

**Unwanted Husbands and Adultery:
Medieval Marriage in the Twelfth-Century Tristan and Isolde Legend**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree
of Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in History**

**University of Sydney
October 2006**

Acknowledgements

I'd like to thank:

My supervisor Lynette Olson, especially for organising time for me every week in the last few months despite scheduling difficulties.

My flatmate and dear friend Edwina Doran for proof-reading and generally tolerating my moods.

Andrew "Percy" Crisp for translating Peter Damian for me with his Latin teacher Dexter Hoyos.

My fellow-honours students who became friends Veronica, Ellen, Christina and Jacqui.

Friends and family who contributed to my sanity in many ways, especially Shaun, Wiley, Lauren, Chris A., Chris C., Aaron, Sam, Robert and my äiti and iskä.

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Introduction

Marriage in the medieval period is an elusive topic for a historian to explore. While it simultaneously involved nearly everyone's lives in the Middle Ages, it was discussed sparingly in the documents that survive to our day. In the twelfth century, however, we suddenly have an abundance of ecclesiastical sources on marriage, due to the medieval Church's developing interest in marriage as a Christian institution. These ecclesiastical texts are the main surviving sources regarding marriage and they focus on its theological or legal aspects - little is known of people's actual lives at the time. In the later Middle Ages, when the Church had already established enough control over the legal proceedings of marriage for there to be actual court records, we get glimpses of married life in crisis. However, the formation of the medieval marriage ideology, which still to a great extent influences modern concepts of marriage, happened mostly during the twelfth century. Romance literature is one of the most useful sources for contrasting the ecclesiastical marriage policy, with secular ideas of marriage. The two obviously influenced each other enough for the lines to blur between what can be considered Christian influence and what were pressures of lay society. The study of literature shows glimpses of the kind of conflicts that arose especially between personal feelings and the requirements of secular society and Christian morality.

There are of course great difficulties in interpreting fiction as a reflection of reality. Fiction rarely gives a very reliable view of people's lives, especially in the case of the very stylised and fantastic approach of twelfth-century romance. However, it is entirely plausible for literature to still mirror ideas and ideals, even fantasies, that people had in relation to their lives. The romances' ideals of chivalry and the descriptions of love and marriage came from the imaginations of their authors, who ultimately should be perceived as products of their times. The authors' creative works show what kind of societies the authors were living in and how they experienced the world. If an

author's society was mirrored in his works of art and his stories also found a large audience, he must have succeeded in relating to his contemporaries enough to suggest that his views could be applied more widely to the medieval world.

Literature gives us an idea of what people were thinking about marriage and love. The viewpoint of romance literature is more secular than the abundant legal and religious writings on marriage. While romance authors themselves could often be in ecclesiastical positions, or at least to have been trained in religious institutions, they were writing with a secular audience in mind. The purpose of the romances was clearly not to instruct lay people entirely according to religious morals, although there seems to always be the didactic purpose of bettering and ennobling people's minds. The fact that the advice of romance authors and the example of their characters is notably different from the moral teachings of bishops and popes, already suggests that they provide a different perspective on society than religious literature.

Modern scholarship on marriage in literature has not been a particularly popular topic in the last twenty years. Most studies on medieval marriage that bear relevance to this thesis were formulated in the 1970s and 1980s. Georges Duby's extensive work on medieval marriage will be discussed extensively in the First Chapter, as well as David Herlihy's theories on the medieval family.¹ A particularly interesting study on the relationship between medieval literature and marriage, in the last decade, have been Peggy McCracken's book on what medieval romance literature show about the position of queens in medieval society.² Another reasonably recent study of medieval literature and marriage is Neil Cartlidge's *Medieval Marriage: Literary Approaches, 1100-1300*, which efficiently summarises the various modern theories concerning marriage in the Middle Ages in the

¹ Especially George Duby, *Medieval Marriage: Two Models from Twelfth-Century France*, translated by Elborg Forster, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1978 and David Herlihy, *Women, Family and Society in Medieval Europe: Historical Essays, 1978-1991*, Berghahn books, Providence, 1995.

² Peggy McCracken, *The Romance of Adultery: Queenship and Sexual Transgression in Old French Literature*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1998.

fields of both history and literary criticism.³ Cartlidge especially points out the contribution of typically masculine discourses to the medieval notion of romantic love in opposition to the trend in feminist history to ignore the traditionally male literary areas in favour of the exclusive study of female authors.⁴ Another important compiler of data on medieval marriage customs is James A. Brundage, whose enormous study on the marital laws should be a constant reference point to anyone studying medieval marriage.⁵ This thesis will attempt to apply the theories and contributions of the above scholars to see what the reception and handling of the love story of Tristan and Isolde in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries may tell us about the relationship between religious ideals of matrimony, secular marriage structures and people's personal aspirations.

Chrétien de Troyes' *Cliges* is the first case study of this thesis and relates back to the idea of what created a valid marriage and whether people really had any choice in who they married. Considering the fact that the church had trouble establishing whether it was consent or consummation that made a marriage, Chrétien's focus on consummation perhaps shows that secular society preferred this practical evidence. It was written in the 1170s and Chrétien indicates in the prologue that he wrote a version of the Tristan and Isolde story that unfortunately does not survive.⁶ Chrétien's *Cliges* is, however, among the earliest written romances which refers directly to the Tristan and Isolde legend.⁷ It in fact follows the plot closely enough to be considered a re-treatment of that story, an attempt to make the story morally more justifiable and illustrates how powerless people often were to follow their individual desires in marriage.

³Neil Cartlidge, *Medieval Marriage: Literary Approaches, 1100-1300*, D.S. Brewer, Suffolk, 1997.

⁴Ibid. pp 9-10.

⁵James A. Brundage, *Law, sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1987.

⁶David Staines, "Introduction" to *The Complete Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*, translation and introduction by David Staines, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, First Midland Book Edition, 1993 (orig. 1990).

⁷The oldest extant lay of Tristan dates from about 1165, Thomas of Oberge's and Thomas of Britain's Tristan stories were written in the 1170s, W.T.H Jackson, *The Anatomy of Love: The Tristan of Gottfried von Strassburg*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1971, p 35.

For Béroul's *Tristan*, written soon after 1191, I will focus on the punishments for adultery and the rights that a husband had when his wife was unfaithful. Béroul's romance relates easily to the various laws of barbarians and Romans, showing that despite the Church's efforts to establish control over marriage, old laws were deeply embedded in marriage customs. Béroul's *Tristan* also shows the enmeshing of ecclesiastical and secular values in the moral principles of the laity. The landed nobility of the twelfth century was becoming more and more aware of what the Church required of them and was adapting those values to fit in with secular ideals of honour and duty.

The more analytical and mystical version of *Tristan* by Gottfried von Strassburg, written sometime in the first decades of the thirteenth century, is an excellent source on the role of sex in people's lives. Religious writers restricted their discussion of sex to the context of marriage and even then considered it a corrupting force. Gottfried, on the other hand, sees sex in the framework of personal happiness, as an expression of love. Passion and love seem to have been something people still wanted in marriage, despite the Church finding them inappropriate to the solemnity of the institution. As such, in the case study of Gottfried, I will concentrate on the concern for personal happiness in marriage, which is illustrated by Isolde's mother's concern and concocting of the love potion.

By default, this study of medieval marriage focuses on the upper classes of society. The audience of the romances consisted largely of the nobility and their authors used aristocratic characters rather than common people. Throughout, I will try to show the relation of the romances as works of fiction to the more official sources, like legal and theological texts. The Tristan legend was enormously popular and well-known and it was re-written by numerous authors. Medieval authors preferred writing stories that were already well-established and interpreting them in their own

way. Gottfried, for example, was telling a very different story to Béroul, even if the basic building blocks were the same. Thus, a comparison of the different Tristan related stories is useful, as the slight and great differences tend to illustrate what social injustices and conflicts were on the authors' minds as they were writing. Since the story is ultimately about adultery, I will also perforce concentrate on marriages in crisis. Marriage legislation obviously only came into the picture at the start of a marriage or if there were serious conflicts in the marriage, thus our ecclesiastical sources are skewed towards unhappy marriages not happy ones. Nonetheless, a crisis can more clearly bring to focus societal problems that otherwise remained under the surface. An example in point being the problem of not freely choosing one's spouse. Tristan and Isolde would never have engaged in adultery had they been allowed to marry each other after falling in love, but duty made Isolde marry the man she had been given to, Mark.

Summary of the main plot points in the Tristan and Isolde Legend

The following synopsis of the Tristan legend will summarise the main points of the story for anyone unfamiliar with the plot of the love story:

Rivalin and Blancheflor, the sister of King Mark of Cornwall, engage in a pre-marital affair, which leaves her pregnant. Upon learning of her pregnancy Rivalin elopes with her to his own kingdom. They are hastily married, and Rivalin dies soon after in armed conflict. Blancheflor dies of grief and childbirth, bringing forth Tristan. The tales of Tristan's youth vary, but eventually he ends up in Mark's court, who, upon learning that he is his nephew, makes him heir. Mark promises not to marry so that there will be no rivals to Tristan's inheritance.

As time passes, Mark comes under pressure from his barons to marry regardless of his promise, and he agrees. Tristan is sent to fetch Isolde, the daughter of the Irish King, as a wife for Mark. Tristan succeeds, however, Isolde is unhappy because Tristan has previously killed her uncle, as Mark's champion, and because she is distraught about leaving her home for a husband she has not even met. On the boat Tristan and Isolde accidentally drink a love potion, intended for Isolde and her husband-to-be, and fall madly in love. Isolde marries Mark and her maid Brangane sleeps with Mark on the wedding night so that Isolde can hide the fact she has lost her virginity to Tristan.

Tristan and Isolde try to meet as often as possible, causing suspicions in court. Mark becomes increasingly obsessed with finding out if they are, in fact, lovers. The various plots to discover the lovers and their clever ruses to make Mark believe their innocence, were especially indulged in when the storyteller wanted to make the story rather a comedy than a tragedy.

The couple are eventually discovered and to escape punishment they run away to the woods. They are later found with a sword between them, causing Mark to again believe their innocence. They are soon after reconciled with Mark and there is usually a trial by ordeal, where Isolde duplicitously affirms that she has always been faithful to Mark. The lovers then usually need to part for long periods of time, but continue to conduct their affair more sporadically.

Eventually Tristan and Isolde die. There are many versions of their end, but neither Gottfried's nor Bérout's Tristan stories, discussed in this thesis, survive completely and are thus missing a resolution. Thomas's version, on which Gottfried's *Tristan* is based, tells that Tristan, who is by then married to another woman whom he does not love, becomes ill and sends for Isolde to cure him. She leaves Mark to come to Tristan one last time. Tristan's messenger flies white sails when he approaches Tristan's home by boat, but his jealous wife claims the sails are black and therefore

the messenger has failed to convince Isolde to come. Tristan dies of despair and when Isolde comes to him she is so overcome with grief she dies herself.

I

Overview of Twelfth-Century Marriage

In order to understand the way romances might reflect medieval society, it is important to understand the differences between them and the religious writings on marriage, as well as the various theories formulated about medieval marriage by modern authors. The following chapter will attempt to shed light on the institution of marriage, as it was around the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The influence of the Gregorian Reform on the ecclesiastical ideal of marriage was notable, as its success was the reason the Church was able to implement a program to reform lay morality. The Church's views on marriage can be summarised by a look at the theological and canon law writings of the twelfth century and their early Christian predecessors. Modern scholarship on the history of the family and marriage has brought forth interesting theories, which will serve as useful analytical tools when discussing how Arthurian romances might reflect the society they were written in.

The Influence of the Gregorian Reform on the Medieval Church's Marriage Policy

The church's views on marriage were rather strict and intended to promote intense sexual modesty as a means to establish a stable society and to save souls. The motivation for the church's interest in controlling marriage is linked, first of all, with the church's new-found interest in secular affairs starting from the eleventh century papal reform. A brief summary of the issues at stake in the Gregorian Reformation is necessary to understand why it affected the Church's interest in marriage. The reformation had started before the eleventh century and had notably concentrated on

eradicating simony and the reasonably common phenomenon of married priests. Once the papacy took the lead in the reformation movement, the focus became the abolition of lay investiture.¹

The rather wide-spread practice of married priests was seen as a serious moral problem by the reformers and as a corruption of the ecclesiastical state. The ecclesiastical authorities felt that if priests lived too much like members of their congregation, they could not easily set themselves as impeccable moral authorities in society. Christianity was also influenced greatly by the concept that sexuality was a source of pollution and since the priests performed many sacred duties, their sexual activity could compromise the ritual purity and thus the effectiveness of those sacraments.² The writings of the Church Fathers, Christian philosophers writing in the first few centuries after Christ, had a profound influence on medieval Christianity, and they took a rather dim view of marriage. They saw the desire for the married state as a weakness of the flesh. St Jerome's views, for example, concentrated on promoting virginity for both men and women, but he admitted that marriage was the next best thing: "Let married women take their pride in coming next after virgins."³ St Jerome cared little for the begetting of offspring, whereas St Augustine of Hippo, while also preferring virginity, emphasised the beneficial nature of procreation: "The union, then, of male and female for the purpose of procreation is a natural good of marriage."⁴ The reformers did not begrudge marriage to lay people, as the Church Fathers sometimes seem to, however, they did believe such weakness was something priests should be above, since they had been called to serve God.

¹ On Gregorian Reformation, simony, married priests and lay investiture see, Geoffrey Barraclough, *The Medieval Papacy*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1968, Chapter III "The Age of Reform", pp 63-117 and R. Allen Brown, *The Origins of Modern Europe*, The Boydell Press, Woodbridge, 1996 (orig. 1972), Chapter VII "Reform of the Church", pp 129-152.

