Taking Flight: Gottfried's *Tristan*, Arthurian Literature
and Learning to Forget the Round Table

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Abstract

This dissertation is an examination of the *Tristan* by Gottfried von Strassburg through the lens of five other French and German Arthurian Romances from the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. I begin with a comparison of *Yvain* by Chrétien de Troyes and *Iwein* by Hartmann von Aue with Gottfried's *Tristan.* I suggest that these three texts problematize the capacity for fiction to signify to a listening audience. The following chapter introduces the idea of flight from the fetters of language through an examination of Chrétien's *Erec et Enide*, Hartmann's *Erec* and Gottfried's *Tristan*. I then consider the presence and effects of texts in the adaptation of *Parzival* by Wolfram von Eschenbach. The protagonist's process of maturation involves not only learning about these texts but accepting the need to renounce them. In my final chapter, I look at the figure of King Mark in *Tristan* and his inescapable state of doubt and despair (*zwîvel*). In these three chapters, I investigate points of intersection between *Tristan* and the genre now termed Arthurian Romance in order to highlight several ways in which all these texts present language as both a burden but also a tool for escape.

Acknowledgements

A Note on Citations

The primary works will be cited parenthetically in the body of the dissertation. Generally, the Old French or Middle High German will be given first along with line numbers, followed by an English translation with the appropriate page number in the translation. The particular editions used in this dissertation are listed in the first portion of the bibliography under "Primary Sources." To prevent confusion between different adaptations, I have opted to use the following abbreviations:

Chrétien de Troyes:

Erec et Enide appears as *EE.*

Lancelot appears as *L.*

Yvain appears as *Y.*

Gottfried von Strassburg:

Tristan appears as *T.*

Hartmann von Aue:

Der arme Heinrich appears as *DaH.*

Erec appears as *E.*

Gregorius appears as *G.*

Iwein appears as *I.*

Wolfram von Eschenbach:

Parzival appears as *P.*

Chapter One
Introduction

<u>The Many Texts of *Tristan*</u>

I began this dissertation with the intention of writing about the *Tristan* by Gottfried von Strassburg and the role of art. I was aware that several scholars had already addressed the prominence of music, foreign languages and literature in the text, most notably W.T.H. Jackson in his monograph, *Anatomy of Love*,[1] and Wolfgang Mohr in his article, "*Tristan und Isold* als Künstlerroman."[2] Guided by a stubborn ignorance about the scope of the project and largely incognizant of relevant monographs and articles, I initially attempted to turn a broad and undefined definition of "art" into a realizable research plan. These investigations bore no fruit. After several months, I was still in need of a more clearly defined focal point for the dissertation and was lacking viable leads. Amidst acts of indiscriminate reading and precious little writing, several questions surrounding the act of adaptation kept stubbornly cropping up in relation to and also in *Tristan*. I began to explore Gottfried's presentation of *texts* in his poem, focusing on those passages in which he plays with other texts in order to challenge his listeners' interpretation.

Building on a definition from Roland Barthes, I understand text as "a process of [oral or written] demonstration [...] *experienced only in an activity of production* [italics in original]."[3] Whether or not a written text is involved does not matter nor does the a person's ability to read. As I understand it, the text can be an assumed but hardly

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[1] *The Anatomy of Love: The* Tristan *of Gottfried von Strassburg* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971).
[2] *Euphorion* 53 (1959): 153-174.
[3] Barthes, "From Work to Text," *Image, Music, Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 157.

unassailable part of communal organization. The members of a political or religious

community may refer to a text even if no physical text exists and/or if the person does not

know how to read.[4] These texts define rules and relationships but are themselves not

immutable. In invoking a common text to support one's position, the producer of text

changes or alters the text in some way through his interpretation. He relies on a text but

also produces more, variant texts. This leaves the altered texts open to additional changes

even as members of the textual community rely more-and-more on text as a source for

authority and legitimacy.

With this broad definition of texts in mind, I began to think of *Tristan* as a text

about the adaptor's engagement with other texts. Gottfried makes use of extant texts but

also alters them radically. His *Tristan* delights in its own hybridity. In the prologue,

Gottfried goes on a fictitious search to find the fictional source for the *Tristan* by Thomas

of Britain. *Tristan*'s adaptor relates his foray through countless texts written in two

languages: *begunde ich sêre suochen / in beider hande buochen / walschen und latînen* (*T*

157-159) [I began to search assiduously both in Romance and Latin books (43)].

Gottfried presents himself as a man who not only writes but reads prodigiously in at least

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[4] Barthes, to the best of my knowledge, never states that a text must be written. I am thankful to have found further support for my loose definition of text in Brian Stock's monograph, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983). In his literary-historical account of the growing dependency on texts in Medieval Europe beginning at the end of the first millennium A.D., Brian Stock explains how textual communities could form even when the written text was inaccessible to its members: "Finally, the textual community was not only textual; it also involved new uses for orality. The text itself, whether it consisted of a few maxims or an elaborate programme, was often re-performed orally. Indeed, one of the clearest signs that a group had passed the threshold of literacy was the lack of necessity for the organizing text to be spelt out, interpreted, or reiterated. The members all knew what it was." 91

three languages, German being implied.[5] *Tristan*'s adaptor calls attention to, even boasts

of, his range of sources and the inescapable pull of texts in different directions.[6]

The visibility of other texts in a work written around the year 1200 is not by itself

remarkable. It was the norm for an adaptor to declare his dependency on other sources,[7]

but his relationship with other texts is invariably one of conflict and exploration. To adapt

an existing text is not the same as being conformist.[8] Ruth Morse calls the texts which

predate a particular adaptation "pre-texts", and I will make use of the term throughout

this dissertation when discussing the chronology of texts. Morse's description of the

freedoms, limitations and ambiguities which accompany the invocation of a pre-text are

worth quoting at length:

> The authority for their [the translators'] truth lies elsewhere. Or, at least, it
> appears to. […] The very deference [of a translator or, more broadly, of an adaptor
> to one or more pre-texts] which appears tentative and humble, in practice allowed
> authors to exploit a rich narrative uncertainty and to create a space within which

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[5] Douglas Kelly suggests that Gottfried's process of adaptation is itself an instance of mimicry, in which *Tristan*'s adaptor borrowed not only Thomas as a source but Thomas' process of adaptation: "Gottfried seems, therefore, to have composed his poem in the same way Thomas claims to have done: he considered all the material he could find in Latin and French and, presumably, German; and then, keeping to one basic narrative sequence, he composed his poem." In: "En Uni Dire" ("Tristan" Douce 839) and the Composition of Thomas's "Tristan" *Modern Philology* 67.1 (Aug., 1969), 15.

[6] *Tristan*'s adaptor was well-read and educated. Although it is unwise to speculate too much about the particulars, Gottfried was literate at a time when most men were not and puts this learning on display. There is, tellingly enough, no trace the *Bescheidenheitstopos* in Gottfried's poem. As an adaptor, he is brash and upfront about his own abilities. Jackson provides a succinct summary of what little is known about Gottfried's education, including how his knowledge of classical works compares to that of his contemporaries. See: *The Anatomy of Love*, 31-33. A similar pride or arrogance informs Tristan's debut performance at Mark's Court in Cornwall. See: Hannes Kästner, *Harfe und Schwert: Der höfische Spielman bei Gottfried von Straßburg* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1981), 18-19.

[7] Although we can safely label the Arthurian Romances as "fiction," the invocation of a source text is common to medieval historical and fictional writing: Both history and romance claim to preserve the memory of the past. Historical writing required the identification, evaluation, selection, and amalgamation of sources. Similar to medieval histories, romance projects behind the extant *conte* a line of transmission back to real or presumed events in the past. This historical paradigm, although by and large an illusion, was apparently taken quite seriously by medieval writers and audience. In: *Douglas Kelly, The Art of Medieval French Romance* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 85-86.

[8] Timothy Jackson writes: "Und in der Tat: Trotz der Macht der *auctoritas*, trotz des übergeordneten Interesses an der Durchsetzung des kirchlichen Weltmodells spürt man hie und da eine gewisse kritische Selbständigkeit gegenüber tradiertem Wissen." In: *Typus und Poetik: Studien zur Bedeutungsvermittlung in der Literatur des deutschen Mittelalters* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2003), 4.

they could manipulate their true tales about the past. The conventions of narration, description, and dialogue, or argument and representation, implicated them in complex series of displacements, by which they could represent and refer without needing to assume the responsibility for their work which later came to seem necessary. Not only did intertextual reference create a dynamic relationship between present and prior texts; the addition of marginal glossing, the suggestion of a parallel narrative, changes of book-hand or type face, all contributed to the creation of dialogic commentary upon the text, sometimes questioning, sometimes supporting, but always intervening.[9]

Like all texts, pre-texts offer support for further textual production by the adaptor. At the same time, pre-texts are ever present, stated or not, in their later iterations. An adaptor might choose to invoke or silently pass over the existence of a pre-text. In either case, the pre-text not only grants the adaptor authority but also puts his adaptation in competition with its pre-text(s).

By choosing to adapt Thomas' *Tristan* and thereby challenge the Tristan-legend in all its known forms, Gottfried decides to make the advantages, pitfalls, joys and frustrations of interlocking and competing texts a focal point of his adaptation:

The intertextuality of the Tristan stories is such that, if we attempt to characterize a given text by picking out its salient features, we are inevitably focusing on elements present to a certain degree in the rest of the tradition: there is always a zone of overlapping features pulling the disparate individual texts back into the whole Tristan legend.[10]

With the legend of Tristan and Isolde, Gottfried knew that he would be in fierce competition with other iterations of the legend in written and oral texts. In his prologue, Gottfried even tells his listeners that he anticipates, even welcomes, intertextual rivalry:

Ich weiz wol, ir ist vil gewesen, / die von Tristande hânt gelesen; / und ist ir doch niht vil

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[9] *Truth and Convention in the Middle Ages*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 231-232.
[10] Matilda Tomary Bruckner, *The Shaping of Romance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 31.

gewesen, / die von im rehte haben gelesen (*T* 131-134) [I am well aware that there have been many who have told the tale of Tristan; yet there have not been many who have read his tale aright (43)].

While any adaptation must contend with its forbears, some material makes for comparatively harmonious textual production. The Arthurian Romance as begun by Chrétien de Troyes is a good point of contrast. Preparing an additional Middle High German version of *Erec* or *Iwein* would have given Gottfried a far less unruly set of texts to adapt.[11] While Gottfried made prodigious use of the Arthurian Romances, *Tristan*'s adaptor deliberately took a more challenging route. Gottfried's *Tristan* is a retelling of a popular, non-Arthurian legend and was composed in the wake of two popular adaptations of the Tristan-legend from the second half of the twelfth century. The first was written in Old French by Thomas of Britain and the other was written in Middle High German by Eilhart von Oberge. Although Gottfried only cites Thomas as a source, these two competing adaptations formed the basis of Gottfried's poem.[12]

Thus I suggest on the basis of the chosen *materia* alone that the challenges and pleasures from pre-texts constitute an issue near and dear to Gottfried's heart. James A. Schultz observes that Gottfried is "surely one of the most self-conscious medieval

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[11] We need only look to Hartmann's adaptation to appreciate that while changes were certainly possible, the general structure was considered adequate without major alterations: "Die Tatsachen eines Chrétienschen Romans brauchen in der Regel im Prozeß der Übertragung nicht geändert zu werden, denn sie bieten schon eine idealisierende, erbauliche Wahrheit und sind mit dieser Absicht formuliert worden." Jackson, *Typus und Poetik*, 31.

[12] Eilhart provides Gottfried with the negative example, against which the latter adaptor can write. The influence of Eilhart on Gottfried is discussed in: Gerhard Schindele, *Tristan: Metamorphose und Tradition* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1971), 22; Marc Chinca, *History, Fiction, Verisimilitude: Studies in the Poetics of Gottfried's* Tristan (London: The Modern Humanities Research Association for the Institute of German Studies, 1993), 96; Jackson, *The Anatomy of Love*, 42; Roy Wisbey, "On Being the Contemporary of Gottfried von Straßburg." *The Modern Language Review* 98.4 (Oct., 2003), lviii.

vernacular writers."[13] *Tristan*'s adaptor exhibits a great concern over how to situate his text amongst those by classical and contemporary adaptors.[14] Gottfried is, after all, the same adaptor who opts to interrupt the plot of *Tristan* to give his audience over 400 verses on the state of compositions *in tiutscher zungen* (*T* 4739) from the last three decades of the twelfth century.

This same self-consciousness does little to help a modern reader such as myself, accustomed, as I am, to understanding texts based in part by their categorization. *Tristan* is difficult to pin down. Since the mid-nineteenth century, scholars have treated Gottfried's *Tristan* as a return to ancient Celtic myth, as a profoundly religious or heretical text and have labeled Gottfried as both a supporter of an idealized courtly culture or its biggest detractor.[15] Yet my impulse to categorize is not entirely anachronistic. It would be unfair to generalize and say that medieval adaptors made no distinction between categories. The verse forms employed by Gottfried and others already stand in marked contrast to the prose in historical, ostensibly non-fictional medieval texts.[16]

My need to classify might be an overly modern preoccupation, but it does seem to have occurred to Gottfried that the comparison of his texts with others would be unavoidable. Gottfried's *Tristan* borders and overlaps many other texts, but its extreme

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[13] James A. Schultz, "Why Does Mark Marry Isolde? And Why Do We Care? An Essay on Narrative Motivation," *Deutsche Vierteljahrschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 61 (1987), 206.

[14] The clearest invocation of this concern is Gottfried's compilation of contemporary Middle High German poets, generally referred to as the "Literary Excursus" (*T* 4547 ff.). I address facets of Gottfried's "self-conscious" presentation of himself vis-à-vis his sources (and competition).

[15] The beginning of the second chapter in Neil Thomas' monograph offers a clear and succinct summary of the major trends in the *Tristan* scholarship. See: *Tristan in the Underworld: A Study of Gottfried von Strassburg's* Tristan *Together with the* Tristran *of Thomas* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1991), 17-24.

[16] Putter addresses the validity of the terms "fiction" and "non-fiction" for medieval texts in his article: "Finding Time for Romance: Medieval Arthurian Literary History." *Medium Aevum* 63.1 (Spring 1994), 2.

hybridity compounds rather than elucidates problems of interpretation. In this dissertation, I have decided to explore one particular volatile contact zone, namely the relationship between Gottfried's *Tristan* and the genre of Arthurian Romance.

<u>*Tristan* and Arthurian Romance</u>

When first planning this dissertation, I did my utmost ignore those texts which influenced Gottfried's own writing. Aware that one never writes about a single work, I still intended to relegate Gottfried's classical and contemporary pre-texts to a few footnotes. This was a pragmatic decision, designed to focus my research and spare me the trouble of having to do much reading. As my research interests shifted, dealing with a portion of Gottfried's sources became an inescapable evil. Thus I opted to introduce a select number of Arthurian Romances into the dissertation.

I am unsure whether I should say that I read *Tristan* through the lens of Arthurian Romance or if I read Arthurian Romance through the lens of *Tristan*. I will split the difference and say that one informs the other and that reading them together should prove enlightening. In the next four chapter, I choose to read Gottfried's text as a response to four foundational Arthurian Romances: *Erec et Enide* and *Yvain* by Chrétien de Troyes and *Erec* and *Iwein* by Hartmann von Aue, and *Parzival* by Wolfram von Eschenbach. For the purposes of this dissertation, my definition of Arthurian Romance does not extend beyond these works aside from the occasional reference to other texts by Chrétien and Hartmann. This means that any forthcoming phrases such as "In the Arthurian Romance . . ." must be understood to include just a fraction of the relevant works.

Pairing *Tristan* with several Arthurian Romances results in intertextual conflict. On the one hand, Gottfried's poem has little in common with the texts adapted by Chrétien, Hartmann and Wolfram. Although *Tristan*'s adaptor gives his poem an Arthurian gloss, the similarities between the two genres are deliberately superficial.[17] On the other hand, Gottfried takes great pains to avoid writing an imitative Arthurian Romance text. This turns *Tristan* into an Arthurian Romance which fervently denies being an Arthurian Romance. As William C. McDonald explains: "In Gottfried's retelling, the legend assumes the shape of an Arthurian romance *ex negativo*: he pays heed to the predominant criteria of the genre, for example, the romance patterns of adventures and quests, but so distorts the poetic tradition as to remove its fundamental coherence."[18] For the sake of simplicity, I am labeling Gottfried's *Tristan* an Arthurian Romance because of its close association with the genre.

Even if one disagrees with this classification of *Tristan* as an Arthurian Romance, the comparison of the genre with *Tristan* nevertheless provides an interesting way of undertaking close readings of the Arthurian Romances. I treat Gottfried's poem as a response to adaptors who either wrote a generation before he did (Chrétien; Hartmann) or contemporaneously (Wolfram). In the dissertation, I label Chrétien and Hartmann as "first generation" Arthurian Romance adaptors, and I call Gottfried and Wolfram "second generation" Arthurian Romance adaptors. The terminology is not elegant, but it allows us

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[17] "It is customary to refer to Gottfried's *Tristan and Isolt* as a courtly epic. This is true only in so far as the milieu in which the story is set is courtly and the material of the story belongs to the Arthurian cycle." Jackson, "Gottfried von Strassburg," in: *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages: A Collaborative History*, ed. Roger Sherman Loomis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), 148.

[18] McDonald, "Gottfried von Strassburg: *Tristan* and the Arthurian Tradition," *In Hôhem Prîse : a Festschrift In Honor of Ernst S. Dick: Presented On the Occasion of His Sixtieth Birthday, April 7, 1989*, ed. Winder McDonnell (Göppingen: Kümmerle Verlag, 1989), 247.

to explore the mutations within the genre of Arthurian Romance in France and Germany over the span of about 40 years, from roughly 1170-1210. My primary interest is Gottfried's reading of the genre as an adaptor. I contend that when Gottfried von Strassburg wrote *Tristan*, he not only borrowed from the genre of the Arthurian Romance, he wrote about it. *Tristan* rehashes and exploits several genre conventions. However, to discuss one man's reading of the genre first requires a discussion of the genre itself, which is vast and amorphous.

<u>A Short Glossary</u>

There are a handful of terms which appear repeatedly throughout this dissertation. For the sake of clarity, I would like to define them here.

Adaptor: The use of the term "author" is so intertwined with beliefs about the originality of a work that I have decided to refer to Chrétien, Gottfried, Hartmann and Wolfram as adaptors. This means that they are readers and interpreters before they put their words on the page.

Arthurian Romance: As I explain above, my understanding of "Arthurian Romance" is limited to Chrétien's *Erec et Enide* and *Yvain*, Gottfried's *Tristan*, Hartmann's *Erec* and *Iwein*, and Wolfram's *Parzival*. Gottfried's path of reading certainly covers much more than this, and I do occasionally cite others' works.

Figure: Throughout this dissertation, I refrain from using the term "characters" to describe persons such as Tristan, Isolde, Mark, etc. "Character" is far too modern a term to be applicable to any of the Arthurian Romances.

Speaker-Listener: Following D.H. Green's example,[19] I refer to speakers and listeners rather than authors, writers or and readers because all these adaptations were intended to be read aloud. This means that listeners, although not in a position to read the text on their own, can nevertheless possess the same necessary cultural literacy as their literate counterparts.

Text: As stated above, I have built a definition of text based on Barthes' essay, "From Work to Text." Particularly as the Arthurian Romances were read aloud, it is appropriate that we think of these narratives as written texts communicated orally. The Arthurian Romances were not bound works on a shelf as we find them today[20] and generates poetic, signifying discourse in every telling.

<u>Chapter Summaries</u>

As I contend that Gottfried is a reader before he is a writer, I first perform a selective reading of one or two Arthurian Romances before moving to *Tristan*.

In chapter two, I look at Chrétien's *Yvain* and Hartmann's *Iwein*, paying particular attention to the titular figure's cousin, Calogrenant/Kalogrenant. This secondary character is of great importance because he speaks, in lieu of the adaptor, about the possibilities and pitfalls of literary production. In a subversive move against the Arthurian Court, Calogrenant/Kalogrenant heralds the arrival of a new, poetic language. I then examine how Yvain/Iwein's actions initially depict him as a bad listener of Arthurian Romance

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[19] *The Art of Recognition in Wolfram's* Parzival (London: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

[20] Barthes' draws a strong distinction between work and text which seems particularly important in any discussion of medieval adaptation: "The difference is this: the work is a fragment of substance, occupying a part of the space of books (in a library for example), the Text is a methodological field. [...] the work can be seen (in bookshops, in catalogues, in exam syllabuses), the text is a process of demonstration, speaks according to certain rules (or against certain rules), the work can be held in the hand, the text is held in language, only exists in the movement of a discourse (or rather, it is Text for the very reason that it knows itself as text)[.]" "From Work to Text," 156-157.

who learns how to listen. I suggest that Yvain/Iwein's transformative moment occurs when he goes mad and loses his senses, enabling him to listen properly for the first time. I then turn to the figure of Tristan and examine his initial entrance into Mark's Court. The boy wonder is capable of a great number of tricks which amaze and overwhelm his audience. Tristan's alluring fictions prove to be more enjoyable and, for a short time, meaningful than the unpleasant truths about Mark's court.

In chapter three, I take a cue from Derrida and suggest that the knight in the Arthurian Romance operates as a deconstructionist within the narrative. The knight is a threat to the established order, especially to the Arthurian Court, and his actions constitute a rebellion against moribund courtly language. To explore this thesis, I use Chrétien's *Erec et Enide* and Hartmann's *Erec*, in which Erec must learn how enact poetic change through his actions. Erec's final battle against the giant Mabonagrin heralds in a new era in which language's shortcomings have been resolved through Erec's transformation into a signifying text. I then look at Tristan's upbringing in and escape from Parmenie. Language, particularly written language, traps Tristan at an early age and causes him to become aware of the tragic fate which awaits him. As we shall see, Tristan is a reluctant martyr and tries to perform Erec's miracle in reverse and uncouple the link between his name, identity and fate.

In chapter four, I focus exclusively on Wolfram's *Parzival*. Wolfram writes as a second-generation adaptor of Arthurian Romance and sees himself burdened by the failed textual legacies of his predecessors, Chrétien and Hartmann. I treat the figures of Parzival's parents as two different and irreconcilable textual legacies, which Wolfram's

protagonist must evaluate and then renounce. In the form of the Grail, Wolfram offers a tempered image of language's renewal which lies somewhere between Chrétien and Hartmann's hope for a reforming of the signifier and signified and Gottfried's Tristan, who offers fictions which are more appealing than reality.

In my fifth and final chapter, I focus on King Mark and his nearly unshakable sense of doubt. In my opinion, Mark is a man on the defensive. He fervently wishes to restore order in his kingdom as well as his own authority. When Tristan arrives, Mark believes there's a chance for such renewal. Unfortunately for the Cornish King, Tristan is not a cooperative text and undermines Mark's authority rather than supporting it. What Mark fails to understand is that pliancy has become a necessity. As evidence for this, I look at the scene of Tristan's discovery in Ireland, in which a resolute Isolde, set on murdering Tristan, becomes so entangled in his fictions that she cannot kill him without also negating her own self. I conclude by returning to Mark one last time, who seeks that most elusive of feelings, certainty.

The red thread underlying the entire dissertation is the idea of escape, and we shall see how all the protagonists spend a great deal of time running away from their troubles. Even centuries later, the scenarios sound familiar. Having marital troubles? Go on a trip with your best friend and leave your wife at home, like Yvain/Iwein. Stuck at a tedious party? Cut out early while everyone else is trapped playing a game, like Erec. Is mommy not letting you go out and play with your new friends? Leave her behind, like Parzival. Unhappy living up to the expectations others have of you? Then be someone else, like Tristan. This is a crude summation of several episodes from the texts examined

in the dissertation, but one way in which we can read Gottfried's *Tristan* and the other

Arthurian Romances is to treat these narratives as stories about getting away from it all.

Chapter Two
Crying Out in the Wilderness

<u>Introduction</u>

The focus of this chapter will be a comparison of Chrétien's *Yvain* and Hartmann's *Iwein* with Gottfried's *Tristan*. I suggest that these three works question the intention, function and purpose of Arthurian Romance. Most of my analysis of Chrétien and Hartmann's texts centers on the opening scene because it is here that the French and German adaptations offer a reflection on the relationship between the speaker and the listener. Chrétien and Hartmann doubt but still fervently wish to believe in the possibility of communication through a text subjected to the scrutiny of the listeners. Through additional examples from Gottfried as well as from Wolfram, I intend to demonstrate that all four adaptors depict themselves as purveyors of a genre in which they have little faith.

In the second half of this chapter, I turn to *Tristan* and examine how Gottfried rethinks the goals of textual communication via the genre-expert *par excellence* and "master dissembler" Tristan. As a bridge bridge between *Yvain*/*Iwein* and *Tristan,* I undertake a brief and selective reading of the portion of *Tristan* generally referred to as the "Literary Excursus," in which Gottfried voices his concern about the negative ramifications of widespread literacy. As this is a chapter on beginnings, I then focus on Tristan's triumphant entrance at King Mark's court. In this scene, we find many of the precepts, assumptions and wishes articulated in the opening scene to *Yvain*/*Iwein* at work, but there is a catch. Tristan does not entertain Chrétien and Hartmann's fantasies about the possibilities of this new genre. Through Tristan, Gottfried turns the Arthurian

Romance into a farce. The figure of Tristan gives his audience whatever it wants to see and hear but also makes his listeners slaves to his will.

Chrétien and Hartmann each uses a figure named Calogrenant/Kalogrenant to expound on the relationship between a speaker and his audience through "a process of demonstration" called the text.[1] Through the text Calogrenant/Kalogrenant produces, the two adaptors engage in a discourse on poetics. I define poetics as a series of interconnected texts[2] which communicate discursively, stress their non-divine origins and posit but never confirm the existence of a fixed center.[3] Calogrenant/Kalogrenant not only articulates the concerns of his adaptor over the use and misuse of poetics, but echoes of Calogrenant/Kalogrenant's apprehensions are found in Gottfried and Wolfram as well. The ultimately goal of poetics through the text is communication, an idea Marc Chinca stresses in his monograph on Tristan. Chinca writes that poetics are "not concerned with art for art's sake but with the communication between author and public through the medium of the literary text."[4] To write an Arthurian Romance is to address and offer a solution to the inadequacy of words through the medium of the text, making the text to an Arthurian Romance a commentary on and active demonstration of poetics.

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[1] Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 157.

[2] I admit that "interconnected texts" is a redundant phrase because the very idea of the text requires intertextuality or interconnectedness. As Barthes pithily explains: "The Text is plural." Ibid., 159.

[3] In drawing a line between poetry and other writing in the Middle Ages, with particular attention paid to Plato, Boccaccio and Chaucer, Jesse M. Gellrich writes: "The play of poetry took the sacrality - the 'mythology' - out of writing, preventing its growth into myth. The insistence on fixed and centered structure, one of the defining properties of mythology, is obvious in many medieval notions [...] But the play of medieval fictional writing refuses such fixity, plays with the location of the center, and accommodates its own deficiencies by making no mistake about its difference from the natural and supernatural orders." In: *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages: Language Theory, Mythology, and Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 48.

[4] *History, Fiction, Verisimilitude: Studies in the Poetics of Gottfried's* Tristan (London: The Modern Humanities Research Association for the Institute of German Studies, 1993), 10.

Yet *Yvain* and *Iwein* offer a perverse, even contradictory image of poetics' implementation. Here a few words about the figure Calogrenant/Kalogrenant are necessary. He is an Arthurian knight as well as Yvain/Iwein's cousin. At the beginning of Chrétien and Hartmann's texts, Calogrenant/Kalogrenant is surprisingly willing to speak openly of his own disgrace (*honte, Y* 60)[5] or his great suffering (*von grôzer seiner swaere, I* 94) without any provocation. His audience consists of Guinevere and other knights from the Arthurian Court, who learn how Calogrenant/Kalogrenant sought adventure and was defeated in a joust near a magical fountain.

The most curious aspect of this scene is that Calogrenant/Kalogrenant admits to being a failure and offers this information voluntarily. Joseph J. Duggan questions why Calogrenant should speak at all, given that the story disgraces the teller.[6] This is a valid question which has hitherto gone largely unanswered and has implications for our understanding of Chrétien's *Yvain*, Hartmann's *Iwein* and the genre of Arthurian Romance. While it is widely agreed that Calogrenant/Kalogreant speaks, at least in part, for the adaptor,[7] what has still not been explained, to the best of my knowledge, is Chrétien's decision to link personal catastrophe with a lengthy discourse on poetics in the Arthurian Romance. For Chrétien's German adaptor, Hartmann, this mixture of storytelling and commentary is so important that he expands the role of Kalogrenant rather than reduces it.

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[5] Admitting to failure is not an action most figures in Arthurian Romance undertake without coercion. Calogrenant's readiness to put his disgrace on display stands in marked contrast to Lancelot's reluctance to be subjected to dishonor by boarding the cart. See Virginia Greene's essay in *Thinking Through Chrétien de Troyes* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2011), 61.
[6] *The Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 115.
[7] See: Tom Artin, *The Allegory of Adventure: Reading Chrétien's* Erec *and* Yvain (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1974), 39.

Half-mimetic figure, half-diegetic narrator, Calogrenant/Kalogrenant is neither fully within Chrétien or Hartmann's text nor completely outside of it. His problems as a knight have very real implications for the rest of *Yvain*/*Iwein*. On a mimetic level, Calogrenant/Kalogrenant threatens the mythical greatness of the Arthurian Court by speaking poorly of himself. Moreover, his words have importance for those listeners outside of the text. There is a religious aura surrounding the disgraced knight, who prophesies a better future by speaking of past failures. Calogrenant/Kalogrenant's words lie somewhere between an irrational, faith-like hope that a broken linguistic system can somehow be mended and despair about the capacity of language to communicate. Like John the Baptist, "the voice of one crying in the wilderness" (John 1:23),[8] Calogrenant/ Kalogrenant speaks prophetically of language's restoration. His verbal actions suit one possible definition of his name. According to Tom Artin, Calogrenant is "a compound from the Late Latin verb *calo* 'I call,' or 'proclaim,' and the present participle of the Old French verb *grener* 'to germinate' or 'sprout.' Calogrenant is the sower of the seed that is the word."[9] The challenge facing us is to determine what kind of message this 12th Century sage expouses and whether or not his message is substantiated or subverted by the Arthurian Romance in which it appears.

Enter the Malcontent

Whether speaking in Old French or Middle High German, Calogrenant/ Kalogrenant is a first-class killjoy. Roger Loomis suggests that the name means 'Cai-lo-

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[8] St. John the Baptist even receives mention in both Chrétien and Hartmann. Arthur swears to arrive at the magical fountain by the feast day of John the Baptist (*Y* 669; *I* 901).
[9] *The Allegory of Adventure*, 44.

grenant is really 'Kay the Grumbler',[10] and I propose that Loomis' definition is perfectly in sync with Tom Artin's interpretation of the Calogrenant as a "sewer of the word." Yvain/Iwein's cousin lacks the seneschal's undisguised vitriol, but Calogrenant/ Kaogrenant and Kay are both quite capable of dampening high spirits. In the midst of vibrant festivities, Calgorenant/Kalogrenant decides to tell a tale about his own failure. Even more curious than the juxtaposition of the jubilant atmosphere of the Arthurian Court and Calogrenant/Kalogrenant's own misfortune is the knight's lack of faith in his audience. He speaks to esteemed but vapid listeners, none of whom understands him. For a figure who espouses the importance of listening carefully so that a speaker's words might reach his audience's hearts, it is very strange that Calogrenant/Kalogrenant decides to waste his time with the likes of Arthur's Court.

Other critics have already suggested that Calogrenant/Kalogrenant acts as a surrogate for the adaptor and that his words reflect the intentions of Chrétien and, later, Hartmann.[11] However, such studies leave aside an important question: why should Chrétien put his most detailed comments about the potential for textual communication into the mouth of a disgraced knight? Neither Chrétien nor Hartmann leaves any doubt

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[10] *Arthurian Tradition and Chrétien de Troyes* (New York: Octagon Books, 1982), 275.

[11] See: Joseph M. Sullivan, "Kalogreant/Calogrenant, Space, and Communication in Hartmann's *Iwein* and Chretienis *Yvain*," *Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies* 42.1 (Feb. 2006), 1; Duggan, *The Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*, 272; Artin, *The Allegory of Adventure*, 39; Green, *The Art of Recognition in Wolfram's Parzival*, 2; Huber, "Höfischer Roman als Integumentum? Das Votum Thomasins von Zerklaere," *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur*, 115.2 (1986)," 86.

that Calogrenant/Kalogrenant tells a story which harms his standing at court.[12] Yet Calogrenant/Kalogrenant so thoroughly dominates the beginning of *Yvain/Iwein* that he casts a shadow over the remainder of the poem. If one were to stop reading at the end of Calogrenant/Kalogrenant's tale, it would seem that this Arthurian Romance should be called *Calogrenant/Kalogrenant*, not *Yvain, le chevalier ou lion/Iwein*. The prominence of communicative failure in the narrative's first scene requires an explanation.

We can explain the attention paid to Calogrenant/Kalogrenant by Chrétien and Hartmann if we allow the disgraced knight to shape our understanding of Yvain/Iwein. The central protagonist only comes to the forefront after Calogrenant/Kalogrenant has concluded his story. Up until this point, Yvain/Iwein has only been named as a member of Calogrenant/Kalogrenant's audience (*Y* 56; *I* 88). Otherwise, Calogrenant/Kalogrenant's cousin is entirely nondescript. Green sees Yvain/Iwein's anonymity as a deliberate choice made by Chrétien and subsequently Hartmann. The two adaptors catch their audience off guard by first ignoring the figure who later becomes the poem's central focus. Without the aid of a modern edition, a listening audience cannot yet know which knight will be the story's focal point.[13]

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[12] Chrétien comments that Calogrenant relates to his listeners *un conte, / Non de s'enor, mes de sa honte* (*Y* 59-60); [a tale not of honour but of his [Calogrenant's] disgrace (295)]; Calogrenant is reluctant to continue when the Queen joins the group (*Y* 120-123)ö Calogrenant says that he returned from his battle with Escaldos *honteusement* (*Y* 560) [in shame (302)] and considers himself a *fou* [fool (302)]: *Si vos ai conté come fos / Ce qu'onques mes conter ne vos* (*Y* 579-580) [Now like a fool I've told you what previously I have never wanted to tell (302)]. In Hartmann's version, Kalogrenant's disgrace is equally apparent: Kalogrenant tells a story *von grôzer sîner swaere / und von deheiner sîner vrümekheit* (*I* 94-95) [of a great tribulation of his that hardly testified to his knightly prowess (238)]; after his failure at the fountain, he is *in dem laester [...] gesehen* (*I*, 790) [revealed in disgrace (245)] and has *einem tôren glîch getân* (*I* 705) [acted like a fool (246)] by telling his companions his story.

[13] Wolfram takes this structure further extremes in *Parzival*, where the title figure's name only appears once at the beginning of the poem (*P* 39,26). Green identifies the same strategy in Chrétien and Hartmann: "as with the repeated mention of Yvain's name at the start of both the French and German romances, we can have no idea that this is indeed the name of the protagonist." The audience for *Yvain* or *Iwein* does not have to endure quite so many lines before discovering which knight will be the focus of the narrative. Green, *The Art of Recognition in Wolfram's* Parzival, 17.

Yvain/Iwein's anonymity matters for several reasons. First, it highlights the "expect the unexpected" maxim of the Arthurian Romance. Second, the twist demonstrates the value of listening carefully because relevant information is initially withheld from us. Third, and most important, is the centrality of failure in *Yvain* and *Iwein*. Both adaptations depict failed communication between speakers and listeners. Chrétien and Hartmann decide to make failure their starting point, and the mordant tone set at the text's beginning never fully dissipates. Calogrenant/Kalogrenant becomes silent after his tale, but the poem really belongs to him because the remained of *Yvain*/*Iwein* vindicates Calogrenant/Kalogrenant's distrust in the possibility of textual communication even as it offers a more a glimmer of hope.[14]

The potential for communicability is so important in *Yvain* and *Iwein* because the threat looms that language might become or already be meaningless. Consequently, misunderstandings in language are a cause for serious crisis. Following Yvain's failure to keep his promise in Chrétien's adaptation, Lunete hurls insults at the traitor-knight in front of the Arthurian Court. According to Lunete, Yvain is: *Le desleal, le guileor, / le mançongier, le jeingleor* (*Y* 2719-2720) [a cheat, a seducer, and a thief (329)]. In this moment of humiliation, Yvain is called a liar who does not keep his word. Like an unfaithful husband (*Qui l* [Laudine]*'a leissee et deceüe*, 2721) [who had beguiled and

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[14] Our analysis of Gottfried's reaction to Calogrenant/Kalogrenant will come in the second half of this chapter, but it is worth noting that Gottfried knew Hartmann's corpus and probably Chrétien's as well. Gottfried praises Hartmann in *Tristan* and may even borrow terminology from the now-lost prologue to Hartmann's German-language adaptation of *Erec et Enide*. See: Haug, *Literaturtheorie im deutschen Mittelalter: Von den Anfängen bis zum Ende des 13. Jahrhunderts* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1992), 120. Gottfried's depiction of Isolde's maid, Brengane, bears a close resemblance to Lunete, the figure in *Yvain*/*Iwein*. Gerhard Schindele also sees a repetition of the Yvain/Iwein, Laudine and Esclados/Askalon configuration in the figures of Tristan, Isolde and Morolt. In both instances, the hatred of the woman (Laudine/Isolde) for the murderer (Yvain/Iwein/Tristan) of her husband (Esclados/Askalon) or family member (Morolt) leads to a forced reconciliation and then to love. See: *Tristan: Metamorphose und Tradition* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1971)*, 50-51.

deceived her [Laudine] (329)]),[15] Yvain has abandoned his wife and shown his word to be false.

Yet Yvain/Iwein is hardly the only figure against whom such charges could be leveled. Calogrenant/Kalogrenant reminds us that a language crisis is well underway before Lunete takes Yvain/Iwein to task for his broken promise. The value of words is called into question in the opening scene to this Arthurian Romance, and poor Yvain/Iwein is merely guilty of continuing an unfortunate trend. The problem is endemic, and the *example par excellence* of miscommunication and misrepresentation in language is the Arthurian Court. Yvain/Iwein may not initially be any better than his cohorts, but he suffers for a transgression many others commit, including his accuser, the master-wordsmith Lunete.

Chrétien and Hartmann use *Yvain*/*Iwein* to explore the consequences of failed communication between a speaker and his audience. To understand this crisis, we need Calogrenant/Kalogrenant's backstory to frame and reinforce the poem's constitutive elements. Each adaptor uses this first scene to bring his uncertainties about the accuracy and transparency of language to the forefront. I would like to suggest that we might consider Calogrenant/Kalogrenant to be a rebel in the midst of the Arthurian Court. He is an expert on literary conventions,[16] who uses this expertise to attack the accepted standards of narrative construction. As a medieval John the Baptist, Calogrenant/Kalogrenant admonishes others so that they might repent before it is too late.

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[15] Lunete's language in Hartmann's adaptation is even more damning. She calls Iwein a *verrâtaere* (*I*, 3118) as well as *einen triuwelôsen man* (*I*, 3183). Lawson translates both words as "traitor" (270; 271).
[16] In Hartmann's adaptation (*I* 244-258, quoted below), Kalogrenant begins his address in the form of an *exordium*. See: Haug, *Literaturtheorie*, 130.

Rolling the Dice

We now turn to Calogrenant/Kalogrenant's instructions to his audience, placing particular emphasis on the possible gains for both the speaker and the listener. Except for Wolfram's *Parzival*, no other Arthurian Romance so clearly demonstrates language's potential to enact change. Calogrenant/Kalogrenant's story sets in motions acts of revenge, murder, marriage, betrayal and even launches an invasion.[17] Language has far-reaching and unexpected consequences, many of which are violent and destructive. Considering language's significant effects in *Yvain/Iwein*, it can be argued that Calogrenant/Kalogrenant's *exordium* is more than a set of formulaic directives. He instructs his audience about words and language because he wishes to prevent the turmoil generated by an errant word.

On the face of it, Calogrenant/Kalogrenant's commands are not unusual. He tells his listeners to pay attention and entreats them not to let his words go unnoticed and unappreciated:

> Cuer et oroilles me randez!
> Car parole oïe est perdue,
> S'ele n'est de cuer antandue.
> De tes i a, que ce, qu'il öent,
> N'antandent pas et si le loent;
> Et cil n'an ont mes que l'oïe,
> Des que li cuers n'i antant mie.
> As oroilles vient la parole
> aussi come li vanz, qui vole;
> Mes n'i ereste ne demore,
> Ainz s'an part an mout petit d'ore,

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[17] This same story causes a foreign army to launch an unprovoked assault on Laudine's lands, born of a rash oath (*Y* 662-677; *I* 893-906). Arthur's court presents a serious threat. The seneschal in Laudine's court speaks in ominous tones of Arthur's arrival: *guerre nos sort. / N'est jorz, que li rois ne s'atort, / De quanquë il se puet haster, / Por venir noz terres gaster* (*Y* 2081-2084) [war is upon us; not a day passes without the king making ready as fast as he can to come and lay waste to our lands (321)].

Se li cuers n'est si esveilliez,
Qu'au prandre soit apareilliez[.]
[...]
Et qui or me voldra antandre,
Cuer et oroilles me doit randre;
Car ne vuel pas parler de songe,
Ne de fable ne de mançonge,
Don maint autre vos ont servi
Ainz vos dirai ce, que je vi.
(*Y* 150-162; 169-174)

[Lend me your hearts and ears, for words that are not understood by the heart are lost completely. There are those who hear something without understanding it, yet praise it; they have only the faculty of hearing, since the heart does not comprehend it. The word comes to the ears like whistling wind, but doesn't stop or linger there [...] So he who would hear me now must surrender heart and ears to me for I do not wish to speak of a dream, or a fable, or a lie, which many others have served you; instead I shall tell what I have seen myself (297).]

Sît ir michs niht welt erlân,
so vernemet ez mit guotem site,
unde mietet mich dâ mite:
ich sag iu deste gerner vil,
ob manz ze rehte merken wil.
Man verliuset michel sagen,
man enwellez merken unde dagen.
Maniger biutet diu ôren dar:
ern nemes ouch mit dem herzen war,
sone wirt im niht wan der dôz,
und ist der schade alze grôz:
wan si verliesent beide ir arbeit,
der dâ hoeret und der dâ seit.
Ir muget mir deste gerner dagen:
ichn wil iu deheine lüge sagen. (*I* 244-258)

[Since you will not excuse me, then reward me by listening politely. I will be happier to tell it to you if you listen attentively. A lot of storytelling is wasted when people don't keep quiet and don't pay attention. Many listeners lend their ears, but if they don't pay attention with their hearts, then nothing registers but the sound. It is a great loss, because both parties are wasting their efforts, the listener as well as the narrator. Because I am not going to tell you any lies, you can all the more readily give me silence (240).]

