
Between fabliau and romance : love and rivalry in Bérout's *Tristran*

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BETWEEN FABLIAU AND ROMANCE : LOVE AND RIVALRY IN BÉROUL'S *TRISTRAN*

In his path-breaking 1957 study, Per Nykrog raised afresh the whole problem of the *fabliau*, and outlined some of the features linking it to a genre that seems, at first glance, sharply differentiated from it : the courtly romance¹. The resemblances between them are attributable in part to the fact that many works in each category were composed by poets of similar professional formation ; to some degree, too, they stem from the circumstance that many of these compositions were (presumably) destined to be read to the same sort of audience. It is my intention here to single out and examine one thematic element shared by numerous *fabliaux* and one specific romance, the *Tristran* of Béroul. This is the familiar topos (an important component in both genres) of the illicit love affair.

Husband, wife, wife's lover : usually the *pas de trois* that they dance is presented under one guise in comic fiction while receiving rather different treatment in more " courtly " or serious writing. What is it that creates the difference ? In much courtly narrative that involves extramarital love, the hearer's or reader's sympathies are firmly directed by the author toward the lovers, and

1. *Les Fabliaux*, Copenhagen, 1957 ; see particularly p. 176-92, 235-41. This study was followed by Jean Rychner's *Contribution à l'étude des fabliaux*, in 2 v., Neuchâtel, Faculté des Lettres, Genève, 1960, in which are examined the transformations of certain tales showing important variants from ms. to ms.

away from the husband ; this is often accomplished by making the latter a man jealous, tyrannical, and generally odious, to the point of seeming to deserve his wife's infidelity and even to be responsible for it¹. The lovers, by contrast, are painted as conventionally lovable : young, handsome, and endowed with the usual complement of social and moral graces. Pressed by the author to make a choice, hearer or reader (unless a strict moralist) is bound to side with the lovers. In many a triangular *fabliau*, on the other hand, it is in the husband's favor that the scales are adjusted : although he may be no paragon of birth or breeding (he inhabits, after all, the world of the comic, hence generally of the commoner), he regularly triumphs over his rival if the latter is depicted as a contemptible figure (specifically, if the rival is a debauched priest or monk). Frequently, however, it happens that there is a quantitative as well as a qualitative difference in the treatment of lover or husband that differentiates the two genres. The relative weight allotted to one or the other of the masculine roles helps to tip a triangular story toward the romantic or the comic mode ; and here the role of the husband is crucial. Are we to interest ourselves primarily in *him*, or in *them* ? Courtly narrative that treats of adultery by and large idealizes it ; in practice, this often involves not so much making the husband hateful as making him invisible. The reduction of his role permits that of the lovers to dominate². One may turn to the

1. Alexandre Micha discusses this topos in *Le Mari jaloux dans la littérature romanesque des XII^e et XIII^e siècles*, in *Studi Medievali*, n. s., t. 17 (1951), p. 303-20.

2. Nykrog thus presents the matter : « Le triangle érotique restera toujours le même, dans toute la littérature européenne jusqu'à nos jours, et il gardera toujours ces deux aspects : romantique ou courtois, et trivial ou réaliste. L'un est celui qui voit l'amant, l'autre celui qui voit le mari ; la femme est dans une position ambiguë, car tantôt elle jouit des douceurs de sa liaison condamnable, tantôt elle a à faire face aux difficultés que lui fait son grossier de jaloux. Le triangle courtois a ainsi deux visages, l'un pénible, l'autre sublime, et du point de vue littéraire il y a entre eux une différence de *style* : le conte romantique place la femme et l'amant au premier plan, en repoussant le mari à l'arrière-plan comme une menace vague ; le conte

thirteenth-century tale of the *Châtelaine de Vergy* for a noble and touching example of this tendency carried to the limit. Here the heroine, mistress of a knight, seems also to be a wife, her married state being implied by her freedom of action, her extreme discretion concerning the love-affair, and a single reference to her *seignor*¹. The said *seignor* never actually appears in the tale. The *Chevalier de la Charrette* of Chrétien de Troyes furnishes a less extreme example of an extra-marital affair in the elevated style; here the husband, Arthur, is briefly present, in the opening pages; yet the action promptly moves far away from him and his sphere of influence. This physical distance has psychological consequences: the lovers can, and do, forget about him, and are able to concentrate undisturbed on each other. The reader, too, can forget about this figure, since the author has no interest either in making him live on the page or in reminding us of his existence while he is absent from the events narrated². In such fiction it is not ruse but refinement of sentiment, and occasional furtive and yet leisurely delights,

comique insiste sur les relations entre le mari et la femme, l'amant étant souvent réduit à l'état d'ombre ou de 'ressort' pur » (p. 69). Some of these observations are repeated in condensed form, in *Courtliness and the Townspeople: the Fabliau as a Courtly Burlesque*, in *The Humor of the Fabliaux: a Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Thomas E. Cooke and Benjamin L. Honeycutt, Columbia, MO, 1974, p. 59-73.