² Kathleen G. Cushing, *Reform and Papacy in the Eleventh Century: Spirituality and Social Change*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2005, pp 98-99.

³ "St Jerome: Virginity and Marriage" in *Women's Lives in Medieval Europe: A Sourcebook*, edited by Emilie Amt, Routledge, New York, 1993, p 23. (Source: *Selected Letters of St. Jerome*, translated by F. A. Wright, Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.), 1963)

⁴ "St. Augustine of Hippo: On Marriage and Concupiscence (423 A.D.)" in *Women's Lives in Medieval Europe: A Sourcebook*, p 27. (Source: *St Augustin: Anti-Pelagian Writings*, translated by Peter Holmes, Robert Ernest Wallace and Benjamin B. Warfield, *Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene fathers*, Ser. 1, Vol. 1, New York, 1893).

St Paul was one of the most influential authorities to proclaim that marriage ultimately distracted from serving God:

He who is unmarried is concerned with God's claim, asking how he is to please God; whereas the married man is concerned with the world's claim, asking how he is to please his wife; and thus he is at issues with himself.⁵

While it seems Paul was referring to secular commitments generally, rather than exclusively to marriage, his views could be used to justify why priests should be entirely dedicated to God, forgoing a wife and a family. Marriage would create moral and social responsibilities for priests that they should avoid, since their job was to guide the laity without bias. Conflicts of interests could arise for priests if they had obligations to their family, as well as to the entire congregation. Ecclesiastical authorities were probably also concerned about the depletion of Church property, when priests would leave inheritances to their sons, especially if the sons did not remain within the Church. In terms of sexual morality, married priests were at risk of becoming too enthused by the allures of marital sex, and also, since marriage was not yet clearly defined in ecclesiastical laws, they were vulnerable to accusations of concubinage and fornication. The fight against clerical marriage is particularly important in understanding the twelfth-century Church's interest in lay marriage, because it was part of the development which served to separate the notions of ideal behaviour between laymen and clerical men. Since the norm for priests was to remain unmarried, it was emphasised that it was nonetheless normal for lay people to marry.⁶

⁵ I Corinthians 7:31-33 in *The New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, Newly translated from the Vulgate Latin*, the Knox translation, Burns and Oates, London 1964 (orig.1945).

⁶ Georges Duby, *Medieval Marriage: Two Models from Twelfth-Century France*, trans. Elbory Forster, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1978, p 19. See also Kathleen G. Cushing, *Reform and Papacy in the Eleventh Century*, Chapter 5 "Reform in Practice", pp 91-110 for more on simony and clerical chastity.

The investiture dispute arose in connection with simony, which was the purchasing of episcopal sees and other ecclesiastical positions.⁷ Lay investiture was the phenomenon of lay authorities giving bishops and priests their ecclesiastical positions, which sometimes included exchanges of money. Simony was disapproved of, because it was seen as profane to purchase a position which God alone could grant. As the papacy grew stronger, the concept of the pope holding enough universal power to influence ecclesiastical matters internationally became apparent. Since, during the eleventh century, the Medieval Church became more unified, with better ability to exert power, it wanted to control all ecclesiastical matters itself. Churches and bishoprics, according to the reformed papacy, were not something the lay lords owned, thus they should have no authority to give away as they chose, something belonging to God. During the later eleventh century the dispute between secular rulers and the popes raged, most notably between German emperor Henry IV and Pope Gregory VII, but finally the Church mostly gained control over its own affairs, separating it from the state.⁸

The Gregorian reformation generally succeeded well and the newly centralised medieval Church started to concentrate on reforming the morals of the laity from a more unified position. Prior to the reformation, the medieval Church did not have the ability to construct a comprehensive program designed to improve lay morality. The twelfth century saw a great enthusiasm particularly for reforming marriage to better fit into the Christian tradition, which was only possible due to the Church's new ability to influence Christendom through canon law. The Church at least claimed to have achieved jurisdiction of marital issues by the last two decades of the eleventh century,⁹ but the idea of marriage in medieval minds was deeply embedded in tradition

⁷ Simony was so called for Simon Magus, who attempted to purchase the Holy Spirit from St. Peter. Brown, "Reform of the Church" pp 139-140.

⁸ See, Walter Ullmann, *A Short History of the Papacy in the Middle Ages*, Methuen & Co., London, 1972, pp 116-141, on the investiture controversy.

⁹ Georges Duby, *Medieval Marriage: Two Models from Twelfth-Century France*, translated by Elbory Forster, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1978, p 20.

and the Church could only try to influence it in ways they saw as conducive to the salvation of the people.

Marriage in Twelfth-Century Canon Law

The ecclesiastical writings on the purpose of marriage are complicated and often confusing. They contradict each other at different eras, but also according to the personal beliefs and conclusions of the author. The most influential and best-known compiler of canon laws on marriage was Gratian, whose views were the cornerstone upon which the popes of the twelfth century built their policy on marriage.¹⁰ Gratian emphasised the indissolubility of marriage, which should be absolute if the marriage was clearly valid: “Once a marriage has been proved to have begun it cannot be dissolved for any reason.”¹¹ He insisted that consent was the most important qualifier of a valid marriage and that consummation was to be seen as a confirmation of consent but not as validating the marriage by itself:

The union of the couple completes the marriage. For according to St. Ambrose, “In all marriage the union is understood to be spiritual, and it is confirmed and completed by the bodily union of the couple.”¹²

The Christian Church insisted on the consent of both parties as Gratian says: “Those who are to be of one body ought also to be of one spirit, and therefore no woman who is unwilling ought ever to be joined to anyone.”¹³ The concept of consent in marriage is particularly relevant to this study, as the major motivator for the adultery of Chrétien de Troyes’ heroine, Fenice, is that she is being forced to marry someone against her will. There are also indications to Isolde’s unhappiness in her being forced to marry Mark, which must have served to create sympathy for her, despite her

¹⁰ Charles Duggan, “Equity and Compassion in Papal Marriage Decretals to England” in *Love and Marriage in the Twelfth Century*, edited by Willy Van Hoecke and Andries Welkenhuysen, Leuven University Press, Louvain, Belgium, 1981, p 60.

¹¹ “Gratian: Canon Law on Marriage” in *Women’s Lives in Medieval Europe: A Sourcebook*, edited by Emilie Amt, Routledge, New York, 1993, p 82. (source for Gratian: *Corpus Juris Canonici*, edited by E. Friedberg, 1959)

¹² *Ibid.* p 80.

¹³ *Ibid.* p 81.

adultery. It seems people's marriage customs came to follow Church policy quite slowly, as especially girls, but quite likely also boys, were torn between the duty to marry whom their family chose and personal preference. The religious authors of the twelfth century argued long about whether it was in fact the consent of the couple or the consummation which validated the marriage. As Gratian points out, preferably both needed to occur for a marriage to be indisputably authenticated. This comes up in the *Cliges* romance when Chrétien's Fenice uses a ruse to avoid consummating her marriage to her husband, in order to stay true to her lover. But the ruse also allowed for the possibility of dissolution, since as Gratian notes: "If a woman proves that her husband has never known her carnally, there may be a separation."¹⁴

The 'consummation or consent' argument was fundamentally about the overall role of sex in marriage. Much of the marriage ideology of the medieval Church came from the ascetic tradition of the Church Fathers. They generally took the position that sexual pleasure was a sin, even in marriage, and marriage itself was a state for the weak, who could not completely devote themselves to serving the Lord. Virginity was idealised and elevated and widowhood was the runner-up. If society had truly been organised as a community of unmarried, chaste, virginal women and men, it would obviously not have been very lasting from an evolutionary point of view. Therefore, Christian philosophers often reluctantly tried to point out that marriage was good in some ways, but simultaneously warned that sex within marriage, while more acceptable than fornication, should not be enjoyed but only conducted in order to produce offspring. Augustine of Hippo in his *The Excellence of Marriage* (c.401)¹⁵ comments on the level of sinfulness between sex in marriage or outside it:

Marital intercourse for the sake of procreating is not sinful. When it is for the purpose of satisfying sensuality, but still with one's spouse, because there is marital fidelity it is a venial sin. Adultery or

¹⁴ Ibid. p 80.

¹⁵ *Love, Sex and marriage in the Middle Ages: A Sourcebook*, edited by Conor McCarthy, Routledge, London and New York, 2004, p 30.

fornication, however, is a mortal sin. For this reason abstinence from all sexual union is better even than marital intercourse performed for the sake of procreating.¹⁶

Most religious authors writing about marriage in the twelfth century wrote along similar lines to Augustine regarding sex. This is particularly evident in penitentials which often have sections dedicated to sexual sins, which included sins committed during marital sex, usually involving too much enjoyment.¹⁷ Part of the abhorrence for excessive sexual pleasure was not just due to hermetic Christian tradition, but Greek and Roman philosophy, which often perceived sex as a corrupting and distracting force, which reduced a man's capacity for rationality. The difference between Christians and classical philosophy was that despite the Greek distaste for immoderate sexuality, they usually perceived it as morally indifferent, while for Christians it was sinful.¹⁸ Hostiensis, a canonist writing in the first half of the thirteenth century, perceives the good of marital sex in very classical terms, as he describes marital copulation as the only true way for rational beings to have sex: "for brutish animals the union is only of their bodies, but for rational beings, union is matrimony, and is thus a union of souls and bodies."¹⁹

Hostiensis, or Henry of Segusio as he is also known, was a canon lawyer, who also held numerous prestigious positions within the medieval Church. He wrote his *Summa 'Copiosa'* between 1239 and 1253. He was thus writing at a time when the Church had already established control over marriage jurisdiction and most of the rules about marriage had been set in place. His major contribution to the bulk of canon law is that he brought together the commonly used traditions of Roman and canon law. His writings were influential among canonists until the seventeenth

¹⁶ Ibid. p 32.

¹⁷ James A. Brundage, *Law sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1987, p 154-155 and Raymond Kottje, "Ehe und Eheverständnis in den vorgratianischen Bussbüchern" in *Love and Marriage in the Twelfth Century*, edited by Willy Van Hoecke and Andries Welkenhuysen, Leuven University Press, Louvain, Belgium, 1981, pp 25-26.

¹⁸ Brundage, *Law sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*, pp 12-21.

¹⁹ Hostiensis, *Summa 'Copiosa'*, text provided by Dr Lynette Olson, translation by the teaching staff at the University of Toronto Department of History.

century.²⁰ He emphasises that the free consent of the parties is what made the marriage a sacrament, but consummation was the final seal that made the marriage absolutely indissoluble: “It is certainly said to be indivisible when the marriage is lawful and consummated.”²¹ The indissolubility came from the partners’ freely given consent, but if afterwards one party claimed having been coerced, their plea would only be heard in the case that consummation had not occurred, if it had, there was nothing to be done.²² Agreeing to consummate a marriage was presumed to be a concrete assurance of consent. The ambiguity inherent in considering consent and consummation mutually dependent, but separate, was never entirely cleared up. The official position after the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 was that the only way to ascertain unequivocal proof of a marriage was to have consent declared publicly by both partners. However, this could not entirely eradicate the problem of clandestine marriages where the couple could claim to have consented privately, which was technically true enough, but incredibly hard to prove if, for example, one of the partners or their parents contradicted the claim. In such cases proof often ultimately came down to determining whether consummation had occurred. The contradiction was that consent was usually, if not always, declared in public but if it was not, it was nearly impossible to prove, whereas consummation usually occurred in private, but produced circumstantial evidence.²³

To confuse matters further, there was a distinction between consenting in the future tense or in the present tense, the former creating a betrothal and the latter a valid marriage. A betrothal was binding, but could still be dissolved by common dissent, or by one party becoming infirm, falling to heresy or fornicating, or by an intervening affinity – meaning they become related within four degrees through the actions of family members – or by one party marrying someone else. If a

²⁰ New Catholic Encyclopaedia, Second Edition, vol 7 Hol-Jub, Thomson /Gale, Catholic University of America, Washington D.C., 2003-, pp134-136.

²¹ Hostiensis, *Summa 'Copiosa'*.

²² Ibid.

²³ Brundage, *Law sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*, pp 235-237.

betrothal was consummated it became a valid marriage.²⁴ The rule regarding words in the present or future tense was most clearly established by Pope Alexander III (pope 1159-1181), who declared that a couple was married if they expressed their consent in the present tense and the man was at least fourteen years old and the girl at least twelve years old, or if they had confirmed their consent in the future tense at the earliest as seven-year-olds and since then consummation had occurred.²⁵

Despite the medieval Church's strict views on the morality of marriage, it was fundamentally concerned with promoting a stable society. When applying the complicated rules of marriage to actual practical cases, they were willing to adapt them according to societal needs. For example, an English cleric called Bartholomew wrote to Pope Alexander III in the late twelfth century about a parishioner, who had told him in confession that he felt guilty about having carnally known his wife's cousin prior to the marriage. This technically made him and his wife related within the forbidden degrees, since these sexual relations had made the husband and his wife's cousin one flesh. The pope wrote back that if the sin was widely known, the man should do penance, relinquish both women and refrain from ever marrying again, but if it was a private sin not known in the community, then he should do penance, but remain faithfully with the one he had married publicly and solemnly.²⁶ The family was the core of society and it was to be protected from scandal.