Calogrenant/Kalogrenant worries that his words (*parole, sagen*) will fall on deaf ears. A perceptive audience does not only hear the words but also understands them. Calogrenant/Kalogrenant demands that his listeners be prepared to interpret the text he is about to impart to them. But what does it actually mean to *Cuer et oroilles me randez!/ biutet diu ôren dar?* This is not such an easy question to answer, given that Calogrenant/ Kalogrenant's audience, having not heard the tale, does not know what he will say nor what they will have understood as a consequence of listening to him.

For elucidation of Calogrenant/Kalogrenant's formulaic but curious instructions, I suggest we turn to a passage from Wolfram's prologue to *Parzival*. Wolfram reiterates Calogrenant/Kalogrenant's sentiments. He inquires on behalf of the audience about the purpose of his text, proving that the question, although unanswerable, is a valid one. Rather than explain his didactic intentions (*guoter lêre*) as expressed through the text, Wolfram demonstrates through metaphor what careful listening looks like:

> ouch erkante ich nie sô wîsen man,
> ern möhte gerne künde hân,
> welher stiure disiu maere gernt
> und waz si guoter lêre wernt.
> dar an si nimmer des verzagent,
> beidiu si vliehent unde jagent,
> si entwîchent unde kêrent,
> si lasternt unde êrent.
> swer mit disen schanzen allen kan,
> an dem hât witze wol getân,
> der sich niht versitzet noch vergêt
> und sich anders wol verstêt. (*P* 2,5-16)

[Never have I met a man so wise but that he would have liked to find out what authority this story claims and what good lessons it provides. On that score it never wants for courage, now to flee, now to charge, dodge and return, condemn and praise. Whoever can make sense out of all these turns of chance has been well

> treated by Wisdom, or whoever does not *sit* too tight, or *walk* astray, but in general under*stands* (4 - Italics are found in Mustard and Passage's translation).]

Both Calogrenant/Kalogrenant and Wolfram remind the listener of what he should already know: intellectual curiosity is a prerequisite for enjoying the text as well as for understanding it.[18] Wolfram equates the acquisition of meaning through the text with the abandonment of extant knowledge. Just as a knight is confronted with the unknown without thinking about its significance, listening carefully means hearing the speaker's words and not engaging in interpretation. The audience for the Arthurian Romance is asked to experience the tale without thinking. Via Calogrenant/Kalogrenant, Chrétien, Hartmann and Wolfram suggest that adventure, including the listeners' adventure in interpretation, means waiting for the unknown to arrive with assurances that it will. Just as adventure will be forthcoming, Chrétien, Hartmann and Wolfram's promise the listeners: *guote lêre* will, in due course, arrive.

Speaking more broadly, the three adaptors assure us that however disparate the events themselves, the narrative will make sense after the fact. In Stahuljak's words, Wolfram promises contingency: "The semantic field of *avanture* is thus rather large, combining both the state of having arrived, a form of determinism and finality, but also the contingency of an occurrence. With chance and arbitrariness at its origin, adventure can be identified as event and as contingency."[19] The citation from the prologue to

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[18] In his prologue to *Lancelot*, Chrétien comments that, having been given the *matiere et san* by Marie de Champagne, he *il s'antremet / de panser si que rien n'i met* (*L* 27-28) [strives carefully to add nothing (207)]. Virginia Greene treats the presence of the verb *panser* as an indication that Chrétien was assigned "the task of producing not only a story, but a thoughtful one, which will require its readers to involve themselves too in the task of thinking, without which a *fiction* cannot be produced." Even in the absence of such a verb from Calogrenant/Kalogrenant and Wolfram's instructions, we can be confident that these figures and the adaptor make a similar demand on their audiences. In: *Thinking Through Chrétien de Troyes*, 50.

[19] Idib., 80.

Parzival along with Calogrenant/Kalogrenant's statements lay bare the operating principle of Arthurian Romances. Speaking as someone who has read and experienced the narrative, Wolfram cautions his listeners that there will be twists and turns along an unanticipated route. *Parzival*'s adaptor depicts the Arthurian Romance as an unruly composition. The listener is expected to give up control and flee (*vliehent*), charge (*jagent*), dodge (*entwîchent*) and return (*kêrent*) along with the poem. Only when the journey is over may the poem be completed through condemnation *and* praise (*lasternt unde êrent*). The narrative ends without definitive closure to allow for an interpretation of the text. Wolfram expresses confidence that his listeners will pay attention to his tale *und sich anders wol verstêt* "in general understand," echoing Calogrenant/Kalogrenant's sentiments and those of Chrétien and Hartmann. The significance of the tale will not be immediately apparent. The adaptor of Arthurian Romance commands his listeners to dig beneath the surface and warns his audience against treating the tale as a mere amusement.

Calogrenant/Kalogrenant asks his listeners to make a wager when he promises that listening to his tale will prove worthwhile. However, the only evidence Calogrenant/ Kalogrenant can offer for this assertion is the untold tale. Thus the potential realizability of communication between Calogrenant/Kalogrenant and his audience is offered and must be accepted before the speaker begins to talk. Like the adaptor of the Arthurian Romance, Calogrenant/Kalogrenant addresses his listeners from perspective of the tale's conclusion. He promises to communicate with his audience because without this

reassurance the speaker has no motive to speak[20] and the audience has no reason to listen. Calogrenant/Kalogrenant instructs his small audience of courtiers to listen, but a good listener understands that the giving of one's trust to another's words amounts to a bet made without any assurances of a successful outcome.[21]

The audience for Arthurian Romance must make the same wager. As Bruckner explains in her monograph, *Shaping Romance*, Calogrenant/Kalogrenant's instructions in Chrétien's adaptation, and by extension Hartmann's, can be understood as a guide to the audience:

> Of course Calogrenant is located squarely in the fiction of Chrétien's *Yvain*, but his *récit* not only offers a *mise en abyme* of the entire romance [...] Calogrenant calls for his public's attention beyond the superficial level of an immediate enjoyment, associated with the ears and the passive act of listening, and enjoins his listeners to wake up their hearts, to take and enclose and keep ("prendre, et anclorre, et retenir," v. 164) the words heard and submit them to a further act of *entandement* constituted by an understanding deep in the heart.[22]

The listener becomes a receptacle for the words of the Arthurian Romance and will only work, rework and thus alter the text after the poem's completion. Until the process of interpretation begins beyond the confines of the text produced by the adaptor, anyone willing to engage as an active listener can only assume that there are meanings to be

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[20] At least he has no honorable reason to speak. Chrétien, Hartmann and Wolfram all take great pains to distance themselves from those who make their living exclusively through storytelling. See: Chrétien's attack on the traveling storytellers in *Erec et Enide*, (*EE* 19-22), Harmann's references to his writing and reading as a leisure activity in *Der arme Heinrich* (*DaH* 1-11), and Wolfram's denial of his own literacy in *Parzival* (*P* 115, 25-30).

[21] As Laudine and Lunete later learn, though, familiarity with a speaker does not make him credible. Laudine and Lunete only see through Yvain's *jangle* (*Y* 329) [guile (329)] after Laudine's second husband has broken his promise. In Hartmann, Lunete makes the listener's disappointment even more acute. Iwein appeared to be a man of his word, but this left her ignorant of his intentions (*I* 3120-3124): *sîniu wort diu sint guot: / von den scheidet sich der muot* (*I* 3125-3126) [His words are noble, his character is anything but (270)].

[22] Bruckner, *Shaping Romance*, 10. For similar comments about Hartmann's *Iwein*, see: Beate Hennig, '*Maere*' und '*Werc*': *Zur Funktion von erzählerischem Handeln im* Iwein *Hartmanns von Aue* (Göppingen: Kümmerle Verlag, 1981), 78.

uncovered. If the listener chooses to "enclose and keep" the speaker's words in his heart and subject them to later acts of interpretation, he must first conclude, apropos of nothing, that the entire enterprise is not a waste of time and that the speaker's words (*wort*) and intentions (*muot*) are *guot*.

Through Calogrenant/Kalogrenant, Chrétien and Hartmann invite us to take a chance and bet that their language is poetic in so far as it deliberately disguises its meaning. The two adaptors indirectly invoke the *Integumentum-Lehre* developed at the Cathedral School in Chartres in the first half of the 12th Century. *Ingenumentum* refers to a covering, a shield or armor. Haug offers a succinct definition of this poetic-hermeneutic concept. *Integumentum* means that "moralische oder philosophische [we should add, poetic] Wahrheiten in literarische Formen 'eingekleidet' und auf diese Weise anschaulich vermittelt werden können."[23] For Haug, the *Integumentum-Lehre* goes further than allegory by alluding to an otherwise imperceptible connection between word and thought: "Chrétien verwendet vielmehr die exegetische Metaphorik der Sinnenthüllung, um damit für sein Werk eine Wahrheit zu beanspruchen, die nicht mit dem wörtlichen Sinn identisch ist."[24]

The positing of hidden meaning offers the adaptor a considerable amount of levity. If someone were to accuse the him of improprieties, he can easily respond that the listener has not understood him. Christoph Huber, building on Haug's arguments, also identifies the *Integumentum-Lehre* as an integral part of the Arthurian Romances and notes that the notion of hidden legitimacy can be disguised in the form of negative

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[23] *Literaturtheorie im Deutschen Mittelalter*, 104.
[24] Ibid..

examples as well as in positive ones: "Für den erwarteten Leser liegt die moralische Verfassung auf der Hand. Auch der Text ist moralisch festgelegt; die dargestellten Inhalte sind aber nicht nur positiv, sondern unter Umständen auch negativ exemplarisch."[25] The *Integumentum-Lehre* is not the equivalent of saying "anything goes," but the adaptor now has license to wander away from more established and recognized narrative material.

For Chrétien's Calogrenant, the invocation of the *Integumentum-Lehre* offers a foundation to words which would otherwise lack poetic meaning and be vapid and empty, like the wind (*li vanz*, 158). From the perspective of the listener, however, there can be no assurance that the speaker produces anything other than wind or, in modern parlance, hot air. Calogrenant/Kalogrenant's simple instructions are difficult to follow because there is no reason why one should comply with them. Hence doubts are understandable. However, if the listener approaches the poem with doubts about its value and questions the words as he hears them, then he will not be listening correctly. Speaking and listening might easily amount to nothing more than a waste of time.

Thus disaster threatens the Arthurian Romance before the poem even begins, as the adaptor must promise poetic truths in an unheard and untested text. Calogrenant/ Kalogrenant's instructions to his fictional audience, and by extension to us, are not just reminders of what constitutes successful speaking and listening. They also underline the ways in which this process can go awry. If the speaker behaves like Yvain/Iwein towards Laudine and presents his audience with words which disguise a malevolent intention, then this is a shortcoming attentive listening cannot fix. Even though the adaptor might

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[25] "Höfischer Roman als Integumentum?", 82.

list his sources and/or have a reputation from other works, the listener will not know whether or not he has wasted his time until some point after the tale is completed.

To further complicate problems, outside texts offer no assistance. The listener is told that any similarity to other tales of a similar ilk offers, at most, a superficial resemblance. In the prologue to *Erec et Enide*, Chrétien disparages his competitors instead of invoking an authoritative source to legitimize his right to tell the tale of Erec:

> D'Erec, le fil Lac, est li contes
> Que devant rois et devant contes
> Depecier et corronpre suelent
> Cil qui de conter vivre vuelent.
> Des or comancerai l'estoire
> Qui toz jorz mes iert an memoire
> Tant con durra crestiantez;
> De ce s'est Crestieens vantez. (*EE*, 19-26)

> [This is the tale of Erec, son of Lac, which those who try to live by storytelling customarily mangle and corrupt before kings and counts. Now I shall begin the story that will be in memory for evermore, as long as Christendom lasts - of this does Chrétien boast (37).]

Just as his Calogrenant turns himself into his own authority by relating memories,[26] Chrétien grants himself permission to tell the tale through this attack on his competitors. The emphasis is not on his, Chrétien, being right, as this is still a point unproven. The adaptor can only assert that his competitors are wrong. Chrétien's sentiments, while presumably sincere, also constitute a common *topos*.[27] *Erec et Enide*'s adaptor resorts to a convention to attest to his incomparable superiority. In other words: Chrétien requires a common stylistic practice to prove his non-relationship with "those who try to live by

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[26] *Don maint autre vos ont servi / Ainz vos dirai ce, que je vi.* (*Y*, 173-174) [instead I shall tell what I have seen myself (297)]; *ez geschach mir, dâ von ist ez wâr* (*I*, 259) [It happened to me and it is therefore true, (*I*, 240)].

[27] See: Haug, *Literaturtheorie*, 103.

storytelling." This is quite the vicious circle and does nothing to help us hedge our bets. To know about other narratives in which Erec is a major figure is to have one's interpretive skills hindered from the outset. These alternative versions, having been mangled and corrupted, are of no use and must be forgotten. Unfortunately, omitting these sources is rather difficult to do because Chrétien has not only mentioned them but uses his audience's familiarity with the material to justify his right to tell the tale at all.

The inutility of extant knowledge about a particular legend leads us back to the insoluble problem posed by Calogrenant/Kalogrenant: the decision to listen to the storyteller comes down to an unfounded trust. A man can listen but not understand, and/or the speaker can offer his audience a tale without substance. Neither the attentiveness of the audience member nor the reliability of the speaker can be demonstrated in advance. Furthermore, neither side of this exchange learns if his efforts were wasted until the after the tale has been told. Calogrenant/Kalogrenant is insistent that his text will be of value. At the same time, the knight's comments make it clear that any adaptor is familiar with the means of deception, even if he claims that he will not to use them.

As Matilda Bruckner suggests by calling this opening episode a *mise en abyme* for the rest of *Yvain*, Calogrenant/Kalogrenant is the adaptor of Arthurian Romance in miniature. Although the knight relates a tale born of his own experiences, his relationship to his listeners mirrors that of Chrétien and Hartmann's audiences and assumes a contractual form:

> His [Calogreant's] invitation, which parallels that of many romance narrators, suggests that within the heart of fiction itself there are matters of vital concern to the romance public, if only it knows how to take romance fictions properly to heart. A fictional narrator like Calogrenant emphasizes both the distancing set up

in the contract romance establishes between authors and their public, who exchange a good story from elsewhere and long ago, but also the rapprochement through bridges that crisscross the spaces between each of the positions around the triangle. The publics inside and outside the fiction encounter similar problems and are thus compelled to follow the same process of *entandement*, from passive listening to active recognitions and interpretations.[28]

Let us briefly recap the components of what Bruckner calls a contract and I call a bet. The adaptor promises to address "matters of vital concern" but does so only through a disguise (*integumentum*). This means that every statement, including those which hint at covered or disguised meaning, must be subjected to the listeners' scrutiny. The contract or bet is an exclusive one. The text, whether being heard or read, becomes the focal point to which the listener is bound. The only stable point of measurement is the text of the particular Arthurian Romance, whose quality can only be measured against itself. Comparable models are purportedly useless, but a person cannot help but refer to them. In *Parzival*, Wolfram equates adventure with the role of the dice when his protagonist is born: *hie ist der âventiure wurf gespilt, / und ir begin ist gezilt* (*P*, 112, 9-10) [Herewith this adventure's dice are cast and its beginning determined (63)]. For the listener, his contractual obligation is to gamble and trust that the story will be worth hearing.

As the Arthurian Court's amateur prophet, Calogrenant/Kalogrenant promises the rebirth of language through it embodiment in the person of the listener: "In exhorting his listeners to receive the word within themselves, Calogrenant suggests that true hearing is incarnation - the received word made flesh, become a living part of the man who hears it."[29] One way of reading the remainder of *Yvain/Iwein* is as an experiment to see whether

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[28] *Shaping Romance*, 10.
[29] *The Allegory of Adventure*, 52.

or not words can be as transformative as Calogrenant/Kalogrenant implies. As we shall see in the following section, only Yvain/Iwein learns to follow his cousin's advice but pays a heavy price for success.

Going Mad

You have to be mad to enter into the bet proposed by the Arthurian Romance adaptors, where there is so little to gain and so much to lose. Yet madness or foolishness is a part of the agreement between the speaker and his audience. Chrétien's Calogrenant ends his story by saying that he has acted like a fool or a madman: *Si vos ai conté come fos / Ce qu'onques mes conter ne vos* (Y, 579-580) [Now like a fool I've told you what previously I have never wanted to tell (302)]. Going a bit crazy is what the Arthurian Romance requires of its speaker and listener. The audience willingly listens to a bizarre tale as told by someone who has no demonstrable authority to speak. The speaker, in turn, makes his text communal property and has no further control over what his listeners do with it. Neither side can trust the other. By reading further in *Yvain/Iwein*, I suggest that going mad and acting foolishly is synonymous with effective communication because it breaks through language's disguises and provides access to the poetic.

In her monograph *Truth and Conventions in the Middle Ages*, Ruth Morse describes Augustine's idealized view of language. Augustine was undoubtedly a source of influence for Chrétien as he is for virtually any writer in the Middle Ages. *Yvain*'s adaptor certainly underwent years of formal education, and it is highly improbable that he never stumbled across the Bishop of Hippo's writings, including those on language. As expressed in *Yvain*, Chrétien accepts language as an imperfect medium of communication

but nevertheless hopes, like a madman or a fool, that the barriers between the speaker and the listener might be briefly suspended through the text. Chrétien's idealized vision of language would differ so greatly from Augustine's, which Morse describes as follows: "The 'language' of highest status was described by Augustine as being neither Greek nor Latin, but the carrier of thought in the mind of God, something humanity might sometimes experience as direct perception or understanding without words, an experience which is prior to the transference that becomes verbal articulation."[30] The ideal language would be no language at all.

Chrétien suggests such an ideal through the creation of individual texts. The Arthurian Romance is akin to secular holy writ in which poetic meaning is always imminent. There is no circumventing language, but it might just so happen that a speaker and listener could communicate through the words in a text and their interpretation. Jesse M. Gellrich's summation of Chaucer and Dante's approach to language and a person's understanding thereof is equally applicable to the works of Chrétien, Hartmann and Wolfram. As in Chaucer and Dante, the Arthurian Romance employs "a discourse that recognizes its own impossibilities and proceeds by locating the authority for making sense no longer in the pages of the past, but in the hands of the reader."[31] Chrétien and his successors write frivolous nonsense which can only become substantive ("the word made flesh") through the listener.

Chrétien, Hartmann and Wolfram all appreciate that there is no escape from language. Even in his description of the otherworldly Grail in Munsalvaesche (*P

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[30] *Truth and Convention in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 183.
[31] *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages*, 27.

238.21-24), Wolfram "hedges on the Grail's ideality by limiting its copiousness 'almost' to equaling heaven, more precisely, almost to equaling what 'one says about' heaven, thereby drawing attention to the fact that it is a mediated approximation, the representation of a representation."[32] Writing in the wake of Chrétien and Hartmann, Wolfram expresses an even greater degree of concern over language's communicability and the ambitions of the Arthurian Romance. As we shall see in chapter four, the Grail itself is a kind of text, being a shared object around which people gather but whose value lies in the language produced by its interpreters. The interpretation of the Grail or text matters, not the thing itself. Yet without the Grail or text, there would be no interpretation. Hence the adaptor writes and mediates language so that his listeners might overcome this very mediation.

According to Calogrenant/Kalogrenant, the speaker and his audience are both responsible for effective communication, which supports my contention that the value of an Arthurian Romance lies outside of the text: *Car parole oïe est perdue, / S'ele n'est de cuer antandue* (*Y* 151-152) [for words that are not understood by the heart are lost completely (297)]; *man verliuset michel sagen, / man enwellez merken unde dagen* (*I* 249-250) [A lot of storytelling is wasted when people don't keep quiet and don't pay attention (240)]. Calogreannt/Kalogrenant speaks in generalities and offers no clue as to how one might implement his instructions. Chrétien and Hartmann, however, pick up where Calogrenant/Kalogrenant leaves off and depict necessarily foolish acts of interpretation.

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[32] Arthur Groos, *Genre, Science, and Quest in Wolfram's* Parzival (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 120.

In the first part of his story, Yvain/Iwein is a negative *exemplum*. Calogrenant/ Kalogrenant's tale triggers his departure from Arthur's Court, the brutal killing of Esclados/Askalon at the fountain, the hasty marriage to Laudine, his failure to remember his promise and finally his flight into the woods. Yvain/Iwein demonstrates the hazards of listening inattentively. Certain of his way (Y 768-770), Yvain/Iwein's focuses exclusively on reaching the fountain. The knight is hasty and fails to fully empty his mind so that he might himself relive Calogrenant/Kalogrenant's exploits.[33] Instead of experiencing Calogrenant/Kalogrenant's adventures firsthand, Yvain/Iwein merely goes through the motions. Chrétien and Hartmann both quickly pass over the repeated episodes from Calogrenant/Kalogrenant's tale. This brevity evinces Yvain/Iwein's detachment from his own experiences. Even when he finds *lacunae* or misrepresentations in Calogrenant/ Kalogrenant's text, Yvain/Iwein never stops to consider them further.[34]

The remedy for Yvain/Iwein's inattentiveness is madness, for it is only in this state that Yvain/Iwein learns to listen and overcome mediated language. Chrétien describes Yvain's mania as an overpowering "tempest" of sound: *Lors li monta uns torbeillons / El chief si granz, que il forsane* (Y 2804-2805) [Then such a great tempest arose in his head that he went mad (330)]. Hartmann's language lacks the aural-quality of

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[33] In their shortened descriptions of the path to the fountain, Chrétien and Hartmann reiterate the speed with which Yvain/Iwein undertakes his actions. In Chrétien, Yvain, after having been armed, *ne sejorna [...] ne tant ne quant* (Y 760-761) [does not delay in the slightest (304)], is so resolutely focused on his goal that he *ne finera tant* (Y 773)[would not stop (304)] until he reaches the fountain and pours the water onto the stone *sanz arester et sanz seoir* (Y 802) [without stopping to sit down (305)]. Hartmann's Iwein *wâfnet er sich zehant* (I 966) [speedily arm(s) himself (247)] and pours water on the stone *dô was sîn twelen unlanc* (I 992) [without hesitating (248)].

[34] In both adaptations, the ugliness of the Herdsman (Y 796-799; I 983-987) and the noise at the fountain (Y 805-806; I 994-998) catch the protagonist off guard. Evidently, Calogrenant/Kalogrenant's account did not do these experiences justice. Chrétien's Yvain stumbles upon additional errors in Calogrenant's story: the vavasour is kinder than Calogrenant described and his daughter so beautiful that her beauty cannot be put into words (Y 779-786). Joseph M. Sullivan convincingly determines that Chrétien's Calogrenant is a rather inept observer and teller. See: "Kalogreant/Calogrenant, Space, and Communication in Hartmann's *Iwein* and Chretienis *Yvain*," 6-7.

Chrétien's, but he too depicts madness as a temporary end to Iwein's linguistic fetters. The knight becomes so possessed by his own disgrace *daz im in daz hirne schôz / ein zorn unde ein tobesuht* (*I* 3222-3223) [that anger and rage assaulted his brain (271)] and he departs for the wilderness.

Yvain/Iwein's madness drives him to the fringes of society but not beyond its borders. Armed with a stolen bow and arrows for hunting (*Y* 2816-2821; *I* 3266-3270), Yvain/Iwein undertakes silent and wordless communication with a hermit (*Y* 2815-2886; *I* 3283-3360), whose abode is situated in a clearing (*Y* 2815; *I* 3285). Being crazy is depicted as a kind of near prelapsarian ignorance. If words themselves have shortcomings and if communication between a speaker and a listener is nearly impossible, then they only way to undo language's hindrances is to forget language itself.[35] Hartmann's Iwein becomes an *unwîse* (*I* 3345), a substantival noun Richard H. Lawson translates the word as "demented man" (273), but "unknowing man" would be just as appropriate. Foolishness, ignorance and madness are intertwined concepts and are not necessarily negative. During his madness, Yvain/Iwein is incognizant of all but his most basic needs and, most importantly, remains unaware of his own incomprehension. He still sees and hears but does not think. In other words, Yvain/Iwien becomes the ideal listener.

The knight gains a great deal through this transformation. For what has he left behind except noise masquerading as substance? The Arthurian Court is a clamorous

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[35] An important step in Parzival's rehabilitation after his failure at the Grail Castle is the transformation of three drops of blood in the snow into the image of his beloved, Condwiramurs. Acting, like a good listener should, as if the three drops signified something other than blood, Parzival sees two drops as Condiramur's cheeks and the third as her chin (*P* 283,11-13). Even as he imposes his own interpretation onto the drops of blood, Parzival loses himself and briefly succeeds in not thinking: *sus begunde er sich verdenken, / unz daz er unversunnen hielt* (*P* 283,16-17) [And thus he mused, lost in thought, until his senses deserted him (154)].

travesty,[36] filled with inattentive and self-absorbed listeners. A brief analysis of its failings should help elucidate the benefits to Yvain/Iwein's madness. In both adaptations, Calogrenant/Kalogrenant's tale is told at Arthur's Court three times. The knight has already begun to speak when the Queen's arrival interrupts his tale (*Y* 61-64; *I* 93-104). Calogrenant/Kalogrenant then begins the tale anew and we, along with a few listeners from Arthur's Court, hear the narrative in its unsubstantiated fullness. The tale must still be told a third time to King Arthur. This time it is not Calogrenant/Kalogrenant but Guinevere who repeats what the disgraced knight has said.[37]

Calogrenant/Kalogrenant establishes a small, exclusive community within the Arthurian Court and places his spoken text at this community's center. This same text can then be told to other listeners by those already acquainted with the tale, forging what Brian Stock calls "textual communities." Stock uses the term in his description of splinter and heretical religious groups in the High Middle Ages, but I find that "textual communities" is quite applicable in describing the circulation of Calogrenant/ Kalogrenant's story at the Arthurian Court:

> The term ["textual communities"] is used in a descriptive rather than a technical sense; it is intended to convey not a new methodology but a more intensive use of traditional methods, and, in particular, their use by groups hitherto dependent on oral participation in religion. What was essential to a textual community was not a written version of a text, although that was sometimes present, but an individual, who, having mastered it, then utilized it for reforming a group's thought and actions.[38]

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[36] In *Erec et Enide*, Chrétien draws a sharp distinction between the noise generated by Arthur and his court while hunting (*EE*, 119-122) and the silence of its three holdouts (*EE*, 130-137).

[37] *Et la reïne maintenant / Les noveles Calogrenant / Li reconta tot mot a mot; / Que bien et bel conter li sot* (*Y* 657-660) [(The queen) immediately told him (Arthur) Calogrenant's adventures word for word, for she knew well how to tell a tale (303)]; *diu künegin saget im her wider / Kâlogrenandes swaere / und älliu disiu maere* (*I*, 890-892) [the queen told him of Kalogrenant's misfortune - and the whole story (247)].

[38] *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 90.

Amongst Arthur, Guinevere and a handful of knights, a new collective forms around the words of Calogrenant/Kalogrenant, but this is a failed textual community and parody's the ambitions of the Arthurian Romance. Like Yvian/Iwein before his madness, Arthur understand only how to repeat the tale. There is no mastery of Calogrenant/Kalogrenant's text because the listeners hear what is said but do not abandon themselves to the experience. Until he flees into the woods, Yvain/Iwein has trouble distinguishing another's experiences from his own and lets Calogrenant/Kalogrenant's memories lead him rather than adventure.

Yvain/Iwein remains in an inattentive and confused state, improbably forgetting the promise he swore to his wife. It is the act of remembrance, quoted below, which crystalizes Yvain/Iwein's thought and brings him, finally, to the present:

> Quant Ivains tant ancomança
> A panser, que des lors an ça,
> Que a sa dame ot congié pris,
> Ne fu tant de panser sospris
> Con de celui; car bien savoit,
> Que covant manti li avoit
> Et trespassez estoit li termes (*Y* 2695-2701)

> [(W)hen Yvain suddenly began to reflect; since the moment he had taken leave of his lady he had not been so distraught as now, for he knew for a fact that he had broken his word to her and stayed beyond the period set (329).]

> nû kam mîn her Îwein
> in einen seneden gedanc:
> er gedâhte, daz twelen waer ze lanc,
> daz er von sînem wîbe tete:
> ir gebot unde ir bete
> diu heter übergangen.
> [...]
> in begreif ein selch riuwe
> daz er sîn selbes vergaz

und allez swîgende saz.
er überhörte und übersach
swaz man dâ tete unde sprach,
als er ein tôre waere. (*I* 3082-3087; 3090-3095)

[Then Sir Iwein began to reflect longingly, and it occurred to him that he had been away from his wife for too long, that he had disregarded both her command and request. [...] (H)e was overcome with such deep regret that he forgot everything else and just sat there quietly, like a fool, not hearing, not seeing what people were saying and doing (270).]

Multiple moments in the narrative converge in Yvain/Iwein's mind. He recalls the promise he made to his wife and his failure to keep it. Although it is already too late, he engages in deep, profound reflection which, in Hartmann's adaptation, eliminates all other sights, sounds and distractions. Yvain/Iwein becomes an attentive listener with the onset of madness. In his mind, language ceases to be necessary as past and present so brutally and unexpectedly collide.

When Hartmann's Iwein returns to consciousness, he achieves an awareness of the poetic language to which Kalogrenant alluded in his prologue. At first, Iwein can conceive of his experiences only as a disorienting and confusing dream:

alsus was er sîn selbes gast,
daz im des sinnes gebrast:
und alle sîn umbevart
und ob er ie rîter wart
die heter in dem maere
als ez im getroumet waere. (*I* 3563-3568)

[So he was a stranger to himself, confused, and it seemed to him that had dreamed of being a knight and going on all his journeys (275)].

It is not just that Iwein's life begins anew once his madness has passed, but that he finally acknowledges his experiences as detached, confusing and unable to be fully explained. He himself is a signifier detached from a signified, who may now reconfigure the

connection between word and meaning. As Wolfgang Mohr explains, the bout of madness in Hartmann's *Iwein* concludes with the incongruous past becoming memory and an object of Yvain/Iwein's control. Yvain/Iwein's transformation into an ideal knight assumes concrete, material dimensions in the form of clothing: "Der dialektische Umschwung - und damit die 'Heilung' - setzt ein, als sich der 'Traum' in 'Erinnerung' verwandelt und so zum Appell wird, ein neues ritterliches Leben anzufangen. Die menschenwürdige Kleidung, die er an seiner Seite findet, bestätigt ihm die 'Erinnerung' und macht die Verwandlung möglich."[39] Yet memory guides Iwein only in so far as he learns to ignore it when confronted with new events. Instead of relying on his knowledge of the past, he attempts to judge each situation by its own merits.

With his second lease on life, Yvain/Iwein has not so much learned anything so much as he comprehends the extent of his ignorance, which is what the adaptor of Arthurian Romance asks of his audience. Yvain/Iwein's acquisition of the lion is a consequence the knight's capacity to listen carefully and understand the aural: *Mes sire Yvains pansis chemine / Par une parfonde gaudine, / Tant qu'il oï anmi le gaut / Un cri mout dolereus et haut* (*Y* 3441-3444) [Deep in thought, my lord Yvain rode through deep woods until he heard from the thick of the forest a very loud and anguished cry (337)]; *lûte âne mâze / hôrter eine stimme / clägelich und doch grimme* (*I* 3828-3830) [(H)e heard an exceedingly loud voice, plaintive yet fearsome (277)]. Yvain/Iwein responds to a cry in which more is at stake than the meaningless but overwhelming noise he first encounters at the fountain. With the lion at his side, Yvain/Iwein becomes an agent for

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[39] "Iweins Wahnsinn: Die Aventüre und ihr 'Sinn'," *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 100.1 (1971), 84.

change in the world, breaking a cycle of repetition and substitution in which he was previously caught.

I would like to conclude this section by briefly contrasting Yvain/Iwein's transformation with the tiresome and repetitive actions and words of the Arthurian Court. No matter where it goes, the Arthurian Court keeps itself confined to an eternal present demonstrably out of sync with the rest of the narrative. Calogrenant/Kalogrenant's story, told again and again in the text's opening scene, is proof of the Arthurian Court's cyclicality. When Arthur has heard of the fountain, he swears an oath and declares that he will venture to this miraculous location before two weeks have passed (*Y* 665-666; *I* 898-903). The King does not create but imitates through domination and is praised for it. It is no coincidence that Lunete disgraces Yvain/Iwein in front of Arthur and his court, for this is the locus of forgetting and the undoing of experience. In Hartmann, Gawain and Yvain/Iwein return to Arthur *mit vreuden sunder leide* (*I* 3060) [full of happiness (270)] and free from all cares. Here, values only superficial values hold sway and accurate judgements are few. Thus we find Arthur praising Yvain/Iwein only a few lines before Lunete's arrival (*I* 3075-3077).

Given the Arthurian Court's reaction to Calogrenant/Kalogrenant's tale of misadventure, in which a textual community is briefly formed only to flounder in the absence of courtly memory, we might speculate that the knight's conception of the vapid storyteller and inattentive listener are the norm and not some aberration. Yvain/Iwein, after all, is the exception to the rule. Calogrenant/Kalogrenant's words concerning honest speech and attentive listeners reeks of desperation. The knight alludes to a model of

behavior which only Yvain/Iwein embodies. Chrétien and Hartmann use Calogrenant/ Kalogrenant to articulate a nearly inimitable standard. The ideal listener for an Arthurian Romance is a mad listener, who first experiences the randomness and confusion of adventures and only then remembers and interprets them.

Tom Artin also detects misery, even hesitation, on Calogrenant's part. Given the way in which even Yain/Iwein initially misunderstands his cousin, we can appreciate Calogrenant/Kalogrenant's misgivings: "But Calogrenant is rightly skeptical about his audience and is relucatant to speak even in parables. He too is a sower of the word, and he wants his seed to fall on the heart, not on deaf ears."[40] The events of *Yvain*/*Iwein* make Calogrenant/Kalogrenant's distrust understandable. Calogrenant/Kalogrenant is tellingly silent the moment his tale is completed. Like an adaptor, we know Calogrenant/ Kalogrenant only from the text left behind. The knight does not provide any additional information or advice in response to the actions of his listeners. The rest of *Yvain*/*Iwein* is a story about the consequences of interpretation. Yvain/Iwein first slavishly repeats Calogrenant/Kalogrenant's route without experiencing the route for himself. As if in a dream, he wanders from place to place but experiences nothing. It is repetition and adaptation without substance, for which the only cure is madness and unknowing.

Genre Fatigue

Now it is time to look at *Tristan* and briefly address how Gottfried treats the genre in which he was working. To do this, we will focus on the passage commonly referred to as the "Literary Excursus." Much ink has been spilled over this section because it is

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[40] *Allegory of Adventure*, 43.

lengthy, tangential and brings the actions in the narrative to a standstill. As W.T.H.
Jackson explains, the "Literary Excursus" seems out of place: "it is surprising to find
embedded in a courtly romance an apparent digression which seems at first sight to be a
review of the present state of the poetic art, complete with all the touchiness and
prejudice, which one associates with artists talking about their rivals' work."[41] I plan to
look at the "Excursus" through the lens of the previous sections and suggest that this
passage is written by a reader who has grown tired of a popular genre and wants to
reform it.

If it were not already clear to us, Gottfried uses the "Literary Excursus" to call
attention to his being a reader first and an adaptor second. *Tristan* is a response to his
predecessors which also puts Gottfried in competition with his forerunners, whom
Gottfried praises for their eloquence:

> ich sihe und hân biz her gesehen
> sô manegen schône redenden man,
> daz ich des niht gereden kan,
> ezn dunke mich dâ wider ein wint,
> als nû die liute redende sint.
> man sprichet nû sô rehte wol,
> daz ich von grôzem rehte sol
> mîner worte nemen war
> und sehen, daz s'alsô sîn gevar
> als ich wolte, daz si waeren
> an vremeder liute maeren
> und alse ich rede geprüeven kan
> an einem anderen man. (*T* 4840-4852)

> [I see and have always seen so many eloquent men that there is nothing I can
> write that does not seem trivial against the present style of writing. People
> nowadays are so well spoken that I am bound to watch my words and see to it that

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[41] "The Literary View of Gottfried von Strassburg," *PMLA* 85.5 (1970), 992.

> they are such as I would have in other men's tales and would approve in another author (108).]

It is often a challenge in *Tristan* to determine when, if ever, we are supposed to take Gottfried seriously. Yet I do not think that *Tristan*'s adaptor is offering faint praise when he speaks so highly of and agonizes over the achievements of his contemporaries. In Gottfried's view, other men have used and continue to use language eloquently. The repetition of the adverb *nû* (*T* 4844-4845) in connection with speech acts makes Gottfried's concern over language's style an immediate one. As *Yvain/Iwein* makes clear, the eloquence of words says nothing about their effectiveness or worth. Gottfried extends this line of thought beyond the confines of a fictional text and confronts the overabundance of unnamed talented speakers. Many men are eloquent (*man sprichet nû sô rehte wol*), but their words form a closed, incestuous linguistic circle much like the Arthurian Court. Language exists in great quantities, but this is not an environment which encourages variations from the norm. As depicted by Gottfried, to be well spoken means that the speaker successfully reproduce the words of other men with no concern for content. A multiplicity of texts produces the same, repetitive discourse.

When Gottfried speaks of the language used by his immediate predecessors and contemporaries, he references three adaptors of epic poetry by name: Hartmann, Bligger von Steinach and Heinrich von Veldeke. As in his more general description of his articulate contemporaries quoted above, Gottfried praises these three men for the way in which they use their words. Yet there is an important addition. In Gottfried's description of Hartmann von Aue, eloquence and meaning, *worten* and *sinnen* (*T* 4624), merge to

create an ideal whole. Here I will only quote Gottfried's praise of Hartmann in full.

References to Bligger and Heinrich are included in the analysis below:

> Hartman der Ouwaere,
> âhî, wie der diu maere
> beide ûzen unde innen
> mit worten und mit sinnen
> durchverwet und durchzieret!
> wie er mit rede figieret
> der âventiure meine!
> wie lûterund wie reine
> sîniu cristallînen wortelîn
> beidiu sint und iemer müezen sîn! (*T*, 4621-4630)

> [Ah, how Hartmann of Aue dyes and adorns his tales through and through with words and sense, both outside and within! How eloquently he establishes his story's meaning! How clear and transparent his crystal words both are and ever must remain! (105)]

An obvious but important observation should be made. In Gottfried's catalogue of Who's-Who in Middle High German literature, Hartmann is an inimitable figure. He outshines the two other men either known (Heinrich) or believed (Bligger)[42] to have written adaptations of classical epics. Considering Hartmann's prominence in the Hartmann-Heinrich-Bligger sequence, I would suggest that Gottfried saw Arthurian Romances as the gold standard against which other adaptors, including Heinrich and Bligger, should be compared. Hartmann embodies a contemporary classical ideal, which is of great importance for an adaptor like Gottfried, whose concern is not how words once functioned but how they work in the present. As Silvia Schmitz elucidates, the metaphor

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[42] It is believed that Bligger wrote lyric, epic and gnomic poems, but the all but two love poems have been lost. Like Hartmann and Heinrich, he probably composed epic poetry as well as love poetry. See: Richard M. Meyer, "Bligger von Steinach," *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur*, 39 ([No City Given]: S. Hirzel Verlag, 1895), especially 305-308.

of Hartmann's "crystal words" is to be understood as a re-appropriation of a classical

ideal in a modern idiom:

> Wie der ›Literaturexkurs‹ überhaupt erschließt sich Gottfried Postulat einer
> Einheit von *wort* und *sin* in dichtungstheoretischem Zusammenhang. Sein
> Maßstab für vollkommene Dichtung sind die *kristallînen wortelîn* (4627)
> Hartmanns, ist sprachliche *perspicuitas*, eine Luzidität der Ausdrucksweise, die
> entsteht, wenn *res* (*inventio*) und *verba* (*elocutio*) im richtigen Verhältnis
> zueinander stehen, wenn das *aptum* [the fusion of parts] beachtet wird.[43]

According to Gottfried, Hartmann successfully balances his obligations to the material

and its presentation. In the summation of Hartmann's *corpus* by *Tristan*'s adaptor, the

tales become perfectly balanced poetic works. This achievement cannot be separated

from the genre in which Hartmann wrote. To speak of Hartmann is to speak of his

contributions to Arthurian Romance. For Gottfried, Hartmann successfully translates a

classical principle (*aptum*) into a new ideal in which *wort* and *sin* work harmoniously.

"Crystal words" work in conjunction with the *Integumentum-Lehre*, in that they do not

reveal poetic meaning directly. Rather, crystal refracts and distort it: "Kristall ist nicht nur

klar und durchsichtig, sondern hat auch die Eigenschaften, Licht zu brechen,

Spiegelungen zu verursachen und Farben zu verändern."[44] Annette Volfing adds that

crystal also signifies linguistic permanence: "the solidity of the crystal suggests not only

moral excellence, but also material durability[.]"[45] Like Calogrenant/Kalogrenant,

Gottfried repeats the argument for the Arthurian Romance. He asserts, like his

predecessors, that refracted language, solidified in text, disguises a constant poetic

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[43] *Die Poetik der Adaptation: Literarische Inventio im* Eneas *Heinrichs von Veldeke,* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2007), 96-97.
[44] Hennig, *'Maere' und 'Werc,'* 17.
[45] *Medieval Literacy and Textuality in Middle High German Literature: Reading and Writing in Albrecht's* Jüngerer Titurel (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 122.

meaning. Gottfried does not interpret Hartmann's corpus for us. In place of an interpretation, he offers a report of his own inimitable experiences.

A brief look at Gottfried's description of Bligger and Heinrich is helpful because we notice a marked contrast with the illustration of Hartmann. Hugo Bekker sums up the lack of attention paid to these two adaptors:

> Bligger and Heinrich get rather short shrift. The former is said to be harp-tongued; his qualities lie in the domain of words and inspiration which 'harp' together. [...] Heinrich, too, receives accolades, but he is gone, and Gottfried does not speak of his qualifications for the wreath [i.e. the competition to become Hartmann's successor].[46]

Gottfried writes that Bligger's language delights through both word and meaning (*daz sint diu wort, daz ist der sin*, *T* 4707), yet there is a crucial difference between Hartmann and Bligger. In Hartmann's case, words and meaning comprise separate tools employed simultaneously in the act of *durchverwet* and *durchzieret* (*T* 4625) [dye[ing] and adorn[ing] (105)]. In Bligger's corpus, though, form overshadows the meaning as "[t]he ideal of clarity and translucence gives way to that of rich stuff of embroidery."[47] *Wort* and *sin* are now distinguishable and separate entities. It is the form of Bligger's language which Gottfried emphasizes. Through his "verbal ingenuity" (*mit spaeher rede* [*T* 4713]) this "master of words" (*der wortwîse* [*T* 4710]) affixes "marvels of verbal ingenuity" onto his tapesty (*an dem unbehange wunder* [*T* 4712]).[48] Bligger's rhymes stick together as if by design (*wie kan er rîme lîmen, / als ob si dâ gewahsen sîn!*, *T* 4716-4717).

