultery with Arthur's wife.[23] Mordred immediately assists his brother's accusation, first by validating Agravain's statement and then by questioning the king as to how they will avenge his honour. This accusation is so striking that Arthur grows pale and silent. While Agravain's previous accusations were easy to deny, the public forum of this accusation, combined with the insinuations that Arthur's shame has become material for gossip, make this accusation not only a humiliating experience for the king, but also impossible to now dismiss.

ii. The Barons

Accusation born out of gossip, a form that will later be discussed in detail, is a powerful weapon within the Tristan legend as well. In Béroul's text we find several mentions of the barons, named Godoine, Ganelon and Denoalen, making accusations of the queen's adultery.[24] The first accusation in the surviving fragment occurs at line 606 in which the barons confront the king and charge that, not only is Tristan and Iseult's love public knowledge, they themselves and many others having seen them in compromising situations, but that the king himself knows about it and in effect condones it as he has not put a stop to it. They offer an ultimatum: banish Tristan or face war with the barons and any others of the court who are aware and disapprove of the affair. Unable to refute this accusation, Mark asks for advice from his men who beg him to consult a dwarf who may devise a trap for the lovers.

Throughout the text the barons never cease their accusations. This is primarily due to the constant reappearance of Tristan. Their goal is never so much to destroy the queen as it is to rid themselves of Tristan of whom they are envious and by whom they are constantly shamed as depicted in the Morholt episode wherein their own cowardice is magnified by his prowess.[25] Through their accusations they are able to make the queen endure a trial by oath and force Tristan into repeated exile by inciting

[23] *Mort,* IV:119; Frappier 108.
[24] *TrB* lines 26, 118-125 and 290.
[25] See also lines 773-778.

the king's anger against his nephew and by their cunning traps to expose the lovers. Yet the barons are faced with a foe more cunning than themselves who has made himself invaluable as court champion and is able to ingratiate himself with his uncle, despite all trespass, and hence foil the barons' best laid plans. It is their final attempt at accusation that brings about their collective end, for in a last effort to reveal Tristan's illicit relationship with the queen, all three are murdered.[26]

iii. Audret

Within the Prose *Tristan* we encounter another accuser motivated by jealousy: Audret. Jealous of his cousin Tristan's success and martial prowess, Audret harbours a deep resentment and hatred for him. Suspecting that there may be an illicit love between the queen and Tristan, he watches them vigilantly until one day he espies them in the queen's room together. Audret makes his first accusation to the king declaring,

> *'Sire, merveilles vos ai a dire. Vos tenez avec vos celi qui honte vos fait et jor et nuit de la roine, et quant vos ce sofrez, vos iestes li plus viz rois et li plus recreanz qui soit el monde'*
>
> ['My lord, I have something remarkable to tell you. You are harbouring in your court the man who day and night is shaming you by consorting with the Queen, and since you put up with this, you are the most base and most ignoble king in the world'].[27]

Audret's accusation of Tristan's treachery carries with it an accusation of the king's own misconduct as well. Though the king professes ignorance of the affair, the accusation has proved doubly effective for not only exposing the lovers, but for inciting the king's anger for the affront to his honour both from the adulterous union and for the implication that he has ignored or condoned it. Though Tristan escapes Audret's snare, the latter is not deterred and convinces Mark to set another trap this time to gain physical evidence to support his verbal accusations. He places sharpened scythes by the bed to injure Tristan when he comes to the queen's bed.[28] The queen foils his plan, however, after discovering Tristan's blood on the bed by purposefully injuring herself on the scythes and hence providing an excuse for the

[26] *TrB* lines 4362-4485
[27] *TrP* II:514.
[28] *TrP* II:532.

blood on her sheets. In this way the queen not only thwarts Audret and the king's plot, but makes an accusation against Audret of attempted murder.

Audret also works with another accuser, his girlfriend Besille, in creating new accusations and traps for the lovers.[29] With each defeat however, Audret becomes more dishonoured and more obsessed with exposing and capturing the lovers until finally only Tristan's death will satisfy him. In his final accusation and revelation of the lovers' meeting place under the laurel tree, he is positive that his ambitions will be realised.[30] Unfortunately here is not his greatest triumph, but his greatest defeat as Tristan once again dupes the king into believing in the lovers' innocence and stirs his anger against Audret. Now believing Audret to be a liar, Mark declares that were it not for their blood tie, he would have had him put to death and instead banishes him from court. As his accusations have always been made in private to the king, he has no support from individual knights nor from the court itself and has no choice but to obey the king's wishes and leave disgraced.

iv. Lamorat

The last of the jealous rivals to be examined is Lamorat, also of the Prose *Tristan*, a knight of king Pellinor who, together with his brother Driant, participate in a joust at Mark's court.[31] Succeeding in defeating forty-two Cornish knights, the brothers are then pitted against Tristan by order of the king. Although Tristan at first declines, declaring the contest to be unfair as he is fresh and the brothers are by now tired, he is ordered by the king to joust. After being easily defeated by a single blow, Lamorat calls upon Tristan to defend himself with a sword. The latter refuses, despite the barrage of insults which are hurled his way, and thus, inadvertently shames Lamorat in front of the entire court. Therefore, when the brothers encounter a knight in Logres, bound for Arhur's court carrying a magical, ivory horn which possesses the ability to shame all unfaithful wives, Lamorat does not pass up the opportunity to take his revenge on his rival. He defeats the knight in combat and ensures that the horn will instead be sent to Mark's court along with a message that it was being sent out of

[29] *TrP* II:532-533.
[30] *TrP* IV:fos 38c-39a.
[31] *TrP* II:521-522.

ill-will towards Tristan from the knight he had refused to fight at the tournament. As previously noted, the accusation via the horn test comes to naught as it is dismissed by the barons of the court and it is the last mention of Lamorat in the text.[32]

III. The greedy and the troublemakers

The third category of accusers is an ostensibly disparate group of individuals including a forester, two spies, a dwarf, several named and unnamed fairies, a chamberlain and the wife of a knight. They are united by their role as accusers and general miscreants motivated by greed or their wish simply to make trouble.

i. The Forester, the Spies and the Dwarf

Within the Tristan legend are a great many accusers motivated by jealousy but also several motivated by greed, such as the forester and the spy of Béroul's text. Both men's roles are brief but result in a change of fate for the lovers and a change in storyline for the work. The forester, for example, is the only person who is not afraid to enter the forest of Morrois where Tristan and Iseult are hiding. Whilst going about his duties, he discovers the couple in their bower. The bounteous reward promised by the king for the capture or information leading to the discovery of the lovers motivates the forester to run swiftly to court to inform the king.[33]

A similar motivation is ascribed to the spy who approaches the barons in Béroul's *Tristan*: *'Aeus fu venue une espie, qui va querant changier sa vie'*. / [A spy came to them seeking to improve his lot.][34] The spy not only makes his accusation that Tristan is continuing his affair with the queen even after her trial by oath, but in exchange for one silver mark, reveals to the barons how to capture Tristan as he enters the queen's chamber via a hole in the wall of the queen's chamber. The spy's role is brief as he facilitates not the downfall of Tristan, but the death of his employers whom Tristan discovers laying in wait for him that night, and kills.

[32] *TrP* II:524-525.
[33] *TrB* lines 1855-1862.
[34] *TrB* lines 4273-4.

The spy in *Ignaurés* is a member of the court, described as a false and cruel liar.[35] Unlike the spy in Béroul's *Tristan*, this accuser is not only motivated by money but by his urge to create trouble and spread gossip. Though economically rewarded for his information, the power of his secret which places him as the centre of attention at the feast appears to be a far greater motivation and reward. His only fear appears to be for his physical safety once he has revealed his secret. It is a concern that many accusers share or would be wise to take into consideration as illustrated by the case of Frocin the dwarf in Béroul's *Tristan*.

The spy was not the only malefactor employed by the barons. The talents of Frocin the dwarf are also called on by the barons in their attempts to reveal the affair of Tristan and the queen. Continually in and out of royal favour, Frocin is only called upon when trickery or his gift of divination is needed to provide proof for the barons' own accusations. Though from the surviving text we only have a reference to Frocin's own accusation that leads the king to climb the laurel tree in order to discover his wife's affair, we have ample evidence of his role as facilitator of the barons' accusations.[36] One example of this is found in the episode detailing the eventual capture of the lovers wherein he covers the floor between Tristan and the queen's beds with flour to provide physical evidence of their night-time liaisons. Unlike the spy who offers his services in exchange for coin, Frocin appears to gain little for his services. We are told he acts with 'maliciousness' and takes great pains to deceive all those around him, including the king and yet no mention is made of financial motives or rewards.[37] We can only conclude that his character acts out of sheer malice or general ill-will.

ii. Fairies

Within the *Cor* and *Mantle* texts, we encounter two other-worldly accusers: nameless fairies. In the *Mantle* text, Arthur receives a magical mantle which will only

[35] *Ignaurés* line 238.
[36] *TrB* line 266.
[37] *TrB* lines 327-330.

fit a lady who has been faithful. The source of the gift is an unnamed lady from a distant land, though the robe itself is the handiwork of a fairy. [38]

Similarly, in the lay of the *Cor*, the gift made by a bad fairy, '*une fee raumponeuse eiree'*,[39] is brought from the lands of King Moraine to Arthur's court. There is reason to believe that this fairy could, in fact be a reference to Morgan le fee. First, though the author, Robert Biket, does not name the fairy, one cannot deduce that it is therefore *not* Morgan, for he does not name Arthur's queen or Garadue's wife either but instead relies on his audience's knowledge of these established characters. Secondly, Moraine is the name given in Lagamon's *Brut* to the kingdom of Moray, whose king, Urien was often cited as Morgan's husband.[40]

If these fairies are indeed both references to Morgan, it is possible they belong in the category of accusers motivated by rejection rather than those who merely possess an urge to create mayhem. Without proof of identity however, their actions include them in this latter group.

iii. Members of the household: the chamberlain and the wife

Within the *lais* of Marie de France, we encounter two accusers who seem motivated by scandal and ill-will. The first is the chamberlain of the husband of Guigemar's lover. His character occupies a scant three lines within the work and yet the picture we gain of this accuser is far more developed than that of many of his peers. Here Marie reveals: *'Cel jur furent aparceü, descovert, trové e veü d'un chamberlene mal veisïe que si sires l'out enveié'*. [That day they were perceived, discovered, found and seen by a cunning chamberlain sent by her husband][41] who, when he could not gain access to her chamber, took to peeking in windows whereby he discovered his lady's secret. Immediately reported to his lord, the accusations of the chamberlain are acted upon and lead to the separation of the lovers.

The next accuser is perhaps the most malevolent of the group. She is presented only as the wife of a certain knight who was recently made godfather to a

[38] *Mantel* lines 130-352.
[39] *Cor* lines 229-30.
[40] See L. A. Paton, 'Morgain in the Horn and Mantle tests', in *Studies in the Fairy Mythology of Arthurian Romance* (Boston, 1903), pp. 1-167.
[41] *Guigemar* lines 577-80.

boy, a twin, born to his neighbour. When informed of the birth of the twins, the wife who Marie describes in line three as 'deceitful and arrogant, prone to slander and envy' declares her amazement at the joy over such a birth for *'Ne n'avendrat cel' aventure que a une sule porteüre quë une femme deus fiz eit, si deus hummes ne li unt feit'.* [it has never occured that a woman gave birth to two sons at once, nor ever will, unless two men are the cause of it.][42] Though her husband chastises her for her slanderous accusation, those in the house take up the gossip and soon we find it being repeated throughout Brittany. The accusation succeeds in defaming the innocent woman's character and she finds herself the object of ridicule and scorn by all. She gains revenge, however, when the slanderous wife of the neighbouring knight falls pregnant with twin girls and, terrified of her own malicious gossip rebounding upon her, gives one of the children to a nursemaid to dispose of. An ensuing case of mistaken identity follows when the twins' paths accidentally cross years later and the truth surfaces much to the mother's shame.

IV. Coerced and Commanded

The fourth kind of accuser is she, for both cases are of women, who is in effect forced into her role due to the complete reliance on her lord for her very livelihood, and is thus helpless to refuse her commission to spy upon the lovers. In Marie's *Yonec,* the accuser is the elderly, unmarried sister of the husband who notes the change in the young wife, previously wasting away from grief, but now vibrant and beautiful once more. The husband, who has also witnessed the change, has the old woman hide behind a curtain to spy on his wife and discover her secret happiness. While Marie describes her as 'curious'[43] there is no pejorative tone to the description of the woman or her actions. Unlike the chamberlain, she is not peeking in windows looking to uncover secrets of her own accord. Rather she is fulfilling her brother and caretaker's order to spy.

Likewise, in the *Bourgoise d'Orliens,* the only fabliau to make use of an accuser, we find the husband using his young niece as a spy. The hesitant young girl is offered a petticoat to eavesdrop on his wife and the clerk who visits her. Though

[42] *Le Fresne* lines 39-43.
[43] *Yonec* line 266.

the reward of a garment may indeed place her among those accusers motivated by greed, it is interesting to note that the girl is portrayed in a neutral light, with no negative language used to address either her character or actions. She reports back to the husband the contents of the wife's discussion as she had been instructed to do, adding nothing to the facts as she heard them, does not encourage the husband to take action and does not suggest any course of retaliation or entrapment, unlike the ill-motivated accusers previously addressed.

V. The husband

The last accuser is the most unusual of all cases here examined. This accuser, the husband himself, is unusual both for the fact that he is the only husband who acts as public accuser of his own wife, and for the form in which he makes his accusation.[44] The husband is Bisclavret who makes his accusation by biting off his wife's nose while he himself is in werewolf form. Though a truly bizarre case, his role as accuser must be considered here, for despite the circumstances, his actions are regarded by the court in which he commits his attack as an accusation.[45] This is shown to be true by the reaction of the court following the attack, for though some of the onlookers would have had the wolf killed, the king instead accepts the advice of a wise man who points out that the beast has, until that moment, held a reputation for its kindness and lack of hostility and therefore must harbour a grudge of some kind against the woman.[46] The court then accepts that the wolf is attempting to reveal something. It is even possible that the author afforded them a clue in the wolf's choice of target, as the cutting off of a woman's nose was occasionally the punishment meted out for adultery.[47] The wife of Bisclavret is taken away and tortured until she reveals her treachery in stealing her husband's clothes and depriving him of his ability to transform back into his human state. Thus the accusation is made

---

[44] It must be noted that although both Arthur and Mark make public sentencing of their wives and several husbands within the fabliaux take immediate vengeance upon their wives whom they catch in the act with their lovers, none actually make the initial accusation of adultery themselves. Neither can the husbands of the lais or fabliaux who seek immediate vengeance be included here as accusers since they omit the use of formal accusation and instead assert their right for immediate retribution.

[45] *Bisclavret* lines 240-260.

[46] *Bisclvret* lines 237-238, 246-247.

[47] See above, pp. 90 and 103 for a discussion of the role of the nose in the punishment of adultery and the avoidance of rape.

and the secret is revealed. Though stemming from the most unusual circumstances, the accusation is no less valid and indeed is more fruitful than many of the more conventional methods of accusation here described.

Having ascertained the diverse range of accusers and their motives, two questions must next be addressed regarding how these accusers were intended to be perceived and how the author accomplished this task. With the exception of the niece and the elderly sister who are both treated in a neutral tone, and Bisclavret who is painted as a righteously indignant accuser, all others are depicted in a negative manner.

The author accomplishes the deprecation of their character in several ways. The use of pejorative description, as seen with the wife in *Le Fresne* who is said to be 'deceitful, arrogant, prone to slander and envy', or the chamberlain, who is described as 'cunning' is the most common of these methods. In this vein the barons of Béroul's text are often described as '*traïtor*/traitors',[48] '*felons*/villains or evil men',[49] and '*traïson*/scoundrels'.[50] Frocin the dwarf is called both '*plains de voisdie*/malicious'[51] and '*felon*/evil'.[52] And the fairy of *Cor*, more than likely Morgan le fee, is referred to as being both '*iree*/bad tempered' and '*raumponeuse*/insulting'.[53] In addition to the narrators' negative descriptions and comments, the personal shortcomings and/or evil attributes of the accuser are often commented upon by other characters as well. For example, Tristan refers to the barons as '*losengier*/liars' and '*traïtor*/traitors;'[54] Mark calls them '*felons*/evil men'[55] and Iseult decries them as '*trichor*/deceivers', '*reherceor*/ evil slanderers' and '*losengier*/liars'.[56] Even the common people accuse them of being '*felons*/villains'[57] while those at court, particularly Yvain, depict them, as '*felon*/evil men' and '*losengier*/hypocrites',[58] going on to single out Denoalen as a

[48] *TrB* lines 3033, 3137, 3788.
[49] *TrB* lines 582 , 741, 3856 and 2754.
[50] *TrB* line 835.
[51] *TrB* line 328.
[52] *TrB* line 470.
[53] *Cor* line 229-230.
[54] *TrB* lines 119 and 121.
[55] *TrB* line 3186.
[56] *TrB* lines 427, 3265 and 26.
[57] *TrB* line 835.
[58] *TrB* lines 3493-3494.

man particularly given to '*acuser*/slander'.[59] Even the accusers' family members are depicted as engaging in the depreciation of their characters; the most notable example is Gawain's public dismissal of Agravain as 'unusually bothersome' and best ignored.[60]

Another method of defaming the accuser's character is simple choice of name. Perhaps the most obvious example of this is found in Béroul's naming of one of the barons as Ganelon. For the medieval audience, undoubtedly familiar with the epic *Song of Roland,* this name would trigger an immediate negative response, conjuring images of Judas-like betrayal and deceit borrowed in large part from the emotions experienced and assigned to this first villain to bear the name.

The accuser's physical description can also be a useful tool in the degradation of his/her character. As noted in the description of the jealous husband, a character's physical repulsiveness often belies a moral uncleanness as well. The most obvious example of such inner and outer ugliness is no doubt Frocin the dwarf. Though unnamed in the Thomas version, the dwarf, common to all branches of the legend, is presented by Béroul as a short, hunchbacked figure with an abnormally large head who, to add further blemish to his person, is gifted in the occult.[61] Spiritually, physically and morally degenerate, the dwarf possesses no redeeming characteristics. While dwarfs had not been considered to be predisposed to malevolence, as illustrated in many examples of dwarfs acting as escorts for maiden within the Celtic sources, and even as noble rulers of magnificent underground kingdoms,[62] by the twelfth century one finds a change in the overall depiction of dwarfs. Court dwarfs are commonly found in the employ of unsavoury characters or are themselves depicted in the role of the antagonist, such as the dwarf who leads Lancelot in the *Charette* into an ambush and subsequent imprisonment by Maleagant's seneschal,[63] or the inhospitable dwarf who in a violent rage chases Gawain from Corbenic.[64] While one cannot conclude that such depiction reflects a motif in which a dwarf himself would present a ready negative image for an audience, it is obvious that Béroul meant the

[59] *TrB* lines 3485.
[60] *Mort* IV:119; Sommer, VI:269.
[61] *TrB* lines 320, 724.
[62] V. J. Harward, Jr., *The Dwarfs of Arthurian Romance and Celtic Tradition* (Leiden, 1958), pp. 6-28.
[63] *Charrete* lines 5077-101.
[64] Sommer IV:343-7.

casting to be pejorative as he has elaborated this image with description of the dwarf's enlarged head and hunched back. Such an image stands in stark contrast to the beauty of the lovers he seeks to betray. When combined with instances of his untrustworthiness and general trouble-making as depicted in his betrayal of his master's secret in the episode concerning Mark's horse-like ears and his eagerness to expose the lovers, the image becomes complete – that of an accuser, repulsive in both body and deed.

Having examined the accusers, their motives and images, the last point for consideration is the form of the accusations themselves of which three common models are found within these texts: accusations through gossip, through use of spies and through public witnessing or physical evidence. Gossip is by far the most prevalent form of accusation within the texts here examined. While gossip itself is not substantial enough evidence on which to base legal action or seek vengeance, the power of gossip cannot be underestimated. Gossip ruined the life of the innocent woman in *Le Fresne* who became hated by ' both the poor and the rich' and lost the love and trust of her husband.[65] Fear of gossip and the shame it would create moved the accuser herself to abandon one of her twin girls and face God's fury rather than endure the censure of her peers.[66] While not powerful enough to grant a husband the legal backing for vengeance, gossip often initially exposes the lovers and leads an angered and jealous husband to find the physical proof he needs in order to claim vengeance upon his wife and her lover. When Arthur encounters his knights gossiping he flies into a terrible rage in which he authorises Agravain to find physical proof in order to prosecute the queen and Lancelot.[67] Likewise, when faced not only by the gossip of his entire court but by his barons threats of war should he refuse to investigate the affair, Mark readily agrees that his barons and, in the Prose *Tristan,* his nephew Audret, use any means possible, including entrapment and spies, to find proof of the affair.[68]

[65] *Le Fresne* lines 29-64.
[66] *Le Fresne* lines 92-98.
[67] *Mort* IV:119; Sommer VI:270.
[68] *TrB* lines 2907-2908; *TrP* II:517.

It is interesting at this point to analyse who uses gossip. First of all, we note that gossip is not gendered. Gossip is engaged here by both the wife of the neighbouring knight in *Le Fresne* as well as by men such as the barons, Agravain and Audret. Gossip, in both the law and literature, was both a pass-time and a means of communication for both men and women and was enjoyed by all levels of society as illustrated by both the 'poor and the rich' who spread the wife's tale of shame in *Le Fresne*, and by the variety of accusers who use this form in making their accusations.[69]

Gossip has received a great deal of 'bad press'. It has long endured a reputation as a means of malice and slander and is commonly associated with idleness. In truth, gossip is not only a means of spreading negative information, for within *Le Fresne* the malicious woman's husband refutes her allegations based on the woman's reputation as a faithful wife – that is based on the positive gossip or commonly held opinion that she was of good repute. Thus gossip is shown to be a tool whereby one can spread tales of one's honour as well as shame and therefore is not considered a vehicle only for slander or lies. In fact, gossip is found to be most powerful when accurate, as shown in the revelation of the infidelity of both Arthur and Mark's queens. Gossip as common knowledge was powerful evidence and though perhaps not enough upon which to base corporal punishment for adultery, did serve in the absence of physical evidence within many court proceedings. Such 'agreed truth' or common knowledge was at least socially and occasionally legally recognised, as shown in case studies surrounding land disputes as well as in personal injury suits, and even Icelandic sagas of this period.[70]

A distinct difference becomes apparent between gossip functioning as an accusation and accusations based on the evidence of gossip. The first, as shown in the cases of Arthur and Mark, is often the form of accusation in which unsuspecting husbands are made privy to their wives' indiscretions. Other husbands, who are

---

[69] Chris Wickham's work on the function of gossip in legal hearings, especially during land arbitration and dispute is an invaluable source on this hitherto badly neglected aspect of communication. This section is heavily indebted to his research and analysis. See 'Gossip and resistance among the medieval peasantry, *Past and Present* 160 (1998), 4-24.

[70] See C. Wickham 'Gossip' and P. R. Schofield, 'Peasants and the manor court: gossip and litigation in a Suffolk village at the close of the thirteenth century', *Past and Present* 159 (Oxford, 1998), 4-42; *Njal's Saga*, ed. M. Magnusson and H. Palsson (London, 1960), pp. 55, 130.

already suspicious, such as these depicted in *La bourgoise d'Orliens* or in Marie de France's *Yonec* or those gossiping accusers, like the barons of Béroul, are urged by gossip to investigate their suspicions. Making use of spies or informants to alert them to acts of infidelity, they hope to arrive in time to make public proof of the gossip and seek immediate vengeance.

Public witness and exposure is the goal of all accusation and is most commonly achieved in the fairies'chastity tests. For example, the humiliation of adulteresses in front of the court as depicted in both *Cor* and *Mantle* and in episodes such as Morgan's sending on of Guinevere's ring in the *Lancelot* and Lamorat's redirection of the enchanted horn in the Prose *Tristan*. Such public proof of infidelity is also the type of accusation Bisclavret uses whilst in his inhuman form when he bites off his wife's nose, assuring a court investigation of his actions.

Accusers often use more than one form of accusation, combining several at once or in stages in order to make their ultimate accusation, as illustrated by Béroul's barons who, after exposing the king to the court gossip concerning his wife's infidelity, gain permission to use their spies to entrap the lovers. Perhaps the best example of this combination of forms is shown in the accusation by Morgan le fée in the *Vulgate Lancelot*. The first form Morgan uses is that of gossip as she reveals what she has 'heard' by means of Lancelot's paintings depicting his adulterous relationship with the queen.[71] The mural, which provides a curious narrative within a narrative, exists as physical proof as well, virtually a signed confession by Lancelot and yet in this setting so removed from Arthur's court and authority, alone without other witnesses, the mural can only serve as motivation for the king to be alert himself and employ others to be on the watch to catch the lovers *in flagrante delicto* rather than evidence upon which to seek immediate revenge.[72] Thus Morgan's accusation is actually incorporating all three forms of accusation by using gossip to alert the king to his wife's trespass and incite him to make use of spies in order to gain the physical evidence he needs in order to seek vengeance. Likewise Maleagant's accusation utilises a combination of forms of accusation: first showing physical proof in the form of blood on the sheets, then gathering witnesses and finally making his open

[71] Sommer V:217-219.
[72] Sommer VI:237.

accusation. He concludes his accusation by appealing to public witness and opinion to judge the trial by combat in which, since he had been unable to catch the queen in the act, he hoped to still prove her guilt.[73]

No form of accusation was without risk to the accuser. Some were merely discredited, such as the fairies behind the test in *Cor* and *Mantel*, others, as shown in the example of Audret faced royal disfavour and exile. Morgan feared physical retaliation from those she wished to expose which indeed proves to be a valid concern and the most common fate of the accusers here analysed, for while Morgan escaped, more often than not death at the hands of the male lover awaited many of the accusers.