The reformed Church's interest in marriage essentially boiled down to the idea that marriage was beneficial to the lay community mainly because of procreation, but many ecclesiastical authorities

²⁴ Hostiensis, *Summa 'Copiosa'*

²⁵ Frances and Joseph Gies, *Marriage and Family in the Middle Ages*, Harper & Row Publishers Inc, New York, 1987, pp 139-140

²⁶ Duggan, "Equity and Compassion", pp 72-74.

also believed it remedied people's inherent sinfulness because it was an acceptable sexual outlet.²⁷ Especially during the twelfth century, the Church was concerned with making marriage a sacrament, which made an entirely secular institution into something that conferred grace. The ideological basis for marriage as a sacrament was that it symbolised the union between Christ and the Church.²⁸ According to Hostiensis, marriage was constituted in heaven by God, after the Fall, as a remedy to sin, but "The Law says that nothing is more beneficial to mankind than marriage, since it alone is empowered to make them".²⁹ The rite of marriage becoming a sacrament was also a reason to underline the indissolubility of it. Hostiensis describes marriage as "the union of husband and wife, maintaining an indivisible companionship for life; the coming together of the divine and human species."³⁰ One of the reasons consent was so important to the religious authorities was that a marriage should not be divisible in any circumstances. The freely given consent of the participants was more likely to produce a stable happy marriage than one where the parties had been coerced or unconsulted. In order to promote balanced familial relationships, the couple should at least eventually feel affection for each other, which would keep them together, raising children for the Christian community. For this purpose, the Church was willing to even tolerate a little sinfulness, which might occur in the marriage bed.

Modern Theories on Medieval Marriage

Modern theories, formulated on the basis of medieval writing on marriage, also have a bearing on the study of marriage through romances. Georges Duby is one of the most influential scholars on medieval marriage. Duby formulated a theory about the nature of medieval marriage in the late

²⁷ Brundage, *Law, sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*, pp 197-199.

²⁸ E.g. "The Book of Vices and Virtues: Blessings of Marriage (13th-14th c.)" in *Women's Lives in Medieval Europe: A Sourcebook*, edited by Emilie Amt, Routledge, New York, 1993, p 90 (Source: *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, ed. W. Nelson Francis, The Early English Text Society, London, 1942)

²⁹ Hostiensis, *Summa 'Copiosa'*.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

1970s, based mostly on studies of twelfth-century France. His conclusions about the role of Arthurian romances in medieval society contribute greatly to this study. Therefore, it is essential to understand the structure of his theory as a whole, to evaluate his views on how love and marriage are depicted in literature. Duby's influential theory claims that there were two existing models of medieval marriage; the ecclesiastical and the secular. According to him, the ideal of marriage was transformed during the twelfth century by the conflicts between these two models. The ecclesiastical model, meant to shape marriage to correspond with divine order, was imposed upon an already existing lay model, which had emerged as a product of the economical and social structure of feudal society.³¹ The obvious problem with Duby's theory, which he notes himself, is that the available sources almost exclusively speak of the ecclesiastical model. Duby derives the existence and nature of the lay model through the ecclesiastical writings, which are presumably addressing problems which occur in the existing marriage customs, and do not correspond with the Church's ideals.³² He also uses literature, including Arthurian romances, to add colour to the lay model.³³ The goal of Duby's study is to show that the ecclesiastical model eventually reigned supreme, even if it was shaped along the way by secular necessities.

According to Duby's theory most conflicts between the two models arose from the differences in their attitudes towards sexual pleasure, paternal authority, divorce and endogamy. While the Church condemned sexual pleasure altogether, the lay model seems to not have judged it at all as long as it did not involve adultery. Even then only the wife's adultery was particularly frowned upon, since the main concern was the corruption of the rightful hereditary line through a woman getting pregnant to someone other than her husband. Even so, adultery was generally disapproved of by both the Church and lay people because it disrupted the order of society. According to

³¹ Duby, *Medieval Marriage: Two Models*, p 3.

³² Ibid. pp 1-2

³³ Georges Duby, *The Knight, the Lady and the Priest: The Making of Modern Marriage in Medieval France*, trans. Barbara Bray, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1983 (orig. 1981) , pp 219-226.

Duby's theory, the familial authority of fathers was challenged by the Church's insistence on the consent of both partners about to enter a marriage, and further by the idea that their consent alone was enough to validate the marriage. It seems unlikely however that this sort of conflict would have come up very often in practice, as most children, especially girls, would have had little choice but to consent to a marriage if their parents insisted upon it. Clandestine marriages were, of course, a cause of concern for parents, but because they were so hard to prove, the Church was ultimately just as set against such unions as lay authorities. Because the Church perceived marriage as a holy sacrament, the union's existence had to be indisputable. Another source of conflict between the models was the practice according to which a man could repudiate his wife, for example, if she failed to produce sons or simply if a better match presented itself. The Church, in contrast, came to see marriage as an indissoluble sacrament. The last major basis of conflict that Duby notes is the tendency of lay people to prefer relatively endogamous marriages to prevent the fragmentation of property, while the Church insisted on excessive exogamy.³⁴

Duby's 'two models' theory has been very influential and provokes comment from most authors discussing medieval marriage. The most obvious things to criticise are his ecclesiastical and male focus, which are partly dictated by his sources and his tendency to ignore the possibility that women had any chance to rise from patriarchal suppression in the twelfth century.³⁵ For example, Duby asserts that arranged marriages, the authority of which was challenged by the Church's insistence on common consent, were mainly arranged by men. However, it seems that at least by the late Middle Ages, mothers were heavily involved in finding suitable husbands and wives for their children.³⁶ Even if mothers did not have the final say in their children's marriages, being

³⁴ Duby, *Medieval Marriage: Two Models*, p 20-21

³⁵ e.g. Christopher N.L. Brooke, *The Medieval Idea of Marriage*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1989, pp 119-120.

³⁶ There are several instances in the Paston Letters, written in the 15th century where mothers are very involved in their children's marriage arrangements. E.g. Letter 2 by Agnes Paston to William Paston in 1440, pp 2-3, and Letter 86 by Margaret Paston lamenting her daughter Margery's clandestine marriage which indicates that her and her mother-in-

involved suggests they still had power in the process. It is also unlikely that parents had no concern whatsoever for the happiness of their children when organising marriages, which suggests that the insistence of consent to marriage cannot have been just an extraordinary annoyance introduced by the Church. In the Tristan story, the love potion was intended by Isolde's mother to be drunk by Isolde and her new husband, Mark on their wedding night. The idea that a mother would want to make sure her daughter would fall madly in love with her husband was certainly not in keeping with ecclesiastical ideals of rational and moderate sexual relations only intended for procreation. Thus the mother's desire for Isolde's happy union must have resonated with the story's audience as a hope that mothers really had for their children.

As David Herlihy has pointed out, Duby's models are not as directly comparable as it initially seems. By nature the ecclesiastical model, arising especially from religious didactic sources, is prescriptive, meaning it was intended to guide people towards a desired ideal. Conversely, the lay model, as we can access it, is descriptive, meaning it at least theoretically describes the actuality of how things were. Thus, the conflict between the models is in some ways imagined, since the ecclesiastical model influenced the lay model in an ideological way, but was not necessarily ever a reality. According to Herlihy the fusing effect evident in the theory of marriage by the end of the twelfth century is due to the existing marriage customs affecting the ecclesiastical ideology more than the other way around. The Church worked more as a standardiser of marriage customs in medieval Europe, than as a shaper of them per se, and its main effect was to demand that all lay people, regardless of gender or station, follow the same rules of sexual morality.³⁷ The romances in this study obviously represent the possibility of glimpsing the descriptive lay model.

law Agnes were most involved in the legal proceedings following the secret marriage, pp 181-183. In *The Paston Letters: A Selection in Modern Spelling*, edited by Norman Davis, Oxford University Press, London, 1963.

³⁷ David Herlihy, "Chapter 8: The Family and Religious Ideologies in Medieval Europe" (1987) in *Women, Family and Society in Medieval Europe: Historical Essays, 1978-1991*, Berghahn books, Providence, 1995, pp 161-163.

An interesting aspect of the Church's control on marriage were the complicated consanguinity rules, which up until the early thirteenth century forbade marriages between persons related to the seventh degree. The Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 finally reduced these degrees from seven to four.³⁸ Duby's theory of the two models for medieval marriage suggests that lay society preferred endogamy to prevent inheritances from splitting too far because of marriages. Bringing estates back together through a convenient marriage between cousins would have been beneficial to noble families.³⁹ The question is how much did lay people actually heed the Church's consanguinity and affinity rules? Medieval people were certainly aware of the biological reasons to avoid marriages with very close relatives. Bede, writing in the eighth century, quotes Pope Gregory, from the sixth century, as commenting on marriages with cousins: "we have learned from experience that the offspring of such marriages cannot thrive"⁴⁰ The rules by the twelfth century were, however, an example of an incest taboo taken to extremes extending the prohibition to seven degrees. It seems possible that the only party interested in enforcing this level of incest prohibition was the Church. The incest rules did not merely apply to blood relations, but extended to godparents and in-laws. There is some evidence of lay people actively avoiding breaking the consanguinity rules. For example, Henry I of France (1031-1060) went as far as to marry a Russian princess, Anna of Kiev, to avoid marrying within the forbidden degrees.⁴¹ On the other hand, there is also extensive evidence that the nobility would abuse the incest rules by marrying just within the forbidden degrees of kinship in order to make annulment possible if the match proved undesirable later.⁴² Certainly it seems that in the stories of Tristan and Isolde, their relationship is incestuous no matter which way you count their affinity, as Isolde is Tristan's aunt through marriage. However, this

³⁸ *Love, Sex and marriage in he Middle Ages: A Sourcebook*, pp 68-69.

³⁹ Duby, *Medieval Marriage: Two Models*, p 8.

⁴⁰ *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, edited by Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1969.

⁴¹ Brooke, *The Medieval Idea of Marriage*, p 122.

⁴² Gies, *Marriage and Family in the Middle Ages*, pp 137, 140.

aspect of their relationship is never even mentioned, let alone disapproved of, even through the adulterousness of their affair is.

Various scholars have formulated theories about why the consanguinity rules were extended as far as they were in the Middle Ages..Brundage suggests that the Church wanted to break up concentrations of land-holding to boost their own power,⁴³ which is closely linked with Goody's idea that the Church intentionally tried to make finding marriage partners harder, in order to ascertain donations of land to the ecclesiastical institutions.⁴⁴ It seems implausible that the Church's motives for consanguinity rules were particularly conscious or goal-oriented. If nothing else, the abuse of the rules by the laity suggests that if the rules were devised with an economic goal in mind, they failed in their objective. Herlihy points out that there is no evidence that donations of land to the Church would have more often come from childless families and that there is no contemporary comment suggesting they saw the rules as an ecclesiastical conspiracy. The Church needed people as much as lay society did, and their emphasis on the good of procreation in marriage suggests they had little interest in keeping the laity childless to increase their own wealth.⁴⁵

It is possible that the rules were simply devised to try and discourage fornication and adultery within typically large households. Extended families often resided within the same house and the consanguinity rules were probably designed to avoid situations where cousins would become attracted to each other and engage in premarital sex. If they could not marry at all, it was theoretically less likely they would fornicate. While such an explanation makes sense to modern observers, medieval authors seem to mainly be concerned with mystical reasons for the consanguinity rules. Peter Damian, a reform-minded theologian writing in 1063, explains that

⁴³ Brundage, *Law, sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*, p 193.

⁴⁴ Herlihy, "Chapter 8: The Family and Religious Ideologies in Medieval Europe", p 160.

⁴⁵ *ibid.* pp 160-161.

since the parts of the human body come in groups of six this is a sign to observe ancient rules of not marrying within seven degrees of kinship: “the picture of human relationships are defined in six steps, the same above and below and coming from the side. For the sake of imposing a caution, seven generations must therefore be counted.”⁴⁶ It should always be borne in mind that even if one can think of a reasonable explanation for a strange rule, contemporaries may simply observe it because it is tradition. The origins of the consanguinity rules certainly seem somewhat obscure even to Damian. He does suggest that marriage was meant to increase love in society by creating new kinship relations, which is an argument for exogamy. Damian does complain about lay courts applying their own consanguinity rules without reference to the ecclesiastical observation of seven degrees: “The public (i.e. the courts) may have these laws, because so many have insisted upon it so vehemently, but they have not taken into account the sacred canons.”⁴⁷ The fact that the degrees of kinship were eventually reduced by the Church in 1215 shows that the laity continued to mostly disregard them.

The main societal change that affected the institution of marriage from the eleventh century to the twelfth century was that wealth became almost entirely based on owning land. Previously the nobility could acquire wealth through looting, and afterwards, starting from the thirteenth century, wages and money economy thrived. In the twelfth century, however, owning land was the only road to affluence. The development of the patrilineal inheritance structure is closely linked with the development of land-based wealth. Land is a limited resource and thus in order for noble houses to maintain the basis of their wealth, the inheritance structure developed especially in France and England to favour primogeniture, (the inheritance going only to the eldest son). This weakened the position of daughters, whose marriages according to the bilineal kinship structure

⁴⁶ Petrus Damianus, “179-180 Opusculum Ocatvum, De Parentelae” Caput II, col. 0193A - col. 0193B from *Patrologia Latina Database*, Cambridge, 1993-1995, translated from the Latin for this thesis by Andrew Crisp and Associate Professor Dexter Hoyos in 2006. (<http://setis.library.usyd.edu.au/pld/index.html>)

⁴⁷ Ibid. Caput VI, col. 196B.

added to the kin group. The new superimposed ancestor-focussed patrilineal structure was only added to through the eldest son's marriage. The development can be seen in the increasing use of surnames in this period, which are particularly telling of the new definition of kinship as starting from a common ancestor from whom lineage is traced, as opposed to every generation redefining their kin through themselves down both the maternal and paternal line. As David Herlihy points out, it is unlikely that the patrilineal structure simply replaced the older model, where both sides of the family were equally important. There is significant evidence that maternal relations and connections were still relied on in inheritance disputes depending on what was most advantageous for the family's needs.⁴⁸

The gradual change to primogeniture diminished the opportunities for younger sons who had very few options in choosing a career. It can be presumed that families did attempt to ensure an income and a life for all their children, even if the eldest was the main heir. Certainly, even after primogeniture became more dominant all children could still theoretically place a claim on their father's fortune.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, the emerging structure meant fewer noble men were likely to be allowed to marry. Georges Duby sees the development of the 'courtly love' ideal as a symptom of the dissatisfaction of the young nobles who were not allowed to become *seniores* (married men with their own households), and thus remained *juvenes* (youths), throughout their lives. The 'courtly love' idea supposedly represents these frustrations with young men attempting to engage in a game of seduction to win the favours of their lord's wife. Duby explains that this game embodies the tensions in feudal society, which decreased marital opportunities for most nobles, while making marriage the cornerstone of lay society. The 'courtly love' literature shows the young men simultaneously undermining marriage and dreaming of entering the married state,

⁴⁸ David Herlihy, Chapter 7, "The Making of the Medieval Family: Symmetry, Structure, and Sentiment" (1983), pp 143, 146-147.