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[46] *Gottfried von Strassburg's* Tristan*: Journey Through the Realm of Eros* (New York: Camden House, 1987), 90-91.
[47] Jackson, "The Literary Views of Gottfried von Strassburg," 994.
[48] All the English terminology is found in Hatto, page 106.

However, form now overshadows content as *wort* takes precedent over *sin* and appearances threaten to further obscure meaning.

In the case of Heinrich von Veldeke, we note that form almost entirely supplants meaning. Gottfried compares Heinrich's legacy with flowers on a tree branch (*T* 4740-4743), but this ideal is immediately counterbalanced with a statement attesting to the misuse of language in Heinrich's wake:

> und ist diu selbe künde
> sô wîten gebreitet,
> so manege wîs zeleitet,
> daz alle, die nu sprechent,
> daz die den wunsch dâ brechent
> von bluomen und von rîsen
> an worten unde an wîsen. (*T*, 4744-4750)
>
> [From this have sprouted branches whence the blossoms came from which they drew the cunning of their masterly inventions. And now this skill has spread its boughs so far and has been so diversely trained that all who are now writing break blossoms and sprays to their hearts' content, in words and melodies (106).]

Hatto's translation of line 4746 (*so manege wîs zeleitet*) does not sufficiently reflect the negativity contained therein. The ability to write poetry (*künde*) has been misappropriated and misused (*zeleitet*) since Veldeke, who becomes the terminus in Gottfried's depiction of language's decline over two decades. Hartmann is the ideal because his works so fully integrate or weave together word and meaning; Bligger is still promising but in his texts word and meaning have become separate entities; Veldeke is a master of form but

Gottfried says nothing about content; and finally, in Veldeke's wake, all linguistic hell has

broken loose. A once idealized language has fallen into the wrong hands.[49]

At this point, we run into a familiar problem. As I understand the "Literary

Excursus," the Arthurian Romance, as exemplified by Hartmann, communicates via its

texts. As a reader, Gottfried has experienced this phenomenon. After Hartmann, though,

the quality of language declines rapidly. A brief look at the praise bestowed on Bligger

and Heinrich demonstrates Gottfried's lack of faith in lengthy, Middle High German

romances and epics written by adaptors other than Hartmann. Gottfried's individual

descriptions then give way to generalities, and this is an important shift in emphasis.

Before his description of Heinrich, Gottfried asks which other poets are worthy of praise

nowadays (*nû*): *Wen mag ich nû mêr ûz gelesen?* (*T,* 4723) [Whom else can I single out?

(106)]. Hatto translates *gelesen* as *lise,* "to let", but another possible translation is: Whom

else can I read?[50] The answer to either formulation of the question is, well, just about

anyone. There is no shortage of candidates: *ir ist und ist genuoc gewesen / vil sinnic und*

vil rederîch. (*T,* 4723-4725) [There are and have been many [adaptors or authors],

inspired and eloquent (106).] Gottfried is being hyperbolic, but we should not

underestimate just how full the literary landscape looks in these descriptions. To write a

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[49] W.T.H. Jackson sees an ascent where I see degeneration: "Harmann, although limpid, is earthbound. Bligger is borne by his own words in eagle's flights. Heinrich von Veldeke is carried aloft by Pegasus, the true classic inspiration, from whose hoofmarks there sprang the stream of Helicon." In: "The Literary Views of Gottfried von Strassburg," 994. Bekker seconds Jackson's claim that Gottfried "seems to be insinuating that Hartmann's work is shallow." In: *Gottfried von Strassburg's* Tristan, 90.
[50] This alternative reading is supported by an explanation for the definition of *lise* in the *Mittelhochdeutsches Wörterbuch* (Benecke, Müller, Zarncke): "endlich ist wahrscheinlich aus der ursprünglichen allgemeinern bedeutung des wortes auch die besondere zu entwickeln, nach welcher lesen heißt b u c h s t a b e n   z u   w ö r t e r n ,   w o r t e   z u   k l a r e r   r e d e   a n   e i n a n d e r   r e i h e n   u n d   v e r b i n d e n . diese vermutung wird um so weniger befremden, wenn man sich erinnert daß in der früheren gestalt der schrift die einzelnen wörter weit weniger getrennt wurden als heut zu tage, und mithin l e s e n keine so leichte sache war." See also: Annette Volfing, *Medieval Literacy and Textuality in Middle High German Literature*, 44; Jackson, *The Anatomy of Love*, 59.

romance or an epic means that there will be a lot of competition by adaptors producing near-identical texts.

Tristan's adaptor is not just concerned about repeating what his predecessors have done. Other adaptors have already devoted so much effort to adorn their narratives with a suitable courtly gloss. Thus Gottfried is left with little else to add in the way of novelty:

> jâ ritterlîchiu zierheit
> diu ist sô manege wîs beschriben
> und ist mit rede alsô zetriben,
> daz ich niht kan gereden dar abe,
> dâ von kein herze vröude habe. (*T* 4615-4620)

> [Knightly pomp, I declare, has been so variously portrayed and has been so overdone that I can say nothing about it that would give pleasure to anyone (105).]

As the "Excursus" is an interruption of Tristan's investiture, Gottfried's musings only postpone and do not, as some critics suggest, replace the scene of Tristan becoming a knight.[51] For the length of the "Excursus" up until the scene of Tristan's investiture (*T* 4975-5068), Gottfried toys with the idea of leaving aside a tired convention. The reason, as the quote above suggests, is that the literary potential of courtly literature, and not just Arthurian Romance, has been exhausted by the year 1210. While we can understand the final two lines in the passage (*daz ich niht kan gereden dar abe,* / *dâ von kein herze vröude habe*) as an invocation of the modesty *topos*, I see no reason why we cannot also take Gottfried at his word. In the "Literary Excursus," *Tristan*'s adaptor expresses his own weariness with a late 12th century fad. Gottfried suffers from genre fatigue, a fact

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[51] See, for example: Jackson, "The Literary view of Gottfried von Strassburg," 992.

underscored by the reference to the thirty other anonymous knights who are to be knighted with and look identical to the figure of Tristan (*T* 4552-4554).

The "Excursus" reads like a literary lexicon, but the specific examples are not there to highlight current *exempla* from Middle High German poetry. Instead, Gottfried calls our attention to the mass of possible candidates for further adaptation. Gottfried's praise or criticism may still be sincere. A figure like Hartmann might, in Gottfried's view, have been the best. If nothing else, Hartmann's approach to the material in Middle High German was fresh and its meanings innovative. In the wake of imitators, though, Hartmann's corpus comes to resemble everyone else's. Education and literacy are still skills to which only a miniscule percentage of Europeans had access. Still, Gottfried implies that imitative poetic talent is not that remarkable and is becoming increasingly widespread.

In the "Literary Excursus," Gottfried also goes on the attack. According to him, *vindaere wilder maere, / der maere wildenaere* (*T* 4666-4667) [inventors of wild tales, hired hunter after stories, (105)] are a dime a dozen. Defaming a rival is its own *topos*,[52] but the invocation of a familiar formula seems quite fitting as a part of the criticism against the widespread, uncontrolled use of language:

> die selben wildenaere
> si müezen tiutaere
> mit ir maeren lâzen gân.
> wirn mugen ir dâ nâch niht verstân,
> als man si hoeret unde siht. (*T*, 4683-4687)

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[52] We find it in Chrétien's admonishment of traveling, oral storytellers at the beginning of *Erec et Enide* (*EE*, 19-22). Chrétien refers to these men as *Cil qui de conter vivre vuelent* (*EE*, 22) [those who try to live by storytelling (37)]. Hartmann and Wolfram continue this tradition. Hartmann presents himself as a knight who happens to be educated and not a cleric. See: Hannes Kästner, *Harfe und Schwert: Der höfische Spielmann bei Gottfried von Straßburg* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1981), 26.

> [Those same story-hunters have to send commentaries with their tales: one cannot understand them as one hears and sees them, (105-106).]

The world is filled with texts so numerous that one text cannot be separated from another. Language is rendered completely self-referential and has ceased to signify to anything other than itself. If the intent of Arthurian Romance is to render familiar forms unfamiliar and force the listener to experience the particular adaptation and not search for answers outside of it, then the genre has failed to uphold its own ambitions. In his prologue to *Erec et Enide*, Chrétien defames other storytellers (*EE* 20-22) "not on grounds of historical accuracy, but on those of artistic merit. The point is no longer that they tell lies, but that they tell them badly."[53] Unlike Chrétien, Gottfried does not go after amateurs but other literate men much like himself. The Courtly Epic and the Arthurian Romance have been stretched, shrunk and abused to the point where the texts in these interrelated genres have ceased to signify.

Gottfried's *Tristan* is born out of a crisis of meaning. Even those who can read as well as listen (*hoeret unde siht*) have become, in a certain sense, illiterate. Here I am borrowing a broad definition of literacy from Annette Volfing, in which she suggests that: "it is also possible to operate with a looser, more metaphorical definition of literacy, whereby the term is not confined to the ability to negotiate the letters of the alphabet, but is used to describe a wider spectrum of interpretive skills: fathoming the true meaning behind words of a text, reading a situation correctly, and even appreciating the whole world as a decipherable text written by God."[54] In Gottfried's presentation of language,

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[53] Ad Putter, "Finding Time for Romance: Medieval Arthurian Literary History," *Medium Aevum.* 63.1 (Spring 1994), 4.

[54] In: *Medieval Literacy and Textuality in Middle High German Literature*, 13

though, literacy, even broadly defined, is no longer a means to interpretation. Words now rest upon so many other words that hunting down their meaning takes the reader into a wormhole of sources without end: *sone hân wir ouch der muoze niht, / daz wir die glôse suochen / in den swarzen buochen* (*T*, 4688-4690) [But we for our part have not the leisure to seek the gloss in books of the black art (106)]. Glossing (*die glôse*) is a learned man's activity and requires interpretation with the assistance of additional texts. For Gottfried, *die glôse* is not a route to understanding but leads instead to further confusion. As Mary Caruthers writes, glossing is always a double-edged sword: "The function of glossing is to elucidate an obscure text. Exegesis conceives of itself as discovering the spiritual or true meaning which lies beneath the literal surface of the word. Thus, properly used, glossing is a means of arriving at truth. But 'to gloss' can also mean to flatter or to cover over meaning in a disingenuous way[.]"[55] The Arthurian Romances are built on the idea that meaning is interwoven or disguised in the individual text. Now these interwoven genres know no boundaries, and a reader no longer experiences the text but reads about it. Language has become circular and uninterpretable, and the reading of one text points not towards itself but away, leading the reader to another text, and then another, and another . . .

Chrétien's Calogrenant says that he is wary of his words might constitute nothing more than a wind: *As oroilles vient la parole / aussi come li vanz, qui vole* (*Y* 152-153) [The word comes to the ears like whistling wind, but doesn't stop or linger there (297)]. Calogrenant is afraid of not saying much of anything. As an adaptor in the midst of this

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[55] "Letter and Gloss in the Friar's and Summoner's Tale," *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 2.3 (Sept., 1972), 209.

rising chaos, Gottfried is confronted with a choice much like Calogrenant's. He believes that his own words will be empty speech/hot air (*ein wint* [*T* 4843]) if he shapes them in accordance with the established but amorphous mold. If he writes as others do, he will be unable to breathe life into his work.[56] The words one utters have the potential to be restorative or devoid of meaning. Calogrenant/Kalogrenant spreads the word in the hope that it might take root, and Gottfried shares the disgraced knight's ambitions and concerns.

In the "Excursus," Gottfried describes a skill, poetic literacy, which has, within living memory, become unmoored from meaning. The slavish adherence to form has made signification impossible. If Gottfried wants to join the mass, he need only shape his words so that they appear like those in others' tales (*an vremeder liute maeren* [*T* 4850]). Language can easily be mimicked, and mimicry is one of the hallmarks of the Arthurian Court. Thus mindless repetition is consistently presented as something to be avoided rather than celebrated in the Arthurian Romances. Language, particularly that written in the artificially constructed aristocratic patois now referred to as Old French or Middle High German, threatens to become a series of unvaried forms whose repetition habit dictates:

> One of the more transparent messages contained in the very language of the romance is the extent to which Arthur's taste for a comforting repetitiousness of thought, symbol and action runs against the grain of all new thought, symbol, and action runs against the grain of all new thought, word, and adventure. To put it

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[56] Just as glossing has both positive and negative connotations, the metaphor of the wind in Chrétien and Gottfried has potential life-giving qualities as well: "[Latin *conflatus*] 'with-wind,' indicates the action of the divine 'breath' blowing life into all things and creating the universe as a *Verbum*." Gellrich, *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages*, 161.

simply, Arthur is forever entreating his knights to stay at home and play the same old games.[57]

The familiar problem to fans of the genre once again rears its ugly head with an added twist. It is not just the knights, but also the adaptors themselves who refuse to learn new tricks. As Calogrenant/Kalogrenant makes clear, the aims of Arthurian Romance are always more likely to fail than to succeed. Yet there remains a foolish hope, played out in *Yvain*/*Iwein*, that a speaker and listener might communicate via a single text. For Gottfried, this sense of purpose has been lost, replaced by repetitive narrative and linguistic forms so vast that no textual community could be formed from it. It is time to shake things up, and that means starting with the most central and common element to all Arthurian Romances and Courtly Epics. It is time for the knight to get a serious makeover.

Reinvention

Tristan's relationship to the Arthurian Romances has always been a point of contention in secondary literature. Put crudely, opinions tend to veer towards one of two extremes: on the one end of the spectrum, some literary scholars try to make *Tristan* fit their definition of Arthurian Literature; on the other, scholars have gone to great lengths to prove *Tristan*'s incompatibility with the genre. In a letter to the brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, Karl Lachmann, the 19th century German philologist, writes: "Den weichlichen und unsittchlichen Gottfried kann ich kaum lesen, wiewohl ich nicht

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[57] Archambault. "Erec's Search for a New Language," 8.

behaupte, die Sage von Tristan sei ursprünglich unsittlich."[58] Lachmann's attack on Gottfried's immorality unwittingly betrays the importance of *Tristan* in our understanding of the Arthurian Romance-genre. Actively denouncing its ties to other, less "immoral" works only highlight the importance of Gottfried's poem to understanding the genre.

As suggested in the previous section, the relationship between *Tristan* and the works of Chrétien and Hartmann is not intended to be harmonious. At the same time, this discord strengthens the connection between Gottfried and the purveyors of courtly literature. In Chrétien, Arthur's Court serves as a point of departure in *Erec et Enite*/*Erec*, *Lancelot* and *Iwein* and is a place to be avoided in *Cligés* and *Parzival*. Rather than using the Arthurian Court, Gottfried uses the Arthurian Romance-texts as his starting point, reconfiguring the textual production begun by Chrétien. The four works I term Arthurian Romances in this dissertation are proudly self-referential. "Artistic introspection" is a vital part of their composition, not only in passages such as the "Excursus": "At all climactic moments we are reminded of the poet and his struggle to create his unique vision."[59] Understanding Chrétien's tales requires that the listener never lose sight of "the implicit analogy that he [Chrétien] draws between the craft of writing and knight errantry, between himself and his literary subjects, between learning and chivalry. [...] The equation of chivalry and learning makes clear that Chrétien is writing as much about himself as he is about the world of Arthur and his knights."[60] With its transmission into

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[58] *Briefwechsel der Brüder Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm mit Karl Lachmann. Im Auftrage und mit Unterstützung der preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, ed. Albert Leitymann. Mit einer Einleitung von Konrad Burdach. 1. Band. Jena 1927. S. 15/16. Brief vom 11.12.1819. Quoted in: Gerhild Geil, *Gottfried und Wolfram als Literarische Antipoden* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 1973), 8.
[59] Martin Stevens, "The Performing self in Twelfth-Century Culture," *Viator* 9 (Jan. 1978), 196.
[60] Ibid., 203.

German and subsequent popularity, this new literary category became an inescapable behemoth for someone like Gottfried who wanted to write in an artificial vernacular.

To continue the genre of Arthurian Romance means that the adaptor does not adhere slavishly to his predecessors' texts. Otherwise, he would risk contributing to a closed and increasingly meaningless collection of words. We saw how Gottfried struggles with this obligation in the "Excursus," but it is a problem Chrétien foresaw. At the conclusion of *Yvain*, Chrétien offers blunt advice to any future adaptors of his text:

> Del Chevalier au lion fine
> Crestiiens son romanz einsi;
> Qu'onques plus conter n'an oï,
> Ne ja plus n'an orroiz conter,
> S'an n'i viaut mançonge ajoster. (*Y* 6815-6819)

> [Thus Chrétien brings to a close his romance of the Knight with the Lion. I've not heard any more about it, and you'll never hear anything more unless one adds lies to it. (380)]

There is a note of humorous arrogance in this conclusion. Chrétien's instructions to his would-be imitators reiterates the fundamental virtue of Arthurian Romance, namely that the telling of narrative should be an escape from established but depleted sources. Lunete calls Yvain a liar (*mançongier* [*Y* 2720]) in front of the Arthurian Court for speaking empty words, a harsh verdict given how lightly the Arthurian Court throws around oaths and promises. Yet the scene does have relevance apropos adaptation. A slavish adherence to Chrétien's *Yvain* would repeat Yvain's initial folly, constructing the foundations of a new narrative upon an old one which itself lacks any verifiable source. A successful continuation of Chrétien's project requires not following Chrétien.

This is a lesson which Gottfried understands. In making Hartmann the pinnacle of communicative language, *der Ouwaere* becomes an inimitable example. This explains why Gottfried tells us only that he understands Hartmann's corpus and not what he understands. To give a name to this inexplicable concept, I would suggest that we use a term from James F. Poag's article, "Lying Truth in Gottfried's *Tristan*." Poag refers to "a structure of meaning objectively present in the world"[61] in Wolfram's *Parzival*, but we find discourse about such a structure in Chrétien and Hartmann's discourse on poetics. Along with Gottfried, all four adaptors are agreed that the listener must act as if the Arthurian Romance contains meaning which the text obscures but makes available. This is akin to the bet Calogrenant/Kalogrenant makes with his listeners. As the audience, we may not be able to explain the presence of every verse, motif or event, but we assume that every scene, sentence and word has value.

Gottfried uses *Tristan* to launch an assault on the centrality of objective meaning assumed to underly the Arthurian Romance. We have already seen that meaning is something which the Arthurian Romance's listener is expected to uncover for himself, and the listener does so under the assumption that active, attentive listening will produce results. Poag uses the term "objective meaning" as a part of his brief but insightful contrast of the figure Tristan with his less enlightened counterpart, Parzival. Any reader of Wolfram's extended continuation of Chrétien's text knows the lengths taken by the adaptor to include and tie together numerous narrative threads. One of the most evocative but mysterious symbols in the poem is the Grail itself. It is an object whose presumed

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[61] "Lying Truth in Gottfried's Tristan," *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 61. 2 (1987): 223.

significance is never expressly elucidated in either Chrétien or Wolfram. It should prove

fruitful to quote Poag at length:

> Wolfram von Eschenbach's Parzival is a hero for whom subjective experience has
> become a central problem. Yet his quest is direct toward discovery of *a structure
> of meaning objectively present in the world* [italics mine]: Parzival is led by grace
> through an ascending order of initiation, until he enters into his inheritance, an
> earthly, feudal kingdom which is at the same time the unmistakable sign of
> Heaven. Gottfried von Straßburg's Tristan finds himself, on the other hand, in a
> dissolving world, where meaning has become questionable, where the normal
> feudal order no longer obtains, where even God seems subsumed by the wholly
> conditional.[62]

Poag's emphasis on the importance of coherent structures is helpful because it not only

highlights the difference between *Tristan* and *Parzival*, but between *Tristan* and the

organizing principle of the Arthurian Romances. Parzival learns to reconcile his

understanding of the world with existing systems of order. As a child in the forest of

Soltane, Parzival initially understands what people say but not what they mean. He

focuses on the ornamentation of language instead of its meaning but ultimately acquires

the capacity to link the words and intentions of others. He learns to react to the specifics

of each situation, having gained the understanding that he must interpret the specific

situation. The scenarios change, but "objective meaning" remains an unseen but

presumed constant, reified in the form of the Grail, in the midst of extreme fluctuation.

While *Parzival*'s listeners are expected to be better informed than the halfwit from the

woods, their path is still very similar to that of the protagonist. They do not know what

lies ahead, must reconsider past events based on new information and are left with

symbols such as the Grail whose meaning cannot be definitively explained nor should it

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[62] Ibid.

be. Blindly following the path of another, as Yvain/Iwein does, or slavishly adhering to one, unshakable tenant, is unacceptable.

The adaptors of Arthurian Romances cast a long shadow over *Tristan* by making refracted linguistic clarity into a goal supported through the particulars of a text. In writing his Arthurian Romance, Gottfried does not so much go against custom but rather upsets already shaky foundations. He rejects the article of faith that there will be meaning for the audience to find. We saw earlier that while Gottfried admires the works of men like Hartmann, Bligger and Heinrich, these three adaptors mark language's descent into chaos. *Tristan*'s adaptor feels that he cannot imitate them in blind faith. Gottfried borrows the forms from these men and others like them, but also rejects trying to duplicate the interpretive process. The goal is not the divine *spiritus* but very worldly "hot air" in the form of fictions (*lügen*) which delight and appease without any hidden didactic content.[63]

Chaos Through Flattery

Like the poem itself, the figure of Tristan is an overabundance of signifiers. A master of languages as well as of the mechanical and liberal arts, he succeeds in briefly being all things to all people. Gottfried is trying to break out of familiar, meaningless moulds by being overly, and overtly, chaotic. Part of the appeal of the Tristan legend for Gottfried is the lovers' purported lack of culpability for their actions.[64] Long before the love potion is consumed, Tristan has already experimented widely with different guises

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[63] Timothy Jackson defines the medieval conception of fiction as speech which contains hidden moral teachings: "eine *lüge* [ist] eine Fiktion; sie ist Erzähltes, das sich in Wirklichkeit nicht zugetragen hat, das aber einen (moralischen) Wert in sich tragen kann." In: *Typus und Poetik: Studien zur Bedeutungsvermittlung in der Literatur des deutschen Mittelalters* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2003), 20.

[64] In her analysis of the poem, "D'Amors qui m'a tolu a moi," widely attributed to Chrétien, Virginia Greene draws the comparison between the lover in the poem who "unlike Tristan [...] accepts full responsibility for the fact that he loves his lady." In: *Thinking Through Chrétien de Troyes*, 23.

and backstories. When the opportunity arises, he takes no responsibility for his words. In this section, I would like to look at one of the early scenes from the poem, in which Tristan first arrives at Mark's Court, Tintagel, in Cornwall. In his first public performance at court, Tristan cajoles and leads his audience into a state of blithe submission. Away from the watchful eye of his guardian and adoptive father, Rual, Tristan is free to experiment and employ his skills as a storyteller without any regard for his own past or the consequences of his words and actions for the future.

Although Cornwall is the place of Tristan's birth, the boy does not know that his arrival is also a homecoming. He performs for an audience made up of Mark and his Court, all of whom are strangers to Tristan. Ever one to attract attention, Tristan puts all his skills on display:

> die saelde haete im [Tristan] got gegeben:
> er kunde und wolte in allen leben.
> lachen, tanzen, singen,
> rîten, loufen, springen,
> zuhten unde schallen,
> daz kunde er mit in allen (*T* 3495-3500)

> [God had bestowed on him [Tristan] the grace of being willing and able to live for his fellows. Laughing, dancing, singing, riding, running, leaping, being on his best behaviour and letting himself go, this he could do with everyone (88).]

I would advise against construing Tristan's behavior as altruistic, since he does not so much live "for his fellows" as parasitically live from them. Tristan acts like a well-trained but dangerous pet, harmless enough at first but not if he becomes agitated. Tristan behaves subserviently as it suits him, and most of those with whom Tristan comes into contact find that he mirrors their wishes and desires, rather than challenging them. Like a

siren,[65] Tristan pulls others into his orbit with his looks, music and words. In Mark's court, Tristan plays the harp (*T* 3549-3570; 3584-3608) along with other stringed instruments (*T* 3666-3682) and sings in Breton, Welsh, Latin and French (*T* 3626-3628). The court, in envious admiration, praises the fourteen-year old who has mastered everything:

> â Tristan, waere ich alse duo!
> Tristan, dû maht gerne leben!
> Tristan, dir ist der wunsch gegeben,
> aller der vuoge, die kein man
> ze dirre werlde gehaben kan
> [...]
> elliu diu werlt diu hoere her!
> ein verzehenjaerec kind
> kan al die liste, di nu sint! (*T*, 3710-3714; 3718-3720)

> ['Ah, Tristan, how I wish I were like you!' 'Tristan, life is worth living for you!' 'Tristan, you have been given the pick of all the talents that a man can possess in this life!' [...] 'Do listen everybody! A fourteen-year-old child has learned all the arts there are!' (91)]

Tristan makes himself into a compendium of learned skills and thereby demonstrates his exemplarity. Through performance, Tristan's audience bestows upon him their own meanings. They see only what they want to see, and Tristan does the utmost to correspond to any and all preconceptions. This is a deliberate and calculated reversal of Calogrenant/Kalogrenant's instructions. In his story of failure, the disgraced knight challenges the Arthurian Court's concept of itself, presenting his audience with an ostensibly true narrative which challenges the social order. Ever consistent, those at court, including Yvain/Iwein, ignore the criticism embedded in Calogrenant/Kalogrenant's

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[65] Kästner compares Tristan to a siren when he first travels to Ireland, but I would suggest that the destructive magnetism of the main figure begins at least as early as Mark's court. See: *Harfe und Schwer*t, 89. Hugo Bekker also compares Tristan to a Siren in this same scene. In: *Gottfried von Strassburg's* Tristan, 78.

spoken text. Tristan, in contrast, flatters those at Mark's Court, particularly the King, and is welcomed in spite of the dearth of information surrounding his person. The court in Cornwall embraces Tristan a freestanding signifier, independent of even the preceding episodes in the poem.[66]

Tristan is a mirror for Mark's wishes and those of the court.[67] As Marc Chinca explains, Tristan's experiments in non-didactic fiction succeed because his narratives are credible: "Tristan has succeeded in refashioning his inherited identity into a new, experimental one, which is accepted by his audience because to them it sounds 'vür war'."[68] Tristan corresponds to his audience's preconceptions just as Gottfried's poem is constructed out of a bricolage of extant classical and contemporary material familiar to educated and non-educated audiences. Tristan is the accessible point of intersection for numerous texts, bringing language to life through word, sound and deed. Mark sees his nephew as an agent who can fill any possible lack: *an dir* [Tristan] *ist allez, des ich ger. / dû kanst allez, daz ich wil: / jagen, sprâche, seitspil* (*T*, 3722-3724) [you can do everything I want - hunting, languages, music (91)]. There is, however, a catch. Tristan reflects the desires of other figures but never fulfills them. Tristan is an object of desire, who at first glance appears to meet others' expectations but, like the unrequited love which informs the second half of the narrative, must ultimately disappoint.

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[66] Tristan fabricates a lengthy backstory and says, truthfully, that he comes from Parmenie (*T* 3277) but also states that his father is a merchant (*T* 3282). The hunter who relates this information to Mark expresses his doubts about the veracity of Tristan's story (*T* 3284-3311), but Mark ignores him.

[67] This is a process which repeats itself many times over, most importantly in Tristan's description of Isolde. Tristan has seen her but the others at Mark's court has not. Jackson identifies a lack of any reference to Isolde's considerable intellectual talents. Tristan's vivid description (*T*, 8253-8300) is centered on her physical attributes alone because Mark and his retinue are not capable of appreciating much else: "Tristan knows what will appeal to Mark's court." In: Jackson, *Anatomy of Love*, 78.

[68] *History, Fiction, Verisimilitude*, 115.

Calogrenant/Kalogrenant shows us how problematic linguistic exchange can be in an environment where the figures act as if familiar words of praise were their own valediction. The Arthurian Court treats itself as a mythic entity even though its figures and their values are base and their worth is not recognized by outsiders.[69] Gottfried continues this tradition of problematic linguistic exchange, but the situation has become more complicated. *Tristan*'s adapter is not just distancing himself from the Arthurian Court but also from the poems in which the Arthurian Court is rejected. This rejection of a rejection threatens to bring the process full circle: rejecting the tale of the knight who escapes from Arthur's Court threatens to lead back to Arthur. Rather than avoid this confrontation, Gottfried experiments by sending his main figure back to the Round Table. When Tristan arrives at Mark's court in Cornwall, the main figure enters a sealed linguistic environment and upsets extant systems of signification even as he appears to uphold them.

We find linguistic slippage away from the ideal in the aforementioned scene in front of Mark's court. Foreign languages are a hallmark of life in Cornwall, and Tristan has mastered them all. Mark's nephew is the focal point around which these different and irreconcilable means of expression converge, which puts Tristan in a position of power.

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[69] Laudine laments to Yvian that on a previous visit to Arthur's court, no one had spoken to her because she did not adhere to the court's own standards. In both Chrétien and Hartmann, Lunete does not explicitly criticize the Arthurian Court. Instead, she states that the fault may have been hers: *si ne fui pas si sage, / Si cortoise ne de tel estre* (*Y* 1006-1007) [Perhaps I was not as prudent or courteous or correct (*Y* 307); *ich weiz doch wol daz ez geschach* / von mîner *unhövescheit* (*I* 1189) [I know that this was owing to my uncourtly behavior (250)]. Laudine helps Yvain/Iwein because he spoke to her when the others did not, and his model behavior demonstrates that the hostility shown Lunete is a fault within the institution. When subjected to outside standards, the Arthurian Court is in the wrong, and this image is tarnished even further in *Yvain/Iwein* as Arthur's traveling court becomes a threat rather than a refuge. Lunete considers the King and his men enemies on two separate occasions. The Arthurian Court is a force to be escaped or defeated in battle, and victory over the court signals progression towards a renewal of language. Such a transformation is never achieved in *Yvain/Iwein*, but a hope in such a possibility is necessary for the continued exchange of words to have any value.

He controls the flow of information and understands everyone else. At the same time, Tristan dictates what, if anything, others learn about him. Tristan is a very good listener and a convincing speaker, but his exemplarity only shows how little the members of the Court in Cornwall understand each other. It is Babel in miniature, and the shared *lingua* is not a language at all but a person. Those proficient in foreign languages put Tristan's knowledge to the test. The courtiers gather around him:

> und swer iht vremeder zungen
> von den bîlanden kunde,
> der versuohte in [Tristan] sâ zestunde:
> dirre sus und jener sô.
> hier under antwurte er [Tristan] dô
> höfschlîche ir aller maeren:
> Norwaegen, Îrlandaeren,
> Almânjen, Schotten unde Tenen. (3696-3703)

> [(A)nd those who had any acquaintance with the tongues of neighbouring countries lost no time in testing him, one in one language, the next in another. While this was going on he [Tristan] replied to what they had to say - to Norwegians, Irishmen, Germans, Scots, and Danes (91).]

Tristan exceeds his audience's expectations. He answers their questions politely, earns his listeners' admiration (*T* 3708-3714) and even makes them a bit jealous: *â Tristan, waere ich alse duo!* (*T* 3710) [Ah, Tristan, how I wish I were like you! (91)]. Tristan gives an appropriate response to every statement and question posed by his interlocutors. He plays to the courtiers' interests and becomes whoever or whatever his listeners desire him to be. Calogrenant/Kalogrenant's tale breaks Arthur's Court apart by offending its idealized conception of itself, but Calogrenant/Kalogrenant's intention is to resurrect, albeit imperfectly, language in the act of interpretation and further adaptation. Tristan offers the

illusion of instantaneously revived communication without the hard work, suffering and fear of failure.

Tristan is too good to be true. He is a quick fix to a problem without a solution. Nevertheless, he becomes the center of the Court in Cornwall because he seems to verify the validity of each person's speech. Chinca suggests that in Gottfried "Fiction and truth evidently rank as equals in the creation of social relationships",[70] although only if the truth is as appealing as the fiction. With Tristan present, everyone can raise his voice and feel validated, just as in the literary landscape depicted by Gottfried in the "Literary Excursus." Even the King is willing to subordinate himself to Tristan. Mark echoes the court's sentiments of admiration when he says: *an dir ist allez, des ich gern. / dû kanst allez, daz ich wil: / jagen, sprâche, setispil* (*T*, 3722-3724) [you can do everything I want - hunting, languages, music (91)]. Whether being a hunter, an expert in the many known tongues of the earth or a musician, Tristan's exchanges with the members of Mark's Court are an exercise in ornamentation and instant gratification. His listeners enable this performance by giving no thought to the possibility of lies or even nuance.

At Cornwall, language has no authority. He who speaks the loudest, most aggressively and most convincingly speaks best. This portends a network of people, words and meaning which is on the verge of breaking down.[71] Tristan disguises this lack. Where Calogrenant/Kalogrenant upsets the image of the Arthurian Court, Tristan flatters the courtiers in Cornwall. Mimicry is a means of disguise and creates a cycle of

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[70] *History, Fiction, Verisimilitude,* 117.
[71] Tristan is not the only one who smells the court's weakness. The knight Gandin recognizes this deficiency and threatens the king: *werdet ir des überseit, / daz ir urwaere sît, / so ensult ir nâch der selben zît / dekeines landes künic wesen.* (*T* 13224-13227) [If you are proved a liar, you should not henceforth be king of any land (215)]. The rash boon which Arthur has sworn to Gandin is a means of putting the validity of the ruler's language to the test.

dependence. As Tristan takes center stage in courtly life, the court's image increasingly depends on Tristan alone. We can better appreciate Mark's unwillingness to later tolerate any attacks on his nephew's reputation, since any condemnation of Tristan is a condemnation of the court's very validity.

Tristan's sudden popularity and subsequent fall from favor amongst the courtiers is a pattern repeated throughout Gottfried's poem and not only at Mark's court. Tristan shows up out of the blue and ingratiates himself in his immediate surroundings. He appeals to his audience's desires and presents himself as the kind of man they want and need him to be. Yet there is always something deceptive about his words and actions. By allowing his listeners to see what they want to see and hear what they want to hear, Tristan satiates their curiosity, allowing him to proceed as he wishes. By speaking foreign languages, Tristan wows his audience through learned and practiced words which his listeners can only comprehend as sounds and whose meaning cannot be understood. Tristan treats his audience to a display of skills without content, but the ruse is quite successful. No figure in Mark's court questions the proceedings. Everyone at court loves Tristan (*T* 3746-3749), and Mark orders his nephew to be horsed and dressed in courtly finery (*T* 3734-3735).

In this "dissolving world",[72] Tristan's crowd-pleasing roll playing not only wins him accolades but, Wolfgang Mohr writes, creates the illusion "wahrer zu sein als die Wirklichkeit."[73]　Not a single courtier understands everything which transpires except Tristan, who becomes the false center around which Mark's Court now turns. Much like

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[72] Poag, "Lying Truth in Gottfried's Tristan," 223.
[73] "'*Tristan und Isold*' als Künstlerroman," *Euphorion* 53 (1959), 166.

the object of fascination in the *Minnesang*, a stranger with a questionable backstory "comes to the fore as the one courted, in whose power it lies to grant happiness or to cause woe[.]"[74] The consequence of the subservience, particularly Mark's, to the love-object will be an inability to later renounce Tristan. Mark and courtiers let themselves be awed by a figure driven by "einem puren Spieltrieb, und jeder Rolle vermag er eine solche Scheinwirklichkeit zu geben, daß die bare Wirklichkeit darüber verlaßt"[75] and only come to regret this decision when cracks in the facade begin to appear.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen that chaos and linguistic breakdown are very real threats in all the Arthurian Romances. Language is fraught with difficulty and very often fails to perform as anticipated: figures make rash boons with unintended consequences,[76] pronounce unenforceable edicts[77] and fail to use language in an appropriate quantity by either speaking too much or too little.[78] Without any guarantee of success, the adaptor tries to enact the imperfect renewal of language through textual production. By looking at the example of Calogrenant/Kalogrenant along with the adaptation and application of his

[74] Bekker, *Gottfried von Strassburgs* Tristan, 81.
[75] Wolfgang Mohr, "'*Tristan und Isold*' als Künstlerroman," *Euphorion* 53 (1959), 166.
[76] In *Lancelot*, the Queen and subsequently Arthur consent to Keu's unstated demand (*L* 154-170), and this decision leads to Keu taking the Queen away from Arthur's Court (*L* 171-179). Yvain/Iwein receives his permission to leave Laudine's court through a rash boon (*Y* 2556-2557; *I* 2913-2921). Hartmann's *Iwein* also refers to the Queen's kidnapping and return in *Lancelot* as well as to the consequences of Arthur's hasty consent to give the Seneschal whatever he desires (*I* 5678-5681). Gottfried takes up the *topos* of the rash boon from Chrétien and Hartmann. In *Tristan*, the knight cum musician Gandin comes to Mark's court in Cornwall with the intention of winning Isolde for himself (*T* 13130-13131). Mark makes a rash boon to the musician and is then forced to give Gandin whatever the latter might desire (*T* 13192-13196). The King's recklessness nearly leads to Isolde's kidnapping by Gandin.
[77] The promise which Yvain/Iwein swears to Laudine offers no possibility of penance if the oath is broken (*Y* 2595-2613; *I* 2926-2955). The inflexibility of the oath forces Lunette to trick Laudine into taking Yvain/Iwein back at the end of the narrative. See: Hennig, *'Maere' und 'werc'*, 180. In a similar vein, Erec retracts his command that his wife not speak during their journey through the woods (*EE* 4928-4931; *E* 6778-6799). Wolfram takes Erec and his adaptors to task for treating the abandonment of this prohibition too lightly (*P* 826, 25-20).
[78] Parzival's failure at the Grail Castle is the clearest example of speaking immoderately. See Trevrizent's explination of Parzival's folly (*P* 473,13-16).

text and instructions in *Yvain*/*Iwein*, we find that there is a hope beyond hope, rooted in fiction rather than reality. The metaphors employed in *Yvain*/*Iwein* for language's restitution are madness, foolishness, in which the mad or foolish man experiences a prelapsarian world. Through his madness, Yvain/Iwein develops the capacity to listen and reveal poetic language to others.

Gottfried's poem recognizes the breakdown of language and makes it a central theme, but it is at this juncture that *Tristan* follows a drastically different path than its French and German predecessors. When the promise of the Arthurian Romance fails one generation later, new and deceptive tactics are required. In *Tristan*, words form such a lengthy chain of signifiers that a reader can no longer be assured of their authenticity. Linguistic chaos reigns, but Gottfried's central figure jumps willingly into the fray. Tristan generates *Scheinwahrheiten* to win the approval and support of others. He offers his audience transitory fictions which are disguise rather than solve the crisis of meaning haunting Mark's court in Cornwall.

Tristan and the figure of Tristan are both texts composed of contradictory and subjective statements. As soon as the title figure, "a master dissembler" moves out into the world, his narrative becomes one of separate textual fragments: "From the start, in fact, the entirety of Tristan's history is brought about by various counterfeits and deceptions,"[79] all of which sound credible.[80] Tristan fights the causality between different

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[79] John S. Anson, "The Hunt of Love: Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan* as Tragedy," *Speculum* 45.4 (Oct., 1970), 594.

[80] While Tristan's fabricated stories become more outlandish as the poem progresses, his moments of invention early in the poem are credible. Writing of Tristan's first fabricated tale in his encounter with the pilgrims, Chinca notes: "Tristan, unlike his counterpart in the saga, is careful to give an account that his interlocutors can neither verify nor falsify and, indeed, is so plausibly narrated that they have no choice but to believe him." In: *History, Fiction, Verisimilitude*, 113.

episodes,[81] making Gottfried's *Tristan* not so much a single text but a series of overlapping but incongruous texts. The figure of Tristan is likewise composed of multiple fictions. With each dishonest act, Gottfried's poem moves one step further away from a single, acknowledged structure uniting the work and plunges even deeper into the realm of fragmentation and disunity.

At several times in *Tristan*, Gottfried refers to his main figure as *der ellende*.[82] The word first appears after Tristan's kidnapping (*T* 2483) but comes to describe his perpetual state of non-belonging. The adjective *elend* still exists in modern German and means wretched or miserable. In its older usage, this nominalized adjective also refers to a person in exile. All these meanings are applicable: Tristan is a man who suffers, he is homeless, and he is in exile. Like a work being read aloud or a painting being viewed, Tristan's only reprieve from his homelessness are those moments where he entertains through his own fictions. Like the *exsul* Aeneas but whose journey never concludes, Tristan is perpetually homeless and in exile. Alone in the woods at the beginning of the poem, the boy exclaims to God:

> nu warte ich allenthalben mîn
> und sihe niht lebendes umbe mich.
> dise grôze wilde die vührt ich.

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[81] Gottfried begins his *Tristan* with the tale of Tristan's parents Riwalin and Blanchefleur which, although at times tumultuous, nevertheless reaches resolution. Riwalin easily succumbs to momentary whims (*T* 262-264) but is otherwise exemplary (*T* 247-259). Their story reaches a definitive if tragic end accompanied by a lesson on the transitory nature of joy and happiness (*T* 1776-1786). Many critics have seen the Riwalin-Blanchefleur section as a precursor to Tristan's own story. Yet I would argue that the two cannot be compared, in spite of some obvious thematic similarities such as illicit love and rash behavior. First, the parents' story is complete but Tristan's is not. Second, the first section depends on meaningful causality whereas the second does not. The ending may be grim and society's structures uncertain, but Gottfried does not exhibit his "dissolving world" in full until Tristan's portion of the poem begins. Third, the parents' story is short, coherent and understandable in contrast to the nearly 18,000 lines which follow it.

[82] Marc Chinca's monograph lists the lines in which the word appears, for which I am grateful: (2483, 2487, 2862, 2921 ('der ellende gast'), 3254, 8215, 8876, 18752. In: *History, Fiction, Verisimilitude*, 119.

swar ich mîn ougen wende,
da ist mir der werlde ein ende. (T 2500-2504)

[I now look all about me and see no living thing. How I dread this great wilderness. Wherever I bend my eyes I see the end of the world (74).]

The description has to do with more than just the scenery. Tristan is a figure perpetually caught between multiple reference points, all of which he rejects. His status as a man in exile in his own story never changes: "Der Wirkungsbereich des 'Künstlers' Tristan ist immer die Fremde."[83]

It is at this juncture that we leave the prophet Calogrenant/Kalogrenant behind, whose fears and hopes are confirmed in the plot of *Yvain*/*Iwein*. We will leave Tristan in the wilderness for now and return to a locus of purported power and great renown, the Arthurian Court, where not a prophet but a messianic figure is about to make his entrance.

