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THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TRISTANIAN LEGEND:  
A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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## **Poděkování**

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## **Anotace**

Obsahem této diplomové práce je analýza a komparativní studie příběhu o Tristanovi a Isoldě. Popisuje jeho literární vývoj od poetické formy k próze počínaje středověkem až po současnost. Vymezuje především obecně středověké verze příběhu, uvádí jednotlivé autory a shrnuje děje příběhů. Velmi stručně jsou také představeny moderní verze příběhu.

## **Annotation**

The content of this diploma thesis is an analysis and a comparative study of the story of Tristan and Isolde. It depicts its literary development from the poetic form to the prose, starting from the Medieval Age to the present day. It delineates mainly the Medieval versions of the story in general, introduced the authors and summarizes the plots of the stories. Also, the modern versions of the story are briefly introduced.

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## INTRODUCTION

Almost everyone in the Western world must have heard the two names Tristan and Isolde connected with tragic love story, either in literature classes or at the movies. To some people, it is just an episode from the book of legends about King Arthur and the knights of the Round Table, but actually, “it is a story at its own right, as old as the oldest stories of King Arthur, and like them, far older than any of the written versions we have today” (Sutcliff 7). There are many variations of the story, but the core of the plot seems to be always the same. Only few legends have marked the romantic imagination of our civilization as strongly as that of Tristan and Isolde. From the first French literary episodes, narrated by Bérout and Thomas of Britain to *the Eternal Return* (in French *L'Éternel Retour*), a film created in 1943 by Jean Delannoy and the famous Jean Cocteau, to the countless adaptations, rewritings and transpositions – medieval or modern – all these works are based on the love story of these two Cornish lovers. (Walter 7)

The story of their fatal love has been popular since the Middle Ages. It gained its popularity primarily because of its focus on great love and the unalterable fatality of a man. Western culture is fascinated by the so-called Tristanian legend for various other reasons - sociological, psychological or literary ones. The story has become a “best seller” in the category of romance, mainly due to the impossible love of the orphan Tristan for a Queen of Ireland who becomes the wife of King Mark of Cornwall, Tristan’s uncle. (Walter 7)

While not considered to be the most famous love story, the story of Tristan and Isolde has a long history and tradition. When compared with other famous love stories most people will recall the story of Romeo and Juliet. It is quite a paradox that these two names are the most well-known. The Tristanian legend is certainly older and more adapted, however, it is less popular than Shakespeare’s tragedy. Throughout the centuries, the novel of Tristan and Isolde was written in several versions with many variations of the story, but always with the same theme of the mythical and unfulfilled love.

This legend creates a connection between several nations. Since it takes place not only in England, but also in Ireland and France, it is a part of other nations’ literary history. Many versions were originally written in Old French, predominantly in Anglo-Norman dialect, on the French territory. However, we may encounter versions written in

England, Sweden or Germany, whose local dialects are used in the works. This shows that the fascination of the story has become international:

Yet one of the most fascinating aspects of the legend is how it took root and thrived in the British Isles, France, Germany, and Norway, then branched out in varied and distinctive ways as it spread throughout Europe, Scandinavia, and, in this century, to the United States. (Grimbert 15)

The main aim of this diploma thesis is to compare versions that have existed since the Middle Ages. They will be analysed, compared and described from various points of view. Firstly, general information about each version will be presented. Secondly, the authors of the version will be introduced. Thirdly, the plot of the stories will be narrated starting from the beginning of the story, through the main body until the end. For this reason, I would like to deal with the differences in content and form. Indeed, there are some elements of the versions, which are common (e.g. the motive of love potion) and some elements, which are different. Therefore, I would like to analyse those elements and present how they differ.

The texts will be examined from their original dialect, but mainly from the translated texts in modern French and modern English. Since I am not a specialist of Ancient French and my knowledge of it is very limited, the use of original manuscript will be minimal. This analysis will lead to the final synthesis and the corresponding conclusions.

Additionally, the question of the contemporary relevance of the story will be dealt with. As someone who is fascinated by the variety of versions of Tristan and Isolde's love story, I want to show how it can speak to us today.



## 1 THE ORIGINS OF THE STORY AND ITS CONTEXT

The following chapter will deal with the origins of the story. Firstly, there will be a brief introduction of the primary written versions of the story and their authors. Secondly, for better orientation, the historical context will be mentioned. Thirdly, the connection with the British Isles will be presented following with a discussion of the term *courtly love*. Finally, the issue of the Anti-Tristanian work will be dealt with and the variations in the main character's name will be explained.

### 1.1 THE FIRST WRITTEN VERSIONS OF THE STORY

The history of Tristan and Isolde dates back to old Celtic times, long before the first mention of the tale was written. The story “flourished in the British Isles, France and Germany, then it quickly spread to Italy, The Iberian Peninsula, Scandinavia, and later, some versions appeared in Czech and Byelorussian” (Grimbert 13). Transmitted orally, cast in verse romances in various countries, we find several episodes in French and British medieval literature (Bérout, Thomas, Marie de France, Chrétien de Troyes), in Scandinavian literature (Brother Robert) in German (Gottfried von Strassburg, Eilhart von Oberge) and also in Czech. The text, which is preserved only in fragments, is therefore collective and anonymous. All preserved versions are more or less adapted and modified by various authors. However, the longest and oldest French fragments are those from the twelfth century written by Bérout and Thomas. They provide a narrative canvas that has spread and evolved. (Deschamps 8)

The legend of Tristan and Isolde was transmitted orally and handed over from one generation to the next. Bérout, the first mentioned author of the story, did not invent it. His work was just an adaptation. When he wrote it, the story had already been circulating orally for centuries, thus it is difficult to go back to the source of the legend. Certain passages may date back to ancient Greece, including the Bérout's bizarre episode of the horse ears of King Mark<sup>1</sup>, which reminds us of the Greek story of King Midas. However, King Midas had donkey ears, not horse ears. Another similarity which may be found in the story concerns the legend of the Minotaur. In the legend of Tristan and Isolde, Morholt is presented similarly to the Minotaur, who was killed by young Theseus on the Island of Crete. (Jolivet 145)

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<sup>1</sup> The name of King Mark comes from the Celtic word *march*, which means a ‘horse’. (Chinca 20)

In the second half of the twelfth century, Marie de France adapted the story of Tristan and Isolde in the poetic form called *lai* and entitled it *Chevrefoil* (the Honeysuckle). This version was probably written between the years 1160 and 1170. Originally called *Lai del Chievrefoil*, it depicts a short episode of Tristan attempting to meet Isolde in secret. Later, during the twelfth century, we come across other adaptations, Middle High German *Tristrant und Isalde* by Eilhart von Oberge and also short episodes of *Folie Tristan* in two versions. An older anonymous version named *The Oxford Folie Tristan* appeared approximately in 1180. The second version, *The Berne Folie Tristan*, was written circa around the year 1200. In the thirteen century, three adaptations of Tristanian legend emerged. Firstly, a short poem entitled *Tristan the Nightingale, The Courtship of the Lovers* appeared, secondly, a German version simply called *Tristan* written by Gottfried von Strassburg and thirdly, an Old Norse version *Tristrams saga ok Isöndar* was written by Bother Robert. In 1230, we encounter the legend written in prose, *the Prose Tristan*. A Czech adaptation of the story *Tristram a Izalda* also appeared in the end of the fourteenth century.

Since then, the story of Tristan and Isolde has been rewritten many times and appeared not only in literature but also in music, in films or in the plastic arts. (Walter 16) For example, if we skip to modern history (i.e. the 19th century), the most iconic non-literal work inspired by the Tristanian legend would be Richard Wagner's opera. Premiered in 1859, his opera named *Tristan und Isolde*, took the essential data of the legend in order to illustrate a more "romantic" version, especially on the deadly aspect of the passion between the two heroes. (Berthelot 5)

The inspiration of the Tristanian legend did not end in the 19th century, but it continued in the 20<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> century with great success:

The success of the myth was not denied during the twentieth century: modern rewritings (A. Mary, R. Louis ...), a film adaptation (*The Eternal Return*, Jean Cocteau), critical studies (Love in the West, Denis de Rougemont) take up and adapt to their own ends the story of Tristan and Isolde. (Berthelot 5)

Nowadays, due to the rising popularity of the cinema, the most recognizable work dealing with the story of Tristan and Isolde would be a film with the same name, *Tristan + Isolde*, released in 2006. Interestingly, the British production cooperated with the Czech

production and the majority of scenes were shot in the Czech Republic. Because of that, a few Czech actors appeared in the cast.

## 1.2 HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The name of the main hero leads back to the sixth or the seventh century. It is thought that the origin of the Tristan's character is based on the hero of the Pictish Drostán (Drest, Drust or Drostain), who had a lover called Essylt. She was the wife of his uncle March. (Grimbert 16). The reason is that these names are "included in the list of kings who ruled from the sixth to the eighth century in the Scottish Lowlands, and over present-day Northumberland" (D'Esplas 5).

Also, the works of Irish literature of the ninth and tenth century provide some key elements of the plot. (Grimbert 16). The Celtic literature of the twelfth century mentions a Drystan, son of Tallweh. Drust (D'Esplas 5).

However, we will be never sure of the precise sources of the legend and it will probably continue to be a mystery:

Its early history will doubtless always remain an enigma, and while it is clear that there are analogues in the tales of the Celts and of other cultures as well, the story that has fired the imagination of the artists of all kinds from the Middle Ages on derives from versions told by French and German poets beginning in the twelfth century. (Grimbert 16)

## 1.3 CONNECTION WITH THE BRITISH ISLES

The story is known to have been created in Northern France, i.e. in the region closest to Great Britain, or Cornwall respectively, while some scenes take place in Ireland, in the native country of Isolde. (Deschamps 6)

As has been said before, the story takes place in the Celtic world. It involves Cornwall, a county in South West England, Ireland, where Tristan went to look for Isolde; as well as Brittany (Bretagne), a region in the northwest of France, where Tristan went after their separation. All these places appear in the Celtic world. The Celtic people were present in a great part of Europe before the Roman Conquest. However, in the Middle Ages their culture mainly concentrated in Great Britain and in Brittany. The legend of King Arthur, which is attached to that of Tristan, is also a part of the Celtic tradition in literature.

Certain names in the story confirm this Celtic origin of the story, e.g. the name of King Mark comes from a name of Celtic origin meaning “a horse”, which certainly had something to do with the strange shape of his ears. (Jolivet 146)

According to Rosemary Sutcliff<sup>2</sup>, *Tristan and Isolde* belongs to Celtic legends, from its far-back beginnings. It is a “tale woven by harpers round the peat fire in the timber halls of Irish or Welsh or Cornish chieftains, long before the time of chivalrous knights and fair ladies and turreted castles in which it is generally set.” It was “enriched by medieval troubadours, who took it and dressed it in medieval clothes, but still the Celtic story is visible, fiercer and darker, and more real, underneath” (7).

#### 1.4 COURTLY LOVE

In the twelfth century, literature was characterized, among other things, by poetry and texts related to courtly love. *L'amour Courtois*, *fine amour* or courtly love is indispensably connected with the chivalric romances, a popular genre in the Middle Ages. This genre first occurred in the courts of Occitania and later in France. There it fused together with ideas of chivalry. (Gaunt and Kay 13)

*Courtly love* first appeared in English literature after the Norman conquest in 1066. In the course of time, it became part of numerous stories of Medieval literature. However, the term *courtly love* was named and defined quite recently. It was introduced and highlighted by the French medievalist, Gaston Paris, at the second half of the 19th century. He elaborated on the theme of courtly love in his article *Studies on the novels of the Round Table: Lancelot du Lac, II: The tale of the cart* (Originally in French *Études sur les romans de la Table Ronde: Lancelot du Lac, II: Le conte de la charrette*). In his study he dealt with the story of knight Lancelot written by Chrétien de Troyes (Denomy 44). Concerning the theme of love, medieval people were quite fascinated by this topic and its subsequent complications.

Courtly love is briefly characterized as “a highly conventionalized code that prescribed the behaviour of ladies and their lovers” (Britannica). It is a conception of love relationship between a man deeply devoted to a woman in the twelfth century. It is necessary to add that this lady was often married and inaccessible. Often, it concerned Platonic love and a relationship rarely accomplished. Courtly love is characterized by the

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<sup>2</sup> Rosemary Sutcliff is an author of *Tristan and Iseult* an inspired retelling of the legendary love story. She published her adaptation in 1971.

profound sense of honour, the importance of speech and oath, the nobility of feeling, generous behaviour and politeness in language and manners. (Larousse) Courtly love is a special form of love. Usually, the courtly lover idealizes his beloved lady. He uses an exalted language usually reserved for a deity and speaks to the lady or about her or about her in his poems/songs. According to Gaston Paris, it has certain rules:

1) The courtly love is illegitimate and furtive; 2) The lover is inferior and insecure; the beloved is elevated, haughty, even disdainful; 3) The lover must earn the lady's affection by undergoing many tests of his prowess, valour and devotion; 4) The love is an art and a science, subject to many rules and regulations – like courtesy in general. (Moore 622)

Certain elements of courtesy can be found in the story. Firstly, Tristan is deeply devoted to the Queen Isolde, who is married and therefore she should be inaccessible. Secondly, concerning their relationship, it is highly illegitimate, and they both meet furtively. Thirdly, Tristan as a lover is always inferior and insecure and he earned Isolde's affection.

However, even though the legend of Tristan and Isolde contains some aspects of courtly love, it also broadly crosses its concept. The fact, that the relationship between Isolde and Tristan was not only platonic, but also physical, quite exclude the legend from the conception of the Courtesy.

As courtly love began to appear in the 12th century literature, it was primarily concerned with the love affairs between a queen and a knight. These affairs can be defined as love triangles. In the case of Tristanian legend, it involves a king, a queen and a knight. The kings may not have always known about the Queen's infidelity (and tolerate it or not), but when they found out, repercussions were sure to follow. You can observe the love triangle motif in various stories. French author Chrétien de Troyes also dealt with a love triangle in his romance, but he took it in an opposite way as an anti-Tristanian work.

### 1.5 THE ANTI-TRISTANIAN WORK

The writer, known only by his religious beliefs and the place of origin, Chrétien de Troyes, lived during the period of the highest popularity of the Tristanian legend. He reacted to it very sceptically. He alluded to the main themes of the legend in several of his romances. One of his work, named *Cligès*, is often seen as an Anti-Tristanian work “for it attempts to exorcise the troubled seduction exerted by the Tristanian legend on the

courtly public of the second half of the twelfth century” (Walter 13). Chrétien de Troyes failed in his attempt. After all, in the 13th century, Tristanian legend, which was still popular, appeared in many new variations on a regular basis. However, this time it appeared in prose. “The considerable number of conserved manuscripts, the quality of miniatures, which illustrates these manuscripts, witness the indisputable success of this story, which mixes for the biggest delight of reader chivalric and sentimental adventures.” (Walter 13)

Chrétien’s different point of view on the Tristanian legend is obvious in the love story of Cligès and Fenice (from the same named chivalric romance *Cligès* written in approximately 1177). Their love affair appears to be more innocent. Even though it unfolds in a different way, it shares some similarities with the previous story of Tristan and Isolde. *Cligès* is thought to be a critical response or even a parody to the story of Tristan and Isolde. There are some of the similarities with the Tristanian legend: Cligès was the king’s nephew (as was Tristan) and he desired his uncle’s wife Fenice. In contrary to Tristan and Isolde, here the ideal of courtly love preserves. They loved each other only platonically, Fenice was inaccessible and Cligès was deeply devoted to her. Also, he had to earn the Fenice’s affection by undergoing many tests of his prowess, valour and devotion. They did not dare to touch each other until the moment Fenice widowed. In Fenice’s own words, she refused to share her body with two men as Iseult did. She claimed that she "cannot reconcile herself to the life that Iseult led". Love in Iseult became "exceeding base; for her body belonged to two masters and her heart entirely to one". Thus, Iseult spent her whole life; "and never once refused the two" (Chrétien de Troyes 92).

#### 1.6 NOTE ON THE NAMES OF ISOLDE AND TRISTAN

The name of the Irish princess Isolde the Fair of Ireland can be found in many variations of the story. In the Anglophone world, the most common version used is Isolde. Nevertheless, Iseult is also quite often seen as this form comes from the French versions. We may also encounter many other variations of this name: e.g. Isolt, Isold, Yseult, Yseut, Ysolt, Ysiaut, Ysoud, Iseo, Isode, Isoude, Izolda, Essyllt, Eselt, Isotta and Ysolde.

The name Isolde also points to its Celtic origin. It reflects the Cornish form *Eselt* or Welsh *Essyllt*. (Chinca 20) The oldest written versions by Bérout, Thomas of Britain and both *Folies* (from Oxford and by Berne) call the Irish princess Yseut. If we look at

the name in its original language, that is to say in ancient French, Bérout calls the princess Yseut, Thomas uses the name Ysolt and the same name appears in *The Madness of Oxford*. Nevertheless, another anonymous author of *The Madness* addresses the princess Ysiaut. In short poem *Tristan the Nightingale* we chance on Ysoud.

On the other hand, in modern French versions from the 20th century, Isolde is called Iseult by René Louis and Isolde by Joseph Bédier. Interestingly enough, the same novel by Bédier translated into English calls the princess Iseult. In a version for children written by Sophie Jolivet, Tristan's lover is called Isolde as in Bédier's.

For consistency, throughout this diploma thesis, the spelling *Isolde* will be used when referring to the name of the heroine as it is the most common variation occurring in English literature.

Tristan's name is derived from the French word "triste" which means "sad". His mother Blanche fleur (sister of King Mark of Cornwall) named him this way, because he was born the day his father, king of Loonnois, died in a battle.

Tristan's name also appears in different variations: Tristram, Tristan, Drustanus or Trystan. In modern French, we only encounter the variation Tristan. If we observe Tristan's name in ancient French, Bérout's and Thomas's versions agree with *The Madness of Oxford* and *Tristan the Nightingale* on the name Tristran. Marie de France calls him Tristram and in *the Berne Folie Tristan* he is named Tristanz. However, in Anglophone literature, the variation "Tristan" is the most common one, and this name variation will occur in the rest of the thesis.