1. *La Châtelaine de Vergy*, ed. by F. Whitehead, 2nd ed., Manchester, 1951. The Châtelaine, though a knight's mistress, avers « Je ne sai quel acoitement / vous pensez, ma dame, por voir, / que talent n'ai d'ami avoir / qui ne soit del tout a l'onor / et de moi et de mon seignor » (v. 710-14). The wording of this single (and mendacious) affirmation of fidelity is very close to that of Yseut's (repeated) protestations.

2. Some courtly narratives of adultery do in fact give prominence to the husband; examples are the *Guigemar* and *Yonec* of Marie de France. In each of these *lais* the husband is a repellent figure, jealous of his wife without (at first) any reason. His inhuman treatment of her predisposes the reader toward the imprisoned wife and her eventual lover.

that are at the center. Any such emotional and sensual experiences, moreover, are treated with the greatest authorial discretion ¹.

In the *fabliau* the triangle is otherwise drawn. Here the husband is very much present; he does not, in this genre, function merely as an obstacle to be surmounted, nor does he represent a vague but menacing shape in the background, serving mainly to intensify the lovers' precious moments together. He is an active participant in the story, possessed of a personality and a will of his own: specifically, the will not to be made a cuckold and a fool. Equal to the lovers in the economy of the tale, he is not seemingly less than their equal on either the social or the moral plane. Even in those *fabliaux* in which social distinctions are made explicit, they seem to make very little difference in the way the characters behave. What differentiates the lovers from the husband is not superiority of mind nor refinement of feeling but mutual physical attraction. To put it succinctly, *they* wish to couple, as promptly and as frequently as possible. *He* (once his suspicions are aroused) intends to prevent them from doing so. The consequence of this circumstance is that the narrative stress falls not upon introspection or lyrical effusions on the part of the lovers or the husband, but upon ways and means: how they may come together and satisfy their lust, how he may detect and thwart their plans, or punish them after the fact. Hence, in the *fabliau* world, the importance of ruse. In this context, ruse amounts to wit bent to carnal ends, or conversely to the frustration thereof.

On the other hand, the *fabliau* husband typically is limited in his capacity to act, which means that the danger he represents for wife or rival is also limited. The social milieu of the *fabliau* of course has something to do with this. Its characters, although not restricted to the peasantry or the bourgeoisie, have no rank more exalted than *chevalier* or *clerc* ². In other words, none of

1. An illustrative passage is this, from the *Charrete*: the *joie* of the lovers is "tel c'onques ancor sa paroille / ne fu oïe ne seüe; / mes toz jorz iert par moi teüe, / qu'an conte ne doit estre dite" (ed. by Mario Roques, Paris, CFMA 92, 1958, v. 4678-81).

2. See the Table in Nykrog, *Fabliaux*, p. 110, which also shows which one of the rivals wins. In a recent study, Marie-Thérèse

the three is in the position of exercising legally constituted power over the other or others, as the feudal society understood power. Whether because of this or on account of generic conventions, the power and authority of the *fabliau* husband, (the one character out of the three whose rights are threatened or violated) are not particularly fearsome, although his wife does fear him none the less. He is a blusterer; he is a potential or actual wife-beater; he threatens, and sometimes causes, various kinds of bodily harm to his rival; yet in the great majority of cases he is not a murderer¹. In fact, it is he who sometimes, through the collusion of his wife and his rival, ends up by being beaten.

Having reminded ourselves of the balance of power generally prevailing in the *fabliau* world, we may turn to a triangular relationship underpinning what looks like (with variations due to individual poets) a distinct genre. This is the courtly romance, and it embraces the widely-disseminated tale of Marc, Iseut, and Tristan.

As it happens, the Tristan story as recounted by Béroul (and some others) is to a large degree anomalous in medieval secular literature. It does not fit into the mold of noble and idealized love, with the husband implied, discreetly minimized or simply absent; nor does it conform to that of erotic ruse and farce, with the husband present, prominent, suspicious, and frenetically active. Béroul's treatment of the situation is by no means comic with regard to the lovers. They are held up not for our laughter but for our admiration as being superior in every way to those around them, including Marc (who is occasionally made ridiculous)²; and Béroul, as if in some uneasiness about the reactions of his hearers or readers, gives us an occasional assurance

Lorcin confidently asserts that the winner is always the younger man: but this is by no means so simple to establish (*Façons de sentir et de penser : les fabliaux français*, Paris, 1979, p. 83-84).