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[83] Mohr, "'*Tristan und Isold'* als Künstlerroman," 155.

Chapter Three
The Knight as a Deconstructive Force

<u>Introduction</u>

In this chapter, I suggest that a successful knight is a good deconstructionist who challenges the authority of the Arthurian Court and who exemplifies a reconstructed alternative. To explore this thesis, I will look at the figure of Erec in Chrétien's *Erec et Enide* and Hartmann's *Erec*[1] together with Gottfried's Tristan. My understanding of deconstruction is derived largely, and perhaps too selectively, from a single passage in Jacque Derrida's *Of Grammatology*:

> The movements of deconstruction do not destroy structures from the outside. They are not possible and effective, nor can they take accurate aim, except by inhabiting those structures. Inhabiting them *in a certain way*, because one always inhabits, and all the more when one does not suspect it. Operating necessarily from the inside, borrowing all the strategic and economic resources of subversion from the old structure, borrowing them structurally, that is to say without being able to isolate their elements and atoms, the enterprise of deconstruction always in a certain way falls prey to its own work.[2]

In the Arthurian Romance, the knight's undertaking is always an inside job. Although a knight like Erec or Yvain/Iwein invariably abandons various courtly milieux for a period of time, he never fully escapes them and thus cannot help but inhabit the institution he

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[1] A brief interjection about the incompleteness of Hartmann's *Erec* is required at this juncture. The prologue to Hartmann's text is missing, but there is no reason to think that it would differ wildly from Chrétien's. Hartmann's opening to *Iwein* demonstrates that Chrétien's German adaptor chose to write more about pomp and ceremony than his predecessor. Thus I presume that Hartmann did not reduce Chrétien's emphasis on appearances in place of substance. Also, given that Hartmann's adaptations are significantly longer than Chrétien's at virtually ever juncture, it is certainly not improbably that Hartmann's descriptions may have been even more indulgent than those of his predecessor. Scott E. Pincikowski gives a good overview of the extant Hartmann manuscripts at the beginning of his *Bodies of Pain: Suffering in the Works of Hartmann von Aue* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 1.

[2] Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimre: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 24.

reforms.[3] The knight's exploits expose the emptiness of the Arthurian Court and similar courtly institutions which adhere slavishly to their own boasts and claims. At the text's conclusion, the knight can only offer a varied alternative of other extant courtly forms in the text. The incompleteness of the knight's project and thus of the Arthurian Romance itself leaves the door open for further adaptations.

The Arthurian Romance and its protagonists are both the agents and products of deconstruction. The knight breaks things apart so that he might rebuild them. At the same time, the knight must also be partially destroyed and reformed, a process rendered visible through madness in *Yvain*/*Iwein* and debilitating wounds in *Erec et Enide*/*Erec*. The term deconstruction, as elucidated here by Arthur Bradley, captures this process of breaking down in order to build up: "As its unusual etymology - with those two apparently contradictory prefixes 'de-' and 'con-' rubbing shoulders against one another - suggests, 'deconstruction' actually describes a double process that is *both* positive *and* negative, both destructive *and* constructive."[4] As we saw in the previous chapter on *Yvain*/*Iwein*, Yvain/Iwein experiences a period of madness and forgetting in which the division between language and experience is nearly totally effaced. The change wrought on the

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[3] The final reconciliation between Chrétien Yvain and Laudine is brought about through verbal trickery. Lunete traps Laudine *au jeu de verité* (*Y* 6634) [the game of truth (378)], which Fredric L. Cheyette and Howell Chickering explain is "a courtly game in which one player pledges to perform something as yet unspecified by another." In: "Love, Anger, and Peace: Social Practice and Poetic Play in the Ending of *Yvain*," *Speculum* 80.1 (2005), 104. Yvain's reconciliation with Lunette is a return to the status quo rather than a meaningful step forward. The union of Yvain and Laudine was brought about by force the first time: Yvain unjustly murders Esclados and supplants him in the marriage bed, but Lunette does tell the Queen whom she is about to marry. Her earlier tactic is a careful presentation of Laudine's precarious situation apropos the fountain. She insists that Yvain is the only assurance against further interference from outside forces. Lunette is more deceptive the second time around. At the poem's conclusion, persuasion has now become outright deceit. Lunette is as an even more skilled con-man than before and Laudine, having learned nothing, is as malleable ever. The conclusion is both laughable and quite serious. After becoming a visible sign for poetic language, Yvain returns to a union and institutional affiliation founded on verbal trickery and deceit and, to borrow Derrida's words, "falls prey to his own work."

[4] Arthur Bradley, *Derrida's* Of Grammatology (Edingburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 42.

body and mind of the knight reveals new visual signifiers. The process snowballs as Yvain/Iwein travels into unknown territory to further alter himself along with existing hierarchies.[5]

The same contradiction between destruction and construction lies at the heart of the genre. The Arthurian Romance questions its own validity, calling attention to the bond of faith which must be established between the speaker and the listener via the text. Just as the legitimacy of Arthur's Court is challenged, each new adaptation must aggressively confront its genre and source material, thereby "undoing, dismantling or questioning the way in which any given system is put together[.]"[6] The Arthurian Romance is a text which comes closest to complete reconstruction in its interpretation through the obliteration of the division between writing and reading.[7] Initially incomplete, the text must be undone in order to achieve its full, reconstructed state. The adaptor instructs his listeners to break down and then build up the far from immutable text.[8] Like the knight, the Arthurian Romance is designed to be born anew with each iteration, resembling its predecessors and counterparts without ever being quite the same.

With Chrétien's *Erec et Enide* and Hartmann's *Erec*, we can test the hypothesis that the knight is an agent of deconstruction even as he is himself deconstructed. Next to Tristan, Erec is the most perceptive protagonist in all of the Arthurian Romances. Like

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[5] At the conclusion to *Iwein*, Laudine does not recognize her husband. She knows him only as the knight *mit dem der lewe varend ist* (I 7927) [who travels with the lion (318)]. Laudine is tricked into taking back her husband when he appears to her *gewâfnet daz im nihts gebrast* (*I* 8039) [in full armor (320)] and does not speak a word (*I* 8043). In keeping with the self-defeat inherent in deconstructionism, Yvain/Iwein's lion, the visible and evidently frightening symbol of his accomplishments disappears.

[6] Arthur Bradley, *Derrida's* Of Grammatology, 42.

[7] See: Barthes, "From Work to Text," 162.

[8] As Arthur Bradley explains, the action of reconstruction is inherent in this process: "its [deconstructionism's] purpose is not to destroy but to re-construct, re-constitute or re-affirm any structure. If deconstruction is actually an exercise in 'reconstruction', however, it does not seek to put things back together exactly as they were." *Derrida's* Of Grammatology, 43.

Gottfried's central figure, Erec understands that being an ideal knight means not having a home. He removes himself from and then travels between diverse *milieux*. For a time, Erec too becomes *der ellende man* (*E* 4023) [the stranger (99)]. Like Yvain/Iwein and unlike Tristan, Erec finds a compromise between loss, reform and living amongst imperfect systems of organization. Haunted by his past, the protagonist finds that the Arthurian Court can be neither fully destroyed nor ignored. Just as Chrétien is unable to banish the inferior counter-narratives propagated by the *jongleurs*,[9] the final stage in Erec's process of identity deconstruction requires an imperfect reconciliation between his allegiances to established institutions and a separate, reconstructed self.

Erec and Tristan both grapple with the difficulties and uncertainties of language. It is language which traps them, but each protagonist turns words into a means of breaking down the established order. Erec rejects the Arthurian Court's unfounded belief in its own grandiosity, whereas Tristan uses recognized linguistic forms as a mask to outmaneuver a seemingly inescapable fate, creating for others a reality which is more present through lies than truths.

I shall trace Erec's transformation from knight into text by looking first at the conditions of his departure from Arthur's Court and his final triumphant victory against the giant Mabonagrin. I shall then turn to *Tristan*, who suffers from an even more acute sense of confinement than Erec. Like the titular hero in Chrétien and Hartmann's narratives, Tristan tries to free himself from linguistic traps. Gottfried's world is even

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[9] In the prologue to *Erec et Enide*, Chrétien calls his poem *une mout bele conjointure* (*EE* 14) ["a beautifuly ordered composition" (37)] and emphasizes that it is not a hack-job *que* [other, traveling storytellers] *devant rois et devant contes / depecier et corronpre suelent* (*EE* 20-21) ["(which others) mangle and corrupt before kings and counts" (37)]. Chrétien's *Erec et Enide* might look like other competing versions of the tale, but because of Chrétien's arrangement and embellishment of individual scenes makes Erec's text his own.

more chaotic, unpredictable and cruel than Chrétien or Hartmanns's. Burdened by an inescapable, tragic fate, Tristan undertakes even more radical measures to free himself than Erec. My analysis of *Tristan* focuses on two defining facets of this figure: his literacy and its application in his forged identity as a merchant. Unlike his predecessors Erec and Yvain/Iwein, both of whom "are concerned with bringing order into a turbulent world,"[10] Tristan engages in nihilistic destruction, breaking things apart without any intention of putting them together again.

The Orator and the Poet

Erec and Tristan's two approaches to language, escape and exploitation, can be encapsulated, if not without complication, in two rhetorical figures: the poet and the orator. Admittedly, drawing a distinction between the two creates a false division, as one has a great deal in common with the other. The poet and the orator both rely on a classically influenced education in rhetoric and thus have recourse to the same toolset. The point of distinction, which I would like to briefly explore here, comes down to the question of intent. An orator's stated intentions are public whereas a poet's are hidden, private or otherwise disguised. As Padraic Colum suggests: "Oratory deals with public

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[10] Judith Kellogg, *Medieval Artistry and Exchange* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), 76.

things; poetry deals with the secret things in the life of man."[11] Put another way, an

orator's audience expects him to tell the truth whereas a poet's expects him to lie.[12]

I am building here on the orator-poet distinction made by Ruth Morse in her

monograph, *Truth and Convention in the Middle Ages*. Morse defines an orator as "a

master of the art of moving and persuading an audience."[13] This is an orator's sole

intention, and the power of his words depends on their efficacy at the moment in which

they are uttered. Unlike the knight, who "cannot make sense of [adventure] at the time of

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[11]"Poetry and Oratory," *Poetry* 9.4 (Jan., 1917), 200.

[12] This rupture between a speaker's words and his intentions is a major concern for Quintilian in his *Institutio Oratoria*, but it is a problem to which he offers no solution. Quintilian writes that only a virtuous man can be a fully formed orator: "*Oratorem autem institiumus illum perfectum, qui esse nisi vir bonus non potest, ideoque non dicendi modo eximiam in eo facultatem, sed omnis ainimi virtutes exigimus* (*Proeminum* to Book I, 9) [Dem vollkommenen Redner aber gilt unsere Unterweisung in dem Sinne jener Forderung, daß nur ein wirklich guter Mann ein Redner sein kann; und deshalb fordern wir nicht nur hervorragende Redegabe in ihm, sondern alle Mannestugenden]." The uncertainty of the speaker's intentions and his virtuousness remains an insoluble problem. While a listener may hope that his speaker is a *vir bonus*, the talent for oratory is hardly restricted to such a class of candidates. Moreover, a good orator has even less incentive to speak honestly, since he can easily convince his audience that he is telling them the truth. For Quintilian, there is no higher authority to whom one can look for guidance. Even many teachers of wisdom (*sapientiae professorum multos*) do not always live as they teach: "*sed vultum et tristitiam et dissentientem a ceteris habitum pessimis moribus praetendebant*" (*Proemium* to Book I, 15) [sondern mit ihrem Mienenspiel, düsterem Ernst und von den anderen abstechender Tracht verdeckten sie ihre schlimmsten Unsitten]. The original Latin and the German translation are found in: *Institutionis Oratoriae/Ausbildung des Redners*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. Helmut Rahn (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1972), 6, 10 (Latin); 7, 11 (German).
Concerns about the misuse of rhetoric extend beyond the orator to any educated practitioner of language, including those speaking or writing about divine truths. Even when a speaker employs rhetoric in the service of God, the possibility remains that the tools of rhetoric might be used to deceive a listener. It is thus understandable that someone like Augustine, himself a student of and advocate for classical traditions, should be wary of the orator's expertise, particularly when combined with ambition. An orator speaks in order to win, and the importance of winning an argument trumps any obligation to speak honestly: "From classical tradition Augustine inherited the threefold distinction among the aims or offices of eloquence: '[The orator] should speak in such a way that he teaches, delights and moves.' [Doc 4.12.27] [...] Although 'delight has no small place in the art of eloquence' (4.13.29), it is often superfluous to the teaching of the truth. Most important, when separated from the truth, the delight aroused by eloquence is very dangerous, as when things are urged 'only for the sake of pleasure [*delectatio*]' (4.14.30)." (In: Eric Jager, *The Tempter's Voice: Language and the Fall in Medieval Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 103-104.) For Augustine, the Fall of man could be understood as the misuse of rhetoric by a corrupt orator and corruptible audience: "[T]he Fall was tantamount to a subversion of the art of rhetoric, especially the proper relation among the three offices - to teach, to move, and to delight. Eve was merely 'moved' and 'delighted' by what the Serpent said; 'teaching,' in the proper sense, had no part in the act of persuasion" (Ibid., 112). Even when the orator employs his rhetorical skills in the teaching of divine truth, this is still no guarantee that he will speak honestly. Man is perfectly capable of imitating the serpent. The orator may cause his listeners to error by moving and delighting them.

[13] *Truth and Convention in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 34.

its occurrence",[14] oratory is not intended to be interpreted long after the fact. The goal is short-term. With its roots in the courtroom, oratory is a genre "created and developed for a single performance."[15] Moreover, the orator need not mean what he says. His speech is markedly decontextualized. An orator's success is measured against the audience's reactions and the attainment of his goal.

A poet, conversely, is someone who "write[s] for the private reader."[16] In the presence of a listening audience, the poet shares his words but not their meaning. Unlike the orator, the poet speaks discursively. In the Arthurian Romance, the poetic path plays out in time and space, echoing Geoffrey of Vinsauf's instructions in his twelfth century *Poetria Nova*: *nec sermo perambulet in re, / Sed rem circuiens longis ambagibus ambi / Quod breviter dicturus eras* (v. 230-233) [Do not let your words move straight onward through the subject, but, circling it, take a long and winding path around what you were going to say briefly].[17] It is expected that a poet's words signify, but their significance is only unearthed through a process of interpretation alters the text.

With their shared roots in rhetoric, oratory and poetry are not mutually exclusive categories. Oratory may use poetic flourishes, and medieval poetics are rooted in the conventions of classical oratory. Furthermore, an orator's speech may be better appreciated by some members of his audience than others, particularly those also trained in rhetoric. The same holds true for a poet's listeners. Wolfram and Gottfried both

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[14] Zrinka Stahuljak, *Thinking Through Chrétien de Troyes* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2011), 85.

[15] Harold Gatoff, "Oratory: The Art of Illusion," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 95 (1993), 289.

[16] Morse, *Truth and Convention in the Middle Ages*, 34.

[17] The Latin text is found in: *Les arts poétiques du XIIe et du XIIIe siècle: rechersches et documents sur la technique littéraire du moyen âge* (Paris: Champion, 1924). The English comes from Margaret F. Nims' translation (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1967). Quoted in: Douglas Kelly, *The Art of Medieval French Romance* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 59.

reference an esoteric group of listeners in their prologues. Some members of the audience will understand the poem in ways others will not.[18] Each adaptor alludes to the poetic quality of his poem, but the existence of a more-informed audience is an inversion of, and thus an allusion to, the oratorical practices at play alongside the poetic ones. Some listeners will only understand the poem superficially, whereas others will comprehend it poetically as a text.

Both the orator and the poet are performers,[19] but each aims to produce a different effect. Just as a dramatist crafts a play with the audience in mind, the orator privileges his performance over content. The potency of his words matters before all else:

> The sincerity and truth of what each artist [the dramatist and the orator] says is measured only by its effectiveness on the day of performance. In his attempt to control his audience by the unique combination of emotional and intellectual appeal that produces oratorical persuasion, the orator focuses on the effect of the moment. He strives, by practicing the art of illusion, to create a temporarily plausible reality.[20]

In his performance, the orator need not address anything other than present concerns. Like an actor onstage, the orator may choose to speak as if he were someone else. His words must be persuasive and appeal to the audience's emotions. Unlike the meandering

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[18] In *Parzival*, Wolfram distinguishes between *tumbe liute* (*P* 1,16) [dullards (3)] and the *wîser man* (*P*, 2,5) [a man so wise (4)]. Of this distinction, Green writes: "By implying that he addresses only such *wîsen* and by flattering each individual listener into believing that he belongs to this category, the narrator wins his audience for himself as effectively as when he manipulates them rhetorically into accepting Parzival's story as very much their own." In: *The Art of Recognition in Wolfram's* Parzival (London: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 27. Gottfried famously speaks of the *edele herzen* (*T* 47), "noble hearts." The term cannot be understood by Gottfried's choice in vocabulary and must refer to those in the audience who appreciate Gottfried's poetic language. Jackson writes: "Gottfried does not mean society or even polite society and the *edele herzen* are not simply nobles. They are an esoteric group and they have one characteristic in common - that they can understand Gottfried and the love of Tristan and Isolde as he presents it." In: *The Anatomy of Love: The* Tristan *of Gottfried von Strassburg* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 53.

[19] The poet or ersatz-poet performs for an audience much as an orator would. Into the twelfth century, a person reading to himself is still depicted as moving his lips as his eyes scan the page. See: Jager, *The Tempter's Voice*, 153. One of the depictions of reading in the first-generation Arthurian Romances is found in Hartmann's *Iwein*. A girl reads aloud while parents listen (*I* 6455-6458).

[20] Harold Gatoff, "Oratory: The Art of Illusion," 290.

language of the poet, however, the truth content of orator's language is not important. A good funeral oration, for example,[21] bestows praise on the dead man regardless of the speaker's own feelings.

Chrétien and Hartmann's poems attempt to resolve the unsettling tension between oratory and poetics. *Erec et Enide* begins with a proverb attributed to the peasantry: *Li vilains dit an son respit / Que tel chose a l'an an despit, / Qui mout vaut miauz que l'an ne cuide* (*EE*, 1-3) [The peasant in his proverb says that one might find oneself holding in contempt something that is worth much more than one believes (37)]. Chrétien reminds us that one must look beneath the surface of language for meaning, invoking the *Integumentum-Lehre*. The broad *sententia* begins the process of departure but does not guarantee resolution. The unnamed agent discards the unnamed object, but whether or not he later realizes his folly goes unaddressed.

The poem takes up the pithy statement by expanding and developing it into a more concrete form. Enide/Enite becomes the object of unappreciated value: "There seems to be in her [Enide] an almost perfect correlation between value and essence, outer symbol and inner nature, signifier and signified."[22] First seen in peasant attire, Enide/ Enite is the embodiment of deconstructed poetic language's potential. Clothes do not make the woman, and Enide/Enite's inner and outer harmony stands out against the varied and superficially unrelated materials which comprise the Arthurian Romance. In a certain sense, Enide/Enite enters the story prematurely since she reifies an abstract ideal,

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[21] Morse writes how divorced the custom of the funeral oration is from a display of sincere emotions: "The listeners were meant to receive pleasure from the oratorical display: the speaker appealed directly to their emotions. He was not on oath, and his duty to the memory of the dead man encouraged decoration and invention for the sake of the occasion." In: *Truth and Convention in the Middle Ages*, 129.

[22] Paul J. Archambault, "Erec's Search for a New Language: Chrétien and Twelfth-Century Science," *Symposium* 35.1 (Spring 1981), 7.

obtained but not yet comprehended. If adventure is the ongoing process of reevaluating the past in light of new and unexpected events, then Enide/Enite is adventure's *telos*: "The story of adventure is, after all, the apparently worthless thing that turns out to be of great value."[23] Although it is her husband who eventually embodies contingency and meaning at the poem's conclusion, the figure of Enide/Enite gives the listeners receive confirmation on the value of the interpretive act.[24] In his text, Chrétien and Hartmann present us with an abundance of signifiers without elucidating their significance. It is the listeners' task to deconstruct them, but the figure of Enide/Enite shows the potential rewards for our efforts. Discovered by chance in an unassuming abode, she is the essence of poetic language in a world largely dominated by deceptive oratory.

As we shall see in our analysis of *Erec et Enide* and *Erec*, the locus of baseless oratory, with its moribund networks of signification, is the Arthurian Court. Two generations of Arthurian Romance adaptors understand that the knight's quest permits him to carve out a small realm of poetic meaning in the midst of baseless but recognized signifiers. The adaptor employs the same signifiers he wishes to expose as inadequate, a reminder that "deconstruction always in a certain way falls prey to its own work."[25] The knight is, in his way, a poet amidst the orators, and the most successful and exemplary knight-cum-poet is Erec.

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[23] Tom Artin, *The Allegory of Adventure: Reading Chrétien's* Erec *and* Yvain (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1974), 38.

[24] It is, after all, Enide/Enite who rides ahead of Erec and who warns him of oncoming dangers. Until his triumphant victory over the giant Mabonagrin, abstract poetic meaning, embodied by Enide/Enite, is always a few steps ahead of Erec until Erec leaves her behind to enter the magical garden alone. See: Stahuljak, *Thinking Through Chrétien de Troyes*, 99

[25] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 24.

<u>Troubles at Court</u>

One would be forgiven for not immediately thinking of Erec as a figure with his own poetic concerns. He is not a scholar like Gregorius, a singer like Heinrich or a translator like Parzival. Yet the first knight in Chrétien and Hartmann's corpus turns out to be a perceptive observer, whose quest is driven by the absence of meaning in the Arthurian Court. As William C. McDonald highlights, Hartmann twice assigns Erec the epitaph *Êrec der wunderære* at the poem's conclusion (*E* 9308; 10045). Kim Vivian translates this phrase first as "the amazing Erec" (155) and then as "Erec the Doer of Wonderous Deeds" (162). McDonald opts for Erec the "'wonder worker'" and "'worker of wonders'."[26] I am in full agreement with McDonald that "the poet imputes qualities to Erec that affirm the spiritual dimension of the phrase [*Êrec der wunderære*],"[27] but I come to a different conclusion about the reason for the epithet's usage. I argue that both Chrétien and Hartmann's Erec is a "wonder worker" because he resurrects meaning in language. In a world dominated by oratory, Erec makes the poetic possible by becoming the text to his own story.

We must begin with the Arthurian Court. For my own understanding of this institution's role in *Erec et Enide* and in the other Arthurian Romances, I am particularly indebted to Paul J. Archambault's article, "Erec's Search for a New Language: Chrétien and Twelfth-Century Science." Archambault subjects the Arthurian Court to unusually harsh scrutiny and views Erec's adventures outside of its borders as a calculated escape from an injurious situation:

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[26] "*Êrec der wunderære*: On Epithet as Exegesis in Hartmann's 'Erec'," *The Journal of English and German Philology* 105.2 (Apr. 2006), 257; 258.
[27] Ibid., 258.

The eponymous hero's adventure might, then, be read not as a series of physical tests that give renewed validity to the traditional concept of courtly love, but almost as a series of excuses to escape and stay away from home, the Arthurian home which is losing its meaning for valid self-representation. The fundamental crisis of *Erec et Enide* seems to be a crisis of language.[28]

As I suggest in the previous chapter, the "crisis of language" lies at the heart of all the Arthurian Romances: Yvain/Iwein cannot distinguish between his own memories and those of Calogrenant/Kalogrenant, Parzival acquires knowledge of courtly texts only to reject them and Erec searches for an alternative to the failing Arthurian Court. The same crisis of language which warrants the creation of a new adaptation presents opportunities for novel forms and means of poetic exploration. The solution to the crisis is a text-based poetry in which the protagonist's sense of identity in challenged and which generates a network of signification too vast to be fully explained but whose depths every listener can potentially investigate. Thus the crisis of language is as much an opportunity as it is a shortcoming.

Chrétien's *Erec et Enide* begins on Easter:

Au jor de Pasque, au tans novel,
a Quaradigan, son chastel,
ot li rois Artus cort tenue;
einz si riche ne fu veüe
que molt i or boens chevaliers
hardiz et conbatanz et fiers,
et riches dames et puceles,
filles de rois gentes et beles (*EE* 27-34).

[On Easter day, in springtime, at Cardigan his castle, King Arthur held court. So rich a one was never seen, for there were many good knights, brave and combative and fierce, and rich ladies and maiden, noble and beautiful daughters of kings (37).]

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[28] "Erec's Search for a New Language," 5.

Perceptive listeners are already wary of such a straightforward statement concerning the grandiosity of Arthur's Court, particularly since the festivities are abnormally self-conscious. Ritual always requires the participant to be mindful of his part in the performance, but Arthur's knights appear embarrassingly aware of the ceremonies. The atmosphere, although initially cheerful, quickly assumes sinister undertones as it becomes clear that the courtiers are reluctant participants. In order to prolong the ordeal, Arthur intends to revive (*ressaucier*) the hunt for the white stag: *Mes ençcois que la corz faussist, / Li rois a ses chevaliers dist / Qu'il voloit le blanc cerf chacier / Por la costume ressaucier* (*EE* 35-38) [but before the court disbanded the king told his knights that he wanted to hunt the white stag in order to revive the tradition (37)]. The situation is familiar to anyone who has hosted a less than successful party: in desperation, the host devises one more activity to prevent his guests from leaving. Rather than welcoming the suggestion, the courtiers greet Arthur's proposed party game with considerable unease. In Cardigan, the guests are tired and morale has evidently sunk.

The hunt for the white stag is nothing new. The use of the verb *ressaucier* to describe the revival or reinstatement of the custom could be read in two different ways. Either it is a new, positive rebirth of an old tradition, the significance of which is underscored by the Easter-trope. Alternatively, the hunt for the white stag signifies a return to bad habits. If the latter reading is true, then Arthur proposes an activity which has, in the opinion of those at court, rightly fallen out of fashion. Guavain becomes the court's spokesman and tries to persuade the aged King to forego the hunt: *Mon seignor Gauvain ne plot mie, / Quant il ot la parole oïe. / «Sire», fet il, «de ceste chace / N'avroiz*

vos ja ne gré ne grace (*EE* 41-44) [My lord Gawain was not a bit pleased when he heard this. 'Sire,' said he, 'from this hunt you will gain neither gratitude nor thanks (37)]. Gawain further explains that the hunt leads to strife. The knight who kills the stag has the right to kiss the most beautiful girl at court (*EE* 46-49), which encourages every knight to assert that his lady is the most beautiful (*ou fust a tort ou fust a droit, EE* 56). Gawain does not specifically reference a previous hunt, but his remarks imply that activities such as the hunt for the white stag have led to problems in the past.

I have glossed this brief opening scene because it explains Erec's decision to leave Arthur's Court. The knight voices his discontent indirectly through his departure, much as Calogrenant/Kalogrenant makes his contempt for the Arthurian Court clear through his tale of dishonor. Gawain's opinions are shared by other courtiers. Internal dissent is on the rise because too many beautiful women (*EE* 50) and too many quarrelsome knights have turned the Arthurian Court into a powder keg. No solution is forthcoming. Calling off the hunt would solve the problem of impending strife but does nothing to alleviate discontent in the long term. Even critics like Gawain in *Erec et Enide/Erec* and Calogrenant/Kalogreannt in *Yvain/Iwein* ultimately remain with Arthur. These figures hint at reform, but aside from the actions which they inspire in the rogue protagonist, such criticisms go otherwise unheeded.

For Gawain and Calogrenant/Kalogrenant, the crucial problem is the court's collective inability to make valid judgments. Arthur's knights are not just quick to anger. Each man's displeasure stems from his own, unfounded opinion. Since the hunt for the white stag culminates in the king bestowing a kiss on the most beautiful maiden at court,

every knight will insist that his chosen female deserves this distinction. Gawain explains

this dilemma to Arthur:

> Ne n'i a nule n'et ami
> Chevallier vaillant et hardi,
> Qui cascuns desresnier voudroit,
> Ou fust a tort ou fust a droit, Que cele qui li atalante
> Est la plus bele et la plus jante. (*EE* 53-58)

> [and there is not a one [maiden at court] who is not the favourite of some valiant
> and bold knight, each of whom would want to contend, rightly or wrongly that the
> one who pleases him is the most beautiful and the most noble (37-38)].

Just Calogrenant/Kalogrenant gives instructions to listeners who will not understand him,

Gawain's criticism of Arthur's intention falls of deaf ears. In his words to the king,

Gawain addresses the court's two main problems: the institution's claim of great worth

and its inability to make and act in response to an accurate judgment.

Viewed more broadly, the Arthurian Court is trapped in its own legendary status.

Gawvain, the court's representative critic, and Arthur, its leader, are aware of this fact, but

this shared knowledge does not lead to action. After listening to Gawain's concerns,

Arthur responds that there is nothing he can do because his mind is made up: *Li rois*

respont: »ce sai ge bien; / mes por ce n'an lerai ge rien, / car parole que rois a dite / ne

doit puis estre contredite (*EE*, 59-62) [The king replied: 'This I know well, but I will not

give up my plan for all that, for the word of a king must not be contravened' (38)]. Arthur

is constant to a fault. The king justifies his actions through his position, and through his

position his actions are justified. As king, Arthur may not take back his word, even

though he and those around him know that his plan is, at best, a misguided one.[29]

The Arthurian Court is mired in its own self-authentication. Arthur's oath

demonstrates how impervious he and his institution are to change, causing a misguided

plan to be enacted. Arthur and his knights are supposed to constitute a living, breathing

ideal,[30] but the court cannot justify its self-aggrandizement with evidence. Nor is its

mythological status great enough to prevent disintegration. Arthur is a necessary signifier,

even though the King and his court have ceased to signify in the Arthurian Romance.

King Arthur bestows titles, nothing more.[31] He cannot produce poetic language, either

within his own court, on newly minted knights nor on the adaptation itself. Arthur and his

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[29] As predicted, discontented mutterings later greet Arthur's announcement that he will kiss the most beautiful girl at court following the hunt for the white stag (*EE* 291). Chrétien calls it: *Mout est ceste parole male* (*EE* 298) [these words did not bode well (40)]. Hartmann postpones the scene of Arthur's announcement until after the fight for the sparrow hawk and does not include any description of the Court's discontentment (*EE* 1099 ff.).

[30] Chrétien, Hartmann and Wolfram speak of the Arthurian Court and its members as mythological *exempla* to follow. In all the Arthurian Romances up through *Tristan*, Arthurian mythology serves as partial, if not total, justification for *auctoritas*, the authority of an author to tell his story. By mentioning Arthur and his knights, the adaptor earns the right to speak. The two adaptors made the Arthurian Court the basis for the poems' existence, as evidenced by the elegiac praise heaped on the Arthur or his court at the beginning of *Erec et Enide*, and *Yvain*, and *Iwein*: *Ains si riche [the court] ne fu veüe / Car mout i ot buens chevaliers, / Hardiz et courageus et fiers, /Et riches dames et puceles, /filles a rois, jantes et beles* (*EE* 30-34) [So rich a one [the court] was never seen, for there were many good knights, brave and combative and fierce, and rich ladies and maidens, noble and beautiful daughters of kings (37)]. *Artus, li buens rois de Bretaingne, / La cui proesce nos ansaingne, / Que nos soïiens preu et cortois, /Tint cort si riche come rois / A cele feste, qui tant coste, / Qu'an doit clamer la pantecostse* (*Y*, 1-6) [Arthur, the good king of Britain whose valous teaches us to be brave and courteous, held a court of truly royal splendour at the most costly feast known as Pentecost (295)]. *swer an rehte güete / wendet sîn gemüete, / dem volget saelde und êre. / des gît gewisse lêre / künec Artûs der guote* (*I* 1-5) [He who turns his mind to true goodness will be attended by happiness and honor. Good King Arthur [...] gives clear proof of this (237).] Chrétien and Hartmann repeat a tired and familiar public image of the Arthurian Court: Arthur is good, he is an example to future generations, and the splendor of his court is not to be outdone. What the listeners understand is that none of this praise is positive. As presented by Chrétien and Hartmann, the Arthurian ideal is static, incapable of change and thus of little use to the forward-thinking adaptor. Arthur does not belong to the new genre of stories to which his myth gave rise. His invocation is an inescapable formality, and Chrétien and Hartmann follow it up by quickly distancing themselves from the stated source material.

[31] In Parzival's encounter with representatives from a world outside the wilderness of Soltane, a knight informs the ignorant protagonist that Arthur makes knights. Parzival inquires: *sô sage mir, wer gît ritterschaft?* (*P* 123, 6) [then tell me, who bestows knighthood? (69)]. The knight replies: *daz tuot der künec Artûs. / junchêrre, komt ir in des hûs, / der bringet iuch an ritters namen, / daz irs iuch nimmer durfet schamen* (*P* 123, 7-10) [That King Arthur does. Young Sir, if you will come to his house, he will give you the name of knight so that you will never need to be ashamed of it (69)].

courtiers serve as recognized *matiere* or *materia* for the adaptor's thoughts but are portrayed as artifacts inadequate for poetic expression.[32] Chrétien and Hartmann choose *matiere*/*materia* which they cannot use. There is a finality in the Arthurian Court which is at odds with the openness and momentum of Arthurian Romance. The former looks neither forward nor backwards but is always entangled in a past which is out of step with the present. The latter, though, moves forward through space and time but also exists in the present, assembling these present experiences in hindsight.

Adaptation is a forward- and backward-looking process. The material comes from the past, but the adaptor transforms it for the future. It is precisely because a narrative's elements are not immutable that *matere*/*materia* can be adapted. Chrétien, Hartmann and Wolfram all portray Arthur as a figure which resists adaptation or change. As evidenced by his desire to revive an old tradition and uphold the foolish oath he has uttered, the King tries to maintain an eternal repetitiveness at court. Arthur desires that each day look much like all the others and that a criticism like Gawain's fail enact change. Arthur denies himself and his court a narrative, that "discourse which *unwinds (se déroule)*, a story which situates itself in time (this time is threefold: the time of the action recounted, the time of writing, and the time of reading)-time which 'unwinds.'"[33] For Arthur, there is no

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[32] Here I am making use of an idealized process of poetic adaptation as described by Douglas Kelly: "Theoretically, conception precedes the search for suitable material to represent of illustrate it, and the material chosen serves to express the original conception." In: *The Art of Medieval French Romance*, 43.

[33] Pierre Gallais "Hegexonal and Spiral Structure in Medieval Narrative," *Yale French Studies* (1974), 115.

forward, backward or a real present. Things simply are as they have always been. Arthur neither creates nor destroys. He simply perpetuates his father's legacy.[34]

The Arthurian Court becomes the dumping ground for defeated and disgraced figures. These new arrivals become Arthur's permanent prisoners. In exchange, the King expunges their misdeeds from the record.[35] Once in the clutches of the Arthurian Court, defeated figures disappear and cease to be present in the text. Thus Chrétien, Hartmann and Wolfram set their sights on the less prominent courtiers because Arthur and his court are stagnant and immutable.[36] Enter *Êrec, der wunderære*, or rather, exit the savior-to-be, who learns that there is no hope of reform within this self-negating sphere.

<u>The Knight Makes an Escape</u>

It is little wonder that Erec uses the hunt for the white stag as an opportunity to distance himself from the Arthurian Court and its leadership. Arthur and his knights have little to offer besides the repetition of ceremonies and the prolongation of crumbling hierarchical and linguistic structures. Although Arthur stresses the incontrovertibility of

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[34] Chrétien's Arthur declares his devotion to customs: *L'usage Pandragn, mon pere / Qui fu droiz rois et anperere, / Doi je garder et maintenir, / Que que il m'an doie avenir* (*EE* 1811-1814) [Whatever may befall me, I want to preserve and uphold the tradition of my father Pendragon, who was king and emperor (59)]. The dependence of Hartmann's Arthur on the legacy of Pendragon is more indirect but equally unambiguous: *ouch vuor der künec ungebeit / behalten sîn gewonheit, / als im si sîn vater liez - / sîn vater Uterpandragôn hiez -* (*E* 1784-1787) [The king hurried unbidden to overserve the custom, as his father had bequeathed him - his father was Utpandragon].

[35] When Yder arrives at Cardigan, Arthur asks his wife to free Yder so that he might remain at court. Guinevere acquiesces and *la reïne claimme quite / Le chevalier tot maintenant; / Mes ce fu par tel covenant / Qu'a la cort del* tot *remaissist* (*EE* 1234-1237) [the queen freed the knight straight away in the proper manner, on the condition that he *always* remain at court (52)]. I would question the benevolence of Erec's deed. Although he spares Yder's life, he banishes him to a meandering locus of perpetual rigidity.

[36] The Arthurian Court, although dying, never completely expires and cannot be totally effaced or discarded. Just when a figure thinks he has left Arthur behind, the King and his entourage materialize. Arthur has Gawain engage Erec in conversation until the entire Arthurian Court can surround Erec and Enide/Enite without their realizing it. Chrétien's Erec is bemused, Hartmann's is incensed: *Vostre granz sans m'a esbaï. / Par grant san m'avez retenu.* (*EE* 4150-4151) [I am dumbfounded by your great cleverness; you have very craftily detained me (88)]; *ir enhabet niht wol an mir getân* (*E* 5067) [You have not done well by me (111).] The Arthurian Court proves inescapable, and even Erec must let the king preside at his coronation.

his own oaths,[37] words and their meanings, even those of the king, are there to be challenged. As depicted in Chrétien, Archambault views the situation in Cardigan as exceedingly grim:

> Beneath the glitter and the clatter and the contrived cheerfulness of the Arthurian world there lurks the inarticulate dread of senescence and cyclical reiterativeness. The world seems to be entering upon a period of decline that seems inevitably to follow the Eastertime apogee: actions are becoming cyclical, proposals retrogressive, symbols, words, codes, and customs moribund and devoid of meaning.[38]

There is neither new life nor a new story to be had at Cardigan or anywhere else Arthur's vagrant court materializes. Here, what Derrida terms "bad writing" ("the perverse and artful is technique, exiled in the exteriority of the body")[39] is the order of the day, but Erec still naively believes in its future rehabilitation. In this section, I would like to examine the circumstances of Erec's first, incomplete escape attempt and messianic proclamation. In Chrétien's adaptation and subsequently in Hartmann's, Erec attempts to reform this locus of representation without substance and finds that his goals are somewhat shortsighted.

When Hartmann's *Erec*-fragment begins, the Queen, her handmaiden and Erec are in the woods, avoiding the hunt and the *matere*/*materia* with which they are all unhappily associated. The three itinerants encounter another group of travelers consisting of a

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[37] In response to Gawain's misgivings about the hunt for the white stag, Arthur justifies his decision by saying: *car parole que rois a dite / ne doit puis estre contredite* (*EE* 61-62) [for the word of a king must not be contravened (38)], implying that his word (*parole*) should not even be questioned.

[38] "Erec's Search for a New Language," 5. Pierre Gallais sees a similar static quality in the Arthurian Court, but in a much less negative light: "For three years it [the Arthurian Court] has been Erec's place of sojourn: he is quite well known there, quite famous. A world frozen in its state of perfection (!), which seems a little dull: thus Arthur proposes the dangerous hunt for the White Stag. But is this the kind of *aventure* which will save the court from its stagnation? It can only thrust the court headlong into confusion." In: "Hegexonal and Spiral Structure in Medieval Narrative," 128.

[39] *Of Grammatology*, 17.

maiden, a dwarf and a knight in full armor. Guinevere desires to know who this other knight might be (*E* 14-17), but she asks Erec not to approach them (*E* 21-22). Instead, she sends her handmaiden (*E* 23-27). The Queen, interested only in a clear answer to the identity of this unknown figure, sends the member of her small entourage who is the least capable of self-defense. The Queen's status alone is supposed to elicit a response (*E* 34-43), but unfortunately the Court's reputation goes unacknowledged by outsiders. The dwarf refuses to acknowledge the Queen's authority and beats the girl with a whip as Erec and the Queen look on, helpless (*E* 52-58).

When faced with changing and uncertain circumstances in *Erec et Enide* and *Erec*, Guinevere can do nothing but bemoan the violence inflicted by the dwarf on her handmaiden: *La reïne ne set que face; | Quant sa pucele voit bleciee, | Mout est dolante et correciee* (*EE*, 192-194) [The queen did not know what to do; when she saw her maiden wounded she was very sad and angry (39)]; *daz begunde si vil tiure klagen, | daz'z ir sô nâhen was geschehen, | daz si'z muoste ane sehen* (*E*, 63-65) [The queen lamented greatly that such a thing had happened so near her that she was forced to witness it (54)]. When the outside world comes calling and an event takes place, the Arthurian Court is unable to defend itself. It privileges a misguided hunt over the protection of its members. The court may claim an exemplary status for itself, but this self-appointed prestige goes unrecognized outside of the itinerant court's boundaries.

Whither should Erec turn? Even before the protagonist leaves Arthur's Court, there is a noticeable dearth of exempla for him to follow. In his introduction of Erec, first referred to as merely *uns chevaliers* (*EE* 82) [a knight (38)], Chrétien embellishes Erec's

reputation more thoroughly than Hartmann.[40] While such laudation is appropriate for exemplary figures, in Chrétien these accolades only contribute to the magnitude of empty language or bad writing heaped upon the Arthurian Court and its associates. We recall, for example, that Calogrenant/Kalogrenant is above repute before he commits self-sabotage by speaking of his *honte* (*Y*, 60) [disgrace (295)]/*von grôzer sîner swaere* (*I* 94) [of a great tribulation of his (238)].[41] Like the aggrandizement of the Arthurian Court, there is something false about Erec's renown at the narrative's beginning. Erec is praised because of his association with the Arthur's institution (*EE* 83), but this reputation carries no weight once the knight steps outside this enclosed network of self-referentiality.

The failure of the Court's reputation to withstand an assault from the outside pushes Erec to search for a more purposeful means of expression in the form of narrative. It is here that Erec's messianic transformation begins as he starts to search for poetic meanings, uncertain of what lies ahead. By accompanying the Queen and her handmaiden unarmed (*EE* 103-104), Erec leaves visual representation of his knightly status and renown behind.[42] When Hartmann writes that Erec did not fight *wan Êrec was blôz als ein wîp* (*E* 103) [because Erec was an unarmed as a woman (55)], the simile refers not only to the embarrassing absence of armor but to the removal of Arthurian signifiers.

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[40] Chrétien writes that Erec *Mout grant los an la cort avoit. / De tant come il i ot esté, / N'i ot chevalier plus loé* (*EE* 84-86) [had received so great honour at court: as long as he had been there no knight had been so highly praised (38)]. Hartmann's initial description, allowing for the possibility that he may have included more extensive praise in the now lost beginning to *Erec*, writes only that Erec *der vrümekeit und sælden phlac* (*E* 3) [who was brave and favored with good fortune (53)]. Hartmann's (presumed) reduction of Chrétien's ironic praise is fitting, since Erec has yet to earn his reputation through deeds performed.