## 2 MEDIEVAL VERSIONS

In the Middle Ages, the very popular story of Tristan and Isolde had a rather odd fate. Even though, it was well known, there was no complete version, which would survive, except for foreign versions as the Old Norse *Trisrams saga ok Isöndar* and Czech *Tristram a Izalda* (from late fourteenth century), other versions were in a fragmentary state. Eilhart von Oberge provided a complete version, nevertheless, he omitted several episodes. (Lacy et al, *The New Arthurian Encyclopedia: New Edition*)

The following chapter looks closely at the medieval versions of the story and introduces them in detail. The enumeration of versions and the authors is proposed in chronological order.

The table called “Medieval versions of the Tristanian legend”, found on the following page, serves for better orientation in the dates of creation of the medieval versions of the story. All mentioned authors wrote the story during the twelfth or the thirteenth century. Firstly, we may observe the origin of the so-called “early tradition”, which concerns the eldest versions – for example the one by Béroul and by Thomas. Secondly, the reader may meet the later tradition of the story, composed of subsequent versions.

The table shows the English names of the works, its original name, the dialect in which the story is written, the approximate date of creation, and its form – i.e. whether it is written in verse or in prose. In the following centuries, Tristan appeared in other adaptations with various names of the story. The adaptations in the following centuries are not mentioned, because they do not play any significant role in terms of the literary transformation of the work.



**Table 1: Overview of Medieval Versions of the Tristanian legend<sup>3</sup>**

<b>Author of version</b>	<b>English name of the version</b>	<b>Original name of the version</b>	<b>Dialect</b>	<b>Date of creation</b>	<b>Verses</b>
Bérout	<i>The Romance of Tristan</i>	<i>Le Roman de Tristan</i>	Anglo-Norman	≈1150 – 1190	4,485
Thomas of Britain	<i>The Romance of Tristan</i>	<i>Le Roman de Tristan</i>	Norman	≈1173	3,082
Marie de France	<i>Chevrefoil</i> ( <i>The Honeysuckle</i> )	<i>Lai del Chievrefoil</i>	Anglo-Norman	≈1176	118
Eilhart von Oberge	<i>Tristant and Isolde</i>	<i>Tristant und Isalde</i>	Middle High German	≈1175	9,446
Anonymous	<i>The Oxfortd Folie Tristan</i>	<i>La Folie Tristan d'Oxford</i>	Anglo-Norman	≈1180	998
Anonymous	<i>the Berne Folie Tristan</i>	<i>La Folie Tristan de Berne</i>	Norman	≈1200	572
Gottfried von Strassburg	<i>Tristan</i>	<i>Tristan</i>	Middle High German	≈1210	19,416
Brother Robert	<i>Saga of Tristrams and Isold</i>	<i>Trisrams saga ok Isöndar</i>	Old Norse	≈1226	≈ 2,700
Luce de Gat Helie de Boron	<i>The Prose Tristan</i>	<i>Tristan en prose</i>	French	≈ 1230	prose
Anonymous	<i>Tristan the Nightingale</i> ( <i>The Courtship of the Lovers</i> )	« <i>Tristan Rossignol</i> » ( <i>Le Donnei des amants</i> )	Anglo-Norman	≈1299	231
Anonymous	<i>Tristram and Izalda</i>	<i>Tristram a Izalda</i>	Czech	≈ 1399	9,000

<sup>3</sup> Data is taken from Berthelot, Anne. *Tristan et Yseut. Bérout, Thomas*. Nathan, 1991. and Lacroix, Daniel, and Philippe Walter. *Tristan et Isolde. Les poèmes français. La saga norroise*. Librairie Générale Française, 1989.

Before attempting to analyse the selected works, it is necessary to present the oldest versions written mainly in Anglo-Norman dialect, which is one of the dialects of ancient French:

Dialect had been introduced to English court circles in Edward the Confessor's time, its history really began with the Norman Conquest in 1066, when it became the vernacular of the court, the law, the church, schools, universities, parliament, and later of municipalities and of trade. (Britannica, 1998)

Other versions come in different languages. Two in middle high German, a language spoken between in the period of High Middle Age from the eleventh century to fourteenth century, and one in Old Norse, which is classical North Germanic language. Old Norse was used approximately between the years 1150 - 1350 and it concerns the literary language of the Icelandic sagas and skaldic poems. (Britannica, 2010)

The following texts will be analysed from modern French. Some of the versions will be analysed from English translations. The synopsis of the plots is reduced only to important parts therefore the plots are not very detailed.

2.1 THE ROMANCE OF TRISTAN BY BÉROUL 1150 – 1190

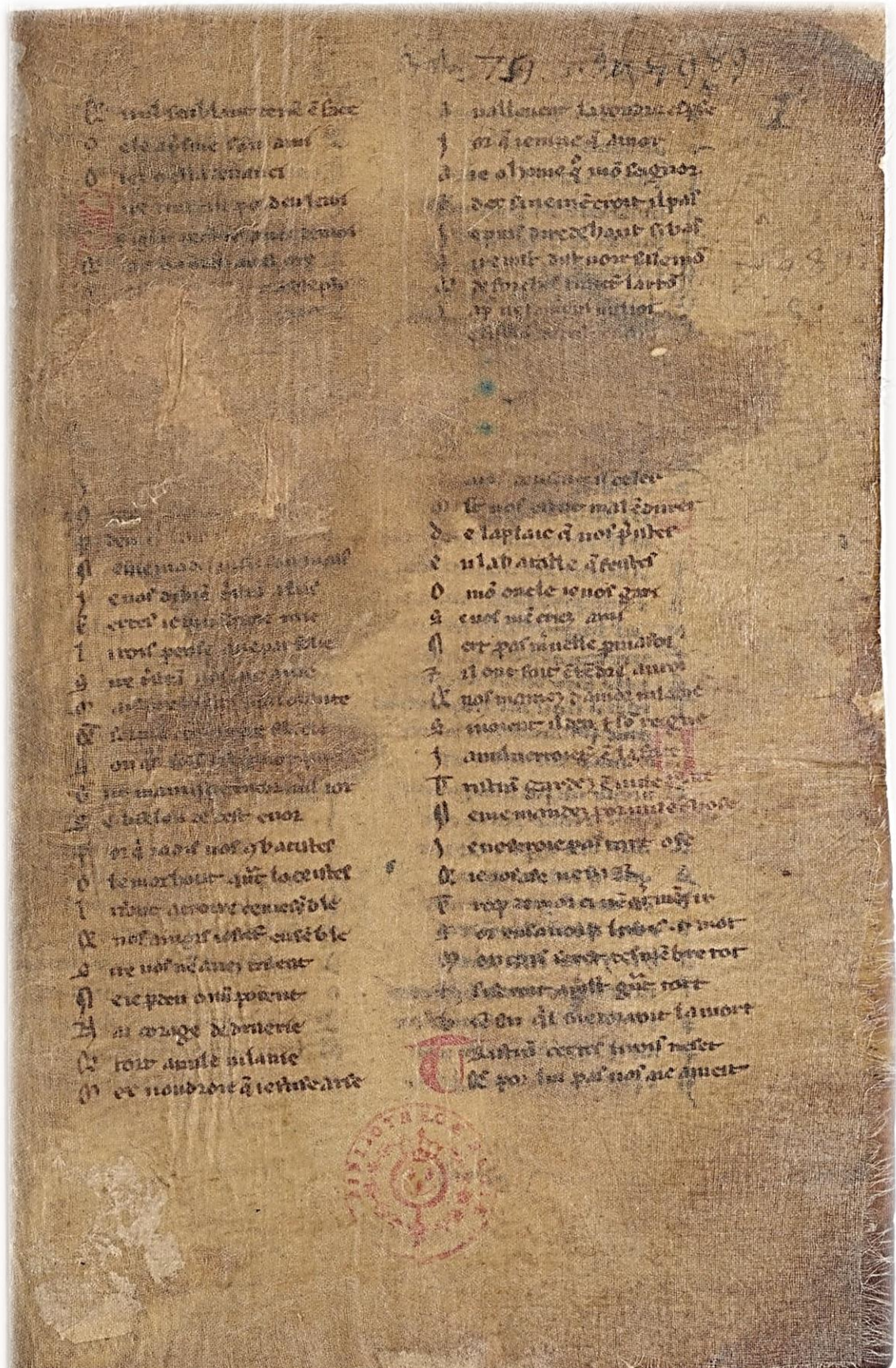


Figure 1 – First page from *Le Roman de Tristan*. 13th century. the National Library of France, Paris.

*The Romance of Tristan* (In French *Le Roman de Tristan*) written by Bérout is considered both the oldest version and the first written version of this story. It was written in Anglo-Norman dialect between the years 1150 – 1190. Nevertheless, the current critics rather prefer the first date mentioned. The manuscript was found in the area of Northern France. (Walter 11)

The story, which implements mythical Celtic elements, is conserved in the National Library of France, in one unique copy from the thirteenth century. Unfortunately, as may be seen from the first page of the enclosed copy, the manuscript contains a lot of mistakes and gaps despite all effort to make it more visible. Because of the damages, the story is not complete. Therefore, the beginning and at the end of the legend is missing. Only 4485 incomplete verses remained well preserved.

The general idea of the story concerns the guilty love between Isolde, who is supposed to be King's Mark fiancée and then wife, and Tristan, a warrior in the service of his uncle, King Mark. The story takes place in the most eastern part of England – Cornwall. As the introduction of the story is ruined the Bérout's narration starts from the episodes of the clandestine encounter spied by King Mark. The manuscript ends with the death of three felon barons after the justification of Isolde in court. (Walter 11) As little as we know about the beginning and the end of the story, likewise little is known about the life of Bérout.

### 2.1.1 BÉROUL

The author of this version, Bérout, is probably the first known author of Tristan and Isolde who adapted it into writing. Unfortunately, we do not have much information about him, only a few facts are known. Based on the language used in his work, it is possible to detect that the author came from Normandy. He may also have lived in England for some time. (Jolivet 143)

We are certain of his existence since his name is mentioned in the work itself (verse 1268 of Bérout's romance). The other writers simply present him as a juggler who must have been closer to the primitive legend. In general, Bérout was a cleric by his treatment of history and therefore by the oral transmission of this story. Daniel Poirion, a French professor at the University of Paris-Sorbonne, characterises Bérout as follows: "He is not a cleric, but a storyteller, who has remained close to the oral tradition, punctuating his account with numerous exclamations, but having the sense of dramatic

intensity and also the humour of a juggler” (Poirion). However, there is some speculation based on the fluency of narration that Béroutl might have just written the beginning of the story and someone else finished it. This is visible in verse 2746 where the style of writing changes. (Poirion)

The last note on the author concerns his authorship. It must be specified that Béroutl and Thomas of England are not the inventors of the Tristanian legend. They should rather be called the "authors", in the medieval sense of the word, those who increase, elaborate and enrich an inherited legendary canvas. (Walter 15)

### 2.1.2 SYNOPSIS

The beginning of the manuscript is mutilated. The visible part of story opens at the time of Tristan and Isolde's secret meeting spied by King Mark. The King was warned by three barons that Tristan and Isolde were having an affair. King Mark decided to investigate the rumour himself. Having found nothing suspicious, he returned to the castle.

Nonetheless, the barons kept telling the King that Tristan and Isolde often meet as lovers. The King was not sure of his future movement and for that reason he sent for the dwarf, who was able to predict the future. The dwarf advised him to send Tristan with the message to another kingdom. If Tristan comes to say goodbye to Isolde during the night, it is a proof that they love each other. To track his steps, they put flour in front of the bed of Isolde.

Tristan agreed to convey the message; however, he felt torn apart before he left. He was simply not able to leave without saying farewell to his beloved girl and so he came to Isolde's room. Because of an open wound, he soiled the sheets of blood; moreover, his traces remained on the ground. Having seen everything, the furious King wanted to punish the young knight violently. The King was about to burn his nephew and Isolde, so he gave the order to light the fire and bring his nephew. He wanted Tristan to be first who burnt in the flames.

Nevertheless, Tristan managed to escape and saved Isolde, who has been sent to the lepers. The two fled to the forest, where they continued to live together. One night, Tristan and Isolde were preparing to go to bed. Tristan put his sword on the bed between him and Isolde and then they fell asleep. However, that night Mark found the two lovers.

He entered their cabin with the intention of killing them. But when he saw that they were living in a purity, separated by the sword, he thought they did not love each other anymore. He let them sleep. Afterwards, he changed his sword with Tristan's and he removed the ring from Isolde's finger to give her his own. Then he left.

The lovers got up and they understood that King Mark had visited their shelter. Tristan wanted to flee the forest, but Isolde was against this solution. In addition, the effectiveness of the love potion had ended. They decided to go to the hermit Ogrin, who ordered Tristan to write a letter to King Mark. In this letter Tristan asked him to take back Isolde. The King agreed. However, Tristan was forced to leave the kingdom.

The barons were not still happy with Tristan's punishment. They asked King Mark to aggravate it. To satisfy his barons, King Mark invited Tristan to the courtyard. To divert suspicion and to calm the barons, the King decided that Isolde should take her oath and swear her innocence. This event should happen at Mal Pas where Isolde swore she was innocent and therefore was to be released. The King was happy and for this reason, he ordered to prepare a tournament. Tristan appeared disguised as a Black Mountain. It was him, who had beaten all the opponents and won. The King invited him to his court and in this way, he gave himself the pretext for Tristan and Isolde to meet. The barons were on their guard again, but Tristan, who was forced to fight with them, managed to defeat them. At this moment, the story ends unfinished with the death of one of the baron, Godoin:

Tristan then turns to the wall, aims several times and shoots. The arrow goes so fast that Godoin cannot avoid it. It is planted right in his eye, through his skull and his brain. The swivel and the swallow do not reach a bliss apple faster. The man falls, hits a pillar and does not move either the arms or the legs. He does not even have time to say, "I'm hurt, God! Confession (...)" (Lacroix and Walter 227)

### 2.1.3 SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

Unfortunately, Bérout's version is not complete. We don't know how Bérout started the text, how Isolde and Tristan met or how Bérout finished the story since it has not been preserved to this day. We may only assume its form from later translations based on his version. Nonetheless, Bérout's version seems to be less popular than Thomas's as it is less translated by following authors.

In comparison with Thomas's "courtly" version, Bérout's *Tristan* represents what is called a "common" version of the oldest French tradition of the legend. Together with Thomas's version, his version comes from the second half of the twelfth century and they are probably based on the same source. Even though Bérout's version is not extant completely, we have an idea of what would it look like completely thanks to Eilhart von Oberge and Brother Robert, who imitated Bérout's version. (Grimbert 426)

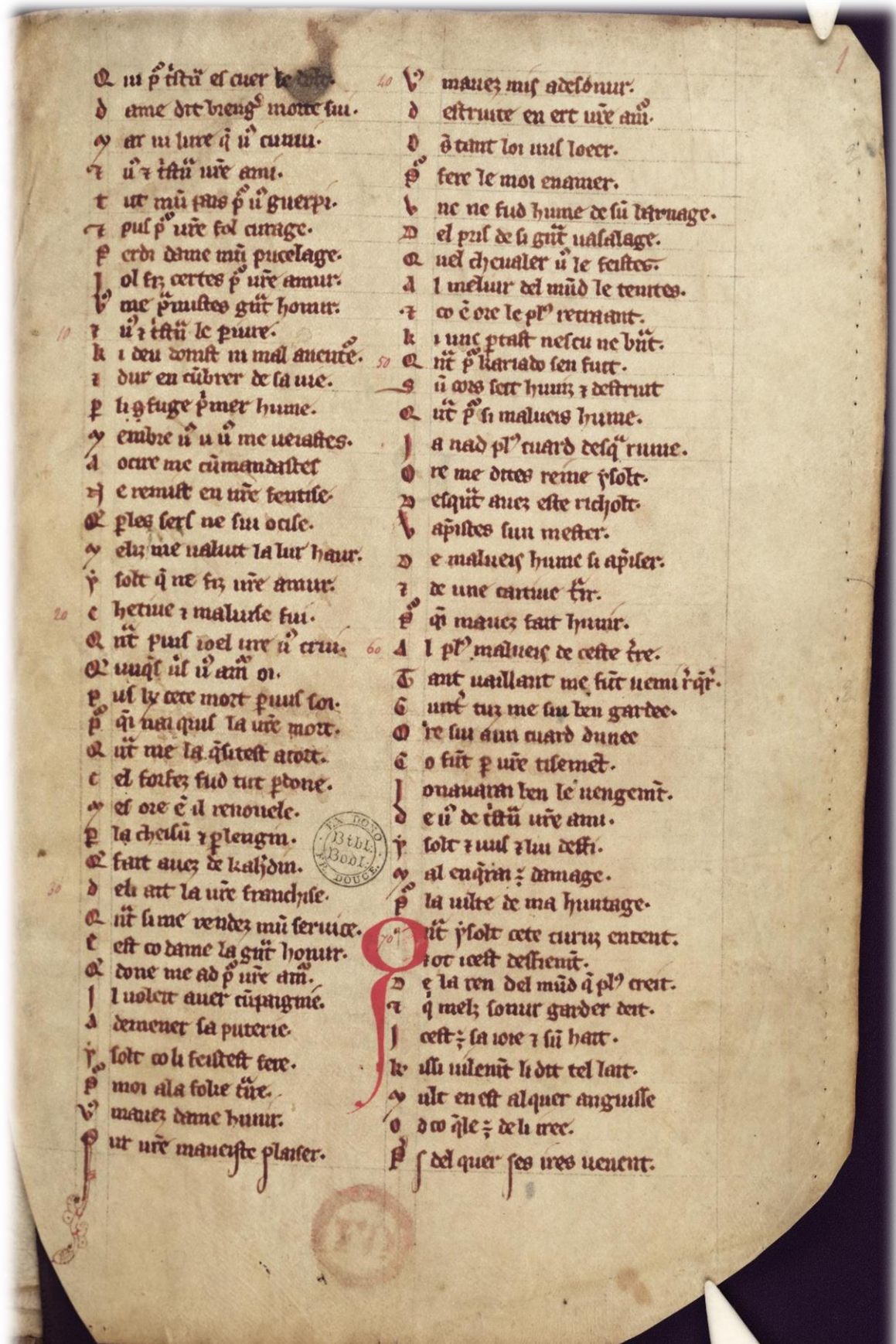
The complexity of Bérout's *Tristan* remains highly extraordinary. The interpretation of his text is neither comfortable, nor easy. According to Lacy, the dynamics of the text "appear fragile and confused and narrative stances are unstable.". The narrator of the story "offers a sympathetic treatment of the two principal characters, even though they are habitual liars and unrepentant sinners." It seems, that the romance glorifies illicit love, it does not condemn the lovers but those who dare to oppose them: "it also comes very close to condoning personal betrayal if not literal treason. Tristan and Isolde are praised and loved by most of the characters, defined by the narrator, protected by God, and denounced only by persons whom the narrator himself denounces as evil, jealous, and hateful. (Lacy, 1999, 1)

Concerning the motive of the love triangle, Mark-Tristan-Isolde, it still remains in some ways 'courtly'. Tristan glorifies Isolde in his songs, which he performs for her. This love triangle together with "the catalyst for most of the events in the narrative is related in Bérout by a partisan narrator, familiar from the *chanson de geste*<sup>4</sup>" (Gaunt and Kay 141).