1. *Le Prestre qu'on porte* supplies an exception to this. Nykrog (*op. cit.*, p. 62) also cites the subplot of *Le Pescheor*; but this is erroneous.

2. Here I cannot agree with Peter Noble, who states in *Le Roi Marc et les amants dans le Tristan de Béroul* that Marc "n'est presque jamais ridicule" (in *Romania*, t. 102 [1981], p. 225).

that even God is on the lovers' side and that the faithful barons who spy on and denounce them are felons¹. On the other hand, the third member of this particular triangle is not just any husband. He is a king, possessed both of a strong personality and of great power, a power he is fully capable of using. He may if sufficiently offended condemn to death his errant wife and her lover; and in fact he does at one point condemn them to the flames despite the almost universal outcry of his subjects. Furthermore, far from being a minor figure whose threatening nature is diminished by distance, (as in the case of Arthur in the *Chevalier de la charrete*) King Marc is very much in evidence during substantial reaches of Béroul's narrative. Some of the longest and most dramatic scenes involve him, scenes when all three of the principals confront each other or when one, in hiding, observes or overhears the other two. Even when they are apart each is aware of the other or others, and aware to the point of obsession.

Owing in part to the accidents that have befallen the unique manuscript of Béroul's romance, we meet the three main characters in the middle of a situation having strong links with the world of the *fabliau*. Two people, engaged in an illicit love-affair, are having a nocturnal rendez-vous. The lady is married²; and her husband, apprised that this meeting is imminent, has arranged to witness it so as to verify certain ugly rumors that are circulating about his wife and the other man. The place

1. The point is made in such lines as "Molt grant miracle Deus i out, / Qui(e)s garanti, si con li plot" (v. 754-5). As for the barons, Béroul introduces them thus: "A la cort avoit trois barons, / Ainz ne veïstes plus felons" (v. 581-2). All quotations are taken from *The Romance of Tristan by Béroul*, ed. by A. Ewert, 2 vol. (Oxford, 1939, 1970).

2. In *Sur le climat social, moral, religieux du Tristan de Béroul*, in *Le Moyen Âge*, t. 82 (1976). Jean Subrenat goes to considerable lengths to show that the marriage of Yseut and Marc is invalid. He cites heterogeneous grounds, many of which are not supported by the existing text: lack of free consent on Yseut's part, absence of a « vie sexuelle entre Yseut et Marc » (p. 226), a *de facto* marriage of Tristan and Yseut prior to her marriage ceremony with Marc (in which case the latter would be « entaché de nullité », p. 229).

of assignation being a garden (thus lacking in cover), the husband is persuaded by an adviser to climb a tree and thence to spy on them. As luck would have it, the lovers are, independently, keen-sighted enough to perceive his shadow or reflection in the fountain and quick-witted enough to improvise for his benefit a little drama of innocent and distant acquaintanceship. In consequence they create in Marc's mind an entirely erroneous impression. The lovers leave severally, Tristran taking advantage of Yseut's early departure to deliver himself of a most pathetic monologue that includes an apostrophe to his *beaus oncles* (v. 251). Only when Tristran, too, makes his exit does the narrative focus move to Marc, who is in the grip of some powerful emotions. In spite of himself, he is moved to tears, tears of pity, grief, and anger. Much of his discomfiture stems from a keen sense of having been made ridiculous; this, in fact, is the burden of the first words he speaks in Bérout's fragment:

« Las ! » fait li rois, « or ai veü
Que li nains m'a trop deceü :
En cest arbre me fist monter,
Il ne me pout plus ahonter... » (265-8)

As if we might have missed the point, Bérout not only shows us Marc in a highly undignified posture but has the character himself be sensible of how undignified it is, even though (as he thinks) there is no witness to this self-imposed act of *lèse-majesté*. Coupled with his shame is a murderous rage, directed not against his wife and nephew but against the dwarf who had denounced them and proposed that Marc spy on their meeting. The dwarf's flight prevents Marc from venting his wrath; but there remains one last, magisterial touch before this spying-from-the-tree episode is definitively over. Interestingly, it is Marc who prolongs its reverberations by bringing it up immediately thereafter. Paying a solo visit to Iseut (contrary to his custom), he tackles her without preliminaries with a demand for the truth and then asks her whether she has seen his nephew "since" ¹. Iseut's osten-

1. " ' Dame, veïs puis mon nevo ? ' "; presumably "since" his banishment; see Ewert edition, II, note on v. 399.