The accusers, though a sexually and socially varied group, emerge with a decidedly singular negative image. Whatever their initial motivation, whether it be greed, lust, a broken heart, wounded pride or merely a quarrelsome nature, their ill intent is always exposed and rarely escapes punishment. Among the male accusers only Bisclavret, who as previously noted, serves as the singular male example of an accuser who is motivated by an honest grievance, escapes death at the male lover's hands. God/fate is often depicted as at odds with the accuser, no matter how valid his claim. Interestingly, such violent ends are reserved only for male accusers. All female accusers survive their accusations and only one woman, the spiteful wife of *Le Fresne,* experiences a form of revenge when she herself falls pregnant with twins.

While the image and motive of the accuser show little connection to the husband, his or her portrayal is often closely linked to the image of the lover and, in some cases, the adulteress. A spurned would-be-lover reinforces the image of the male lover or occasionally the wife as a loyal lover, just at the presence of a jealous rival serves to highlight the male lover's unequalled martial or sexual prowess. Additionally, it is by means of accusation that a lover's flaws or the far reaching potential damage of an affair is often exposed, as illustrated by the outcry of Mark's barons who, though depicted as jealous and treacherous, are also acting in the best interests of their king and the kingdom in securing the king's power and legitimacy of the royal line. Their criticisms of the lovers reveal a darker side to the their actions

[73] See above, p. 187.

and images not as 'underdogs' but as traitors and insurrectionists, defying vows of loyalty as vassals, churchmen, apprentices or as marriage partners and placing kingdoms, communities and homes in danger.

Chapter 5:
The Language of Adultery

Lancelot and Guinevere joined in bed: from *Lancelot-Graal*, Artois, c. 1320
London, British Library, Add. MS 10293, 312v.

'Sire, ma parole avers la vostre que vaudroit?'

['My speech sir, in comparison to yours, what could it be worth?']

- Chrétien de Troyes, *Philomena* lines 276-277.

The Language of Adultery

The power of language has been touched upon in previous chapters for its ability to illuminate qualities of individual characters, for example, Guinevere's sense of humour or Mark's cruelty.[1] In this chapter, however, two different ways of addressing language will be addressed. It will first examine how the act of sex is portrayed and discussed and second, how language is used or abused in perpetrating, prosecuting and evading punishment for the crime of adultery.

I. The language of sex

Et la reïne estant
ses braz ancontre, si l'anbrace;
estroit pres de son piz le lace,
si l'a lez li an son lit tret;
et le plus bel sanblant li fet
que ele onques feire li puet,
que d'amors et del cuer li muet . . .
Or a Lanceloz quanqu'il vialt,
Qant la reïne an gré requialt
Sa conpaignie et son solaz,
qant il la tient antre ses braz
Et ele lui antre les suens
Tant li est ses jeus dolz et buens,
et del beisier et del santir,
que il lor avint sanz mantir
une joie et une mervoille
tel c'onques ancor sa paroille
ne fu oïe ne seüe.
Mes toz jorz iert par moi teüe,
Qu'an conte ne doit estre dite:
Des joies fu la plus eslite
Et la plus delitable cele
Que li contes no test et cele.

[The queen stretched out her arms toward him, embraced him, hugged him to her breast and drew him into the bed beside her, gazing as gently at him as she knew how to gaze, for her love and her heart were his . . . Now Lancelot had his every wish: The queen willingly sought his company and comfort, as he held her in his arms, and she held him in hers. Her love-play seemed so gentle and good to him, both her kisses and caresses, that in truth the two of them felt a joy and wonder, the equal of which had never yet been heard or known. But I shall ever keep it secret, since it should not be written of: The most delightful and choicest pleasure is that which is hinted, but never told].[2]

[1] See above, pp. 47 and 136 respectively.
[2] *Charrete* lines 4654-4684

With only the scantiest of detail to inspire the imaginations of his audience, Chrétien leaves the readers or listeners of the *Charrete* to hypothesise and indeed fantasise over the concupiscent details of Lancelot and Guinevere's evening together as they consummate their adulterous affair. The narrator of the Vulgate follows this convention of not providing a sexually explicit account of the lovemaking between Lancelot and the queen, though it is interesting to note that it is Guinevere who initiates the first sexual encounter between herself and Lancelot, '*si le prent par le menton et le baise . . . asses longement'* / ['taking him by the chin and gave him a prolonged kiss'].[3] Of their night together, we are told only that Lancelot, '*dales samie qui molt sentramoient et orent toutes les ioies que amant peuent'* / ['lay with his beloved, and they had all the joys that lovers can have'].[4] Marie de France uses similar language in describing the first adulterous sexual encounter between her hero Guigemar and his lover, stating ' *Ensemble gisent e parolent / E sovent baisent e acolent;/ Bien lur covienge del surplus / De ceo que li autre unt en us!'* /['They lay together and talked, kissing and embracing. May the final act, which others are accustomed to enjoy, give them pleasure'].[5]

It is most interesting that within the works comprising the Tristan corpus, a legend in which one of the lovers' primary goals throughout all versions appears to be to couple as often as possible, there is a similar reluctance to discuss any details of the sexual liaison. Béroul uses the euphemisms '*parleroit a la roïne*' / 'to speak to the queen'[6] and '*delit entent'*.[7] Thomas most often omits sexual episodes from the texts but occasionally alludes to sexual activity as: '*jueir*/play',[8] '*naturelment li estuit*/she must do as nature urges',[9] '*deliter*/delight',[10] and '*desir*/desire'.[11] The Prose *Tristan* likewise chooses not to portray scenes of sexual trysts. Instead what the reader learns of such romantic encounters often comes through the dialogue of others, most often

[3] *Lancelot* II:146; Sommer III:263.
[4] *Lancelot* II:228; Sommer III: 414.
[5] *Guigemar* lines 531-535.
[6] *TrB* lines 697-8.
[7] *TrB* line 734.
[8] *TrT* line168.
[9] *TrT* line163.
[10] *TrT* lines 156, 158, 496 .
[11] *TrT* line 154.

Brangain, Gorvenal or the narrator, who quickly and plainly summarise the lascivious action. In what becomes a standard statement of omission, whether to tantalise or to sanitise, the narrator begins his summary of the couple's first night together: *'Que vos diroie je? Il fait de li ce que il veust et li tost le non de pucele', /*['What shall I tell you? He did with her what he wanted so that she lost her virginity'].[12]

The fabliaux, on the other hand, suffer no such decorum or prudishness. In contrast to the vagaries of the descriptions of amorous rendezvous as given in the lais and longer romances, within the fabliaux these scenes are concerned with the act and details of the sexual encounter and often with an intentional use of language rude and crude as exemplified in excerpts from various fabliaux:

Quant li vallés ot la promesse,
Si trait le vit, dont une asnesse
Peüst bien estre vertoillie.
Cele qui estre en veut brochie
Se descuevre jusqu'au nombril.
'Gautier', fet ele, 'a ton ostil
fai mon con besier une foiz,
quar il est bien reson et droiz:
ne s'entrevirent onques mes
si prendront l'uns a l'autre pes'.
Le vit fut roides comme pel
Si atasta s'il i ot sel
Et si fu pres de hurter enz.

[When the young man heard her promise, he whipped out a prick that could have plugged a jenny ass. She who was wanting to be skewered by it, pulled her dress up to the navel: 'Walter', said she, 'make my cunt kiss your tool once, because they've never met before, so they should greet each other!' The prick was rigid as a pole, and it probed to find a place to fit and was ready to thrust inside].[13]

Adonc covint que il ostast
La coiffe au cul por fere l'uevre.
De sa chemise la descuevre,
Puis si commence a arecier,
Et cele la borse a cerchier:
Que qu'ele cerche, et cil l'estraint,
De la pointe du vit la point;
El con li met jusqu'a a la coille,
Don't li bat le cul et rooille
Tant, ce m'est vis, qu'il ot foutu.

---

[12] *TrP* II:448. See also II: 536, II:550.
[13] *Du Fevre de Creeil* lines 133-145; Eichmann II:139.

['First he had to take off his loin covering to do the job. Then he took off her shirt. Then he began to get hard, and she, to search for the purse. While she was searching and he was embracing her, with the point of his penis he pricked her. He put it into her cunt all the way up to his balls, with which he beat her ass and banged so much that, in my opinion, he fucked her'].[14]

This language common to sexual discussion within the fabliaux was, as even now, not always popularly received as perhaps best illustrated in the opening lines of the *Lais d'Aristote* in which the author states:

Or revendrai a mon ditié
D'une aventure qu'emprise ai,
Don't la matere molt prisai
Quant je oi la novele oïe,
Qui bien doit estre desploïe
Et dite par rime et retraite
Sanz vilonie et sanz retraite,
Quar oevre ou vilonie cort
Ne doit estre noncie a cort;
Ne jor que vive en mon rimer
Ne quier de vilonie ouvrer.
Ne ne l'empris, ne n'emprendrai
Ja vilain mot n'entreprendrai
En dit n'en oevre que je face;
Quar vilonie se desface
Toute riens et tolt sa savor.
Ne ja ne me ferai trovor
De rien que voie en mon vivant
Quar vilain mot vont anuiant.
Ainz dirai de droit examplere
Chose qui doit valoir et plere;
S'ert en leu de fruit et d'espee.

[Now I will return to my telling of the adventure which I have undertaken whose matter I valued very highly when I heard the story; it should be developed well and told in rhyme and delivered without crudeness and without hedging, because a work that has crudeness running through it should not be spoken at court. Never in my life do I seek to relate crudeness in my work. I never dealt with it and never will. I will never use crude language in my speech or in any work I undertake. For crudeness deforms everything and takes away its flavour. I will never let myself make up such things that I see, as long as I live, for crude words cause trouble. But I will tell in an upright, moral tale something which must be worthwhile and pleasing; this will be in the place of fruit and spice].[15]

The author here states that these works *should not* be read at court, not that they *were not*. Such statements led many critics to assert that the fabliaux were not enjoyed by a courtly audience. Joseph Bédier's long lasting assumption of a neat

[14] *Boivin de Provins* lines 272-281.
[15] *Li lais d'Aristote* lines 39-60.

correspondence between social class and literary taste[16] stemmed from the fabliaux's use of earthy language, the presence of uncourtly topics common to the genre, such as the selling of livestock, the preparation of food, merchants' travels, daily village life and gossip. The genre's attention to more universal human subjects such as indigestion, defecation and bathing along with a certain penchant for mocking or targeting those individuals who would normally be shown a certain amount of respect in courtly literature – nobles, women and clerics, all seemed to further Bédier's argument.

While the author of the *Lai d'Aristote* may have believed that one should not tell fabliaux in court, there is much evidence that they were told, enjoyed and written by individuals from all social classes. While most of the authors are anonymous, among those named we find professional writers and jongleurs such as Jean Bodel, ecclesiastics such as Henri d'Andeli, and a prominent jurist, Philippe Rémi de Beaumanoir.[17] Manuscripts of fabliaux are listed in the inventories of several private libraries in France[18] and perhaps most interesting is an extant playlist for an evening's entertainment at the court of Conrad IV that asks for one *chanson de geste*, two lais and a fabliaux to be delivered.[19] Conrad's list of literature reads like a menu itself. If indeed the reading of the lais was, as the author of the Aristotle claimed, verbally in place of 'fruit and spice', then the fabliaux were surely the literary *digestif* to aid the guests who had earlier consumed such weighty courses as the *chansons de geste* and the lais.

Sex is the most central theme of the fabliaux. The treatment of the act itself is almost entirely without sensuality of any kind and instead is treated with a humour

[16] Bédier's theory held sway from 1893 until 1957 when a reactionary work by P. Nykrog, *Les fabliaux: etude d'histoire litterature et de stylistique médiévale* (Copenhagen, 1957), argued extensively that the fabliaux are essentially an entirely courtly genre. Both of these positions now appear too simple and too extreme. For a balanced discussion of the genre, see Muscatine, *Fabliaux.*
[17] Bédier cites the *Lai d'Aristote* along side a number of more serious works as the work of a high-society clergyman, Henri d'Andeli. See J. Bédier, *Les Fabliaux: Etudes de littérature populaire et d'histoire littéraire du moyen âge,* 5th ed. (Paris, 1925), p.387.
[18] M. Schlauch, *Medieval Narrative: A Book of Translations* (New York, 1934), p. xii.
[19] *Ibidem*

that is often coarse, occasionally rude and at times verges on the obscene.[20] Far from the description of Marie de France's lovers in her lay of Guigemar who 'gain pleasure from the final act', by and large the description of sex and sexual members in the fabliaux are uninhibited and direct. In referring to intercourse, the most commonly used verb is *foutre*. It is used at least once in over a third of the total surviving fabliaux and in some three-quarters of those that depict adultery.[21] In a dozen of these the author uses the term in his own voice, as a part of the narrative; in the remainder it is used by characters in dialogue, in just more than half of which it is said by the woman. If this number in any way suggests restraint, however, it is only because of the co-presence of a rich array of variations. The gamut extends from self-conscious delicacy to an invenerate interest and indeed joy of employing the impolite and lewd linguistic variations that sexual activity provides an author. Sex itself is described by the more colourful authors as giving justice, to dub, to take the maidenhood, to give the king's blows, to prick, to beat, to whip, in a variety of terms, on the buttocks with the testicles referred to as the thong of the cistern, or with the hammers or the mallets. Riding metaphors are of course replete, the more unusual are to mount without reins or saddle or to squeeze the mare. Intercourse is often described through animal imagery – it is a ferret hunting for a rabbit in its lair, a squirrel searching for nuts, feeding or watering a horse or feeding a piglet. Further analogies are based on eating – sex is likened to having the final course, to have some bacon or a roast, to nurse or

[20] While Lancelot and Guinevere's kiss and subsequent affair becomes the stuff of legend, inspiring lovers for centuries afterwards as in the case of Dante's lovers Paulo and Francesca who are enflamed into committing adultery themselves while reading of the tryst, the language and the subject matter of the fabliaux has proved more troublesome. Recent publications of fabliaux are entitled 'Ribald Tales of the Old French' or 'Bawdy Tales from the French', and just as the titles themselves seem to attempt to apologize or at least warn the reader of the content of the fabliaux they present, so they also attempt to sanitize the works through imaginative, if somewhat heavy handed editing and translation as revealed in the modified titles of the following works: *Du con qui fu fez a la besche* /[The cunt that was made with a shovel] becomes 'The devil's work'; *Le chevalier qui fist parler les cons* / [The knight who made cunts speak] becomes 'The knight who conjured voices and *Cele qui fu foutre et desfoutue* /[She who was fucked and defucked] becomes 'The heron'. See R. Hellman and R. O'Gorman, *Fabliaux, Ribald Tales from the Old French* (New York, 1965), p. i; P. Brians, *Bawdy Tales from the Courts of Medieval France* (New York, 1972), p. 1; R. Harrison, *Gallic Salt*, (Berkeley, 1974) and Schlauch, p. 30. The language of sex as presented in the fabliaux is not, it appears, a comfortable topic. Per Nykrog's insistence that the texts be read, *'avec une objectivité toute médicale'*, however is perhaps as limiting as the prudishness of those he campaigned against as it too negates much of the shock appeal and guilty fun of the obscenity that is much of the appeal of the works. See P. Nyrog, *Les Fabliaux*, p. 209.

[21] See I. Strasser, 'Mariage, amour et adultere dans les fabliaux', in *Amour, Mariage et Transgressions au Moyen Age*, eds D. Buschinger and A. Crépin (Göppingen, 1984), pp. 425-431.

to be skewered or turned on a spit. Agricultural terms are used: to seed a garden, to grind grain, to mow a patch, to plough a field, to harvest, to crush grapes, to exercise pasture rights, to draw in the shafts and terms taken from day to day activities, to open the door, beat the drum, crack nuts, give a cure, polish the ring, measure the length, broach the cask, forge, get plugged, greased or sharpen with a stone. Others are more obscure, 'to bring back the cunt of Rome' or 'to take the turquoise'. Many references to sex within the fabliaux are also polite, however: 'to play the game of love', 'to take one's pleasure or delight' or 'to sleep with one's partner'. Though it must be confessed that these are rare within the genre as a whole, they do make up almost a quarter of the references to sex within the group of adulterous tales here discussed.

Due to the inherent terseness of the works, due to their focus on the sexual act and indeed the often earthy language and frank treatment of sex and sexual relationships within the fabliaux, many critics are highly dismissive of the genre, considering them as only dirty jokes with very little character development and able to say less about roles of femininity, masculinity, sex or marriage.[22] It is not until these tales are taken on in later centuries by Chaucer and Boccaccio that their worth and content are judged positively. Brevity should, however, in no way be equated with superficiality. There is, in fact, an enormous amount of information conveyed in the language of these texts concerning marriage and the sexual roles of men and women; though we may not be given even the names of the characters, we are privy to their innermost fears, vexations, joys and occasionally pain. A most excellent example is found in *l'Enfant qui fu remis au soleil* which at first appears to be another example of the often encountered equation, 'couple minus merchant husband equals wife plus lover'. However, when the greedy merchant returns after several years and demands an explanation for his wife's pregnancy, the tale quickly departs from the standard equation. The panicked wife reveals that while crying one night due to the stresses his prolonged absence was causing her, no doubt not only the emotional difficulty of being separated from one's spouse for several years but also the stresses

[22] See J. Bédier, *Fabliaux*, pp. 325-326; J. Beyer, 'Schwank und Moral' in *The Humor of the Fabliaux: a Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Thomas Cooke and Benjamin Honeycutt (Columbia, 1974), pp. 15-42; G. M. Burger, 'Le Theme de l'obscenité dans la littérature française des douzième et treizième siècles' (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Stanford, 1973), pp. 154-249.

of running a household and possibly his business while he was away,[23] that it began to snow and when a snowflake fell into her mouth, she conceived.[24] Feigning stupidity, the husband allows his wife to believe in the success of her dupery for fifteen years, until such time that he decides to undertake another long voyage on which he intends to take his son along. The wife's deep misgivings are realised when her husband returns home alone, after selling the boy into slavery in a far off land. When the hysterical wife demands to know her son's whereabouts, the husband informs her that the land they journeyed to was very hot and the boy melted – but after all, what had she expected from a child conceived from the snow. The tale ends with the wife's realisation that her husband had known the truth all along and that he had nursed his grudge for fifteen years awaiting his vengeance upon her. It is a dark and painful description of a marriage in crisis and of both a wife and a husband scorned. The humour, though present, is dark; the punch line hits like a fist to the stomach rather than a light-hearted laugh and in this way is much more akin to the humour found within the Tristan legend, especially Béroul's work which relies greatly on black or tragic humour.

This tale provides an appropriate segue into the second half of this chapter that will focus on how language is used in order to commit the crime of adultery or in escaping punishment, as the wife so unsuccessfully attempted in her assertion that she had conceived from the snow.

II. The use and abuse of language in adultery

In the creation fabliau *Du Con qui fu fez a la besche,* God entrusts the making of the female genitalia to the devil with the instructions that the devil was to add

[23] The difficulties and dangers encountered by wives of absent husbands in the Middle Ages is discussed with an emphasis on wives of knights in J. Brundage's article, 'The Crusader's Wife', *Studiana Gratiana* 12 (1967), 425-441.

[24] The power of a woman's thoughts at the moment of her child's conception or during gestation is a topic of great consideration, especially in the twelfth and thirteenth century as illustrated in Gerald of Wales' description of a mother who was fascinated with a painting of a black man, staring at it every day. Her thoughts resulted in the birth of a black child. Similarly, the case of Aleric de Vere who wished to rid himself of his wife by claiming the child she carried was illegitimate. The boy was born with a defect in his eye identical to the defect his father had received through an accident. It was said that if a wife would think of her husband while committing adultery, any children from that union would physically resemble the father rather than the lover. See Gerald of Wales, *Journey*, II:7.

nothing of his own, nor take away anything from God's creation. Unfortunately, when the devil completes his task, temptation proves too much and the devil

> *Vers la fame un petit s'abesse;*
> *Un pet li a fet sor la langue.*
> *Por ce a fame tant de jangle.*
> *Por ce borde ele et jengle tant . . .*
> *Por ce le doit l'en molt soufrir;*
> *De parler ne se puet tenir*
> *Se n'est par amors ou par don.*

> [crouched a little over the woman and laid a fart on her tongue. This is why a woman is so full of chatter. This is why she jokes and chatters so much . . . This is why so much has to be endured from her; she can't keep from talking unless for love or a gift].[25]

Though the author declares that no one should say anything bad about women or their genitalia, he insists that '*maint predomme en sont destruit; honi en sont et confondu et lor avoir en ont perdu*' / 'many good men are destroyed because of it, they are disgraced and confounded by it and they've lost their money because of it'.[26] Here is plainly established a link between women's sex and their language, both born from the workings of the devil. This syzygy is, with varying degrees of subtlety, present within all the texts examined in this study. Intercourse, both physical and verbal are, as the author of the fabliau asserts, the weapons of women by which they confuse men and rob them of their honour. The most common warning examples cited throughout these texts are of Adam, a perfect man who was deceived by the words of a woman, and Solomon, the wisest man to live, who fell victim to women's sexual attraction. Indeed if perfect man was no match for his wife, then how much less so is the common man? The general consensus of the spectrum of works acknowledges that, as the narrator of *La Saineress* writes, '*Mes il n'est pas en cest païs cil mie se peüst guetier que fame nel puist engingnier*' / 'There is no man in this country so well endowed with sense that he can keep watch enough that a woman couldn't deceive him'.[27]

The manipulation of language is the talent of women. The episodes of linguistic deception vary in form. They can be brief, often the sexually charged punch

[25] *Du Con qui fu fez a la besche* lines 64-75.
[26] *Du Con qui fu fez a la besche* lines 80-83.
[27] *La Saineress* lines 111-113; Eichmann II:111.

line of the work, as found in *La Fame qui cunquie son baron,* in which a sexually unsatisfied wife, whose husband has been secured in the basement, plugging the holes in his wine casks with his fingers, goes off in search of 'a plug that fits'.[28] Often these deceptive statements come in the form of veiled truths to add a comic conclusion, reliving the details of the wife's deception, as in *La Saineress* in which the wife recounts the details of her affair to her husband in a guise thin enough for an audience, if not the husband, to perceive clearly:

> *Le pautonier le prent esrant;*
> *en un lit l'avoit estendue*
> *tant que il l'a .III. foiz foutue.*
> *Quant il orent assez joué,*
> *foutu, besié et acolé*
> *si se descendent del perrin. . .*
> *'et m'a plus de .C. cops ferue,*
> *tant que je sui toute malue. . . .*
> *Par .III.rebinees me prist*
> *et a chascune foiz m'assist*
> *sor mes rains .II. de ses peçons*
> *et me feroit uns cops si lons*
> *toute me sui fet martirier. . .*
> *Granz cops me feroit et sovent;*
> *morte fusse, mon escient,*
> *s'un trop bon oingnement ne fust.*
> *Qui di tel oingnement eüst,*
> *ja ne fust mes de mal grevee.*
> *Et, quant m'ot tant demartelee,*
> *si m'a aprés ointes mes plaies*
> *qui molt par erent granz et laies,*
> *tant que je fui toute guerie.*
> *Tel oingnement ne haz je mie. . .*
> *l'oingnement issoit d'un tuiel*
> *et si descendoit d'un forel*
> *d'une pel molt noire et hideuse,*
> *mes molt par estoit savoreuse'.*
> *Dist li borgois: 'Ma bele amie,*
> *a poi ne fustes mal baillie.*
> *Bon oingnement avez eü'.*

> 'The rascal took her at once and stretched her out on the bed and fucked her three times. When they had played enough, fucked, kissed, and embraced, they came down from the room . . '.

In response to her husband's questioning the wife describes the 'treatment' thus:

> 'She [the lover in disguise] struck me more than a hundred strokes, until I was completely softened . . . she took me three times and each time set two of her

[28] *La Feme qui cunquie son baron* line 85.

> lancettes upon my loins and struck me with a blow so long that I was completely martyred. . . she dealt me harsh and repeated blows; I would have died I think if it hadn't been for a very good ointment. Whoever has such an ointment will never more be grieved by pain. And after she had hammered me so much, she anointed my wounds which were very big and wide, until I was completely cured. I don't mind that kind of ointment at all. . . The ointment issued from a pipe which came down from a small forest with a black and hideous skin, but it was very sweet'. The bourgeois said, 'my dear girl, you were almost destroyed! You've had a good salving'.[29]

At other times the manipulation of language is part of an often detailed and extensive plot. Occasionally dialogue consumes the entire text as found in Marie's fables and many fabliaux, which by their nature are fluent, fast paced and largely narrative oriented. Dialogue takes a large role within the fabliaux, averaging sixty percent of the text in most works, though some contain much more. In the most dialogue oriented fabliaux, all but five of the 357 lines in the work are dialogue and only nine of those are spoken by the husband. Far from tiresome, as one could expect such extended episodes of speech to be, these scenes provide an excellent forum for authors to explore their skills for wit and banter, usually voiced through the female character. The most popular stage for such exploration were contests of language as illustrated in *Des trois dames qui trouverent l'anel* and *Li jugemenz des cons* wherein those who expressed themselves best or used language in the most creative way to achieve their goal won.