⁴⁹ See, K.J. Leyser, *Medieval Germany and its Neighbours 900-1250*, Hambledon Press, London, 1982, Chapter 7 "The German Aristocracy from the Ninth to the Early Twelfth Century: A Historical and Cultural Sketch", pp 161-190.

which would finally place them in the company of adult men.⁵⁰ The term ‘courtly love’ was not, however, used by contemporaries to define their literature, but is a nineteenth-century definition. While many romances and stories from the twelfth century seem to follow the pattern of the courting and the eventual affair between a young man and a woman married to the young man’s superior, there are numerous examples in romances that do not simply fit into the ‘courtly love’ model. Tristan and Isolde, for example, theoretically fits into the model, since Tristan is an unmarried man and Isolde his uncle’s wife. However, the model usually suggested for a ‘courtly love’ situation involves a courtship process, where the young man must prove his love and preferably compete against some rivals for his lady’s affections. With Tristan and Isolde, their love is brought about by a magic potion and they give into their feelings completely and immediately. While there are later rivals for Isolde’s attention, these disturbances amount to some trouble for the couple, but never create a genuine competition for her affections. According to Duby’s theory, the rivalry and the gradual winning of the lady were essential to train the young men in knightly values and in the virtue of moderation.⁵¹ This model applies very badly to the Tristan and Isolde situation, which is told from the perspective of the supposedly ill-behaving lovers, putting the reader or listener into their position, but does not seem to have a lesson of moderation or even knightly virtue.

The story of Tristan and Isolde does fall under the definition of ‘courtly love’ in the sense of being adulterous, which was often the only way love, or more accurately passion, manifested in literature. The idea was that passion could not happen in a marriage, a concept probably influenced by the medieval Church’s distaste for sexual pleasure and the increasingly religious significance of the marriage rite. It is worth noting though, that at least one romance author, Chrétien de Troyes, seemed to see no discrepancy between love and passion and the married state. Duby suggests

⁵⁰ Duby, *The Knight, the Lady and the Priest*, pp 221-224 and Georges Duby, *Love and Marriage in the Middle Ages*, translated by Jane Dunnett, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1994 (orig. 1988), p 59.

⁵¹ Duby, *Love and Marriage*, pp 61-62.

Chrétien's works represented a counter trend to the existing adulterous 'courtly love' movement.⁵² It seems strange; however, that such an early representative of Arthurian romance literature would already be going against an existing trend. Perhaps the definition of 'courtly love' has been interpreted too narrowly, and the adultery aspect was not essential to the representation of passionate love.

How likely is it that a situation, where a young knight constantly flirted with the wife of his lord, was even tolerated by the lord himself? Duby believes this sort of situation occurred commonly and the lords encouraged it in order to gain a better hold on their retainers. It is hard to imagine that in a notably religious society people would approve of such behaviour. After all, the reputation of an entire family could depend on the virtue of its women, and adultery, especially by wives, not only disrupted lineage but was a serious sin. Such a society could not possibly actively encourage playing with adultery for the sake of inspiring a twisted loyalty in unruly youthful knights. The frequent event of adultery in literature must have been a literary topos, not a description of reality. The flirtatious adventurous young knight may have been a character reflecting the social situation, but an idealised caricature nonetheless. He could still represent the dissatisfaction of the noble youths, but since most of the authors were clerics, perhaps the character was more likely to reflect their concerns than the young men's concerns. Perhaps adultery was just a way to add excitement to a story about love and passion, which were already sinful to begin with. The medieval society also placed great value to virginity and from a secular perspective it would be less sinful to have a married lover than to despoil a virgin, thus possibly ruining her chances of ever marrying. Medieval romances also display a remarkable lack of bastards and adulterous relationships are pretty much always barren. Isolde certainly never has children with either Tristan or Mark, which suggests the fantastic, unrealistic nature of the story. A

⁵² Duby, *The Knight, the Lady and the Priest*, p 224.

love story may well reflect possibilities, concerns and conflicts that had significance to medieval audiences. However, a love story does not need to necessarily follow the conventions of the actual society it to some extent describes. Despite the fact that romance stories cannot be directly applied as a description of the society it was set in, the issues they address can show us what kinds of societal injustices that were on people's minds at the time.

The romances discussed in this thesis will shed light on secular perspectives on love, passion and marriage, which cannot be found in ecclesiastical sources. Because the Tristan and Isolde legend is essentially adulterous, the concepts the story naturally discusses involve marriages in crisis rather than happy ones. While any single literary work cannot speak for all people, often its popularity shows that the audience could relate to the problems and conflicts it used as its basis. The case studies in this thesis will hopefully show that the ecclesiastical views of marriage discussed in this chapter were by no means always shared by lay people. The Church may have tried and eventually succeeded in making marriage into a religious union, rather than just a secular one, but many ideas about marriage still derive from non-Christian origins. Local customs and secular societal organisation had a deep-set interest in the married state which could not be entirely overtaken by religious agendas. At the same time, the encompassing of marriage into the spiritual hierarchy, which otherwise quite clearly preferred virginity, shows that the Church was adapting to secular society rather than constantly setting itself against secular interests. Marriage was a secular institution but its Christianisation of it was part of the plan to embrace all Christians, even if they lived in a secular world.

II

Chrétien Troyes' *Cliges* and the sin of loving two men at once

Chrétien de Troyes was an author active in the Champagne region in France and associated with the courts of Countess Marie de Champagne and Philip Count of Flanders.¹ His romances were some of the earliest Arthurian romances on the Continent and were written in the vernacular. I have chosen to concentrate on Chrétien's *Cliges*² to examine medieval attitudes to marriage, because it includes numerous references to the Tristan and Isolde legend and is thus a good comparison point to Béroul's *Roman de Tristan*, from the late twelfth century, and to Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan*, from the early thirteenth century, which will be discussed in the following chapters. Scholars roughly date *Cliges* to the middle of the 1170s and it is chronologically the second of Chrétien's surviving romances.³ This means *Cliges* was written before the surviving continental Tristan romances, demonstrating the popularity of the legend, at least in oral tradition, but probably also in written versions that have not survived to our day. Apart from obvious parallels to the Tristan story, *Cliges* also offers valuable discussion of the societal changes involving marriage and inheritance, as Fenice, Cliges' lover, uses the unfairness of Cliges' social situation to justify her adultery. It also sheds light on the debated issues of whether consent or consummation validated a marriage. Andreas Capellanus's *The Art of Courtly Love* will serve as an interesting comparison to Chrétien's ideas, as Andreas wrote his ironic treatise soon after Chrétien, at least to some extent under the influence of the same patroness, Marie de Champagne. Her court is considered to have contributed greatly to the 'courtly love' ideas, which have dominated modern scholarship concerned with twelfth-century literature.

¹ See epilogues to Chrétien's romances *The Knight of the Cart* for his reference to Countess Marie and *The Story of the Grail* for reference to Count Philip, both to be found in *The Complete Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*, translation and introduction by David Staines, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, First Midland Book Edition, 1993 (orig. 1990).

² Chrétien de Troyes, *Cliges* in *The Complete Romances of Chrétien de Troyes* (All references to Cliges will be from this translation by David Staines).

³ David Staines, Introduction to *The Complete Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*, p xii.

Very little is known about Chrétien for certain except that he wrote in the second half of the twelfth century and five of his romances survive to our day. It is possible that he was a cleric, since he was clearly well-educated by twelfth-century standards and such training was usually only available through ecclesiastical institutions. His subject matter, however, does not seem very appropriate for a religious person. Jean Frappier does not think he could have been a cleric, but he does believe Chrétien had got clerical education. The twelfth century saw a great renaissance of appreciation for ancient Greek and Roman literature and culture and this trend originated in ecclesiastical spheres. On the other hand, Frappier points out that the separation of sacred and profane was not as sharp at this time as could be presumed and thus even those with clerical training could easily engage in writing very secular works.⁴ Considering that Chrétien was very interested in the themes of consent in marriage and moral propriety, he may well have been a cleric attempting to instruct lay people. The only thing specifically at odds with ecclesiastical ideas on marriage in his romances is his tendency to see sex and pleasure as perfectly acceptable in wedlock. Sexual pleasure was a debated point in religious circles and thus Chrétien could still, as a cleric, have held such an opinion. Whether he was a lay person or a cleric he certainly had the intention of promoting morality in society.

There are only a couple of definite dates that can be applied to Chrétien's work. *The Knight of the Cart*, which is usually presumed to be the third of the extant romances, could not have been written before 1159, when Marie de Champagne, to whom the romance is dedicated, married Henry the Liberal and became active in the Champagne region. Chrétien's last work, dedicated to Philip of Flanders, must also have been started before 1191, as Philip went on the Third Crusade in

⁴ Jean Frappier, *Chrétien de Troyes, The Man and His Work*, translated by Raymond J. Cormier, Ohio University Press, Athens, Ohio, 1982 (orig. 1968), p 4, 10.

1190 and died in the Holy Land in 1191.⁵ Chrétien seems to have been an extremely popular author. This conclusion can be drawn from the fact that his works were translated and new adaptations of them were made within a couple of decades of their appearance. Some of the adaptations of the same stories that Chrétien wrote possibly only had a common Celtic source with Chrétien.⁶ However, the versions that are clearly translations of Chrétien's works are evidence of their wide distribution.⁷ The period in which Chrétien was writing coincides with the time when the idea of marriage in Europe was evolving from a secular traditional event to an ecclesiastically governed sacrament. It is not therefore surprising that the issues discussed in his romances address concerns and conflicts in love and marriage.

The plot of *Cliges* parallels the Tristan story to a significant extent. The context is Arthurian, although most of the action takes place in Greece. Both Alexander, Cliges' father, and Cliges himself gain their reputation and knightly training in Arthur's court. The first half of the story concerns the love affair and marriage of Cliges' parents, Alexander and Soredamor. This story is very similar to the story of Rivalin and Blancheflor, Tristan's parents, except that Alexander and Soredamor are restrained and proper even though their feelings are as intense as those of Tristan's parents'. Cliges' parents' love affair is almost pathetic as neither has the courage or the nerve to admit their love to each other. Chrétien seems to want to show the young couple's innocence

⁵ Staines, Introduction to *The Complete Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*, pp x-xi.

⁶ The most likely transmission routes of Celtic legends about the Arthurian court, which were then adapted on the European Continent to the distinctive genre of Arthurian romance, were through Brittany and through the Anglo-Normans. The evidence is hard to come by because the transmission seems to have happened mainly through oral transmission by storytellers and later troubadours. Brittany was ideally located as it had connections with the Celtic peoples of the British Isles and the French on the Continent, and they may have been bilingual. Many place names and plot elements in the Arthurian cycle show Breton influence and there are Arthurian elements in the Breton *lais* that survive to our day. For the Breton-transmission theory, see e.g. R.S. Loomis, *Arthurian Tradition and Chrétien de Troyes*, Octagon Books, New York, 1982, (orig. Columbia University Press, New York, 1949). For sources suggesting transmission from Welsh storytellers to the French speaking Anglo-Norman nobility (newly ruling England from 1066) and from them to the French continent see e.g. Rachel Bromwich, "First Transmissions to England and France" in *The Arthur of the Welsh: The Arthurian Legend in Medieval Welsh Literature*, edited by Rachel Bromwich, A.O.H. Jarman and Brynley F. Roberts, University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 1991, Chapter 13, pp 273-298 and Stephen Knight, *Arthurian Literature and Society*, Macmillan Press Ltd, London, 1983.

⁷ Staines, Introduction to *The Complete Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*, pp xvi, xviii, xxi xxv for examples of twelfth and thirteenth century works with either direct influence from Chrétien or common sources.

through their inability to express their feelings. Their intentions are ultimately honourable since neither of them selfishly seeks to satisfy love, however they are constantly concerned with how the other may feel about such a move. The virtuousness of Alexander is emphasised in his reluctance to ask for Soredamor's hand, when he is offered anything he wants by King Arthur for bravery in war: "Alexander dared not utter his desire in this regard, though realising that the king would not disappoint him were he to ask for his beloved. He was so afraid of displeasing her, who would have been delighted, that he would rather suffer than have her against her will."⁸ The personal consent of Soredamor is more important to Alexander than his own happiness. This appears to be Chrétien's way of asserting that consent and love in marriage arrangements were the key to a successful and socially constructive marriage.

The young couple is finally saved by the intervention of Queen Guinevere, who suggests they marry rather than languish in their love. This, of course, is in stark contrast with the scandalous affair of Rivalin and Blanche-flor, which culminates in pre-marital sex, an out-of-wedlock pregnancy, and the elopement of the couple. Guinevere emphasises the importance of choosing to marry one's love rather than conducting illicit affairs:⁹ "Now I advise you never to resort to force or yield to the wilfulness of loving. Join yourselves together in marriage and honor. In this way, I believe, your love will have the power to last a long time."¹⁰ This clearly demonstrates Chrétien's belief in the good of marriage, which was not only honourable, but the proper outlet for romantic feelings.