sibly candid and courageous account of the tryst in the garden entirely corresponds to the scene as Marc has observed it. Not content, after this verification, to let the matter rest, Marc confides to Iseut (and also to her attendant, Brengain) that he knows she has spoken the truth because he had been present during her interview with Tristran, watching and listening from the pine tree. He goes so far as to describe the emotions he then felt, emotions so powerful that he came close to falling from his lookout post. He was, he says, moved to compassion when reminded of events long past : Tristran's battle with the Morholt, Tristran's suffering on the sea and from his wound, Iseut's healing ministrations to him. Marc had, he adds, in addition, a fresh cause for pity : Tristran's entreaty to Iseut, for help in acquitting his debts before departing from the royal court. Marc took good note of Iseut's rejection of Tristran's plea, and observed as well that they did not approach each other. In short, he is at this moment a profoundly relieved and happy man, and a man without any reserve in confiding either his actions or his past and present feelings. Covering his wife with kisses, he swears that he will never doubt her or his nephew again. Henceforth they may come and go as they please ; what is Tristran's will be his, what is his will be Tristran's.

This whole garden episode and its aftermath offer a close parallel to the classic *fabliau* theme of the *cocu battu et content*¹. The hearer or reader who has followed the tale thus far knows full well that Marc is a *cocu*, although Marc (like many a *fabliau* husband) is unaware of the fact. Indeed, by the end of this incident he is not merely content but euphoric. Nevertheless he has also been beaten — not with sticks but with tricks, in a

1. Analogies between this episode and two widely-disseminated tales in East and West, that of the Enchanted Tree and that of the Carpenter's Wife, are examined by Helaine Newstead in *The Tryst Beneath the Tree : An Episode in the Tristan Legend*, in *Romance Philology*, t. 9 (1955-56), p. 269-84. Among medieval European treatments of the Tree theme she cites the *comédie latine* of *Lidia* ; of the Carpenter's Wife, a redaction of John of Capua's *Directorium vitae humanae*.

virtuoso display of words and gestures that to the literary audience are utterly mendacious and are to Marc utterly persuasive.

Yet, though beaten verbally and evidentially Marc nevertheless has by his presence during the garden tryst accomplished something he would have wanted to accomplish, had he been aware of the true state of affairs. He had been detected by his wife and her lover, who consequently refrained from committing adultery on that particular occasion. The hearer or reader may safely assume that such was indeed their intention, even though Bérout's preceding text has been lost ; obsessed by the love potion, the lovers as this romancer represents them are driven to physical union, whenever and wherever this is even remotely and dangerously possible.

Here, then, is an episode that sets before us a genuine amorous triangle. While granting the husband prominence, it deprives him of any semblance of dignity, makes him painfully aware of his humiliation and yet willing to add to it by making it public (he quite unnecessarily informs not only his wife but her confidante that he had been up in that tree). We see Marc first animated by dark suspicions and then (mistakenly) reassured, expansive, confiding, affectionate, and ready to be cuckolded again ¹. In short, although the tryst scene does not show Marc as a crudely comic figure ², Bérout does make of him a character undeserving of admiration. But, how, we may ask, does this episode treat the lovers ?

Neither nobly nor sentimentally. If, rather than accepting

1. Moshé Lazar relegates Marc to the category of "le mari typique des fabliaux", in *Amour courtois et fin'amors dans la littérature du XII^e siècle*, Paris, 1964, p. 154, n. 10 ; but this observation is part and parcel of his reading of the scene where Marc surprises the lovers in the forest, a situation, in Lazar's view, stage-managed by the lovers.

2. See Alberto Vàrvaro, *Il "Roman de Tristan" di Bérout* (Turin, 1963, p. 228. (In English as *Bérout's Romance of Tristan*, tr. by John C. Barnes, Manchester/New York, 1972, p. 168). Professor Vàrvaro's judicious assessment is seconded by Colette-Anne Van Coolput in *le Roi Marc dans le Tristan de Bérout*, in *Le Moyen Âge*, t. 84, 1978, p. 37.

them at Béroul's evaluation, we judge them by the words and actions he attributes to them, we may well wonder at his undisguised partiality for these two. They are every whit as devoid of intellectual elevation, moral scruple, or delicate feeling as are the men and women who populate the *fabliaux*. Any lustful cleric or priest or *chevalier*, any straying peasant women or bourgeoisie or undifferentiated *dame*, is brother or sister to Tristran or Iseut. The words and actions of the lovers immediately subsequent to the garden scene bear out, I think, this judgement concerning their lack of scruple¹. Béroul treats us to separate accounts of the evening's proceedings as given by each of the principals to a trusted confidant. Immediately upon returning to her *chambre* Iseut encounters Brengain and recapitulates to her what has occurred : her detection of Marc's presence by his reflection in the fountain and her sudden change of plan :

« Onques de ce que je i quis
N'i out mot dit, ce vos plevis,
Mais mervellos conplaignement
Et mervellos gemissement ». (353-56)

She sums up with remarkable concision, and precision, what she and Tristran had said to each other, and continues :