[41] Chrétien describes Calogrenant as *uns chevaliers mout avenanz* (*Y* 58) [a most courteous knight (my translation)], and Hartmann does not describe Kalogrenant's reputation. It is worth considering, though, that Kei's reproach that Calogrenant/Kalogrenant is not as courtly as he perceives himself to be (*Y* 73-74; *I* 113-117), meaning that Calogrenant/Kalogrenant has hitherto been held in high esteem.

[42] Erec addresses this oversight in Chrétien's adaptation and insists that it would be impossible for him to return to Arthur's Court in Cardigan to retrieve his armor without losing track of his adversary (*EE*, 237-261). Hartmann's Erec does not say a word about his armor (*E*, 113-130).

Erec no longer sees himself as a member of the Arthurian Court, and his humiliation and defeat push him even further outside of it.

As Susan L. Clark explains, Erec and his audience both trust in the self-establishing conventions of the Arthurian Romance to furnish Erec with what he lacks: "At the beginning of the romance, Erec has not learned to dissemble, nor has he any reason to do so. He simply fares forth, significantly lacking those standard possessions of knights, that is armor and a woman - and the audience is led to believe that he will soon be provided with them."[43] Yet I would suggest that Erec's actions are quite subversive and constitute a poorly executed rebellious act. Like a medieval Frankenstein, Erec scorns, within certain boundaries, his own creators and begs permission from the Queen to depart. Although Erec explains this decision in terms of revenge, the crisis is broader and concerns his purpose in life. Hartmann's knight says to the Queen that if he cannot avenge himself, *enweiz, zwiu mir das leben sol* (126) [I do not know what use life is to me (55)]. Erec is now cut loose to pursue and discover as-of-yet unknown people, places and, most importantly, meanings.

Erec's first foray is of limited duration. When he asks the Queen's permission to leave and avenge himself (*EE* 244-246; *E* 131-137), Erec adds that, if successful, he will return to court in three days (*EE* 265-266; *E* 138-143). The allusion to Christ's death and resurrection is inescapable. By echoing the Easter motif with which Chrétien's prologue begins, Erec alludes to his own anticipated transformation and positions himself to be a messianic figure. However, the absence of the epithet (*Êrec, der wunderære*) at this early

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[43] *Hartmann von Aue: Landscapes of Mind* (Houston: Rice University Press, 1989), 54.

stage in the poem is a reminder of Erec's immaturity and haste.[44] The brazenness of youth is made quite evident in the figure of Erec, who still believes that a restoration of his honor and that of the maiden will rectify the world's ills.

Erec's teleological aims prove to be overly ambitious, even arrogant. The unexplored world of meanings in the poem is more extensive than Erec initially appreciates. As he tracks his opponents after taking his leave from the Queen and her handmaiden, Hartmann's Erec thinks only of revenge, which is itself a limited but potentially restorative act: *et tete als dem dâ leit geschiht: / der vlîzet sich dicke dar zuo, / wie er'z mit vuoge widertuo* (*E*, 167-169) [He acted as one does who has suffered grief: he makes every effort to set things right again (55)].[45] In the same vein, Erec's plan to stay away for three days is not a deed which is complete in itself. Erec has abandoned the Arthurian Court, but the young knight fixates on restoring an imperfect ideal rather than beginning the messy work of institutional and personal deconstruction.

<u>Going in Circles</u>

The hope for an easy alternative to Arthur's Court and the desire to play the hero explains Erec's reluctance to initially take on his immediate social structures. Only later does Erec relinquish mind and body to adventure. During his initial departure, though, Erec remains largely in control of his situation and is not yet adrift in the woods.[46] The knight has not given himself over to the experience of the moment since the memory of the past remains foremost on his mind. The protagonist later explains to Enite's father,

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[44] In Chrétien, Erec is not yet 25 (*EE* 90) and in Hartmann the knight is still *der junge man* (*E* 18). McDonald traces the evolution in the epithets ascribed to Erec. See: "*Êrec der wunderære*," 262-263.

[45] In Chrétien, Erec is still fixated on revenge even in the midst of his battle (*EE* 921-924).

[46] Erec easily finds the tracks of the knight, the dwarf and the maiden and soon has them in his sights (*E* 160-163). Susan L. Clark writes that, "For much of *Erec*, Hartmann characterizes his protagonist as a man plagued by disorientation." In: *Hartmann von Aue*, 48.

Koralus, that he rode after the knight for revenge: *ûf selher âventiure wân, / als ich nû gesaget hân / sô bin ich im her nâch geriten* (*E*, 492-494) [In hope of such adventure, as I have already told you, I rode after him here (59)]. Erec envisions his *âventiure* before its arrival. This *âventiure* is not the transformative adventure ultimately required since Erec can envision and know it in advance. Thus it is no surprise that Erec arrives in a town which mirrors the Arthurian Court in all its imperfections. Even as Erec distances himself from Arthur's Court, he ends up more or less where he started.

Erec's victory over the mysterious knight takes place on the jousting field at the court of a duke, who goes unnamed in Chrétien but whom Hartmann calls Imain (*E* 176). In both the French and German adaptations, the Duke's city is a more expanded, confusing and permanent version of the Arthurian Court with non-noble figures and less obvious hierarchies. Here, Erec is anonymous (*EE* 366-367; *E* 245-247) and draws no attention to himself when he enters the city. The atmosphere is active and chaotic, where unseen market forces determine whether a man rises or falls.[47] If the beating endured in the woods were not sufficient proof of the Arthurian Court's lack of clout outside its own borders, then the fate of a penniless knight missing his armor drives the point home.

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[47] Chrétien describes hunting birds on display, the playing of dice games, chess and backgammon (*EE* 349-357). Hartmann tells us only that it is *ein market* (*E* 223) [market town (56)] and that Erec *ouch was er habelôs dâ gar* (*E*, 238) [was completely without means (56)]. In Hartmann, the victims of this early capitalism are Koralus, his wife and Enite, who are all victims of financial theft perpetrated by another member of the nobility: *im hete diu überkraft genomen / allez, daz er ie gewan. / sô vil was dem rîchen man / grôzer êren niht verlân / daz er einen kneht mohte hân* (*E* 408-413) [Superior force had taken from him everything he had ever owned. So little was left the once powerful man of his great standing that he could not keep even one servant (58)]. The world and its inhabitants are fickle and untrustworthy, and noble heritage and rank are not adequate safeguards against such malevolent, largely unseen forces. Equally important is Erec's inability to set this injustice aright. Chrétien's vavasour is less a victim of market forces. Although he has lost his land, it was not through the intrigue of unscrupulous relatives (*EE*, 515-517). The vavasour has also had the opportunity to rectify this wrong by marrying his daughter to a rich and eligible nobleman (*EE* 518-533).

Erec's previous exploits, for which he is known at Arthur's Court, have no value here. Although renowned elsewhere for his achievements, Erec is now a nobody.

The knight does not adequately appreciate that this mercantile town is not an ideal place to refashion a new, improved identity. The echoes of the Arthurian Court are unmistakable. We learn that a contest is to take place on the day following Erec's arrival. It is a popular event (*EE* 552-555; *E* 193-199), where any knight might contend that his lady is the prettiest. A joust ensues only if another knight disagrees. The winner not only has his statement validated but also receives a sparrowhawk to bestow on his lady (*EE* 574-577; *E* 200-203). In Hartmann's *Erec*, the sparrow hawk contest is only in its second year (*E*, 185-192). In both versions, the same knight, Yders, whom Erec and the Queen encountered in the woods, has already gone unchallenged twice (*EE* 595-596; *E* 204-206). Both Chrétien and Hartmann inform us that this is an undeserved victory. Furthermore, should the outcome be repeated for a third time, then the ceremony will be abolished:

> Par deux anz l'a il ja eü
> Qu'onques chalangiez ne li fu;
> Mes se il ancore oan l'a,
> A toz jorz desresnié l'avra.
> Ja mes n'iert anz que il ne l'et
> Quite sanz bataille et sanz plet. (*EE* 595-600)

> [He (the knight) has already had it (the sparrowhawk) two years in a row without being challenged, and if he gets it again this year he will have claimed it for ever. He will retain it each year without combat or complaint (44).]

> und ob ez alsô kæme (if he were to win the sparrowhawk for the third time)
> sô hete er in immer mêre
> âne strît mit voller êre.
> nû sagete man daz mære
> daz dâ manec wîp schœner wære

dan des ritters vriundin.
dô was sîn vrüemekeit dar an schîn:
er was alsô vorhtsam,
daz er in mit gewalte nam. (*E* 207-215)

[and if it were to happen thus, he would keep it, to his great honor, uncontested, forever. The story was told that many a woman there was more beautiful than the knight's lady friend. but here his superiority in knightly skills was obvious: he was so feared that he took the hawk by force (56).]

The practice of claiming the sparrowhawk is a senseless exercise if Yders wins only by inspiring fear in his opponents. Erec leaves Arthur's Court and its outdated *coutume* of the hunt for the white stag only to find himself at a counter court whose aspirations are identical to the one left behind. The contest for the sparrow hawk threatens to become a stagnant event if Yders wins for a third time. The validity of a statement, such as the beauty of a woman, is determined solely through the threat of violence. Tristan might approve of Yder's tactic, but Erec is not Tristan. Erec decides to do what Gawain fails to achieve when Arthur proposes the hunt for the white stag and aggressively challenges a problematic ideal. Chrétien and Hartmann's knight endeavors to break apart this false and soon irreversible fusion of word and meaning.

A counter-court such as Imain's poses an even greater challenge to the would-be messiah than Arthur's. Instead of bucking the trend, Erec returns to a corrupt system even as he performs a liberating act in the joust for the sparrow-hawk. Erec acquires Enide/Enite and transforms her into an object fit for the Arthurian Court. Erec is understandably in high spirits and is anxious to return to the Arthurian Court as a triumphant avenger with a story to tell and a maiden in tow:

Erec de son oste depart
Que mervoilles li estoit tart

Que a la cort le roi venist,
De s'aventure s'esjoïst:
Mout estoit liez de s'aventure,
Qu'amie ot bele a desmesure,
Sage et cortoise et de bone eire. (*EE* 1479-1485)

[Erec left his host, for he was extremely impatient to return to the court of the king. He rejoiced at his adventure and was delighted in it, for he had an extremely beautiful lady, wise and courtly and well-bred (55)].

als im erschein der ander tac,
Êrec fil de roi Lac
der enwolde dâ niht langer tweln.
sîn umuoze begunde er zeln
und sprach, er müeste rîten
und vüeren vrouwen Êniten. (*E* 1400-1405)

[When the next day came, Erec fil de roi Lac did not want to tarry there any longer. He felt the time pressing and said he had to ride on and take Lady Enite with him (70).]

Erec can now impress the others at court and is most concerned with making sure that his prediction to return in three days comes true. Erec succeeds in bringing words, judgment and meaning into sync at both courts: Erec substantiates Enide/Enite's claim to the sparrowhawk (*EE* 843-846; *E* 687-689) by defeating Yders and his unfounded claim. Upon his return to the Arthurian Court, Erec temporarily quells unrest amongst the courtiers by winning the court's unanimous approval that Enide/Enite is the most beautiful woman at court.[48]

By joining thought, word and practice, Erec restores authenticity to language. Enide/Enite is the silent object around whom this minor miracle is performed. As a

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[48] In Chrétien's adaptation, Guinevere echoes the court's unanimous judgment. *Beisier la poez quitemant: / Tuit l'otroions comunemant* (*Y* 1827-1828) [You may freely kiss her; we all concede it with one voice (39)]. In the German adaptation, Hartmann speaks the unity of opinion: *nû enwart niht dâ wider gestriten, / si enwære diu schœniste dâ / und über die werlt ouch anderwâ* (*E* 1763-1765) [Now there was no argument among them that Enite was the most beautiful lady there, and anywhere in the world (74)].

woman of unsurpassed beauty, she allows Erec to move from oratory towards poetics as he proclaims her to be the most beautiful. Yet this is a minor accomplishment, brought about by a knight who is still loud, boastful and only slightly less disingenuous than the two courts. Erec still does not know how to value Enide/Enite.[49]   Yet a change begins when Erec and Enide/Enite leave the bride's family and journey to Arthur's Court. The two lovers travel in silence. In the absence of courtly noise and in an isolated location between the two courts, an unspoken understanding develops between them: *Mout estoient d'igal corage / Et mout avenoient ansanble* (*EE* 1512-1513) [They were very equal in spirit and very well suited to one another (56)]; *triuwe und stæte si besaz* (*E*, 1497) [Loyalty and constancy took hold of them (71)]. This is not an impulsive and deceitful love like in Yvain/Iwien. Instead, an understanding and certainty about the other person's intent, which is only possible independent of language, links Erec and his bride.

Courtly intrigue challenges this new, verbally unacknowledged bond. The effects of Erec's minor miracle wear off as do his courtiers' good opinions of him. The knight's restorative act has ceased to matter. As his popularity plummets, Erec retreats with Enide/ Enite to the bedroom and becomes an object of contempt. Erec's courtiers accuse him of recreancy:

> Tot mist son cuer et s'antandue
> An li acoler et beisier;
> Ne se queroit d'el aeisier.
> Si conpeignon duel en avoient,
> Antra'aus sovant se demantoient
> De ce que trop l'amoit assez. (*EE* 2440-2445)

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[49] Hartmann's Erec reveals this ignorance in monetary terms. The knight happily explains to Koralus that Enite is of no value financially: the protagonist already possesses riches and is of such fine stock that he does not require a dowry or property as payment for taking Enite (*E* 578-582).

[He turned all his attention to embracing and kissing her; he pursued no other delight. His companions were grieved by this and often lamented among themselves, saying that he loved her far too much (67).]

die minneye er sô sêre,
daz er aller êre
durch si einen verphlac,
unz daz er sich sô gar verlac,
daz niemen dehein ahte
ûf in gehaben mahte. (*E* 2968-2973)

[He loved her so much that because of her alone he no longer concerned himself with his honor. It reached the point that he spent so much of his time lying around that no one held him in esteem (88).]

Erec's court criticizes their lord's withdrawal from society. Yet for Erec, courtly life is superficial and, except during brief restorative moments, inadequate. In Enide/Enite, Erec possesses the embodiment of linguistic perfection, but this knowledge is a selfish and ineffectual. Although veiled in the language of sexual congress, Erec makes Enide/Enite an object of private study but abandons the reformative practices he began when he first left Arthur's Court. To become a miracle worker of significance and grant others access to the poetic, Erec must perform an act of widespread linguistic revitalization.

Here again, Archambault's analysis concerning Chrétien's adaptation is extremely helpful. Archambault suggests that Erec's series of adventures might be better construed as flight rather than atonement:

The critical scene has often been described as the turning point of the romance. Erec, so the argument goes, must seek adventure in order to 'prove' to himself, his spouse, and his retinue, that he is not *recreant*. But might it not be interpreted more broadly as the mere intensification of a refusal that has possessed Erec from the beginning, that is, as the explication of a revolt against Arthurian symbol patterns which allow one knight to level an accusation of *recreantise* against a fellow member of the Round Table whenever he allows himself to make

concessions to tangential yearnings, speaks a language neither predictable nor cyclical, or simply spends his honeymoon making love in silence?[50]

Arbitrary judgment enabled by a carelessness for the power and meaning of words resurfaces amongst Erec's own followers. In his prologue, Chrétien condemns the wandering storytellers, who, in telling the tale of Erec, *depecier et corronpre suelent* (*EE* 21) [mangle and corrupt (37)] it. The adaptor of *Erec et Enide* and his German counterpart make his protagonist the object of gossip at the hands of bad storytellers. The amateurs' tale of Erec's bedroom activities defames the knight and burdens him with an unwanted and undeserved textual legacy of lust for his wife and neglect of his court.

Under the shadow of others' rumors and tales, Erec departs for the woods and says nothing of his aspirations. This time, the Christ-like figure makes no promises about the length of his sojourn. Chrétien and Hartmann portray Erec's moment of resolution to leave his court in very different ways. Chrétien's Erec consoles Enide and admits that both she and those at court are right: *Dame, fet il, droit en eüstes, / Et cil qui m'an blasment ont droit* (*EE* 2576-2577) ['My lady,' said he, 'you were right to do so, and those who blame me are also right (69)], but Erec does not acquiesce to his courtiers' opinions. Hartmann's Erec is more laconic: *der rede ist genuoc getân* (*E* 3052) [Enough of that (89)]. A word-for-word translation would read: "that is enough talk." Not only does Hartmann's Erec mean "You've said enough," but that enough words have been spoken. The sentiment is not so different from that in Chrétien: Enide is right, Erec's court is right, everyone is right, and that is the problem. Each man now insists on the validity of his words, and such statements have gone unchallenged long enough.

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[50] "Erec's Search for a New Language," 9.

Language has misrepresented Erec's situation and tarnished his reputation. Erec cannot rely on the words of his courtiers. It is time to set out for the amorphous woods and begin a full scale assault on courtly networks of signification. Led, quite literally, by the ideal of poetic meaning in the form of Enide/Enite, Erec gives himself over to adventure. To counter the spoken texts about his failings, Erec must offer the world a new, authoritative text which causes language's resurrection and the restoration of his own story.

Joie de la Court

I am doing a great injustice to Chrétien and Hartmann's adaptations of the Erec-legend by skipping straight to the end. Space necessitates this decision, and it behooves us to briefly address Erec's triumphant transformation. In this section, I suggest that Erec is not just a miracle worker but miracle-producing text. This metamorphosis occurs through his actions in the *Joie de la Court*-episode. This is a more radical and dangerous iteration of Erec's earlier encounter with Yders. In an enticing *locus amoenus*, Erec fights for his life against a monstrous enemy who has been imprisoned by his own language. Erec breaks down a cruel and destructive linguistic system in which even the most powerful of men can be enslaved. I will focus on two facets of the final challenge and its consequences: first, I address just how the final battle puts language at its center; second, I examine Erec's post-battle triumph as the protagonist returns to his court.

A few words about the task facing Erec are necessary. When the knight enters the Castle Brandigan, he hears rumors about an impossible challenge whose outcome is

supposedly unalterable.[51] Aside from the greater degree of danger, the circumstances are reminiscent of the joust for the sparrowhawk. Unlike Erec's first challenge, however, the stakes in the *Joie de la Court*-episode are markedly higher. The court at Brandigan is held in check by a malevolent force of seemingly eternal duration. As in the Arthurian Court and its bigger, more bewildering counterpart, the past overshadows and dictates the mood of the present. The threat of the comparatively insignificant contest for the sparrow-hawk has become a living nightmare without any hope of change or transformation.

Neither we nor Erec possess further details about the challenge awaiting him. Yet Erec has developed a skill he previously lacked when rumors circulated about him and Enide/Enite at his own court. Erec has learned to listen to but also to ignore what people say: *Erec ot bien et si antant / Qu'an dit de lui aval la vile* [...] *Outre s'an va sanz delaiier* (*EE* 5526-5527; 5530) [Erec heard clearly and understood what they [the townspeople] were saying about him (...) Onward he went without tarrying (105)]. The knight understands that the world is not a fixed entity and that even the seemingly most insurmountable of obstacles can be overcome: *sleht er mich, sô bin ich tôt: daz ist der werlde ein ringiu nôt* (*E*, 8046-8047) [If he kills me, then I shall be dead. That is of little consequence for the world (141)]. The arrogance Erec displays in his initial departure

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[51] In Chrétien's adaptation, the townspeople, looking at Erec in awe, lament that he should die on account of this unnamed threat: *Onques nus ne vint d'autre terre / La Joie de la Cort requerre / Qu'il n'i eüst honte et damage / Et n'i leissat la teste an gage* (*EE* 5513-5516) [No one ever came from another land to seek the Joy of the Court without meeting with shame and loss, and forfeiting his head there (104)]. In Hartmann's adaptation, it is the King Guivreiz will shares this information with Erec: *ein âventiure hie stât / ze selhem gewinne, / daz ich in mînem sinne / des vil grôze angest hân, / ez müeze iu alsam ergân, / als ez allen den ergie, / die noch her kâmen ie* (*E* 7975-7981). [The adventure here is at such a price that in my heart I fear very greatly that things will turn out the same for you as they have for all the others who have ever come here (141)].

from Arthur's Court, including his boast that he will return in three days, is gone. Now, he fixes his gaze on the future and refuses to live in a present held hostage by the past.

Through his actions in the *Joie de la Court*-episode, Erec effectuates linguistic restoration. The giant Mabonagrin has become enslaved by an oath sworn to his beloved. Not knowing the terms of the oath, Mabonagrin concedes to the rash boon which his beloved demands (*EE* 6067; *E* 9532). The mislead knight's constancy subordinates him to the will of his beloved. In Chrétien, the giant calls explicit attention to his confinement (*in prison*) in language: *Por ce me cuide a delivre / Toz les jorz que j'eusse a vivre / Avuec li teni an prison* (*EE* 6095-6097) [Thus she thought to keep me all the days of my life with her: completely in her power, in prison (112)]. Mabonagrin's dilemma validates the uncertainties and doubt which initially drive Erec from the Arthurian Court, where oath swearing and rash judgments are the norm. There, language only brings the courtiers together when it tricks its victims. Judith Kellogg comments on the malevolent power of the oath in Chrétien's romances: "The inability to move beyond the literal, monologic nature of language can turn the oath, which had formerly unified and protected the aristocratic community, into a suffocating and alienating institution."[52] Whereas the oath should signify a shared and purposeful bond, it is now nothing more than a trap.

When Erec defeats Mabonagrin, he breaks language's hold on the giant. This is not just an act of liberation of the giant from his oath, it is also a restoration of signifier and signified in the *Joie de la Court.* Juxtaposed against the severed heads on sticks and the monstrous knight lurking therein, the garden's name is initially a perverse joke. This

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[52] *Medieval Artistry and Exchange*, 171-172.

uncoupling of word and meaning does not escape the attentions of Hartmann's Mabonagrin: *wan mit mir was im benomen / elliu sîn wünne gar* [...] *sô ist eht Joie de la curt / genzlîchen nider gelegen* (*E* 9593-9594; 9601-9602) [(F)or because of me it was robbed of all its joy (...) Thus indeed did *Joie de la curt* vanish completely (158)]. Order is subsequently restored, initially on a very local level, when grief is turned, appropriately enough, to joy and language begins to properly signify again.

The process, however, does not end there. Erec's transformative actions in the garden, impressive as they are, would not warrant the repetition of *Êrec der wunderære* if the positive effects were confined to the kingdom of Brandigan. Instead, word of Erec's accomplishment spreads far and wide in Hartmann:

> an sînem lobe daz stât,
> daz er genant wære
> Êrec der wunderære.
> ez was eht sô umbe in gewant,
> daz wîten über elliu lant
> was sîn wesen und sîn schîn.
> sprechet ir, wie daz mohte sîn?
> waz von diu, schein der lîp nû dâ,
> sô was sîn lop anderswâ.
> alsô was sîn diu werlt vol (*E* 10043-10052)

> [It was a sign of his fame that he was called Erec the Doer of Wondrous Deeds. Things were such that his being and aura spread over all the lands. Do you ask how that might be? It was thus: when his body appeared in one place, his fame was elsewhere; thus the world was filled with him (162).]

In his essay "From Work to Text," one of Roland Barthes' criterion for distinguishing between a work and a text is the materiality of the former and the immateriality of the latter: "the work can be held in the hand, the text is held in language, only exists in the movement of discourse [...] *the text is experienced only in an activity of production*

[italics in original]."[53] The body of Erec is transformed into a text whose fame and influence reverberate outwards. The knight is not only a living being but exists through discourse as well. The effect of Erec's deeds and the words about those deeds move in tandem. As Hartmann's text and Vivian's translation make clear, Erec's very being and aura (*sîn wesen und sîn schîn* [*E* 10049]), signified and signifier, spread. Erec achieves an impossible victory at the Joie de la Court, but of greater importance, and the reason for the repeated epitaph, is his legacy as a shared, signifying text about *Êrec der wunderære*.

Chrétien's *Erec et Enide* and Hartmann's *Erec* are texts about language's ability to signify through the abandonment of baseless oratory and prohibitive oaths and institutional structures. Erec rectifies the imperfect relationship between word and meaning. We note, though, that this is a transformation demonstrated only on the level of plot. As suggested in the previous chapter, just because an adaptor asserts that such a transformation is possible does not make it so. Erec's metamorphosis from man into discourse is as much an instruction to the audience as it is a part of the narrative's happy ending.

The second-generation adaptors of Arthurian Romance scrutinize Chrétien and Hartmann's hope for language's transformation from oratory into poetry. Wolfram rejects Erec's achievements, including the final miracle.[54] *Parzival*'s adaptor makes it plain that the figure of Parzival is ultimately a reader of texts and not, like Erec, a text to be read. Gottfried, by contrast, heads in the opposite direction by becoming the empty center of

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[53] In: *Image, Music, Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 157.
[54] As Arthur Groos explains, *Parzival*'s adaptor goes to great lengths to problematize his predecessors' texts: "Wolfram's appropriation of Hartmann's narrative history and extension of its ruinous consequences into his own narrative suggest that Erec's success did not permanently restore the social order by breaking the adventure at Bandigan." In: *Romancing the Grail: Genre, Science, and Quest in Wolfram's* Parzival (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 117.

others' experiences. As William C. McDonald explains, Gottfried's Tristan also works miracles, even though the two figures have little in common: "Saintly Erec, literary cousin to the characters in *legendae*, could scarcely come up against a more opposite type than Tristan, the trickster, adulterer and schemer who makes a cuckold of Marke, his own uncle and protector."[55] In his way, though, Tristan's miracles reflect the concerns of his literary cousins. Whereas Erec, Yvain/Iwein and Parzival are all knights who demonstrate the potential for language's revival through the unearthing of poetic meaning, Tristan does everything in his power to make language unintelligible.

Reading Be Bad

In this section, I would like to explore Gottfried's depiction of Tristan's problematic relationship to burdensome texts. Like Erec, Tristan feels stifled by language's fetters. Erec is pushed into his quest by the absence of purpose or value in the Arthurian Court's oratory. Gottfried's miracle worker, by contrast, suffers from the opposite problem. Tristan bears the burden of overlapping and competing iterations of the Tristan-legend, making him one of the most malleable figures in medieval literature,[56] an inherited attribute which Gottfried happily exploits. Yet an unpleasant certainty lurks in the midst of this textual confusion: Tristan is supposed to die. No matter the number of episodes or the degree of culpability born by the main figure, all events push Tristan ever

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[55] "*Erec der wunderære, Tristan der wunderære*: Concerning the Derivation of an Epithet in the *Tristan* of Gottfried von Strassburg," *Studi Medievali* L (2009), 200.

[56] Douglas Kelly sees the legend as particularly fluid, providing the adaptor with more iterations than he can use in a single adaptation: "The variety of often contradictory and incredible accounts of different episodes that the oral or written sources provided required careful and thoughtful choice by the poet who decided to write a poem on the subject they dealt with." In: Douglas Kelly, "En Uni Dire" ("Tristan" Douce 839) and the Composition of Thomas's "Tristan" *Modern Philology* 67.1 (Aug., 1969), 17.

closer to his destruction. This is the burden of Tristan's textual inheritance, and it is a constant of which Tristan is painfully aware and against which he fights.

Unlike in Chrétien, Hartmann and Wolfram's texts, Gottfried uses the noun *aventiure* to denote an event whose outcome is already known.[57] As employed in the Arthurian Romances, the invocation of adventure presumes the event's arrival but says nothing about its nature. Gottfried retains the futurity of adventure but uses the term to refer to an event which has already arrived and is due to arrive again. In the prologue, Gottfried writes: *wir lesen ir leben, wir lesen ir tôt* (*T* 235) [We read their life, we read their death (44)]. As in this repetitive oscillation between life and death, *aventiure* describes happenings which are already known even before they arrive. Hugo Bekker suggests that such events "com[ing] *von aventiure* may harbor the implication that an unseen hand guides them, no matter whether it is the open hand of God or the closing hand of Fate."[58] I suggest that we can avoid the question over the presence or absence of God and Fate in the text if we ascribe agency to the textual legacies of the Tristan legend.

The figure of Tristan is perpetually attached to an inescapable literary legacy made possible only through literacy. Unlike Erec and Yvain/Iwein, Gottfried's main figure is formally educated. *Tristan*'s adaptor tells us little else about Tristan's upbringing, with the consequence "daß einer Kindheit Tristans kein Wert beigelegt wird,

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[57] Gottfried presents the more disruptive events in Tristan's chronology as the dictates of an inescapable fate: the arrival of Norwegian merchants (*in den zîten unde dô / kam ez von âventiure alsô* [*T,* 2150]) [At this time it chanced (70)]; the discovery of Tristan's lifeless body (*T,* 9369-9370) by the two Isoldes and Brengane,: *nu ergieng ez, alse ez solte / und alse der billîch wolte* (T 9369-9370) [And now it happened, as it was meant to happen (164)].

[58] *Gottfried von Strassburg's* Tristan*: Journey Through the Realm of Eros*. New York: Camden House, 1987), 47.

daß er eigentlich keine besitzt[.]"[59] Tristan is not the product of a place, a people or even of a particular blood line. Tristan is the product of a courtly education whose central component is reading and book learning. Up until the age of seven, Tristan's adoptive mother teaches him speech and courtly mores *daz er wol rede und ouch gebâr / vernemen kunde und ouch vernam* (*T* 2058-2059) [until he could understand what people said and did (and in fact did understand) (68)]. Afterwards, Tristan's formal education begins:

> sîn vater der marschalc in dô nam
> und bevalch in einem wîsen man.
> mit dem sante er in iesâ dan
> durch vremede sprâche in vremediu lant.
> und daz er aber al zehant
> der buoche lêre an vienge
> und den ouch mite gienge
> von aller slahte lêre.
> daz was sîn erstiu kêre
> ûz sîner vrîheite. (*T* 2060-2069)

> [his father the Marshal took him and placed him in the care of a man of experience and promptly sent him abroad with him to learn foreign languages and begin at once the study of books, and ply them more than any other branch of study. This was his first departure from freedom (68)]

The final two verses of the quotation strike me as crucial because they make book learning not just a skill but also a burden. Tristan's father, Riwalin, loses his *vrîheite* when he falls in love with Blanchefleur (*T* 865), but Tristan's loss of freedom comes not through the uncontrollable throngs of passion and illicit love but through education. Tristan's other acquired skills, the playing of string instruments and the arts of combat (*T* 2093-2120), are described as time-consuming (*T* 2100-2102), yet Tristan's adaptor makes no statement attesting to the adverse effects of these occupations. Language becomes

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[59] Wolfgang Jupé, *Die «List» im Tristanroman Gottfrieds von Straßbrug: Intellektualität und Liebe oder die Suche nach dem Wesen der individuellen Existenz* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1976), 56.

Tristan's undoing, being his first oppressor and, if Gottfried had completed his poem, his last. Perhaps I am placing too strong an emphasis on lines 2068-2069, but they explain Tristan's sense of foreboding after seven years of courtly education:

> aller hande hovespil
> diu tete er wol und kunde ir vil
> [...]
> sîn dinc was allez ûz erkorn
> beide an dem muote und an den siten.
> nu was aber diu saelde undersniten
> mit werndem schaden, als ich ez las,
> wan er leider arbeitsaelic was. (*T*, 2121-2122; 2126-2130)

> [He exceeded at all manner of courtly pastimes and had many at his command (...) Everything about him was of the rarest, both in qualities of mind and of manners. But (as I read) his fair fortune was chequered with lasting adversity, for, alas, he was blessed with trouble (69).]

Being blessed or destined to misery or sadness (*arbeitsaelic*) is the same reduction of freedom which accompanies becoming literate. As a learned child, Tristan appears as the paradigm of excellence. One looks at him and recognizes his refinement (*T* 2126-2127), but appearances deceive. Conforming to courtly standards is a lot like learning to read and speak formally. There are rules which one follows and examples to which one must adhere. Tristan masters courtly customs even as he is burdened by them. This dissatisfaction is an extension of Tristan's literacy. Through education, Tristan's language ceases to be his own. He is forced to work within the boundaries which others have established:

> in sîner êrsten vrîheit
> wart al sîn vrîheit hin geleit.
> der buoche lêre und ir getwanc
> was sîner sorgen anevanc.
> und iedoch dô er ir began,
> do leite er sînen sin dar an

und sînen vlîz sô sêre,
daz er der buoche mêre
gelernete in sô kurzer zît
danne ie kein kint ê oder sît. (*T* 2083-2092)

[With his first experience of freedom his whole freedom was cut short. The study of books and all its stern discipline were the beginning of his cares. Yet once having started on it he applied his mind and industry to it with such vigour that he had mastered more books in that short space than any child before or after him (68-69).]

Gottfried's statements are perhaps somewhat hyperbolic and may have a humorous, quasi-autobiographical resonance.[60] Nevertheless, Tristan learns through literacy that he operates in numerous systems whose rules and practices need to be learned and rehearsed before they are mastered. This upbringing includes, in order of importance, languages (*T* 2094), followed by music (*T* 2096), jousting (*T* 2104-2106), hunting, (*T* 2118) and other unspecified courtly games (*T* 2121-2122).[61] Language, however, remains the cornerstone of Tristan's education and his very being.

In the confusing and perplexing world depicted by Gottfried, Tristan is the incarnation of written and spoken language's ability to signify. Language, particularly written language, lives at Tristan's expense. Tristan is fated to die so that language might live. On the hazards of writing, Derrida says: "It [writing] menaces at once the breath, the spirit, the history as the spirit's relationship with itself. It is their end, their finitude, their

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[60] This process cannot be wildly different from Gottfried or Hartmann's own and keeping in mind that this description would also have applied to other authors of the period, it is vaguely autobiographical. See: Schmitz, *Die Poetik der Adaptation: Literarische Inventio im* Eneas *Heinrichs von Veldeke*. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2007, 8-9; Petrus Tax, *Wort, Sinnbild, Zahl im Tristanroman: Studien zum Denken und Werten Gottfrieds von Strassburg* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1971), 26; Chinca, *History, Fiction, Verisimilitude: Studies in the Poetics of Gottfried's* Tristan (London: The Modern Humanities Research Association for the Institute of German Studies, 1993), 8.

[61] Tax also sees importance in order the skills are named:"Zugleich ergibt sich aus der Schilderung von Tristans Bildungsgang, daß die intellektuelle Komponente an erster Stelle steht." In: *Wort, Sinnbild, Zahl*, 27.

paralysis."[62] I mention this short passage because it so wonderfully inverts the situation in *Tristan*. Writing in Tristan makes the protagonist inseparable from his fate, making Tristan a reliable and decipherable signifier for anyone who understands his name.[63] Tristan's problem is Erec's in reverse. Erec goes on adventure to unite signifier and signified in his own person, becoming text incarnate after Mabonagrin's defeat. For Tristan, however, the same signifier-signified ideal threatens to be his doom:

> diz maere, der daz ie gelas
> der erkennet sich wol, daz der nam
> dem lebene was gehellsam.
> er was reht alse er hiez ein man
> und hiez reht alse er was: Tristan. (*T* 2018-2022)

> [All who have read this tale know that the name accorded with the life: he was the man that his name said he was, and his name of Tristan said what he was (68).]

It may initially feel perverse to treat this trickster figure as a reliable signifier, but that is exactly what he is. Tristan is the unassailable constant in the legend, where name and meaning converge. Tristan cannot help but be Tristan and reifies, without any effort, the ideal of poetic language towards which Chrétien, Hartmann and Wolfram's knights strive. Whereas Hartmann's Iwein must ask himself in the wake of his madness, *bistûz Îwein, ode wer?* (*I* 3509) [Is it you, Iwein, or somebody else (274)], Tristan knows all too well who he is.

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[62] *Of Grammatology*, 25.
[63] There are, of course, many passages where the name seems out of place. Although he lies about his origins, Tristan uses his real name with Mark's hunters. He adds, falsely, that his father gave him the name (*T* 3136). Everyone evidently understands the significant of the name because one hunter cries out: *durch got, wie nante er [Tristan's father] dich dô sô? / du waerest zwâre baz genant / juvente bêle et la riant, / diu schoene jugent, diu lachende* (*T* 3138-3141) [Why in heaven did he call you that? *Juvente bele et la riant* - 'Fair youth and smiling' - would have been a better name for you, believe me]. Yet whatever momentary discrepancy exists between the name and the object, the ending of the poem should uphold the validity of the name and enliven language through Tristan's death.

Although Gottfried never states it directly, I think we are to understand that Tristan fully comprehends the meaning of his name and is a reluctant martyr. For no matter how great his skills or marvelous his achievements, Tristan is fated to die a tragic death after being an object of both delight and disdain for others. For Petrus Tax, this unhappy outcome begins with Tristan's education:

> Hier wie dort sind also die durch der *buochen lere* erworbenen Eigenschaften Tristans Voraussetzung und Anlaß, daß er durch das Geschehen selbst in Mitleidenschaft gezogen wird, Sorgen aller Art erleiden muß und dabei seine Freude und Freiheit einbüßt. Derselbe Tristan, der sich gerne als glänzender Hofmann aufspielt, ist auf weiten Strecken ein Getriebener: ihm wird mitgespielt.[64]

I am in full agreement with Tax. Tristan is a persecuted man (*ein Getriebener*) and the plaything of legend. There is, however, another side to this coin. Certainly, Tristan's literacy and linguistic prowess cause him distress and suffering, but these same skills allow him to successfully outwit his persecutors. No matter where he finds himself, Tristan has the run of the place. *Der Getriebene* never fully escapes the bonds of his literacy, but this same proscriptive knowledge enables him to reinvent himself time and time again. Moreover, Tristan learns to exert full control over his surroundings and thereby undo the joining of signifier and signified in his person. Tristan learns how not to be Tristan, and it is to his first instance of un-becoming that I would like to turn.

A Game of Chess

Unlike the protagonists in the Arthurian Romances, Gottfried's Tristan knows the ultimate outcome of his adventures. Burdened by this understanding, Tristan attempts to undo the fetters fate wrought by trying to be someone other than Tristan. In order to have

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[64] *Wort, Sinnbild, Zahl*, 26-27.

a closer look at the protagonist's attempts to be anyone else, we will look at Tristan's first recorded encounters with Norwegian merchants. In the following section, we will examine a similar episode, in which Tristan arrives in Ireland for a second time and has a prolonged conversation with the Marshall guarding the coastline. Each scene depicts not only the advantages of freestanding fictions but also constitute an escape from fate and predetermined signification.

Although these episodes are separated by several thousand verses, it is no accident that they both take place on the coast. As Ingrid Hahn outlines, Gottfried expresses a continued fascination with the sea and the individual subjected to natural forces thereon: "Die Vorstellung vom einsamen Menschen auf der Meeresflut hat Gottfried, wie es scheint, überhaupt gereizt."[65] The sea allows for anonymity. It is a place of transition, where Tristan may abandon an old identity and assume a new one. Tristan's series of escapes begins at the harbor in Canoel in Parmenie (*T* 2149-2159). This is an environment centered on superficial values. Gottfried informs us that the merchants at the harbor offer many alluring objects for sale (*T* 2298-2202) to what is presumably a large number of potential consumers. As Erec learns in his pursuit of Yders, such environments offer an anonymity and experimentation not found at court.

The decisive moment arrives when Tristan's companions are about to return to the castle:

> nu man sî dô gewerte
> alles, des sî wolten,
> und dannen kêren solten,
> von âventiure ez dô geschach,

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[65] *Raum und Landschaft in Gottfrieds* Tristan: *Ein Beitrag zur Werkdeutung* (Munich: Eidos Verlag, 1963), 21.

daz Tristan in dem schiffe ersach
ein schâchzabel hangen,
an brete und an den spangen
vil schône und wol gezieret,
ze wunsche gefeitieret. (*T*, 2216-2224)

[When they had been given all they wanted and were about to turn back, it so happened that Tristan caught sight of a chess board hanging in the ship, with its field and its fence very marvelously decorated (70-71).]

There are several ways we might choose to understand Tristan's espying of the chessboard. First, we know it draws the eye, being "marvelously decorated" and thus might arouse a child's interest. Second, fate (*von âventiure*) lures Tristan's thoughts away from his companions and to the chessboard. Hollandt advocates for this reading, describing the meaning of *âventiure* as: "*aventiure* ist hier also nicht eine dem Helden verhängte Mühsal, die er auf sich nimmt, um sich zu bewähren, sondern unglückliches Schicksal, dem gegenüber er auf Mittel und Wege sinnt, um nicht von ihm vernichtet zu werden."[66] If we view this scene from the perspective of hindsight, then Hollandt's interpretation is quite convincing. The merchants inadvertently make possible Tristan's return to the place of his birth and to King Mark, his only living relative. As a direct consequence of his kidnapping, Tristan comes to Cornwall and thus to Mark's court. Tristan's excursions to Ireland, the winning of Isolde and his betrayal of Mark would all be secondary consequences stemming form innocuous words about a chessboard. Yet the phrase *von âventiure* need not carry as much weight as Holldandt ascribes to it. An alluring object could "just happen" to catch a person's eye. The third possibility, and the

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[66] *The Hauptgestalten in Gottfrieds* Tristan*: Wesenszüge, Handlungsfunktion, Motiv der List* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1966), 82.

one I favor, is that Tristan sees an opportunity for escape and tries to gain the upper hand by preempting fate.

Gottfried's description of the chessboard's accidental discovery constitutes a plausible excuse to distract the merchants. On this excursion to the market at the harbor, Tristan has left the confines his home. Just as Erec uses the hunt for the white stag as a pretext to break away from the Arthurian Court, Tristan seizes an opportunity. Surrounded by unfamiliar and foreign faces and just as he is about to return to his learning and thus to his prison, he decides to engage the merchants in conversation. Tristan's question to the merchants is the first instance of spoken dialogue attributed to the protagonist. After being entrapped and silenced by language, Tristan decides to use this oppressive skill to make himself heard: *»ei« sprach er »edelen koufman / sô helfe iu got! und kunnet ir / schâchzabelspil? daz saget mir!«* (*T* 2230-32) ['Oh,' he said, 'noble merchants, in Heaven's name, don't tell me you play chess? (71)]. Even though the Norwegians invite Tristan to play a game (*T* 2243-2247), it is Tristan who initiates this conversation and thereby draws attention to himself.