Apparently, Tristan and Isolde in Bérout's version were not properly punished for their sins. It seems that the consequences of their sins were "often mild and more often non-existent." King Mark became suspicious again and again but he longed with the punishment. Later, he started to threaten the lover that he will hurt them, but actually, he never did so. (Lacy, 1999, 3)

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<sup>4</sup> The term *Chanson de geste* refers to epic or heroic poems, (or sometimes manuscript rubrics refer to them as *romans*), which designate almost any kind of vernacular narrative text, including chronicles, saint's lives and beast epic (e.g. *Le Roman de Renart*). (Gaunt and Kay, 2008, 11)

Figure 2 – First page from *Tristan* by Thomas of Britain. 13th century. Bodleian Library, Oxford.



Thomas's version of *The Romance of Tristan*, written in Anglo-Norman octosyllabic verse, can be dated with more certitude than Béroul's version. It is assumed that its origin is to be dated to around 1173. However, the text of Thomas of Britain is written in the form of discontinuous fragments including several lacunae.

There are about six manuscripts preserved, which contain different pieces of the story. Two manuscripts called *Douce* and *Sneyd* are conserved in the Bodleian Library (Figure 2) in Oxford. They incorporate the most important parts of the plot. These manuscripts are also the longest surviving fragments. Unfortunately, another manuscript, located in Strasbourg Library, was damaged by fire caused by bombing during the Franco-Prussian War in 1870. The next manuscript from Italian Turin was lost. Nevertheless, the text was transcribed before it disappeared. The fifth manuscript, *Manuscript of Cambridge*, is the smallest and without any doubt the newest one. It is preserved in the Library of Cambridge. On a balance, there are around 3 082 Thomas's verses preserved, almost one sixth of the original text. *The Romance of Tristan* by Thomas of Britain inspired Gottfried of Strasbourg to write his twelfth-century German adaptation. (Walter 11)

Another manuscript was found in 1995:

Until the Carlisle Fragment was discovered in 1995, all these fragments came from what must have been the last quarter or third of the original romance, beginning with Tristan's leaving King Mark's court to travel to his homeland in Brittany, and ending with the lovers' deaths. (Shoaf)

What also survived are the versions based on Thomas's text. There is a translation into Old Norse of the entire romance by Brother Robert, and a translation into 13th-century High German by Gottfried von Strassburg, which is unfinished. It ends with the very same scene as the scene represented by the first surviving fragment passage, Tristran's departure. A Middle English poem, *Sir Tristrem*, also follows Thomas's version of the story. (Shoaf)

**Table 2: Overview of the Tristanian manuscripts by Thomas<sup>5</sup>**

<b>Name of the manuscript</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Verses</b>
<i>The Cambridge Manuscript</i>	Cambridge, University Library	52
<i>The Carlisle Manuscript</i>	Cumbria Record Office	154
<i>The Oxford Manuscript, Douce</i>	Oxford, Bodleian Library	1817
<i>The Sneyd I,II Manuscript, French</i>	Oxford, Bodleian Library	889
<i>The Strasbourg Manuscript</i>	University Library	69
<i>The Turin Manuscript</i>	Accademia delle Scienze, Italia	258

Regrettably though, both French *Romances of Tristan* (Bérout's and Thomas's) are preserved only in a damaged state. By a happy coincidence, both plots partly complement each other. Bérout's version, which starts in the middle of an encounter of two lovers and ends up with the partial vengeance of Tristan on the point of leaving Isolde and the Cornwall, while Thomas's work also opens up to a situation of irremediable separation, even though it is provoked by different circumstances: at the price of a slight contradiction, it is therefore possible to link the two texts as it was the same work. Moreover, thanks to the various fragments of manuscripts of Thomas's text, we have an ending of the romance, which has so impressed generations of readers and become the key element of the myth of unhappy lovers. (Berthelot 4)

### 2.2.1 THOMAS OF BRITAIN (THOMAS D'ANGLETERRE)

There are very few facts known about Thomas of Britain. He is also known under the names: Thomas of England and Thomas of Brittany. French literature and some English sources refer to him as Thomas d'Angleterre and this name is used most frequently. Probably, he was most likely an Anglo-Norman cleric. This may be proven by his rationalism influenced by rhetoric, syllogisms according to the rules and his style which follows the laws of the *ornatus facilis*<sup>6</sup>. He knew the *Disciplina Clericalis*<sup>7</sup>. Nevertheless, his topic did not completely correspond with an attitude of a cleric in a

<sup>5</sup> Data is taken from Brun, Laurent. "Thomas." *Arlima*, *archives de littérature du Moyen Âge* [https://www.arlima.net/qt/thomas\\_dangleterre.html](https://www.arlima.net/qt/thomas_dangleterre.html) Accessed 13 November 2018

<sup>6</sup> *Ornatus facilis* is a term used for medieval rhetoric. This rhetoric is characterized by figures of repetition whose purpose is to avoid forced imagery and artificiality. (Dictionary of World Biography: The Middle Ages, Volume II, 435)

<sup>7</sup> *Disciplina Clericalis* is a textbook of wisdom dedicated to clerics. (Britannica)

sense of a churchman. He occurred in courtly circles and had a marked fondness for psychological analyses tinged with preciousness. His originality consists in the presentation of the subject; it is by this that he is courteous, not by the theme, which is tragic. Thomas's "courtesy" has been questioned lately; in our opinion, the traditional opposition: courteous version (Thomas), common version (Béroul) is maintained with some corrections. (Wind 12)

He settled in England. He is assumed to have lived at the court of King Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine. Thomas might have found an inspiration in the work *Roman de Brut* written by Wace and used certain elements from this work in *Tristan*. Both of them were inspired by a chronicle *Historia Regum Britanniae* written by Geoffrey of Monmouth. (Academic)

Because of the fragmental state of the manuscripts, the plot will be examined from the six preserved sections - from their digitalized versions or their French translation by Lacroix and Walter (1989).

### 2.2.2 SYNOPSIS

Unfortunately, the first 38 verses of *the Carlisle Fragment* have not been preserved completely. Only a few words and phrases can be found. This fragment, discovered recently, conserves the dialogue between Isolde and Tristan which follows their drinking of the love potion, the consumption of their passion, their arrival in England, the marriage of Isolde and Mark, and their wedding night.

Tristan and Isolde were on the ship from Ireland to Cornwall. They expressed their mutual desire and passion as they were under power of a love potion. They tried to be together both during the day and during the night, as much as they could. They were not afraid of any intimacy. Isolde's maid Brangien warned them but she was bound by a promise of confidentiality. Nevertheless, Tristan and Isolde loved each other and suffered at the same time as the vessel approached the coast of Cornwall. At the shore, Isolde married King Mark shortly after her arrival. As she was no longer a virgin, Brangien replaced her on the King's bed during the wedding night. The King drank a lot of alcohol and the light candle was blown, he could not recognize the difference.

Later, the King and a dwarf found the lovers asleep in the orchard. They came late so they did not find them "in the act". However, the King was upset by what he had seen.

He asked the dwarf to wait there while he ran to the palace in order to find his barons. Tristan woke up and warned Isolde that they were discovered. He explained to her, that he must escape and subsequently he left her with a heavy heart. He realized that they could never be together and decided to let himself be enthralled by another woman. This woman was very similar to Isolde and seemed to be a perfect compensation. She bore her name with the attribute Isolde of the White Hands (in French: Iseult aux Blanches Mains) and her beauty was equal to that of the Queen Isolde. Nonetheless, Tristan was not able to consummate the marriage because of his love for the real Isolde. Afterwards, Tristan put himself in service of king Arthur and fought against a giant.

Tristan and Kaherdin were heading to England. Kaherdin desired to visit Brangien and, of course, Tristan wished to see Isolde. After a long and exhausting journey, they both arrived in a town. They heard that King Mark and his company had to spend the night in the same town. Tristan and Kardin decided to meet them. They climbed up and hid in an oak tree where they observed the procession of the king's company without being spotted. They were trying to spot the Queen and Brangien<sup>8</sup>.

Tristan returned with Kaherdin back to Brittany, but before he left, he wished to meet Isolde once again. He camouflaged himself as a leper<sup>9</sup> and stood in front of the king's court. Finally, on a feast day, the King and the Queen came out of the palace. Tristan asked the Queen for mercy for God's sake and begs for alms. The Queen continued her way. Tristan followed the whole procession and kept on asking for alms. When they arrived at church, Isolde looked at him very angrily and suddenly, she recognized him since he was holding a goblet, she gave him. She wanted to put her ring in it but Brangien noticed her and recognized Tristan, so he backed off. He hid in a ruined building at the king's court and thought about his next moves. Occasionally, he fell asleep and frost took him slowly. Isolde begged Brangien to come and find Tristan and bring him to her. After a long time, she persuaded her and Brangien brought Tristan to her chamber. After spending a night together, Tristan headed back to his land and to his wife.

He joined his wife Isolde of the White Hands, but instead of expressing love for her, she became jealous of the other Isolde, whom Tristan loved. Her heart was filled with

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<sup>8</sup> Here we can see the inspiration for a *lai* by Marie de France. She describes this moment in *Chevrefoil*. However, her ending does not correspond with Thomas's following retelling.

<sup>9</sup> There is another moment, which inspired the authors of *Folie Tristan*. They narrate this short episode, when Tristan managed to get into the castle dressed like a fool in order to meet with Isolde.

pain, anxiety and torment. Secretly, she started wearing a cilice as Tristan with Kaherdin left again for England.

Tristan and Kaherdin snuck into King Mark's palace in disguise during a celebration. During the celebration, a dwarf killed Kaherdin and injured Tristan with a poisoned blade. Tristan, located back home in Brittany, knew that there was only one person, who could save him. He sent Gouvernal on a ship to bring Isolde, who possessed knowledge of medicinal herbs. If the ship arrives with white sails, it means Isolde is aboard, if not, sails are going to be black. The ship with white sails was approaching the shore of Brittany and Tristan asked his wife what colour the sails were. Since his health was very weak, he could not come and see himself. Isolde of the White Hands, filled with jealousy, told him the sails were black. Tristan expired out of despair. When the Queen Isolde arrived to her lover, she found him dead. The grief of her loss overcame her and subsequently she passed away at his side.

### 2.2.3 SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS OF SUBCHAPTERS 2.1 AND 2.2

Both texts, Bérout's and Thomas's take part in an old tradition of Tristanian legend. They are the oldest preserved texts that have existed for over eight centuries. On the one hand, there remains only one of Bérout's incomplete manuscript. On the other hand, Thomas's version is well preserved in 6 fragmentary manuscripts. Even though the story is incomplete in both texts, the preserved manuscripts almost cover it up. The texts resemble each other in their form, since they are both written in octosyllabic verse.

Bérout's and Thomas's points of view on certain events in the story vary. Each of them approaches the story from a different perspective. Unlike Bérout, "Thomas sees nothing ironic in the fact that Isolde's equivocation should have brought about this most satisfactory of folklaw verdicts: honour appeased, and dissension healed" (Wallace 414).

In this version we also encounter the power of the love potion, which plays its role. Tristan and Isolde drank it up accidentally. The duration of efficiency of the love potion varies from one author to another. In comparison with Bérout, who claims the love potion is efficient for the period of three years, Thomas claims the efficacy of the love potion lasts forever.

The occurrence of certain characters differs, either because of the fragmentary and incomplete state of the manuscript or due to the author's adaptation. In both versions, we

encounter the basic characters, but also those who play minor roles. However, some of them came along only in the first or second version. The barons and the dwarf are present in Bérout's and also in Thomas's version. They serve as guards of good manners and the King's honour. However, Kaherdin, a friend of Tristan occurs only in Thomas's version.

Also, the motive of jealousy plays a significant part in Thomas's version. Either the jealousy of King Mark, who must cope with the fact that his wife is having an affair with his nephew or the jealousy of Isolde of the White Hands. In comparison with King Mark, whose jealousy had only mild consequences, Isolde of the White Hands brought his husband to death.

2.3 CHEVREFOIL BY MARIE DE FRANCE 1160 – 1170

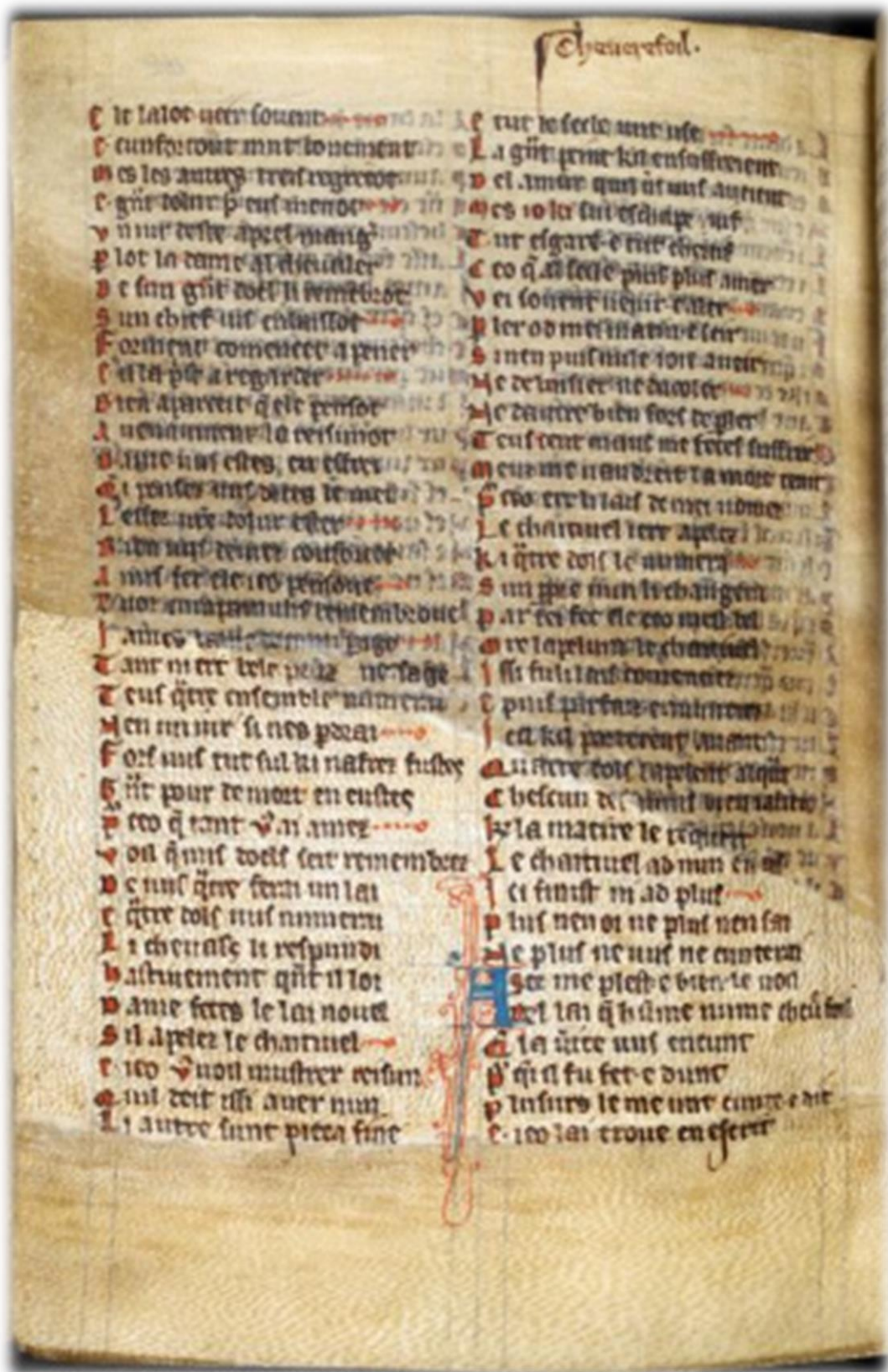


Figure 3 – First page from *Chevrefoil* by Marie de France. the Harley 978 manuscript of the British Museum

Marie de France wrote a courtly poem on Tristan's story and she titled it in Anglo-Norman dialect *Lai del Chievrefoil*. In French, we encounter the name *le Lai du Chèvrefeuille*, which translates into English as "Honeysuckle". The text was probably created between 1160 and 1170 as a part of the collection of *lais*. The whole composition of *lais* (*The Lais of Marie de France*) contains 12 texts, named mostly after the knights of the Round Table *Guidemar*, *Equitan*, *Le Fresne* (The Ash Tree), *Bisclavret* (The Werewolf), *Lanval*, *Les Deux Amants* (The Two Lovers), *Yonec*, *Le Rossignol* (The Nightingale), *Milon*, *Le Malheureux*, *Le Chevrefoil* (The Honeysuckle) and *Eliduc*. *Chevrefoil* is the eleventh poem in the collection. As may well be seen from the figure 3 above, the collection of *the Lais of Marie de France* has been very well preserved until today, and the whole text is perfectly legible on the original.