The idea of marriage as the proper place for love is of course in clear contrast with Andreas Capellanus's treatise *The Art of Courtly Love*, which sees a grave conflict between the married

⁸ *Cliges*, p 114 (containing lines 2173-2254)

⁹ *Cliges* was written before the character of Guinevere had been developed as the lover of Lancelot and the greatest adulteress in Arthur's court.

¹⁰ *Cliges*, p 115 (containing lines 2255-2329)

state and true love. It must, of course, be remembered that Andreas's work is humorous and most agree that his work is supposed to be ironic rather than to be taken seriously.¹¹ Andreas's work is an attempt to codify the courtly game of seduction. Such societal rules tend to be unwritten and even unspoken, but the treatise could be perceived as a stylistic representation of the court life Andreas was familiar with. Andreas was quite probably a cleric, possibly a chaplain as his title "capellanus" indicates. His ideas were influenced by those of Ovid, the Roman author, whose concepts of love and seduction became popular in the twelfth century, along with other Roman writings. Ovid's ideas of love were strictly sensual and did not have marriage in mind. Andreas was also probably influenced by the Arabic ideals of love that were available to him through the cultural influence of Muslim Spain.¹² These numerous inspirations should already alert the reader to the fact that his views cannot just be simple descriptions of Champagne court life, as the stylistic models are from different cultures and time periods. Andreas's work was almost certainly written after *Cliges* and thus Chrétien could not have been influenced by Andreas, but he may well have read Chrétien. The concept of love in *Cliges* also betrays Ovidian influence, indicating they were both under the sway of Marie de Champagne's court where Ovidian passion was a fashionable literary topic.

It would seem to be a mistake however, to simply presume that Chrétien's ideals, which appear to often be in conflict with what is now considered 'courtly love', were a reaction to an existing popular philosophy which despised marriage as a killer of passion.¹³ Over the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the Arthurian court became the idealised literary setting of courtly or courteous behaviour, chivalric ideals and courtly love affairs. While love stories were often of an

¹¹ See, Michael D. Cherniss, "The Literary Comedy of Andreas Capellanus" in *Modern Philology*, vol. 72, no. 3 (February, 1975), pp 223-237. Also on use of irony in the Middle Ages see, D.W. Robertson Jr, "Chrétien's Cligés and the Ovidian Spirit" in *Comparative Literature*, vol. 7, no.1 (Winter, 1955), pp 32-34.

¹² John J. Parry, Introduction to, *The Art of Courtly Love*, translated by John J. Parry, W.W. Norton and Company, New York, 1969, pp 4-7.

¹³ Georges Duby, for example, believes Chrétien to be reacting to an exiting trend. See Georges Duby, *The Knight, the Lady and the Priest: The Making of Modern Marriage in Medieval France*, translated by Barbara Bray, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1983 (orig. 1981) p 224

adulterous nature, like the popular Tristan and Isolde legend, there are, nonetheless, examples of courtly knights wooing virgins with marriage in mind.¹⁴ For example, in the Tristan story itself, the pre-marital passion of Rivalin and Blanche-flor results in marriage. Chrétien was the earliest of the Arthurian romance authors and thus presuming that he would already be reacting to an exiting trend is quite implausible. Adultery added an extra level of excitement and danger to stories, but this does not automatically mean it was an accepted part of an ideal of love.

Andreas claims in Book III of *The Art of Courtly Love* that the preceding books outlined in detail how to obtain the love of a woman so that Walter, the stated receiver of this instructive book, might more determinedly avoid such endeavours. Such a declaration seems somewhat hypocritical, considering the not only thoroughly explanatory but also comical nature of the previous chapters. Andreas may have used comedy to emphasise the ridiculousness of love, but his dialogues also speak loudly of how love was a positive influence, making men display more generosity and goodwill towards their fellow people.¹⁵ The discrepancy between the tone of the last book compared to the earlier ones, can probably be partly explained as Andreas using the tools of the medieval rhetorical tradition where one must thoroughly examine the opposition's view before stating one's own case. I think, that perhaps the best explanation for the complicated meaning of Andreas's book is that it satirises love by examining popular theories of passion and adultery in a humorous light from the most extreme viewpoints imaginable. Such extremes were very far from the ideologies expressed by Chrétien, however, some of the oppositions expressed by the wooed women in Andreas's book show similarities to Chrétien's principles. Perhaps, Chrétien's thoughts on love and marriage were in fact typical for an educated, non-extremist man, preferring practical conclusions which could set an ideal that was not unattainable but was also not un-Christian.

¹⁴ Ibid. p 225, Duby gives such an example from Roman de la Rose.

¹⁵ Ibid. e.g. pp 42, 59-61.

Andreas's argument for why passion did not belong to marriage seems like a reaction to the marriage ethics expressed by Chrétien. In Andreas's dialogues the noblewoman upon being approached by a man of the higher nobility with romantic intentions, refuses the man's suggestions by explaining that she is married: "it would be wicked for me to violate his bed or submit to the embraces of any other man, since I know that he [my husband] loves me with his whole heart and I am bound to him with all the devotion of mine."¹⁶ She later defends her decision to not indulge in adulterous affairs by explaining that: "Everyone should choose that love which may be fostered by security for continual embraces and, what is more, can be practiced every day without any sin."¹⁷ She has rather shrewdly noted that the love of which Andreas's nobleman speaks is sexual desire and "nothing prevents this feeling existing between husband and wife."¹⁸ Her opinions echo the speech of Chrétien's Guinevere who in *Cliges* strives for a long lasting love which can be cultivated between husband and wife.¹⁹ Such opinions cannot have been very unusual, since they supplied a topic for one of Andreas's eight example dialogues. The nobleman replies to her that sexual pleasure is in fact more sinful in marriage because it defiles a sacred state, where sex should only be for the purpose of procreation: "For whatever solaces married people extend to each other beyond what are inspired by the desire for offspring or the payment of the marriage debt cannot be free from sin, and the punishment is always greater when the use of a holy thing is perverted by misuse than if we practice the ordinary abuses."²⁰ The argument shows that Andreas was greatly influenced by ecclesiastical writings which saw sex as sinful regardless of the circumstances. However, Andreas used these religious views to justify forgoing all propriety

¹⁶ Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*, translated by John J. Parry, W.W. Norton and Company, New York, 1969, p 100.

¹⁷ Ibid. p 102.

¹⁸ Ibid. p 102.

¹⁹ See above p 32.

²⁰ Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*, p 103

by indulging in extra-marital affairs, which through some loopholes could actually be considered less sinful than defiling a marriage with passion.

For Chrétien, there was no problem with wanting love in marriage. However, indulging in extramarital affairs was not easily defended. He clearly found the Tristan and Isolde story immoral and the romance of Cliges and Fenice seems to be an attempt to show how the former two could have conducted their affair without falling to such depravity. The direct and explicit comparisons to the Tristan story become most apparent once the romance moves from Alexander and Soredamor's love to that of their son, Cliges, and the German emperor's daughter, Fenice. The situation, upon the untimely death of Cliges' parents, is that his uncle Alis, who had earlier become emperor due to false rumours of Alexander's death, had from the time of Alexander's return from Britain been merely emperor in name. Cliges and Alis agreed that Alis would remain emperor, however Cliges would inherit the throne after him and the uncle would not marry so that there would be no confusion in the hereditary line. This parallels the situation between Mark and Tristan, where King Mark, Tristan's uncle, declares he will never marry and instead his sister's son, Tristan, will be his heir. Both Alis and Mark break their word due to external advice "Barons are often led astray by wicked counsel they believe and so do not adhere to the principle of loyalty."²¹ Alis seeks the hand of the German emperor's daughter, Fenice, and despite the fact that she is already promised to the Duke of Saxony, her father gives her to Alis as long as he agrees to bring enough military force to be able to take her to Greece despite the troops of the duke.²²

An interesting aspect of this situation is that Fenice has not yet even been introduced by name nor is her presence required in the marriage negotiations between Alis' messengers and the German emperor. Her consent is immaterial to the emperors organising the marriage. The way the situation

²¹ *Cliges*, p 119 (containing lines 2578-2657)

²² *Ibid.* p 119 (containing lines 2578-2657).

is presented does not, however, suggest that this sort of circumstance was unusual. Later developments of the story, nonetheless, imply that arranging a marriage in this manner without consulting one party at all, could result in serious scandal. Perhaps Fenice's plan to become Cliges' lover could have been avoided had her marriage been happy and voluntary to begin with. She is presented as a pawn or an asset in her father's game to create the best possible alliance. The German emperor easily breaks his promise to the Duke of Saxony in favour of the better match, Alis. Hostiensis' rules on betrothal expressly address that a betrothal should not be broken for a more favourable match.²³ While it seems unlikely that the duke and Fenice were actually betrothed, her father's easy breaking of his promise probably represented a not unusual reality. Dynastic marriage negotiations involved great alliances and political relations which left little room for considering the church's demand for the consent of the bride. The presumption is that Fenice would be more than happy to swap the duke for a husband who was an emperor.

The idea that a woman should always choose the man who was most worthy in public opinion is a common theme in Andreas Capellanus's *The Art of Courtly Love*. The idea seems to be that while a woman may freely choose or refuse the love of any man, she ought not to reject an applicant with whom there is nothing wrong. For example, in one of Andreas's dialogues, a nobleman says to a woman of the middle class "it should be clear enough to Your Prudence that you should by no means reject my love if you find that my character corresponds with my birth."²⁴ In this sense the woman's choice for Andreas is merely a formality, as she should in the end choose whoever is more worthy, on the basis of their appearance and public demeanour, thus leaving little room for her emotional personal preference. The love affair in *Cliges* is entirely based on personal preference. Fenice is introduced the first time she sees Cliges and their love for each other is immediate. The day is lovely and they are both beautiful and young, which all seems to be enough

²³ Hostiensis, *Summa 'Copiosa'*, text provided by Dr Lynette Olson, translation by the teaching staff at the University of Toronto Department of History.

²⁴ Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*, p 65.

for them to fall in love. Their love is not brought on by external interference of a love potion, like it was for Tristan and Isolde, nor is it a calculated summing up of each others good qualities, like it was for Andreas. For Chrétien this kind of love is simultaneously involuntary but unforced.

Fenice wants to be with Cliges not with Alis. She devises a plan which would allow her to remain a virgin after marrying Alis, in order to save herself for Cliges. It is interesting that in the story she is unable to plot preventing the marriage to Alis completely. As Fenice realises she is in love with Cliges, she concurrently understands her situation with Alis: “But she was compelled by necessity to marry a man who could not please her, and so was anguished and distraught, not knowing where to turn for counsel about the man she desired, except to her reflection and her sleepless nights.”²⁵ Chrétien probably does not need to explicitly explain why Fenice cannot prevent the marriage, because the matter would have been clear to his audience. It seems she is either compelled to consent to marry Alis because it is her duty, or she is actually never even consulted. This is a clear indication of the schism, discussed extensively by Georges Duby,²⁶ between the lay practice of marriage, which only really required the consent of the parents, and the ideology of marriage promoted by the Church, requiring the consent of the spouses. The consent of the couple would better assure a happy marriage, which would theoretically discourage sinful behaviour, like adultery and divorce. The family was the core of society and keeping couples together was good for its stability. Chrétien seems to be describing circumstances in which young noblewomen either could or did find themselves and he disapproves of the lack of choice which could lead to grave sins.

Fenice confides in her nurse, Thessala, who makes a magic potion for Alis to drink on the wedding night. The potion makes him believe he is consummating the marriage, when in fact he is

²⁵ *Cliges*, p 123 (containing lines 2900-2976)

²⁶ See First Chapter of this thesis pp 17-28, and Georges Duby, *Medieval Marriage: Two Models from Twelfth-Century France*, trans. Elbory Forster, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1978.

dreaming, and from then on he continues to only imagine having sex with Fenice while asleep, never realising he is only dreaming. A potion is also used as a plot device in the Tristan story, in which a love potion is drunk mistakenly by Tristan and Isolde compelling them to adultery. This is Chrétien's first step in correcting Isolde's mistakes. Instead of the potion starting a tumultuous lifetime of allowing their feelings to ruin their lives, as it did for Tristan and Isolde, Chrétien uses the potion to allow Fenice to maintain her virginity. Fenice makes a long speech about how she will not become like Isolde and will not allow her and Cliges' reputations to be sullied: "I would rather be torn limb from limb than have the two of us be reminiscent of the love of Tristan and Iseult. Many madnesses, shameful to recount, were spoken of them." Despite the popularity of the Tristan story, it was clearly considered by many an infamous story with horrific consequences. The main sin for Isolde, as far as Fenice and presumably Chrétien were concerned, was sharing her body with two men when she only loved one of them: "I could never reconcile myself to the life Iseult led. Love debased himself too much in her, for her heart belonged to one man and her body was the property of two lords. Thus she passed all her life never refusing the two. Unreasonable was that love." In this at least Chrétien and Andreas agreed, since for Andreas a woman taking two lovers was the worse thing imaginable, although he did not consider a husband as one of those lovers.²⁷ Chrétien does not approve of the idea that sharing one's body with a lover as well as a husband was acceptable, any more than taking several lovers would be. Only one of Chrétien's romances *The Knight of the Cart*, which develops the adulterous love story of Guinevere and Lancelot, appears to be more accepting of adultery. However, it seems likely that he did not feel very comfortable with his topic, as he very explicitly states that Marie de Champagne provided him with the topic and he failed to even complete the story himself, but another author finished it for him.²⁸ Certainly in *Cliges* Chrétien goes to great lengths to excuse

²⁷ Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*, p 162.