Linguistic contests and play are not limited to the shorter verse works, but are common in the longer verse and prose romances as well, the best example of which is found in the linguistic performances of Iseult. 'Truth, Half-Truth and Untruth: Béroul's Telling of the Tristan Story',[30] is the apt title that Barbara Nelson Sargent-Baur chose for her article on the use and misuse of language in Béroul's *Tristan*. While the title applies to all the language of all characters within the text, it is the half-truths and the untruths of Iseult that prove more common and more memorable than any truths she may disclose within the text. Iseult's skill at linguistic deception is a character trait common to all portrayals of her. The Prose *Tristan* depicts an exasperated King Mark complaining to the queen, '*Dame, dame, bien savez fol*

[29] *La Saineress*, lines 42-47, 71-90, 92-100; Eichmann II:109-111.
[30] B. N. Sargent-Baur, 'Truth, Half-Truth and Untruth: Béroul's Telling of the Tristan Story', in *The Craft of Fiction*, ed. L. A. Arrathoon (Michigan, 1984) pp. 393-421.

apaier!' / 'Lady, Lady, you know how to talk your way out of anything!'[31] Iseult's quick thinking and quicker tongue deliver her from punishment, if not always from suspicion on several occasions within the prose work, as shown in her attempt to explain Tristan's presence in her bedroom not long after being rescued from Palamedes' abduction by her lover.

> *'Sir', fait ele, 'de la compaignie Tristan ne puet nul mal venir. Se je la compaignie Tristan amoie sanz vilenie, de ce ne me devez vos blasmer, car vos savez bien qu'il a plus fait por moi que chevaliers qui soit ou monde. S'il n'avoit fait fors solement ce qu'il me delivra des mains Palamedes, le bon chevalier, qui m'en me noit en estrange terre a vostre honte et a vostre desonor qu'il n'I ot onques si hardi de toz cez qui ceanz estoient qui ses armes en osast prendre, Tristanz m'en delivra a force et se combati a li. Et quant il m'ot si dou tot en sa saisine, s'il m'amast de fole amor, il me poïst adonc avoir mené en laterre de Lyonois ou quel que part qu'il vosist, que ja por vos nou lessast. Et quant il ça m'amena et me rendi a vos si deboneremment com vos veïstes,ja puis n'i deüssiez penser folie por mauvese parole que l'en vos deïst'.*
>
> ['My lord', she said, 'Tristan's company can't do me any harm. You ought not to blame me for enjoying his company in all innocence, since you know well that he has done more for me than any knight in the world, if only that he rescued me from the hands of Palamedes, the brave knight, who was carrying me off to a foreign land to your shame and dishonor without there being a single knight here bold enough to take up his arms; it was Tristan who fought against him and rescued me by force. And once he had me thus completely in his power, if he had loved me unlawfully, he could at that point have taken me to the kingdom of Leonois or wherever he wished and he wouldn't have let the thought of you stop him. And since he brought me back here and returned me to you of his own free will, as you saw, you should never suspect him of ill-conduct, whatever malicious gossip you were told about him'].[32]

Iseult here crafts a logical and apparently truthful argument that is, in fact, a blend of half-truths, lies and insults. For as the audience is well aware, Iseult and Tristan's choice to return to court rather than make a new home in Logres is part of a plan to keep themselves free from scandal and continue their easy life and illicit affair at Mark's court.[33] Though Mark and his barons rightly do not believe the queen's argument, they lack physical or visual proof to refute her statement. Iseult's speech not only frees her from imminent punishment but also turns the accusation of wrong doing against her own accusers with her disparaging remarks against the barons' cowardice that would not let them challenge Palamedes and in her insinuations that

---

[31] *TrP* II:516.
[32] *TrP* II:516; Curtis, 131.
[33] *TrP* II:511.

Mark has no authority nor power over her lover who 'wouldn't have let the thought of you [Mark] stop him'.[34]

Iseult's refusal to accept blame for any of her actions is an aspect of her character more deeply discussed in chapter one of this thesis, but may be examined in its context as a highly effective component of her language that enables her to deflect blame and avoid punishment even in seemingly unmanoeuverable situations.[35] One of many examples from the Prose *Tristan* is found when Iseult is confronted by Mark in front of the court and is commanded to drink from a bewitched horn that will spill over any woman who had been unfaithful in her marriage. When handed the horn, Iseult demands to know its origin, which Mark refuses to disclose. The queen refuses to drink from it, declaring

> *'Ce ne feroie je mie, sauve vostre grace, devant que je seüsse que ce fust, car par aventure il est faiz par enchantement por correcier les hautes dames qui n'ont mie fait a la volenté de toz les enchanteors ne de totes les enchanteresses de la Grant Bretaigne. Et certes, je sai bienque ceste chose vint de la Grant Bretigne, ou sont tuit li enchantement, et qu'il vos est envoiez por metre descorde entre moi et vos, ou entre autre bone gent de Cornoaille'.*
>
> ['It may be a magic horn made in order to upset the ladies who haven't acted in accordance with the wishes of all the enchanters and enchantresses of Great Britain. Indeed, I am sure that it came from Great Britain, which is full of enchantments, and that it was sent to you with the intention of creating discord between you and me or between other good people in Cornwall'].[36]

When the horn spills the wine over Iseult's chest, Mark denounces her as an adulteress and moves to have her put to death. Iseult offers the none-too-veiled threat that she is willing to undergo trial by combat, her champion of course to be Tristan whom none will fight for fear of their lives - a point that is not missed on Mark. Determined to prove his wife's infidelity, the king orders the other ladies of the court to drink from the horn. As all but four women are unsuccessful, Iseult declares that,

> *'Or m'est avis se a morir vient par l'espreve de cest cor, je n'I morrai mie sole, car ceste dame en est corpable, se corpe I avient, ausi com je sui'.*
>
> 'it seems to me that if the testimony of this horn leads to death, I won't be the only one to die! This lady is just as guilty as I am, if guilt comes into it'.[37]

---

[34] *TrP* II:516.
[35] See *TrP* II:530 and above, p. 1.
[36] *TrP* II:530; Curtis, 139.
[37] *TrP* II:531; Curtis, 139.

Terrified of losing all their wives, the barons confirm that guilt is in no way measured by the bewitched horn and that it is, as the queen asserted, a cruel joke sent by malicious fées. Deflecting her blame onto the magical miscreants of Britain and sharing her guilt with the ladies of the court, Iseult verbally wriggles herself out of another impossible situation and once again avoids punishment for her crime.

Language is both Iseult's weapon and plaything in virtually all the texts within the Tristan legend, though different authors portray her linguistic skills and their own in a variety of forms ranging from the subtle puns and cryptic analogies of Thomas's work,[38] to the intricate interlacing of truths and half-truths found in Béroul's. In Béroul's *Tristan*, the interpretation, misinterpretation and warping of language is one of the most intriguing facets of the work and is the single greatest motivating factor beyond sexual lust for action.

Owing to the damaged condition of the surviving manuscript of Béroul's text, we pick up the account in the midst of an impromptu performance and at the beginning of a series of lies and half-truths that dominates the work as the lovers repeatedly attempt to disguise their adulterous affair. Advised by the spying dwarf, Frocin, King Mark has assumed a vantage point high in a tree in the orchard from which he may spy on his wife and nephew and confirm his suspicions of infidelity. On her way to a clandestine rendezvous with her lover, Iseult catches sight of her husband and instead of an embrace, greets her lover with a reprimand:

'Par Deu, qui l'air fist et la mer,
Ne me mandez nule foiz mais.
Je vos di bien, Tristan, a fais,
Certes, je n'I vendroie mie.
Li rois pense que par folie,
Sire Tristran vos aie amé;
Mais Dex plevis ma loiauté,
Qui sor mon cors mete flaele,
S'onques fors cilqui m'ot pucele
Out m'amistié encor nul jor. . .
Sire, vos n'en avez talent;
Ne je, par Deu omnipotent,
N'ai corage de drüerie
Qui tort a nule vilanie.
Mex voudroie que je fuse arse,
Aval le vent la poudre esparse,
Jor que je vive que amor
Aie o home qu'o mon seignor'

[38] See the 'owl dialogue' at *TrT* lines 871-941 and Brangain's speech at lines 1616-1673.

> ['In the name of God who created the air and sea, never send for me again! Tristan, I assure you, regretfully, that I would not come. Lord Tristan, the king thinks that I have loved you sinfully; but I affirm my fidelity before God, and may He punish me if anyone except the man who took my virginity ever had my love. . . sir you have no desire; nor, in the name of Almighty God, do I have a desire for any love that leads to sin and shame. I would rather be burned alive and have my ashes scattered in the wind than ever in my life to love any man except my lord'].[39]

It is the subtle layering of half-truths amongst a few lies and one rare truth that gives Iseult's speech both depth and verisimilitude. The queen is, in fact, addressing three separate audiences: Tristan, whom she must warn through her speech of her husband's presence; Mark, whom she must persuade of her fidelity and the omniscient audience who cannot be deceived. This conflict is settled by a technique Iseult employs many times to great effect, namely making an equivocal speech and allowing her husband or judges to believe what they will. Half-truths such as 'May [God] punish me if anyone except the man who took my virginity ever had my love', or 'sir you have no desire; nor, in the name of Almighty God, do I have a desire for any love that leads to sin and shame', are true enough to allow the queen to pass any trial by ordeal and are evidence enough for the eavesdropping king to be reassured of his wife's faithfulness, though the reality of these statements, that Tristan, not Mark is the man who took Iseult's virginity and that Iseult's fear of slander, not her fidelity, moves her to decry a love that would expose her. Iseult's dangerous play with language, even when telling the truth, is made possible through often very thinly veiled vagaries as shown in her statement that: 'I would rather be burned alive and have my ashes scattered in the wind than ever in my life to love any man except my lord'. Well aware of, and perhaps even flaunting her disregard for the standard punishment of burning for an adulterous queen, Iseult blunts her confession with an indiscriminate reference to 'my lord', satisfying her husband's suspicion while leaving open the object of her fidelity.

Iseult's use of language when discussing, committing or attempting to flee persecution for her crime is much more complex, witty and engaging than the prose version's portrayal of the same speech in which she flatly denies the affair and blames the barons for spreading lies. The prose version is without the irony and witticism of

---

[39] *TrB* lines 15-38.

Béroul's; the lie, unaccompanied by half-truths is inexpressive of the verbal skill witnessed in the previous passage is successful. It is interesting to note that in the prose work, this performance does not lead to confrontation nor to dialogue between the king and queen. Indeed, virtually all discourse between husband and wife in the prose work is encapsulated in scenes such as this, most often Iseult's denial of her affair. There is very little interaction between Mark and Iseult as a married couple; though very occasionally the author makes reference to the two engaged in an activity together, presiding over court or even playing chess together, the audience is not privy to their everyday interaction or speech behind closed doors. [40] In contrast, Béroul's work takes the audience into Mark and Iseult's bedroom, illustrating how husband and wife talk, as opposed to only engaging in communication vicariously through overheard discussion between the wife and lover.

When the king returns to his bedroom and begins to question the queen as to her whereabouts, she declares, '*Sire, le voir vos en desno. Ne croiras pas que voir en die. Mais jel dirai sanz tricherie*' / ['Sir, I will tell you the truth, you will not believe me, but I will tell you without deceit'].[41] In fact, Iseult does relate to the king the entire proceedings of the night, including her conversation with Tristan and thus, based upon the scene Mark witnessed, Iseult has, in fact told the truth by accurately relating her story. The deeply embedded irony in this episode lies in the fact that the audience is well aware that Iseult is recounting a lie, though truthfully. The levels of deceit and reality begin here to expand into an accordion like structure, occasionally collapsing only to open once again revealing new twists of truth and perception which allow the repetitive cycle to continue: the lovers, under threat of physical harm, reform or deceive the king into granting forgiveness, Mark's anger is abated, the trysts resume, the jealous barons inform Mark whose suspicions are once again aroused and the lovers are again thrown into a period of separation or exile until they can renew the cycle through another linguistic deception. This interlacing of truth, half truth and lies becomes heightened and much more elaborate as the work progresses into a spiral of intensification as trysts become more dangerous and passionate, accusers demand greater action and Mark's need for vengeance or

[40] *TrP* III:837.
[41] *TrB* lines 399-401.

vindication becomes greater. In comparing the first of these cycles, the tryst under the tree, to the final one, the oath at Mal Pas, the progression becomes apparent. At the Mal Pas Iseult has gone to elaborate means to stage the scene of her oath in contrast to her previous impromptu performance in the garden. She has chosen a setting which serves a two fold purpose in her plan: first, it ensures the queen a means of humorous revenge against the barons who have accused her of soiling herself sexually by her illicit affair and who now, in their struggle to cross the mud, become physically soiled in the mire of the Mal Pas. Secondly, her setting provides the means by which she will be able to make her equivocal oath as the muddy ground 'forces' the queen to ask Tristan, disguised as a leper, to carry her across the swamp on his back. This odd request is soon understood by the reader when Iseult makes her declaration of innocence, stating:

> *'Seignors', fait ele, 'por Deu merci,*
> *Saintes reliques voi ice.*
> *Or escoutez que je ci jure,*
> *De quoi le roi ci aseüre:*
> *Si m'aït Dex et Saint Ylaire,*
> *Ces reliques, cest saintuaire,*
> *Totes celes qui ci ne sont*
> *Et tuit icil de par le mont,*
> *Qu'entre mes cuises n'entra home,*
> *Fors le ladre qui fist soi some,*
> *Qui me porta outre les guez,*
> *Et li rois Marc mes esposez.*
> *Ces deus ost de mon soirement,*
> *Ge n'en ost plus de tote gent. . .*
> *Qui voudra que je plus en face,*
> *Tote en sui prestre en ceste place'.*
>
> [Lords, praise be to God; I see many holy relics here. Now hear my oath – and may the king be reassured by it – that, in the name of God and Saint Hilaire, and on these relics and this reliquary and all the relics that are not here and all those throughout the world, no man has ever been between my thighs, except the leper who made himself a beast of burden and carried me over the ford and my husband King Mark. I exclude these two from my oath, but I except no one else. . . If anyone requires further proof from me , I am ready to provide it here and now].[42]

Thus with humour and actual, though misleading truth, Iseult answers the claims of the barons and vindicates herself in this confession before men and God. Physical or

[42] *TrB* lines 4197-4217.

situational humour often accompanies linguistic humour, making possible the verbal deception as seen in the queen's oath at Mal Pas or adding a comic element to an otherwise tense moment as Mark's tree climbing evokes in the scene of the first tryst.

Béroul is not alone within the corpus of works of Tristan legend in his use of humour, nor is humour a stranger to the genre of romance itself. What is curious about Béroul's text is not the physical comedy alone, but the blend of situational humour and verbal deception that is employed by the queen. It is in this manner that perhaps a connection between the image of the adulteress in the fabliaux and Iseult in the Tristan legend, especially Béroul's version, can be made. Béroul's work has often been described as a hybrid: a cross between fabliaux and romance.[43] While later works, such as Thomas' to an extent and most obviously in the Prose *Tristan,* as illustrated in the comparison between scenes of the tryst beneath the tree, have attempted to tone down much of the situational humour, elements of this hybridisation remain, most often in language. Whether accompanied by physical humour or props, whether voiced as truth, half-truth or an unadorned lie, verbal deception is most often portrayed as one of the most beloved themes of medieval literature : a contest. Contests appear in every work here considered, often in several shapes or forms - as battles, trials by combat, organised verbal debate, tests of sexual fidelity and simple outwitting. Though replete with a variety of contests, the one competition that is central to every branch of the Tristan legend is a challenge, perhaps appropriate considering the equivocal use of language and symbol throughout the legend, of two natures. It is a competition not only for the sexual favours of the queen, but a contest of language and who uses it best.

Male lovers also occasionally engage in linguistic play, usually achieving at least a certain level of success. The most famous of course is Tristan, who relishes his joint deception with Iseult on many occasions, perhaps the most efficacious and entertaining of which is his part in the deception at Mal Pas. Instructed to dress as a

[43] Much work has been done in tracing and identifying the humor of the Tristan story to its Celtic origins and indeed in tracing the origins of the fabliaux and their humor as well, arguing that the term 'fabliaux' itself is representative of a kind of humor long present in oral and written tradition and is not only indicative of the late twelfth and thirteenth century genre. See R. Curtis, 'L'humour et l'ironie dans le *Tristan en Prose*', in *Der Altvanzosische Prosaroman,* ed. R. Schwaderer (Munich, 1979), pp. 77-94.

leper and await the queen, Tristan passes the time and enhances his performance linguistically by begging and occasionally berating the members of court and of the households of both King Mark and King Arthur who has come to officiate at the trial by oath. Tristan's verbal exploits span some 200 lines in Béroul's work,[44] ending with a most dangerous speech which jeopardises the success of the oath and indeed his and the queen's honour and physical safety should Mark see through his deceptive speech. While waiting for the queen, Tristan amused himself by attempting to get something, be it a crust of bread, a coin or even King Arthur's leggings! Catching sight of Mark who is riding '*fiers et posteïs*/regal and imposing',[45] the temptation proves too great and Tristan calls out to him:

'Por Deu, roi Marc, un poi de bien!'
S'aumuce trait, si li dit, 'Tien,
Frere, met la ja sus ton chief:
Maintes foiz t'a li tens fait grief'.
'Sire', fait il, 'vostre merci!'
Or m'avez vos de froit gari'.
'Dom est tu, ladres?' fait li rois.
'De Carloon filz d'un Galois'.
'Qanz anz as esté fors de gent?'
'Sire, troiz anz i a, ne ment.
Tant con je fui en saine vie,
Molt avoie cortoise amie.
Por lié ai je ces boces lees;
Ce tartaries plain dolees
Me fait et nuit et jor soner
Et o la noisë estoner
Toz ceus qui je demant du lor
Por amor Deu le criator'.
Li rois li dit, 'Ne celez mie
Conment ce te donna t'amie'.
'Dans rois, ses sires ert meseaus,
O lié faisoie mes joiaus,
Cits maus me prist de la comune.
Mais plus bele ne fu que une'.
'Qui est ele?' ' La bele Yseut:
Einsi se vest con cele seut'.

['In God's name, King Mark, give me something!'
Mark took off his hood and said, 'Here, brother, put this on your head; you have suffered too often from the weather'.
'Sir', he responded, 'thank you. Now you have protected me from the cold'.
'Where are you from Leper?' asked King Mark.
'From Caerleon, the son of a Welshman'.
' How long have you been an outcast from society?'

[44] *TrB* lines 3628-3631, 3674-3690, 3715-3730, 3749-3776.
[45] *TrB* l. 3742.

'Truthfully, sir, three years. While I was healthy, I had a most courtly lady. Because of her, I now have these ugly sores, and thus I have to use this rattle day and night, making noise that startles those from whom I ask something for the love of God the Creator'.

The king said, 'Tell me how your lady did this to you'.

'Good King, her husband was a leper; I made love to her, and I contracted the disease from our union. But there is only one woman more beautiful than she'.

'Who's that?'

'The beautiful Yseut! She even dresses as the other one does'].[46]

Tristan's half-truth, like Iseult's, is humorous, yet stands quite apart from that of the queen in both tone and intent. The irony and symbolism contained in the first line of his speech, centering on the request for goods and the giving of a cap is lost on the king, but not to Tristan, nor to the audience. The truth is that Mark has indeed given something to Tristan – his wife and his honour. The giving of a cap to protect the 'leper' from the cold is an interesting, though unwittingly ironic token, as it is Mark who has exiled Tristan from his court, casting him into 'the cold'. It is protection, in fact, from the king and his barons that has brought the queen and Tristan to Mal Pas in the first place. Rather than be satisfied with his gain, Tristan, spurred on by his success, begins a spontaneous and highly dangerous linguistic game with the king, recounting the 'leper's' story in a thinly veiled, mocking speech in which he admits to adultery and in fact calls Mark a leper.

Dangerous speech is a characteristic of Tristan throughout the corpus, for example both *folies* detail an episode in which Tristan disguises himself, similar to the episode of the Mal Pas. Here the speech is even more dangerous than that witnessed in Béroul's work as Tristan ceases to veil his story, declaring his illicit relationship with the queen and including facts in his performance known only to the three members of the adulterous triangle.[47] The queen becomes distressed and the court, acting as a chorus, declare that should the king believe this fool that death will be in store, yet Mark remains unsuspicious and untroubled. Seemingly disappointed in the king's gullibility Tristan, who has entered Mark's court using the name 'Tantris', goes so far as to point out the flaw in his thin disguise: *'Esgarde [moi] en mi lo vis: Don ne sanble je bien Tantris? Metet li 'tris' dewaunt la 'tran' E vus y truvert 'Tristan.' /*

[46] *Ibid.* lines 3749- 3776.

[47] *FB* lines 394-439, 446-463, 480-492; *FO* lines 327-366, 391-408, 416-456, 463-476.

'Take a good look at my face: Don't I look just like Tantris? Put 'tris' before 'tan' and you get Tristan'.[48] It would seem that his physical deception is more powerful than the truth he utters which is taken as a lie. Though the dialogue is daring, it lacks the subtle complexities of Iseult's speech; the success of this ruse is contingent on Marks gullibility, not Tristan's aptness for linguistic deception. After all, there is no need to lie to the king when he does not acknowledge truth. Tristan is at his best verbally when with Iseult, relishing in their joint deception on many occasions. Though not the mastermind of the linguistic plot, Tristan does engage in the verbal deception with success and is always willing to lend physical humor to the scene, as seen in the episode of Iseult's ambiguous oath, limping, tottering and complaining as he carries his lover on his back over the swamp. The focus of the majority of texts is this depiction of linguistic play, far more so than the description of the sex act – the author seeks not so much to establish whether lovers lie together sexually, but how well the lovers lie together verbally.

It has been established that while women are not alone in their use of linguistic deceit, they do remain the masters of it. While the lover may occasionally use language to some success in his perfidy, husbands are explicitly warned not to engage in such activity. The only instance of a husband successfully using language against his wife is found in the fabliaux *De l'Enfant qui fu remis au soleil*. The husband is able to reply to his wife, who had attempted to deceive him by declaring that their illegitimate child was conceived from the snow, that the boy, who has been secretly sold into slavery, melted in the heat of the sun. The narrator appears very proud of this verbal victory concluding:

La dame s'est aperceüe
que son mari l'a deçeüe,
qui dist que son filz est remis.
Or li est bien en lieu remis
ses engiens, et tornez a perte,
don't folement estoit couvert.
Bel s'en est ses sires vengiez,
qui laidement fu engingniez
et par paroles et par dis.

[The lady realized that her husband was deceiving her, saying that her son had melted. Now her trick, with which she had tried a foolish cover-up, had really

[48] *FB* lines 180-181b.

> backfired and turned into a loss. Her lord, who had been vilely tricked, both by speeches and words, had avenged himself beautifully for it].[49]

Apart from this example however, husbands most often fail in their attempts to use language as a means of deceit. Language is most often the vehicle by which husbands are shamed or humiliated not only by their wives, but by themselves. Mark's language most often serves to reveal his gullibility as illustrated following the tryst under the tree in both Béroul and the prose work, and again following the return of the lovers after their exile in the forest. It occasionally serves to shame him as well, as illustrated in his angry outbursts at the test of the horn in which he three times publicly declares Iseult to be unfaithful.[50] Perhaps the most damning aspect of Mark's language is not obvious to his court or household, but is his lack of response, in a sense his lack of language, when responding to the lovers' ruses and attempts at linguistic deception in order to preserve his honour or conceal his part in an attempt to physically trap the lovers. While his cowardice remains unknown to the public, his inability to successfully respond verbally to the lovers increasingly weakens his authority and respect in the eyes of his wife, his nephew and the audience of the tale.