Concerning the form of the *lai*, the text is written in octosyllables with flat rhymes (AABB). The *lai* contains 118 verses, so it is shorter in comparison with the other texts on Tristan and Isolde. It seems this *lai* was created at the time of the birth of the legend and its oral transmission. It is preserved in two manuscripts: *the Harley 978 manuscript* of the British Museum, dating from the middle of the 13th century, and *the manuscript New French Acquisitions 1104* of the National Library in Paris, which dates from the end of the 13th century. It contains an isolated episode where Tristan and Isolde meet secretly in a forest where they can freely enjoy their love for a short time. (Walter 12)

*Chevrefoil* of Marie de France narrates a short episode about perfect understanding between the two lovers. Tristan manages to pass a message to the Queen and meets her. (Berthelot 4)

It is obvious that Marie de France does not deal much with the psychology of the characters. She begins her *lai* with a short prologue, in which she addresses the readers (or listeners since *lai* was a musical form) and takes them directly into the action of the story.

For the purpose of this thesis, I have read the translated text of the *lai* from Old French into Modern French done by Phillippe Walter and from its English translation by Judy Shoaf. The reader is reminded that all the adaptations of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were translated in prose.



### 2.3.1 MARIE DE FRANCE

Little is known about the life of Marie de France. We don't even know her full name. This woman writer and poetess is known only under her name and place of origin she referred to herself as in her work. Her simple introduction is written between the verses of her *Lais*: "My name is Marie, and I am from France."

She probably lived between 1154 and 1189. Specialists note that she was born in France (Île-de-France) and lived in England at the Anglo-Angevin court of Henry II. She rightly deserves a title of the "first French woman of letters" with her numerous works as *Lais*, *Fables* and *Espurgatoire Saint Patrice* and *La Vie seinte Audree*. In her work, there are several signs of the Anglo-Norman dialect. The style of Marie de France is quite simple and clear, but on the other hand also a bit dry. (Poirion)

Marie does not consider herself as the author of the *lai*. She claims that she heard it many times and she even saw it written. (Grimbert 30)

### 2.3.2 SYNOPSIS

The whole *lai Chevrefoil* is opened by the author's speech in which she directly addresses the reader. Marie announces that she is going to retell the story about Queen and Sir Tristram and "their love so true, so pure, from which their sorrows multiplied, then, in a single day, both died" (Shoaf 1). She also announces that it is Tristan who composed the *lai* "so that his adventures with his lover Isolde are not forgotten" (Whalen 20). Subsequently, the story starts with the depiction of the plot:

King Mark chased Tristan out of his kingdom because he discovered that Tristan and Isolde had an affair. Tristan returned to his homeland, South Wales, and stayed there for a year. However, he strongly desired to see Isolde. He came back to Cornwall and hid in the forest. He heard that King's procession should pass this way. "He cut a hazel in half there, shaped and trimmed it, neatly square" and created a stick on which he wrote his name (Shoaf 3). Then he put it on the way, hoping that Isolde would find it and notice what was written on it. And so she did.

On her own, she strayed from the path and looked for Tristan. They reunited again. They talked about their situation and tried to find a solution to it. The Queen promised to attempt a reconciliation with the King:

Then she outlines every little thing  
Needed to make peace with the King,  
For it weighs heavy on her husband  
Thus to have sent him from the land--  
Accusers forced him, it wasn't fair. (Shoaf 4)

Afterwards, she had to leave him alone. Tristan returned home and waited for the King's message. Finally, King Mark forgave him and invited him to return to his court. The story ends with the following verses, which announce that it is Tristan, who composed the *lai*:

Because of the joy, the delight  
He found in his beloved's sight,  
And because of what he'd written,  
Exactly as the Queen had spoken,  
To keep those words in memory sharp,  
Tristan, who played so well the harp,  
Made of this a brand-new lai.  
The name is easy for me to say:  
English folk call it "Goatleaf,"  
French "Chevrefoil" ("Honeysuckle," in brief).  
I've spoken for you the whole truth of the lai  
Which I recounted for you today. (Shoaf 4)

In contrast to the previous versions depicted above, Marie de France chose the happy ending. Luckily enough, Tristan was forgiven by King Mark and he returned back to his court in Cornwall.

### 2.3.3 SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The version by Marie de France clearly distinguishes from the two previous medieval versions since it contains only a short episode of Tristanian legend. Probably, she came out from Thomas's version and adapted the story to a short poem.

Firstly, Chevrefoil differs in the form. In comparison with two long poetic romances, Chevrefoil is merely a short *lai* of 118 verses. Secondly, the usual plot of the story also varies. In association of Tristan and Isolde, we always expect tragic death of

the lovers at the end. However, Marie de France decided to change it and her poem is finished with a happy ending instead.

In *Chevrefoil*, there are only a limited number of characters. Since the *lai* is very short on the whole, only three main characters are present: King Mark, Isolde and Tristan. In the *lai*, Mark does not take any action, only his presence and his deeds are described. The main participants in the action are Tristan and Isolde, who meet briefly in the woods.

The motive of love between Isolde and Tristan in *Chevrefoil* seems to be so great, they must die without each other. As Marie describes herself the name of the *lai* *Chevrefoil* fits well with the story of two unfortunate lovers. *Chevrefoil* = the Honeysuckle “clings to the hazel branch: when it has wound itself round and attached itself to the hazel, the two can survive together: but if anyone should then attempt to separate them, the hazel quickly dies, as does the honeysuckle” (Whalen 43). After the all consequences, Tristan still longs to see his lover again and suffers if separated.

The consequences of Tristan’s wrongdoing seem to be again quite moderated. The King neither punished Tristan physically, nor put him in a prison. Instead, he was expelled from the kingdom. This may be because of Tristan’s kinship with the king.

2.4 TRISTRANT UND ISALDE BY EILHART VON OBERGE ≈1175

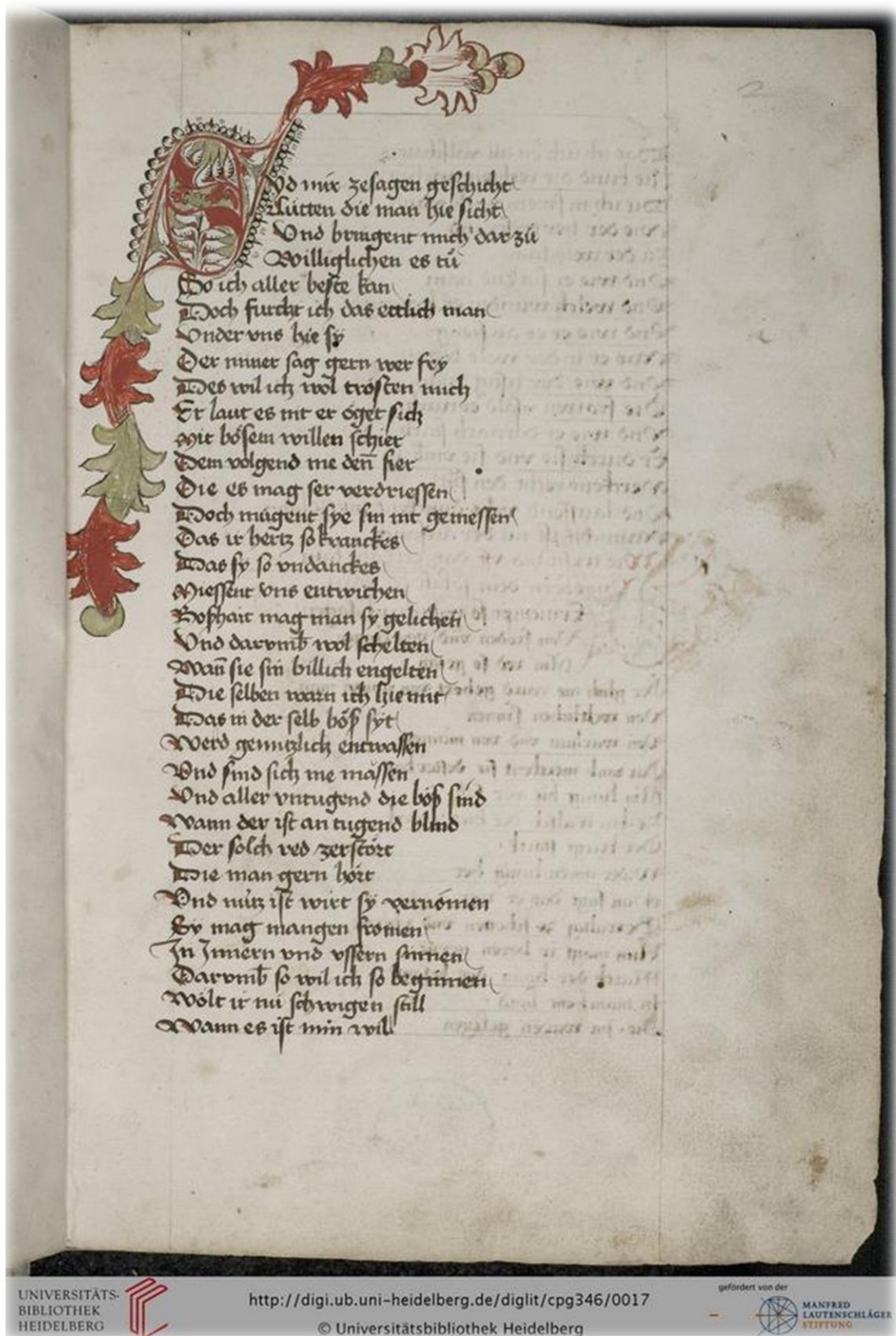


Figure 4 – First page from *Tristrant* by Eilhart von Oberg, 1455. Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, Cod. Pal. germ. 346, Germany

*Tristrant und Isalde*, written by Eilhart von Oberge, is supposed to be the oldest complete text of the story about the Tristan and Isolde. As may be seen in figure 4, the text is well preserved and completely legible. The whole story contains 9 444 verses. Oberge was likely inspired by the original French version while writing his adaptation of the story in the Middle High German language. The date of creation is considered between the years 1170 and 1190, however we may also encounter the year of creation 1175. “Among the non-French versions, a place of honour is due to Eilhart von Oberge’s *Tristrant* which seems to draw on sources used by Bérout, and the foreign transcriptions of the work of Thomas, which were very successful (...).” (D’Esplas 5)

As it is conserved in plenty of manuscripts, it is possible to access “three fragmentary manuscripts from around 1200 and three complete 15-th century paper manuscripts, which obviously exerted tremendous influence on subsequent generations” (Encyclopedia of medieval literature). The manuscripts are preserved in various libraries in German: National Library in Berlin, Dresden Library Mscr.M.42 (D) and Heidelberg Library (Codices Palatini germanici 346 (H)).

Same as Bérout’s work, Oberge’s version “belongs to the same tradition, the primitive or common version of the legend” (Lacy et al. 100). Both authors used the same general plot, and so it is supposed that they proceeded from a common source. Nevertheless, there is also a possibility that Eilhart von Oberge created a free adaptation of the original French text. Lacy claims, that “Eilhart’s poem is worthy of admiration, on the other hand, characters’ psychological motivation” seems to be rather weak. (Lacy et al. 100)

Even though Oberge’s version is completed, it omits certain scenes, which are included in the more detailed version of Bérout. E.g. The scene with the equivocal oath or the death of the dwarf is left out completely: (Lacy et al. 100)

The episodes preserved in both romances show some striking differences of detail, and Eilhart’s romance, bringing the story to a conclusion, also preserves such episodes as that of the second Isolde, not included in the French fragment. (Lacy et al. 100)

#### 2.4.1 EILHART VON OBERGE

Eilhart von Oberge flourished in 12th century and might have been active approximately between the years 1150 – 1200. He was a poet of German origin, who was “important in the history of the court epic and the development of the Tristan and Isolde story in Romance literature” (Britannica). He was also “a member of a Brunswick family mentioned in the records of Henry III of Saxony.” (Britannica) Eilhart was the first poet who introduced the legend of Tristan and Isolde to the German audience at the court of the duke of Brunswick, Henry the Lion. (Encyclopedia of medieval literature, 2013)

Eilhart von Oberge proceeded from an Old French source now lost in order to create an epic *Tristrant und Isalde*. However, it is not easy to evaluate his importance:

Uncertainty about his chronological position in relation to Heinrich von Veldeke (the Flemish author of *Eneit*, a retelling of the story of Aeneas), the corruptness of the early fragment, and later complete but modified versions of his epic make it difficult to assess Eilhart’s importance. His epic was popular, for it provided the basis of a 15th-century prose novel, *Tristrant und Isalde*, and a tragedy by Hans Sachs. Its relationship to the classic epic by Gottfried von Strassburg (fl. 1210) is clear but less significant. (Britannica)

What is interesting, the Czech version of Tristan and Isolde from the 14th century was based on the text of Eilhart von Oberge and other German versions. (Encyclopedia of medieval literature, 2013)

#### 2.4.2 SYNOPSIS

Rivalin fell in love with Blanchefleur and gained her as a reward since he helped King Mark in a war. Blanchefleur gave birth to a son Tristan. Unfortunately, she died after giving birth.

When Tristan became older, he decided to go to Cornwall and see his uncle, King Mark. Morholt came to threaten Mark and so Tristan decided to face him. Tristan defeated him, however, he was injured by poisonous lance.

Because of the injury, Tristan suffers a lot. He is about to die, so he asks to be sent to sea on a ship. They do as he said and Tristan appears on the surface with his sword and harp. The ship is heading to Ireland, where Isolde found him and healed him.

Subsequently, Tristan returned to Cornwall. Mark was very content and he wanted Tristan to be his successor on the throne. Nonetheless, his courtiers kept on persuading Mark to get married, so Mark made up a bridal quest, which he supposed as impossible to complete. He asked to bring a lady, whose hair was brought by fighting swallows.

Tristan was sent on his way and sought the lady in Ireland, where the ship brought him. Actually, he had no idea that the hair belonged to Isolde. When he saw her, all was clear. In order to obtain Isolde, Tristan had to kill a dragon. He succeeded in this task and gained Isolde as future bride for King Mark. However, on the way to Cornwall, they drank a love potion, which efficacy lasted four years. They fell in love with each other and the lovers lost their virginity to each other. Nevertheless, when they arrived to Cornwall, Isolde married King Mark. She switched with her maid Brangien during the wedding night so the king did not notice a thing.

The lovers continued their affair and the king became suspicious. Subsequently, they were discovered, and the king threatened the lovers with death. However, the lovers managed to escape, and they were able to live two years in the woods. During one night, Mark managed to find them. He intruded in their hideout, being sure not wake them up. He just changed his sword with Tristan's. In the morning, the lovers understood that Mark had visited them. They decided to reconcile with the king. Mark accepted the reconciliation with Isolde, but Tristan was banished from the Kingdom.

Tristan went to the court of King Arthur. There he performed several heroic acts and participated in several battles. Afterwards, he got married with another woman, Isolde of White Hands. Nonetheless, their marriage remained unconsummated. Meanwhile, Tristan attempted to meet Isolde again several times. He succeeded, was caught and escaped again.

Tristan was again seriously injured by poisoned lances. He asked for Isolde, who was the only one, who could heal him. The ending of the story developed traditionally with the arrival of the ship with white sails, which carried Isolde on board. As we know from previous depiction, Isolde of the White Hands lied to her husband and claimed that the ship landed with black sails without Isolde. Consequently, Tristan could not bear his injuries anymore and died. Isolde disembarked together with King Mark and sought Tristan. When she found him dead, she embraced him and died too. For the first time, King Mark learned about the love potion, which caused the love affair. He forgave the

lovers, buried them and he planted a vine on their graves. The vine grew and connected with each other. That was a sign of eternal love between Tristan and Isolde.

#### 2.4.3 SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

Eilhart's *Tristan und Isalde* is considered the first complete text of the legend, besides the text of Marie de France, who wrote only a short *lai*. This version was written in Middle High German language around the year 1175 in a form of verse.

The version of Eilhart von Oberge deflects substantially from the classic versions as we know them from Thomas of Britain, Gottfried von Strasbourg and Brother Robert. Since Mark wished that Tristan would inherit his throne, he did not intend to get married. Nevertheless, his courtiers persuaded him to do so. Consequently, he asked Tristan to find and bring the lady to whom belong beautiful hair he had found. (Lacy et al, *The New Arthurian Encyclopedia*)

In this version we also encounter the love potion. Apart from Thomas, for whom its efficacy lasts forever, and Bérout, who claimed it lasts three years, Eilhart extended this period to four years. Both Bérout and Eilhart perceive the couple as victims of magic.

The Eilhart's version is characterised by the role of Fortune and the narrator's irony. However, his version lacked "an intellectual depth, it broadly appealed to a wide audience throughout the centuries, especially because several humorous scenes based on grotesque misunderstandings and violence offer fairly coarse entertainment" (*Encyclopedia of medieval literature*). What is significant, the Arthurian world is included in Eilhart's version, whereas in version of Gottfried von Strasbourg the centre of concentration is the court of Cornwall. (*Encyclopedia of medieval literature*)

As in all the versions, Eilhart von Oberge describes the destiny of the love triangle including Isalde, Tristrant and the King Marke. "The illicit love affair" between Tristan and Isalde was again "brought about by a love potion concocted by Isalde's mother" (*Encyclopedia of medieval literature*). She wanted to dedicate it for her daughter and her future husband King Marke. Unfortunately, the love potion was drunk up by Isalde and Tristrant, who stayed together for four years.