²⁸ Staines, Introduction to *The Complete Works of Chrétien de Troyes*, p xx.

Fenice's adulterous intentions and show under which circumstances such unfortunate sins were not only likely but understandable.

One of the first defences of Fenice and Cliges' actions is, as Peter S. Noble points out, that Alis breaks his given word in marrying at all.²⁹ Secondly, Alis is marrying a young woman of his nephew's age, when he himself is old. This scenario was probably not unusual in reality and it was a common setting in adulterous romances; Isolde was much younger than Mark, and Guinevere much younger than Arthur in Arthurian romances. It is probably not unfair to presume that medieval people, similarly to modern people, thought a marriage had a better chance of lasting if husband and wife were close in age. Adulterous behaviour was conceivably much more sympathetic if the husband was described as old and tired and the wife as young and bored. Fenice notably also defends her adultery with the fact that Alis had promised not to marry in order for his nephew to have an unhindered path to the throne. By remaining a virgin she protects Cliges' inheritance and by seeking Cliges' love she is in fact correcting the unfair situation brought about by the broken promise of Alis: "Under oath he swore to Cliges' father never to take a wife. Since he will soon marry me, his oath will be violated. But I have not so little respect for Cliges that I would not rather be buried alive than ever be the reason for the loss of a penny of honor rightfully due him. May I never be able to bear a child and so bring about his disinheritance."³⁰

Fenice has very little regard for any consanguinity issues that arise from the fact that she is in love with her husband's nephew. Of course, her remaining a virgin and thus never becoming one flesh with Alis, means she does not reasonably have to worry about it. Nonetheless, it is perchance curious that such a possibility is not even mentioned as an impediment to their relationship. Like Cliges' parents, Cliges and Fenice take a long time to actually admit their love to each other and

²⁹ Peter S. Noble, *Love and Marriage in Chrétien de Troyes*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 1982, p 34.

³⁰ *Cliges*, pp 125-126 (containing lines 3068-3152 and 3153-3230)

they have to endure long separations without confirmation of each others feelings, let alone any consummation. Fenice's virginity is portrayed as a virtuous attempt to undermine the undesired marriage especially as she makes her plans while she is still unaware of Cliges feelings. When they finally declare their love for each other, Fenice's first concern is convincing Cliges of her devotion: "So help me God, you may be certain you uncle never had any part of me, for that did not please me, nor was it permitted him. Never yet has he known me as Adam knew his wife. It is wrong to call me lady, though I realize people call me lady who do not know that I am a virgin."³¹ Fenice goes on to compare their love to Tristan and Isolde's with the difference that Cliges and her behaviour had been honourable.

From there, the plan is simple. With help from Thessala, Fenice will fake her own death and afterwards she will be able to be with Cliges in hiding, without the public shame of running off with her lover as Isolde did, since she will be presumed dead. The most important thing to Fenice is reputation, which is why she does not want to simply elope with Cliges: "I shall never go with you in this fashion, for then the entire world would talk of us the way people do of the blonde Iseult and Tristan." She continues to explain that if she now ran away with him it would render pointless all the effort she had put into remaining a virgin, as no one would believe she had done so, in light of her disgraceful elopement.³² This corresponds with the idea in Andreas's *The Art of Courtly Love*, where love affairs only became shameful if people found out about them, as well as Tristan and Isolde, who did not see any disgrace in their behaviour until someone found out about their adultery.

In keeping with his morally upright approach, Chrétien inflicts some serious hardships on Fenice once she implements her plan. Three physicians from Salerno grow suspicious of Fenice's illness,

³¹ *Cliges*, p 151 (containing lines 5170-5251)

³² *Cliges*, p 151-152 (containing lines 5170-5251 and 5252-5337)

because they recall a story of King Solomon's wife, who feigned her own sickness and death to be with her lover. L.T. Topsfield suggests that this story of Solomon's wife was in fact the initial inspiration for the entire *Cliges* romance.³³ When everyone else presumes Fenice dead, the doctors torture her, as the physicians did the wife of Solomon, hoping to get a response to prove she was not truly dead. She remains immobile and eventually the women of the court, led by Thessala, burst in and stop them hurting the presumed corpse of Fenice. After going through this ordeal, which could be considered penance for the sins she was committing, she is buried and then saved by Cliges and taken to a hiding place. She heals in safety and enjoys a wonderful year with Cliges as her lover.

Of course this happy state cannot last forever and the two are eventually discovered by Alis's knight. They are caught lying naked in the orchard of their hiding place, with a sword in front of them as Tristan and Isolde were caught in the woods with a sword between them. The sword falsely convinced Mark that Tristan and Isolde were still chaste with each other, but for Cliges it is the weapon with which he chases down their discoverer and cuts off his leg. The lovers are nonetheless found out and Alis also finds out that he never actually had sex with his wife. The couple flees to King Arthur, who hears their case against Alis. Cliges' basis for a claim is again that Alis illegally broke his word when he married, which convinces Arthur. Before setting out on a military expedition to dethrone Alis, they get word that Alis has died of his distress and Cliges is now the rightful Emperor of Greece. Cliges promptly goes back to his empire, marries Fenice, they are crowned and they live happily ever after.

It is interesting that the story which focuses on a very 'courtly' love affair, with very elaborate descriptions of the anguish of love and the hardships in attaining one's lover, still ends in

³³ L.T. Topsfield, *Chrétien de Troyes: a Study of the Arthurian Romances*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981, p 65.

respectable marriage. The story ends happily for Cliges and Fenice, however, despite their best efforts to avoid ill-repute, the consequences for future empresses in Greece is that they were forever kept under lock and key “The emperor had not trust in her so long as he remembered Fenice.”³⁴ Chrétien’s lovers may have, in his mind, escaped public disgrace and perhaps even divine punishment more successfully than Tristan and Isolde, but the societal consequences were still dire. Adultery upset social stability and was equally reprehensible from a lay and a religious point of view. As Noble points out, in real life there was no easy solution to Fenice’s problem of loving one man and being compelled to marry another. The introduction of the magic potion was the only way to solve the unsolvable problem of wanting to only give her body to the man she loved. Magic was also needed to bring about her feigned death.³⁵ It seems that the real solution to Fenice’s problems in her love life would be for the Church’s insistence on the couple’s consent to be taken seriously. While Cliges and Fenice’s marriage was ultimately happy, the bad communal consequences of their actions could not be avoided. Despite their endeavours to act as honourably as possible, they had to lie, deceive and resort to magic in their attempt to be together, which was why the romance had to end in a way which showed their love still tainted the society they lived in.³⁶

In conclusion, *Cliges* offers important evidence that adultery was a serious issue, even when handled in light literature. The popularity of the Tristan and Isolde legend did not simply mean that adulterous affairs were thought acceptable, but that despite the story being sympathetic to the lovers, their actions were condemnable by societal standards. Fenice is extremely repulsed by the idea of becoming like Isolde and having her reputation suffer because of feelings she ultimately considered ennobling and good. In *Cliges* Fenice attempts to remain respectable by avoiding the consummation of her marriage to Alis, which alone considering the debates in medieval

³⁴ *Cliges*, p 169 (containing lines 6619-6664)

³⁵ Noble, *Love and Marriage*, pp 41-42

³⁶ Topsfield, *Chrétien de Troyes*, pp 91-92

theological circles of whether a marriage was truly valid without consummation, brings doubt to the legitimacy of that marriage. She perceives her honour as being saved through her devotion to only ever being the wife and lover of Cliges. The means by which she achieves her goals are incredibly absurd and unrealistic, however, the details which excuse her behaviour, show us what the inexcusable aspects of adulterous love affairs were. Firstly, taking a lover when one was already married was wrong, according to Chrétien, because it made the woman share her body between two sexual partners. Secondly, few adulteresses could use Fenice's justification of correcting a hereditary line through their adultery. After all, the most reprehensible consequence of adultery in noble houses was a wife confusing hereditary lines by carrying the child of someone who was not her husband. Thirdly, in real life there were no magic potions to protect the virginity of reluctant wives. Fourthly, the husband an adulterous woman was trying to escape from was unlikely to conveniently die, thus allowing a new marriage to her lover. Finally, in real life the ideal that Chrétien hopes for, where a husband and wife also loved and respected each other equally, was at best a rarity: "Cliges made his beloved his lady, for he called her beloved and lady and she lost nothing in this, for he loved her as his beloved, and she loved him as one should love one's lover. And each day their love increased."³⁷

³⁷ *Cliges*, p 169 (containing lines 6619-6664)

III

Revenge and Reconciliation:

The Rights and Duties of a Cuckolded Husband in Béroul's *Tristan*

Béroul wrote his *Tristan* soon after 1191, but it only survives in fragments.¹ The date is based on a passage in his text which seems to refer to an illness the Crusaders were afflicted with in Acre in 1190-1191.² Its composition thus coincides with the period in which the Church gained legal control of marriage.³ Only the middle of the *Tristan* poem survives, but it is useful to the study of medieval marriage, because it contains descriptions of a husband's reaction to his wife's adultery. The romance starts with King Mark, Tristan's uncle and Iseut's husband, almost discovering the two lovers by hiding in a tree.⁴ Tristan and Iseut are alerted to his presence and put on a show of innocence to convince him their meeting is innocuous. The story then proceeds to Mark finding out about their love affair, their sentence to be burned at the stake and their subsequent escape. In this context, I will specifically discuss how the romance relates to medieval legal punishments for adultery and how Mark transgressed his legal rights. After living in exile, Tristan and Iseut eventually realise their sin, which is specifically characterised by their awareness of having failed to adhere to social responsibilities as wife and nephew. The subsequent reconciliation between Iseut and Mark shows the importance the Medieval Church attached to the indissolubility of marriage. On a more secular note, the exculpation of Iseut served to re-establish both Mark's position as king, the power of which was linked with his ability to keep his wife in check, and Iseut's as queen, which was linked to her monogamy with the king. Throughout, it is evident that

¹ Béroul, *The Romance of Tristan*, edited and translated by Norris J. Lacy, Garland Publishing, London, 1989.

² Norris J. Lacy, Introduction to *Tristan*.

³ Georges Duby, *Medieval Marriage: Two Models from Twelfth-Century France*, trans. Elborg Forster, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1978, p 20.

⁴ I will use the spellings, Tristan and Iseut, provided by Norris J. Lacy's translation when referring specifically to Béroul's characters and the standardised English spellings, Tristan and Isolde, when referring to the characters as they appear in popular tradition generally.

sexuality and the stability of marriages did not merely affect individuals, but had social repercussions as well.

There are some contradictions in Bérout's approach to his characters. It seems the audience is supposed to believe the motivations of the characters as Bérout states them, rather than evaluating them through their actions. For example, the three barons, who attempt to expose Tristan and Iseut's adultery, are always described as evil, regardless of the fact that they always seem to tell the truth when trying to get Mark to believe his nephew and wife are conducting an illicit affair. By contrast, Tristan and Iseut are always described as good, noble and beautiful, even when they are lying and deceiving the king. Mark's fluctuating opinions regarding the guilt and innocence of his wife and nephew also show serious inconsistency, as sometimes, in a matter of a few lines, he changes his mind about their guilt while he is off-screen.⁵ There are also inconsistent plot points, like the death of one of the three barons, which is subsequently forgotten, as he returns to the story a while later.⁶ This could show just a general medieval disregard for details of plot consistency or it could indicate that the poem represents the work of more than one author and was completed in segments.⁷ Either way, the segments that will be focussed on in this chapter - the burning at the stake scene, the remorse in the woods scene, and the ordeal scene - each alone form consistent wholes.

The first part especially relevant to medieval marriage in *Tristan* is the section where Mark, after practically catching the couple in the act of adultery, decides in his anger to burn them publicly at

⁵ E.g. lines 567-572 the king is convinced Tristan and Iseut are innocent after believing their feigned innocence in the orchard where he was hiding in a tree, and then on lines 615-617 the barons claim Mark is aware of their crime and condones it, which he admits in lines 627-630. Bérout, *Tristan*, pp 29-31.

⁶ Gornal kills one of the three barons on lines 1710-1711 but then the three are back on line 3028, Bérout, *Tristan*, pp 81, 143.

⁷ Lacy, Introduction to *Tristan*, p 3-5.

a pyre. The populace is extremely horrified at King Mark's intention of burning his wife and his nephew and they lament their fate loudly:

News spread throughout the city
that Tristran and the queen Iseut
had been found together
and that the king wanted them put to death.
All the people wept⁸

They love Tristran because he has been Mark's champion, defending the people of Cornwall from outside threats. Burning is clearly painted as a horrific punishment, which is not justified in the circumstances. The people's main concern is that the act of adultery has not been proven beyond a doubt, as there has been no trial: "King, you would be committing a terrible injustice if they were not tried first; wait until afterwards to kill them. Sir, have mercy!"⁹ It seems that the populace's laments are designed to correspond to the reactions of the audience of the romance. Burning was certainly not a punishment for adultery in twelfth-century France, nor does it seem to have been at any other time in France or the British Isles. This is particularly puzzling, as most other references to legal procedure in Bérout's *Tristran* are reasonably accurate.¹⁰ Reinhard points out that romances, however, are full of examples of ladies being rescued from being burnt at the stake.¹¹ It seems likely that burning was used in romances mostly to horrify the audience. Between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, burning became the punishment for the most heinous crimes medieval people could think of, especially heresy and witchcraft. It is clear that Tristran and Iseut's crimes should not be counted among those. It is, however, possible that the twelfth-century audience of the romance thought that burning had been exacted as punishment for adultery in the mythic past. Since the Arthurian material's popularity can be presumed to have had a lot to do

⁸ Bérout, *Tristran*, lines 827-831, p 41.