In this section, Iseult, Tristan and Mark have been the focus of discussion but they are certainly not alone within the genre. Although Guinevere's sense of humour has been examined previously in this thesis, [51] her use of linguistic deception in accomplishing or disguising her crime has remained uncommented upon primarily due to a striking lack of instances of verbal trickery. In contrast to Iseult, Guinevere, especially as depicted in the Vulgate, is remarkably truthful in her language. It is, in fact one of the greatest differences between the two adulterous queens. The fact that Guinevere does not use verbal deception to accomplish her aims, does not mean that she is incapable of doing so; an example of female mendacity, she proves quite adept at the game when necessary. For example, it is only by her verbal dupery of Mordred, first delaying her reply to his proposal and then making protracted arrangements for the wedding, that she is able to buy the time necessary to send for Arthur's aid.[52] While not given to blatant lying in the Vulgate, Guinevere is a master of artful, verbal

[49] *De l'Enfant* lines 134-142.
[50] *TrP* II:513.
[51] See above, p.47.
[52] *Mort* IV:135-137; Sommer VI:321-323.

dodges as illustrated in discussion with Arthur and his nephews wherein she finds herself in an awkward situation as the king and the two knights discuss what they would give to have the company of Lancelot forever. When questioned by the king, Sir Gawain declares that he would give up his masculinity and become ' the most beautiful woman in the world, happy and healthy on condition that he would love me above all others, all his life and mine'.[53] When the discussion next turns to the queen who *is* the most beautiful woman in the world and *is* the object of Lancelot's love, she gracefully sidesteps the question with the humorous quip, 'Sir Gawain has proposed all that a lady can give'.[54]

Not every text to address the queen's character uses her skills for verbal deception so sparingly, however. Guinevere's linguistic ingenuity and chicanery are at their best in the *Cor* when, after failing the magical test of wifely fidelity, Guinevere faces an irate and murderous husband. First, the queen proclaims herself innocent of the charges and offers to undergo trial by ordeal.[55] She then explains that she had erred only in giving a ring as a token to a young combatant the previous day. Guinevere then reverses the roles of the participants in this scene, becoming the accuser rather than the accused and casting Arthur as the focus of the test by reminding him and the court that wifely infidelity is not the only cause of failure, but also excessive jealousy on the part of husbands. The queen then delivers an inspiring speech in which she extols the value of wifely fidelity and its role in creating a happy marriage which she likens to bread and wine, the basic support of life.[56] Convinced of his own guilt and moved by his wife's speech, Arthur dismisses the test and the court resumes its feasting.

In contrast to Tristan, Lancelot does not often engage in lingual deception. Though willing to disguise himself physically to avoid recognition in battles and tournaments, Lancelot rarely resorts to verbal duplicity, preferring martial action to verbal contests. In fact, one of the only instances of Lancelot's voiced misrepresentation of truth is found in a curious coupling of half-truth and physical strength when acting as champion for Guinevere against the false accusations of

[53] *Lancelot* II:140; Sommer III:258.
[54] *Ibidem.*
[55] *Cor,* lines 324-33.
[56] *Cor,* lines 391-400.

Maleagant. Having discovered the queen's bed covered in blood, Maleagant accuses the wounded Kay of having illicit intercourse with Guinevere. Though the queen, Lancelot and the audience know Guinevere to be guilty of adultery, it is Maleagant's wrongful attribution of guilt to Kay who had remained asleep at the foot of the queen's bed, rather than Lancelot, which allows the queen's real lover to champion Kay's innocence and thereby her own, declaring in trial by combat:

> *'Et je t'an lief come parjur,*
> *. . . et si rejur*
> *qu'il n'I jut ne ne la santi.*
> *Et de celui qui a manti*
> *praigne Dex, se lui plest, vangence*
> *et face voire demonstrance'.*

> ['And I swear that you lie, and I further swear that he never slept with her or touched her. And if it please God, may He show His righteousness by taking vengeance upon him who has lied'].[57]

Unlike King Mark, whose amateur guises and attempts at trickery always fall weak or serve to illuminate his inadequacies and cowardice, Arthur's play with language is not intentional. It is much more akin to the language of husbands found in other genres, characteristed by the failure to comprehend the foolishness or occasionally the double entendre of their statements. This is shown in tongue-in-cheek scenes such as that in the Vulgate *Lancelot* in which the king, his wife and knights discuss what they would do to have Lancelot's company. The king's reply is '*ie li partiroie par mi quanque ie poroie auoir fors seulement le cors de ceste dame dont ie ne feroie nului part'* / 'I'd share with him equally everything I have, with the sole exception of the person of this lady, whom I'd share with no one'.[58] That very evening, however, his wife will indeed be shared with Lancelot as the couple first consummate their affair. This darkly humorous inability to wield language as successfully as their wives and occasionally the lovers is a characteristic quite common to the fabliaux for its comic properties, as seen in the words of the husband in the tale of *La Saineress,* who agrees with his wife who has just revealed in a very thinly veiled lie that she and her lover, disguised as a female medic have been having

[57] *Charrete* lines 4971-4976.
[58] *Lancelot* II:140; Sommer III:253.

sex upstairs, stating, '*bon oingnement avez eü*' / 'indeed you have had a good salving!'[59]

Others outside the triangle use language to assist the wife in her ruse. The most infamous example is of course Brangain in the Tristan legend. Not only does Iseult's handmaid participate in physical duplicity, giving her own virginity to Mark to preserve Iseult's reputation, but also participates in verbal duplicity: diverting attention from Tristan and Iseult's relationship, currying favour with the king and restoring his relationship with his nephew.[60] She is not alone in her use of language to aid the adulterous couple. In *Cor,* Yvain comes to the queen's aid both physically and verbally by restraining Arthur from attacking his wife and later by insisting that the king not take such a test too seriously, as he insists there is no married woman who has not had light thoughts.[61] Within the fabliaux are countless helpers, for example: the mother of the adulterous wife in *La Sorisete* who continues her daughter's ruse and helps delay the husband who comes searching for the 'mouse', or the friend of the wife in *Du Cuvier* who sends a cryptic reply to her friend's appeal that she would not have asked fo the tub had she known her need.[62] Thus she enables her friend to keep her secret and offers her aid in smuggling the lover out of the house.

Just as sex and language are linked, so, by extension sexual deviance and linguistic deviance would seem to go hand in hand. The texts themselves warn of this abuse of language. Several fabliaux state that their entire purpose was to illustrate how a woman is made to deceive, turning lies into truth and truth into lies.[63] Many texts warn of such distortion, stressing the importance of believing one's own eyes and not the words of one's wife. This, however, is no guard against the wiliness of a woman, for often verbal distortion is accompanied by visual distortion as seen by the convincing costuming of the female medic, by Tristan on many occasions at court and at Mal Pas and the clever body switches depicted in Mark's bridal bed, or in *Les Tresces* when the adulterous wife who has been thrown out of her home convinces her

[59] *La Saineresse*, line 99.
[60] *TrT* lines 1687-1729.
[61] *Cor*, lines 309-11.
[62] *Du Cuvier*, lines 148-149.
[63] *Le chevalier qui fist sa fame confesse, Le prestre qui abevete, Le vilain de Bailluel.*

friend to return in her place. The outraged husband who mercilessly beats the woman he believes to be his wife and again throws her out of the house is convinced he has suffered a nightmare and forgives his perfectly healthy, unmarked wife who greets him in the morning.[64] Even husbands who catch their wives in the act of adultery can be made to disbelieve their eyes as shown in the fabliaux *Du Prestre ki abevete* and Marie de France's fable in which husbands are made to believe that they have suffered optical illusions.

The urge to have visual confirmation of an affair can even lead to a husband placing himself in physical danger, as shown in Mark's reluctance to enter the forest of Morrois or in the example of the husband of *La Borgoise d'Orliens* who attempts to spy on his wife and lover and instead finds himself locked in the upstairs cupboard where he is attacked by household servants.[65] So convinced of the misinformation they have gained visually, these husbands then find themselves susceptible to the explanation of the "truth" as dictated by their wives.

Though others may dabble with language, even with some proficiency, none express the skill or achieve the success of wives which leads one to ask why language is shown to be the weapon of women? First, no doubt, there is the precedent of Eve, an ever-present image of she who deceived her husband first. It is a motif common to the fabliaux, more subtly expressed in the romances and replete in the theology and even medical theory of the Middle Ages. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, language is one of the only weapons women have. Unlike Tristan or Lancelot, the female lover cannot rely on fear of her martial prowess to keep accusers or even her husband in check. It is a helplessness Iseult herself comments upon when forced to defend herself against charges of adultery whilst Tristan is in exile and unable to act as a champion.[66] Language is a wife's only defence or means to hide her crime.

The second question that follows is why play on language, particularly seen through women's dialogue, is so central to the description of adultery? The central reason is in the medieval rationale that literature is meant to both teach and entertain.

---

[64] *Les Tresces* lines 408-412.
[65] *La Bourgoise d'Orliens* lines 175-213.
[66] *TrB* lines 3239-3241.

All the works here considered are, to an extent, didactic. Moralistic messages are found in the fables, lais, fabliaux and however subtlety, in the romances. Some are clearly stated, some understood, some seem entirely unrelated and make us second guess our reading of the tale itself. The morals may speak against unchecked personal flaws or weaknesses, the jealousy of some husbands, the brutality or stupidity of others, the general lustiness or deceptive nature of women but all at least attempt to illustrate what motivation a woman had to commit her crime. As the author of the fabliaux *Guillaume au faucon* claims, adultery is not funny in real life, it is only funny in literature. Funny, of course can mean comedy or laughter but can equally mean thought provoking, ironic, fateful or even sad. By such a definition adultery is funny. The language used to describe the sexual act and the language used to describe the motivation, the concealment and even the prosecution of the crime is funny. As illustrated in the first chapter on the adulteress, it is through women's language rather than their actions that their characters are developed and revealed. By examining how they linguistically reveal or conceal their circumstances and crime, we cease to examine these women as personifications of the courtly love ethic or disregard them as shallow cardboard caricatures. Instead they may be studied as a group of complex, fully developed and engaging characters whose actions and language can tell us much about attitudes toward marriage, sex and domestic crisis in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and how laughter, especially through literature, is used to help understand, cope with or rationalise events, crises and those things out of one's control.

Conclusion

The title of this thesis, 'Images of Adultery', indicates the multiple purpose of this work. First, it establishes that this study's focus is the depiction of an act and those who commit it. Secondly, the plurality of the word *images* denotes both that multiple characters' images are here examined: the adulteress, the husband, the lover and the accuser, and that multiple images of each of these characters are also presented.

This thesis has shown that it is impossible to create a single image for any of these characters or indeed the act of adultery itself. In my analysis, I have tried to avoid the possible pitfalls of conflating or selecting individual images from the corpus of literature or even from within a genre in an effort to form a single, unified image of characters or themes, as the result is often an inaccurate, occasionally fraudulent image, unrepresentative of the diversity found within these texts of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The argument for the diversity of the images which this thesis has put forward is contrary to some views of medieval literature as tightly bound by genre and archetype. Admittedly, factors, such as genre, do have a discernible effect upon the works within; for example, courtly literature often places demands upon the lover and wife's characters that are absent within other genres such as the fabliaux in which a lover's worth or mere presence is unnecessary in the tale. Similarly, the often earthy language in which sex is described within the fabliaux does not fit into the exalted, quasi-religious sex scenes as depicted in many courtly texts. Even these divisions, however, must be qualified as stark differences exist even between works within a genre, as shown in the contrast between the characters, language and depiction of sex in the *Charrete* and *Vulgate Cycle* and the various incarnations of the Tristan legend in which a decidedly 'uncourtly' love was exhibited, though in the genre of courtly romance.

It is significant that this study has shown both men and women occupying categories the categories of villain, victim, facilitator and profiteer. The variety of roles

and images illustrates the key theme of this study: diversity. The panoply of Old French literature depicting wifely adultery in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries shows the authors' understanding of and intent to convey the inherent diversity of their subject as illustrated by the large number of different authors who chose to include adultery in their works and by individual authors who repeatedly used the theme in variation. Literature affords a unique and liberating avenue by which the sexual relationships and differences between men and women can be depicted and discussed in a range of diverse settings and circumstances. One literary critic aptly comments on this ability of literature, stating: 'if human beings were not divided into two biological sexes, there would probably be no need for literature. And if literature could truly say what the relations between the sexes are, we would doubtless not need much of it either.'[1] Indeed, the personal and unique nature of both sex and marriage contributes to a wide and diverse group of works depicting adultery.

While character portrayals are not consistent, the interaction between characters does form discernible and revealing patterns. Ultimately what is depicted in these texts is a counterbalance between husbands and wives, weighing the victims versus the villains. The actions and/or personal attributes of the villain, husband or wife, serve to elevate the appeal of or sympathy for the victimised spouse. The villainous husband often facilitates his wife's crime by his actions. Often expressed in the form of brutality or jealousy, these characteristics act as the impetus for the wife to seek out or accept a more attractive lover; they may also serve to exculpate her from the blame of engaging in the affair. Conversely, villainous wives, whose husbands are kind and generous, are often severely punished or censured. Their actions elevate the husband's image, freeing him from any shared blame. The image of the lover can often help tip the scales. His poor qualities can magnify a husband's positive attributes and, teamed with the wife's infidelity can greatly elevate the husband's characters. More commonly, however, it is the lover's strengths,

[1] Barbara Johnson, *The Critical Difference: Essays in the Contemporary Rhetoric of Reading* (Baltimore, 1980) p. 13.

especially his sexual and often physical prowess, that are shown to magnify the weaknesses and failings of a husband and thus further diminish the husband's image.

Motive and responsibility are easier to determine than profit, though the latter appears to be the guiding force behind the actions of the wife, lover, accuser and occasionally the husband himself. A husband's knowledge of his wife's character, sexuality and actions can save him from shame, embarrassment of ignorance and even save his life.[2] In these ways, the husband profits. It is when he does not know these things that others profit. Husbands who do not know of their wives' infidelity, do not understand their wives' or the lover's language, those husbands who do not know their wives bodies or how to please them, place themselves, their marriage and honour at risk. Those men who do know - the lovers – prosper, arguably as does the wife, though often sexual gratification, even in the circumstance of a villainous husband, can be met with physical punishment for the wife or lover, thus bringing into question the actual profit of the experience. Similar dubious gain is earned by the accuser, who, though seeking profit in the form of gifts, esteem or revenge upon the lovers, rarely finds any. The accuser is often cast as a villain in his or her pursuit and, regardless of the weaknesses in the wife or lover that the accusation exposes, serves to elevate their images as victims due to the ill motive behind the accuser's actions.

The prominence of adultery in the sexual literature of the period should not be taken as evidence of misogyny, as identified by many critics.[3] Nor should it be considered as proof for an eroticised view of the high Middle Ages or evidence of a sex-obsessed society or one in which love did not play a part.[4] It becomes apparent that the study of adultery is, in fact, the study of marriage in crisis. The mutually dependant or counterbalanced relationship between the images of the husband and wife establishes the

[2] For example, see *Mort Artu, Le sot chevalier* and *Equitan.*

[3] For this debate, see R. Howard Bloch, ' Medieval misogyny', *Representations* 20 (1987), pp. 1-24 and Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago, 1991), *cf. The Medieval Feminist Newsletter* 7 (1989), pp. 2-16.

[4] See above, p.5 and Georges Duby, *Medieval Marriage: Two Models from Twelfth-Century France*, trans. Elborg Forster (Baltimire, 1978, 1991).

importance of the marital core of the story. The ease in which the lover is dismissed in all but only a few texts emphasises the authors' focus to be the marriage rather than the affair. The crisis of wifely adultery allows for all aspects of the marital relationship and each character's image to stand out and be examined individually and in reference to one another, illustrating an interconnected and diverse collection of characters and images of femininity, masculinity and marriage.

Just as one cannot gain an accurate understanding of the complexities of the adulterous triangle by separating out one character for examination from his or her context, so just one theory of criticism cannot be applied to a text to form an accurate understanding of the images conveyed. As this thesis has shown, it is instead necessary to draw from all avenues of criticism while keeping the characters in both their historical and literary context if one attempts to form any social or sexual constructs from these works or comment on the subjective nature of the topic. Sexuality is such a diverse topic, as reflected by the diversity of the literature that addresses it, that it would be erroneous to ignore that diversity in one's criticism of these texts.

These are complex tales that illustrate the impact of personal weakness upon a marriage and possibly society. These texts are not entirely misogynist nor do they give a superficial portrayal of their characters or topic. They are concerned with motive, intent and repercussions of the husband's actions, the wife's infidelity, the lover's trespass and the accuser's betrayal. Nor, however, are they entirely moralistic in intent, in tone, in narrative, or in action, as shown in the wide use of situational humour in all genres. Epitomised in Guinevere's laugh and Iseult's knowing wink, humour is a fundamental part of both sex and sexual literature.[5] These tales blend education and entertainment, highlighting the beliefs, concerns, fears and fantasies of the audience.

It is only by means of a contextual and non-exclusionary consideration of the works that one can be sure to avoid the snares illustrated by the beguiling of King Mark:

[5] For a discussion of humour in literature of the Middle Ages, see *Humour, History and Politics in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Guy Halsall (Cambridge, 2002) and *Humour and History*, ed. Keith Cameron (Oxford, 1993).

erroneous interpretation of figures and symbols, satisfaction based only on half truths and lack of understanding. In this way, one is able to study the depiction of sex roles and relationships as presented in these texts while being sure, as cautioned by the author of the closing lines of the *Charrete*, to 'add nothing further, nor omit anything, for this would harm the story.'[6]

[6] *'N'i vialt plus metre ne moins, por le conte malmetre' Charrete,* lines 7111-7112.

Appendix I: The Sources

A. Le Chevalier de la Charrete

The twelfth century romance of *Lancelot* or *Le Chevalier de la Charrete* is the third or possibly the fourth major work by the poet Chrétien de Troyes. The author only refers to his toponym, 'de Troies' once in his first romance, *Erec et Enide*,[274] naming himself merely 'Crestïens' in his other works. However, his acknowledged patronage by Marie, the countess of Champagne, and the obvious dialectical traits that are common in the regions south of Paris place him in the area of Champagne for most of his career, if not most of his life.[275] At the opening of his poem *Cligés,* Chrétien provides a list of his works to date:

> *Cil qui fist d'Erec et d'Enide.*
> *Et les comandemanz d'Ovide,*
> *Et l'art d'amors an romans mist*
> *Et le mors de l'espaule fist,*
> *Del roi Marc et d'Ysalt la blonde,*
> *Et de la hupe et de l'aronde*
> *Et del rossignol la muance,*
> *Un novel conte rancomance*
> *D'un vaslet qui an grece fu*
> *Del linage le roi Artu.*

> [He who wrote *Erec and Enide*, who translated Ovid's commandments and the *Art of Love,* who wrote of the Shoulder Bite, of King Mark and Isolde the Blonde, of the metamorphosis of the hoopoe, swallow and nightingale, begins here a new story of a youth who, in Greece, was of Arthur's line.][276]

From these references to classical and medieval Latin literature, his familiarity with Ovid and Statius, and an obvious understanding and use of rhetoric, Kibler concludes that Chrétien must have attended one of the many church schools in the area of Troyes. There he received the standard education of a clerk and must have entered minor orders. Though no written evidence survives, Chrétien's claim that he composed a poem casting King Mark and Iseult the Blonde makes him possibly the first poet to treat this famous

[274] *Erec* line 9.
[275] See A. Foulet and M. B. Speer, *On Editing Old French Texts* (Kansas, 1979).
[276] *Cligés* lines 1-10.

Breton legend in French and indeed, he may have been responsible in part for its popularity. Chrétien occasionally makes reference to the Tristan legend in his works, most notably in his *Erec* and composes the anti-Tristan work *Cligés.* The majority of his works are centred in the Arthurian world. Chrétien may have become acquainted with the Celtic legends of his Arthurian characters through several avenues. He may have heard his tales from the wandering storytellers. The last lines of his poem *Yvain* would seem to support this theory as they claim that the story will stop due to the fact that the narrator had 'heard no more'.[277] Certainly the cosmopolitan nature of the court of Champagne, Troyes' reputation as a great trading centre and its two annual fairs would attract a large array of international performers, from whom Chrétien could have learned new stories and legends. Chrétien, like many of his contemporaries, most notably Marie de France, also condemns the ineptitude of some storytellers who mangle their tale and distort the legend.[278] Complaints of this variety are quite common in the works of other contemporary authors and may not only serve to illuminate possible rivalries, but also reveal the existence and role of bilingual wandering Breton storytellers who would be responsible for spreading Celtic legends into France. Another possibility is that Chrétien was exposed to the Arthurian legend via Henry of Blois, the Abbot of Glastonbury and uncle of Count Henry I of Champagne, his patron's husband. Henry of Blois was a keen supporter in the development of Glastonbury and no doubt favoured the transmission of the Arthurian tale and the fame it brought with it. It is also possible, due to his keen knowledge of English topography especially as found in *Cligés,* that Chrétien must have visited England. However, it is equally likely that he could have gained his knowledge from any number of travellers he may have met at Marie's court or from his education. Chrétien was familiar with Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae* which had been translated into Anglo-Norman in 1155, and he had possibly been exposed to the legend long before. William of Malmesbury's complaint in his *Historia regum anglorum* of 1125 reveals that 'wild tales' were already being told near and far concerning King

[277] *Yvain* line 6806.
[278] *Erec* line 22.

Arthur whom he willingly accepts as a historical figure.[279] Some of these tales may have reached Chrétien or he may have been influenced by his classical education, for while the abduction motif used in *Lancelot* is in keeping with the Celtic roots of the tale, it is also a trope that is quite common in classical literature as well, as shown in the abduction of Penelope among others.

Dating the *Lancelot* or indeed any of Chrétien's work proves to be equally as difficult as establishing details of his life and career. As Chrétien reveals that his inspiration and material for the poem was derived from his patroness, Marie of Champagne, one can presume his work did not begin before her marriage to Count Henry I in 1159. Shortly after the count's death in 1181, Chrétien left the court of Champagne and took on a new patron in Philip of Flanders for whom he began the *Perceval*, his final work, unfinished presumably due to the death of the poet himself. The *Lancelot* must have been written in the thirty years between these bookend dates; any further narrowing of the date of composition would be sheer hypothesis or conjecture.

Much has been made of the role of Chrétien's patron in the creation of the *Lancelot*. Chrétien notes in his introduction that the countess supplied both the 'sens' and the 'matiere' for the work; he would contribute nothing but his 'effort and careful attention'.[280] This disclaimer at the opening of the poem, coupled with the fact that Chrétien did not finish the piece himself, but left it in the hands of his clerk, Godefroy de Lagny, has long been cited as proof that the author himself did not approve of the subject of the narrative.[281] However, these assumptions prove to be unfounded in the author's attitude as found in the text and in his contemporary works. Firstly, the dedication reveals no malice. Second, we have Godefroy's closing statement:

> *Seignor, se j'avant an disoie,*
> *ce seroit oltre la matire.*
> *Por ce au definer m'atire:*
> *ci faut li romanz an travers.*
> *Godefroiz de Leigni, li clers,*
> *a parfinee la Charrete;*
> *mes nus hom blasme ne l'an mete*

[279] William of Malmesbury, *Historia Regum Anglorum,* ed. W. Stubbs *RS* (London, 1997), p. 11.
[280] *Lancelot* lines 224-29.
[281] See P. S. Noble, *Love and Marriage in Chrétien de Troyes* (Cardiff, 1982).

se sor Crestïen a ovré,
car ç'a il fet par le boen gré
Crestïen, qui le comança.
Tant en a fet des lors an ça
ou Lanceloz fu anmurez,
tant con li contes est durez.
tant ena fet. N'i vialt plus metre
ne moins, por le conte malmetre.

[My lords, if I were to tell any more, I would be going beyond my matter. Therefore I draw to a close: the romance is completely finished at this point. The clerk Godefroy de Lagny has put the final touches on the Knight of the Cart; let no one blame him for completing Chrétien's work, since he did it with the approval of Chrétien, who began it. He worked on the story from the point in which Lancelot was walled within the tower until the end. He has done only this much. He wishes to add nothing further, nor to omit anything, for this would harm the story].[282]

Godefroy's statement conveys the existence of a plan - an idea of the limits of the tale, the beginning and the end. It is a product of a self-conscious craftsman who has acted with care not to 'harm the story' in any way. Such care can hardly be justified if the author were vehemently opposed to his work. Also revealed in Godefroy's conclusion is the fact that Chrétien began the work and wrote through the episode of Lancelot's adulterous affair and continued on through the capture and imprisonment of the hero.[283] This fact does not lend support to Ryding's theory that the work was abandoned due to its poor structure, [284] nor does it lend support to the idea that Chrétien disliked the theme of adultery so vehemently that he was willing to give up the project.[285]

Within the work there is no mention of the lovers' actions as sinful, nor does Lancelot, whose intimate thoughts have guided the text throughout, or the queen express

---

[282] Kibler, p. 294.
[283] In L. Thorpe's, *The Lancelot in the Arthurian Prose Vulgate,* (Cambridge, 1980), he argues, based on Claude Luttrell's hypothesis, that Chrétien was not the first to write of Lancelot and may not have been the first to address his affair with the queen. By making use of the German *Lanzelet*, Thorpe has revealed the identity of Ulrich von Zatzikhoven's source to be an anonymous Anglo-Norman piece left by one of the hostages for Richard I in 1194. The work does not survive, but if the hypothesis is true, the stark differences between von Zatzikhoven's work and Chrétien's would support the claim that these texts were centred on an established motif, rather than being the progenitors of it. Thorpe theorises that if we have lost one of these anonymous manuscripts, we may have in fact lost many. Thus, he argues that Lancelot, who appears nameless in Chrétien's work, was in fact known to the contemporary society, as perhaps was his affair with the queen, making her silent plea for help to an unknown 'amis' much clearer.
[284] Ryding argues that the *Knight of the Cart* is a prime example of a work that cannot be adapted to the bipartite successfully, as the first half was so neatly wrapped up the writer had to virtually throw in the towel and abandon the work to an inferior so as not to risk his reputation. See Ryding, p. 134.
[285] See Mullally, p. 113-136 and Cross and Nitze, pp. 63-100.

any hesitation or belief of wrongdoing in their affair. Had Chrétien hated the theme of his work so greatly and been so bold, therefore, as to imply blame on his patroness in his opening verse, it is hard to imagine why no mention is made within the work, not a word of advice or a twinge of conscious is raised in protest. In fact, Chrétien seems rather proud of his work, as he goes on to mention it in other of his narratives, including three famous allusions to its plot in one of his most successful works that was being completed contemporaneously with the *Charrete, Le chevalier au lion.* The most striking of these allusions is found in lines 4734-39 in which the action of the tale is made to coincide with that of *Lancelot.* Speaking of Gawain's adventures with the sister, it reads:

> *A tant vint l'autre suer a cort,*
> *afublee d'un mantel cort*
> *d'escarlate forré d'ermine:*
> *s'avoit tierz jor que la reïne*
> *ert de la prison revenue*
> *ou Meleaganz l'a tenue*
> *et trestuit li autre prison,*
> *et Lanceloz par traïson*
> *estoit remés dedanz la tor.*[286]

> [Just afterwards the other sister arrived at court, wrapped in a short mantle of scarlet lined with ermine. Only three days previously Queen Guinevere had returned from the prison where Maleagant had kept her and all the other captives; and Lancelot, betrayed, remained locked within the tower.]