« Ne sai que je plus racontasse ;
Conp[l]ainz i out une grant masse ». (365-66)

And then, full of self-congratulation,

1. In *Abelardian Ethics and Béroul's Tristran*, in *Romania*, t. 98, 1977, p. 501-40, Tony Hunt endeavors to make a case for the lovers' "benignity" towards Marc, contrasting it with the credence the king gives to the "unjust" accusations of the barons (516). (This article is discussed by Peter Noble, *art. cit.*) In my own view, if any of the three main characters is benevolent it is (occasionally) Marc ; witness his actions and his monologue in the forest scene (well discussed by A. Vârvaro, *op. cit.*, p. 160-68). (On the other hand, C.-A. Van Coolput is mistaken in asserting that Marc is generous to the lovers although now convinced that they *are* lovers [*art. cit.* p. 45-46].)

« Onques li rois ne s'aperçut,
Ne mon estre ne desconnut ;
Partie me sui du tripot ». (367-69) ¹

It had been touch-and-go, and she came out of the situation unscathed — such is her evaluation of the scene to Brengain, her attendant, her intimate friend, her other self ². As far as Yseut is concerned, there is not the slightest indication that any moral issues are involved ; there was only a project of an erotic rendez-vous, the frustration of this plan, the improvisation of a dialogue to deceive the watching and listening Marc, and now the jubilant assumption (even before Marc comes to her with corroboration) that she (she !) is out of danger. Her lack of concern for her husband is not perhaps particularly shocking since we (like, presumably, the contemporaries of Bérout) know the story of the love potion ; perhaps we are even disposed to be indulgent to persons whose responsibility is diminished because their wills are not free ³. On the other hand, the total absence on Yseut's part of sentiment for her lover, of any expression of oneness with him in this joyous moment of relief and of unreserved confession, takes one aback ⁴. Yseut's slight concern for

1. In *Le Legs du moyen âge*, Melun, 1950, p. 129, Albert Pauphilet branded this line (accurately, I believe) as an " expression d'une vulgarité frappante. »

2. One should remember that in other versions of this tale and wherein parts of it that precede Bérout's fragment are recorded, Brengain not only was Yseut's companion on the journey from Ireland to Cornwall but even substituted for her on the royal wedding night.

3. The possibility of an influence of Abelard's ideas concerning intention, i.e. freedom of the will, as constitutive of sin was raised (and rejected) as early as 1963 by Vârvaro (*op. cit.*, III, 1), and was argued affirmatively and at length by Tony Hunt (*art. cit.*). Abelardian influence was recently and summarily dismissed by Jean-Charles Payen in *Bérout et l'abélardisme*, in *Romania*, t. 103 (1982). One comment by Payen deserves quotation : " ... Bérout n'a pas à être ou à ne pas être abélardien. Ce qu'il lui faut, c'est innocenter ses héros qui sont en situation de faute, et le philtre d'amour est là pour lui simplifier la tâche " (p. 375).

4. Peter Noble's comment in *Bérout's 'Somewhat Softened Feminine View'?*, in *Modern Language Review*, t. 75 [1980], p. 747,

her lover, her self-absorption under stress, put her on a level with such *fabliau* characters as the *vilain's* wife in "Les perdrix"; the latter, we remember, gets out of a tight situation by accusing her (putative) innamorato to her husband¹.

The counterpart of Yseut's conversation with Brengain is that of Tristran with Governal. This is far shorter: two lines for Tristran's *résumé* and two for the other man's reaction. Tristran tells how *he* (not *they*) behaved; and Governal

Qant conter l'ot, Deu en mercie
Que plus n'i out fait o s'amie. (383-84)

Once again, there is not slightest suggestion of compunction on the lover's part nor of disapprobation on that of the confidant, who is well apprised of the true state of affairs.

The king's prompt and menacing arrival in the royal chamber is for Yseut another scare (v. 388) and then a new opportunity for deception; and she shamelessly makes sport of him while retelling, with feigned fear and trembling, her interview with Tristran². The more this scene is prolonged, the more Marc's

merits attention: "Iseut is selfish and quite prepared to use Tristran and his love for her, as the fact that she sends him to Orri's hut would indicate". (This judgement is repeated in "*Le Roi Marc...*", 223-24). Yseut's selfishness, I think, also looks out in the episode under examination here. R. Howard Bloch has some brief but stimulating observations on the degree of self-interest and independence marking in varying degrees the whole spectrum of medieval courtly genres, with the selfish individualism of *fabliau* characters at one extreme end of the scale; see *Medieval French Literature and Law*, Berkeley, 1977, p. 225-27.