⁹ Bérout, *Tristran*, lines 885-887, p 43.

¹⁰ A.H. Diverres, "Tristran and Iseut's Condemnation to the Stake in Bérout" in *Rewards and Punishments in the Arthurian Romances and Lyric Poetry of Medieval France: Essays presented to Kenneth Varty on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday*, edited by Peter V. Davies and Angus J. Kennedy, D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, 1987, p 21.

¹¹ J.R. Reinhard, "Burning at the Stake in Mediaeval Law and Literature" in *Speculum*, vol. 16, no. 2 (April 1941), pp 187-189.

with its exotic foreignness and its placement in mysterious and exciting British history, the terrifying scene of an ancient king inflicting a wrathful punishment does not seem out of place.

Ultimately, the burning of adulterers can probably be dismissed as a dramatic device, but the populace's insistent demand for the adulterous pair to be tried, seems more historical. Mark's decision to burn the adulterers regardless of popular opposition and his insistence that a trial is not necessary, paint him as a tyrant. Medieval law codes seem to agree that a husband who killed his wife and her lover upon catching them committing adultery, was treated as a minor offender and should not be severely punished. This was not an uncommon point of law as Roman, Germanic, Visigothic and Burgundian laws all recognised a husband's right to punish his wife and her lover if caught in the act.¹² Burgundian laws, however, note that if the husband only kills one of them he must make compensation: "either let him (the injured party) kill both of them, or if he kills only one of them, let him pay the wergeld of that one"¹³ Sicilian laws, confirmed by the German Emperor Frederick II in 1231, note that if the husband did not delay, he could kill the offenders immediately. However, if the case was brought to court, the punishment for adultery was not automatically death, but rather the confiscation of property. It also warns that "the woman must not be handed over to her husband who would rage against her until he killed her", but instead she must be punished objectively by the court, for example, by slitting her nose.¹⁴

Bearing in mind that *Tristan* is a work of fiction, could Mark have been considered to have exceeded his legal rights in waiting after the revelation of their guilt to publicly execute Tristan and Iseut? He could have killed them in private if they had indeed been caught in the act, which

¹² Fritz Mezger, "The Origin of a Specific Rule on Adultery in the Germanic Laws" in *The Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol 68, no 3 (July-September 1948), p 146.

¹³ "Laws of the Burgundians (5th-6th c. A.D.) in *Women's Lives in Medieval Europe: A Sourcebook*, edited by Emilie Amt, Routledge, New York, 1993, pp 48-49 (Source: *The Burgundian Code*, tr. Katherine Fischer Drew, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1972)

¹⁴ "Laws of Sicily (1231)" in *Women's Lives in Medieval Europe: A Sourcebook*, pp 67-68. (Source: *The Liber Augustalis, or Constitutions of Melfi, Promulgated by the Emperor Frederick II for the Kingdom of Sicily in 1231*, tr. James M. Powell, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, NY, 1971)

they strictly speaking were not. The indignation of the crowds could be perceived as the people's reaction to Mark's attempt to override legal practice and cause disgrace by publicly executing the lovers, rather than allowing a trial. Diverres suggests Béroutl may have been intentionally contrasting Mark's behaviour with the twelfth-century ideal of kingship, as he seeks personal vengeance by abusing his authority as king.¹⁵ However, while he does take some time to organise the public execution, he clearly still has the right to avenge the offence Tristran and Iseut have done to him and he is also still experiencing the jealous rage that he initially felt upon finding out about their affair. The problem is that the populace is not convinced of their guilt.

The doubts the populace has regarding Mark's decision are due to the lack of indisputable evidence of adultery and the necessity of organising a public trial, not just a public execution. Mark and the Dwarf of Tintagel had set up Tristran and Iseut by letting them sleep in the same room and sprinkling flour on the floor to see if they went to each other during the night. Tristran noticed the flour and avoided the ploy, but unfortunately a wound on his leg opened leaving tell-tale blood stains on the floor as well as in Iseut's bed. Perhaps the circumstantial evidence of the blood could not be considered conclusive proof of their guilt. The internal testimony of the romance suggests that it was not conclusive, since the lovers manage later to exculpate themselves by explaining away such evidence. Nonetheless, thirteenth-century legal texts indicate that adultery could be proven even if the couple were merely caught alone in the same room.¹⁶ Either way, the demand for a public trial is the crowd's explicit stipulation. Iseut especially, being the queen, was a public figure whose guilt or innocence would have had to have been proven outside the privacy of the royal bedchamber, since her condemnation affected the entire community.

¹⁵ Diverres, "Tristran and Iseut's Condemnation to the Stake in Béroutl" p 28-29.

¹⁶ Ibid. p 24.

At least by the beginning of the thirteenth century, any official power queens may have had in past centuries had significantly diminished. Their only official duty was to produce heirs.¹⁷ Of course, queens were still powerful due to their intimate relationship with the king, which is evident in the characterisation of queens as intercessors in disputes or in relations between the people and the king. Similar imagery of women and mothers as intercessors was used for the Virgin Mary as well. Furthermore, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the institution of kingship generally strengthened and centralised, causing a situation where a lot of people relied on their personal relationships with the king for their position in society. However, since a queen's power was so very reliant on her role as the consort of the king and the mother of his children, she obviously became extremely vulnerable to accusations of adultery, which could undermine both roles.¹⁸ Personal vengeance, which was ultimately the right of a cuckolded husband, could not be lawful when the marriage was symbolic of the unity of the kingdom. Especially since Mark decided to punish Iseut publicly, it followed that her guilt had to be established publicly, otherwise her burning would solely be a pointless act of cruelty.

Dinas, a friend of Tristran's at court, reprimands Mark for behaving dishonourably towards the queen, when she is about to be led to the pyre:

Sir, have mercy on the queen!
You want to have her burned
without a trial; that is not honorable,
since she has not confessed the crime.¹⁹

However, he is also concerned that such an act will only incite revenge from Tristran, who by this point has managed to escape:

Do you think that if such a noble woman,
whom he brought here from a distant kingdom,
were put to death, he would not be distraught?

¹⁷ Peggy McCracken, *The Romance of Adultery: Queenship and Sexual Transgression in Old French Literature*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1998, p 6.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* pp 6-10.

¹⁹ Bérroul, *Tristran*, lines 1096-1099, p 53.

No there will be serious trouble.²⁰

As part of a public trial, Tristan could have used his right to do trial by combat. Tristan is the greatest knight in Mark's kingdom, which ultimately means he would have won any such trial through physical prowess. The idea behind trial by combat was that God would not let the guilty man win, which obviously creates a problem in a narrative where the greatest warrior, Tristan, is also guilty. Tristan clearly thinks he would win any such fight, regardless of the fact he knows he is guilty: "he trusted so completely in God that he was fully convinced that if he were allowed to defend himself, no one would dare take up arms against him".²¹ It seems strange that Tristan practically confesses to being at fault himself, but desires to protect the queen's honour through combat, when in all sense if he is guilty so should the queen be. Truth is relative as God has given Tristan such prowess that he can defend whichever cause he chooses with success.

Mark eventually decides to give Iseut to lepers as common property, instead of burning her, so that her honour will be entirely destroyed. Once Tristan saves Iseut from the lepers, they run away to the woods.²² During their stay at the woods they encounter the hermit Ogrin, a devout man who wishes them to repent their sins. However, when the couple insists they cannot stay away from each other because of the power of the potion, which causes them to love each other, the hermit does not turn them away, but allows them shelter and food at his lodging regardless. The point seems to be that sinners, such as Tristan and Iseut, need to be given a chance to repent their sins. God seems to favour the lovers in the poem: "He does not want a sinner to die" simply because he wishes them to live in order for them to eventually repent their sins. Payer has noted that the ability to confess one's sins and be forgiven over and over again was a great acknowledgement by

²⁰ Ibid. lines 1115-1118, p 55

²¹ Ibid. lines 813-817, p 41

²² Leprosy was considered a punishment of sexual sins in the Middle Ages, thus giving Iseut to them was also symbolic of what Mark considered her sexual depravity.

the Church of human weakness, allowing people to live with enduring hope of forgiveness.²³

There is a strong implication, in contrasting the hermit's willingness to allow the lovers his hospitality and Mark's chasing them away, that Christians should not punish sinners until they have a chance to repent or to explain. The lovers have the alleviating circumstance of the potion, which compels them to sin, which to a large extent, exculpates them already.

Eventually the potion's power runs out and the lovers finally realise their sin. Prior to this, the lovers are happy in the woods despite their poverty, but now Tristan regrets the loss of material as well as societal privileges:

I have forgotten chivalry,
the court, and the knightly life.
I am deprived of furs and fine clothes,
and I am no longer at court in the company of knights.²⁴

Moreover Tristan also realises the disservice he has done to his uncle: "God! My uncle would have loved me so if I had not betrayed him!"²⁵ He also regrets that he has deprived Iseut of the same things and destroyed her honour as well. In her regrets, Iseut also specifically mentions the loss of her chance as queen, to arrange the marriages at court, illustrating the unofficial power of queens.²⁶ In arranging marriages, she would not only be influencing the private lives of the members of court, but forming links which allowed political alliances as well. Tristan realises that he now has a social responsibility to bring Iseut back to Mark, because their marriage is not only a social institution, the dissolution of which brings secular disapproval to all three parties, but was also a sacred union:

I ask God, ruler of the world,
to grant me mercy and give me
the strength to leave
my uncle's wife to him in peace!

²³ Pierre J. Payer, "Confession and the Study of Sex in the Middle Ages" in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, edited by Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage, Garland Publishing, New York, 1996, p 3.

²⁴ Béroul, *Tristan*, lines 2165-2169, p 103

²⁵ *Ibid.* lines 2170-2171, p 103

²⁶ *Ibid.* lines 2215-2216, p 105

Before God, I swear that I would do it
 gladly, if I could,
 so that Iseut might be reconciled
 with King Mark, whom she married
 (alas!) in the presence of many noble men
 and according to the rites of the Christian church.²⁷

This passage reveals that the Church's involvement in marriage was significant enough to warrant a mention as part of Tristran's regret. For the first time Tristran seems to realise that he has taken away his uncle's wife, which is a condemnable act because he owes allegiance to him. He has broken the secular virtue of loyalty. Reconciliation will mend the situation and allow him to do right by his uncle. The Church always preferred reconciliation to estrangement, as did secular society. Marriage was both a secular and ecclesiastical institution, as it was publicly contracted in the presence of witnesses and, as Tristran says, performed according to Church rites. The lovers' guilt over a mixture of secular and religious transgressions shows how deeply the Church's ideals had permeated lay society. It shows the enmeshing of sacred and secular value systems, as the Christian concern for sins is placed over the top of the secular concept of loss of honour and station.

With help from friends, Tristran and Iseut manage to be reconciled with Mark, by convincing him again they are innocent of adultery. They still love each other, but the compulsion to be together and for physical union, ended with the ceasing of the potion's effect. According to Ogrin, God forgives them as long as they are truly repentant. He specifically states that:

When a man and a woman sin,
 if they have loved each other and then separated,
 and if they repent
 and are genuinely repentant,
 God will forgive them for their transgression²⁸

This seems to have been the Church's position generally in regard to adultery. Thirteenth century marriage court cases indicate that ecclesiastical courts generally demanded that the illegitimate

²⁷ Ibid. lines 2185-2194, pp 103-105

²⁸ Ibid. lines 2345-2349, p 111.

union cease and the married couple be reconciled, even when the adultery case had been brought back to court several times and the guilty parties flogged publicly.²⁹ Unfortunately, extant records of ecclesiastical court cases involving marriage only survive, at the earliest, from the late thirteenth century. Prior to then, the Church was less organised and ecclesiastical courts were probably rarer and certainly less capable of creating and storing extant records of their proceedings. However, since the later court cases show the implementation of the rules discussed in twelfth-century legal texts, one can conclude that the same ideals guided the early ecclesiastical marriage courts, in whatever form they existed. The fourteenth-century court cases show that while divorce was technically allowed by canon law in cases of adultery, even then, the spouses were not allowed to re-marry.³⁰ Gratian made the same concessions in the twelfth century, when he stated that: “A man may forsake his wife because of her fornication, but he may not marry another.”³¹ Nonetheless, he among other ecclesiastical authorities still enforced that a marriage was indissoluble: “Once a marriage has been proved to have begun, it cannot be dissolved for any reason.”³² True to the rules of indissolubility, the court cases from fourteenth-century records show a decisive tendency to attempt reconciling estranged spouses, who had problems ranging from money issues to adultery.³³

No ecclesiastical court is, however, present at the reconciliation arrangements between Mark and Iseut, even though the lovers’ guilt was partly imbedded in the offence they committed against the sacredness of matrimony. Reconciliation is preferable for secular reasons as well, since it will allow the healing of the damage done by the lovers’ betrayal of the king. Tristran also suggests

²⁹ From a course reader provided by Dr Lynette Olson, featuring ecclesiastical court cases from 13th, 14th and 15th centuries, this example being from 1292.

³⁰ Karen A. Corsano, *Custom and Consent: a Study of Marriage in Fourteenth-Century Paris and Normandy Based on Records of Ecclesiastical Courts*, a thesis submitted to the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Licentiate of Mediaeval Studies, Toronto, 1971, p 69.

³¹ “Gratian: Canon Law on Marriage” in *Women’s Lives in Medieval Europe: A Sourcebook*, edited by Emilie Amt, Routledge, New York, 1993, p 81. (source for Gratian: *Corpus Juris Canonici*, edited by E. Friedberg, 1959)

³² *Ibid.* p 82.