The work itself was of equal popularity to the other works of Chrétien, illustrating a welcome reception by its audience. From the twelfth century a single copy of each of Chrétien's poems survives, at least in fragment, in the Annonay manuscript. Extant from the thirteenth century are eight *Erec* manuscripts, eight *Cligés*, seven *Lancelot*, seven *Yvain,* and nine *Perceval*. The fourteenth century shows a rapid decrease in the number of surviving manuscripts: only two *Cligés*, one *Yvain*, and four *Perceval*. The lack of *Lancelot* manuscripts in the later centuries should not be taken as proof of the piece's poor reception. It is far more likely that as the poem became the basis of popular, expanded works including the prose *Lancelot*, and the Vulgate Cycle, it ceased to be or only rarely was preserved in Chrétien's version.

---

[286] *Yvain* lines 4731-4739.

B. Vulgate Cycle

The term 'Vulgate Cycle' refers to the thirteenth century collection of the *Estoire de Merlin, Estoire del Saint Graal, Lancelot, Queste del Graal, Mort Artu* and the *Post Vulgate.*[287] The core of the cycle, including the *Lancelot, Queste del Saint Graal* and the *Mort Artu,* is generally believed to have been composed over a period of fifteen to twenty years, from approximately 1215-1230. Sometime thereafter, the other two works in the cycle, *Estoire de Merlin* and the *Estoire del Graal* were composed and added.[288] The Cycle takes its name from the first and only complete edition of the corpus compiled and edited by H. Oskar Sommer between 1908 and 1912. Sommer's work has been accused of being a rather 'diplomatic transcription'[289] due to its lack of modern conventions of typography and punctuation, its few emendations and variants the sources of which Sommer does not reveal, and finally his reliance on only London based manuscripts which are themselves poorly documented. In addition to these drawbacks, recent scholarship has shown that Sommer's base manuscript, BL Add. 10293, is in some ways defective compared to the BN fr. 768, which is now realised to be the best surviving manuscript of the corpus. For these reasons, subsequent editions of all the texts of the Vulgate have been undertaken, but never as a complete cycle. While one must acknowledge such limitations, there is no entirely convincing argument to abandon Sommer's edition. Indeed, as Sommer's manuscript varies little from the BN fr. 768 and in light of this study, provides little to no new insight into the depiction of the characters, their crime or their relations with other members of the adulterous triangle, and for

[287] While the Vulgate *Lancelot* is generally referred to as the Prose *Lancelot,* one must distinguish between the cyclical Vulgate version and the non-cyclical *Lancelot.* The latter is a shorter version of the tale that provides no narrative bridge to either the *Queste* or the *Mort Artu.* The non-cyclic work provides no new insight and indeed very little variation at all from the Vulgate *Lancelot* in the portrayal of the lovers, their roles or their actions. It has therefore not been included in this study as such a comparison between the works would be an exercise in repetition. See E. Kennedy, *Lancelot and the Grail: A Study of the Prose Lancelot* (Oxford, 1986) and *Lancelot du Lac: The Non-Cyclic Old French Prose Romance* (Oxford, 1980).
[288] Interestingly, F. Lot argued for a more refined period of composition between 1221 and 1225. Lot's argument has since been disregarded for both its impracticability, as such a claim would necessitate the author(s) producing at least one volume per year during the hypothesised period and for its claim that the entire cycle was the work of a singular author. See J. Frappier, 'The Vulgate Cycle', *Alitma* (Oxford, 1959), pp. 295-318 and Guerin, *The Fall of Kings,* p. 20.
[289] E. Kennedy, *Lancelot and the Grail.*

reasons of continuity, Sommer's complete Cycle will be used here when citing from the Old French text. At any time wherein his manuscript has proven inadequate or when the BN fr. 768 or other manuscripts reveal pertinent information, or important diversity in language, plot or image of the characters or act of adultery, it has been noted within the relevant discussion. Equal to the grandeur of Sommer's undertaking is that of a recent and highly acclaimed English translation of the Cycle edited by Norris J. Lacy from which the English translation of these texts is used unless otherwise noted as my own.

Authorship of the Vulgate Cycle is a hotly debated topic that unfortunately remains an inconclusive quest. The epilogue of the *Queste del Saint Graal* claims Walter Map to be the author of the work.[290] Map's role, however, can be quickly dismissed. While Map was an official at the court of Henry II and had composed a satirical work about the king's court entitled *De Nugis Curialium,* he died in 1209, almost a decade before the work bearing his name was composed.[291] Scholars have hypothesised that the attribution to Map may have been made in order to lend authority or a measure of historical veracity to the work's authorship due to his close affiliation with Henry II who himself had encouraged a revival of the Arthurian legend and the opening of the tombs at Glastonbury.[292] Others have interpreted the name itself as a nickname, possibly a joke or form of anonymity utilising the Welsh patronymic *ap* or *mab* meaning 'son of' to create an anonymous author, 'Walter, son of . . .' in the style of the term 'John Doe' to refer to a person of unknown identity.[293] Regardless of the reason for choosing Map as the attributed author, it is clear that the historical Walter Map had no part in the creation of the Cycle. In fact, it is doubtful that the work had a single author at all. Given the diversity of texts, tone and styles within an otherwise roughly unified plot, several theories of multiple authorship have been put forward. The first is that each of the branches of the Vulgate were written by different authors working independently of one

[290] Sommer VI:279-80.
[291] For a detailed discussion regarding the dating of the Vulgate Cycle, see F. Lot, *Etude sur le Lancelot en prose* (Paris, 1954), pp. 126-140 and F. Lot, 'Sur la date du Lancelot en prose', *Romania* 57 (1931), pp. 137-146.
[292] E. J. Burns, 'Introduction', *The Old French Arthurian Vulgate in Translation*, ed. Norris Lacy, vol. I (New York, 1993), p. xxi.
[293] Ibid.

another and then incorporated together by later interpolators.[294] Frappier has pointed out several flaws with this argument, his main point being that such a stance fails to take into account a vital and complex narrative thread that is carefully worked into the *Lancelot* and the *Queste*, that Lancelot is the father of Galahad. Such an idea is the guiding force of much of the *Queste* and seems illogical that it was, as Frappier states, 'the afterthought of a redactor'. Rather, as he goes on to argue convincingly,

> 'This invention is the keystone of an arch; it could not have been conceived except by one who had the whole edifice in mind, or one who at least saw the *Lancelot* proper and the *Queste* as inseparable. . . The man who conceived it was the true creator of the *Lancelot-Graal* . . . In my opinion, a single man, whom I have called the "architect" conceived the trilogy and outlined the plan of the whole'.[295]

Frappier believes that this 'architect' was most likely the author of the *Lancelot* and two other men took on the task of writing the *Queste* and the *Mort Artu* in line with a distinct plan. Other critics, as for example Peter Korrel, have taken issue with Frappier's idea that the 'architect' wrote the *Lancelot*, instead claiming that the architect was in fact a Cistercian monk who wrote the *Queste*.[296] However, it seems implausible, as Korrel himself recognises, that an order that considered unchastity to be the root of all evil would devote the majority of the work to the life and love affair of an unchaste man and ignore the absence of Galahad, the Christ-like hero of the *Queste,* in the first three and final volumes of the text. While few believe a Cistercian was the 'architect' of the entire Cycle many critics, including Frappier and Loomis have affirmed the hypothesis put forward by Pauphilet of a Cistercian author for the *Queste*.[297] In this vein, the *Queste* was an answer to the *Lancelot*, a reaction influenced by the Cistercian philosophy of a monastic or clerical author who wished to expose Lancelot's worldly and often sexual victories as moral and spiritual failings and, in fact, set up an anti- Lancelot in the person of his son, Galahad. This explanation would also account for the sympathetic tone the

[294] See J.D. Bruce, 'The Middle English metrical romance 'Le Morte Arthur': its sources and its relation to Sir Thomas Malory's 'Morte Darthur', *Anglia*, 33 (1900), 67-100.
[295] See J. Frappier 'The Vulgate Cycle', *Altima*, p. 316.
[296] P. Korrel, *An Arthurian Triangle*, (Leiden, 1984) p. 178.
[297] A. Pauphilet, *Etudes sur la 'Queste del Saint Graal,'* (Paris, 1921). See also R. Loomis, 'The Origin of the Grail Legends' and J. Frappier, 'The Vulgate Cycle', in *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. R.S. Loomis, (Oxford, 1959) pp. 274-318.

author of the *Mort* has for Lancelot and why, in the hands of a non-Cistercian 'architect' or author, the work quickly reverts to the tale of Lancelot and again resumes the affair with the queen. A new and very persuasive argument has been put forward by Emmanuéle Baumgartner however, which calls into question what she sees as an overly-Christianised interpretation of a courtly text which has been denied its 'Arthurian paternity'.[298] Supporting this hypothesis, E. Jane Burns comments upon various thirteenth century sermons and pronouncements that, in line with Augustine's denouncement of literature as lies that delight men instead of leading them to God's Word, deplored 'the falsehoods and lies written about Perceval and the Holy Grail, lamenting those who have abandoned religious truth in preference for stories' about Lancelot and the secularised holy relic.[299] If the Grail material is the most religious component of the Vulgate Cycle, the theme in general appeared as most irreligious to medieval Church authorities.

One of the cycle's first commentators, the seventeenth century poet Chapelain, claimed that the work lacks focus, rambles, gives you headache and puts you to sleep.[300] Indeed, some of the Vulgate Cycle's greatest defenders have called the piece, 'one of the most disjointed European literary works ever written',[301] and that its 'highly repetitive narrative structure creates a monotony bordering on the offensive'.[302] While in later centuries the rambling prose style has not been viewed favourably in comparison to the tightly structured rhetoric of the verse works, the popularity of the prose in the thirteenth century was great. When the verse accounts, were recast into prose, possibly destined to be read privately rather than delivered orally, they relied heavily on the qualities of historical veracity and the authority of other prose works: chronicles and Biblical texts or sermons. Appealing to the prose tradition of chronicles such as Geoffrey of Monmouth's

[298] E. Baumgartner, *L'arbre et le Pain: Essai sur la Queste del Saint Graal* (Paris, 1981). See also N. F. Regalado, 'La chevalerie celestielle: spiritual transformations of secular romance in *La Queste del Saint Graal,*' in *Romance: Generic Transformation from Chrétien de Troyes to Cervantes,* eds K. Brownlee and M. S. Brownlee (Hanover, 1985), pp. 91-113.
[299] Burns, p. xxx.
[300] A. Pauphilet, *Le Legs du Moyen Age* (Melun, 1950), p. 30.
[301] Bruce, *Evolution*, p. 410.
[302] Lot, *Etude*, pp. 63-4.

pseudo-history of the British kings and the vernacular tradition of sermons and the new Old French translation of the Bible in the early thirteenth century, the prose Vulgate assumed a historical veracity and sense of authority that allowed it to be advertised as a 'truthful' alternative to the verse works. Female readers were especially exhorted to abandon 'deceptive tales' of the Arthurian world in favour of prose texts, such as the Vulgate, which would provide a more accurate 'truth'.

C. Béroul's Tristan

Very little is known of Béroul. He wrote his poem in a French that can be traced with almost certainty to Normandy and dated most likely between 1176 and 1202. While no contemporary source mentions a poet by the name of Béroul, within his own work he does give us his name twice.[303] Outwith these few facts, the details of Béroul's life and identity are a mystery. Professor Norris Lacy expresses some reservation in his introduction to his compilation of Tristan poems in unreservedly declaring Béroul and his poetry as Norman, stating that it is only with 'confidence, though not absolute certainty' that we can trace the poet and poem to Normandy.[304] The major difficulty in dealing with Beroul's language is the corrupt nature of the unique manuscript: it is in a physically lamentable state, suffering from a loss of the majority of folios, the surviving leaves being badly water damaged and torn. The scribal damage is extensive as well; poor ruling, irregular use of capitals and guide letters, a clumsy hand, an unusually high number of imperfect rhymes, frequent omission, duplication or transposition of lines as his eyes obviously wandered are made more difficult to decipher by the scribe's frequent use of non standard-abbreviations. An early study of Béroul's language done by Mildred Pope in 1913 concludes that the language was a Western Norman dialect.[305] Ernest Muret, disagrees with Pope's conclusions but 1) affirms the continental provenance and 2) points out that the poet sometimes uses rhymes belonging to a dialect not his own.

[303] *'Berox l'a mex en sen memoire' TrB* line 1268 and *'La ou Berox le vit escrit', TrB* line 1790.
[304] Interview of Norris Lacy, 8 May 2000.
[305] Mildred Pope, 'A note on the Dialect of Béroul's 'Tristan' and a Conjecture', *Modern Language Review* 8 (1913), 47-101 at 48.

This frequent borrowing of other dialects, in particular the Picardian and Western, have scholars arguing for Northern, Western, and perhaps more puzzling, even North-Eastern origins of Béroul or his scribe's language or the possibility of an Eastern French intermediary between Béroul and the scribe of the unique manuscript.[306] Lacy would argue the possibility that Béroul was often content with approximate rhymes and it is only our expectation of perfect rhymes which forces us to introduce ideas of intermediary scribes or non-Norman dialectical origins of Béroul's language.[307] Although this is virtually an insoluble problem, Lacy's argument is both interesting and persuasive. It is safe to conclude that concerning Béroul's language, Norman is a likelihood and that the more general 'Northern or North-western' is a virtual certainty making Béroul's version of the Tristan legend readily accessible to an Anglo-Norman audience and contemporary authors.

The dating of the poem has been problematic. The traditional dating of the poem has placed it after 1191, a date suggested by the interpretation of the reading of line 3849's mention of the leper who suffered from *le mal dagres* as a reference to *le mal d'Acre* - possibly the illness that afflicted the crusaders at Acre in the winter of 1190-1191. In the late sixties, Mary Legge argued for earlier date c. 1160 based on several Scottish allusions in the text, including a reference to St. Andrew's shrine (line 3132) and the localisation of Arthur's court at Carlisle, home of the Scottish court under David I. While Legge's argument is of great interest and has broken new ground in calling attention to a previously neglected Scottish connection present in the work, many of her conclusions should not, perhaps be accepted without further investigation.[308] Most scholars continued to use the post 1191 reference to continue to date the work. In the late eighties, Merritt Blakeslee among others, challenged the dating again, pointing out that the symptoms of the illness at Acre do not correspond to those of leprosy. Two descriptions of the disease have been given by the chronicles *Itinerarium Ricardi* and the

---

[306] A. Ewert, *The Romance of Tristan by Béroul*, (Oxford, 1931), S. Gregory, *The Romance of Tristan by Beroul*, (Amsterdam,1992), pp. xi-xxiii and T.B.W. Reid, *The 'Tristan of Beroul: A Textual Commentary* (Oxford, 1972).

[307] See Lacy, *Tristan Poems* I, pp.3-10.

[308] Legge , *Medium Aevum*, 38, (1969), pp 171-4.

L'Estoire de la Guerre Sainte by Ambroise that discuss swollen faces and limbs, a terrible cough, loss of voice and the loosening and loss of teeth.[309] It is clear from the symptoms here enumerated that the crusaders were suffering from at least two diseases. The reference to the falling out of teeth would indicate the advanced stages of scurvy, arising from the famine conditions mentioned in both accounts. The exposure to the cold and rain followed by hoarseness, coughing and swelling of limbs can be attributed to an outbreak of typhus, known often by names such as 'camp fever' or 'war fever' due to its association with crowded and unhygienic conditions.[310] While a spotted discoloration of the skin occurs from the high fever that accompanies the disease, the physical symptoms of typhus are not long lived. Therefore it is unlikely that the 'leper' of Béroul's text did suffer from the same disease that affected the crusaders at Acre and to use this reference to date the work presents a limited if not faulty interpretation of the text. The numbness of limbs, stiffness in joints and deformation of limbs alluded to by the disguised Tristan are, however, all recognised symptoms of leprosy and would be legitimate, and more importantly for the success of the ruse being played on the king and barons, believable complaints from one posing as a leper.[311] A wider, possibly earlier, though not radically different date of composition has been suggested by Blakeslee after consideration of the dialect(s) present within the text and analysis of contemporary sources that would place the poem between the dates of 1176 and 1202.[312]

D. *Thomas' Tristan*

Of Thomas the author we know very little. He gives his name in the Douce and Sneyd fragments[313] and is given the label *Thomas von Britanje* by his adaptor Gottfried

---

[309] See especially Ambroise, *L'Estoire de la Guerre Sainte*, ed. and trans. M. J. Hubert and J. L. La Monte (London, 1941), lines 4265-78.

[310] Many mysterious illnesses affecting armies and travelling groups, usually in the winter, have now been rediagnosed as outbreaks of typhus including the mysterious malady that occurred on a Greek battlefield in 430 BC, previously referred to as 'the Plague of Athens', and an outbreak of a 'spotted fever' at a monastery in Salerno in 1083. See K. F. Kipple, 'Typhus, Ships and Soldiers', *in Plague Pox and Pestilence*, (London, 1997) p. 104.

[311] G. Whitteridge, 'The Date of the *Tristan* of Béroul', *Medium Aevum* 28 (1959),167-171.

[312] M. Blakeslee, *'Mal dacre, Malpertuis,* and the Date of Béroul's Tristan'. *Romania* 106 (1985),145-72.

[313] Lines 2131 and 3124.

von Strassburg possibly due to his familiar and warm description of London and its people as well as his use of certain 'insular French features of his language'.[314] The belief that Thomas was a cleric has been propagated by Novati and Roncaglia's interpretations of lines 344-6 and 2603 which read respectively, '*E les dames faire le solent, Laissent ço q'unt pur ço que les volent; Asaient cum poent venir a lor voleir, a lor desir'* / [this is what ladies commonly do, they leave what they have for what they fancy, seeking to find a way to attain their wish and their desire] and *'Mais jo në os ben mun [sen] dire,/Car il n'afert rens emvers mei'* / [But I do not dare to give my opinion [of women]since it is not at all my business].[315] In fact, as Gregory states, these attitudes and pessimistic outlook on love could be the words of a confirmed bachelor rather than a cleric, or as I propose, merely foreshadowing the ends to which each member of the ill-fated love affair comes.[316]

The dating of Thomas' work is unfortunately uncertain; there exist four facts, however that do lead to an approximate, reasonably reliable guess. First, Thomas' direct borrowing from Wace, who completed his work in 1155, helps establish a solid date after which we can attempt to place the work. Second, Gottfried, Thomas' adapter, completed his work c. 1210, giving a roughly fifty five year window in which to place the composition of Thomas' work. To help further narrow this time frame, Gregory has shown the earliest fragments, the Sneyd fragments, to date linguistically from the late twelfth century and makes an interesting and highly plausible argument that Chrétien de Troyes' work *Cligés* (c. 1176) was written after, not before Thomas' work . Using all four of these factors, it is possible to place the composition of *Tristan* at c.1170.

Joseph Bédier's initial argument that by the mid-twelfth century there was a single archetype of the Tristan legend from which all subsequent versions of the legend were derived has been challenged due to the distinct differences in the treatment of Tristan, the method by which Thomas and his successors relate the tale and the psychological introspection and sustained authorial commentary found within the text as

[314] See Gregory, Thomas, *Tristan*, p. 4.
[315] See A. Roncaglia, 'La statua d'Isotta', *Cultura Neolatina* (1971), 41-67.
[316] Gregory, Thomas' *Tristan*, p. 5.

opposed to the much more straightforward, linear style of Béroul.[317] Lacy and Stewart argue that rather than a single common archetype, there were most likely a number of parallel versions, oral or written that included the basic outline of the story but differing in detail.[318] In defense of this argument both Thomas and Béroul and their successors declare themselves to be working at a time when several versions of the tale are circulating and advertise themselves to be the most accurate and/or best of the competition.[319] While Lacy and Stewart's argument seems more logical and in harmony with evidence within the sources, Stewart perhaps goes too far in his argument when he states that Thomas' version alone 'breaks new ground as far as the Tristan legend is concerned' for his psychological introspection and 'intricate arguments developed by characters and author alike'.[320] While in no way can one dispute the skill of Thomas as a poet, it is also impossible to judge Béroul as any less of an artist for his different style and lack of prolonged soliloquy within his work. It is fairer perhaps to begin any comparison of the two with the understanding that many of the stylistic differences between the two works are due to audience. The easy, relaxed rhyme scheme, neat division of episode, fast paced action of Béroul's work, his attention to physical detail, and lack of prolonged discourse are perfectly suited for the memory and skills of an oral performer and patience and memory of an oral audience, while Thomas' difficult rhyme scheme, fluid, rather than episodic style, lack of physical description and detailed soliloqy lends itself better as a written work with attentive reader as audience.

E. The Prose Tristan

The prologue of the Prose *Tristan* is composed by a man named Luce who claims to be an English knight and lord of Gat Castle in Salisbury.[321] But as Renée Curtis notes in her research on the work, there is no trace of a castle by this name near Salisbury, nor any

[317] Thomas, *Le Roman de Tristan*, ed. J. Bédier (Paris, 1902-05).
[318] Stewart, Thomas' *Tristan*, pp. 4-6.
[319] *TrT* line 2104; *TrB* lines 1265-70; *TrE* lines 9446-57 *TrG* lines 131-54.
[320] Stewart, Thomas *Tristan*, p. 4.
[321] *TrP* line 10.

possible variant of the name.[322] There is no other mention of Luce in association with any other medieval work and therefore it has been assumed that he was possibly working under a pseudonym, especially considering that his language has no Anglo-Norman influence. Curtis believes that his claim of being an Englishman may well have been to protect himself from criticism of his style.[323] A second claim of authorship is found in the epilogue by a man who identifies himself as Helie de Boron who was most likely a knight, as he states he has 'left all knightly deeds' in order to complete this book.[324] In some manuscripts he also links himself to the author of the verse Grail and Merlin, Robert de Boron, though this claim remains unsubstantiated and it is now generally held that Helie was an impostor attempting to exploit Robert's fame. That we are told in the prologue that both men are responsible for the work and that it was Luce who began the work and 'spoke briefly while he was alive' prompting the assumption that Luce died before the work could be completed and Helie completed the work alone. As Curtis argues there are many indications of just such a change in voice, including several narrative asides in which the author, now decidedly Helie de Boron, recommends the consulting of the 'Story of Tristan' by Luce de Gat for clarification of an episode.[325] Though it is extremely difficult to pinpoint where the transition of authorship takes place, there is a noticeable difference from the beginning of the work, which is focused on the Tristan legend as put forth by Thomas and Béroul and the remainder of the work which appears as an episodic collection of adventures closely linked to the Arthurian court. Thus the story is transformed from a romance addressing the love of Tristan and Iseult to a Round Table romance in which Tristan is only one of many major figures.

F. The Folies

The *Folies* are two short, anonymous, Anglo- Norman episodic poems from the twelfth century that relate a similar tale of an occasion in which the exiled Tristan returns to King Mark's court to see Iseut. Each poem is known by the location of the

[322] *TrP* I, p. 2.
[323] Ibid.
[324] *TrP* IV: epilogue, line 56.
[325] *TrP* III:842 and R.L. Curtis, 'The problems of the authorship of the Prose Tristan', *Romania* 79 (1958), 314-338.

manuscript: *Le Folie Berne* and *Le Folie Oxford.* The Oxford manuscript consists of approximately 1000 lines and follows closely to the style and story line set forth in the text of Thomas, while the Berne folio of some 600 lines is more in keeping with the pointed wit and less 'courtly' style of Béroul's *Tristan.*

G. *Tristan Menestrel* and *Rossignal*

Tristan Menestrel is an episodic poem taken from Gerbert de Montreuil's thirteenth century *Fourth Continuation of Chrétien de Troyes' Perceval* lines 3309-4832. Though originating in Arthur's court at a joust, the poem quickly shifts to Tristan's return to his uncle's court where he reconciles with his uncle and once again gains access to the queen.