1. *Recueil général et complet des fabliaux des XIII^e et XIV^e siècles*, éd. par Anatole de Montaiglon et Gaston Raynaud, 6 vols., Paris, 1872-90, I, p. 188-93.

2. Marc's character and role as handled by Béroul is set in the context of other medieval depictions of the jealous husband (including that of Thomas) by Alexandre Micha. His evaluation of the scene under discussion demonstrates both insight and scholarly caution: Yseut "n'est pas loin de le transformer en mari de *fabliau* dans la scène savoureuse où elle se joue sans vergogne de lui, en lui contant avec une savante ingénuité la scène sous le pin" (*art. cit.*, p. 307).

affection, his relief, and his re-established trust and magnanimity display themselves and contrast with the thoughts and speeches of his wife and nephew. Marc's new benevolence extends as far as to Brengain, even though she has just heard the entire account of his spying activities ; and he sends her off to Tristan's lodging to fetch him with a charge that is charity itself :

« Brengain — que Dex anor te donst ! —
 Por mon nevo va a l'ostel... (505-6)

But the girl is faithful both to her mistress and to her mistress's example ; she feigns reluctance to fetch Tristan from his lodging on the false pretext that he hates her. It takes Marc's benevolent promise to use his good offices between them to overcome her resistance and send her bounding out the door. She straight-away encounters the very man she was sent to bring, for he is near by and not through any accident. In fact, we surprise him in an activity many degrees removed from the heroic :

Tristan estoit a la paroi,
 Bien les oiet parler au roi. (529-30)

By the time Brengain encounters him he has heard all and is thanking God for the renewed opportunity to be with Yseut to his heart's content¹. What follows, though, ought to give us pause, for it furnishes a brief but valuable insight into Bérout's depiction of the character of his hero. Tristan seizes Brengain by the arms and embraces her, but does not even to her reveal his awareness of the current situation, obtained through eaves-dropping. For a confirmation of this reading we have only to consider Brengain's behavior : she proceeds to give Tristan a *résumé* of Marc's conversation with Yseut, an account unchecked by any interruption from Tristan, though her speech merely recapitulates what he has overheard.

This entire opening scene of the Bérout fragment is in many ways an anticipation of the last complete episode, the *escondit* ;

1. A break in the ms., at v. 533, is regrettable ; yet the sequence of thought is clear : " Brengain a par les braz saisie,/Acole la, Deu en mercie / ... D'estre o Yseut a son plaisir " (531-34).

and it is inevitable that we bring to the latter scene our memory of the earlier one. At the center of each are the same bare bones ; the same three principals again share the stage and, once more, two of them collaborate in order to convince the husband of his wife's fidelity, allay his suspicions, and make it possible for the love-affair to continue. The flavor of the *escondit*, though, is much at variance with that of the *tryst*. The latter involved only three people (and in its aftermath the confidants of two of them), and in its small number of characters and limited space had some of the homely, small-scale, domestic quality that regularly figures in the *fabliaux*. By contrast, the drama that begins at the Mal Pas is as public and theatrical as possible. It is Iseut's doing that the cast is a large one, for she has requested that all of Marc's subjects be present :

« Esgarde un terme, si lor mande
 Que tu veus a la Blanche Lande
 Tuit i soient, et povre et riche ;
 Qui n'i sera, tres bien t'afiche
 Que lor toudras lor herité ;
 Si reseras d'eus aquité ». (3267-72)

This order, once issued, is obeyed to the letter. The rabble are there in their numbers, taunting the " leper " and receiving his blows ; a host of *vaslets* and *escuiers* unload the baggage, set up the tents, and attend to their superiors. But it is to the courtly that Iseut directs her best efforts. All the knights of Marc's kingdom are there with their wives (4123-24) ; and many a one has brought along his *druë* (4086). Marc's barons, too, are in attendance ; and Arthur has in his train a hundred of his own (3260, 3360, 3440). As a consequence, this episode has the brilliance of many of the " big scenes " frequent in courtly romance : crowds of servants and squires ; feasting, hunting, tourneying ; the giving of gifts ; the hearing of petitions ; all against a background of flower-strewn tents, expensive horses, furs and rich fabrics, golden reliquaries, fine armor. Wealth, beauty, power, and refinement, concentrated in the Blanche Lande, are summed up :

Nus ne vit deus plus riches corz ;
 Mestier nen est dont la nen ait. (4102-3)

All this lavish display of luxury and largesse, all this vast assembly of two royal courts preludes to an impressive public ritual — not, for once, a wedding or coronation but a formal oath, sworn upon all the heaped-up relics to be found in Cornwall. We are breathing the atmosphere of the romance world at its most magnificent. Yet there are elements out of keeping with the whole, and these elements are entirely supplied by the lovers. Tristran plays to the hilt his character of begging leper, clashing with the elevated tone of the general scene not only through his revolting make-up and costume but through his actions. He begs alms, receives insults, strikes blows with his stick, misdirects the arriving travelers (those who are attempting to cross the ford), applauds their muddy misadventures with thwacks of his leper's goblet and bottle, wheedles gifts from Arthur and then from Marc, tells the latter an indecent and equivocal story, and at last hobbles over the foot-bridge with the queen on his back. In short, shouting, jesting, clacking, laughing, scratching himself, he plays his unheroic role not reluctantly but with *brio*, from the moment he puts on his disguise.