Tristan tempts the agents of fate, the merchants who "just happen" (*von âventiure* [*T* 2150]) to be at the harbor. Knowing the grim end which awaits him, Tristan tries to alter his preordained path. Fascinated by the youth and his skills in languages and music, the merchants cast off during the chess game, purportedly without Tristan or his tutor, Curneval, taking notice (*T* 2309-17). The Norwegians believe they have the upper hand. Unfortunately for Tristan's kidnappers, their captive calls the shots. Tristan wins the chess game (*T* 2319), and when the purported victim realizes his predicament, he emits

(*jaemerlîchez clagen*, *T* 2333) [a pitiful dirge (72)]. The others on board cannot help but

imitate the boy. Tristan's doleful performance affects and overwhelms his audience.

Curneval begins to cry (*T* 2334) so profusely that it rankles Tristan's kidnappers (*T*

2336-39). Tristan's mood becomes everyone else's mood, and he bends their will to his

and makes his would-be kidnappers his rescuers.

As I write in the introduction to this dissertation, there is a hyperawareness of pre-

texts in *Tristan*. This attentiveness to the forceful and near inescapable power of pre-texts

leads not to a spirit of radical conformity, but to one of extreme and constant rebellion

from Gottfried and his double, Tristan. Both understand conventions inside and out and

use their insider knowledge to manipulate these systems to their own advantage. When

God subjects the Norwegians' ship to a mighty storm (*T* 2406-2417), Gottfried describes

the magnificent return of *âventiure*:

> und si selbe âne trôst beliben
> umbe ir lîp und ume ir leben.
> si haeten sich mitalle ergeben
> an die vil armen stiure,
> diu dâ heizet âventiure. (*T* 2418-22)

> [(And) they despaired of their lives. They had abandoned themselves utterly to
> that poor prop called 'Chance' (73).]

The merchants power is now undone, and they must abandon themselves to that powerful

and unsought agent, *âventiure*. Even though Gottfried attributes the storm to God and the

merchants understand it as such (*T* 2441-2451), Tristan does not. The raging storm elicits

no reaction from the boy. In the midst great chaos, confusion and fear, Gottfried's

protagonist is eerily silent and briefly disappears from the scene. For eights days and

nights, the merchants' quail as the storm rages around them (*T* 2401-2439) and no mention is made of Tristan.

Perhaps we can explain Tristan's disappearing act as enabled by *âventiure* in the sense of "Chance", which those around the protagonist experience, not the protagonist himself: *hie von sô haete s'alle ir maht / vil nâch verlorn unde ir sin* (*T* 2438-2439). Hatto translates this loss of *maht* and *sin* as "they [the merchants] were near to exhaustion" (73). Yet we might understand the description as comparable to Yvain's episode of madness, which Chrétien equates with a storm of unbearably loud sound: *Lors li monta uns torbeillons / El chief si granz, que il forsane* (*Y*, 2804-2805) [Then such a great tempest arose in his head that he went mad (330)]. The merchants lose their physical strength but also meaning (*sin*). Whereas Hartmann, according to Gottfried, so masterfully combines *worten* and *sinnen* (*T* 4624), *Tristan*'s adaptor briefly severs the relationship between word and meaning in the figure of Tristan. For a figure whose destiny is purportedly unshakeable, Tristan, the poem's constant signifier, disappears and causes a brief moment in which a fixed meaning is completely absent. The storm ceases only when the merchants come to their senses and recall Tristan's presence (*T* 2441-2449), bringing him back into the narrative.

Ruth Morse writes how pre-texts afforded medieval adaptors considerable levity: "[I]n practice [pre-texts] allowed authors to exploit a rich narrative uncertainty and to create a space within which they could manipulate their true tales about the past."[67] Tristan loves narrative uncertainty and the possibility of "what if . . ." Although propelled

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[67] *Truth and Convention in the Middle Ages*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 231-232.

towards a fixed end, Tristan succeeds in escaping for brief periods to become the chaotic and liberating force of *âventiure*, the absence of meaning in which all meanings are possible. If, as I have suggested, Tristan can make himself an agent of 'Chance' (*âventiure*) by speaking at opportune moments, drawing attention to himself and disappearing, then he has a chance of outwitting fate.

The Man in the Boat

In the previous section, I suggest that Tristan can undo the link between word and meaning in order to produce the vacuum in which new meanings might be inserted. To test this hypothesis against an additional example, I would like to briefly examine the verbal exchange between Tristan and the King of Ireland's Marshall. In this scene, Tristan tries to enter Ireland under false pretenses for the second time. We shall see that Tristan will hide the truth and obscure interpretation by detaching himself from his own story. Although more verbally and physically present than during the storm, Tristan nevertheless achieves a kind of invisibility and frees himself, albeit temporarily, from the Tristan-legend.

Events in the poem require Tristan to assume a disguise. The failure to create a credible fiction means a violent end for Gottfried's protagonist. The King of Ireland has put his guards on the lookout for Tristan after Mark's nephew slew the Queen's brother and the Princess Isolde's uncle, Morold. The death of Morold at Tristan's hand must still be avenged (*T* 8739-8743), which puts Morold's murderer in a difficult position. Tristan finds the best solution is to ignore the risks entirely while speaking and performing on his own terms. When faced with great peril, Tristan turns a somber situation into a

celebratory one. For a young man born to sadness, Tristan shows that he still knows how to have a good time.

A few words about Tristan and his adversaries are necessary. Before any verbal exchange takes place, Gottfried makes it clear that we are not to have sympathy for Tristan's opponents. The adaptor describes King Gurmun's men as torturers (*T wîzenaere*, 8744) and murderers (*T mortaeten*, 8745) who have already proven their willingness to harm innocent men as well as guilty ones (*T* 8746-8748). They are, in other words, bad interpreters who cannot properly do their jobs. They are also champions of narrative consistency, which Tristan avoids whenever possible. Morold's death necessitates their presence on shore, and their official charge is to determine whether or not those landing in Ireland are from Mark's kingdom (*T* 8739-8743). The authorities presume that newcomers to Ireland are guilty until proven innocent. Thus Tristan needs to be able to tell a persuasive account of his origins to an audience of non-discerning spectators in order to gain entrance.

Tristan engages in a con-game, and King Gurmun's men serve as the collective mark. Being truthful does not matter, but speaking convincingly does. With his life on the line, Tristan works to hamper interpretation. The severity of the situation does not matter. Tristan's goal is to not be deciphered, his task is not so much to lie but to eliminate all relevant information, i.e. that he and his companions come from Mark's court. His adversaries can believe anything they like so long as they think that their interlocutor is not Tristan.

The method matters as much as the content, and these circumstances compel Tristan to undertake a one-man theatrical performance. This is neither the first nor last time that Tristan proves to be a more than ample actor, but his actions here are particularly stagy: Tristan hides himself in a cloak (*T* 8756) and grabs a chalice to serve as a prop (*T* 8758-8760).[68] For a moment, Tristan is most clearly defined by these two, easily recognizable objects, neither of which has anything to do with Tristan himself.[69] The cloak and the chalice stand out on account of their ordinariness. They have no greater significance and are meant only to distract the eye from the figure bearing them.

Tristan's manner of approach recalls his earlier arrival in Ireland. His first arrival is necessitated by his poisoned wound from Morold's sword, which only Queen Isolde can heal. Tristan floats towards the shore, with only has a harp in his possession. He sings and attracts the attention of the locals (*T* 7503-7512). These Dubliners are at first drawn by the curious image of a boat drifting aimlessly off the coast (*daz wîselôse schiffelîn T* 7508). As they approach, Tristan begins to play the harp and sing, which brings his listeners to a standstill (*T* 7515-7546). When Tristan finally speaks directly to his audience, he describes himself as a minstrel turned merchant (*T* 7559-7606). He explains

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[68] In *Der Kaufmann im Mittelalter: Literatur, Wirtschaft, Gesellschaft* (Pfaffenweiler: Centaurus-Verlagsgesellschaft, 1993), Heirbert R. Brennig describes the cloak and chalice as props (Requisiten) and mentions that Kurneval, Tristan's tutor, travels with his former pupil in a small boat towards the Irish shore. However, we are never told whether or not Kurneval is disguised as well (233). Brennig believes that Tristan's companion to be dressed in a similarly theatrical fashion, a detail which the poem neither confirms nor refutes. While I find Brennig's hypothesis quite probable, the absence of this detail is perhaps more revealing given that Gottfried provides detailed a description of the ruse. I am tempted to justify the missing description of Kurneval as a testament to Tristan's ability to become overwhelming if he so chooses. Although there is another coconspirator taking part in this part of the deception, it is clear that the tutee completely overshadows the tutor.

[69] The nondescriptness of the cloak and chalice stands in stark contrast to the recurring symbol of the boar, which William C. McDonald calls "a violent, disruptive image with which the hero has deep attunement" (161). In: "The Boar Emblem in Gottfried's *Tristan*," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 62.2 (1991). Unlike the boar symbol, with its "narrative clues of foreshadowing and fulfillment" (Ibid.), the bottle and cloak are sufficiently conventional that they do not impart any information about the reveler's identity.

that the harp is a sign that he is a courtly minstrel (*spilman*) and that his instrument saved

his life after all his traveling companions were killed by pirates: *daz [Tristan's survival]*

hât diu harpfe getân, / an der ir iegelîcher sach, / ich waere ein art spilman (*T*

7589-7591) [thanks to my harp from which all could see that I was a minstrel (142)].

Tristan's statement is strange in its broad contours as well as in its particulars. No wonder

Tristan's rescuers have trouble explaining it to others:

> Si seiten wider ze maere,
> daz in widervaren waere,
> âventiure an einem man,
> dâ man sich es lützel an
> und niemer solte versehen. (T 7635-7639)

> [They reported that they had experienced an amazing thing in one you would
> never have suspected of it (143).]

According to Tristan, the harp and his ability to play it are visual and aural testaments to

his story. Yet they confirm nothing about his second career as a merchant (*T* 7569-7574),

his business partner (*T* 7575-7576) and their failed voyage to Normandy (*T* 7577-7585).

Tristan's audience ignores half of his story to make the fiction credible. The harp and

Tristan's musical skills are his salvation. Tristan's listeners want to save the dying man

not because of who he is but what he can do (*T* 7607-7614). The harp from his first

voyage is as vapid a symbol as the cloak and the bottle from the second. They are props

to a story which Gottfried's poem does not verify. Tristan repeats this process when he

returns to Ireland for the second time. Before anyone on either side utters a word, we

understand that Tristan's speech will be disguised not only through his language but

through the costume as well.

With his new attire, Tristan sails towards the shore and makes a dramatic entrance with his tutor, Kurneval, at his side: *und kêrte hin gegen der habe / und bôt in sînen gruoz hin abe /mit gebaerden und mit munde, / sô er suozeste kunde* (*T* 8763-8766) [(and) made for the harbour and saluted an bowed across to the citizens with all the charm he could muster (156)]. Tristan's outward behavior is noticeably out of sync with the precariousness of the situation. Mark's nephew presents himself as vivacious and carefree at exactly the moment in which humility and caution are required. As Brennig explains, this is a calculated strategy:

> Das Grundprinzip seiner Strategie hatte sich schon früher bewährt: Er verhielt sich immer genau entgegensetzt der Erwartungshaltung seiner Umgebung. Dadurch entstand ein Überraschungseffekt, den er regelmäßig zu seinen Gunsten nutzte. Also griff er auch in dieser Situation auf diese Taktik zurück: Tristan gibt sich, obgleich die äußersten Umstände als wenig freundlich erscheinen, und jeder, angesichts der massiven Drohgebärde, mit seiner vorsichtig-ängstlichen Zurückhaltung rechnet, nicht eingeschüchtert, sondern begrüßt die Anwesenden scheinheilig *sô er suozeste kunde* (8770).[70]

As in Tristan's relationship to Curneval, in which the tutor, the sanctioned authority figure, has no control over his charge, Tristan dictates how things proceed in his encounter with the King's Marshall. Brennig is absolutely right in calling this a tactic meant to elicit surprise (*Überraschungseffekt*) from the audience, but we can take his argument one step further. By catching his audience off guard, Tristan evidences his knowledge of the rules and his refusal to play by them.

Tristan makes sure that any exchange takes place on his terms. There is a strict hierarchical structure to which Tristan should submit, particularly given his status as a foreign visitor. Tristan is expected head the Marshall's instructions and not make trouble.

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[70] *Kaufmann im Mittelalter*, 233.

Instead of behaving passively and letting himself be interrogated, Tristan not only changes the rules but even the nature of the game being played. He makes his approach in such an over-the-top manner that he undermines the seriousness of the situation along with the Marshall's authority. Tristan does not reveal anything but rather ensures that those standing in judgment of him can only misinterpret the situation.

This is pure presentation on Tristan's part, oratory "created and developed for a single performance."[71] Tristan's illusion is an exercise of form in place of substance, and yet is more effective and convincing than the truth. Tristan is the most present and real in those moments in which he refuses to be Tristan. Not beholden to the dictates of pre-texts, Tristan fulfills the promise of poetics by undoing his own identity. His gestures, word and voice[72] combine to create a performance which delights his audience more than the truth would. Those on shore who witness Tristan's approach and greet him enthusiastically (*T* 8767-8769), calling: *«habe an lant, habe an lant!»* (*T* 8771) ['Put to land! Put to land!' (156)]. The people on shore do not hear him, but Tristan has already piqued their interest. He has not even told them anything they could hear, let alone understand, but this does not matter. Tristan demonstrates an alternative approach to poetics in which it does not matter what he says so long as he does not speak to the issue: that his name is Tristan and that he comes to Mark's court. This gives him the freedom to be anything other than what he is: Tristan is free so long as he is not Tristan.

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[71] "Oratory: The Art of Illusion," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 95 (1993), 289.
[72] As Derrida (inconsistently) argues, the voice narrows, but does not close the gap between signifier and signified: "In every case, the voice is closest to the signified, whether it is determined strictly as sense (thought or lived) or more loosely as thing." In: *On Grammatology*, 11.

Tristan speaks with the intention of not being understood. Like an ideal orator, "no argument, no digression, no characterization of any principal in the [orator's] speech [...] need have any cogency of relevance independent of its function in the performance."[73] The orator's multiple *personae* for himself and others "must only be consistent with the particular scenes (narratives, arguments, anecdotes, digression) in which they appear."[74] Tristan in the boat is a smooth and capable con-man. Others have commented on his resemblance to a Siren, albeit a very mobile one. Tristan enters any environment he pleases and then draws others to himself. There are no rocks upon which his enemies flounder, but there are many other traps set in their way.

In order for Tristan's schemes to work, he must capture and keep his audience's attention until he acquires what he wants. A con works best if the mark does not recognize the use of deception, even after the fact. The best con leaves the victim feeling rewarded, not cheated. To achieve this goal, Tristan creates fictions which appear more credible than real life.[75] We see this at the conclusion of Tristan's conversation with the Marshall. Tristan sees the fraud through to the end so that the Marshall does not have the slightest inkling that Tristan has cheated him:

> der marschalc sîne gâbe nam,
> diu dûhte in rîche und lobesam,
> und hiez in stôzen in die habe.
> sînem lîbe und sîner habe
> vride und genâde er dô gebôt. (*T* 8885-8889)

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[73] Harold Gatoff, "Oratory: The Art of Illusion," 291.
[74] Ibid., 291.
[75] See: Wolfgang Mohr, "'Tristan und Isold' als Künstlerroman," *Euphorion* 53 (1959), 166.

> [The Marshal accepted his gift, which he thought princely and handsome, and then bade him to put into port. He ordered good treatment and security for Tristan[76] and his effects (158).]

Blinded by greed and Tristan's performance, the Marshall unwittingly submits to an avowed enemy. An enemy of Ireland appears in front of a group of guards and moves right past them. Tristan's fiction, which has no correlation within the poem, proves to be valid because it is accepted. Tristan's tale of the lives he and his traveling companions have left behind in Normandy becomes valid currency. It is as if the knights of Arthur's court put all their energy into actions and rhetoric they know to be worthless instead of jumping ship. A full confession from Tristan would bring the proceedings to a grinding halt. The fabrication keeps the poem hurtling forward, but not without significant damage to the integrity of the narrative.

In *Yvain*, Calogrenant cautions his listeners that speech could devolve into meaningless sounds (*li vanz*, 158). As the man in the boat, Tristan bring Calogrenant's fears to life. Disguised in his cloak and waving the bottle around, Tristan consists of nothing but gestures and a voice which weave together a most agreeable fiction. Gottfried does everything possible to sever the link between *matiere* and *sens*, *wort* and *sin* through adaptation. Yet in a weird way this dissonance between the raw material and meaning is abolished for a brief moment, albeit only on the most localized level. It is the ideal harmonization of word and flesh: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1:14).

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[76] The name does not appear in Gottfried's original. The Marshall knows nothing of Tristan's "true" identity.

<u>Conclusion</u>

In this chapter, I have tried to suggest two ways in which the knight in the Arthurian Romance can take flight by becoming a deconstructive force. Borrowing from a very selective reading of Derrida and developing the orator-poet categories, I show that Chrétien, Hartmann and Gottfried all suggest ways to subvert extant systems of linguistic control. I am indebted to Paul J. Archambault's essay, which makes the crisis of language the focal point of Chrétien's text:

> One might possibly suggest that the hermeneutic key to *Erec* lies rather in a conflict between words and words; or, more precisely, in a crisis resulting from Erec's dissatisfaction with an old language that results in a search for and discovery of a new one. From the very moment he enters upon the scene Erec seems to be turning away. From an old courtly language which no longer has any significance for him. The whole Arthurian symbology seems to him 'useless, stale, flat and unprofitable.'[77]

In my sections on *Erec et Enide* and *Erec*, I try to explore this idea further through alternative examples and through the importance of Hartmann's Erec being a "miracle worker" suggested in William C. McDonald's essay. In both versions of the Erec-legend, the protagonist not only rectifies the rupture of word and meaning in the *Joie de la Court*-scene but also offers himself and his story as the basis for further textual production. The transformation of the knight into text threatens existing hierarchies and carries the promise of linguistic renewal outside of the single text.

Gottfried and his double Tristan share Chrétien and Hartmann's concerns about outdated and meaningless ceremonies, words and actions. Whereas Erec transforms himself into an alternative text which can permeate the varied loci of the narrative,

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[77] Paul J. Archambault. "Erec's Search for a New Language: Chrétien and Twelfth-Century Science." *Symposium* 35.1 (Spring 1981), 5.

Tristan strives free-standing fictions. Tristan rejects the very poem in which he appears and the textual legacy which informs his fate. Like an actor or professional storyteller, Tristan tailors his speech to be fittingly appropriate to the circumstances, as exhibited in the scene with the Marshall. The conditions against which he must react will change after he has gained admission to Ireland and so will his story. Like quality oratory, the tale Tristan tells to the Marshall and his men only has value in this one particular time and place. This is an act of exchange under false pretenses, in which Tristan gains something (admission) for a valueless good (his story). This fact is underscored by Tristan's offer to exchange material goods to finalize the deal (*T* 8852-8862). The ruse is a success, and curiously no one is the worse off for it.

There are echoes of a deity testing a mortal's consistency and loyalty in both these scenes.[78] There are disguises and false words are spoken. In Tristan's case, the guards fail to fulfill their duty because they let themselves be distracted and are ultimately tricked through props, words and gifts. In a classical or biblical model, the guards' behavior would be punished. Instead, they are rewarded precisely because they have shown no concern for continuity and consistency, albeit unwittingly. As Chinca explains, Tristan has taught them to embrace fiction and enjoy its benefits in the real world:

> Even if Gottfried's audience can see that Tristan's story is false, it is bound to acknowledge that it is nevertheless a plausible story and, because of this, one that

[78] Such as Mercury and Battus in Book II of the *Metamorphoses*. Mercury uses two unspecified disguises and has the freedom, as the tester, to speak inconsistenty and lie to Battus. The episode concludes with Battus' transformation into a stone. Tristan, a figure of Celtic derivation, may retain a God-like status without actually being a god. The immortals in the Metamorphoses have the freedom to act and speak inconsistently even while they punish any mortals who would behave in a similar fashion. Now Christ himself plays along and does not protest Isolde's perversion of the truth (15733-15736). As the figure who tests and not the one who is tested, Tristan does not succumb to the tests laid out for them by Melot and Marjodoc. For more on the origins of the Tristan legend, see: Neil Thomas, *Tristan in the Underworld: A Study of Gottfried von Strassburg's* Tristan *Together with the* Tristran *of Thomas* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1991), 21.

has real effects. The episode of the pilgrims is, it seems to me, an object-lesson in how, in a narrative mode based on verisimilitude, the only reality that matters is virtuality, the reality that consists not in fact, but in the effect of a discourse. The audience recognizes that its experiences of the story is the place where meaning is made.[79]

For Gottfried, there are benefits to accepting fictional texts without any concern for their didactic aims or degree of consistency with other, competing texts. Whereas Erec becomes omnipresent at conclusion or Hartmann's poem through *daz wîten über elliu lant / was sîn wesen und sîn schîn* (*E* 10047-10048) [Things were such that his being and aura spread over all the lands (162)], Tristan transforms himself into his fiction's unfilled and undetermined center, giving the listener the opportunity to experience poetic language which signifies more clearly and strongly than reality.

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[79] *History, Fiction, Verisimilitude: Studies in the Poetics of Gottfried's* Tristan, 113.

Chapter Four
The Renunciants

<u>Introduction</u>

In this chapter, we will focus on Wolfram's *Parzival* and juxtapose it in the

following chapter with Gottfried's *Tristan*.[1] At first glance, the figures of Parzival and

Tristan appear to be complete opposites, as do the poems in which they appear. Parzival

is pious whereas Tristan makes God's will his own; Parzival undergoes a marked

transformation from ignorance into knowledge whereas Tristan is skilled and

knowledgeable from the beginning; and Parzival laments and repents his transgressions

whereas Tristan never expresses any sign of *riuwe*, regret or sadness, about his actions.[2]

To a greater extent than *Erec et Enide*/*Erec* or *Yvain*/*Iwein*, *Parzival* is about discovering,

examining and renouncing the past in order to shape the future. *Tristan*, by contrast,

moves in the opposite direction. In Gottfried's text, Tristan avoids looking either forwards

or backwards. He is a one-man sideshow and repeatedly establishes present and realistic

fictions.

Wolfram's *Parzival* and Gottfried's *Tristan* share one important feature: both

poems are second-generation, German Arthurian Romances.[3] I suggest that the variance

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[1] While I will make use of several passages from Chrétien's *Perceval*, the focus of this chapter and the next is the second-generation of adaptors of Arthurian Romance in Germany as represented by Wolfram and Gottfried. Chrétien does not fall into this category, and thus most of my non-Tristan examples will come from Wolfram's *Parzival*.

[2] The word is not commonly used in any of the Arthurian Romances, but it does appear in *Parzival* and Hartmann's *Gregorius*. See: Klaus Speckenbach, *Studien zum Begriff 'edelez Herze' im* Tristan *Gottfrieds von Strassburg* (Munich: Eidos Verlag, 1965), 24.

[3] Hugh Sacker places the writing of Parzival in "the first decade of the thirteenth century". In: *An Introduction to Wolfram's* Parzival (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), ix. Like Gottfried, Wolfram was familiar with popular, vernacular writings of the time. His extensive knowledge has made him a useful historical guide for determining when other works were written: "Wolfram's references to other literary texts are so numerous that most of the corpus of Middle High German literature around 1200 is dated with reference to *Parzival*" In: Arthur Groos, *Romancing the Grail: Genre, Science, and Quest in Wolfram's* Parzival (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 36. Green dates *Parzival* to around the year 1200. In: *The Art of Recognition in Wolfram's* Parzival (London: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 1.

between *Parzival* and *Tristan* might be in part explained by their shared relationship to the genre. The *roman* as fashioned by Chrétien had begun to emerge as a distinct literary category. By around the year 1200, audiences and adaptors alike had expectations of what may and may not transpire in this genre:

> After Chrétien de Troyes, however, there was awareness of romance *(roman)* as a class of writing distinct from history, hagiography, and Fabliau. Although the characteristics of *roman* as romance were neither constant nor imposed, the word did identify and determine a class of writings recognized by romancers, their publics, and their detractors. These characteristics influenced what would be written as and designated *roman*, and fashioned public taste and expectations.[4]

Wolfram and Gottfried decided to reinvent a recent but established literary phenomenon. As we saw in the previous two chapters, the Arthurian Romance observes, contemplates and deconstructs itself, but the extant texts by Chrétien and Hartmann complicate this task for the next generation of adaptors. Wolfram and Gottfried face a new challenge. To write a text that comments on its own construction requires the invocation of its predecessors while at the same time the new text should demonstrate its superiority. The solution for both adaptors is the renunciation of the genre. Wolfram and Gottfried position themselves as adaptors of something other than Arthurian Romance and use their poems to comment on the genre with which they share a stated but rejected affiliation.

Both Wolfram and Gottfried decided to continue Chrétien and Hartmann's legacies by not only rejecting Arthur and his Court but also Chrétien and Hartmann's

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[4] *The Art of French Medieval Romance* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 318.

adaptations.[5] *Parzival* and *Tristan* renounce their influences and prominently feature acts of renunciation.[6] In spite of an unshakable fascination with and dependency on their predecessors' achievements, Wolfram and Gottfried treat the texts of Chrétien and Hartmann as heretical. The second-generation arrives ready to preach the good word at the expense of the old.

Parzival and *Tristan*'s adaptors renounce through their narratives, first acknowledging and then dismissing the influential pre-texts. Even as the two adaptors require the writings of Chrétien and Hartmann for their own texts, *Parzival* and *Tristan* are exercises in negating sources of influence. In contemporary cinematic entertainment, the term "reboot" is used to describe the resurrection of a popular franchise. In the case of a film, a reboot usually involves a new cast, creative team and a reworking of the source material. Some aspects of the material's previous iterations are retained, while others are discarded. The term reboot is obviously anachronistic, but thinking of *Parzival* and *Tristan* as genre-reboots is not too far off the mark: each text rehashes extant *materia/matere* with the aim of superseding what came before.

Wolfram uses Chrétien's unfinished fragment, *Perceval*, to generate a lengthy poem with greatly expanded literary borders. *Parzival*'s adaptor presents a more

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[5] Wolfram chastises both Chrétien and Wolfram by name. Chrétien is taken to task for the inadequacy of his adaptation (Ob von Troys meister Christjân / disem maere hât unreht getân / daz mac wol zürnen Kyôt, der uns diu rehten maere enbôt (*P* 826, 29-827,4) [If Master Chrétien de Troyes did not do justice to this story, that may well vex Kyot, who furnished us the right story (430)]. Wolfram depicts Hartmann as the Arthurian Court's handler, responsible for making sure that no injuries befall Parzival when he is about to meet Arthur (P 143.21-144.4).

[6] A cursory look at the major events in both poems illustrates the prominence of renunciation. In *Parzival*, Herzeloyde renounces courtly society, Anfortas and Trevrizent retreat from the secular world, Sigune becomes an anchoress, Firefiz converts from Islam, and Parzival leaves his wife and the Arthurian Court so that he might wander until he finds the Grail. Zrinka Stahuljak shows that much of Chrétien's *Perceval* is about the impossibility of return, particularly his mother and the Grail Castle. See: *Thinking Through Chrétien de Troyes* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2011), 87. In *Tristan*, the main figure renounces the textual claims of others such Morgan and Morolt, Isolde buries her own scorn against her uncle's murderer, and Mark tries, unsuccessfully, to sever the ties between him and his nephew.

expansive but fading courtly world, in which Arthur and his court threaten to be overshadowed by other centers of communal organization.[7] Arthur still serves as a point of reference, but his power has further diminished. Even his sobriquet as *der meinbaere man* (*P* 281, 16) [the Man of May (153)] is undercut by an unseasonal snowfall. Arthur is no longer the poem's starting point, and his reputation is of even less value than in *Erec et Enide*/*Erec* or *Yvain*/*Iwein*. Unlike Chrétien and Hartmann, Wolfram shows no sign of using the Arthurian-myth as camouflaged *auctoritas*. Wolfram expands and reinvents the genre's boundaries, almost leaving Arthur behind in the process.

Gottfried takes a very different approach from Wolfram and tries to meld the Arthurian genre onto the Tristan legend. It is a deliberately uneasy fusion of two separate traditions. This imbalanced marriage of material results in a rewriting of the Arthurian Romance genre. Gottfried's only writes two passages where he mentions Arthur by name (*T* 16859-16865; 16898-16901). Otherwise, *Tristan*'s relationship to the Arthurian Romances is an implicit one.[8] As in Wolfram's *Parzival*, Gottfried is interested in drastically reworking the material. Whereas Wolfram belatedly acknowledges the tradition in order to criticize and reinvent it, Gottfried employs the Arthurian-myth in order to renounce it completely.

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[7] Arthur's Court, aware of its diminished authority, even tries to become proactive and puts the Prince Urjans on trial for rape. The guilty figure does not even acknowledge Arthur's authority as a judge. "Arthur says nothing about the peace of the realm or the punishment of public offenses. Instead he strikes a tone of lamentation. His rhetoric is strong and his words have cosmic overtones" but one wonders whether he speaks more for the state of his court than for the state of mankind. See: Sarah Westphal-Wihl, "Orgeluse and the Trial for Rape at the Court of King Arthur: *Parzival* 521, 19 to 529, 16," *Arthuriana* 20.3 (Fall, 2010), 90.

[8] I address the relationship between *Tristan* and the Arthurian Romance in the second section of the introduction.

To explore the manifestations of renunciation, I will examine the textual legacies of Parzival's father and mother, Gahmuret and Herzeloyde. As Arthur Groos explains, Parzival's father and mother represent two different legacies which merge in Parzival:

> Parzival's parents, like those of his Old French counterpart, are members of the knightly aristocracy, but they are descended from two different societies within that aristocracy: Gahmuret from the Arthurian world, in which Parzival begins his knightly career; Herzeloyde from the Grail world, of which he will ultimately be regent. Both worlds, represented by heterogeneous chronotopes with divergent conceptions of time and space, also involve the hero in different types of adventures, inscribing his career in a nexus of multiple genre expectations.[9]

I will focus on an important difference between Gahmuret and Herzeloyde's legacies. Gahmuret creates visible but fragmented textual tracks, whereas Herzeloyde's textual legacy is largely hidden. I will first look at the textual legacies left behind by the figure Gahmuret in the first two books of *Parzival* and then examine the textual legacies of Herzeloyde, Anfortas and the Grail in the section thereafter. The legacy of the parents looms large over the son, forcing Parzival to choose between two irreconcilable sides to his heritage. Situated between these extremes are other pre-texts of varying quality and utility. Parzival must navigate the legacy pre-texts force upon him and learn to renounce those which would mislead him.

Paternal Textual Legacies

In this section, I would like to examine the textual legacies of Parzival's father, Gahmuret. One need not impose a Freudian analysis on *Parzival* to appreciate the importance of the father-figure to the son. As Hugh Sacker succinctly explains, "The main story of *Parzival* must be interpreted against this [Gahmuret's] background [...]

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[9] *Romancing the Grail*, 57.

many of the events of his life determined in part by his paternal heritage - so that to understand Parzival one must continually refer back to his father."[10] As we shall see in the next section, the largely secret and unspoken legacy of the mother is equally important. First, though, I would like to explore the texts Gahmuret produces. These take the form of a letter, a gravestone as well as non-physical texts through the knowledge of others about his person, and their physical presence in Wolfram's text points to the broader difficulties of textual inheritance.

With few exceptions, Chrétien and Hartmann's figures demonstrate little awareness of pre-texts.[11] Although the narratives do not hide their own hybridity, the absence of any comment on pre-texts fits this early stage in the genre's development. Knights such as Yvain/Iwein and Erec belong to the first-generation of knights, whose chivalric codes and ethics are determined after the individual romance has reached its conclusion: "having *been* accomplished, adventure is identified with a set of rules [italics added]."[12] The first-generation Arthurian world relies solely on the production and transference of spoken texts produced within the narrative.

In *Parzival*, however, the figures are very conscious of extant literature and acknowledge the pre-texts which inform their behavior and the listeners' understanding thereof. For example, Wolfram and his figures conceive of knighthood as an *ordo*,[13]

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[10] *An Introduction to Wolfram's* Parzival, 8.

[11] When the influence of pre-texts appears in the narrative, the figures do not offer comment. Enite's marvelous saddle contains a visual depiction of Thisbe and Pyramus (*E* 7707-7713), but neither she, Erec nor anyone else seems aware of its existence. Such allusions are there solely for the audience.

[12] Zrinka Stahuljak, *Thinking Through Chrétien de Troyes*, 80.

[13] Gahmuret, when confronted with his obligations to Queen Ampflise, acknowledges the power of text over his fate: *dô muose ich nâch der ordens craft, / als mir des schildes ambet sagt, / derbî belîben unverzagt (...) ich werde es trûric oder geil, / mich behabt hie ritters urteil* (*P* 95, 26-28; 96, 1-2) [I am obligated to obey the force of its laws unfalteringly, as the trade of knighthood requires. (...) Whether it makes me glad or sad, I am in this case bound by chivalric verdict (55)]. See: H.B. Wilson, "Literacy and Wolfram von Eschenbach," *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 14 (1970), 34.

meaning that a shared text unites, or at least appears to unite, its members.[14] Other texts, including two associated with Gahmuret, create division and contention. Pre-texts are an unavoidable influence of questionable utility, particularly those we would now designate as fiction. The courtiers in Wolfram's narrative have become literate and acknowledge the existence and influence of shared texts from outside of *Parzival*.[15] These courtly epics have become, in Barthes' sense of the term, works. These are "object[s] of consumption" in which the "practice [is] reduced to a passive, inner mimesis[.]"[16] Arthurian and Courtly literature threatens to supplant experience and reduce *âventiure* to "only a second-hand narrative of events which took place in a real-life adventure."[17] Wolfram and his protagonist must overcome stultification through mere consumption of pre-texts.

Wolfram's solution is a novel one. He gives up his membership in these textual communities by asserting that he does not know how to read: *ichne kan deheinen buochstap. / dâ nement genuoge ir urhap: / disiu âventiure / vert âne der buoche stiure* (*P* 115.27-30) [I don't know a single letter of the alphabet. Plenty of people get their material that way, but this adventure steers without books (65)]. This interjection from the adaptor grabs the listener's attention because it is so obviously at odds with the poem. In

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[14] In practice, however, such a unifying text has little power. In the midst of a tournament, such words have no authority: *man sprach dâ wênic ritters reht* (*P* 78,10) [there was little mention of chivalric rights (45)].

[15] When Duke Liddamus justifies his decision to abstain from fighting, he uses literary allusions to make his case: he shares Tranzes' (Vergil: Drances) passivity (*P* 419, 13); refuses to act like the warrior Wolfhart from the *Nibelungenlied* (*P* 420, 22) and would prefer instead to emulate Rumolt, *er bat in lange snited baen / und inme kezzel umbe draen* (*P* 420, 29-30) [he urged him (King Gunther) to stay home (226)]. Equally important is the resonance these allusions have for Liddamus' interlocutor, Kingrimursel. Kingrimursel understands these references to Heinrich's *Eneasroman* and the *Nibelungenlied* and interprets them to suit his intentions: *ir râtet mir dar ich wolt iedoch* (*P*, 421, 5) [You advise me to do just what I wanted to do anyway (227)]. Knights and rulers have been transformed into consumers of courtly literature and form textual communities within a new work, and it is unclear if they would prefer to produce new adventures or, as Liddamus suggests, leave the fighting to someone else and read about it instead (*P* 420, 15-17). Wilson briefly addresses this scene in his article. See: "Literacy and Wolfram von Eschenbach," 35.

[16] Barthes, "From Work to Text," 161, 162. For an example, please see previous footnote.

[17] Wilson, "Literacy and Wolfram von Eschenbach," 35.

Wolfram's case, we assume that he is both culturally and technically literate. Yet Wolfram

challenges us to consider whether an adaptor of such a lengthy and detailed poem might

really be incapable of reading. Historically, this is unlikely,[18] but I suggest that Wolfram's

comment can be explained if we treat the adaptor's boast as a renunciation and a response

to the negative but inescapable influence of pre-texts.

Wolfram's feigned illiteracy is partially a dig at Hartmann von Aue, who calls

attention to his proficiency as a reader and writer at the beginning of *Der arme Heinrich*

and *Gregorius*.[19] Hartmann purportedly writes so that *der süntlîchen bürde / ein Teil*

ringer würde / die ich durch mîne müezekeit / ûf mich mit worten hân geleit (*G* 35-42) [(I

might) lessen a bit the great weight of the sinful burden that I, through frivolous pursuits,

have loaded on myself through my words (168)]. Words are to be Hartmann's

redemption. The restorative power of the new words outweighs, but does not negate, the

adverse effects of the old. Hartmann speaks of linguistic renewal through the addition of

new language. That was one generation ago. Now Wolfram, a reader and adaptor, needs

to make himself heard amidst voices such as Hartmann's.[20] Wolfram is immeshed in

various and overlapping textual communities and does not wish to behave like a knight

who prefers to read about adventures rather than perform them. Thus Wolfram declares

that *disiu âventiure / vert âne der buoche stiure* (*P* 115,29-30) [this adventure steers

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[18] Groos comes out in favor of Wolfram being literate. See: *Romancing the Grail*, 43-45.

[19] H.B. Wilson and in Hermann J. Weigand both view Wolfram's claim of illiteracy as a joking response to Hartmann von Aue. See: Wilson, "Literacy and Wolfram von Eschenbach," 38 and Weigand, "A Jester at the Grail Castle in Wolfram's *Parzival*," *PMLA* 67.4 (Jun., 1952), 493-494.

[20] In *Der arme Heinrich*, Hartmann assumes a similar penitential tone to that in *Gregorius* and states that while he hopes his words will entertain his readers (*DaH* 14-15). After briefly outlining the benefits for his audience, he goes on to say that he hopes his audience will pray for him (*DaH* 18-25). Although Hartmann reminds his listeners that praying for another might do the prayer's own soul some good (*DaH* 26-28), the primary beneficiary of the text to *Der arme Heinrich* is the adaptor.

without books (65)]. Wolfram turns back the clock, renouncing the pre-texts which dictate conformity and repetition rather than inspire new tales of *âventiure*.

We find Wolfram's renunciation of pre-texts mirrored in the challenge Gahmuret's legacy poses to Parzival. Before the protagonist can renounce his literary legacy, he must first learn something of the texts at work. Unfortunately for Parzival, his father's textual legacies offer no solutions to his problems. The inutility of the knowledge gained from the experiences which constitute a textual adventure is, according to Zrinka Stahuljak, one of the hallmarks of Chrétien's texts: "experience, mastered in the past, cannot be abstracted and universalized in other situations. A gap remains between knowledge and experience."[21] As an adaptor, Wolfram appreciates this obstacle. His knowledge of and experiences with Chrétien and Hartmann's texts will not amount to more than consumerism if he does not sufficiently transform the borrowed material into a new experience, understood here as a radically different kind of adaptation.[22] Wolfram commands his readers: *swaz âventiure gesprochen sint, / die endarf hie niemen mezzen zuo, / irn hoert alrêrst waz er nu tuo, / war er kêre und war er far* (P 333 16-19) [Let no one judge these adventures by others which have been told until he has heard what Parzival now undertakes, in what direction he turns his course, and where he travels (179)]. A comparison is permitted only once Wolfram's narrative has reached its conclusion. All intervening and interfering pre-texts must be temporarily renounced.

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[21] *Thinking Through Chrétien de Troyes*, 104.
[22] To borrow again from Barthes, who emphasizes that "no vital 'respect' is due the Text: it can be *broken* [italics in original] (which is just what the Middle Ages did with two nevertheless authoritative texts - Holy Scripture and Aristotle)[.]" In: "From Work to Text," 161.

The incongruities of texts from the past with experiences in the present are demonstrated in the incompatibility of Gahmuret's textual legacies with Parzival's own experiences, particularly as concerns the clarity of signs. Gahmuret's portion of the poem contains its fair share of suffering and confusion, but the chivalric world in which Gahmuret's adventures begin is still largely decipherable. Green writes that Gahmuret inhabits "a feudal world in which he [Gahmuret] has an acknowledged place and well-defined obligations to others."[23] I would add that Gahmuret's obligations are clear because they are textual.

Let us take the beginning of the narrative proper in *Parzival.* This episode begins with an explanation from Wolfram about the rights of inheritance, an uninspiring topic but important for comprehending Gahmuret's place in this feudal social order:

> si pflegents noch als mans dô pflac,
> swâ lît und welhsch gerihte lac.
> des pfliget ouch tiuscher erde ein ort:
> [...]
> daz der altest bruoder solde hân
> sîns vater ganzen erbeteil. (*P* 4, 27-29; 5, 4-5)

> [It is still the custom as it used to be the custom wherever Latin law prevails [...] it is the custom still in a corner of our German land as well [...] that the eldest brother should have his father's entire inheritance (5).]

The shared text of the law determines that Gahmuret should not inherit his father's kingdom. Wolfram emphasizes the familiarity of this rule, anticipating his acquaintance with such a custom. Whether or not this practice was ever written down is irrelevant. It still forms a central and unassailable text whose authority no figure in *Parzival* disputes. Even though Gahmuret's brother decides to share his inheritance with Gahmuret, he

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[23] Green, *The Art of Recognition*, 38.

clearly acts against custom and thus the custom is still enforced (*P* 6, 29-7, 10). Gahmuret and other courtiers are still beholden to pre-texts, such as the rules of inheritance and the *ordo* of knighthood. While there is friction, these texts are not yet in bitter competition with each other.

This harmony is tenuous. Textual problems emerge because Gahmuret does not simply read but also acts, producing texts of his own. Unlike Chrétien and Hartmann, for whom pre-texts are largely shared, unwritten narratives, Gahmuret leaves behind tangible textual traces. The first takes the form of a letter to his first-wife, the Muslim Belacane, in which Gahmuret declares and explains his decision to leave her in the dead of night. Although ostensibly self-deprecating, Gahmuret uses writing to absolve himself of responsibility. Text becomes a means of deferment which permits him to indefinitely postpone any repercussions from his decision. For all his prowess on the battlefield, Gahmuret tends towards passive-aggressive behavior in his love life. In this letter, Gahmuret acknowledges that he departs like a thief (*diep* [*P* 55,22]) but justifies his actions by claiming that he wishes to spare Belacane grief (*P* 55, 23). Gahmuret writes down his own ancestry in the letter, but only offers signifiers for absent and inaccessible people, places and institutions. His letter contains useless information because it permits no response or further dialogue and the people and places mentioned therein are completely inaccessible to Belacane.

Gahmuret flees his first wife never to see her again, but there is a second part to his textual legacy. Belacane bears him a son, a living if confusing sign of Gahmuret's past: *eins suns, der zweier varwe was, / an dem got wunders wart enein: / wîz und*

swarzer varwe er schein (*P* 57, 16-18) [a son of two colors and in whom God had wrought a marvel, for he was both black and white (32)]. In this dual coloring, the borders between white and black, good and evil, salvation and damnation merge without resolution. The closed but clear text of the letter Gahmuret leaves behind for Belacane opens up in the uncertain appearance of the son. Familiar with his brother's looks only from the reports of others, Parzival describes Firefiz' *antlütze* (*P* 747,23) [countenance (390)] as *als ein geschriben permint, / swarz und blanc her und dâ* (*P* 747,26-27) [It was like a parchment with writing all over it, black and white all mixed up (390)].