Tristan Rossignal is taken from the early thirteenth century poem *Le Donnei des Amants* lines 453-660, in which a hopeful lover tells his lady of an instance in which Tristan had imitated the call of the nightingale to summon his lover for a tryst.

H. *Lais* of Marie de France

It is interesting for this study that in the corpus of works herein considered, at least eight are the products of a confirmed female author. Several lays which are now regarded as anonymous have, at various times, been attributed to Marie, including *Espine, Graelent, Doon, Guingamor, Lecheor Tyolet* and *Tydorel.*[326] The poet gives her name only once in the prologue of *Guigemar*:

Oëz, seignurs, ke dit Marie,
Ki en sun tens pas ne s'oblie.
Celui deivent la gent loër
Ki en bien fait de sei parler.
Mais quant il ad un païs
Hummë u femme de grant pris,
Cil ki de sun bien unt envie
Sovent en dïent vileinie;
Sun pris li volent abeisser:
Pur ceo comencent le mestier

[326] B. de Roquefort included *Espine* and *Graelent* in his 1819 edition of Marie's *Lais* and K. Warnke included *Guingamor* in his 1925 edition of the poet's works. In his 1879 edition of the *Lais,* Gaston Paris could only conclude with certainty that of the above mentioned, only *Lecheor* was not attributable to Marie.

Del malveis chien coart felun,
Ki mort la gent par traïsun.
Nel voil mie pur ceo leissier,
Si gangleür u losengier
Le me volent a mal turner [327]

[Hear, my lords, the words of Marie, who, when she has the opportunity, does not squander her talents. Those who gain a good reputation should be commended, but when there exists in a country a man or woman of great renown, people who are envious of their abilities often speak insultingly of them in order to damage this reputation. Thus they start acting like a vicious cowardly, treacherous dog which will bite others out of malice. But just because spiteful tittle-tattlers attempt to find fault with me, I do not intend to give up.]

While little is known of Marie's background or identity, the information she reveals of herself in narrative asides such as this is invaluable.[328] Here the author speaks of her own craft and talent and reveals a darker side to her art, namely critics and possibly plagiarists. Marie's fame was wide indeed, as attested by the criticism of Denis Piramus who calls her by name in a list of works he finds to be distracting from the influence of the Church and the message of the scriptures. Whilst admonishing the readers and hearers of his *Life of St. Edmund* to shun such frivolity and possibly dangerous forms of entertainment, it is interesting that though he mentions other works by title, Marie is the only author he actually names.[329] With admirers also come imitators and plagiarists, prompting Marie on several occasions to comment on her own abilities or the inabilities of her emulators.[330] Marie's popularity and the extent to which her works were mimicked and pirated have sparked debates eight centuries later as to the origin and authorship of several anonymous lais which appear to be closely linked or copied from her works, the most obvious and controversial being *Graelent* and *Guingamor* for their many

[327] *Guigemar,* lines 3-17.
[328] For theories on the identity of Marie de France see: As abbess of Shaftesbury – J. C. Fox, 'Marie de France', *English Historical Review* 25 (1910), 303-306 and 'Mary, Abbess of Shaftesbury', 26 (1911), 317-26; As Waleran de Meulan's daughter – P. Grillo, 'Was Marie de France the Daughter of Waleran II, Count of Meulan?' *Medium Aevum* 57 (1988), 269-74, Y. de Pontfarcy, 'Si Marie de France était Marie de Meulan', *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale* 38 (1995), 353-61; As Marie de Boulogne – A. Knapton, 'A la Recherche de Marie de France', *Romance Notes* 19 (1978), 248-53; As Marie de Champagne – E. Winkler, *Französische Dichter des Mittelalters: II, Marie de France* (Vienna: Hölder, 1918); As a nun from Reading – E. Levi, 'Marie di Francia e le abbazie d'Inghilterra', *Archivum Romanicum* 5 (1921), 472-93.
[329] Denis Piramus, *La vie Seint Edmund le Rei*, ed. H. Kjellman in *Göteborgs Kungliga Vetenskaps Och Vitterhetssamhalle Handlingar*, series A, Band 4, No. 3, (Göteborg, 1935), p. 4, lines 25-79.
[330] *Milun,* lines 1-5 and *Guigemar*, lines 1-2.

similarities to Marie's *Lanval*.[331] The eight lais of Marie's that have been used herein for their depiction of an adulterous triangle are: *Guigemar, Equitan, Le Fresne, Bisclavret, Lanval, Yonec, Laüstic* and *Chevrefoil*. In order to avoid heavy repetition, individual treatment has not been given to the similar anonymous lais. However, any differences in the depiction of adultery or portrayal of the principal characters have been noted.

I. Cor

The only surviving manuscript of *Le lai du Cor* dates from 1272-1282.[332] The dating of the poem itself proves problematic. The author, Robert Biket, of whom there is little known, uses both Germanic and Welsh expressions and topographical references, and was well-versed in a continental Anglo-Norman. His use of hexasyllabic metre has prompted some to argue a date of composition before the works and influence of courtly Arthurian writers, who popularised the octosyllabic metre, had become widespread.[333] Though, as Legge has noted, as this poem is a burlesque of courtly romance, it can hardly precede much of the genre that it aims to satirise.[334] Others have noted similarities with the works of Marie de France and Chrétien but have failed to note that all draw upon well established folklore motifs and that any similarities are negligible and are likely coincidental.[335] The poem itself is heavily borrowed from the *Lanzelet* that can be dated with almost certainty to 1194 and thus a broad dating of the late twelfth century seems probable for this work.

The work burlesques the genre of courtly romance and though written in the tradition of a lai, closely resembles a fabliau in its light-hearted tone, lack of character or scene descriptions and its focus upon a single event – a chastity test in which a magical horn will spill over any man who has an unfaithful wife or is himself jealous.

---

[331] For a comprehensive bibliography of the long ranging debates over the authorship and origins of both these lays, please see G. S. Burgess, *The Old French Narrative Lay: An Analytical Bibliography*, (Cambridge, 1997) pages 63-67 and 71-73 respectively. Of particular interest, see R.N. Illingworth, 'The composition of *Graelent* and *Guingamor*', *Medium Aevum*, 44 (1975), pp. 31-50.
[332] Ox. Bod. Digby 86.
[333] See E. Hoepffner, 'The Breton lais', in *Alitma* (1961), pp. 112-121.
[334] Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature*.
[335] See Erickson, pp. 22-23.

J. The Anonymous French *Lais*

Mantle – the language of this lai, is consistent with continental Anglo-Norman, most consistent with that of Centre, though it possesses a few rhymes of Picardian influence. The lack of the first person present tense or use of the *passé simple* help date the work to the beginning of the thirteenth century. Like *Cor*, the poem recounts a chastity test, this time in the form of a robe crafted by a mysterious fairy. Any woman who tries the garment on and isn't herself a faithful wife or lover will have it shrink in proportion to her infidelity. Not aware of the garment's magical properties, Guinevere is given it to try on in front of Arthur's court. When the robe shrinks to the size of a small rag, Arthur is outraged and condemns his wife who escapes with the help of the barons and her own shrewd wit.

Tydorel is a late thirteenth century *lai* which shares many similarities with Marie de France's *Yonec*. Both *lais* recount the histories of two generations in which the son is actually the product of an adulterous affair between his mother and her other-worldly lover. However, unlike several other anonymous lais that appear to be close reworkings of Marie's texts, *Tydorel* stands far enough apart from its predecessor in story-line, characterization and tone to be considered separately in this study.[336]

Other lays such as *Graelent* and *Guingamor* which are often linked with Marie de France's *Lanval* or *Ignaurés* which is closely linked with the romance *Vergi* are not given individual analysis but will be noted within the discussion if and when they provide differing images of lovers or the act of adultery.

K. Fables of Marie de France

Marie de France's collection of fables was written some time between 1160, after the *Lais* and 1189, before her *Espurgatoire*. Roughly half of Marie's *Fables* are Aesopic, though the remainder are her own, incorporating not only beast fables, which comprise

[336] For a comparison between the lais of *Tydorel* and *Yonec*, see F. Dubost, 'Yonec, le vengeur, et Tydorel le veilleur', in *Et c'est la fin pour quoy sommes ensembles: hommage a' Jean Dufournet. Littérature, histoire et langue du Moyen Age.* 3 vols (Paris,1993) pp. 449-67.

comprise approximately one-third of the works, but human characters as well. In the prologue of her work, Marie identifies herself with the ancient fabulists, tracing her work to Aesop. Indeed, the first forty of Marie's fables correspond in sequence and content with Aesop's *Fables* as preserved in the *Romulus Nilantii* manuscript. Though Marie's manuscript source has not survived, the fourteenth century *Romulus* was the source of later popular French verse translations; its similarities with Marie's work appear to show a similar manuscript source or tradition. As Spiegel notes in her translation of Marie's *Fables*, finding a source for the other sixty-three fables has proved problematic. Spiegel and Warnke have cited as sources: *Bidpai*, the *Panchatantra*, Poggius, Abstemius, Odo, *Le Romand de la Rose, Le Roman de Renard,* and folk stories and traditions of Arabia Germany, Italy, Lesbos, Russia, Serbia and the Hebrew.[337] Many of these tales more closely resemble *lais* or *fabliaux* but have been put into fable form and adapted for moral application by Marie. Spiegel proposes an interesting hypothesis that the Norman crusaders were responsible for bringing back these written and oral folktales and stories. Undeniably, however, it was Marie, who not only compiled and translated the works, but made classic fables and tales contemporary by adding commentary and aspects of life in the twelfth century and made them her own through her style and tone and in depth characterisation.

L. The Fabliaux

The fabliaux are short witty poems written in octo-syllabic rhyming couplets and can be discussed as an established literary genre by the beginning of the thirteenth century. Though the writing of fabliaux continued far into the fourteenth century and formed the basis of works such as Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and Boccaccio's *Decameron*, for this study only those fabliaux dating from the twelfth to the thirteenth centuries will be used. The fabliaux are found in forty-three manuscripts or fragments, the largest of which contain 59 of these short works. At least thirty texts appear in three

[337] Marie de France, *Fables*, ed. Harriet Spiegel (Toronto, 1994), p. 7.

or more manuscripts, leading to their classification as 'classics' of the genre.[338] In an unprecedented undertaking, Willem Noomen and Nico van den Boogaard have edited a highly acclaimed collection of fabliaux which will be used as the Old French source for the fabliaux herein discussed.[339] All English translations outside the excellent work of John Du Val and Raymond Eichmann's work on the BN MS 837[340] are mine. The works themselves are mostly anonymous, however, a table of the fabliaux used in this study consisting of the titles, synopses, authorship (when available), date and place of composition is found in appendix 2.

---

[338] Per Nykrog, *Fabliaux,*(Copenhagen, 1957), pp.44-50.
[339] W. Noomen and N. van den Boogaard, *NRCF,* 10 vols (Van Gorcum, Assen, Pays-Bas, 1983-1997).
[340] Raymond Eichmann and John DuVal, *The French Fabliaux BN MS 837* (New York, 1985).

Appendix II:

Fabliaux synopses, authorship, manuscript information dating

Arsenal = Paris, Arsenal
B.mun = Chartres, Bilbliothéque Municipale
Berne = Berne, Bibliothèque de la Bourgeoisie
BN = Bibliothèque Nationale

Chantilly = Chantilly, Condé
Cologny-Genève = Cologny-Genève Bibliothèque
DS = Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz zu Berlin
Nottingham= Nottingham University Library

Oudenaerde = Royal Library of Oudenarde
Oxford Bod. = Oxford Bodleian
Pavia = Pavia Bibliotheche Universite, Aldini
❖Denotes incomplete manuscript

TITLE	SYNOPSIS	MSS	AUTHOR	REGION	DATE
Aloul	Aloul is a greedy, money-hungry man whose excessive jealousy and unjust suspicion of his wife prompts her to attempt to trick him. Unable to sleep one night, the wife takes a stroll in the garden where a priest finds her, tricks her and rapes her. The woman takes the priest as her lover. That night he returns for lovemaking, but is caught when Aloul wakes up finding his wife and the priest next to him in bed. The priest escapes to the meat house where he attacks and rapes the maid. A fight ensues when the priest returns to Aloul's bed to finish his interrupted lovemaking. The priest is caught and is about to be castrated by the men of the household when the women of the house break in and throw the priest out of the manor, saving his life.	*BN* fr. 837	Anonymous	Picardy	13th century
Auberée	A wealthy young man is forbidden from marrying his love, as she is poor. Only days after ending the relationship, a rich old widower marries her for her beauty. Grieving for her company, the young man employs Auberée, a local seamstress, to help him arrange a tryst with the girl. Auberée demands the young man's scarlet robe in payment and when visiting the girl, hides the robe under the sheets of her bed. When the husband returns, he finds the robe and suspecting his wife of adultery, throws her out of the house. Auberée brings the bewildered girl to a safe house where her lover is hiding. The girl refuses to have sex with the young man, but on Auberee's advice, he threatens her that if she starts to scream and people come to her aid they will only find her naked in a room with him and she will be publicly shamed. Not willing to receive such a reputation, the girl consents to having sex with the young man. The next morning Auberée explains to the husband that she left a cloak she was working on there while visiting the girl. The husband realizes he was "wrong" and allows his wife to return home.	*BN* fr. 837 *BN* fr. 19152 *BN* fr. 1593 *BN* fr. 12603 *BN* fr. 1553❖ *Berne* 354 *DS* Hamilton 257 *B. mun.* 620 ❖	Jehan	Picardy/ Beauvais	1270-1280
Baillet (le prestre qui fu mis au lardier)	A cobbler's wife's adultery is exposed to her husband by their young daughter who reveals that the priest visits when her father goes to market. Baillet returns from work one day to catch his wife in the act. She hides her lover in a meat safe and tries to persuade her husband that the bath and dinner she prepared for the priest are for him, as she had a premonition would return early. Baillet refuses, saying he has come to get the old meat safe to sell. In the market square, the priest, still inside the safe, sees his brother, a wealthy curate, and begs for help in Latin. Baillet calls for the attention of all to witness his amazing meat safe that speaks Latin! The priest's brother soon realises what is happening and Baillet is able to drive up the price on his talking meat safe higher and higher as the audience grows. When the priest inside will not speak Latin to the large audience, Baillet gets a large mallet and threatens to smash the reluctant safe. Fearing for his life, the priest begins to pray and his brother is forced to pay an exorbitant sum to save the man's life and honour.	*BN* fr. 12483	Anonymous	Unknown	After 1325

Berengier long cul	A Lombard castellan is forced to marry his daughter to the son of a usurer. The husband shows no skill or desire to engage in martial games. When insulted by his wife, he commands to be dressed in his armour to engage in a tournament but only pretends to partake in the joust. When his wife finds out, she disguises herself as a knight and rides out to challenge her husband to a joust. When bested by his wife, whose identity remains unknown, the husband's life is spared, though he is made to kiss the bottom of the mysterious knight. While on his knees, poised for the kiss, the husband notices that his adversary has an unusually long rear bifurcation. The wife plays on her husband's ignorance of the female body and explains this oddity by granting her husband's wish to know the name of the victor which she gives as Berengier long cul. When the humiliated knight returns home he finds his wife in bed with her lover. He at first threatens her but is told not to try or else he will face the wrath of Berengier long cul. The husband realises he has been bested by his wife but cannot object without exposing himself as both a coward and a cuckold.	*BN* fr. 837 *BN* fr. 19152 *Berne* 354	Guerin	Picardy	Early 13th century
La bourgoise d'Orliens	Posing as his wife's lover to catch her in the act, the husband attempts to outwit his wife but finds himself outwitted as the woman leads him to an upstairs room where she asks him to wait for her return. In the meantime, the wife entertains her real lover downstairs until meal time when she goes to the dining room and asks the men of the household to help her rid herself of a clerk who has been petitioning her for her love whom she has trapped upstairs. The men, happy to help the lady of the house in her husband's absence go and beat the disguised husband tot he brink of death and toss him out on a manure pile. He returns to the house later that evening, his disguise shed, claiming in his travels he was set upon by dangerous men. The household servants relate their evening's exploits and how well his wife preserved his honour to which he agrees, never mistrusting her again.	*BN* fr. 837 *Berne* 354 *DS* Hamilton 257	Anonymous	Normandy With rhymes typical of Ouest	Possibly late 12th century
Le bouchier d'Abeville	A butcher gone to market attempts to find lodging with an inhospitable parson. When rudely refused, the butcher goes to the field and steals one of the parson's best sheep. He returns and offers the parson the sheep's meat in exchange for lodging. Agreeing to the bargain , the priest and his household, including his mistress dine with the butcher who realises another avenue to further shame the priest and makes a silent bargain with the mistress to exchange sexual favours for the sheep's skin. He strikes a similar deal with the maid of the house and the next morning, after the butcher has left on his way, the parson is awakened to the quarreling of the women over the fleece. In the heat of their argument they reveal how they earned the skin and the parson is publicly shamed. Moments later his shepherd returns from the field to report the loss of a fine sheep in the night and all becomes clear to the humiliated parson.	*BN* fr. 837 *BN* fr. 2168 *DS* Hamilton 257 Pavia, Aldini 219 Chantilly 475	Eustache d'Amiens	Amiens	Late 13th century

Les braies au cordelier	A bourgeois' wife fools her husband into leaving for market too early in the morning to allow her more time with her lover but is almost caught in the act when her husband realises the actual time. In his rush to leave the house, her lover, a Franciscan friar, forgets his britches which the husband accidentally puts on instead of his own when he departs for the market again at the correct time. The friar returns to continue their lovemaking but notices that his britches are gone and only the husband's are there on the floor. Meanwhile the husband too realises he is wearing the other man's pants and goes out of his mind with rage. However, when he confronts his wife, she explains that she dreamed a Franciscan's britches under her pillow would help her conceive – a story the friar backs up when the husband approaches him at the friary.	*BN* fr. 837 *BN* fr. 19152	Anonymous	Centre-Est	1240-1260
Le chevalier a la robe vermeille	A knight goes to visit his lover but they are interrupted by the premature arrival of her husband. The wife hides her lover under some clothes, but the husband demands to know whose palfrey and sparrowhawk are outside the house. Catching sight of the young knight's scarlet robe, the husband flies into a rage which is quickly soothed as his wife appeals to his greedy nature by claiming her brother has left them as gifts to her husband. Satisfied by her answer and delighted by the gifts, the husband goes to sleep but in the morning finds all his gifts missing. His wife, who had hastily dressed her lover and helped him escape while the husband slept accuses the man of silliness and believing too much in his greedy dreams, for as he can see himself, there is no hawk, nor palfrey nor rich robe.	*BN* fr. 837 *BN* fr. 1593 *DS* Hamilton 257 Pavia, Aldini 219 Oxford Bod., Douce 111	Anonymous	Unknown origin but set in Champagne	Possibly early 12th century
Le chevalier qui fist sa fame confesse	A knight is determined to find out if his dying wife has really been as good as he believes her to have been, so posing as a confessor he hears her admit to multiple affairs including a five year relationship with his nephew. After confession the wife makes a miraculous recovery and is then confronted by her husband who threatens her with physical violence. The woman convinces her husband she was actually punishing him with a wicked joke for presuming to take the hermit's habit and attempting to trick her.	*BN* fr. 837	Anonymous	Normandy	Unknown possibly early 13th century
Le chevalier qui recovra l'amor de sa dame	A lady refuses to see her lover who, exhausted after a day at tournament, falls asleep in the garden awaiting their tryst. The knight refuses to be cast off and instead climbs through her bedroom window and approaches her, regardless of her sleeping husband beside her. When the husband awakes, he believes the knight to be the ghost of a knight he accidentally killed in battle and begs him for forgiveness. The knight assumes the role of the ghost and asks the man to have his wife accept his apology for an unnamed offense he committed while alive. The wife, aware of her lover's identity and ruse, refuses until begged by both men. She eventually accepts the sincerity of her lover's apology and his bravery and forgives him.	*Berne* 354	Pierre d'Anfol	Centre	Unknown. Possibly late 13th century.

Le clerc qui fu repus derriere l'escrin	A clerk and his lover have their dinner interrupted by another of the woman's lovers who takes his pleasure with her while the clerk hides behind a chest to keep his shame from being known. The lovers are interrupted by the return of the husband and the second lover is hidden behind a table while the wife picks a fight to distract her husband. The clerk hiding behind the chest believes the husband to be aware of his hiding place when the husband absent-mindedly gestures toward the chest while shouting at his wife and thus the priest bursts out of hiding and reveals not only his own presence but reveals the hiding place of the other lover as well. The husband chooses peace over revenge and the author gives no conclusion to the work.	*BN* fr. 1446 Paris, Arsenal 3524	Jean de Condé	Hainaut	1313-1315
Connebert	A priest named Richard, who has helped to cuckold many of the husbands in Colchester, attempts his greatest conquest ever of the blacksmith Tiebaut's wife, Mahaut. Unfortunately for Richard, Tiebaut not only witnesses the act but overhears the wife declare that all her body inside and out belongs to the priest except her arse which belongs to her husband. The priest declares that suits him well, but that he intends to beat her arse well. Tiebaut seizes the couple and refuses an offered ransom of 200 pounds preferring, he says with simple sarcasm, that he instead wishes to have the priests balls that have spited him by beating on his arse. He drives 5 nails through the priest's scrotum and hands him a razor before setting fire to the forge. Faced with death by burning, the priest castrates himself and flees.	*Berne* 354 Nottingham, Middleton L.M.6	Gautier le Leu	Colchester	After 1250
Constant de Hamel	The wealthy peasant Constant has a beautiful wife, Ysabeau, who is coveted by the village priest, a provost and a forester. The three villains are unable, despite gifts and promises of riches, to persuade the woman to be unfaithful and so they decide to financially ruin her husband through the use and abuse of legal vagaries and loopholes. The priest declares their marriage to be incestuous, prompting the husband to pay a fee of seven pounds for the priest's assistance in representing him before the Archbishop. The provost agrees only to renew Constant's privilege to harvest his wheat in exchange for a fee of ten pounds. The forester agrees only to return Constant's cattle he has seized for Constant's supposed illicit cutting of trees in the forest for a fee of 100 sous. In retaliation, Ysabeau proposes a plan to pretend to yield to the pressure and succumb to the men's wishes. Each in turn is asked to come to the house where they think they are to be bathed before enjoying themselves with Ysabeau but in fact are trapped in a large cask full of feathers. Through a hole in the cask they are made to watch while Constant rapes each of their wives (mistress in the case of the priest) in turn. Constant then lights the cask on fire and to save their lives, all the men must overturn the cask and naked, covered in feathers, run for their lives from Constant's dogs through the village, exposing their shame.	*BN* fr. 837 *BN* fr. 19152 *BN* fr. 1553 *Berne* 354 Oudenaerde, Décanat 3❖	Anonymous	Picardy	Early 13th century

Du cuvier	A wife and her clerk lover are surprised in the bath by the inopportune return of her husband. The wife hides her lover under the tub and uses it as a table for her husband and his men who have returned for lunch. The neighbour woman who lent her the tub, however, sends word that she needs her tub right away. The wife sends a cryptic message to the neighbour who realizes the situation and has her servant raise the cry of fire to enable the lover under the tub to escape without notice.	*BN* fr. 837	Anonymous	Champagne/ Provins	Mid 13th century
La dame qui fist trois tours entor le moustier	A wife, eager to meet her priestly lover, makes an excuse that she has run out of thread and goes to her lover's house instead of her friend's as she promises her husband. When her husband later looks for her and she is not with the friend spinning, he assumes she has been with another man. When she returns home, he threatens her with a knife but is stopped when she reveals that she was performing a secret ritual to detect the sex of their unborn child. He realizes he has ruined the ritual and apologizes.	*BN* fr. 837 *BN* fr. 1593 *BN* fr. 1635 Chantilly, Condé 475	Rutebeuf	Champagne	1249-1285
La dame qui se venja du chevalier	A castellan's wife and her lover are making love when he uses some crude pillow talk. Taking offense, the wife devises an intricate plan to punish her lover whom she invites to her house again, pretending to offer forgiveness, when she knows her husband will return soon. Upon his return, she tells the naked and frightened knight to stay in bed and she will divert her husband's attention. She does the opposite instead, warning her husband that she has a friend in her bed with her and that her husband should get his sword to cut off the head of he who would be between her legs where only her husband should be. The husband goes to get his sword and the frightened lover begs his lady's forgiveness. At the return of her husband, the wife slips out of bed, spreads her legs and invites her husband to beat with his sword. The husband laughs thinking it to be a good joke and the couple go downstairs to eat dinner while the lover gets dressed and escapes out the garden door.	*DS* Hamilton 257	Anonymous	Nord	Early 13th century
Les deux changeors	One of two friends gets married to a beautiful girl whom the other friend pesters until she becomes his lover. One day, to play a cruel joke, the lover asks the girl to lay down naked beside him, but covers her face and invites his married friend in to see his mysterious girlfriend. The married man declares his friend to be lucky to have such a beautiful lover, since he can hardly wait to get out of bed in the morning to be rid of his own wife. The enraged wife punishes her lover by convincing him to take a bath with her at a time she knows her husband to be returning. The lover hides in the tub while the wife convinces her husband that it is an ugly friend of the wife's who is in the tub and she'd like to give her a scare. The husband agrees to the joke and pretends to get into the bath whereby the lover is forced to hide behind the wife's bottom. When the husband leaves the room, the wife gets out of the tub, declares her lover to be a coward and ends the affair.	*BN* fr. 837	Anonymous	Picardy/ Normandy	Early 13th century