Unlike him, Iseut looks every inch the romance heroine : well mounted, nobly escorted, clad in silk and ermine, a golden circlet on her golden hair. Like him, though, she engages in words and gestures that are at variance with the generally high tone of the proceedings. She enters the scene in a state of some hilarity, for all is arranged as planned and, for a bonus, her three enemies are at that moment struggling in the mire where the "leper" has treacherously sent them :

Atant es vos Yseut la bele ;
El taier vit ses ainemis,
Sor la mote sist ses amis ;
Joie en a grant, rit et envoise. (3824-27)

She soon laughs (or smiles) again, in answer to Dinas's expressed concern for her fine cloak, in danger of being muddied at the ford ; with a wink and a stare she conveys to him her intentions. Now at last alone with the "leper" on the bank, very much conscious of her audience on the other side, she addresses him with quite gratuitous brutality, ordering him to be her beast of burden. Carried on his back to the far side, she refuses to reward

her porter although Arthur himself pleads on his behalf ; her pretext is that he has already received gifts from Arthur, her *seignor* (3973), and others ¹, and that his wallet is well filled ². Her public refusal of charity may serve as a reminder of her earlier, private communication to Tristran through Pirinis (3308-12) : that Tristran should, when in disguise, not only beg for alms of gold and silver but keep whatever he gets and show it to her. Yet it is not only uncharitable but discourteous. Arthur, after all, has done her a large favor by coming. In any case, her niggardliness at this dramatic moment is accompanied, by way of excuse, with an inventory of what she has detected on her unwilling bearer's person :

« Les pains demiés et les entiers
Et les pieces et les quartiers
Ai bien parmié le sac sentu ;
Viande a, si est bien vestu ». (3967-70) ³

This kind of unnecessarily realistic detail, this concern for the trivial of everyday life, has an odd sound in the mouth of a queen, and particularly a queen whose reputation and future are at stake ; but it is no odder than the brutal conclusion of her speech (not *to* him but *about* him, as if he were less than human) :

« Hui a suï bone pasture,
Trové a gent a sa mesure.
De moi n'en portera qui valle
Un sol ferlinc n'une maalle ». (3977-80)

1. Béroul does not explain how she is aware of these acts of charity, which took place before her arrival.

2. Is there an obscene play on words in v. 3965-69 ?

3. It is difficult to know what to do with these givens. To read the passage literally is to form a curious image of Tristran-as-leper, staggering across a partially-submerged footbridge, crutch in hand, woman on back, wearing before him a food-bag filled with loaves of bread broken and whole. After Iseut makes her assertion that the "leper" is well provided no one denies it, a detail implying that Béroul expects the hearer's or reader's concurrence without discussion. Many elements of this scene are probingly discussed by Vårvaro, *op. cit.*, VI, 3 and 4, and particularly as to Béroul's mingling of styles.

The studied insolence of "gent a sa mesure", embracing as it does both Arthur and Marc (whose gifts she has specifically mentioned), is seemingly lost on the two kings, who are in the best of spirits as they set her on her palfrey.

All this has been lacking in refinement ; but the next day at the *escondit* Iseut rises to new heights of self-assurance in manner and of coarseness in expression. Here, for once, there is a major episode in the continuing drama of love and rivalry at which one of the three parties is not present, even as spectator or spy. The physical absence may perhaps account for the reiterated evocations of carnal relations, licit and illicit, made by Iseut and then by her witnesses. Here again her style of expression clashes with that of the other members of the courtly world ; and the contrast is particularly vigorous at the moment of taking the oath. It is Arthur who administers it, or attempts to do so ; and although the matter at issue is whether, once and for all, Tristan has been her lover, the form employed is courteously vague :

« Entendez moi, Yseut la bele,
Oiez de qoi on vos apele :
Que Tristan n'ot vers vos amor
De puteé ne de folor
Fors cele que devoit porter
Envers son oncle et vers sa per ». (4191-96)

Cool and self-possessed, Iseut substitutes for this her own oath, literally true although in reality false, since it is based on the charade performed so theatrically the previous day at the Mal Pas. Carrying equivocation about as far as it can be carried, her *escondit* simultaneously affirms and denies that she is a faithful wife, that Tristan is not her husband's rival, that no one else has ever enjoyed her love. She goes far beyond Arthur in specifying what sort of love is at issue, swearing