"Eilhart followed the lover's story until the bitter end," when Tristrant married another woman and later, he was "mortally wounded from the battle" (*Encyclopedia of medieval literature*). Here again, his beloved Isalde came to his rescue



but his wife betrayed him and said Isalde is not coming. The story traditionally ends with the death of both lovers. (Encyclopedia of medieval literature)

2.5 THE OXFORD FOLIE TRISTAN ≈1180

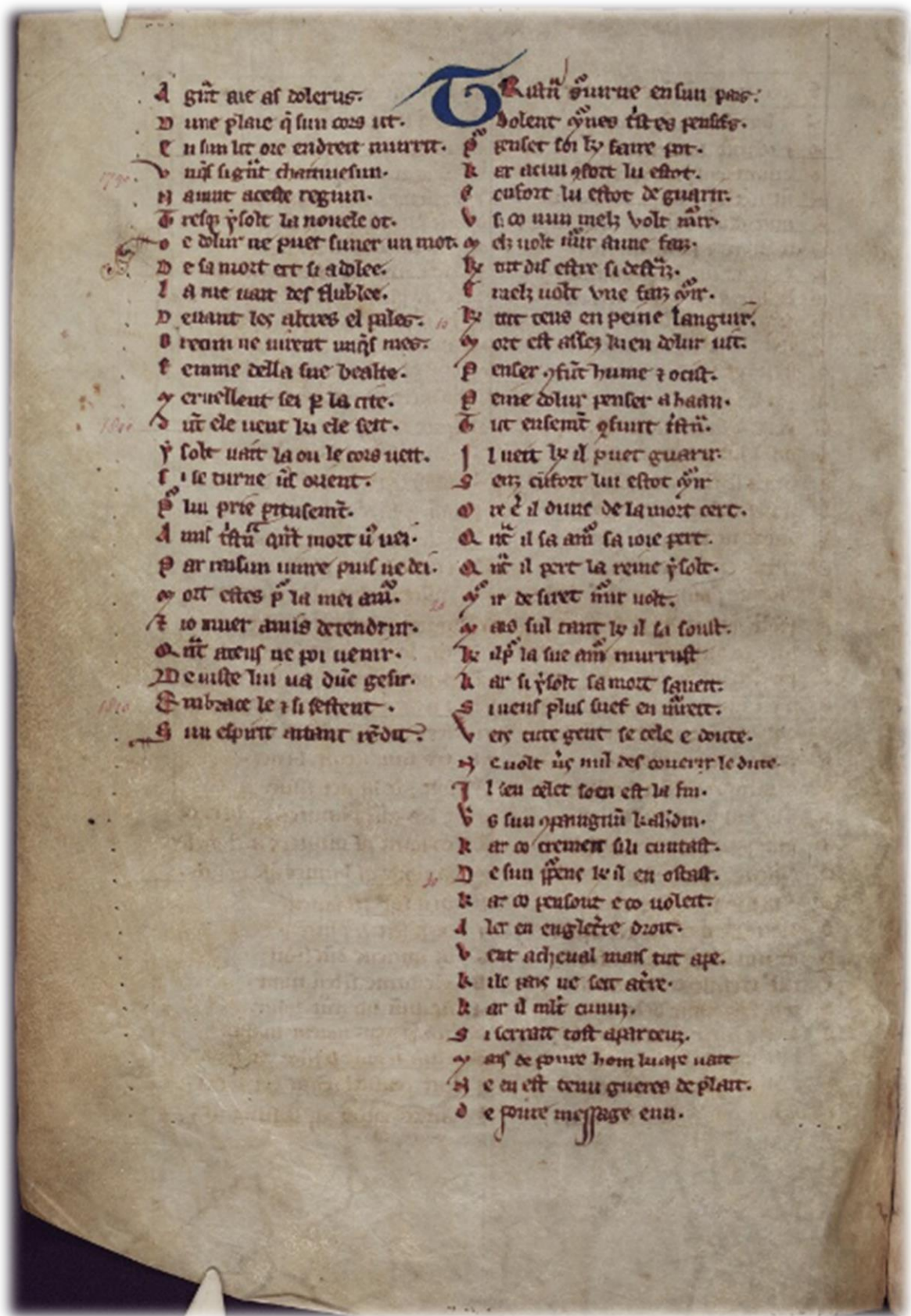


Figure 5 – First page from *La Folie Tristan D'Oxford*, Anonymous. 1250. Bodleian Library MS. Douce d. 6, Oxford.

Another form of Tristanian legend can be found in *The Folie Tristan*. The English names of the story are *the Tale of Tristan's Madness* (translated by Alan S. Fedrick in 1970) or simply *Tristan's Madness*, but also *The Folly of Tristan*. The title of the text comes from a short story about some strange behaviour of Tristan, who pretends to be a madman in order to get closer to Isolde. These versions are not the whole novels written in prose it was the case in previous versions, but there are rather short episodes from the Tristanian legend also written in verse. It is assumed that the origin of both versions dates to the end of the twelfth century. *The Oxford Folie Tristan* is supposed to be older and probably written around the year 1180. *The Berne Folie Tristan* was written few years later, probably around the year 1200. (Arlima, 2018) *The Folie Tristan* concerns two versions with the same title written in Anglo-Norman language. In order to distinguish both versions, they were named after their place of location. *The Oxford Folie Tristan* is located in Bodleian Library MS. Douce d.6. in Oxford, UK and the *The Berne Folie Tristan* (Bern manuscript, No. 354) in Switzerland. They present two different versions of the same episode. The Oxford manuscript covers 998 verses while the Berne manuscript contains only 572 of them. *The Oxford Folie* probably draws on *the Bern Folie*. It describes Tristan's short return to the court of Cornwall where he wanted to meet with Queen Isolde. Tristan disguised himself as a fool, so no one could recognize him. He wished to enter the palace of King Mark where he was forbidden to stay. (Lacroix and Walter 12)

*The Oxford manuscript* is the longest and therefore more polished text of both *Folies* since it contains 998 octosyllabic verses in flat rhymes. The previous image (fig. 5) shows a unique digitized copy of the manuscript. The manuscript consists of Tristan romances, which were written in Anglo-Norman verse and other short texts: (fols. 1r-12v), making it "the longest surviving fragment of Thomas's Tristan (lines 1269-3086), (fols. 12v-19r) the unique copy of *the Folie Tristan d'Oxford*, etc., in an English manuscript of the mid or later 13th century" (Digital Bodleian). It has been restored in the Bodleian Library in Oxford under its original name *La Folie Tristan d'Oxford* (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Douce, d 6, f. 12vb-19ra). The origin of the manuscript is dated to approximately the year 1250 and is written in Anglo-Norman language. As may be seen from the figure, the state of the manuscript is very well preserved and contains no lacunae. (Digital Bodleian)

This version is “related to the courtly version of the Tristan story as narrated by Thomas” (Lacy 219). Tristan, dressed like a fool, returned to Mark’s kingdom and “makes repeated references to his relationship with the queen, but he is recognized neither by Mark nor, for some time, by the queen herself” (Lacy 219).

#### 2.5.1 ANONYMOUS AUTHOR

As was mentioned above, the author of both versions of *Folie* is unknown. However, we may assume that he found inspiration in Thomas’s version, since “its tone and spirit clearly mark the episodic accounts found” in both versions (Lacy 8). According to Hoëpffner, Thomas himself could be an author of this version. (Lacy 8)

The author of *the Oxford Folie Tristan* is methodically very much concerned with re-creating the history of the lovers up to the moment when the encounter narrated in the poem takes place.(Field 56)

#### 2.5.2 SYNOPSIS

Tristan and Kaherdin are in Brittany, at the court of Duke Hoël. However, it is not certain whether he is married to Isolde of the White Hands, as in previous *Folie*. (Lacroix and Walter 235)

Tristan was mourning since he left Queen Isolde. He stayed in the country and did not know what to do. He was trying to heal his love wound, however, he would prefer to be dead. He compared living in suffering to a state of death. He intended to return to England but on foot as a poor man without money in order not to be recognized. He knew that Mark would kill him in the case he found him. He did not tell anybody about his plans.

In the morning, he went to the shore and sailed across the sea to Great Britain. Two days later, he arrived at Tintagel, on the coast of Cornwall, where King Mark lived. No one could recognize him. Tristan asked people about the king, the queen and what else was new. He deeply wished to speak to Queen Isolde but was not sure how to approach her. He dressed like a fool. He changed his clothes with a fisher, cut his hair, changed his voice and coloured his face with herbs.

He succeeded in getting to the castle and got people’s attention. He started to behave foolishly and confessed publicly his love to the Queen Isolde. Mark and Isolde noticed him and subsequently, the king invited him into his chamber. He was amused by

Tristan's performance. Tristan introduced himself as Tantris and continued to court the Queen. He offered the King to change Isolde for Tantris's sister. He tried to gain Isolde's attention by reminding her their love story.

After saying that she did not know him, Isolde left the chamber angrily. She hurried to portray this episode with the fool to her maid Brangien. Brangien became suspicious and decided to find the fool. She managed to find him and discover his real identity. She brought him back to Isolde. Afterwards, Tristan presented the ring she gave him and the dog Husdent recognized him. Isolde realized that it was really him and they embraced.

## 2.6 THE BERNE FOLIE TRISTAN ≈1299

The version of French *Folie Tristan de Berne* or in English *The Berne Folie Tristan* is shorter. It is conserved in two manuscripts: *The Bern Manuscript* in Burgerbibliothek of Bern, Switzerland (354, f. 151rb-156rb) and a second manuscript in fragmentary state is stored in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, UK (302, f. 100rb). The longest manuscript contains 584 octosyllabic verse of flat rhymes. Its origin also dates to the end of the 12th century. (Arlima)

*The Berne Folie Tristan* also “offers much the same story as the preceding, but it is a less polished version, and its character and tone relate it more closely to the Bérουλ version than to that of Thomas” (Lacy 219).

### 2.6.1 ANONYMOUS AUTHOR

The author of *the Bern Folie Tristan* is unknown. However, from this version, written in French, we may find a certain inclination to Bérουλ’s version, whose character and tone is similar. (Lacy 2019)

The Bern Manuscript was recently discovered in Cambridge but these forty verses on a single folio do not significantly improve our knowledge of the handwriting tradition of *Folie Tristan*. The work is thought to have been composed after Thomas's novel. (Walter 12)

### 2.6.2 SYNOPSIS

The following summary of the plot of *the Berne Folie Tristan* is examined from the French translation by Walter and Phillippe (1989) and from English translation by Lacy (1998).

In this shorter episode of Tristan’s folly, we meet this young knight directly at the court of Mark. King Mark is tremendously angry because Tristan had already stolen his wife before. Instead of being punished, Tristan managed to escape.

Tristan was located at the court of Mark where he was not safe. He was not sure where to go or where to turn. Meanwhile, the king regretted that he could not take revenge on Tristan for his betrayal and consulted it with the barons. He asked them to extradite him if they saw Tristan and he expressed his gratitude for them if they find him. The barons promised to find him.

When Tristan heard the news about his punishment, he decided to leave the land. He deeply feared the king who threatened him with death if he found him. He had been on the run for a long time and missed Isolde. He suffered without her. He constantly thought about the possibility of meeting her and went slightly mad. Tristan decided to set on a way back to Cornwall. He travelled day and night in order to reach the sea as soon as possible. He changed his name to Tantris, tore his clothes, scratched his face and cut off his blond hair. People around him considered him mad and threw stones at him, nevertheless but he went on with going to the court.

No door closed, he managed to get directly to the castle in front of King Mark. Mark considered him a madman and asked him about his name and origin. Tristan claimed that he was a son of a walrus and a whale. He said the king brought his sister to the castle and wanted to exchange her for the queen. He would take her and build a house where they would take their pleasure. He revealed to the king that it was Brangien who prepared the love potion which was consumed by Isolde and Tristan. He told him he knew about the king's presence, when he was pretending to be asleep together with Isolde in a forest cabin. Their bodies were only separated by Tristan's sword. He continued in persuading Isolde that it is him and he compared his suffering with that of Yder from an Arthurian roman. Yder<sup>10</sup>, who killed a bear, never felt for Guinevere so much pain and torments that Tristan endured for Isolde. He claimed that he left Brittany and went to Spain. He wandered already enough on the world and went to find Isolde. Unfortunately, the king said he was occupied and needed to go hunting. He stopped listening to him and left. Everyone else, including Isolde, also followed the king and left the hall. Tristan stayed there alone.

In her chamber, Isolde discussed the strange meeting with a fool with her maid Brangien. She asked her to come and find the fool and bring him to her. Brangien did as queen ordered and found the fool. She discovered that it is, in fact, knight Tristan and asked him not to reveal his name yet. He blamed Brangien again of bringing the love potion and all the suffering she caused to Isolde and Tristan before. Subsequently, they two forgave each other and Brangien brought Tristan to Queen Isolde. Tristan said to Isolde, that all the time, he did not do anything else other than hide their "game." Their love made him suffer too much. Isolde still did not believe him, and so Tristan ordered

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<sup>10</sup> Yder is a character, which appears in many Arthurian texts. In the *Romance of King Yder*, he saved the life of Queen Guinevere and puts King Arthur in jealousy because of queen's sympathies to him.

bring in a dog, Husdent. The dog recognized him immediately and finally, Isolde believed that it was Tristan standing in front of her. What is more, he showed her the ring she gave him. In this point, Isolde understood she was a fool when she was unable to recognize him. They embraced each other and thought about next steps. They supposed that King Mark would be successful in hunting and would not return sooner than in a week. After this statement, they embraced again, and the story ends at this point.

## 2.7 SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS OF BOTH FOLIES

Both *Folies* represent the same short episode of Tristan's return to the court of Mark. They are mainly distinguished by its length. *The Berne Folie Tristan* is a shorter version in comparison with the previous *Folie*. *The Oxford Folie Tristan* is almost twice as long with its 998 verses. The Bern version contains 584 verses. The length of the *Folies* reflects on their polish, therefore on their quality. (Lacy 219)

Concerning the characters, in Bern version, we meet Tristan's friend called Dinas. This person is also mentioned in Bérout's version. However, Dinas does not appear in either Thomas's version nor in *the Oxford Folie Tristan*.

From *the Berne Folie* we know that Tristan was in Britany married to the second Isolde (of the White Hands), before he went back to Cornwall to see the queen. (Field 56)

In *the Berne Folie* one may find traces of the versions by Bérout and Eilhart von Oberge, therefore it is considered as a common version of the story. On the contrary, *the Oxford Folie*, is visibly influenced by Thomas's courtly version. (Grimbert 31)



2.8 TRISTAN BY GOTTFRIED VON STRASSBURG ≈1210

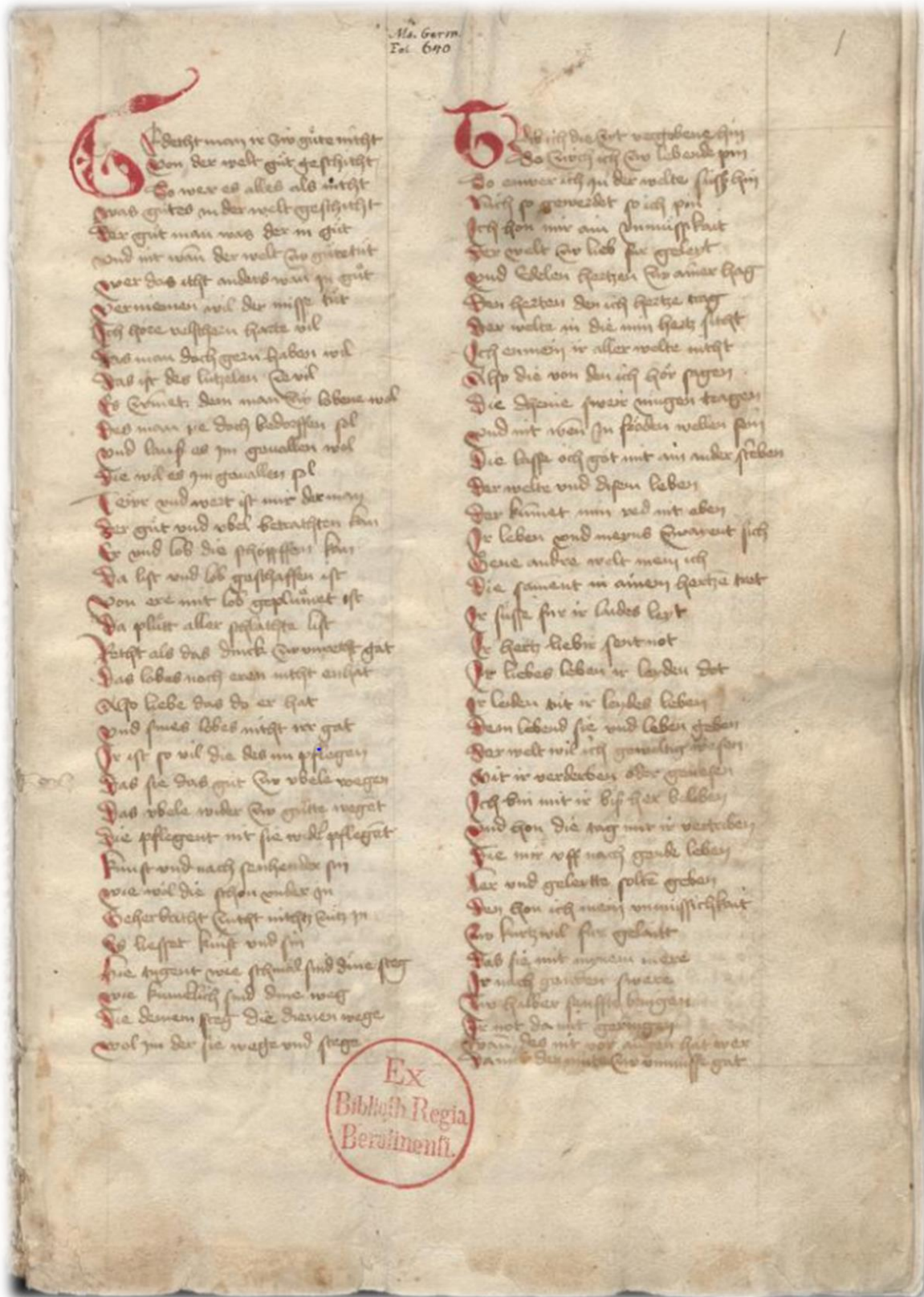


Figure 6 – First page from *Tristan*. 1461. Berlin, Staatsbibliothek und Preussischer Kulturbesitz, mgf 640 (B), Germany

Gottfried of Strasbourg (1180-1215), a German poet, rewrote *Tristan* of Thomas of England in the German language (Middle High German), around the year 1210. According to D'Esplas, Gottfried's version is seen as "the most beautiful German love epic in the High Middle Ages" (16). The text contains about 19,416 verses. (D'Esplas 16)

Gottfried von Strasbourg left the romance of Tristan and Isolde unfinished. His version written in "Middle High German rhymed couplets is a complex and difficult work" (Lacy et al, *The New Arthurian Encyclopedia*).