L'enfant qui fu remis au soleil	A greedy merchant leaves his wife for two years to seek richer markets, in which time she falls in love with a young man and becomes pregnant by him. When the husband returns he demands to know the patronage of the child and the wife explains that one night while crying due to the hardships his absence had caused her, it began to snow and when a snowflake hit her tongue, she conceived. The husband does not believe his wife, but bides his time for revenge. Fifteen years later, the merchant decides to take the boy on a trip. The wife, still not trusting her husband tries to dissuade him but the merchant takes the boy far away and sells him into slavery. When he returns home, the frantic wife begs to know what has happened to her son to which the husband replies that the land they journeyed to was very hot and he melted – but what could they expect by a child conceived from the snow. The wife realizes her husband knew all along and collapses in grief.	*BN* fr. 837 Chantilly, Condé 475	Anonymous	Picardy/ Normandy	Early to mid 13th century
Estormi	Three priests covet Lady Yfame and due to her poverty ,believe she will prostitute herself for them. She and her husband devise a plan for her to lure the priests to her room where her husband will beat them and take their purses. The husband's rage proves too great and instead of beating up the priests, he accidentally kills all three and coerces his nephew into burying the bodies. The nephew, however, accidentally kills another innocent priest, believing him to be one of the three reanimated.	*BN* fr. 837	Hues Piaucele	Picardy	Early 13th century
La Feme qui cunquie son Baron	The very young wife of a greedy, cruel, physically abusive and deformed man takes her revenge for her mistreatment by punching holes in his wine casks. Alerted by his wife's cries, the husband rushes to save his prize wine by plugging the holes with his fingers. The husband orders his wife to get help. She promises to find 'a plug that fits', and quickly disappears upstairs where a lover is waiting.	*BN fr.* 12603, fol.301c-d	Anonymous	Unknown – possibly Centre or l'Est	Unknown – attributed to the late 13th century
Le fervre de Creil	A blacksmith notices that his apprentice has an unusually large penis and begins to tempt his wife with praises of it. He goes on so much that she is moved to witness the phenomenon itself. The apprentice is reluctant to begin sexual relations with the wife, but agrees upon a promise of new britches and a shirt. The husband arrives just seconds before penetration and puts a stop to the act, expelling the apprentice from his work and beating his wife to the point of wearing himself out.	*BN* fr. 837	Anonymous	Picardian influence in Centre or Est	Possibly early 13th
Guillaume au faucon	A mock romance in a fabliaux style in which a young squire named William falls in love with his knight's wife and begs her for her love, but is refused. William refuses to eat until she grants him her love, even though the wife promises to reveal what William has proposed, if he does not eat. His obstinacy wins over her heart however and the wife tells her husband it is for his 'falcon' (a term the wife has been described by previously) that William covets that he pines and starves himself. The knight willingly offers his bird. With her husband's 'permission', gained by the play on words, to consummate the relationship, the lady takes William as a lover.	*BN* fr. 19152	Anonymous	Picardian influence	c. 1250

Gombert et les deux clercs	Two clerks taking lodging with a peasant fall in love with the man's wife and daughter. One clerks steals the ring from which the cooking pot hangs over the fire and, crawling into bed with the daughter, promises her his "golden" ring which she cannot see is the iron fire ring, if she has sex with him. The other clerk, intent on sleeping with the wife, moves the cradle that was next to the peasant's bed next to his own so that when the man came back, feeling his way in the dark, he would climb into the wrong bed, freeing his own bed for the clerk to climb into, fooling the wife into thinking he was her husband and having sexual relations with him. The clerk who had sex with the daughter returns to the bed he believes his companion to be sleeping in and tells him of his night's exploits, but soon realizes it is Gombert, the peasant next to him. Gombert attacks the clerk, but the other clerk comes to his friend's assistance and the two beat the peasant and leave the house.	*BN* fr. 837 *BN* fr. 2168❖ *Berne* 354 *DS* Hamilton 257	Jean Bodel	Picardy	1190-1194
Le meunier d'Arleux	A miller demands that a girl named Marie have sex with him. Frightened, she approaches the miller's wife who devises a plan to punish her husband in which she will substitute herself for Marie in bed. Unknown to the wife, the miller's associate, Mouset, offers the miller a pig for the chance to have sex with Marie as well. The greedy miller agrees. That night, after making love five times with his wife, whom he believes to be Marie, he allows Mouset into the room and he likewise engages in sex five times with the miller's wife before morning. When the miller, feeling very satisfied at his gain of not only the girl, but the boon of the pig, returns home his wife reveals that it was she, not Marie he slept with and how amazed she was that in fourteen years of marriage, he had never before performed ten times in one night. Thus the miller realises that he has made himself a cuckold. Mouset demands his pig be returned as he did not get to sleep with Marie. The matter is brought to court wherein the judge rules that the pig be returned and a fine of thirty sous be paid.	*BN* fr.1553	Enguerrant le Clerc d'Oisi	Cambrai	13th century
Le meunier et les deux clercs	Two clerks are robbed of their wheat and horse by a greedy miller but are granted lodging by him for a night. One clerk approaches the large bin in which the miller locks his beautiful daughter every night and promises her a golden ring that is, in fact the cooking pot ring. She hands him the key to her bin through a slit in the boards and he enjoys himself with her. The other clerk moves the cradle from beside the wife's bed to his own so when the woman returns from relieving herself outside, she gets into the wrong bed where the clerk and she have sex. The first clerk mistakenly gets in bed with the miller and reveals his deeds with the daughter, urging his friend to hop in the bin and find out for himself the goods to be had. The miller tries to choke the clerk, but the clerk proves too powerful. The miller runs out of the room, lights the fire and sees his wife in bed with the other clerk. He calls her a whore and she retaliates by revealing he has stolen the clerks horse and wheat. The two clerks then attack the man, beat him and take back their goods and animal.	Berne, 354 *DS*, Hamilton 257	Anonymous	Picardy	13th century

Le povre clerc	A poor clerk leaving the city asks a townswoman for hospitality, but she claims her husband is away and would be angry if she gave him anything and sends him on his way, though he notes delivery of two casks of wine, a freshly baked cake being put out to cool by the maid and some pork being cooked. He also notices a priest enter the house. The husband returns quickly thereafter, encountering the clerk to whom he promises hospitality. The woman denies that there is any food but has the maid go make some bread. The husband asks the clerk to relate a tale for their listening pleasure while they await their food into which the clerk works references to wine, like that which was delivered, and a cake that he saw in the house, forcing the wife to produce the hidden food each time, much to her husband's anger. After dining and drinking, the clerk finishes his tale, revealing in it the hiding place of the inhospitable wife's lover in the stable, prompting the husband to fly into a rage and attack the priest, whose cloak the husband gives the clerk who leaves satisfied.	Berne, 354	Anonymous	D' Oïl	13th century
Le prestre crucifie	Rogier, a crucifix maker, notices his wife's face light up when he tells her he must go to market with a statue and thus he knows she intends to deceive him. When he returns home suddenly, his wife hides her priestly lover in her husband's workshop, where he stretches out like one of the statues on a cross. The husband, wise to his wife's deception, asks her to join him at his work in the shop. Catching sight of the priest, he declares that he must have been drunk when he made such a statue, for he has made grotesque genitalia for his sculpture and so he quickly castrates the priest, cutting off both testicles and penis. The priest runs for his life but is caught by two water boys who return him to Rogier who holds him for 15 pounds ransom.	*BN* fr.837 *BN* fr. 2173 Cologny-Genève, Bodmer 113	Anonymous	Ile de France	First half of the 13th century, though possibly the last years of the 12th century.
Le prestre et le leu	A priest from Chartres frequents the wife of a peasant who digs a trap in a path which the priest happens to use to meet his lover. That night, on the way to his rendezvous, the priest falls in the pit into which a wolf has been trapped as well. The wife, concerned for her lover, sends her maid to look for the priest, but the girl falls in the pit as well. The husband checks his trap to find the wolf which he kills, the priest, whom he emasculates and the serving girl whom he expels.	*DS* Hamilton 257	Anonymous	Paris or Orléans	Unknown. Possibly 13th century
Le prestre et le mouton	A priest is in the middle of making love to the wife of a knight. A ram notices the movements of the priest's head and takes such as a challenge. It takes a run and violently attacks the priest, rendering him incapable of continuing coitus.	*DS* Hamilton 257	Haiseau	Unknown	Mid 13th century
Le prestre qui abevete	A priest set out to woo a peasant's wife. When he arrives at her house, he sees her eating with her husband and yells through the door that he can see them having sex. The husband assures him they are eating, but the priest swears they are not and calls the husband to come outside where he is. The husband and priest change places, where the husband witnesses the priest and his wife having sex to which the priest claims they are only eating. Befuddled the peasant believes the priest.	*BN* fr. 1593 *BN* fr. 12603	Garin/Jean Bodel	Centre	c.1200

Le sacristain	William the money changer is robbed and forced into poverty. His wife Ydoine is propositioned by a priest who promises 100 pounds for her love. The couple plan to rob the monk and beat him up before he can consummate his affair with the wife. William hits the monk too hard and kills him, however, and so the couple, to hide their crime, place the priest in the abbey's lavatory, with some hay in his hand. The prior finds the monk but worries someone will think he murdered him and brings him to the village to frame a peasant, and places him by William's door. William finds the monk later that night and places him in a dung heap where he finds a butchered pig that had been stolen was being hidden. William takes the pig, leaving the monk, but when the thief goes to reclaim the pig meat, he finds a monk. To hide the crime, the monk is hung up where the pig was stolen and the local lord finds a monk in place of his pig the next day. To escape blame, he ties him of his horse and raises the cry to stop the "thief" who is running away with the horse. The horse jumps over a ravine and the saddle breaks, sending the monk falling into the pit from which everyone assumes he cracked his head and died.	*BN* fr. 19152 *BN* fr. 1593 *BN* fr. 2168 *BN* fr. 14971 Paris, Arsenal, 3527, f. 179c❖ Berne, 354 *DS.*, Hamilton 257	This fabliau appears in 3 extremely similar versions. I and II are anonymous but III mentions Jehan le Chapelain	I= Bourgogne II= Le Centre III= L'Est	Version I is dated 1266 and believed to be the oldest. II and III are believed to be late 13th century.
La saineress	The wife of a bourgeois deceives him by smuggling her lover into their house under the guise of a female doctor who will cure her of an ailment. The wife then relates her sexual experience through a series of thinly veiled euphemisms, all of which the husband understands to be proper medical treatment.	*BN* fr. 837	Anonymous	D'Oil	Mid to late 12th century
La sorisete des etopes	A priest marries his mistress to the town fool in case she should fall pregnant through the affair. On the wedding night the priest wants to have sex before her husband and she go to bed. The wife tells her husband that her genitalia, her 'mouse', has run away and is hiding under her mother's bed. The fool is delayed by the mother at her house for some time and the given the mouse in a basket to bring to his wife. When he returns, just after the priest has left, he opens the basket to find the creature has escaped and gives his wife the bad news. She tells him not to worry, for the creature has returned and upon inspection, he finds the wet and tired beast is back where it belongs, but looks exhausted and will be left alone that night.	*Berne* 354	Anonymous	Etampes in Beauce	Late 12th- early 13th century
Les tresces	A knight's wife helps her lover, whom her husband has caught, go free. In retaliation the husband throws the wife out of the house. The wife persuades a neighbor woman to go into her house for her. Thinking it is his wife returned, the husband beats the woman and cuts off her hair before throwing her out again. The wife returns to her home and cuts off a horses tail, switching it with the other woman's hair she finds stuffed into her husband's pillowcase. She then climbs into bed and goes to sleep. When her husband wakes to find his wife asleep, unbeaten beside him and finds the horse's tail in his bed, he is made to believe he is losing his mind.	*BN* fr. 19152 *BN* fr. 12581 *Berne* 354	Garin	Orleans/ Anjou	First quarter of the 13th century

Les trois dames qui troverent l'anel	Three ladies find a ring and agree that the one who best tricks her husband so that she may be with her lover will win the ring. The first gets her husband drunk and tonsures him and then places him outside an abbey. Believing it is a sign from God, the man takes his vows and his wife is free to enjoy her lover. The second woman takes six eels to roast and leaves the house to find a fire to prepare them.. She is gone a week with her lover but returns with the eels roasted, pretending no time has elapsed. When her husband attacks her, she cries for help and the men of the village believe the husband to be insane and tie him up. The third woman disguises herself as the daughter of a neighbour and has her lover ask for her hand in marriage. In this disguise, she manages to have her own husband negotiate her new marriage and give her away in marriage to her lover.	*BN* fr. 837 *DS* Hamilton 257	Anon. (*BN*) Haiseau (*DS*)	Normandy/ Picardy	Mid 13th century
Le vilain de bailluel	A swineheard's wife convinces him he is dying. She covers him with a sheet and has her lover, the priest, come to commend his soul to God. The priest and wife have sex in front of the husband who swears if he weren't dead, he'd kill the priest, who tells him to be quiet and close his eyes.	*BN* fr. 837 *BN* fr. 12603 *Berne* 354 *DS* Hamilton 257 Chantilly, Condé 475	Jean Bodel	Picardy/ Normandy	1190-1194

Bibliography

MANUSCRIPTS CONSULTED

BÉROUL, *Tristan,* Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris MS fr. 2171.

*Fabliaux,*Bibliothèque de la Bourgeoisie, MS Berne 354.
_______ Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, MS fr. 837.
_______ Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, MS fr. 1446.
_______ Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, MS fr. 1553.
_______ Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, MS fr. 1593.
_______ Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, MS fr. 1635.
_______ Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, MS fr. 2168.
_______ Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, MS fr. 2173.
_______ Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, MS fr. 2188.
_______ Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, MS fr. 12581.
_______ Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, MS fr. 12603.
_______ Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, MS fr. 19152.
_______ Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, MS fr. 24432.
_______ Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, MS fr. 25545.
_______ Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris nouv. acq. MS fr. 934.
_______ Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Digby 86.
_______ British Library, MS Harley 2253.
_______ British Library, Add. MSS. 10289.
_______ Nottingham University Library, MS Middleton L.M. 6.

Lancelot-Graal, British Library, Add. MSS 10293.
_______, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, MS fr. 768.

MARIE DE FRANCE, *Lais*, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, nouv. acq. MS fr. 1104.

THOMAS, *Tristan,* Cambridge, University Library MS. DD. 15-12.
_______ Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS. Douce d. 6.
_______ Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS. Fr. d.16.

PRINTED SOURCES

*Abrégé de livre des Assizes de la Cour des Bourgeois,*ed. A. Beugnot (Paris, 1972).

AILRED OF RIEVAULX, *Aelredi Rievallensis Opera Omnia* I, ed. A. Hoste and C.H. Talbot, *Corpus Christianorum: Continuatio Medievalis,* 1 (Turnhout, 1971).

_______ *Sermo II de Oneribus, PL* 195, cols. 789-96.

ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *De animalibus libri XXVI*, ed. E. Filthaut, vol. 12 in *Opera Omnia,* ed. B. Geyer (Munster, 1955).

AMBROISE *L'estoire de la Guerre Sainte*, ed. and trans. M. J. Hubert and J.L. La Monte (London, 1941)

Ancrene Riwle, trans. M. B. Salu (London, 1955).

ARISTOTLE, *Historia Animalium,* trans. D. W. Thompson in *The Works of Aristotle*, vol. 4 (Oxford, 1910).

AUGUSTINE, *De genesi ad litteram*, ed. M. Zycha, *CSEL* 28.1 (Wien, 1864).

_______ *De doctrina christiana,* ed. W. M. Green, *CSEL* 80 (Wien, 1963).

Les Fabliaux: Etudes de littérature populaire et d'histoire littéraire du moyen âge, ed. J. Bédier (1893), 5th ed. (Paris, 1925).

BÉROUL, *Tristan*, ed. and trans. N. J. Lacy, in *Early French Tristan Poems* vol. I (New York, 1998), pp. 3-203.

The Book of St. Gilbert, ed. and trans. R. Foreville and G. Keir (Oxford, 1987).

BOUTILLER, *La Somme Rurale* (Bruges, 1479 ; reprint 1974).

Brut Y Tywysogian, ed. J. W. ab Ithel, *RS* (London, 1860).

CARADOG OF LLANCARFAN, *Vita S. Gildae Auctere Cartatoco*, ed. J. Stevenson *RS* (London, 1838).

CHRÉTIEN DE TROYES, *Lancelot/Le Chevalier de la Charrete,* ed. and trans. W. Kibler (New York, 1981).

CONSTANTINE THE AFRICAN, *Viaticum,* in *Constantini liber de coitu, el tratado de andrologia de Constantino el Africano* ed. E. Montero Cartelle (Chile, 1983).

Counsils and Synods: *With Other Documents Relating to the English Church 2,* eds F. M. Powicke and C. R. Cheney, part I (Oxford, 1964).

EADMER, *Vita*, ed. R. W. Southern, *The Life of St. Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury by Eadmer* (Oxford, 1962).

_______ *Historia Novorum in Anglia*, ed. M. Rule, *RS* (London, 1884).

Early Welsh Geneological Tracts, ed. P.C. Bartrum (Cardiff, 1966).

The French Fabliaux B.N. M.S. 837, ed. and trans. R. Eichmann and J. Du Val (New York, 1984).

GALEN, *De Usus Partium*, trans. M. T. May (Ithaca, 1968).

GEFFREI GAIMAR, *L'Estoirie des Engles,* ed. T. D. Hardy, 2 vols *RS* (London, 1889).

GEOFFREY OF MONMOUTH, *Historia Regum Britanniae*, ed. N. Wright (Woodbridge, 1991).

_______ *Brut Y Brenhinedd: Cotton Cleopatra Version*, ed. and trans. J. J. Parry (Cambridge, 1937).

_______ *Vita Merlini* in *La légende Arthurienne: études et documents,* ed. E. Faral (Paris, 1929)

GERALD OF WALES, *Giraldus Cambrensis Opera*, ed. J.S. Brewer, J.F. Dimock and G.F. Warner, 8 vols *RS* (London, 1863).

_______ *The Journey Through Wales/ The Description of Wales*, ed. and trans. L. Thorpe (London, 1978).

GILDAS, *De Excitio et Conquestu Britanniae*, ed. and trans. M. Winterbottom in *Gildas: The Ruin of Britain and Other Works (*London, 1978), pp. 13-79.

HENRY OF HUNTINGDON, *Historia Anglorum*, ed. and trans. D. Greenway (Oxford, 1996).

HIPPOCRATES, *The Works of Hippocrates*, eds and trans W.H.S. Jones, et al. (London, 1923-31).

_______ *Hippocratic Writings*, ed. G.E.R. Lloyd, trans. I.M. Lonie and G. Baader (London, 1983).

ISIDORE OF SEVILLE, *Etymologies*, ed. J. André (Paris, 1981).

_______ *The Medical Writings: An English Translation with an Introduction and Commentary,*ed. and trans. W. D. Sharpe, *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, n.s. 54, pt. 2 (1964).

JEROME, *Commentarius in epistolam ad ephesios* III.5; *PL* 26, col. 567.

LAȜAMON, *Brut*, ed. and trans. W.R.J. Barron and S.C. Weinberg (Harlow, 1995).

La Chastelaine de Vergi, ed. and trans. L. Arrathoon (New York, 1984).

Lancelot du Lac: The Non-Cyclic Old French Prose Romance, ed. E. Kennedy (Oxford, 1980).

Las Siete Partidas del Rey Don Alfonso el Sabio, ed. G. Lopez (Salamanca, 1555; reprint Madrid, 1974).

*Le Lai du Cor,*ed. C. T. Erikson *ANTS* (Oxford, 1973).

Le Livre des amours du Chastellain de Coucy et de la Dame de Fayel, eds A.Petit and F. Suard, (Lille, 1994).

Les Folies de Tristan, ed. and trans. S. Rosenberg, *Early French Tristan Poems* vol. I (New York, 1998), pp. 219-309.

Mantel, ed. P. Bennet (Exeter, 1975).

MARIE DE FRANCE, *Chèvrefoil*, ed. and trans. R. O'Gorman in *Early French Tristan Poems* vol. II, ed. N. Lacy (Cambridge, 1998).

Fables, ed. and trans. H. Spiegel (Toronto, 1987).

___________, *Lais*, ed. A. Ewert (London, 1944).

Medieval Handbooks of Penance: A Translation of the Principal 'Libri Poenitentiales,' eds J. T. McNeill and H. M. Gamer (New York, 1990).

MICHA, A., ed., *Lancelot: Roman en prose du XIIIe siécle.* 9 vols (Geneva 1978-83).

MIGNE, J. P., *Patrologia Latina* (1844-55).

La Mort le roi Artu: roman du XIIIe siécle, ed. J.Frappier (Geneva, 1964).

Njal's Saga, ed. M. Magnusson and H. Palsson (London, 1960).

Nouveau Recueil Complet des Fabliaux, eds W. Noomen and N. van den Boogaard, 10 vols (Van Gorcum, 1983-1997).

PHILLIPPE DE BEAUMANOIR, *Coutoumes de Beauvaisis,* ed. A. Salmon (Paris, 1899).

PHILLIPE DE NAVARRE, *Les Quatre Ages de l'Homme,* ed. M. de Fréville (Paris, 1888).

PIRAMUS, DENIS, *La Vie Seint Edmund le Rei,* ed. F. L. Ravenel. Bryn Mawr College Monograph Series, vol. 5 (Pennsylvania, 1906).

PLATO, *Timaeus,* trans. R. G. Bury (London, 1929).

RAYMOND OF PEÑAFORT, *Summa de poenitentia et matrimonio*, III.xxxiv.30 (Rome, 1603).

REGINALD OF DURHAM, *Reginaldi Monachi Dunelmensis Libellus de admirandis Beati Cuthberti virtutibus*, ed. J. Raine, *Surtees Society* 107 (London, 1835).

RICHARD OF CIRENCESTER, *Speculum historiale,* ed. J. E.B. Mayor 2 vols, *RS* (London, 1863-69).

RICHARD DE COGGESHALL, *The legend of Fulk Fitzwarin,* ed. J. Stevenson *RS* (London, 1875).

ROGER OF WENDOVER, *Flowers of History: Comprising the History of England from the Descent of the Saxons to AD 1235*, trans. J. A. Giles, 2 vols (London, 1848).

Le Roman de Tristan en Prose, ed. R.Curtis, 3 vols (Cambridge, 1976).

Summa cum ad Sacerdotem, eds J. Goering and P. Payer in *'Summa Penitentie fratrum predicatorum:* A thirteenth century confessional formulary,' *Medieval Studies* 55 (1993), 1-50.

THOMAS, *Le roman de Tristan par Thomas*, ed., J. Bédier (Paris, 1902).

_______ *Tristan*, ed. and trans. S.Gregory, *Early French Tristan Poems* vol. II (New York, 1998), pp. 3-155.

TOBIN, P. M. O., *Les Lais Anonymes des XIIe et XIIIe Siécles* (Geneva, 1976).

Tres Ancien Coutumier in *Coutumiers de Normandie*, ed. E. J. Tardif (Rouen, 1881).

Trioedd Ynys Prydein, ed. and trans. R. Bromwich (Cardiff, 1961).

Tristan Rossignol, ed. and trans. K. Fresco, *Early French Tristan Poems* vol. II (New York, 1998), pp. 201-213.

Tristan Menestrel, ed. and trans. K. Fresco, *Early French Tristan Poems* vol. II (New York, 1998), pp. 214-281.

The Trotula: a Medieval Compendum of Women's Medicine, ed. and trans. M. Green (Philadelphia, 2001).

*The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances, Edited from Manuscripts in the British Museum,*ed. H. O. Sommer, 8 vols (Washington D.C., 1908-1916. Reprint, New York, 1969).

WACE, *Roman de Brut: a history of the British*, trans. J. Weiss (Exeter, 2003).

WILLIAM OF MALMESBURY, *Historia Regum Anglorum*, ed. W. Stubbs *RS* (London, 1997).

English Translations

BRIANS, P., *Bawdy Tales from the Courts of Medieval France* (New York, 1972).

BURGESS, G. S. and K. Busby, *The Lais of Marie de France* (Harmondsworth, 1986).

CURTIS, R. L., *The Romance of Tristan* (Oxford, 1994).

GOTTFRIED VON STRASSBURG, *Tristan*, trans. A. T. Hatton (Harmondsworth, 1987).

GREGORY OF TOURS, *Historia Francorum*, trans. L. Thorpe (Middlesex, 1974).

HARRISON, R., *Gallic Salt* (Berkeley, 1974).

HATTO, A.T., *Gottfried von Strassburg: Tristan. With the Surviving Fragments of the Tristran of Thomas* (Harmondsworth, 1960; reprinted 1965 and 1967).

HELLMAN, R. and R. O'Gorman, *Fabliaux: Ribald Tales from the Old French* (New York, 1965).

LACY, N. J., ed. and trans. *Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation.* 5 vols (New York, 1993-96).

SCHLAUCH, M., *Medieval Narrative: A Book of Translations,* (New York, 1934).

SECONDARY STUDIES

ALLEN, P., *The Art of Love* (Philadelphia, 1992).