There is a glibness to Gahmuret's undertakings[24] reminiscent of the foolish frivolity Wolfram ascribes to Chrétien and Hartmann.[25] Gahmuret creates unresolved problems through his texts, either because no response is possible, as with the letter, or because the sign is unique but still indecipherable, as is the case in Firefiz' appearance. At the start of Gahmuret's adventures, Wolfram writes that *sîn muot was ebener denne sleht* (*P*, 12, 26) [his nature is plainer than plain (9)]. Gahmuret is successful because the signs around him are initially clear and decipherable,[26] but his involvement blurs the boundaries between one text and another. As Gahmuret moves from one textual community to the next, the competing taxonomies begin to confuse the knight.[27]

Gahmuret becomes a man without a permanent home and leaves behind pieces of himself. He bears the sign of an anchor on his shield and clothes. As Wolfram explains,

[24] Gahmuret's brother criticizes him for his *schimpflîchen siten* (*P* 8, 29) [jesting unconcern (7)].
[25] See Wolfram's warning to Hartmann when Parzival is about to enter the Arthurian Court (*P* 143.21-144.4) and his criticism of Erec's lack of resolve in the enforcement of his prohibition against speaking in *Erec et Enide*/*Erec* (*P* 826,25-20).
[26] For example: Gahmuret reconizes his cousin, Kaylet, and does not joust with him (*P* 39,11-13), in contrast to Parzival, who inadvertently kills a relative, Ither.
[27] Gahmuret loves Belacane, *ein heidenin* (P 28, 11) a [heathan (17)], who is *nâch der helle (...) gevar* [of hell's color (29)]

the sign is inappropriate for its referent: *sîn anker heten niht bekort / ganzes landes noch landes ort, / dane wârn si ninder în geslagen* (*P* 14,29-15,1) [despite the sign of the anchor he was never to find any place to dwell or tarry]. This is a minor discrepancy which the audience easily understands, but small thought it may be, the inappropriateness of the anchor points to the larger unraveling of signifier and signified over the course of Gahmuret's adventures. Even when grief or regret (*riuwe*) finally moors Gahmuret (*P* 92,12-13), he finds in his textual wake deeds which cannot be made right and for which no extant text offers a solution. Gahmuret's world begins to fall apart. As a knight cut from the cloth of Chrétien and Hartmann's texts, he can no longer solve the problems he generates: "Gahmuret's limitations are shown by his inability to progress beyond this stage, beyond the stage, that is, of knight-errant."[28] Confronted with textual confusion, Gahmuret becomes a renunciant but finds that he cannot outrun his textual legacy.[29] He falls prey to the words of others,[30] and this mounting linguistic confusion culminates in his death.[31]

Even in death, Gahmuret's textual legacies expand but their meaning is obscured and their utility nil. His body is taken to Baghdad. There, his corpse is interred in an elaborate and costly grave. A short narrative about Gahmuret's life is inscribed on his tombstone, reducing roughly 3,200 verses to 25. The dedication on the gravestone declares that no one shall surpass Gahmuret's greatness: *sîn prîs gab sô hôhen ruc, /*

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[28] Hugh Sacker, *An Introduction to Wolfram's* Parzival, 13.
[29] Herzeloyde commands her husband to renounce his first wife, Belacane: *Ir sult die moerinne / lân durch mîne minne* (P 94,11-12) [You should renounce the Moorish woman for my love's sake (53)]
[30] It is the judge's verdict that traps Gahmuret into marrying Herzeloyde (*P* 96,1-5). Gahmuret accepts that he is bound to the verdict (*P* 97, 13-17). His coat of arms no longer bears the sign of an anchor (*P* 99,15-16) and it is replaced by the panther, a sign of his father's house (*P* 101,7-8).
[31] Gahmuret's armor is softened through the application of goat blood, which leads to his otherwise unavoidable death in a joust (*P* 105,18-24).

niemen reichet an sîn zil, / swâ man noch ritter prüeven wil (*P* 108,12-14) [His fame

towered so high that no one shall achieve its equal, however knights may be esteemed

(61)]. This statement is more than just hyperbole. It demonstrates, on an exaggerated

scale, the problem of pre-texts, namely that they are there, confusing and, in the case of

Gahmuret's grave, wrong. Gahmuret leaves behind incompatible textual legacies.

Although it states on his gravestone that Gahmuret *er truoc den touf und cristen ê* (*P*

108,21) [supported the Christian law (61)] and a cross is visible on the grave, the

heathens worship him as a god (*P* 107,19-20). In the West, Gahmuret is transformed, in

death, into a Christian saint by Herzeloyde, who collects relics from her deceased

husband (*P* 111,14-112,2).[32] Gahmuret becomes a series of overlapping and incompatible

textual fragments in need of a resolution.

As Eleanor Kutz writes, Parzival inherits the unenviable task of trying to join

disparate textual fragments from the past and present passed down to him through his

parents:

> The mistake Parzival's parents make is to place themselves exclusively in one or
> another of these worlds, moving abruptly and completely from the non-courtly to
> the courtly, or from the courtly to the religious. The different realms remain, for
> them, isolated and unintegrated, with conflicting demands which require the
> denial of one world as a precondition for the acceptance of the next.[33]

The figure of Gahmuret leaves behind several textual fragments whose narratives are

irreconcilable: the order of knighthood, a letter to his former wife and finally a

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[32] Timothy Jackson writes that the conflation of a knight and a saint is not particularly unusual. Here Wolfram is continuing but also parodying a trend. Hartmann's Gregorius is saved by God and then saves others, allowing for the transition from knight to saint. See: *Typus und Poetik: Studien zur Bedeutungsvermittlung in der Literatur des deutschen Mittelalters* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2003), 78, 81.
[33] "The Story of the Parents in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*," *Monatshefte* 70.4 (Winter, 1978), 366.

gravestone which proclaims Gahmuret a deity. The confusion born of these textual legacies reflects the effect of Courtly Literature and Arthurian Romances.

These texts, whose meanings once seemed so clear,[34] threaten to become objects of passive consumption. Yet there is no ignoring such texts, which invite, like the hyperbolic inscription on Gahmuret's tombstone, competition and correction. Parzival's journey requires the acquisition of this extant textual knowledge and membership into new textual communities which find a way of overcoming the influence of the old ones.

Herzeloyde, Trevrizent and the Grail

The members of the Grail Castle deal with mounting textual confusion through renunciation. In this section, I would like to briefly examine how the renunciants' example offers Parzival an alternative to the irreconcilability of extant texts, particularly those of his father. At the center of this clandestine group stands the Grail, a stone-cum-text. As we saw in the previous section, there is an overabundance of texts at play in *Parzival*. There are so many, in fact, that the texts cannot be harmoniously combined in the central figure. Wolfram's protagonist acutely feels the difficulty of judging the importance of disparate events and statements because even simple instructions prove invalid or in need of addenda. Parzival has the added burden of inheriting his textual legacies from his father. Gahmuret's abundant textual traces leave a great deal said, but these competing fragments are too numerous for Parzival to collect them into a harmonious whole. This problem is further compounded by the absence of clear textual

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[34] We need only think of Gottfried's praise of Hartmann's *cristallînen wortelîn* (4629).

grounding in courtly institutions.[35] The tentative textual bonds of knightly and feudal order have been severed and do not allow for the creation of a new text in the form of a figure like Erec.[36]

The Grail Kingdom offers a substitute text. Largely hidden from view, Wolfram presents us with an alternative but secretive textual community which conceals its discourse from the non-initiated. An aura of silence surrounds those initiated into the ways of the Grail. The constituents of Munsalvaesch renounce,[37] deny[38] or disguise[39] the unwanted influence of textual intervention. Like *Tristan*, Wolfram's text is an archive and repository for a diverse set of sources, especially the Arthurian Romance.[40] The discourse of chivalry, however, has assumed sinister connotations because it bespeaks violence and chaos where it once purportedly denoted order.[41] The devolution of clear signifiers in Wolfram's text is a less subtle reiteration of tensions already present in Chrétien. Writing about *Yvain*, Judith Kellogg observes: "This is a world really as open-ended, insecure,

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[35] For example: Keie severely beats Cunneware for laughing at Parzival. Wolfram comments: *sîns slages waer im erteilet niht / vor dem rîche ûf dise magt, / diu vil von vriunden wart geclagt* (*P* 152,14-16) [No royal decree would have awarded him the right to flog that maiden, who was so much pitied by her friends (85)]. No royal decree would stop Keie, either. We saw in *Erec et Enide/Erec* how little power the Arthurian Court possess outside of its own borders. Wolfram has taken this failing one step further, turning the belligerent seneschal into a sadist who does not acknowledge the royal authority to which he subject.

[36] Wolfram denies the efficacy of Erec's actions. See: Groos, *Romancing the Grail*, 117.

[37] In the forests of Soltane, Herzeloyde attempts to forbid any words or sounds which might awaken in Parzival an awareness of knighthood. When the *stimme* (*P* 118,27) [voices (67)] of the birds in the trees awakens in her son an awareness of his own hereditary and textual inheritance (*art, P* 118,28), Herzeloyde orders the birds to be killed (*P* 119,1-4). Parzival's textual inheritance comes through in spite of the noticeable absence of formal education: "[Herzeloyde's] flight from court to a preliterate pastoral existence at Soltane robs her son of the chance for literary acculturation." *Romancing the Grail*, 35.

[38] Trevrizent speaks briefly of his time as a knight but then claims *mîn leben ich dar ûf zierte, / daz mir genâde taete ein wîp. / des hât vergezzen nu mîn lîp* (*P* 458,10-12) [I lived a life of pomp and show to gain a lady's favor. I have forgotten all that now (246)]. In spite of the use of the verb *vergezzen* in the absence of any true loss of memory, that Trevrizent has renounced his knightly past.

[39] The Grail's initial presentation is itself a ruse. Parzival directs his focus to the objects and people surrounding the Grail, such as its female barer (*P* 236,12-14), rather than looking at the Grail itself.

[40] For the comparison of narrative to archive with regard to Arthurian Romance, see: Mark Chinca, *History, Fiction, Verisimilitude: Studies in the Poetics of Gottfried's* Tristan (London: The Modern Humanities Research Association for the Institute of German Studies, 1993), 24, 30.

[41] In: *Medieval Artistry and Exchange* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), 78.

and potentially anarchic as that portrayed in the turbulent epics of the rebel-baron cycle, such as *Raoul de Cambrai*. We find a similar violent pursuit of a finite amount of wealth and land, and in both cases the most dangerous foes are not pagans and Saracens, but members of the same class." Discovering who is friend and foe has become a complicated and uncertain enterprise. Hence we understand Herzeloyde's distress when Parzival shares his newly acquired knightly vocabulary with her. Herzeloyde collapses, *sîner worte si sô sêre erschrac* (*P* 126,1) [So greatly was she terrified by his words (71)]. It is time for a renunciation of chivalric texts because they have failed to preserve order or serve as a recognized authoritative sources for behavior.

Wolfram instills his text with strong religious overtones, magnifying an already existent attribute of the genre. *Parzival*'s adaptor commands that his audience treat the text as holy writ. After summarizing a portion of Parzival's adventures, Wolfram adds: *swerz niht gloubt, der sündet* (*P* 435,1) [Whoever does not believe this commits a sin (234)], a more emphatic claim to textual authority than Calogrenant/Kalogrenant's variation of "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Matthew 11:15).[42] Wolfram presents his text as a fictional continuation of divine history which is completely incompatible with the previous generation of Arthurian Romances. Like Gottfried, Wolfram also views

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[42] Gottfried's prologue also reiterates this sentiment in the final four verses of the prologue (*T* 241-244). See: Jackson, *The Anatomy of Love*, 63.

himself as Chrétien and Wolfram's competitor. In order for *Parzival*'s text to fulfill its eschatological aims,[43] certain texts must be rewritten and others must be renounced.[44]

A marked distrust of language pervades *Parzival* as does a sense that the Arthurian Romances and the genre's discourse have further contributed to the problem. The texts of Chrétien and Hartmann are faulty and incomplete because the poetic meanings hidden therein and the intentions of their adaptors generate more doubts than certainty. For much of the narrative, Parzival wanders through the wreckage of the previous generation's texts. The knight suffers from an ambivalence towards virtually everyone and everything, with the exception of his wife, Condwiramurs. As Green describes, their relationship between Parzival and his wife is based on the standards established by Chrétien and Hartmann, unusually straight forward:

> A characteristic feature of Parzival's adventures, in contrast to those of the other principal male figures in the narrative, is the untroubled nature of his marriage to Condwiramurs, a fact the hero acknowledges and Trevrizent cites as a principal reason to hope for his salvation (733.9-16, 468.1-9). Unlike romance heroes such as Erec and Iwein, Parzival's career does not involve the bipartite pattern of winning both a wife and kingdom, followed by their loss and recovery, [...] To be sure, the encounter with the Grail in Book V involves him in the traditional pattern of loss and recovery of his principal future kingdom, but this analogue draws attention to a basic change: the attainment of a wife and the Grail kingdom are separate thematic issues.[45]

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[43] Alois Wolf writes that Wolfram's text reveals its forward-thinking, eschatological aims: "Sind die heroischen Mythen der Chansons de geste auf die Vergangenheit bezogen, so ist der Gral-Ritter-Mythos, wie von der Forschung schon bemerkt, auf die Zukunft ausgerichtet und hat eine eschatologische Dimension." In: *Gottfried von Strassburg und die Mythe von Tristan und Isolde* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1989), 2. If we had to situate the other Arthurian Romance between these two poles, I would suggest that it looks to the near future without declaring such grand ambitions as *Parzival*.

[44] The former knight and hermit, Trevrizent, is literate and composes religious tracts: *doch ich eine leie waere, / der wâren buoche maere / kund ich lesen unde schrîben, / wie der mensche sol belîben / mit dienste gein des helfe grôz, / den der staeten helfe nie verdrôz* (*P* 462,11-16) [Though I was but a layman, I could read the Scriptures and set forth in writing how man should be steadfast in serving Him Whose help is great and Who never wearies in helping the soul that may be lost (248)].

[45] Green, *The Art of Recognition in Wolfram's* Parzival, 116.

For Parzival, his love for his wife and her love for him are constants about which he never expresses any doubts. In this respect, Parzival successfully and without much difficulty ensures that he does not inherit one of Gahmuret's less admirable traits. The absence of conflict between Parzival and Condwiramurs bespeaks the renunciation of love as a source of conflict, a central component in the Arthurian Romance genre.

Yet certainty in love does not buy Parzival full peace of mind. Instead, it allows him to focus more strongly on his mediated relationship with the Divine. Trevrizent warns the knight against his uncertainties, particularly as concerns Parzival's ambiguous feelings towards God: *nu lêret iuwer gedanke, / hüet iuch gein im an wanke* (*P* 462,29-30) [Now let your thought teach you to beware of wavering toward Him (248)]. Even as Trevrizent espouses the importance of unwavering devotion to God, the hermit also appreciates the difficulty in achieving such certainty. Trevrizent, a representative of the Grail Castle, mends the textual division between man and God. He adapts and summarizes the story of man's fall and damnation. He justifies his textual authority because he presents himself as an honest speaker: *sag ich niht wâr die wârheit, / sô lât iu sîn mîn triegen leit* (*P* 464,9-10) [If I do not tell you the real truth, you may reproach me for my deception (249)], which presumes that the listener can detect falsities.

Trevrizent is obsessed with the idea of thoughts. He freely acknowledges that thoughts between people are inaccessible: *gedanc sich sunnen blickes wert: / gedanc ist âne slôz bespart, / vor aller crêatiure bewart: / gedanc ist vinster âne schîn* (*P* 466, 16-19) [Thoughts can be hidden from the light of the sun; thoughts are secure without a lock, proof against all creatures; thoughts are darkness without light (250)]. Although

Trevrizent views the inaccessibility of thoughts from the vantage point of the history of mankind's fall and salvation,[46] he reiterates Calogrenant/Kalogrenant's concerns over the inaccessibility of thought and intention.[47] The hermit admits that only God can know the thoughts of another: *diu gotheit kan lûter sîn, / si glestet durch der vinster want, / und hât den heleden sprunc gerant, / der endiuzet noch enclinget* (*P* 466,20-23) [Only the Deity can be so pure and bright that it pierces this wall of darkness, like a rider running to the attack, but soundless and unseen (250)], and this is a problem Wolfram refuses to solve.

The abilities of the divine to read another's thoughts do little to aid the person. Not only are thoughts and intentions inscrutable except to God. People are also prone to error and misunderstand information, even if the speaker's intentions are good. Trevrizent, although he only admits it towards the narrative's conclusion, is a source of misinformation. The hermit initially informs Parzival that no man will find the Grail if actively seeking it (*P* 468,10-14), but Parzival successfully searches for and finds it. Trevrizent proves how inscrutable the thoughts of others are by inventing a small fiction. The hermit admits that he told Parzival a lie: *ich louc durch ableitens list / vome grâl, wie ez umbe in stüende* (*P* 798,6-7) [From cunning, in order to divert you from the Grail, I told you a lie as to how things stood with it (416)]. Even as old pre-texts are rejected and new, more authoritative ones are discovered, the unreliability of communication remains.

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[46] Trevrizent describes, in an abbreviated form with his own embellishments, the legacy of Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel (*P* 464,11-465,10).

[47] In chapter two, I explore Chrétien and Hartmann's concerns over the inaccessibility and unknowability of intentions in *Yvain*. While both adaptors hope to use the text to the Arthurian Romance as a means of overcoming the division between making sure that a person's words reflect his intentions (*muot* [*I* 3125-3126]). The Arthurian Romance explores the possibility of overcoming this divide but expresses little confidence that it will succeed.

The replacement of one faulty text with another is an insufficient solution which only furthers the problem of the inscrutability of people and their words.

Wolfram uses the Grail to offer a solution to this problem. We recall that Erec and Yvain/Iwein make the new union of word and meaning and the emergence of poetic language visible: Erec through his achievements in the *Joie de la Court*-episode and Iwein/Yvain through his lion. Unlike his predecessors, Parzival only bears witness to language's revitalization. He does not experience it. The language and thoughts of man remain inscrutable and unknowable. No figure in the text overcomes this difficulty. The Grail, however, offers assurances that a system of order does exist but is perpetually out of reach. The Grail serves as a visible signifier for what James Poag terms "a structure of meaning objectively present in the world",[48] and, we should add, a structure of meaning objectively present in the text.

Although not apparent when first seen, the Grail is an object on which text is temporarily inscribed. Trevrizent explains to Parzival that the names of future members of the Grail Kingdom appear on the stone: *ze ende an des steines drum / von karacten ein epitafum / sagt sînen namen und sînen art, / swer dar tuon sol die saelden vart* (*P* 470, 23-2) [On the stone, around the edge, appear letters inscribed, giving the name and lineage of each one, who is to take this blessed journey (252, translation amended)]. Unlike in adventure, where linkage is appreciable only in retrospect, the Grail makes connections and order visible in advance by announcing the names of those who have not yet come to the Grail Castle. The Grail shares with its audience institutional relationships

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[48] "Lying Truth in Gottfried's Tristan," *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 61. 2 (1987): 223.

and connections which have yet to be formed, but this information is visible only for an instant: *die schrift darf niemen danne schaben: / sô man den namen gelsen hât, / vor ir ougen si zergât* (*P* 470, 28-30) [No one needs to rub out the inscription, for once he has read the name, it fades away before his eyes (252)]. The Grail's texts become secret communal property, which is visible for a moment but then disappears in order to keep the Grail's proclamations secret. However, the knowledge imparted by the Grail is not, by itself, of much use. From the Grail one learns only of names unattached to referents, much like the family tree Gahmuret provides Belacane. Unlike Gahmuret's text, though, the Grail promise the embodiment of its short communiqués. The names it mentions are made material by the arrival of new members.

While the Grail's messages may be clear, its purpose is obscured by the inhabitants of the Munsalvaesche. In the hands of the Grail Castle's keepers, the clarity of the brief and limited messages imparted by the stone is obscured by the improvised ritual undertaken when Parzival arrives for the first time. The presentation of the Grail is elaborate to the point of excess.[49] Hermann Weigand even suggests that the entire ceremony is a one-time event, thrown together to elicit a question from Parzival: "It is clear beyond a doubt, then: the appearance of the Grail in Book v at the end of the procession of virgins does not have the character of a rehearsed ritual."[50] The inhabitants of Munsalvaesche turn the palace into a locus of deceptive words and practices, which distract Parzival from the suffering of Anfortas and thereby prevent the protagonist from

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[49] I will not cite all the details here because whatever symbolic values they may have, the specifics of the interiors of *Montsalvaesche* and the presentation of the Grail all point towards external excess. Some highlights include: a hundred chandeliers, a hundred couches and three great fireplaces (P 229, 24; 229,28; 230,9). The ceremony includes a bleeding lance, a procession of thirty women until finally Repanse de Schoye enters with the Grail (231,17-22; 232,9-235,14; 235,15-30)

[50] Weigand, "A Jester at the Grail Castle in Wolfram's *Parzival*," 500.

asking the right question.[51] Divine language mediated through the Grail is rendered unintelligible through human interference, meaning just as the Grail offers a solution to the slipperiness and uncertainties of language, its potential is hampered by the same people charged with guarding it.

Through the Grail, Wolfram rejects the notion of the knight being a bearer or symbol for poetic language. Wolfram attests that language does ultimately signify but this signification is only visible at a certain remove. We listen to a poem about Parzival, a figure who relies on the Grail as a visible sign for the aforementioned "structure of meaning objectively present in the world".[52] As an object in the poem, the Grail only offers a meager quantity of accurate information and provides little guidance. The details of future members of the Grail Castle have little application within Wolfram's world. They do nothing to solve day-to-day confusion, misunderstandings and misinterpretation.[53]

A good member of the Grail Castle learns to renounce the centrality of the Grail. Even as this stone reflects a divine will, a divine presence and a divine plan, the confusions and tribulations of secular life must be solved without its aid. The value of the Grail is the discursive texts its produces. During his first visit to Munsalvaesche, Parzival

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[51] Weigan even suggests a reading in which Parzival's silence is a punitive measure: "Since metaphysical motivation is always multiple, we need not point exclusively to Parzival's blood-guilt as the deeper cause of his failure to ask the question. Viewed from another angle, Parzival's lips were sealed in order to punish the knights for their presumption in trying to force the hand of Providence." In: "A Jester at the Grail Castle in Wolfram's *Parzival*," 502.

[52] "Lying Truth in Gottfried's Tristan," 223.

[53] One of the Grail's other functions to serve as a source of food (*P* 238,2-239,10). Summarizing a detail found in Chrétien's *Perceval* but continued in Wolfram's adaptation, Joseph Duggan advises us not too overlook the Grail's worldly significance in spite of the liturgical imagery surrounding it: "The wafer thus functions not as a viaticum, the eucharistic provision for the soul's journey to the next life, but rather as food that, sanctified thought it may be - Chrétien does not specify - has the decidedly physical and mundane effect of nourishing earthly life." Duggan, *The Romances of Chrétien de Troyes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 241. In Wolfram's adaptation, Cundrie brings food from the Grail Sigune, who has become an anchoress (*P* 438,29-439,5).

fails to inquire about Anfortas' suffering, misinterpreting advice from Gurnemanz not to ask too many questions (*P* 239,11-17). A simple command requires, if not full renunciation, an addendum only obtainable through further travels and experiences to learn about the kind of question which should be posed.[54] Parzival must accumulate, sift through and renounce other texts.

Even as some of the answers to Parzival's questions are cleared up in hindsight, and the protagonist trusts that divine will lurks behind all human endeavors, the irreconcilable differences between words and meaning as well as speech and intentions remain. The Grail, as a reflection of divine will, says little else about the intents or aims of the Creator: "[...] the grounding of the divine message is deferred indefinitely, a conclusion that seems logical in terms of the careful distancing of the three narrative personae in this episode-God, the Grail-scriptor, and Trevrizent. The hierarchical structure, which normally creates order, here masks the intentionality of an ultimately inscrutable divine will."[55] Parzival's ultimate success and election to the Grail Castle confirm only that a small portion of God's plan has been deciphered.[56]

Conclusion

In *Parzival*, Wolfram expresses an ambiguous attitude towards language. On the one hand, he renounces the achievements of his predecessors. He expresses his intent to write a new kind of Arthurian Romance, in which the follies and sins of the forbearers

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[54] As it is never clear what Parzival is supposed to ask. This is a point made repeatedly by Gross. See: *Romancing the Grail*, 213.

[55] Groos, Romancing the Grail, 214.

[56] "Wolfram's narrative also withholds answers on a variety of issues related to the question itself. Anfortas does not answer the inquiry addressed to him at all, since this is a performative speech act rather than a true question. Both the speech act and its formulation as a question mask the relationship - or nonrelationship - between Parzival's actual utterance and the miracle that ensures. The question necessarily precedes, but does not cause or compel, divine intervention." Groos, Romancing the Grail, 217.

will not be allowed to hamper his achievement.[57] Like Trevrizent, Wolfram claims to write a more authentic Arthurian Romance, unhampered by the confusion generated through literacy (*P* 115, 24-116, 4). Yet as the poem progresses and the lies and deceptions of Trevrizent and the Grail community are found out, the same uncertainties about the reliability of language emerge. Wolfram tries to find a middle ground between the idealized depictions of poetic language in *Erec et Enide*/*Erec* and *Yvain*/*Iwein* and the false presence of word and meaning in Tristan's fictions. Between these two extremes stands the Grail, a less fantastic and less satisfying embodiment of poetic language than in Chrétien and Hartmann's texts but still more hopeful for language's renewal than in Gottfried's.

Wolfram is ultimately ambivalent, just like the figure of King Mark. *Parzival*'s adaptor and the King of Cornwall both desire certainty in a world that rarely offers it. Wolfram refuses to accept uncertainty, but he does accept that poetic meaning is only observable from a considerable remove. Mark, however, insists on certainty and believes that he has found a walking, talking Holy Grail in his nephew, Tristan.

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[57] As cited previously (footnote #25), Wolfram has some sharp words for Chrétien and Hartmann.

Chapter Five
The Senselessness of Doubt

<u>Introduction</u>

In this final chapter, I would like to focus on King Mark and his chronic state of crippling doubt (*zwîvel*). Mark is a consumer of texts who never reaches a satisfying interpretation. The King is constantly changing his mind and becomes ever more irresolute as the narrative progresses. As W.T.H. Jackson puts it: "Mark cannot make a decision."[1] In this concluding chapter, I suggest that Mark's confusion and indecision reflect facets of the discourses on poetics already at play in the Arthurian Romances. The irresolvable nature of Mark's doubt can be seen as a reflection of Calogrenant/ Kalogrenant's misgivings about the Arthurian Romance, an unwillingness to reform a corrupt court and an inability to renounce ineffectual pre-texts. Instead, Mark looks for certainty where none is to be had.

The Cornish king has evidently misunderstood the purpose and aims of this new genre. Stubborn though he is, Mark deserves our sympathy. By the time of Tristan's arrival in Cornwall, the king has already lost much of the prestige and importance he had enjoyed only fifteen years previously.[2] Having witnessed this period of decline, it is understandable that Mark should be so easily influenced by rumors, intrigue and his own

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[1] *The Anatomy of Love: The* Tristan *of Gottfried von Strassburg.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 98.

[2] In her summation of Gottfried's depiction of Mark's Court in the Rivalin and Blanchefleur episode of *Tristan*, Gisela Hollandt writes, "Alles in allem erscheint Marke hier also in ganz positiver Weise als der ideale Herrscher, dessen Hof in jeder Hinsicht maßgeblich ist." In: *Die Hauptgestalten in Gottfrieds* Tristan*: Wesenszüge, Handlungsfunktion, Motiv der List* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1966), 54-55. McDonald treats Mark's court in hits heyday as a deliberate allusion to the Arthurian Court. See: "Gottfried von Strassburg: *Tristan* and the Arthurian Tradition." *In Hôhem Prîse: A Festschrift In Honor of Ernst S. Dick: Presented On the Occasion of His Sixtieth Birthday, April 7, 1989,* ed. Winder McDonnell (Göppingen: Kümmerle Verlag, 1980), 244.

doubts. Mark hopes for a miracle and naively trusts that Tristan will offer a solution to all his worries and fears. Saddled with an increasingly belligerent court, Mark wants his nephew to reunite what had once appeared whole. The king declares Tristan to be a second self: *nu suln ouch wir gesellen sîn, / dû der mîn und ich der dîn* (*T* 3725-3726) [(L)et us be companions. You be mine and I will be yours (91-92)]. Yvain/Iwein has his lion, Erec has Enide/Enite, and Parzival has the Grail. In Mark's eyes, it only follows that Tristan is the king's counterpart, through whom a previous, imagined glory will be restored.[3]

Tristan's doting uncle wants more than just to live vicariously through his younger, more talented nephew. Mark views Tristan as a potential authoritative text for his kingship, which would legitimize the royal authority Mark's counterpart, Arthur, so noticeably lacks. In exchange for Tristan's assistance, Mark declares that he will grant Tristan *mîn lant, mîn liut und swaz ich hân / trût neve, daz sî dir ûf getân* (*T* 4461-4462) [(Dear Nephew,) my land, my people, and all that I have shall be at your disposal! (102)]. Mark makes himself beholden to Tristan. Once his nephew has defended his borders and acquired his bride, Mark may no longer call his kingdom or wife his own without his second-self. Everything hinges on the bet into which Mark enters when the king declares

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[3] Rainer Gruenter indicates the similarity between Mark's words and the *Minnesprache*, implying that the King not only knows literature of the period but also that his faith in Tristan resembles the bond between two lovers. See: *Tristan-Studien*, ed. Wolfgang Adam (Heidelber: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1993). It is also possible that Gottfried echoes Chrétien here, who himself echoes love poems. In trying to assuage onlookers from fearing his lion, Yvain says: *Qu'il est a moi et je a lui, / Si somes conpaignon andui* (*Y* 6777-6778) [Please believe this, for he is mine, and I am his; we are companions together (376)]. Unlike Mark and Tristan, the bond between Yvain and his lion is, until the poem's final verses when the lion disappears, unshakable. Hartmann's text does not contain such a similar line. Of the lion, all Iwein says is: *er ist mîn vriunt und suochet mich* (*I* 7739) [It is my friend and is looking for me (317)].

his unfailing support for his nephew. Should Tristan prove to be anything less than his uncle had hoped, then Mark is left with nothing.

For Mark, Tristan is a source of anxiety regardless of his presence or absence. Mark wants to believe a lie. Well, not just one lie. Mark places his hope in a whole series of lies which are far more appealing than the truth.[4] Cornwall's king turns Tristan into a figure of great importance and does everything possible to ignore any contradictory opinions. Mark wishes to treat Tristan as a complete, truthful and decipherable text which supports his beliefs and right to kingship.

Unfortunately for the King, dissenters at court hinder the formation of a cohesive textual community around Tristan. Mark repeatedly stumbles upon divergent voices in the fore- and background of Gottfried's text. As discussed in chapter three, Tristan destabilizes when he ought to serve as the text's immutable center. In this regard, he is much like Erec, Parzival and Yvain/Iwein. Unlike his predecessors, however, Tristan challenges and destroys systems of order without rebuilding them, offering his varied audiences fictions entirely incompatible both with each other and within the broader narrative. Tristan's destructive actions do not go unnoticed, and Mark's nephew is often, if understandably, unwelcome and viewed as a threat.[5] Even before Tristan's fame has

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[4] The following is a brief outline of the falsehoods which form the foundation of Mark and Tristan's relationship: When Tristan first enters Mark's court, he volunteers falsified, if credible, information. After having been abandoned by his kidnappers on the shores of Cornwall, Tristan unexpectedly encounters the king's hunting party. He tells his new companion that he comes from Parmenie and that his father is a trader (*T* 3097-3099). When this information is passed on to King Mark, the master hunter tells the King that he doubts the truth of Tristan's story (*T* 3277-3283). Yet Mark ignores this sage advice from a trusted member of his court. The reason is clear: Mark is completely enamored with Tristan (*T* 3406-3407).

[5] When Tristan challenges the giant Urgan li vilus, Urgan makes it clear that he knows a great deal of Tristan's backstory, including that Tristan killed Morolt *durch hôhvart* [from over-weening pride (252)].

spread, his presence at Mark's court unsettles the other courtiers. The king must bid, beg

and badger the inhabitants of Tintagel to treat the newcomer well:

> er [Mark] bat besunder unde gebôt
> al dem hovegesinde,
> daz sî dem vremedem kinde
> guot unde genaedic waeren
> und daz s'im êre baeren
> mit rede und mit gesellekeit.
> des wâren s'alle samet bereit
> mit willechlîchem muote (*T* 3386-3393)

> [He [Mark] asked or commanded the household one and all to be kind and gracious to the young stranger and to honour him with their company and conversation, and they were all very glad to comply (87).]

A contradiction lurks in this description. Mark does more than make a request. He must

order (*gebôt*) his court to do behave decently towards his nephew. His subjects comply,

for the moment, but there is already a note of discord in Cornwall which only grows in

volume as the poem progresses. Not everyone is pleased about Tristan's arrival. Even as

the newcomer does his best to reflect each person's wishes and desires, some portion of

Tristan's audience refuses to accept these fictions. They see through the act, which not

only puts Tristan's life at risk but also threatens to ruin the blind faith with which Mark

embraces all that Tristan says and does. Many of Mark's courtiers wish to expose Tristan

for a corrupted and vapid collection of texts.[6] Wherever Tristan performs in front of a crowd, a portion of the audience refuses to let itself be fooled.

Yet Mark remains blind, or rather blinds himself, to the obvious. The king tries to deny that language can ever be anything other than what he, Mark, wishes it to be. For example, Mark finds solace in the certainty based on an elaborate performance and a fabricated statement in the Ordeal (*T* 15760-15764). Yet this is only the most extreme instance in a series of episodes where Mark accepts the statements he wishes were true. The king takes pleasure in fiction, even as he demands to know the truth. Thus it is understandable that Mark is of two minds and becomes a victim of *zwîfel*. The term has negative connotations, whose meanings range from doubt to complete despair.[7]

W.T.H. Jackson writes how *zwîfel*, along with *arcwan* (suspicion), becomes synonymous with Mark's court: "*Arcwan* and *zwivel* ('doubt') dominate the courtly scene and particularly its representative, Mark himself. [...] The word occurs at each crisis of the relations between Mark and the lovers[.]"[8] Yet if we think back to the second chapter,

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[6] Mark's faith in Tristan is a problem which becomes increasingly difficult to overlook as the poem progresses. While the steward Marjodoc and the dwarf Melot are the most prominent critics at Tintagel, a large group of dissenters hovers in the background. Although Mark successfully silences them at first, they become increasingly incensed. After Tristan's first excursion to Ireland, rumors begin to circulate amongst the Barons at court that Tristan is a practitioner of the black arts (*T* 8328-8331). The conclusion may be wrong, but the misgivings are well-founded. Tristan's success and popularity constitute a perversion. Tristan may not be a sorcerer, but the Barons are on the right track when they observe how Tristan deceives through illusion: *merket wunder, hoeret her: / der pârâtiere, wie kann er / gesehendiu ougen blenden / und allez daz verenden, / daz er ze endene hât* (*T* 8345-8349) [Listen, is it not a mystery how this trickster manages to pull the wool over people's eyes and succeeds in all this enterprises? (151)] More comprehensive investigations into Tristan's behavior are later undertaken by Marjodoc and Melot, but Gottfried makes it clear that the steward and the dwarf typify a widespread distrust of Tristan.

[7] The term in not unique to *Tristan* and its severity varies enormously. *Zwîvel* makes an appearance in the very first verse of *Parzival*, and Wolfram's brief *sententia* proves a succinct and apt description of the challenge facing Tristan's uncle: *ist zwîvel herzen nâchgebûr, / daz muoz der sêle werden sûr* (*P*, 1, 1-2) [If inconstancy is the heart's neighbor, the soul will not fail to find it bitter (3).] Referring to the word's appearance in the prologue to Wolfram's *Parzival*, Haug writes that the *zwîfel* "besitzt einen weiten Bedeutungsspielraum von religiöser *desperatio* bis zu bloßer Unsicherheit." See: *Literaturtheorie im deutschen Mittelalter* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1992), 159.

[8] *Anatomy of Love*, 120.

we recall that doubt and suspicion are already imbedded in the text of an Arthurian Romance. The adaptor makes a bet with his listeners. He offers his audience a text, and the audience in turn accepts what the adaptor produces with the intention of altering and exploring it further through interpretation. Mark, however, has not fully understood the terms of the bet. *Zwîfel* and *arcwan* induce a crisis because the king wants Tristan to be as good as his word. Mark seeks an immutable text which confirms rather than challenges him and wants Tristan to be a purveyor of linguistic rehabilitation. Thus the ruler in Cornwall is willing to accept any excuse, no matter how absurd, to excuse his nephew. Like King Arthur, Mark is capable of thought and contemplation but cannot deal with results which are not to his liking.[9] As listeners, we can appreciate Mark's difficulty. It is one thing to be pliant, but it is a matter of a whole different magnitude to abandon one's claims to any and all verbal consistency.

To focus on manifestations of textual breakdown in *Tristan*, I would first like to examine the relationship between Mark and *zwîfel*. In this section, I suggest that Mark has very good reasons to be on the lookout for a figure who might save him and his kingdom. I then continue by addressing the incompatibility of certainty within the Arthurian Romances, for it is certainty which Mark ardently desires but cannot have. I then conclude both this chapter and the dissertation by highlighting an additional instance of confusion, despair and delight involving Tristan and his future paramour, Isolde. Ultimately, there is an irreconcilable contradiction between the Arthurian Romances and

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[9] See Virginie Greene's description of Arthur's thought process in *Lancelot* in: *Thinking Through Chrétien de Troyes*, (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2011), 52-53.

the world beyond the text, and a good listener and reader knows to accept, rather than resist, this uncertainty.

The Reluctant Adventurer

King Mark has been much maligned in the secondary literature for his uncertainty, indecisiveness and passivity,[10] but I would like to defend Mark. In this section, I suggest that Mark is a reluctant adventurer. As the king stares into the Love Grotto and observes his sleeping wife and nephew, Gottfried calls Mark *der wegelôse man* (*T* 17533) [pathless man (272)]. This is an apt term to describe Mark's general confusion and frustrations. He is a figure whom adventure befalls in the form of Tristan but who has no path to follow.[11] Mark may never stray far from the borders of his kingdom, but the king nevertheless experiences an acute form of disorientation. Tristan bombards Mark's senses with fictions whose inconsistencies Mark chooses to notice. As a consequence thereof, *der wegelôse man* suffers from madness much like Chrétien's *Yvain*, for whom "[m]adness can be understood as a directionless wandering, empty of sense, an *issir du sen* [*Y*, 2797]."[12] Others delight in Tristan's fictions and the empty center of his texts. For Mark, the confusion never abates. The king neither accepts Tristan's fictions as they come nor enjoys an after-the-fact vantage point from which he can assess, link and comprehend his own experiences. Doubt plagues the king's mind and his *wân unde zwîvel* (*T* 18220) [doubt and suspicion (281)] are a constant burden. Doubt

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[10] Jackson offers a particularly harsh critique in the *Anatomy of Love*, 111. See also: Hollandt, *Die Hauptgestalten in Gottfrieds* Tristan, 53; 57.

[11] The path followed by the protagonist in the Arthurian Romance has both physical as well as metaphoric value and presence: "Im Artusroman ist die *straze* eine aktive Größe, sie führt den Helden nach den objektiven Gesetzen der Aventiure. Der Held weiß nicht, wohin es geht, er überläßt sich willig der höheren Lenkung." Hahn, *Raum und Landschaft in Gottfrieds* Tristan*: Ein Beitrag zur Werkdeutung* (Munich: Eidos Verlag, 1963), 101.

[12] *Thinking Through Chrétien de Troyes*, 86.

is a mire in which the king becomes ever more entrenched and from which he is unable to save himself.

But who can blame Mark? Times have changed, and not for the better.[13] With an unruly court and potentially devastating rumors about his wife and nephew, Mark's suspicions and worries are quite understandable. There is a crisis in process before Tristan arrives in Cornwall, and it is a reiteration of the crisis in language which Gottfried identifies in the "Literary Excursus." Gottfried, Tristan and Mark all respond to the same problem, namely that language has become unmanageable and has ceased to work reliably. For Gottfried and the figure Tristan, the solution is to look outwards from the midst of the fray. Tristan presents himself as an object cloaked in fictions. His textual production pleases his audience, but these texts also reveal an empty center in hindsight. Tristan's fictions cannot, in other words, be joined together like the episodes in an Arthurian Romance. Mark takes a different approach to the same problem. Whereas Gottfried and Tristan see an opportunity to place themselves at the center of the chaos, Mark retreats behind stone walls.

Gottfried alerts us to Mark's isolationist tendencies in his description of Tristan's initial approach towards and entrance into Tintagel. The castle appears suddenly and unexpectedly on the horizon: *in kurzen zîten ez dô kam, / Tristan daz er die burc gesach*

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[13] In the "good ol' days" fifteen years previously, Mark's renown is such that a knight like Rivalin is drawn to Tintagel by the king's reputation (*T* 420-426). There are also lavish festivities over which Mark presides, and his presence is a delight rather than a burden (*T* 608-611). Finally, Mark is still a warrior who fights (*T* 1128-1134) rather than someone who immediately capitulates in the face of an external threat. As Hugo Bekker rightly points out, Mark's court may lack a shared purpose or identity, but this problem is easily overlooked by those present because everything is so idyllic: "Glamour abounds. There is not a cloud in the sky. If there is a problem at all, it is so minor as to be virtually undetectable, and hinging on the fact that in this sphere of gay abandon, in which the creation of joy is the common goal, everyone allows his fancy to prevail on an individualistic basis. Where then is societal cohesion? What is there to prevent things from collapsing if calamity were to strike?" In: *Gottfried von Strassburg's* Tristan, 31. See also: Gruenter, *Tristan-Studien*, 141.

(*T* 3147-3148) [It was not long before Tristan saw the citadel (83)]. Ingrid Hahn calls attention to the abrupt appearance of Tintagel in the literary landscape: "Das Moment perspektivischer Fernsicht ist kaum entwickelt. Der Ort selbst wird weder beschreibend noch als Teil einer Großlandschaft eingeführt. Das Schloß steht in keinem Zusammenhang mit anderen Räumen, es taucht als ein isolierter Punkt aus dem Fluß des Geschehens auf[.]"[14] Much like the mysterious Grail Castle, Munsalvaesche, Tintagel appears unsought and undesired. Gottfried gives us the impression that Mark and his once illustrious court have gone into hiding and would rather not be found. These would-be renunciants have much in common with the elusive inhabitants of the Grail Castle, except that Gottfried's text does not permit retreat from the world.