Due to the superior talent of Gottfried and to the fact that he continued the courtly version of the story, according to Thomas of Britain, his work became very popular. However, Gottfried's version breaks off before the Tristan's marriage to Isolde of White Hands. (Lacy et al. 101)

In his version, Gottfried uses the language by which he "breaks away from the conventional speech of his day" (D'Esplas 16). "He tried to express the unspeakable by freeing itself progressively from logical and syntactical principles, similar to a falcon, with which he compares Isolde the Fair: The bird (...) gazes into the depth of the azure before piercing the skies created to carry him. But the tenso is different" (D'Esplas 16).

### 2.8.1 GOTTFRIED VON STRASBOURG

Little is known about the life of Gottfried von Strasbourg. We know only his name and a few facts. However, it is sure that he died before completing his version of *Tristan*. Generally, it is thought that he was a man with a good education. Probably, he also moved in higher circles of the society. Concerning literature, he was fluent in both languages: French and German. (Chinca 6)

Nevertheless, we may observe "a good deal about his ideas and tastes from the work itself, especially his literary opinions and stylistic views. Obviously, Gottfried was "a learned and cultured poet and also an admirable stylist" (Lacy et al 101). Naturally, he was rather attached to the courtly version of the Tristanian legend, than to Bérout's or Eilhart's version. (Lacy et al. 101)

### 3.8.2 SYNOPSIS

Rivalin, Tristan's father died. Shortly enough, Tristan's mother died of grief and so did Tristan obtain his name after sorrow. Tristan is elevated by his foster parents.

Consequently, he was kidnapped and later he appeared at the court of King Mark of Cornwall.

King Mark, very fond of Tristan, sent him to gain Isolde. The Princess of Ireland should become the Queen of Cornwall and his wife. Nevertheless, Tristan and Isolde accidentally drank up the love potion, which was meant for the wedding night of Mark and Isolde. Even though they fell in love with each other, Isolde still must marry Mark and so she did. However, Isolde continued her affair with Tristan and so the love triangle emerged. Consequently, they face up the suspicion and they are persecuted by the courtiers. Their love affair was exposed and so the couple was forced to leave the court.

They decided to settle in the woods for some time. Later, they decide to return back to Cornwall. However, they continued in their love affair they got caught in bed by King Mark himself. This time, Tristan is forced to leave the court alone. He started to wander around and missed his lover. At this moment the story breaks off Thomas's conception because Gottfried died before finishing his piece.

### 2.8.3 SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

Gottfried's version is very similar to that of Thomas of Britain since he took it as a source and translated it to Middle High German. It separates in the point when Tristan left the court alone. Later, we learn that Tristan married Isolde of the White Hands from the "preserved fragments of Gottfried's source, Thomas of Britain, we know that the marriage remained unconsummated." (Lacy et al, *The New Arthurian Encyclopedia: New edition*)

We may guess the continuation of Gottfried's version from his source: sooner or later, Tristan started to die because of a poisoned wound and wished to see Isolde for the last time. The ship with white sails approached the shore. White sails were a sign that Isolde was on board. Nonetheless, Tristan's wife Isolde of White Hands lied to him when claiming that the sails were black. Tristan died of despair. When Isolde sighted his dead body, she embraced him and died.

In Gottfried's version, we may notice a contrast in respect with Isolde's and Mark's relationship: "Their marriage is a sacrament, but Gottfried passes over the ceremony in haste, and does not mention the officiation of a priest, unlike the wedding of Rivalin and Blanchefleur." (Chinca 24)

Concerning the wine, which Isolde and Mark drank up on their wedding night, according to Gottfried, it is not a love potion but a usual wine. (Chinca 24)

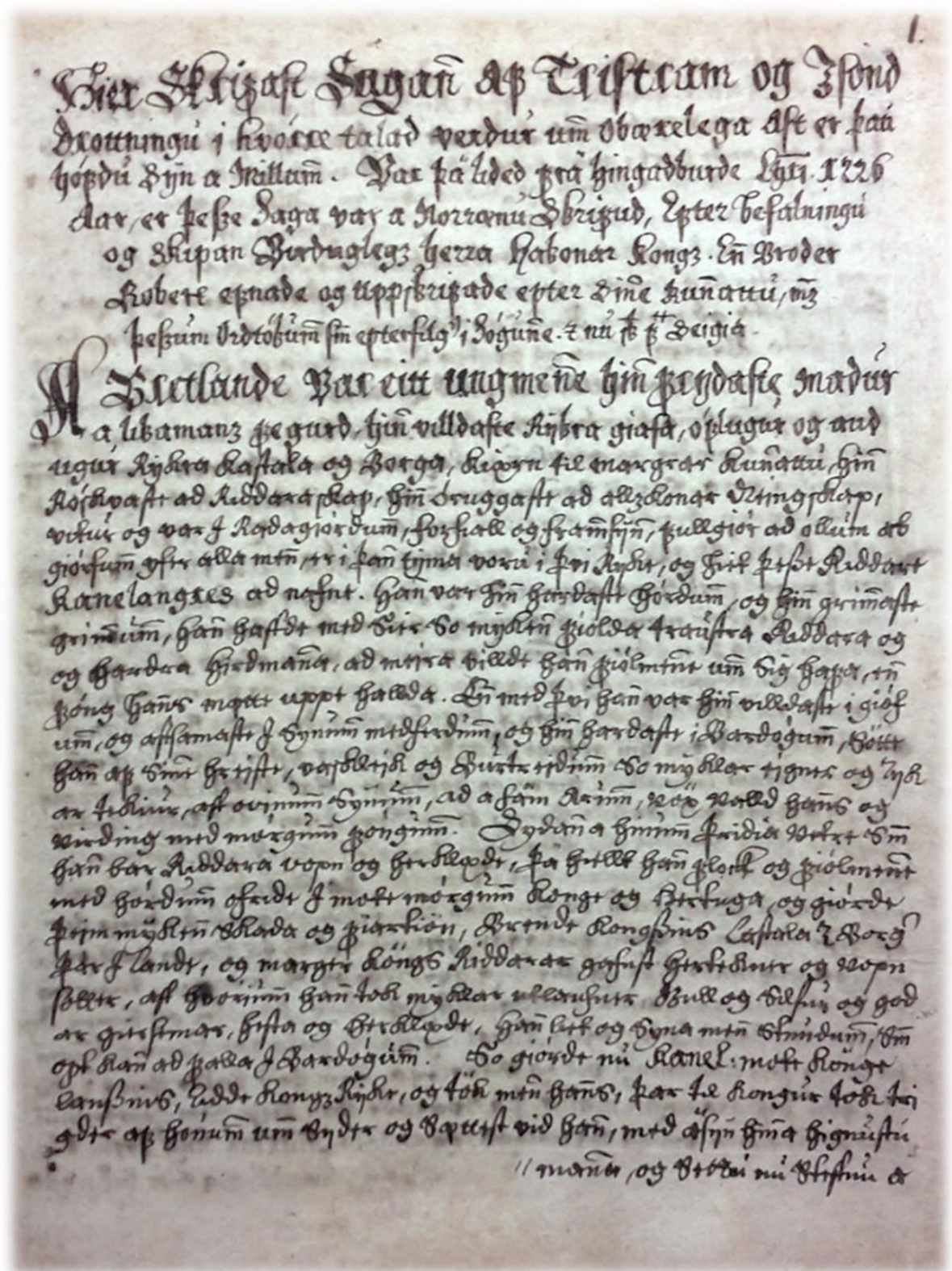


Figure 7 - First page from *Tristrams saga ok Isöndar*. Copied in 17th century. Restored in Copenhagen, Arnamagnæan Collection, AM 543 4to

*The Saga of Tristram and Isold* or originally *Tristrams saga ok Isöndar* is an adapted text of the story. Since it contains all passages of traditional story, from the meeting of Tristan's parents until the death of two lovers, it is considered as adequate part of the courtly branch of the Tristanian legend. Nevertheless, the work is nothing than a translation of the version of Thomas of Britain. The author Brother Robert translated the text in Old Norse language around the year 1226 on demand of Haakon IV, King of Norway. The reason of King's demand for translation is not a mystery. Haakon IV followed the model of the Plantagenêts in modernizing the kingdom and had many books from England translated into Norwegian. The whole saga contains about 2700 lines. (Lacroix and Walter 485)

Because of its date of creation, *Tristrams saga ok Isöndar* is considered the first French romance, translated into Scandinavian language. Further, there is no record in the Norwegian vernacular literature of any tradition connected with verse narrative and so "the translation of Thomas's romance into Norwegian required the development of a suitable prose style" (Rivera 56).

The text of *Tristrams saga ok Isöndar* is conserved in quite recent and multiple manuscripts dating from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The first one is located in the Library of Copenhagen University in Denmark (København, Københavns Universitet, Nordisk Forskningsinstitut, Den Arnamagnæaske Håndskriftsamling, AM 543, 4<sup>o</sup>). The second (QB 51 fol., dated to 1688) is located in the National Library of Reykjavík and the third one also (JS 8 fol., the beginning of the 18th century). (Lacroix and Walter 489)

### 2.9.1 BROTHER ROBERT

It is assumed that Brother Robert or Abbé Robert was not of Norwegian origin. His Anglo-Norman name reveals that he probably came from England. It is supposed, that he belonged to Lyse Abbey near Bergen, Norway. Nevertheless, his text contains a lot of misunderstanding and mistranslations, which suggests that French was not his mother tongue. (Lacroix and Walter 486)

Robert's court writing style contains a lot of features, used in earlier religious literature. The use of the present simple, amplification and alliteration is very frequent. Also, when comparing the versions of Thomas and Gottfried, it is clear that Robert did not leave out any episodes or changed their order. Nevertheless, some scenes are

shortened. Robert did not deal much with Thomas's "psychological interest and introspective passages" and he shortened them significantly (Rivera 56).

### 2.9.2 SYNOPSIS

The story starts traditionally with the portrayal of Tristan's father, whose name in this version is Kalegras. He married King Mark's sister (Móroff in this version), spent three years in bed with her and conceived Tristan. As usual, his mother died in grief because Kalegras was killed.

Consequently, Tristan was kidnapped by African warriors and they sold him as a slave. Later, Tristan appears at the court of his uncle Mark.

Afterwards, Tristan is injured in a battle with a dragon as a piece of the sword is lodged in Tristan's head. Fortunately, Isolde cured him, and he gains Isolde as a reward for killing the dragon. Surprisingly, he refused and proposed that his uncle Mark would be a better option. Tristan brings Isolde to Cornwall and, while on the ship, they drink from a horn. However, the reader does not know if it concerns the love potion or not. Clearly, Tristan and Isolde are fond of each other. Later the story continues in the usual way.

Further, we discover that Tristan married another woman, Isolde the Dark. Together, they had a son, who later became the King of England.

### 2.9.3 SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

Brother Robert adapted the story and adjusted it to Nordic readership. The names of the characters do not appear in their original version but in Old Norse. Tristan is seen as Tristrams, Isolde as Isöndar and the King Mark as Móroff.

The mention of the African warriors, who kidnap Tristan seems to be original and adjusted for Nordic audience.

2.10 THE PROSE TRISTAN ≈ 1230

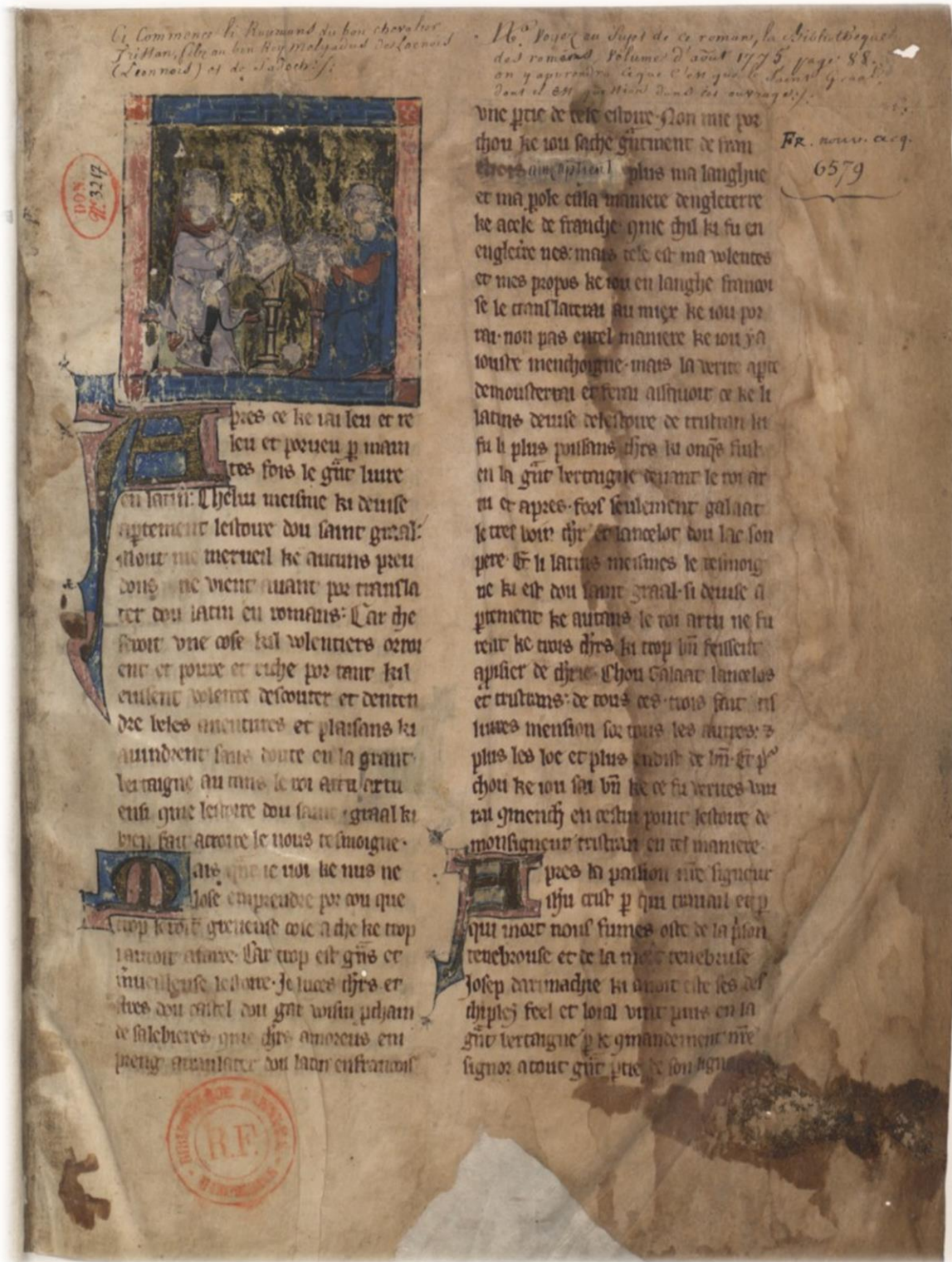


Figure 8 – First page from *Le Roman de Tristan, en prose*, by Luce de Gast. 1201-1300. Bibliothèque nationale de France. Département des manuscrits. NAF 6579



The *Prose Tristan* is French, a rather long and complex romance, which exists in two versions. These two versions come from the mid-thirteenth century and are attributed (probably falsely) to Luces de Gat and Helie de Borron. As may be seen from Figure 9, the whole story is well preserved. Actually, there are numerous manuscripts (about 45 manuscripts, mostly restored in the National Library of France) and printed editions, which may refer to the enormous popularity of the story. It was also translated into many languages, English included. (Lacy et al. 91)

The *Prose Tristan* is supposed to be the oldest Romance ever written in prose. Usually, the romances were written in verse and later turned to prose. According to the author, the story is taken from the history of the Holy Grail. While reading, we may notice the characters from the Arthurian legends, which also take in the *Prose Tristan*. (Porney)

Clearly, from the style of writing, the author or authors were apparently familiar with the Tristan texts of both branches (Lacy 5):

It seems that the prose version of the legend, dating from about 1215 to 1230, found its inspiration directly in an original manuscript or archetype, The Ur Tristan, a nebula – according to Gaston Paris – of anecdotal poems (‘lais’) with more or less clearly defined contours, or else one fully-fledged romance, a lost archetype – this is the view of Joseph Bédier – which was the direct source of Bérout, Thomas and their successors. (D’Esplais 4)

#### 2.10.1 LUCE DE GAT AND HELIE DE BORON

The authors of *the Prose Tristan* present themselves (probably falsely) as two knights. Even though, they name themselves in the story, “anachronistically in the prologues and in the epilogues of the various manuscripts alongside Walter Map, the supposed source of the stories, and Henry II of England the supposed generous patron” (Aurell 160), they two might have never existed. It is known because of the fact that both Henry II of England and Walter died a long time ago, before *the Tristan Prose* was written, which “robs the two knights of any claims to authenticity” (Aurell 160).

#### 2.10.2 SYNOPSIS

Isabella, Tristan’s mother died shortly after giving birth to him. His father Meliadus entrusted Tristan to Gouvernail, who brought him up. After seven years, Meliadus married again. However, his wife hated Tristan and she even tried to kill him.

Later, even the King Mark of Cornwall attempted Tristan's life. Nevertheless, Gouvernail saved a Tristan's life and he rather brought him to a French court.

Soon, Tristan became an ornament of the court, admired by many ladies. He was admired particularly by King's daughter Belinda, who tried to seduce him. She failed and tried to take revenge on Tristan. After this affair, Gouvernail decided to move Tristan to Cornwall to King Mark, with whom he reconciled.

Morhoul, brother of the Queen of Ireland, came to threaten Mark. Tristan decided to defeat him, so they encountered on Samson's island, where he succeeded. Unfortunately, Tristan was seriously injured by Morhoul's poisonous lance. Tristan embarked on a ship which landed in Ireland. The King of Ireland and Isolde's father noticed injured knight and asked her to help him. Isolde, having seen him injured, decided to heal him, as she was the best in curing the most dangerous wounds. Eventually, those two started to be attracted to each other. Later, Isolde discovered that it was Tristan, who killed his uncle Morhoul. For that reason, Tristan returned back to Cornwall.