ARONSTEIN, S. 'Prize or pawn? Homosocial order, marriage and the redefinition of women in the Gawain Continuation,' *Romantic Review* 82 (1991), 115-26.

ATKINSON, C.W., *The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, 1991).

BROMWICH, R. (ed.), *Arthur of the Welsh*, (Cardiff, 1991).

BARBER, R., *The Knight and Chivalry,* 2nd ed., (Woodbridge, 1995).

BARTLETT, R., *Trial by Fire and Water* (Oxford, 1986).

_______ 'Rewriting saints lives: the case of Gerald of Wales,' *Speculum* 58 (1983), 598-613.

BATTS, M., 'The role of King Mark in Gottfried's *Tristan* – and elsewhere', in *Gottfried von Strassburg and the Medieval Tristan Legend*, eds A. Stevens and R. Wiseby, *Arthurian Studies* 23 (1990), pp. 117-126.

BAUMGARTNER, E., *L'arbre et le pain: essai sur la Queste del Saint Graal*, (Paris, 1981).

BÉDIER, J., 'Les fêtes des mai et les commencements de la poésie lyrique au Moyen Âge', *Revue des deux mondes* (1896)

BENSON, L. and J. Leyerle, *Chivalric Literature: Essays on Relations Between Literature and Life in the Later Middle Ages* (Kalamazoo, 1980).

_______ 'The tournament in the romances of Chrétien de Troyes and *L'Histoire de Guillaume le Marechal*', in *Chivalric Literature: Essays on Relations Between Literature and Life in the Later Middle Ages,* eds L. D. Benson and J. Leyerle (Kalamazoo, 1980), pp. 1-24.

BENTON, J.F., 'The Court of Champagne as a literary center,' *Speculum* 36 (1961), 551-91.

BEYER, J., 'Schwank und Moral', in *The Humor of the Fabliaux: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. T. Cooke and B. Honeycutt (Columbia, 1974), pp. 15-42.

BILLER, P., 'The common woman in the western church in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries,' in *Women in the Church*, ed. W. Shields and D. Wood, *SCH* 27 (1990), 127-57.

BLAKESLEE, M., '*Mal dacre, malpertis,* and the date of Béroul's *Tristan*,' *Romania* 106 (1985), 145-72.

BLOCH, R. H., *Medieval French literature and Law* (California, 1977).

_______ 'Medieval misogyny', *Representations* 20 (1987), 1-24.

_______ *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago, 1991).

BOGIN, C., *The Women Troubadours* (New York, 1980).

BOKLUND, K., 'On the spatial and cultural characteristics of courtly romance,' *Semiotica* 20 (1977), 1-37.

BØRRESON, K. E., *Subordination and Equivalence: The Nature and Rôle of Woman in Augustine and Thomas Aquinas*, trans. C.H. Talbot (Washington, 1981).

BROCKINGTON, M., 'The separating sword in the Tristan romances: possible Celtic analogues re-examined', *Modern Language Review* (1996), 281-300.

BROMWICH, R., 'The Welsh Triads', in *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. R. S. Loomis (Oxford, 1959), pp. 44-51.

BROOK, L., 'Guigemar and the white hind,' *Medium Aevum* 56 (1987), 94-101.

BRUCE, J. D., *The Evolution of Arthurian Romance,* (Baltimore, 1923).

___________, 'The Middle English metrical romance 'Le Morte Arthur:' its sources, and its relation to Sir Thomas Malory's 'Morte D'Arthur,' *Anglia* 33 (1900), 67-100.

BRUNDAGE, J., 'The Crusader's Wife', *Studiana Gratiana* 12 (1967), 425-441.

BULLOUGH, V. L., 'Medieval medical and scientific views of women,' *Viator* 4 (1973), 485-501.

_______ 'On being male in the Middle Ages,' in *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages,* ed. C. Lees (Minneapolis, 1994).

BURGESS, G. S., *The Old French Narrative Lay: An Analytical Bibliography* (Cambridge, 1997).

BURNLEY, D., *Courtliness and Literature in Medieval England* (London, 1998).

BURNS, E. J., *Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature (*Philadelphia, 1993).

_______ 'Knowing women: female orifices in the Old French fabliaux,' *Exemplaria* 4 (1992), 81-104.

BUSBY, K., 'Ceo fu la summe de l'escrit (chevrefoil line 61) again,' *Philological Quarterly* 74 (1995), 1-12.

CAMERON, K. (ed.), *Humour and History* (Oxford, 1993).

CARMI-PARSONS, J., 'Of queens, courts and books: reflections on the literary patronage of thirteenth century Plantaganet queens', in *The Cultural Patronage of Medieval Women*, ed. J. McCash (Athens, GA, 1996), pp. 175-201.

_______ 'The intercessionary patronage of Queens Margaret and Isabella of France', in *Thirteenth Century England* VI, Ed. M. Prestwich, R. Britnell and R. Frame (1997), pp. 145-156.

CARPENTER, J. and S. B. Maclean (eds), *Power of the Weak: Studies on Medieval Women* (Urbana, 1995).

CHOLAKAIN, R., *The Troubadour Lyric: A Psychocritical Reading (*Manchester, 1990).

CIRLOT, J. E., *A Dictionary of Symbols,* trans. Jack Sage (London, 1962).

CONRAD, L.I and M. Neve, V. Nutton, R. Porter and A. Wear, *Western Medical Tradition 800 BC-AD 1800* (Cambridge, 1995).

CORBETT, P., *The Roman Law of Marriage* (Oxford, 1930).

CROSS, T. P. and W. Nitze, *Lancelot and Guinevere: A Study on the Origins of Courtly Love* (Chicago, 1930).

CURTIS, R. 'L'humour et l'ironie dans le *Tristan en Prose*', in *Der Altvanzosische Prosaroman*, ed. E. Ruhe and R. Schwaderer (Munich, 1979), pp. 77-94.

_______ 'The problems of the authorship of the Prose Tristan', *Romania* 79 (1958), 314-348.

CURTIUS, E. R., *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages,* trans. W. R. Trask (London, 1953).

DAVIS, J., *'Le Roman du Castelain de Couci:' A Critical Study,'* Dissertation Abstracts International – A: The humanities and social sciences, 33:11, 1973, 6305.

DE ROUGEMONT, D., *Love in the Western World (*Oxford, 1936).

DOLS, M., *Medieval Islamic Medicine* (Berkeley, 1984).

DUBOST, F., 'Yonec, le vengeur, et Tydorel le veilleur,' in *Et c'est la fin pour quoy sommes ensembles: hommage a' Jean Dufournet. Littérature, histoire et langue du Moyen Age.* 3 vols (Paris,1993), pp. 449-67.

DUBY, G., *William Marshal: the Flower of Chivalry* trans. R. Howard (New York, 1985).

_______ *Medieval Marriage: Two Models from Twelfth-Century France*, trans. E. Forster (Baltimore, 1978, 1991).

_______ *The Chivalrous Society*, trans. Cynthia Postan (London, 1977).

DUGGAN, A. J. (ed.), *Queenship in Medieval Europe* (Woodbridge, 1997).

DUMVILLE, D., 'Nennius and the *Historia Brittonum*,' *Studia Celtica* 10 (1975), 78-95.

_______ 'The historical value of the *Historia Brittonum*,' *Arthurian Literature* 6 (1986), 1-26.

ECKENSTEIN, L., *Women Under Monasticism* (Cambridge, 1996).

EISNER, S., *The Tristan Legend: A Study in Sources* (Illinois, 1969).

ERLER, M. and M. Kowaleski (eds), *Women and Power in the Middle Ages* (Athens, GA, 1998).

FARAL, E., *La Légende Arthurienne* (Paris, 1929).

FERRANTE, J., *The Conflict of Love and Honor* (Paris, 1973).

FINEGAN, R., *Women in Aristophanes* (Amsterdam, 1995).

FINKE, L., 'The magical mistress tour: patronage, intellectual property and the dissemination of wealth in the *Lais* of Marie de France', *Signs* 25 (2000), 2, 479-503.

_______ 'Sexuality in medieval french literature,' in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, eds V. L. Bullough and J. A. Brundage (New York, 1996), pp. 345-368.

_______ 'Towards a Cultural Poetics of the Romance,' *Genre* 22 (1989), 109-27.

FISHER, J. H., 'Tristan and courtly adultery,' *Comparative Literature,* 9 (Oregon, 1957), 150-165.

FOULET, A. and M. B. Speer, *On Editing Old French Texts* (Kansas, 1979).

FOX, J. C., 'Marie de France,' *EHR* 25 (1910), 303-306.

_______ 'Mary, Abbess of Shaftesbury,' *EHR* 26 (1911), 317-26.

FRADENBURG, L.O. (ed.), *Women and Sovereignty* (Edinburgh, 1992).

FRAPPIER, J., 'A propos du lai de *Tydorel* et de ses éléments mythiques', in *Histoire, myths et symbols: études de littérature française* (Geneva,1976), pp. 219-244.

_______ *Amour Courtois et Table Ronde* (Geneva, 1973).

_______ *Chrétien de Troyes: l'homme et l'oeuvre* (Paris, 1971).

___________, 'The Vulgate Cycle,' *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages: A Collaborative History* (Oxford, 1959), 295-318.

_______ 'Le prologue du *Chevalier de la Charrette* et son interpretations', *Romania* 93 (1972), 337-79.

FREUD, S., *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* trans. A. and J. Strachey, eds. J. Strachey, A. Richards and A. Tyson, 10 vols (London, 1935).

FROST, C., 'The Attitude to women and the adaptation to a feminine audience in the *Ancrene Wisse,*' *AUMLA* 50 (1978), 235-50.

GAFFNEY, P., 'Iseult la (dumb) blonde,' *Romania* 113 (1995), 401-420.

GARBÀTY, T. J., 'The uncle-nephew motif: origins and development,' *Folklore* 88 (1972), 376-84.

GAUNT, S. and S. Kay (eds), *The Troubadours* (Cambridge, 1990).

GOERING, J., 'The *Summa de penitentia of Magister Serlo,*' *Medieval Studies* 38 (1976), 1-53.

GOLDING, B., *Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertine Order circa 1130-circa 1300 (*Oxford, 1995).

GRANSDEN, A. *Historical Writing in England, c.550-1307*, vol. 1 (London, 1974).

GREEN, M., *Women's Healthcare in the Medieval West* (Aldershot, 2000).

GRILLO, P., 'Was Marie de France the daughter of Waleran II, count of Meulan?' *Medium Aevum* 57 (1988), 269-74.

GUERIN, V., *The Fall of Kings and Princes* (Stanford, 1995).

HALSALL, G., ed., *Humour, History and Politics in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2002).

HARF-LACNER, L., 'Fairy godmothers and fairy lovers,' in *Arthurian Women: A Casebook*, ed. T. Fenster (New York, 1996), pp. 135-190.

HARWARD, V. J. Jr., *The Dwarfs of Arthurian Romance and Celtic Tradition* (Leiden, 1958).

HARVEY, R., 'Courtly culture in medieval Occitania', in *The Troubadours*, eds S. Gaunt and S. Kay (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 8-27.

HOLZKNECHT, K., *Literary Patronage in the Middle Ages* (London, 1966).

HUDSON, J., *The Formation of the English Common Law* (New York, 1996).

HUNT, T., 'Abelardian ethics and Béroul's *Tristan*,' *Romania* 98 (1977), 501-40.

JACQUART, D., and C. Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1985).

JAEGER, C. S., *The Origins of Courtliness: Civilizing Trends and the Formation of Courtly Ideals, 939-1210* (Philadelphia, 1985).

JAEY, M., 'Consuming passions: variations on the eaten heart theme', in *Violence Against Women in Medieval Texts*, ed. A. Roberts (Gainsville, 1998), pp. 75-96.

JOHNSON, B., *The Critical Difference: Essays in the Contemporary Rhetoric of Reading* (Baltimore, 1980).

JOUANNA, J., *Hippocrates' Women: Reading the Female Body in Ancient Greece,* trans. M. B. Debvoise (London, 1998).

KAEUPER, R., *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe* (Oxford, 1999).

KEEN, M., *Nobles, Knights and Men-at-Arms in the Middle Ages* (London, 1996).

_______ 'Chivalry and courtly love', *Peritia* 2 (1983), 149-69.

KELLY, J., 'Did women have a renaissance,' in *Women, History and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly* (Chicago, 1984).

KENNEDY, E., *Lancelot and the Grail: A Study of the Prose Lancelot* (Oxford, 1986).

KENNEDY, E.D. (ed.), *King Arthur: A Casebook* (New York, 1996).

KIPPLE, K., 'Typhus, ships and soldiers,' in *Plague, Pox and Pestilence* (London, 1997).

KLEINBERG, A., *Prophets in Their Own Country* (Chicago, 1992).

KNAPTON A., 'A la recherche de Marie de France,' *Romance Notes* 19 (1978), 248-253.

KORREL, P., *An Arthurian Triangle* (Netherlands, 1984).

KRISTEVA, J., *Tales of Love,* trans. L. S. Roudiez (New York, 1987).

LACAN, J., 'Seminar XX: God and the *jouissance* of the woman,' in *Female Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne*, eds J. Rose and J. Mitchell (New York, 1981).

LACY, N. J., *Early French Tristan Poems,* 2 vols (Cambridge, 1998).

LAZAR, M., *Amors courtois et Fin' Amors dans la littérature du xiie siècle* (Paris, 1964).

LEGGE, M. D., *Anglo-Norman in the Cloisters* (Edinburgh, 1950).

_______ *Anglo-Norman Literature and its Background* (Oxford, 1963).

LE MEE, K. W., *A Metrical Study of Five Lais of Marie de France* (Paris, 1978).

LEVI, E., 'Marie de Francia e le abbazie d'Inghilterra,' *Archivum Romanicum* 5 (1921), 472-93.

LEYERLE, J., 'Conclusion: the major themes of chivalric literature', in *Chivalric Literature: Essays on Relations Between Literature and Life in the Later Middle Ages,* eds L. D. Benson and J. Leyerle (Kalamazoo, 1980), pp. 131-146.

LEWIS, C. S., *The Allegory of Love* (Oxford, 1936).

LOCHRIE, K., P. McCracken and J. A. Schultz (eds), *Constructing Medieval Sexuality* (Minneapolis, 1997).

LOMPERIS, L. and S. Stanbury, *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature* (Philadelphia, 1993).

LOOMIS, R. S., ed. *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages: A Collaborative History* (Oxford, 1959).

___________ , *Arthurian Tradition and Chrétien de Troyes* (New York, 1949).

___________ , 'The origin of the grail legends,' in *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages: A Collaborative History* (Oxford, 1959), pp. 274-295.

_______ 'Problem of the Tristan legend. Bleheris, the Diarmiud parallel, Thomas date,' *Romania* 53 (1927), 82-324.

LOT, F., *Etude sur le Lancelot en Prose* (Paris, 1918).

_______ *Nennius et l'historia Brittonum: étude critique, suivie d'une édition de diverses versions de ce texte* (Paris, 1934).

_______ 'Sur la date du Lancelot en prose,' *Romania* 57 (1931), 137-146.

MacDONALD, W.C., 'King Mark: Gottfried's version of an Ovidian husband figure', *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 14 (1978), 255-267.

_______ 'King Mark, the holy penitent', in *Zeitschrift für deusches alterum und deutsche literature*, ed. F. Worstbrack (Stuttgart, 1991), pp. 393-418.

MACKEY, L., 'Eros and logic: the rhetoric of courtly love,' in *The Philosophy of (Erotic) Love,* eds R. C. Solomon and K. Higgins (Lawrence, 1991), pp. 336-351.

MARTINDALE, J., 'The sword on the stone: some resonances of a medieval symbol of power', *Anglo-Norman Studies* xv (1993), pp. 199-242.

McCRACKEN, P., 'The Body politic and the queen's adulterous body in French romance,' in *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature,* ed. L. Lomperis and S. Stanbury (Philadelphia, 1993).

_______ *The Romance of Adultery: Queenship and Sexual Transgression in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia, 1998).

The Medieval Feminist Newsletter 7 (1989), pp. 2-16.

MÉNARD, P., 'Les Fous dans la société médiévale,' R*omania* 98 (1977), 433-59.

MUIR, L., *Literature and Society in Medieval France: The Mirror and the Image* (London, 1985).

MULDER-BAKKER, A.B. (ed.), *Sanctity and Motherhood: Essays on Holy Mothers in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1995).

MULLALLY, E., *The Artist at Work: Narrative Technique in Chrétien de Troyes* (Philadelphia, 1988).

MURRAY, J., 'The Absent penitent: the cure of women's souls and confessors' manuals in thirteenth century England,' in *Women, the Book and the Godly,* eds L. Smith and J.H.M. Taylor (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 13-26.

_______ 'Gendered souls in sexed bodies: the male construction of sexuality in some medieval confessors' manuals,' in *Handling Sin: Confession in the Middle Ages*, eds P. Biller and A. J. Minnis (Woodbridge, 1998), pp. 77-93.

MUSCATINE, C., *The Old French Fabliaux* (New Haven, 1986).

NOBLE, P.S., *Love and Marriage in Chrétien de Troyes* (Cardiff, 1982).

NYKROG, P., *Les Fabliaux: Étude d'histoire, littérature et de stylistique médiévale* (Copenhagen, 1957).

PARIS, G., 'Lancelot du Lac: Le conte de la charette,' *Romania* 12 (1883), 518-19.

PARRY, J. J. and R. A. Caldwell, 'Geoffrey of Monmouth,' in *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages* ed. R.S. Loomis (Oxford, 1959).

PARSONS, J. C. (ed.), *Medieval Queenship* (Stroud, 1994).

PATON, L., *Studies in Fairy Mythology of Arthurian Romance* (New York, 1960).

_______ 'Morgain in the Horn and Mantle tests,' in *Studies in the Fairy Mythology of Arthurian Romance* (Boston, 1903), pp. 1-167.

PAUPHILET, A., *Études sur la Queste del Saint Graal,* (Paris, 1921).

_______ *Le legs du moyen âge*, (Melun, 1950).

PAYER, P. J., *The Bridling of Desire: Views of Sex in the Later Middle Ages* (Toronto, 1993).

_______ *Sex and the Penitentials: The Development of a Sexual Code 550-1150* (Toronto, 1984).

PENSOM, R., *Reading Beroul's Tristan* (Bern, 1995).

PETERS, E., *The Shadow King: Rex Inutilis in Medieval Law and Literature, 751-1327* (New Haven, 1970).

PETRAKOPOULOS, A., 'Sanctity and motherhood: Elizabeth of Thuringia', in *Sanctity and Motherhood: Essays on Holy Mothers in the Middle Ages,* ed. A.B. Mulder-Bakker (New York, 1995), pp. 259-96.

PONTFARCY, Y. de, 'Si Marie de France était Marie de Meulan...,' *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale* 38 (1995), 353-61.

POPE, M., 'A note on the dialect of Béroul's *Tristan* and a conjecture,' *Modern Language Review* 8 (1913), 47-101.

PUTTER, A., 'Knights and clerics at the court of Champagne: Chrétien de Troyes' romances in context', in *Medieval Knighthood V Papers from the Strawberry Hill Conference, 1994*, eds. S. Church and R. Harvey (Woodbridge, 1995), pp. 243-66.

RABINOWITZ, N. S., *Anxiety Veiled: Euripides and the Traffic of Women* (London, 1993).

REGALADO, N. F., 'La chevalerie celestielle: spiritual transformations of secular romance in *La Queste del Saint Graal,*' in *Romance: Generic Transformation from Chrétien de Troyes to Cervantes,* eds. K. Brownlee and M. S. Brownlee (Hanover, 1985), pp. 91-113.

REID, T.B.W., *The Tristan of Béroul: A Textual Commentary* (Oxford, 1972).

RHYS, J., *Studies in the Arthurian Legend* (Oxford, 1891).

_______ and J. Gwenogvryn Evans, *Text of the Mabinogion from the Red Book of Hergest* (Oxford, 1887).

ROBERTSON, D.W., *A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives* (Princeton, 1962).

RONCAGLIA, A., 'La statua d'Isotta', *Cultura Neolatina* (1971), 41-67.

RYCHNER, J., *Contribution à l'étude des fabliaux,* vol. 2; 39 (Neuchatel, 1960).

RYDING, W., *Structure in Medieval Narrative* (The Hague, 1971).

SARGENT-BAUR, B. N., 'Truth, half-truth, untruth: Béroul's telling of the Tristan story,' in *The Craft of Fiction*, ed. L. A. Arrathoon (Michigan, 1984), pp. 393-421.

_______, '*Dux bellorum/rex militum/roi faineant:* The transformation of Arthur in the twelfth century,' in *King Arthur: A Casebook*, ed. E. D. Kennedy (New York, 1996), pp. 29-44.

SASAKI, S., 'Anel et seel: de Béroul et du *Lancelot* au roman de *Tristan en Prose*' in *Miscellania Mediaevalia:Melanges offerts à Philppe Ménard*, ed. C. Faucon (Paris, 1998), pp. 15-34.

SCHENCK, M. J. S., *The Fabliaux: Tales of Wit and Deception* (Philadelphia, 1987).

SCHOEPPERLE, G., *Tristan and Isolt: A Study of the Sources of the Romance*, 2 vols (London, 1913).

SCHOFIELD, P. R., 'Peasants and the manor court: gossip and litigation in a Suffolk village at the close of the thirteenth century,' *Past and Present* 159 (1998), 4-42.

SHIRT, D. J., 'Le Chevalier de la charrete: A world upside down?' *Modern Language Review* 76:4 (1981), 8-11.

SHAHAR, S., *Growing Old in the Middle Ages* (London, 1997).

SINCLAIR, A., *The Deceived Husband: A Kleinian Approach to the Literature of Infidelity* (Oxford, 1993).

SIRAISI, N., *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine* (Chicago, 1990).

_______ *Taddeo Alderotti and his Pupils: Two Generations of Italian Medical Learning* (Princeton, 1978.)

SMITH, N.B. and J.T. Snow, 'Courtly love and courtly literature', in *The Expansion Transformations of Courtly Literature*, eds N.B. Smith and J.T. Snow (Georgia, 1980), pp. 3-16.

STROHM, P., 'Queens as intercessors', in *idem*, (ed) *Hochon's Arrow: the Social Imagination of Fourteenth-Century Texts* (Princeton, 1992) pp. 98-119.

STRASSER, I., 'Mariage, amour et adultere dans les fabliaux', in *Amour Mariage et Transgressions au Moyen Age*, eds D. Buschinger and A. Crépin (Göppingen, 1984), pp. 425-431.

THORPE, L., *The Lancelot in the Arthurian Prose Vulgate* (Cambridge, 1980).

TUDOR, V., 'The misogyny of Saint Cuthbert', *Archaeologia Aeliana* 5 (1984) 157-167.

TUVE, R. *Allegorical Imagery* (Princeton, 1966).

UTLEY, F., 'Must we abandon the concept of courtly love?' *Medievalia et Humanistica* 3 (1972), 299-323.

VANCE, E., 'Love's concordance: the poetics of desire and joy of the text,' *Diacritics* 5 (1975), 40-52.

_______ 'Chrétien's *Yvain* and the ideologies of exchange,' *Yale French Studies* 70 (1986), 42-60.

VANN, T. M. (ed.), *Queens, Regents and Potentates,* (Dallas, 1993).

VAUGHN, S., 'Anselm and women,' *Haskins Society Journal* 2 (1990), 83-93.

VINCENT, N., 'Isabella of Angoulême: John's Jezebel', in *King John: New Interpretations*, ed. S. D. Church (Woodbridge, 1999), pp. 165-219.

WACK, M., *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages: the Viaticum and its Commentaries* (Philadelphia, 1990).

WARD, B., *Miracles and the Medieval Mind* (Pennsylvania, 1982).

WARNKE, K., *Die Fabeln der Marie de France, mit Benutzung des von Ed. Mall hinterlassenen Materials* (Geneva, 1974).

WEBSTER, K., *Guinevere: A Study of her Abductions* (Massachusetts, 1951).

WEINER, J. S., *The Piltdown Forgery* (London, 1955).

WEINSTEIN, D., and R. Bell, *Saints and Society: the Two Worlds of Western Christendom 1000-1700* (Chicago, 1982).

WHITTERIDGE, G., 'The date of the *Tristan* of Béroul,' *Medium Aevum* 28 (1959) 167-171.

WICKHAM, C., 'Gossip and resistance among the medieval peasantry,' *Past and Present* 160. (1998), 4-24.

WINKLER, E., *Französische Dichter des Mittelalters: II, Marie de France* (Vienna: Hölder, 1918).

WULFF, F., 'Le conte de mantel, texte français des derniéres années du xii siècle,' *Romania* 14 (1885), 345-80.

ZUURDEEG, A. D., *Narrative Techniques and Their Effects in 'La Mort le Roi Artu,'* (York, 1981).

UNPUBLISHED THESES

BURGER, G. M., 'Le thème de l'obscenité dans la littérature française des douzième et treizième siècles' (Unpublished Ph. D. thesis, Stanford, 1973).

ZEIGLER, G., 'The Characterisation of Guinevere in English and French Medieval Romance,' (Unpublished Ph. D. thesis, Pennsylvania State University, 1975).