Tristan and the king's hunting party are still at a considerable geographic remove when Tintagel first appears. This gives Tristan time to orient himself and take charge. There is no evidence that Tristan intends to travel to Mark's court. Neither we nor Tristan have been informed about the name of the citadel's ruler, and Tristan knows nothing about his own backstory. Even as fate pulls him thither, Tristan refuses to let the castle exert its influence on him. He inquires about the place's name (*T* 3155-3156) and then makes *zwei schapel wol geloubet* (*T* 3151) [two leafy garlands (83)] for himself and the huntsman (*T* 3152-3154). Having stumbled across Mark's hiding place, Tristan prepares to enter with a crown on his head and Mark's hunting party doubling as his own personal army. Mark's nephew arrives as a conqueror who has already won an unspecified battle.

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[14] Ingrid Hahn, *Raum und Landschaft in Gottfrieds* Tristan, 80.

Tristan's triumphant entrance at Tintagel understandably scares the castle's inhabitants out of their wits. As the mysterious stranger and his new band of followers approach Mark's residence, Tristan begins to blow his horn and the others in his impromptu entourage follow suit (*T* 3209-3221). They make such a racket that *diu burc diu wart gedoenes vol* (*T* 3222). Hatto translates *gedoenes* as "music" [The castle was filled with music! (84)], but "noise" might be a better translation, given the reaction of those dwelling within the castle walls. Like many a loud and unexpected sound, this overabundance of noise not only startles Mark and his court. It terrifies them. Adventure has arrived, unsought and unexpected, like all good adventures:

> der künic und al diu hovediet,
> dô sî daz vremede jageliet
> gehôrten und vernâmen,
> si erschrâken unde erkâmen
> vil inneclîche sêre,
> wan ez dâ vor nie mêre
> dâ ze hove wart vernomen. (*T* 3223-3229)

> [When the King and his household heard this strange hunting-measure they were shocked to the very marrow, since it had never been heard there at court (84).]

Tristan inadvertently discovers and breaches Mark's hiding place. The Court at Tintagel has served a place of refuge from a hitherto unnamed threat, which materializes in the form of Tristan. Tintagel once offered the hollow jubilance of the Arthurian Court. Now, Mark and his followers live like those in a city under siege. Arthur shares Mark's dislike and distrust of the outside world. The famed king uses pomp and pageantry to camouflage his court's own weaknesses, as evidenced by Arthur's insistence on reviving the hunt for the white stag. Evidently Mark cannot bring his court to participate in

outdated rituals. Instead, the king and his courtiers have gone on the defensive and hope that no one finds them.

Change, however, is unavoidable. As he makes clear in the "Literary Excursus," Gottfried does not have the power to keep linguistic chaos at bay. Not even Tristan, capable as he is, can do that. So Gottfried must find a way to work within the confusion. Rather than just mourning the loss of meaning as exemplified by Hartmann von Aue (*T* 4621-4637), Gottfried leaves the past behind, invoking it only to use and exploit its signifiers for short-term purposes. This is how Tristan, unburdened by the past which should dictate his future, first enters Mark's court. While we learn from Gottfried that Tristan feels drawn towards his uncle (*T* 3240-3247; 3396-3402) and Mark towards his nephew (*T* 3406-3407), this is a bond which Tristan happily breaks once he learns of his kinship with Mark. For Tristan, the pull of a blood relative is laden with history and thus the undesired future. It exerts its influence on Tristan, *diu natiure zôch in* [Tristan] *dar* (*T*, 3245) [instinct drew him (Tristan) towards him (i.e. Mark) (84)], pulling the protagonist back into fate's clutches. Tristan resists the power of fate and counters by becoming adventure, with Mark as his most maligned victim. Rainer Gruenter describes Mark as "den bezauberten König" whom Tristan captures in his nets,[15] and this state of enchantment and deception is ongoing and never reaches a conclusion. The unendingness

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[15] *Tristan-Studien*, 143.

of adventure leaves Mark befuddled, confused and frustrated as his disorientation mounts.[16]

The Tristan-Isolde affair forces Mark to strengthen his resolve to make sense of the increasing number of fictions confronting him. Mark's attitude towards the affair between Tristan and Isolde is never a matter of love or even lust.[17] The problem lies in the texts which take the form of rumors and suspicions at court as these threaten the king's preferred fictions. The intervening texts upset Mark's world. He loses his sense of direction (*er wânde her, er wânde dar* [*T* 15250]) and can no longer distinguish between truth and fiction: *mit disen zwein was er betrogen. / disiu zwei, wâr unde gelogen, / diu haete er beide in wâne / und was ouch beider âne* (*T* 15260-15262) [With these two, truth and untruth, he was deceived. He suspected both alternatives, yet both eluded him].

Regrettably for Mark, to be on adventure, voluntary or otherwise, is to lose control. Although Gottfried calls Mark jealous, it is the truth about Tristan as a false messianic figure which Mark cannot confront. For the king, the affair between his wife and nephew is the clearest indication that the hope he had placed in Tristan is misguided.

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[16] Adding to the confusion, members of Mark's court do not relish Tristan's presence and view the King's nephew as a threat of growing proportions. When the Barons try to convince the King that he should take a wife, Mark replies: *Marke sprach: »got der hât uns / einen guoten erben geben. / got helfe unz, daz er müeze leben! / Tristan die wîle er leben sol, / sô wizzet endelîche wol, / sone sol nimer künigîn / noch vrouwe hie zu hove gesîn.«* (*T* 8358-8365) ['Heaven has given us a good heir,' answered Mark, 'God help us by keeping him alive! While Tristan lives, know it once for all: there will never be a Queen and lady here at court!' (151)] Mark projects his own present hopes and future aspirations onto Tristan. The King treats his nephew as a millennial force and believes in the possible restoration of his kingdom and his word so long as Tristan lives and validates Mark's vision(s). Unfortunately for the king, his decision to defend Tristan puts him increasingly at odds with his courtiers. As Mark digs himself in deeper, it becomes more and more difficult for him to back down.

[17] Mark greets Tristan and Isolde formally and immediately plans the wedding (*T* 12538-12543). Isolde's arrival in Cornwall prompts no comment from the king: "An keiner Stelle ist von Markes Reaktion beim Anblick der künftigen Gattin die Rede. Er ist hier wiederum nur als König anwesend, für den die Ehe eine Institution im Rahmen seines Herrscheramtes darstellt." In: Hollandt, *Die Hauptgestalten in Gottfrieds Tristan*, 61. Only a few lines later, the guests at the wedding extol Isolde's beauty and radiance, a further sign that Mark has eyes only for his nephew (*T* 12559-12568)

The word of the king carries little weight at the time of Tristan's arrival,[18] and if Mark admits to his mistake, then he ruins not only the past but also the future.

The Problem of Certainty

I would now like to continue my examination of the reasons for Mark's *zwîvel* by focusing on its opposite, certainty. I contend that Mark desires certainty in a world where no certainty is be had.[19] A good listener accepts the necessity of doubt and the powerful instability which accompanies it. He understands that while fiction may serve as a substitute for meaning in the real world, it cannot exist harmoniously with real world events. Mark craves certainty in complete conformity with the world as he would like it to be. The king wants fiction and real life to fit harmoniously. Mark's problem is an exaggerated form of the listener's. Confronted with texts in the form of Tristan, which unite and divide its audience, Mark tries to treat his nephew as a stable entity. Unfortunately for Mark, Tristan only brings people, places and events together in his fictions.

Indicative of both a presence and deficiency, *zwîvel* is a necessary consequence of the search for poetic truth and is thus an expression of concern for truth. Even as the text claims to have a source or a speaker at its center who promises successful communication through the text, the locus of meaning is never truly identifiable. As Mathilde Bruckner explains, the Arthurian Romance cannot be reduced to a finite number of meanings in

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[18] For example, Tristan expresses his indifference to Mark's prohibition against his fighting Morolt: *weder mit gebote noch mit bete / kund er ime sô vil niht mite gegân, / daz er'z durch in wolde lân* [He could be brought neither by commands nor by entreaties to do as Mark wished and abandon his purpose (125)]. If that were not enough, Tristan's act of rebellion happens in front the court in Tintagel. Tristan, not surprisingly, gets his way. See: Rainer Gruenter, *Tristan Studien*, 149-150.

[19] Such a luxury is not even afforded the ruler of Munsalvaesche. Even though Trevrizent tells Parzival *von dem zwîvel ich iuch nim* (*P* 464,8) [I shall take away your doubt (249)], the protagonist's acquisition of the Grail proves that even an amateur holy man makes mistakes.

interpretation, obfuscating not only what the text means but the source(s) of its authority: "the process of interpretation continues, since the text continues to supply more elements than can be worked into any of the systems it contains within itself."[20] For Cornwall's king, this superabundance of elements converges in the person of his nephew. When Mark first expresses his delight in Tristan's abilities (*an dir ist allez, des ich ger* [*T* 3722] [you can do everything I want (91)]), he assumes an exact correlation with his own wishes.

Like an adaptor, Mark expects Tristan, his chosen archetypal *materia*, to work in conjunction with his thoughts.[21] A consumer of Arthurian Romance, Mark believes he can make Tristan conform to his broad and imprecise image of the ideal knight. At Tristan's Investiture, the King commands his nephew to uphold general chivalric values: *nu bedenke ritterlîchen prîs* (*T* 5025) [give thought to the glory of knighthood (110)]. He tells Tristan to be *diemüete* and *unbetrogen* (*T* 5029) [modest and straightforward (110)], *wârhaft* and *wolgezogen* (*T* 5030) [truthful and well-bred (110)]; he should be benevolent (*guot* [*T* 5031]) and dignified (*hôchgemuot* [*T* 5032]) to the powerful [Hatto translates these two terms as kind and proud (110)]; he should take care of his appearance (*T* 5033), and honor all women (*elliu wîp* [*T* 5034]); and he should be generous and true (*milte unde getriuwe* [*T* 5035]). Mark's speech is the kind of superficial summary an inattentive

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[20] *The Shaping of Romance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 102.
[21] Douglas Kelly summarizes the process as described in 11th and 12th century handbooks: "Adaptation began as thought - the invention of the mental conception or *status archetypus*. With that thought, the new work supersedes the source." In: *The Art of Medieval French Romance* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 93.

listener of Arthurian Romances might develop on his own.[22] Mark attempts to link a very

general set of ideals to his nephew in order to bring an end to all future narrative

uncertainty. As I understand the king's goal, Tristan will be what he, Mark, commands,

thereby upholding the authority of the king's word and reifying through Tristan a finite

set of vague chivalric vocabulary.

Mark seeks certainty in a world where certainty is not possible, something the

king would know if he had listened to Calogrenant/Kalogrenant more carefully. The

Arthurian Romance proposes a partnership between the adaptor, his fictional knight and

the listening audience. No one masters the material.[23] Furthermore, while the adaptor

may know the pathways the knight takes, he only claims that his text contains poetic

meanings. He does not claim to know them all. The adaptor, the knight and the audience

are united through interpretive collaboration or what Barthes terms "playing": "'Playing'

must be understood here in all its polysemy: the text itself plays [...] and the reader plays

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[22] Thomas Cramer summarizes the general terms which converge around the figure of Arthur. While I disagree that Arthur is *actually* an embodiment of these values, there is certainly a strong association, both implicit and explicit, of such terminology with the Arthurian Court: "Artus ist zur Verkörperung eines Systems von Idealvorstellungen geworden, die sich am ehesten als Synthese weltlich-kämperischer Tugenden, geistlicher Normen und ästhetischer Ansprüche beschreiben lassen. Keine dieser Tugenden ist genau definiert - im Deutschen heißen sie *manheit, zuht, mâze, milte, güete, êre* -, jeder der Begriffe evoziert vielmehr eine unbestimmte Aura ethischer Idealität - und ist demgemäß unübersetzbar. Alle diese unscharfen Vollkommenheitsvorstellungen konvergieren in dem Begriff 'ritterlich', als dessen Inkarnation eben Artus steht." In: Thomas Cramer (ed. and trans.), "Nachwort,' in *Erec* (Stuttgart, 1972). Quoted in: Neil Thomas, *Tristan in the Underworld: A Study of Gottfried von Strassburg's* Tristan *Together with the* Tristran *of Thomas* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1991), 25. Jackson offers a similar assessment of the values praised, if not necessarily enacted, at Arthur's Court in including "honor (*ere*), best explained as reputation among the right people; generosity (*milte*); loyalty (*triuwe*); constancy (*staete*); balance (*maze*), the ability to strike a mean between various virtues; good conduct (*zuht*), the ability to behave well in polite society; and inevitably bravery (*tapferheit*)" and adds that these concepts were never more than commonly shared ideals lacking a specific definition: "but it is unlikely that an actual code of courtly behavior either existed or was thought to exist by writers." In: *The Anatomy of Love*, 144.
[23] Joseph Duggan highlights Chrétien's own doubts about his ability to communicate with his listeners: "This is decidedly not the type of distant narrator who tells the story as an objective sequence of actions: on the contrary, Chretien gives the impression of continuously grappling with both the audience and the tale." In: *The Romances of Chrétien de Troyes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 279.

twice over, playing the Text as one plays a game, looking for a practice which re-produces it[.]"[24]

If I might offer two possible metaphors to describe Mark's situation: the king of Cornwall understands neither the rules of the game nor the terms of the bet. The mystery and uncertainty of poetic language in the Arthurian Romance are a part of the genre's appeal and as texts they are subversive. In their article on Chrétien's *Yvain*, Cheyette and Chickering write: "Throughout the romance Chrétien's language is slippery and multiple in meaning, as well as pyrotechnic in its sonorities and rhetorical figures. He is as deceptive and evasive as he is playful. His ironic tone does not stabilize readers' interpretations but instead keeps them provisional."[25] The text is a poor source for confirmation for an institution like kingship but wonderful for communal explorations of poetic meanings. We might think of the figure of Tristan as someone who invites those within and outside of the text to play a series of games. A figure such as the Marshall of

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[24] "From Work to Text," 162. I should note that the word "play" comes up repeatedly in some of the literature on Chrétien. Fredric L. Cheyette and Howell Chickering use it in their title (see following footnote). Judith Kellogg also uses it in her discussion of the continuation Guillaume de Lorris' continuation of *Le Roman de la Rose* (Medieval Artistry and Exchange (New York: Peter Lang, 1989),125) as does Mathilde Bruckner in her monograph, *The Shaping of Romance*, 90.

[25] "Love, Anger, and Peace: Social Practice and Poetic Play in the Ending of *Yvain*," *Speculum* 80.1 (2005), 76.

Ireland plays along willingly and is rewarded for his efforts. Tristan's detractors, who insist on established and unwavering narratives, suffer for their inflexibility.[26]

Mark is not a cooperative participant in Tristan's textual games as they generate further instability and uncertainty. Thus it comes as no surprise that Mark finds his doubt briefly assuaged only in those moments where the words of Tristan or Isolde uphold the status quo. Thus Isolde's statement before the court in the Ordeal convinces Mark entirely:

> al sîn [Mark's] herze und al sîn muot
> diu wâren niwan an sî geleit
> âne aller slahte valscheit.
> sîn zwîvel und sîn arcwân
> die wâren aber dô hin getân. (*T* 15760-15764)
>
> [His [Mark's] heart and mind were centered only upon her, wholly and without guile. His doubt and suspicions had been set aside once more (248).]

Speech from Tristan and Isolde never reflect their intentions. The thoughts of the two lovers' *herze* and *muot* are deliberately not expressed in their visual and verbal performances. Like a cooperative audience member who does not understand his own cooperation, Mark accepts the oath, even when he has no grounds to do so. Mark takes

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[26] The first person to openly express his distrust of Tristan is the figure of Morgan. Like Mark, Morgan adheres to a single narrative and refuses to indulge Tristan's fictions. He questions Tristan's motives and does not yield when confronted with a convincing performance. As Mark Chinca explains, Morgan's presence is an affront to Tristan's competing identities and fictions: "Rual's revelation of the truth [which is far more incredible than Tristan's tale] calls a halt to Tristan's playing with fictitious identities, for the time being at least; his identity is fixed, he loses the freedom to manage his relations with the rest of society on a basis of his making." In: *History, Fiction, Verisimilitude*, 116. Tristan demands the Morgan return lands belonging to Riwalin but speaks independently of any recognized authority. Riwalin is, understandably, incredulous. Tristan mentions nobles who have sworn allegiance to him, but Tristan's speaks of "sources" in terms so vague as to be of little value: *ich weiz wol, sô manec edele man, / des ich hie niht genennen kan, / sîne hende mir gevalten hât* (*T* 5431-5433) [I know that so many nobles - I cannot name them here - have placed their hands in mine in token of their homage (115)]. Tristan creates impromptu fiction based on fictitious sources in the hope that Morgan will listen to him. Faced with Morgan's rejection, Tristan solves the situation by plunging his hitherto hidden sword into Morgan's skull, through his tongue and into his heart (*T* 5450-5455), proving that fictions as envisioned in the Arthurian Romances require everyone's willing participation.

refuge in fiction, but he refuses to admit to his participation. The king ought to know better, but Mark lets himself be pushed into this position of certainty because he believes that certainty is its own reward. Like the Marshall accepting gifts, Mark obtains what he wants by putting his faith in the lie and not questioning it. Having already envisioned the ending he desires, the king believes himself to be in control of his own narrative.

Mark desperately wants his definition of words find validation. Lest we fail to recognize the pattern, Gottfried makes it clear that the absence of *zwîvel* and *arcwân* (*T* 15763) after the Ordeal cannot be more than temporary. As expected, *zwîvel* gives way to such overpowering anger that Mark feels only an insatiable lack as he falls prey to rage: *und niwan an sîme zorne lac. / ern haete niht gegeben ein hâr, / waere ez gelogen oder wâr* (T 16532-16534) [and (was) wholly taken up by his anger - he was past all caring whether his suspicions were true or false (258)]. Just as Yvain/Iwein is liberated through his madness, Mark's *zorne* offers only a brief respite from his doubt and suspicion.

Incident in the Bath

Taking a cue from Chrétien that the Arthurian Romance is a game, Gottfried's *Tristan* is a *kint* who never quite grows up. Whenever Tristan starts to follow a single path as a merchant, minstrel, knight, etc., the action is always interrupted. Tristan/*Tristan*, the *er* and the *ez*, cannot really be pinned down because he/it pushes indefatigably forward. Tristan tends towards a "thoughtless plunging into a situation in a spirit of bravado, a flying in the face of fate in the belief that he has the presence of mind to extricate himself from any situation by his superior cunning."[27] Gottfried's protagonist/text is an object

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[27] Jackson, *Anatomy of Love*, 79.

hurtling through space, making brief attachments to those things around him/it but then abruptly severing these ties to head in a new direction. As a compilation of texts at the center of Gottfried's poem, the figure of Tristan cannot be understood in its entirety.[28]

As an example of a figure who is initially very reluctant to accept Tristan's fictions but who learns to play along, I suggest we look at the figure of Isolde. She has been almost entirely absent from this dissertation, a lack which I would now like to partially rectify. In this section, I would like to examine her thoughts and attitude when she discovers that Tristan has infiltrated the court in Ireland. The scene works well with our discussion of Mark. For unlike the Cornish king, Isolde learns to be pliant. When unable to reconcile fiction with reality, Tristan's future paramour learns how to accept the contradiction.

A few words about the plot are necessary. Tristan has arrived in Ireland a second time to win Isolde for Mark's bride. During his first residency at the Irish court, Tristan had called himself Tantris, a ruse which no one in Ireland subsequently discovered. Where we pick up, "Tantris," having been poisoned as a consequence of his battle with a dragon, has been cured in the interim by the two Isoldes and Brangane, Isolde's servant and confidante. While Tantris recuperates, Isolde begins to examine Tantris more carefully than at any previous time:

> nu nam Îsôt sîn dicke war
> und marcte in ûzer mâze

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[28] The figures of Erec and Parzival, although often unrecognized or misunderstood, are not nearly so mysterious for the other figures. As we saw in chapter three, Erec transforms at the narrative's conclusion into an accurate textual discourse (*E* 10043-10052). Parzival is more of an enigma for the other figures in the poem, who often fail to recognize him or fail to comprehend his intentions. When the Grail names Parzival king (*P* 796,17-21), however, Parzival's legitimacy as a ruler goes unquestioned because it is proof that Parzival has been led, unwittingly, by God (See: Green, *The Art of Recognition in Wolfram's* Parzival (London: Cambridge University Press, 1982), esp. 209.

an lîbe und an gelâze.
si blickte im dicke tougen
an die hende und under d'ougen.
si besach sîn arme und sîniu bein,
an den ez offenlîche schein,
daz er so tougenlîche hal. (*T* 9992-9999)

[Isolde kept on looking at him; she scanned his body and his whole appearance with uncommon interest. She stole glance after glance at his hands and face, she studied his arms and legs, which so openly proclaimed what he tried to keep so secret (173).]

The image is a striking one because it seems as though Tristan has let his guard down. He becomes the object of a brief passage of sexually suggestive *discriptio*.[29] He is a visible, perceptible figure. Except for the name, he employs none of the additional smoke and mirrors from his fictions. Although Isolde still knows Tristan only has her tutor, Tantris, she pushes this fiction out of her mind. Love moves Isolde, as love often does, to contemplate the object of her desire.[30] Normally performing incessantly, Tristan is uncharacteristically still, with no props or words serving as a distraction.[31] As W.T.H. Jackson writes, Isolde sees Tristan disrobed and unadorned, giving her intimate access to the normally shape-shifting agent of adventure: "The interesting thing about this passage is that it is the first time that Isolde has taken note of Tristan as a person."[32]

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[29] Bekker sees no ambiguity in Gottfried's language in this description and contends that "Tristan and Isolde are 'acting out' erotic meanings without being aware of them." In: *Gottfried von Strassburg's* Tristan, footnote #5, 147-148.

[30] Virginia Greene observes that love in the Arthurian Romances is often a catalyst for the act of contemplation, as it opens up the possibility for poetics in the same courtly milieux which are often depicted as base and superficial: "Love transforms the everyday thinking that every rational being does into specialized thinking, that you may call obsession, or ratiocination, or meditation." In: *Thinking Through Chrétien de Troyes*, 73.

[31] There is a similar scene of silent contemplation of Tristan's form in the Love Grotto scene. Here, it is not Isolde but Mark who views the lovers through a small window (*T* 17498-17510). The two lovers lie with a sword between them, which leads Mark to become, once again, convinced of their innocence (*T* 17511-17525). Gottfried adapts the scene from Thomas, retaining the ambiguity of the image: "It is this inherent ambiguity of signs that helps keep the story of Tristan and Iseult moving from episode to episode, as Mark fails to resolve his uncertainty about their love once and for all." In: Bruckner, *Shaping Romance*, 16-17. See also: Jackson, *The Anatomy of Love*, 96-97; 130.

[32] *The Anatomy of Love*, 80.

Isolde still has not successfully put Tristan in the proper frame of reference. He slew her uncle, the giant Morold, and she has neither forgotten nor forgiven this action. Yet Isolde still has not made the connection between Tantris and Tristan and thus between Tristan and Morold. After gazing upon Tristan as Tantris, Isolde begins to consider how his appearance conflicts with her knowledge of Tantris, the minstrel:

> got hêrre wunderaere,
> ist iht des wandelbaere,
> dest ie begienge oder begâst,
> und dest an uns geschaffen hâst,
> sô ist hie zewâre wandel an,
> daz dirre hêrlîche man,
> an den du solhe saelekeit
> lîbes halben hâst geleit,
> daz der als irreclîche
> von rîche ze rîche
> sîne nôtdürfte suochen sol. (*T* 10009-10020)

> ['O Lord, Worker of Miracles, if anything Thou dost or hast done, and anything Thou hast created falls short in any way, there is a failure here, in that this splendid man, whom Thou hast endowed with such physical perfections, should seek his livelihood wandering from land to land so precariously (173).]

Although she does not yet appreciate its significance, Isolde has stumbled across a discrepancy between Tristan's physique and his self-proclaimed identity as a *spilman*. Isolde acknowledges Tristan's vagrancy and identifies him, quite accurately, as a figure without a permanent home. Isolde understands Tristan's circumstances but then jumps to the wrong conclusion. She attributes Tristan's homelessness as a fault in creation, but Isolde has it backwards: to be *wandelbaere* is *wunderberaere*. What she sees as a problem is for Tristan his greatest asset, as he is about to demonstrate.

Tristan's varied fictions and their accompanying value mean that Tristan can be of no lasting value to anyone. The performance he puts on and the oratory he employs is

suitable for any occasion but is of no long-term worth. A new fiction must be enacted or a

new location found in order to postpone disaster. Anytime someone believes himself to

have benefitted by Tristan's actions, he loses more than he gains. Isolde's discovery of

Tristan's fixed identity is one of the few incidents in which the past, and with it the

predicted tragic future, catch up to Tristan (10062 ff.). After observing her tutor, Isolde

examines his armor. The fact that "Tantris" has armor is at odds with Tristan's fiction,

since Isolde and the others at court know him only as a *spilman* or a *koufman*.

This small discrepancy leads to further inquiries. Isolde discovers that a small

piece is missing from Tristan's sword which she fills (*T* 10080-10086) with the splinter

she and her mother found embedded in Morold's skull (*T* 7181-7195). This raises Isolde's

suspicions but does not furnish her with unambiguous proof:

> Tantris-Tristan wird also nicht etwa der Tötung Morolts überführt, weil er im
> Besitz der Tatwaffe ist - in der Artus-Dichtung wäre dies der entscheidende
> Beweis gewesen. Bei Gottfried aber ist das Schwert kein beweiskräftiges Indiz für
> die Identität seines Eigentümers; es ist Tristans Schwert das sich im Besitz eines
> Mannes namens Tantris befindet.[33]

Isolde does not make, or does not trust herself to make, an associative leap between the

sword and her uncle's killer. For definitive proof, she relies on language. The "ta-dah!"

moment follows as a conclusion derived from the manipulation and contemplation of

written text:

> nu sî die namen begunde
> zetrîben in dem munde,
> nu geviel si an die buochstabe,
> dâ man si beide schepfet abe,
> und vant in disem al zehant
> die selben, die s'in jenem vant.

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[33] Hollandt, *Die Hauptgestalten in Gottfrieds* Tristan, 121.

> nu begunde s'an in beiden
> die sillaben scheiden
> und sazte nâch alse vor
> und kam rehte ûf des namen spor.
> si vant ir ursuoche dar an.
> vür sich sô las si Tristan,
> her wider sô las si Tantris.
> hie mite was sî des namen gewis. (*T* 10109-10122)

> [Trying the names over on her tongue she seized on the letter of which each is formed and soon found that they were the same. She then divided their syllables and, reversing them, found the key to the name. She found what she had been looking for. Forwards she read 'Tris-tan', backwards she read 'Tan-tris.' With this she was certain of the name (174).]

Isolde identifies her uncle's killer by being literate. She recognizes the letters/characters (*die buochstabe* [*T* 10111]) of Tantris' name and plays with their order and accompanying sounds. She forgets Tantris, the agreeable fiction, and discovers the murderer of her uncle: "Isolde hat den *sin* (10625), Tristans List durchzuschauen."[34] Isolde, privileged with the opportunity to see Tristan at rest and thereby in a position to examine his person and possessions, can clearly identify the nature of Tristan's deception. While many of Tristan's enemies, and even his friends, sense that there is something misleading about Tristan's words and actions, Isolde is in the unparalleled position to act upon this knowledge. Yet Tristan, although disarmed, naked and sitting in a bath, walks out alive. How does this happen?

In order to see Tristan as the murderer of her uncle, Isolde must ignore Tristan's more agreeable identities as a minstrel and tutor. Like Mark, Isolde has enjoyed and benefitted from Tristan's fictions. Now she must deny this enjoyment in order to position herself as a perceptive reader deserving of revenge:

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[34] Ibid.

«jâ jâ» sprach aber diu schoene dô
«ist disen maeren danne sô,
disen valsch und dise trügeheit
hât mir mîn herze wol geseit.
wie wol ich wiste al dise vart,
sît ich in merkende wart,
sît ich an ime lîp unde gebar
und sîn dinc allez alsô gar
besunder in mîn herze las,
daz er gebürte ein hêrre was! (*T* 10123-10132)

['I knew it!' said the lovely girl. 'If this is how things stand, my heart informed me truly of this deception. How well I have known all the time, since I began to take note of him and study him in every detail of his appearance and behaviour and all that has to do with him, that he was a nobleman born (174).]

Isolde rewrites her own relationship with Tristan, making herself into an astute observer who was right all along. She invents a small fiction, a slight distortion of the truth, to justify her position. One fiction begets another.

Tristan makes an attempt to convince Isolde not to kill him. In the following quotation, Tristan not only flatters Isolde but indicates how intertwined her life has become with his and his fictions:

gedenket iuwers namen an mir.
ir sît ein vrouwe unde ein maget.
swâ man den mort von iu gesaget,
dâ ist diu wunneclîche Îsôt
iemer an den êren tôt.
diu sunne, diu von Îrlant gât,
diu manic herze ervröuwet hât,
â, diu hât danne ein ende!
owê der liehten hende,
wie zimet daz swert dar inne? (*T* 10156-10165)

[Consider your sex and spare me! You are a woman, well born and of tender years. If you earn the name of murderess, enchanting Isolde will be dead to honour for ever. The sun that rises from Ireland and has gladdened many hearts, alas, will be extinguished. Shame on those dazzling white hands - how ill a sword

becomes them! (175)]

Isolde has come close to achieving the impossible: she almost captures Tristan and calls him to account for his actions. She reads Tristan, nearly renouncing her former affections for him and denying the pleasure she takes in fiction. As Tristan could explain to her, though, reading is a kind of trap. It hinders action and *vrîheite* (*T* 2069), first for the tutor and now for the tutee. For Isolde to act on her knowledge would mean a loss of honor and prestige. In the eyes of others, she would be as good as dead (*iemer an den êren tôt* [*T* 10160]). To be sure, Tristan buys time by pleading with Isolde.[35] As in the episode with the Norwegian kidnappers, though, Tristan plays the victim even as he maintains the upper hand. Tristan threatens to make Isolde into a kind of cipher which is defined, like he is, through absence. Her name (*T* 10156), femininity (*T* 10157), reputation (*T* 10159), honor (*T* 10160) and even her very agency, expressed in the delight she awakens in others (*T* 10161-10164), is at stake. To reject Tristan's fictions is to have nothing.

Like Tristan,[36] Isolde begins to split in the face of this impossible decision:

> sus was ir herze in zwei gemuot,
> ein herze was übel unde guot.
> diu schoene warf daz swert dernider
> und nam ez aber iesâ wider.
> sine wiste in ir muote
> under übel und under guote,
> ze wederem si solte:
> si wolte unde enwolte;

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[35] "Der höfische 'homo ludens' verleugnet sich auch hier nicht: mit dem Ausspielen gesellschaftlicher Werte fristet er sein leben." In: Tax, *Wort, Sinnbild, Zahl*, 52.

[36] As the poem nears its completion, Tristan, addressing the effects of his constant traveling and homelessness, laments: *ich doch nû vil lange ergeben / als ungewissen winden, / wie kunde man mich vinden? / ine kan es niht erdenken wie. /man suoche dâ, sô bin ich hie. / man suoche hie, sô bin ich dâ. /wie findet man mich oder wâ? / wâ man mich finde? dâ ich bin* (*T* 19512-19520) [I have been at the mercy of such very uncertain winds now for a very long time [nearly 20,000 lines] - how could anyone find me? I cannot fathom how. If a man sought there I would be here, if he sought here I would be there. How or where should one find me? Where am I to be found? 297].

si wolte tuon unde lân.
sus lie der zwîvel umbe gân,
biz doch diu süeze wîpheit
an dem zorne sige gestreit,
sô daz der tôtvînt genas
und Môrolt ungerochen was. (*T* 10267-10280)

[Thus her heart was divided in purpose - a single heart was at one and the same time both good and evil. The lovely girl threw down the sword and immediately picked it up again. Faced with good and evil she did not know which to choose. She wanted and yet did not want, she wished both to do and refrain. Thus uncertainty raged within her, till at last sweet womanhood triumphed over anger, with the result that her enemy lived, and Morold was not avenged (177).]

Isolde experiences the overwhelming effects of adventure, in which rational thought is suspended (*sine wiste in ir muote* [*T* 10271]), but she still tries to think. Isolde should ignore her complicity in the fiction of Tantris and act. A good adventurer is a flawed adventurer, who only considers the consequences of his actions in hindsight. Isolde hovers between action and inaction (*tuon unde lân* [*T* 10275]). When adventure comes to Isolde, she hesitates and considers the consequences before the act rather than after. By failing to take action, Isolde vindicates Tristan of Morold's guilt and negates the consequences of past action. By not accepting the inherent contradiction in Tristan's multiple fictions, Isolde makes the past less real and less present than the immediate moment.

Isolde's recognition and awareness of Tantris' real identity ought to lead to action, but instead a new opening for yet another fiction is formed. Tristan, the object in motion, still passes, however fleetingly, through space and time, allowing him to exploit his own mobility as a weapon against others. As Queen Isolde has sworn to protect him, Tristan forces her to keep her word (*T* 10358-10364; 10371-10382), thereby ensuring that no

harm comes to him. Tristan has been identified but both the queen and her daughter are powerless to do anything.

The only option, as Brangane suggests, is to move forward and leave the past behind: *man sol den mantel kêren, / als ie die winde sint gewant* (*T* 10426-10427) [One should turn one's coat according to the wind (178)]. Brangane proposes a reconfiguration of the relationship between Tristan and the Irish royal family and, by extension, the Irish court because it might prove advantageous. Brangane "[macht] also Gesichtspunkte geltend, die die Person des Angeschuldigten und dessen Gesinnung ins Spiel bringen."[37] Oaths, bonds and history all give way to the immediate concerns of the present. This abandonment of one's obligations to court and family requires a resetting of all relationships as well as the creation of a fictional bond between the participants, wherein conflicting texts are renounced and a new text produced. After discovering, threatening and failing to kill Tristan, Isolde discovers the value and inescapability of utilitarian fictions but also learns to ignore the contradictions of multiple texts.

Conclusion

Let us now try to draw a few conclusions from this dissertation. Gottfried writes his poem much like Tristan speaks. He composes an adaptation of the Tristan-legend which conforms, in large part at least, to his audience's preconceptions and general familiarity with the story. In this respect, *Tristan*'s adaptor follows in the footsteps of other 12th and 13th century adaptors of the Tristan-legend, including Gottfried's most important source, Thomas of Britain. The problem facing any adaptor of the Tristan

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[37] Hollandt, *Die Hauptgestalten in Gottfrieds* Tristan, 42.

legend is the popularity and heterogeneity of the material. The audience's familiarity

leads to many opinions on the subject matter. Adaptors like Chrétien, Hartmann and

Wolfram largely avoid running up against their listeners' extant knowledge by making

secondary figures the focal point of their poems. For Thomas, and later for Gottfried, to

work with the Tristan legend is to offer listeners a tale they think they already know and

which will invariably conflict with the new telling.[38]

This overabundance of Tristan-parts poses a problem for the adaptor but also

affords him an unusually high degree of freedom. To be sure, the legend must broadly

fulfill the audience's expectations. This requires the adaptor to include key components of

the work, such as the love potion and the Ordeal.[39] However, once the adaptor has

included the requisite amount of Tristan-content, he is then free to treat and explain this

disparate material in very different ways. The goal, as Douglas Kelly explains, is to bring

order to material which is disorderly because of its popularity:

> Yet at a time when adherence to *matière* was deemed essential and when the
> changes permitted in the *matière* were often strictly prescribed, as the arts of
> poetry show, we may indeed sympathize with those who, like the Tristan poets,
> drew their material from such variegated and often contradictory or repetitious
> sources and succeeded in making an orderly and meaningful narrative out of it.[40]

The Tristan-legend is already a particularly unruly thing to adapt by the time Gottfried

begins his adaptation. The challenges facing him are not radically different from those of

his predecessors. Gottfried synthesizes an amorphous and often contradictory collection

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[38] "Thomas was not the only Tristan poet to allude to the problem of brining together divergent *matière*. There are remarks in all the important Tristan poem concerning the number and variety of tales circulating about the Tristan legend and the difficulty poets had in reconciling conflicting versions." Douglas Kelly, "En Uni Dire" ("Tristan" Douce 839) and the Composition of Thomas's "Tristan" *Modern Philology* 67.1 (Aug., 1969), 13.
[39] Ibid., 16.
[40] Ibid.,, 17.

of episodes surrounding a figure named Tristan. Of course, Tristan, the object of Gottfried's adaptation, does not exist in the singular. He is already a collection of competing texts, and Gottfried only increases his plurality.

In the prologue, Gottfried tempts us to look for absolutes in his poem: *tiure unde wert ist mir der man, / der guot und übel betrahten kan, / der mich und iegelîchen man / nâch sînem werde erkennen kan* (*T* 17-20) [The man is dear and precious to me who can judge of good and bad and know me and all men at our true worth (41)]. The point of the *sentenia* is that one simply cannot know this information. Terms such as *guot* and *übel* remain abstract concepts whose worth cannot be measured against specific examples. In *Tristan*, Gottfried suggests that such judgements can no longer be made.

A stable, dependable referent for the sign has been lost, and even widely accepted meanings can be inverted without detection. Writing about the fragment from Thomas' Tristan found in the *Folie d'Oxford*, Mathilde Bruckner writes: "If signs may lead toward the truth, they may equally lead away from it: words become lies, actions deceit, objects tokens of magic, and appearance disguise. Tristan uses signs to send contradictory messages."[41] Through King Mark, we see the fallacy of certainty as the king does his utmost to only make use of the information which conforms to his own conclusions. There is an excess of information at Mark's disposal. Named and unnamed members of his court bring competing narratives to the king's attention. Mark suffers from an ongoing state of doubt and *zwîvel*, which is only ever briefly alleviated. Like Mark, we want *Tristan* to make sense. We understand that the speaker may not be telling the whole truth

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[41] *The Shaping of Romance*, 15.

or may speak flatteringly only to fulfill his own ends, but this doubt born of untruthful words only increases our curiosity.

In this dissertation, I have read several episodes of Tristan against the background of the Arthurian Romance. These other texts, associatively connected to Gottfrieds *Tristan*, partially contextualize Gottfried's study of the necessity for the deliberate misuse of language. At the time of a nascent mercantile economy,[42] a need to trust an immaterial arrangement of symbols and values presented a challenge explored in Chrétien and Hartmann and then again by Wolfram and Gottfried. These written texts, intended to be performed aloud before a group of culturally literate listeners, addresses the new, uncomfortable relationship between voice, text and meaning.

The Arthurian Romances I have looked at in this dissertation suggest solutions through the medium of literature. In *Yvain/Iwein*, the figure of Calogrenant/Kalogrenant makes it clear that you can never know nor trust the intentions of another but that a certain goodwill is required if communication via a text is to take place. In *Erec et Enide/ Erec*, the protagonist transforms himself into a textual ideal, pervading the lands with language in which word and meaning are reliably intertwined. In *Parzival*, Wolfram depicts the unreliability of even the best-intentioned speakers and suggests, through his

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[42] Brian Stock explains the importance of literacy for new forms of exchange: "Through analogous principles [of an economy consisting of producers and consumers] a new type of discourse evolved for communicating between individuals. Like the economy, it was governed by a set of abstract rules, which, like prices, were largely independent of human control. Literacy, like the market, insured that an entity external to the parties in a given interchange - the text- would ultimately provide the criteria for an agreed meaning. Just as the market created a level of 'abstract entities' and 'model relations' between producer and consumer, literacy created a set of lexical and syntactical structures which made the persona of the speaker largely irrelevant." In: *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 86.

own poetic text, that signifying language comes exclusively through God and its meanings are imminent, not present.

In *Tristan*, Gottfried provides, as it were, an answer to the dilemmas faced by Chrétien, Hartman and Wolfram. By adapting a legend whose previous iterations already problematized the uncertainties of language and a person's ability to manipulate it, Gottfried makes it clear that he shares the concerns of his predecessors and contemporaries. Gottfried's solution, however, is not to be concerned. Chrétien, Hartmann and Wolfram write adventures in the anticipation that through further discourse generated by and around their texts, poetic meanings might be revealed or, in Wolfram's case, that signs of divine meaning might be manifest in the poetic. For Gottfried, this ambition of the Arthurian Romance may have once been a worthwhile or promising pursuit for the previous generation but not anymore. *Tristan*'s adaptor presents a world in which texts come constantly into conflict and in which the most successful figures are those who learn to live with and ignore the contradictions.

As proof of the incompatibility of consistent truths with modern fictions, we return, for the last time, to King Mark. As his suspicions grow and wane only to return more violently than before, Mark finally has his fears, worries and desires confirmed. The king comes unexpectedly to Brangane and Isolde's handmaidens while Tristan and Isolde are enjoying a planned rendezvous in the garden (*T* 18178-18183). Brangane, perhaps sick of the contradictions with which she has had to live, says and does nothing to prevent the lovers' discovery: *diu verdâhte Brangaene, / diu arme erschrac unde gesweic, / ir houbet ûf ir ahsel seic, / hende unde herze enpfielen ir* (*T* 18186-18189)

[Lost in thought as she had been, Brengane was taken by surprise, and did not say a word. Her head drooped on her shoulders, her hands and heart dropped away from her (280)].

In the absence of any traps set to deceive the king, Mark finds Tristan and Isolde together (T 18195-18211), enjoying a post-coital nap. Mark is the sole witness to Isolde's infidelity:

> wân und zwîvel was dô dan,
> sî altiu überleste.
> ern wânde niht, er weste.
> des er dâ vor ie haete gert,
> des was er alles dô gewert. (*T* 18220-18224)

> [His old overload of doubt and suspicion were gone - he no longer fancied, he *knew*. What he had always desired had now been given him in full (281).]

For once the indecisive King immediately undertakes a clear course of action. Mark departs the scene and goes in search of witnesses, telling them what he has seen (*T* 18231-18244).

The triumph is short lived. When Mark returns with his courtiers to behold the scene, Tristan has departed and Isolde is alone (*T* 18370-18373). The last we hear of Mark is that he must suppress his rage and postpone taking revenge (*T* 18401-18403). Mark's doubt has transformed him. The king's general sense of uncertainty solidifies into suspicions about the illicit relationship between Tristan and Isolde. When first introduced, Gottfried calls the King *Marke der wol gemuote* (T, 3262) [Mark the Debonair (84) or, my translation, Mark the Benevolent]. Mark, having begun as an unperceptive but good-natured King and ends as a bitter and distrustful spouse and uncle.

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