There he depicted the beauty of young Isolde, so the king asked Tristan to bring her to England, so she could become the Queen of Cornwall. Tristan followed his command and brought Isolde to Cornwall. Unintentionally, the knight and Lady Isolde drank up the love potion intended for King Mark and his future queen and they fell in love. Nonetheless, Isolde married King Mark anyway. Only Brangien, Isolde's maid, known about their passion. Isolde, fearing that Brangien could reveal the secret, let her maid killed. Nevertheless, the officers won't obey her and Brangien is still alive.

Later, King found out about the affair between Tristan and Isolde. He banished him from the Kingdom. Subsequently, Tristan got married to a lady also named Isolde. After some time, he wanted to see his lover and set on a journey to meet her again.

Nevertheless, Tristan abandoned Isolde and the story ends with Tristan, who became a Knight of the Round Table and set on the Quest of the Holy Grail.

### 2.10.3 SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

Each version of the Prose Tristan is a unique text. "To define precisely the ways in which different versions of the same narrative may convey divergent meanings" is not an easy task (Grimbert 207). "The alternations among Tristan texts amount to a profound meditation on the shifting meaning and value of love." (Grimbert 207)

In *the Prose Tristan* we can find one major innovation in the development of the story. It concerns the “thorough fusion of the Arthurian world and the Tristan tradition” (Lacy 5). In the comparison with the late Tristan texts, the early Tristan texts as Bérout’s or Thomas’s were marginally Arthurian. E.g. In the Bérout’s version, King Arthur “played a prominent role only in the climactic episode of Isolde’s trial and oath” (Lacy 5). However, in the later text *Tristan Prose*, Tristan is introduced as a knight, who belongs to the Round Table of King Arthur. Tristan spends a lot of time in the presence of the other knight Lancelot and he even attempts to participate in the Grail quest. (Lacy 5)

We may find a very unexpected twist in the role of Mark. Instead of being a quite tolerant king, in *Prose Tristan* he shows his dark side as a villain. What is more surprising, he eventually kills Tristan. (Lacy 5)

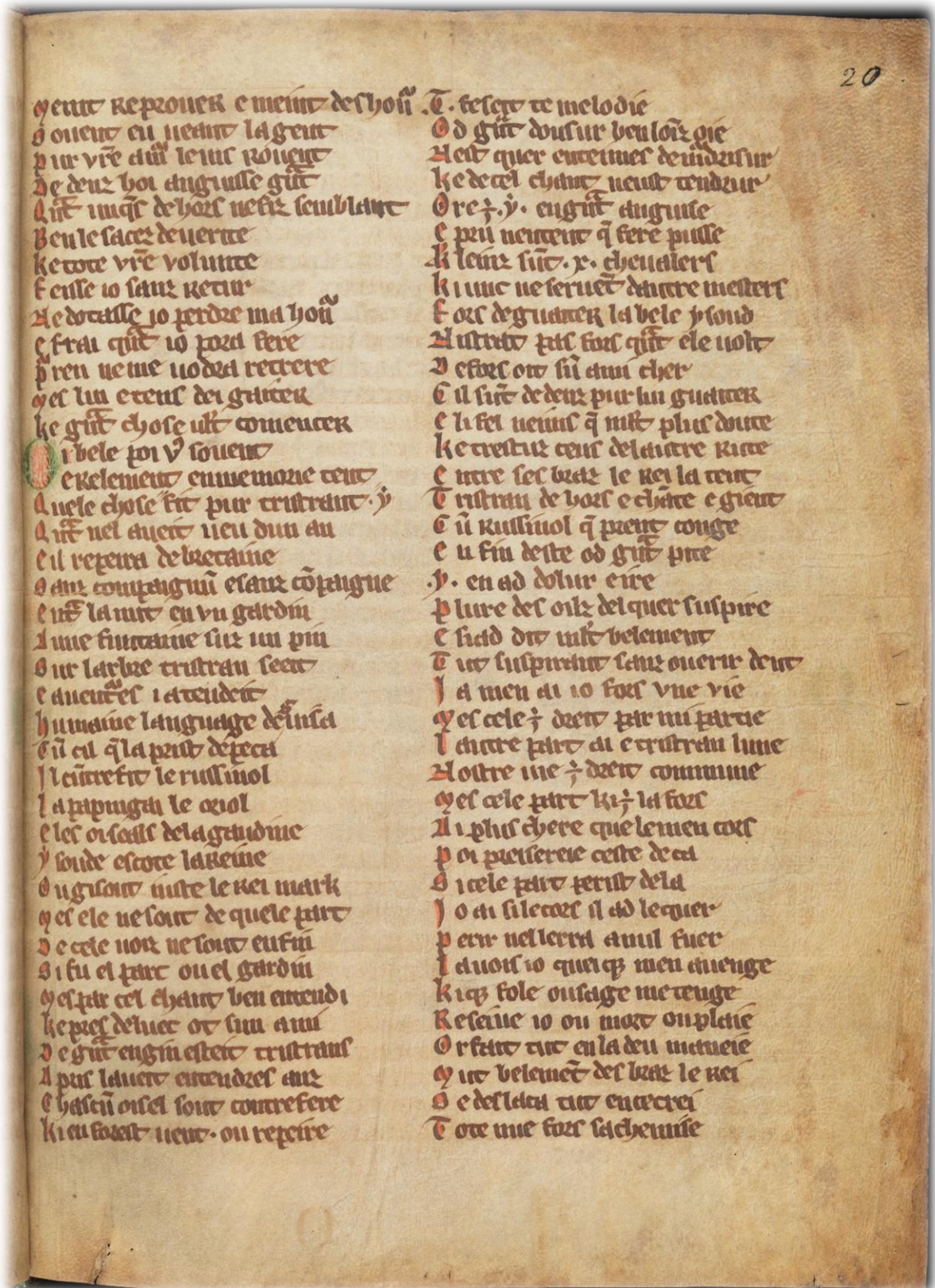


Figure 9 - First page from *Tristan Rossignol* from *Donnei des amants* 13th century. Cologny, Fondation Martin Bodmer, Cod. Bodmer 82, Switzerland.

*Tristan the Nightingale* or « *Tristan Rossignol* » in its original French name is a short extract from an anonymous poem called *Le Donnei<sup>11</sup> des amants* (v. 453 – 683). This poem comes from the 13th century and consists of 1244 octosyllabic verses, written in Anglo-Norman dialect. However, the episode of Tristan the Nightingale contains only 231 verses.

The whole passage can be found in a single manuscript, which is well preserved until nowadays, as may be seen from the Figure 6. The episode of *the Tristan Rossignol* starts at the line 14 with the exclamation: *Oi! bele, poi vus sovent* (English translation by Lacy: *Alas! Fair lady, you scarcely remember*). This manuscript is deposited in the library and museum of Martin Bodmer Fondation in Switzerland (Cologny, Geneva, Cod. Bodmer 82, formerly Phillipps 3713, ff. 17a -24d). It is supposed to have been copied at the end of the 13th century or at the beginning of the 14th century. It deserves to be mentioned since it is generally left unmentioned in Tristanian anthologies. (Walter 12)

#### 2.11.1 THE AUTHOR OF THE STORY

As was mentioned above, the author of the poem is unknown. From the text, it is visible that the author was thoroughly acquainted with the courtly lyric tradition: “As we have seen, the poem set in courtly milieu, and, in the opening exchanges, the lady expresses, in classic courtly fashion, her fear of slanderers.” (Field 53)

The author is also the narrator of the story. He records the words of Tristan and Isolde, who in turn, relate the stories of others. Those stories are “many and varied, testifying to the wide literary knowledge of the writer” (Field 53).

#### 2.11.2 SYNOPSIS

The episode narrates another clandestine meeting of the two lovers. Isolde is invited to join his lover Tristan, who imitates the sound of the nightingale.

It's been a year since Isolde saw Tristan. They missed each other a lot, so Tristan decided to meet again with his lover. One evening, Tristan went to the castle and sat in the garden by the fountain. He waited for Isolde and imitated the sound of nightingale and other birds in order to allure her. Queen Isolde listened to the sounds of birds. King Mark was lying next to her in bed, holding her arms in sleep. She was not sure where the

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<sup>11</sup> The word *donnei/donnoi* comes from Occitan language (France) in a sense of “service or courtship of a lady” (Walter, 1989, 323)

sounds came from but was certain that it was Tristan. Isolde would like to approach Tristan, but she was guarded by the King, the dwarf and other knights, who observed her every move. Tristan continued to sing and moan like a nightingale, which takes “its leave in piteous tones at summer’s end” (Lacy 205). Isolde was moved and cried. She claimed the King owns her body, but Tristan possesses her hearth. She wanted to go outside no matter what. Very gently, she managed to escape from the King’s arms. However, it was not easy to get to the garden.

Since her love affair with Tristan, King Mark has become very jealous and guarded the queen by the day and night. The guards in number about five were changing daily on their watch.

That night, Isolde succeeded to escape from the king bed. However, when she tried to open the door of the bedroom, the chain made a noise, which woke up a dwarf. The dwarf tried to stop her, caught her arm and asked her where she was going. The queen gave the dwarf a slap. She hit him so hard that he lost four teeth and started to scream. This woke up King Mark, who went to ask what happened. The dwarf explained what happened and claimed that Tristan was back. Nevertheless, the king did not believe him. He ordered him to let the queen go, so she could please in the garden. He hated the idea of the queen being his prisoner.

Isolde happily continued in the garden where she met Tristan. They embraced each other tightly and kissed. They did a lot of things, but spoke only a little despite the king, the dwarf and the guards. Isolde illustrated the idea that the girlfriend was perfect and pure only when she exposed herself to adventure and when she puts herself in danger, if at least her love was sincere.

Tristan didn’t want to risk being caught, and he was dressed as a fool. He had his beard, moustache, head and neck cut off like a madman and while being called a fool, people threw a soup on him. This was a proof for Isolde that he did not love her for nothing.

This small episode of meeting of Tristan and Isolde ends with the short epilogue: “Often, the heart and face do not coincide in their expressions. Because some sigh, suffer, complain as they were going to die. They go through ups and downs, but in their heart, they feel no harm because their love is a comedy.” (Lacroix and Walter 327)

With these words, the extract of Tristanian story ends and we are not sure of the following development of the story.

### 2.11.3 SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

Tristan the Nightingale is a short episode associated with the Tristanian legend. We may find the two allusions in this poem to the Tristanian legend, which may refer to an incident related in Bérout (vv414-18) and to *Folie* (vv.667-74). (Shirt 133)

The motive of the nightingale singing is not original. We can find a similarity with one *lai* of Marie de France called *Laüstic*. This *lai* also narrates the story of nightingale's singing, which should allure a lady to leave the bed of his husband and join her lover. She simply apologized to him, that she liked to listen to the nightingale's singing and so she went. In comparison with Marie's *lai*, the husband killed the nightingale, cut his throat and throw it on his wife. (Lacroix and Walter 317)

The motive of jealousy seems to lead the story. King Mark was so jealous of Isolde's inclination to Tristan that he let Isolde guarded by even 10 guards. Despite of these arrangements, the Queen managed to escape quite successfully and joined his lover.

For the first time we encounter violence from the part of the Queen. She did not manifest any violence in any other version.

No version of Tristanian legend, not even *the Folie Tristan* mentions this detail of soup being thrown at Tristan, who is dressed as a fool. Maybe, the author of the *Le Donnei<sup>12</sup> des amants* knew another tradition than that of *Oxford and Bern Folie Tristan*.

From *the Bern Folie*, it is clear that Tristan was married to another Isolde, Isolde of the White Hands. However, from *the Tristan Rossignol*, there is no mention about Tristan's relationship with the Isolde of the White Hands. (Field 56)

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<sup>12</sup> The word *donnei/donnoi* comes from Occitan language (France) in a sense of "courting to a lady" (Walter, 1989, 323)

## 2.12 TRISTRAM A IZALDA ≈ 1399

*Tristram a Izalda* is a Czech version dated to the end of the fourteenth century. It is based on German versions and compiles the Tristanian legend from Eilhart von Oberge, Gottfried von Strassburg and Heinrich von Freiberg, who finished Gottfried's version. Written in Old Czech, *Tristram a Izalda* with its 9000 verses form "the longest narrative poem in medieval Czech literature" (Lacy et al, The New Arthurian Encyclopedia).

The poem is preserved in two manuscripts. First one, the Strahov MS (A), is dated to the year 1449. The second, the Brno MS (B), from 1483 is of particular importance, since it contains the complete story. (Lacy et al, The New Arthurian Encyclopedia)

It is conceived as "an inspired translation of the German models; but it has little in common with the aristocratic world of Eilhart or Gottfried" (Lacy et al, The New Arthurian Encyclopedia).

The popularity of the Old Czech poem about Tristram and Izalda was not significant. The literary critics claim that the poem is not esthetically or linguistically valuable, that this work is only conventional and belongs among other chivalric epics. They also judge Tristan's deeds as autotelic and that in the center of interest is only a love affair. (Tichá 9)

The poem was adapted to Czech environment, which is visible on the vocabulary used in Czech lands. Some French expressions corresponding to the division of society were substituted with expressions of Czech medieval society. We can encounter with words as *šafář*, *man*, *maršálek* and *tovaryš* (journeyman) etc.

### 2.12.1 AUTHOR

Little is known about the author of the Czech version *Tristram a Izalda*. The author elaborated it individually and his work seems to be more successful than from his German predecessors. He proposes "a magnificent fresco of human fates, drawn by an excellent psychologist" (Tichá 2).

It is remarkable as he successfully managed to avoid the long-winded descriptions and captured his heroes in development and in and in action as living people and their weaknesses. He seems to be a master of dialogues, who gave proper drama to individual episodes and spoke in a cultivated way between the lines. (Tichá 2)



### 2.12.2 SYNOPSIS

The story starts traditionally with the meeting of Tristan's parents, the King Rivalin and Mark's sister Blankfor, who fathered Tristan. Blankfor died after giving birth and Tristan was brought up by Kurvenal, who made him a knight.

When Tristan grew up, he went to Cornwall. He killed Morholt, who threatened to Mark's Kingdom. However, he was injured and poisoned. No one except Isolde could heal him. And so she did. When Tristan was cured, he left for Cornwall.

The King Mark did not want to get married, but his men persuade him. He said that he will marry the lady, whose hair brought two swallows. Tristan went to Ireland in order to find the lady. Subsequently, Tristan found out that the lady is Isolde and he received her hand, when he killed a dragon. He brought Isolde to Cornwall on a ship, but they drank up the love potion and made love. Nevertheless, Isolde married King Mark and simultaneously had love affair with Tristan.

King Mark found out about the adultery and wanted to burn the lovers. Luckily enough, Tristan managed to escape and saved Isolde. They hid in the woods and lived there for two years. Later, the king found them, Isolde returned back to court and Tristan was expelled from the Kingdom.

Tristan wandered around subsequently he met his new friend Kaedin, whose sister Isolde of the White Hands married. Tristan wanted to meet Isolde again, therefore he entered the castle in disguise as a fool. Nevertheless, he was mortally injured when he tried to revenge for killing his friend Kaedin. He knew that only Isolde could cure him, so he asked his wife to send for her. The ship with white sails and Isolde on board arrived. However, Tristan's wife lied and claimed that Isolde was not on board. Saddened Tristan died and when Isolde found him, she died immediately next to him. Afterwards, Isolde's maid let herself wall up and Mark regretted his deeds. Finally, Kurvenal inherited the Mark's Kingdom.

### 2.12.3 SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The Czech version comes out from German sources and their influence reflects of the structure and form of the story. Traditionally, it is written in verse and the action corresponds with them. The plot of the story matches with classical action, but at the end, we found out that Brangien let herself wall up and Kurvenal gained the Kingdom. Czech

version also contains the episode of *Folie Tristan*, when Tristan intruded into the court dressed up as a fool.

The Czech version differs from others with its psychology of characters, which is well elaborated. The characters seem to be usual people with all their faults. Concerning its originality, it consists in conception of the relationship between Tristan and Isolde and in the medieval conventions. The lovers clash with the conventional moral, true feeling and indifference and last but not least with underestimation of true love. (Tichá 9)

## 2.13 SUMMARY OF MEDIEVAL AND FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

In the Middle Ages, Tristanian legend went through various transformations. Long before it was part of the Arthurian legend, it existed in Celtic mythology. The legend was distributed orally long before it was written. There are two written versions of old tradition. Bérout's version, which is considered as a "common" or "primitive" and Thomas's version, which is "courtly". Presumably, Bérout's version "is most faithful to an earlier state" or the original legend (Grimbert 17). On the other hand, Thomas's version "incorporates changes that were a product of the court culture" (Grimbert 17). Both versions are unfinished and preserved in a fragmentary state. Later, Thomas's courtly version was more adapted and translated to other languages.

The story continued to live its own separate life when certain episodes evolved in independent poems based on few moments found in Thomas's version. For example, Marie de France extracted the moment, when Tristan waited in the woods for the King's procession. She composed the *lai* called *Chevrefoil* based on this episode of Tristan and Isolde's meeting. Further, another episode drew from Thomas's courtly version and evolved in two independent poems named *Folie Tristan*. They narrate the short action of Tristan in disguise, when entered the Mark's court and met Isolde. We also encounter with a short poem called *Tristan the Nightingale*, which "epitomizes the legend into a single episode" (Grimbert 29).

The next transformation of legend underwent was when it expanded to other languages as German, Norwegian or Czech. Following version of Eilhart von Oberge with fully survived text, contains a plot, which "preserves a slightly different strand of the common version" therefore the version by Bérout (Grimbert 17). In addition, Thomas's version became more popular and hence more translated or adapted. At least, the authors Gottfried von Strassburg and Brother Robert claimed that they followed his

version, as they translated it to Middle High German (In Gottfried's case) and into Old Norse (Brother Robert). Both texts were adapted to its audience, abbreviation of some passages and the original names were replaced with their local equivalents. There was even Czech version of Tristan and Isolde, which contains well elaborated psychology of characters.