« Q'entre mes cuises n'entra home,
Fors le ladre qui fist soi some,
Qui me porta outre les guez,
Et li rois Marc mes esposez ;
Ces deus ost de mon soirement ». (4205-09)

And, as if this fairly plain reference were not enough, she reiterates it :

« Ge n'en ost plus de tote gent ;
De deus ne me pus escondire :
Du ladre, du roi Marc, mon sire.
Li ladres fu entre mes janbes
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Qui voudra que je plus en face,
Tote en sui preste en ceste place ». (4210-16)

Taking their lead from her, the whole multitude of witnesses, persuaded that the oath in this form goes beyond the minimum required, speaks as one person ; and the choral effect drives home once again the crude language used by the queen on this solemn occasion.

But coarse language betokens coarseness of thought ; and once again we find ourselves on a strange and shifting middle-ground between two modes of thought and expression, the courtly and the non-courtly, *courtois* and *vilain*, *stylus gravis* and *stylus humilis* (taking *stylus* not only in its verbal but also in its generic sense). This is a tale of noble lovers whose words, actions, and thoughts are on many occasions anything but noble, whose relationship is not only illicit and obsessive but explicitly physical. Whatever other contemporary or later romancers may invent, in Béroul's hands the lovers are not united by any mystical concept of spiritual union, nor by charity, nor friendship, nor even affection. We may, I submit, take literally what Tristran asserts to Ogrin in the Morrois forest after that hermit has warned them of dangers temporal and eternal : " Q'el m'aime, c'est par la poison " (1384). Iseut corroborates this :

« Sire, por Deu omnipotent,
Il ne m'aime pas, ne je lui,
Fors par un herbé dont je bui,
Et il en but ; ce fu pechiez. » (1412-15) ¹

1. For *pechiez*, see Janet H. Caulkins, *The Meaning of " pechié "* in the Romance of *Tristran* by Béroul, in *Romance Notes*, t. XIII (1971-2), p. 545-9.

It is carnal desire, nothing else, that links them. When that desire suddenly ends (the three years of the potion being used up), what remains for them to do? Nothing occurs to their minds but to resume their wonted places in the world, and thereafter go their several ways. It is true that their separation, and Yseut's reconciliation with Marc, appear to revivify their illicit liaison¹; once revived, though, it is on the same basis as before². There is no subsequent evolution either in their relationship with each other or in their attitude toward the third member of the triad. Trickers and tricked: so the three of them first appear on Béroul's stage, and so they remain until they vanish from our sight.

It is not at all my intention to suggest that the tale of Marc, Yseut, and Tristran should be read as a *fabliau* that has moved up in the social scale and in the process taken on the dimensions of a romance. This would be a drastic over-simplification of what is far from being a simple narrative. Much of it conveys the *sens de l'aventure et de l'amour*³ and by so doing it is at home in the world of courtliness and of romance. Yet it exhibits other ties as well, and Béroul's redaction has one foot in the *fabliau* world. Consider: an illicit love affair based on physical attraction; the lover's wills all bent on satisfying desire; their intellectual activity limited to avoiding detection, eluding pursuit, and juggling with the truth; their morality characterized by a cynical and ruthless manipulation of those around them and by a profound egoism even with respect to each other — such are the lovers of Cornwall. If singleness of motivation, vulgarity of thought and feeling, frenetic energy, and a type of comedy verging

1. The observations of Denis de Rougemont on the importance of the obstruction as it functions in various tellings of the Tristran story are still worth noting; see *L'Amour et l'occident*, Paris, 1939, revd. ed. 1956; Eng. tr. *Love in the Western World*, New York, 1940; revd. ed. New York, 1956, especially I, 8.

2. See the penetrating discussion of various critical views of this problem in Vàrvaro, *op. cit.*, Eng. trans., *Postscript 1971*, p. 203.

3. The expression is borrowed from Reto R. Bezzola, *Le sens de l'aventure et de l'amour (Chrétien de Troyes)*, Paris, 1947.

on cruelty and *Schadenfreude*¹ are all normal constituents of those *fabliaux* that relate an adulterous triangle, these traits are never far beneath the surface, and frequently rise well above it, in Béroul's telling of this harsh and haunting story.

Barbara Nelson SARGENT-BAUR.

1. For a further exploration of the lovers' often cruel abuse of language to serve their own ends, see my *Truth, Half-Truth, Untruth: Béroul's Telling of the Tristran Story*, in *The Craft of Fiction: Essays in Medieval Poetics*, ed. by L. Arrathoon, Rochester, Mich., 1984, p. 393-421.