Subsequently, the legend expanded in its versions written prose. Starting with *Prose Tristan*, its popularity endured with long prose reworking that continued in France, Italy, Spain and Britain. Further, we encounter with the attempts to “drawn the lovers into the Arthurian orbit, with Tristan eventually becoming a knight of the Round Table” (Grimbert 34). Namely, Thomas Malory attempted in the 15th century to include the story of Tristan and Isolde as a part of the Arthurian Legends. In his *Le Morte D'arthur*, reflecting the inspiration from *Prose Tristan*, the lovers occur with their story, however, it is not much well elaborated. Even though Malory was a good narrator, he did not manage to develop the depth of characters' psychology. (Tichá 6) Even though that there were attempts to categorize Tristan as a Knight of the Round Table, he is not perceived as one and readers connect him with the story of tragic love. During the centuries, the legend also evolved in other retellings in Germany or Scandinavia and it even left the borders of prose or poetry, transforming into a drama or opera.

### 3 MODERN VERSIONS

The following chapter will briefly illustrate the history of literal modern versions created from the 1900s onwards. During the Middle Ages, the legend went through an eclipse and it was resurrected several centuries later. Romantic poets and artists brought it back to life since they went through the masterpieces conserved in manuscripts or early printed editions. Later, it was brought to light by various scholars and philologists, who published summaries, modern translations and editions. The legend was resurrected successfully with Wagner's opera, which had an exceptional impact throughout the Western world. Further, the eminent French medievalist Joseph Bédier wanted to bring the attention back to the roots of the legend and made a reconstruction of the story from the original texts. This led to a series of retelling of the story. (Grimbert 49)

The following table identifies the most modern versions of the story, created in the nineteenth and twentieth century. The table does not contain data about translations.

**Table 3: Overview of Modern versions of Tristanian legend<sup>13</sup>**

Author of version	Name of version in English	Date
Joseph Bédier	<i>The Romance of Tristan and Iseut</i>	1900
André Mary	<i>Tristan</i>	1937
Marcelle Vioux	<i>Tristan and Isolde, Eternal Lovers</i>	1946
Robert Bossuat	<i>Tristan an Iseut, a Story from the Twelfth Century</i>	1951
Pierre d'Espezel	<i>Tristan and Iseut, Reconstucted from the Manuscript of Thomas, the Two Bérouls, and the Berne Version of Tristan's Madness</i>	1956
René Louis	<i>Tristan and Isolde</i>	1972
Michel Cazenave	<i>Tristan and Isolde</i>	1985

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<sup>13</sup> Data is taken from Grimbert, Joan Tasker. *Tristan and Isolde: A casebook*. Routledge, 2013.

### 3.1 ROMANCE OF TRISTAN AND ISEULT JOSEPH BÉDIER

Medievalist Joseph Bédier, as the first specialist, reconstructed the story of Tristan and Isolde in prose in French. His version contains 183 pages divided into nineteen chapters and it was published in 1900. The Bédier's writing is full of action.

He worked with many sources of the legend as he was inspired from the texts of Béroul, Thomas etc. Many other authors attempted to retell the story and came out from the same sources as he did.

#### 3.1.1 JOSEPH BÉDIER

Joseph Bédier was born in 1864. He was considered as a distinguished French medievalist, literary historian and a poet. His edition of *The Romance of Tristan and Iseult*, regarded as an authoritative reconstruction of the story, was originally published to considerable acclaim in France in 1900. He collected ancient French poems and used a variety of other early sources. Besides the story of Tristan and Isolde, he also produced a critical edition of the *Chanson de Roland*, among other volumes of literary history. In 1920, he was appointed member of the French Academy. He died on August 29, 1938. (Belloc and Rosenfeld 207)

#### 3.1.2 SYNOPSIS

Tristan was born when his father Rivalen, King of Lyonesse, died in a foul ambush. His mother Blanche fleur died shortly after giving birth because she could not stand the sadness caused by the loss of her husband. Thus, Tristan lived as an orphan and he was brought up by Rohalt and afterwards by the squire Gorvenal. He taught him the arts, which suited the barons.

Subsequently, Tristan was lured to the ship of the merchants of Norway. He appeared in Cornwall, where he was greeted by his uncle, King Mark, Blanche fleur's brother. Tristan on behalf of Mark took part in the battle with Morholt, the uncle of Isolde. Eventually, Tristan beat Morholt, but he was injured by poisonous barb. No one could heal him, therefore they sent him to die on the sea. The boat boarded in Ireland, where Isolde the Fair rescued him. After being healed, he returned to Cornwall.

The barons pressed the King Mark to find a fiancée. He made up a quest, which he supposed as impossible to accomplish. The king told the lords that he was going to marry the lady, whose hair was brought by two swallows. Tristan knew that the hair

belonged to Isolde. He sailed to Ireland in order to find the lady. In Ireland, Tristan beat a dragon who threatened the country and gained Isolde for King Mark.

Isolde's mother prepared the love potion for her daughter and for King Mark. She gave it to Brangien, maid of Iseult. But during the trip to Cornwall, Tristan was thirsty and therefore he took this potion and offered it to Iseult. They fell deeply in love. Following this event, Brangien exclaimed that it was their death that they drank.

When they anchored in Cornwall, King Mark welcomed the beautiful lady Isolde. They got married shortly after her arrival. Tristan and Isolde often met secretly. but later King Mark discovered them. He ordered Tristan to leave. Therefore, the unfortunate Tristan went away. Without Isolde, he lived desperately in the woods. The two lovers began to meet again secretly. Unfortunately, King Mark saw them. Tristan noticed it and he pretended that he was asking Isolde to intercede with King Mark for him.

The next day, King Mark invited Tristan into the castle, but as the young man began to meet Isolde, so King Mark drove them out of the castle. The two left and they lived together in the woods.

After a few years, King Mark wandered in the woods and found Tristan and Isolde sleeping in their cabin. As Tristan put a sword between them, the king was convinced that they did not love each other anymore and he put his ring of alliance on the finger of Isolde before leaving the hut.

Following this event, Isolde decided to return to King Mark and Tristan remained alone. After a while, he found and married Isolde of the White Hands. Nevertheless, their marriage was not happy. Later, he attempted to meet with Isolde the Fair again.

Subsequently, Tristan was injured by poisoned spear a knew he was dying. He asked Kaherdin to go for Isolde. If he will bring Isolde, the boat sail will be white. If not, it will be black. The boat approached with Isolde, but Tristan's wife betrayed him. She told him that the sail was black. Successively, Tristan died. When the boat landed, Isolde the Fair rushed to Tristan. However, she found him very late. "She kissed his mouth and his face, and clasped him closely; and so gave up her soul, and died beside him of grief for her lover. (Bédier 202)

When King Mark heard what happened, he crossed the sea in order to bring back the corpses of Tristan and Isolde. He buried them, but over the night, a green briar sprang

from Tristan's tomb, which "climbed the chantry and fell to root again by Isolde's tomb" (Bédier 202). That was a sign of their eternal love.

### 3.1.3 SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

Joseph Bédier had in intention to bring the legend closer to the general reader. He offered his version, which he perceives as very composite. Since he attempted to use all sources, he combines them variously. Nevertheless, he assumed that the oldest French texts were the most important in the evolution of the legend. (Grimbert 426)

Bédier wrote a version combining the "characteristics of Bérroul's style with modern novelistic elements in order to tell a story that would once seem remote in time and be comprehensible to modern readers" (Grimbert 66) He depicted the main characters "with great sympathy and imbued with the noblest and the tenderest of feeling, which are only occasionally overridden by a surge of paranoia, jealousy, or anger easily imputable to their impossible situation" (Grimbert 66).

As he himself declared, he tried to avoid a mixture of the ancient and the modern. His aim was "to steer clear of disparities, anachronisms and embellishments and, through the exercise of historical understanding and critical discipline, to avoid intrusion of our modern concepts into the older forms of thinking and feeling (...)" (Bédier 205)

Bédier provided a source for many of the following versions by various authors, which based their retelling of the story on Bédier's version. His work was widely translated and adapted.

### 3.2 FUTHER DEVELOPMENT OF MODERN VERSIONS

Since modern versions do not differ significantly, it is not necessary to analyze them in detail as it was in preceding chapters. Often, modern versions are retellings of medieval versions. Therefore, the following chapter deals only with the development of modern versions in brief.

The Tristanian legend declined after the Middle Ages. It was mostly because its "reputation that romance had developed among Renaissance neoclassical theorists as a degenerate or popular form of literature" (Grimbert 49). The interest in the legend revived in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries thanks to the Romantics, who "revolted against the tyranny of neoclassical rules concerning subject matter and form" (Grimbert

49). The story resurrected again in those countries, where it originally flourished and it even left the borders of Europe, expanding to the United States. (Grimbert 49)

After Joseph Bédier, many contemporary authors attempted to retell the story of Tristan and Isolde since “Bédier’s reconstruction has been the object of many subsequent reeditions” (Shirt 149). They followed the classical action of the story and included few innovations.

First attempts to follow Bédier’s version came from his student André Mary, who published his story of *Tristan* in 1937. He accompanied his work with a section of explanatory notes on medieval life. During the time, his version was republished several times. “Mary’s version features a surprisingly literal rendering of the extant portions of the twelfth-century texts, but the rest of the narrative follows Bédier’s principle of weaving elements from various sources into a somewhat romanticized whole.” (Grimbert 67)

In 1946 a non-scholar Marcelle Vioux proposed a simplified version of Bédier’s. In his *Tristan and Isolde, Eternal Lovers* alluded to “a bond that linked the lovers in another existence before they were reunited on earth” (Grimbert 70). Vioux provides the story as a novel, deeply deals with lovers’ honorable feelings and supplies “modern psychological motivation for most of their decisions” (Grimbert 70).

Robert Bossuat, Pierre d’Espezel and René Louis decided to work with the same sources as Bédier. Bossuat claims that Bérout’s version is the closest to the hypothetical story, containing the characters reflecting “primitive, irrational impulses of Irish and Welsh heroes” (Grimbert 68). On the contrary, from d’Espezel’s title of the book, which enumerates the sources he used, it is clear that he based his version on several texts. He tried to illustrate how the legend evolved from Celtic and pagan sources. (Grimbert 68) René Louis “seems to be determined to underscore the primitive or barbaric traits and to eliminate as much as possible the chivalric and courtly backdrop.” (Grimbert 69) He modified the scene with the love potion. He claimed that Brangien also drunk up the love potion and fully aware passed it to Tristan. (Grimbert 70)

In 1985 Michel Cazenave published the most recent retelling of *Tristan and Isolde*. He aimed to bring legend back to its origin in Celtic and pre-Celtic mythology. He rejected the artistic interpretation as “Romantic vision of a transcendent end for the lovers and the tragic overtones imposed by a Christian feudal perspective” (Grimbert 69).



While his adherence to the general plot outlined in the extant medieval texts tends to obscure this optimistic vision, the addition of certain significant details does underscore the lovers' privileged situation within the universe. (Grimbert 69)

Apart from prose, the story expanded also in poetry, drama or film.

### 3.3 TRISTANIAN LEGEND FOR ELT

Since the story has been part of our Western culture for centuries, the students are usually introduced to it at 2<sup>nd</sup> grade of elementary school and they meet with it again in high school, alternatively at universities. The story is usually discussed in literature classes and belongs to the required reading. However, it is rarely presented in English classes, which is a shame.

There are various ways how to work with the story. It may be a good source of knowledge and fun if read in simplified English at the high school level. There are many authors, who adjusted the story for ELT students. Oxford University Press even offers a book by Bill Bowler from level A1, accompanied with an audiobook. The students may also be attracted by animated movie *Tristan & Isolde* (2002), which was adapted to children and contains a happy ending or its version for older students *Tristan + Isolde* (2006). Even a sequence from the movie may serve for educational purposes if accompanied with the questions or interactive exercises. Beside the movies, there is also a comic, which might be presented to students during an English lesson.

Teachers can also use an extract from the story and bring it to class for various teaching purposes. The story provides a wide range of vocabulary concerning the Middle Ages. The students may encounter words like *knight*, *warrior*, *sword*, etc., which may be useful for their subsequent reading of other literature on medieval themes.

The grammar of past tenses may be demonstrated and taught on various extracts from the story. Especially, the first chapter of the birth of Tristan offers the highest concentration of past tenses. The teacher may erase the verbs in the past tense, provide their infinitives and students may be asked to put them in the correct form.

The students may practice listening and speaking skills with an audiobook. After listening to one chapter of the given extract, guiding questions may be asked to stimulate students' interaction. This can be followed by a speaking activity with students discussing their answers and subsequent questions.

The dramatization of the story may also be a good opportunity to improve their English skills. When performing parts of the story or the story as a whole, students may be attracted to it and enjoy playing it. Nevertheless, this activity is quite time consuming.

Ordering the sequences of the action in the story may also seem a stimulating activity. The teacher prepares cuttings with the summary of the story, dividing it into individual parts of the story. Afterwards, students are asked to put them in the right order.

Nevertheless, there are some themes in the story which deserve caution. Some sequences should be reduced or left out, e.g. the sexuality of Tristan and Isolde, since some parts of the story may contain strong sexual connotations.

## CONCLUSION

The content of this thesis was an analysis and a comparative study of the story of Tristan and Isolde. It depicted its literary development from the poetic form to the prose, starting from the Medieval Age to the present day. It delineated mainly the Medieval versions of the story in general, introduced the authors (if any) and summarized the plot of the stories. Also, the modern versions of the story were briefly introduced.

Originally, the story was a Celtic legend, broadcasted orally within the British Isles and Northern France. It is probably based on the hero of the Pictish *Drostan* from the sixth century, who had a lover *Essylt*. The legend started to appear in the written form in the twelfth century. The oldest manuscripts were written in verse in Anglo-Norman dialect. The first two French authors of the manuscripts, Bérout and Thomas formed part of the old tradition of the story. Bérout presented a common version of the story, Thomas provided a courtly version. However, both versions did not survive completely, and they are in a fragmentary state. Later, the story continued to spread abroad, and it was translated into other languages and widely adapted.

Besides the whole legend, also single episodes of the story emerged in the Medieval literature. First appeared in the short poem called *lai*, inspired by the Tristanian legend. It became popular and chanted among the Medieval population of the Western world. The main representant of this genre was Marie de France with its *Chevrefoil* and other *lais*. Later we encounter other single episodes of the story as the two *Folie Tristan* (Oxford and Bern version) or *Tristan Nightingale*, which narrate the story of Tristan's numerous attempts to reunite with Isolde.

Shortly after, the French versions of the story expanded into other languages. Firstly, it was translated by German authors. Eilhart von Oberge in his *Tristrant und Isalde* led the story in a common way inspired by Bérout. He provided first complete version. Another German author, Gottfried von Strasbourg in his *Tristan* came out from Thomas's courtly version. Thanks to the German adaptations, we may reconstruct the original form of Bérout's and Thomas' story. Later, the legend appeared also in Old Norse language as *Tristrams saga ok Isöndar* or even in Czech as *Tristram a Izalda*. Both versions were adapted to their milieu and contain local equivalents of words.

First Tristanian legend written in prose emerged in the 13th century. From that point on, the story of Tristan and Isolde started to relate to Arthurian legends. *The Prose*

*Tristan* combines a “fusion of the Arthurian world and the Tristan tradition” (Lacy 5) and Tristan was viewed as a Knight of the Round Table. Also, *the Prose Tristan* slightly deviated from the classical action of the story, with Mark attempting to kill Tristan. The story did not end traditionally with the death of two lovers, but Tristan setting on the Quest of the Holy Grail. Besides the plot, the authorship of the prose by Luce de Gat and Helie de Boron is also debatable.

With the new texts of the legend written in prose, the tendency to visualize Tristan as a Knight of the Round Table continued. In the 15th century, Thomas Malory included a knight Tristan in his publication of *Le Morte d'Arthur*. Nevertheless, Tristan is not perceived as one and wide contemporary readership views Tristan and his legend as an independent character of an independent story.

During the following centuries, the story of Tristan and Isolde started to be fading away. Nevertheless, thanks to the effort of the Romantic poets, various artists, scholars and philologists it was brought back to life. Also, the story gained its popularity back with Wagner's opera, which had an exceptional impact on other artists. Furthermore, thanks to his attempts, French medievalist Joseph Bédier brought the attention back to the roots of the legend and made a reconstruction of the story. This led to a series of retellings and translations of the story by many other authors as André Mary, René Louis or Michel Cazenave. The story is still read within the contemporary society and obviously, Bédier's version is still the most popular. Nonetheless, the rising popularity of cinematography brings the attention of the audience rather to the screen than the book. The reader has an opportunity to compare the story with the movies inspired by Tristanian legend as modernized *the Eternal Return* (1943) or traditional *Tristan + Isolde* (2006).

The reasons why the legend still attracts the contemporary society are various. Either it may be because of its expression of strong emotions, or its themes of tragic love, which are dealt with. Nevertheless, it still attracts people's attention through various representations in art.

The story of Tristan and Isolde grew ideologically in the Middle Ages. At that time, it had to provoke the society necessarily with its main idea: the true feeling of love, which has more value than human life. Therefore, it is necessary to follow it in his name and fight against the false conventions. (Tichá 2)

The legend remained attractive to the wide readership through the Western world during the centuries since it contains powerful human emotions, relationships and conflicts. The romantic tragedies are to the most readers of the particular interest since it deals with the theme of unfulfilled love between Tristan and Isolde. (Lacy et al. 271)

The topicality of the story of Tristan and Isolde consists its themes. Even though it is a medieval legend, the readers still prefer the topics connected with unfulfilled love, the fight with honour and loyalty, jealousy, which leads even to a death. The tragic ending of the story makes the legend even stronger and more popular in the world of literature. “The impression the story of Tristan and Isolde makes today is marked by that primeval and bitter taste which distinguishes it from the suavity characteristic of the courtly idealism dominant at the end of the twelfth century.” (D’Esplas 4)

Also, the attractiveness of the story consists in it “infernally voluptuousness”. We would look in vain for a work such fascinating as is the story of Tristan and Isolde itself. (Grimbert 394)

The topicality of the story is shown through its evolvement in contemporaneousness. The legend did not remain in its place of medieval literature, but it is still being adapted even nowadays. What is more, it even left the borders of literature and it evolved into more forms of art as music, films and fine arts. Therefore, it is the occurrence of the story in many various forms of arts, which makes it almost eternal.

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