³³ Corsano, *Custom and Consent*, p 77.

that if Mark does not wish to take Iseut back he is willing to take her back to Ireland to her father. The point of it is that the relationship between Iseut and Tristan is impossible, because there is no acknowledged model for their love to exist in. Iseut is already married, allowing Tristan no legal way of possessing her as his partner, thus the only way to give her the life she deserves, is for her to return to her rightful husband or to the house of her father. Tristan also offers yet again to do battle with anyone who does not believe that he and the queen never committed adultery. No one stands up to him, Mark takes his wife back, and Tristan has to leave the court to further guarantee Iseut's fidelity. After he is gone, demands for her to clear herself arise again from the three barons, eventually leading to Iseut's trial by ordeal. Mark's initial reaction to the request is to become enraged at the barons, yelling: "You care nothing for my happiness."³⁴ This response shows how important the restored marriage is to Mark, not only because of the societal advantages of his re-established faith in his wife's chastity and his own ability to keep her, but for his personal happiness.

Eventually Mark does, however, agree that it would be beneficial for his reputation to have Iseut undergo trial by ordeal to clear her name. The adultery case has given him the name of a cuckold and a weak king, which can only be rectified through a public trial. McCracken suggests that the ordeal can be construed as a public healing ritual, and it certainly seems to function as such in *Tristan*.³⁵ Trial by ordeal usually involved some sort of physical harming of the defendant and seeing how quickly God healed the harm. In Iseut's case she has to swear on relics, presumably with the idea that if she lies, God will strike her down. She manages to make an exculpating oath by organising Tristan, disguised as a leper, to carry her over a muddy patch on her way to the ordeal:

no man has ever been between my thighs,
except the leper who made himself a beast of burden

³⁴ Bérout, *Tristan*, line 3074, p 145.

³⁵ McCracken, *The Romance of Adultery*, p 82.

and carried me over the ford
and my husband King Mark.³⁶

The ‘duplicitous oath’ scene seems to have been a part of the Tristan and Isolde legend for a long time, betraying some serious distrust of ordeals and taking oaths as a legal practice. They were nonetheless extremely popular from pre-Christian to Christian times, quite possibly because they allowed for a communal healing process. The ordeal would not be undertaken unless there were no other way to settle the matter than for the defendant to clear themselves through swearing their innocence.³⁷ The doubt about Iseut’s blamelessness was a destabilising factor in the community, because it created a rift between the royal couple. All the participants need Iseut to prove her innocence: Iseut and Tristran to restore their honour, Mark to restore his image as a strong king and the people to have peace and stability in the kingdom. The adultery charge compromises Mark’s masculinity, making him appear a fool and affecting his ability to keep his enemies at bay. It also compromises Iseut’s position as the king’s consort and the prospective mother to his heirs, because adultery potentially disrupted the line. Obviously, like Fenice, Iseut could be technically seen as restoring the line to Tristran, the heir apparent, but this possibility is never addressed.

The issues of legitimate succession are in fact curiously absent from the whole romance, despite the fact that based on other sources of the Tristan story, the reason Mark married to begin with was to produce a direct heir. Consanguinity issues arising from Tristran sleeping with his aunt-in-law are also absent from the text. Tristran does feel bad about betraying his uncle and there are references to how he is supposed to love her only as he loves his uncle, but no-one screams “Incest!”, when accusing them. Illegitimate children, or any children at all, probably remain unmentioned simply for narrative reasons; Iseut falling pregnant by Tristran would result in far more serious troubles than mere sexual transgression. Consanguinity could, however, easily be

³⁶ Bérout, *Tristran*, lines 4205-4208, pp 197-199.

³⁷ On the traditional nature of the Ordeal see Rebecca V. Colman, “Reason and Unreason in Early Medieval Law” in *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, vol. 4, no. 4, (Spring, 1974), pp 582-583

addressed in regard to the various accusations levelled at the pair, but is not. One can only conclude, once again, that despite the church's attempts to paint consanguinity as a serious moral offence, people paid little regard to it. Within three decades of the completion of *Tristan* the church officially reduced the degrees of kinship from seven to four, which indicates a concession in the face of determined disinterest in following the excessive rules. Tristan and Iseut would still be considered related within four degrees, but ultimately, since they are only related through marriage, their transgression is offensive because it ruptures social order and is a sinful union, not specifically because they are related.

It is unclear how Béroul intended to end his romance and whether the reconciliation between Mark and Iseut would truly last. From the parts that we do have, it seems the lesson of *Tristan* is that reconciliation was always preferable to animosity between spouses. Tristan and Iseut's relationship is impossible as they have no way of being together in the way that they deserve to live, according to their rightful position in society. They are wealthy, noble and beautiful, deserving the trappings that go with the aristocratic class. A criticism of arranged marriages is not particularly evident in *Tristan* as it was in *Cliges*. The lovers are exculpated by the love potion, but the sin of adultery is clearly considered serious. It is, however, the social transgression which *Tristan* focuses on. Despite their feelings, the lovers had no right to disrupt a union which had importance to the entire community and was witnessed officially by earthly as well as divine authorities. The social position of the royal couple more than sacramental indissolubility guides the desire for the reconciliation of Mark and Iseut. The disrupting forces of the romance are the barons and their desire to cause a scandal for their own purposes. Scandal was not conducive to social stability, which was the main goal for both the Church and the Kingdom. *Tristan* is a notably secular source, which shows how secular and religious ideas of marriage were finding common ground in secular society.

IV

“Love is so blissful a thing”:

Sexual Behaviour and Honour in Gottfried von Strassburg’s *Tristan*

Both the previously discussed romances go some way to defend the behaviour of the lovers. Gottfried von Strassburg’s *Tristan* also tries, to an extent, to excuse the adultery of Tristan and Isolde, but for him the justification is love itself.¹ While Bérout’s lovers are only breaking the rules of propriety because of the love philtre and indeed eventually realise their sin once the philtre’s effect runs out, the potion of Gottfried’s lovers never ceases to bind them in love. In Chrétien de Troyes’ romance Fenice and Cliges seek acceptance through avoiding the validation of Fenice and Alis’ marriage, the rules for which can be found in ecclesiastical and secular works, because they want their love to culminate in a proper marriage. Gottfried on the other hand is comfortable outside the reality and traditions of society. He does not seem to care that Tristan and Isolde’s love is impossible, but justifies its existence simply through its intensity. In idealising passionate love the way he does, Gottfried is in stark contrast with ecclesiastical authorities on sex and marriage. Since the historical record of medieval sexual behaviour is strongly dependent on ecclesiastical writings, secular poems like Gottfried’s come as close as we can get to lay views on love and sexuality. Yet, Gottfried also shows aversion to the common marriage customs, which, regardless of the Church’s insistence on consent, often left a bride-to-be with little choice in influencing who her groom was. The efforts of Isolde’s mother to allow her daughter a happy life show a concern that medieval mothers could relate to, as compromising personal desires with societal expectations cannot have been easy for most wives.

¹ Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*, translated by A.T. Hatto, Penguin Books, London, 2004 (original translation 1960). All references to Gottfried’s *Tristan* to this edition. I will use the standard English spellings of Tristan and Isolde, as provided by Hatto, and will specifically indicate if I mean the legend in general rather than specifically Gottfried’s version.

Gottfried von Strassburg wrote his *Tristan* in the early thirteenth century, but nothing is known of him otherwise. He is, almost certainly, chronologically the latest of the romances discussed in this chapter, and his active period coincides with the final consolidation of the medieval Church's marriage policy in the first two decades of the thirteenth century. The story focuses mainly on Tristan rather than Isolde, who only comes into the romance at about half-way through. Gottfried used Thomas of Britain's *Tristran* as a basis for his story, seemingly following its plot very closely, but putting his own spin on the interpretation of the story. In particular, Gottfried's views on love seem to be very much his own, rather than a part of the Tristan and Isolde legend generally.² During the twelfth century there arose a keen interest in the individual and his feelings in literature and culture in general, and Gottfried's *Tristan* is a good example of the culmination of the twelfth century development.³ Because I wish to particularly examine the ideas Gottfried has about marriage, I will focus on the parts of the romance where Tristan goes to woo Isolde as a wife for Mark, saves her from an undesired marriage to a steward, and then tragically falls in love with her on the boat on their way to Cornwall. Gottfried's ideas on love and sex are particularly discussed when Tristan and Isolde fall in love at sea, again with reference to the impossibility of their situation, as they are honour-bound to Mark whether they choose to be or not. Judging from the way Gottfried deals with matters of love and passion, his views on sex were very different to those found in the ecclesiastical writing that survive in abundance to our time. This does not, of course, mean that his views were necessarily shared by all his contemporaries, but it shows that there was a variety of opinions on sex rather than just the monotonous suppression of sexuality that we see from church authorities.

The first part of interest for medieval marriage in Gottfried's poem is the starting of the wooing mission which Tristan eventually undertakes to win Mark a wife. Mark has chosen Tristan, his

² A.T. Hatto, Introduction to *Tristan* by Gottfried von Strassburg.

³ See, Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual 1050-1200*, S.P.C.K., London, 1972.

beloved nephew, as heir but many of his barons are not happy with this and wish for Mark to marry: “Thereafter Mark’s councillors adopted a policy of importuning him morning and evening with urgent advice to take a wife from whom he could get an heir, either a son or a daughter.”⁴ Mark is unswayed by his councillors, but the court becomes increasingly hostile to Tristan, who starts to fear for his life. The barons are increasingly envious of Tristan, until eventually Tristan himself begs Mark to take a wife in order to make life at court safe for him again. Mark agrees that the situation is intolerable for Tristan and his councillors get together to decide who would be most suitable to be Mark’s wife. A royal marriage is clearly a communal matter, as the barons are the ones who come up with a recommendation of who Mark should marry. They choose Isolde, based on Tristan’s description of her, as Tristan has by now already met her and tutored her under a false persona in Ireland. The marriage of Mark is a political and official matter, as indicated by the reasons the barons choose Isolde: “lovely Isolde would be a fitting wife for Mark in birth, breeding, and person”.⁵ However, the barons are obviously duplicitous and actually choose Isolde because fetching her would be the most perilous for the king’s champion, Tristan. Ireland, where Isolde is from, and Cornwall, Mark’s kingdom, are after all age-old enemies. However, the language they adopt in trying to convince Mark of Isolde’s suitability is presumably typical of what royal councillors looked for in a queen candidate; her station and upbringing, along with her beauty made her perfect to be a royal wife.

In addition to Isolde being Mark’s equal in excellence, the marriage between her and Mark could bring together the two countries and end their animosity. Again, even if the barons’ motives are deceitful, such political advantages were probably a common consideration in the marriage negotiations of the nobility. As the barons say: “it often happens that there is mischief between two countries; but then let the two sides seek and find remedy and make peace, together with their

⁴ Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*, p 151.

⁵ *Ibid.* p 152.

children.”⁶ This is a clear example of the ideals the laity might have for marriages as consolidators of political plans. Mark is still reluctant to go along with the marriage arrangement, but Tristan’s enthusiasm to prove to the court that he is honourable and wishes the best for Mark, as they do, leaves Mark no choice but to let him go on the dangerous mission with the barons. Altogether, this part of the romance shows that the motivations for an influential person’s marriage were not romantic, but pragmatic. Mark has no particular fascination with Isolde, but he is agreeing to his vassals’ demands in order to make a direct hereditary line a possibility.

It is worth noting that the main concern for acquiring a queen for Mark is to produce heirs, which never then occurs with Isolde. While it is clear later on that Isolde pays Mark the marriage debt, she never conceives to either her husband or Tristan. Introducing a plotline where Isolde was to become pregnant would probably have been unwise, as it would have created serious paternity doubts that the author would have had no way of clearing. Unless there was a period in which Isolde was clearly and without doubt faithful to Mark, medieval people would have had no possible way of determining who the father of the child was. Therefore, apart from the initial intention of producing heirs to the throne, children are never again referenced in relation to the marriage, although canon laws based the good of marriage only on reproduction: “childbirth is the sole purpose of marriage for women”.⁷ While ecclesiastical and lay concepts of marriage often disagreed, they did not live in isolation of each other. The church opposed adultery because it was a sin but it was also to support the lay system which relied upon undisputable succession and inheritance structures. The subject of children was probably generally omitted from the Tristan story, simply because it was not part of the traditional legend. The omission does, however, suggest that despite children being an obvious consequence of sex the subject is left entirely

⁶ Ibid. p 153.

⁷ “Gratian: Canon Law on Marriage” in *Women’s Lives in Medieval Europe: A Sourcebook*, edited by Emilie Amt, Routledge, New York, 1993, p 82. (source for Gratian: *Corpus Juris Canonici*, edited by E. Friedberg, 1959).

unaddressed because it would have been too disrupting, in the context of adultery, to be safely included if the storyteller wanted sympathy for his heroes.

Once Tristan is in Ireland he needs to find a way to convince the Irish King to give Isolde to him as a wife for Mark. Luckily, the country is being ravaged by a dragon and the King has promised Isolde as reward for killing it: “The cursed fiendish monster had burdened the land and the people with such an excess of harm that the King swore by his royal oath that he would give his daughter to whoever would make an end of it, provided he were a knight and of noble birth.”⁸ Tristan slays the dragon and cuts off its tongue. However, the poison in the tongue makes him pass out so that a dishonest steward, who is in love with Isolde, finds the dead dragon, cuts off its head and claims to have slain it himself. Because of her father’s promise Isolde is now obliged to marry the steward, which she finds a distasteful prospect. Presumably her disappointment relates to the steward’s reasonably low position in society or his bad reputation, although Gottfried only explains that his affections are against her wishes. Since the King is bound by his word, Isolde’s mother is the one who takes it upon herself to stop the undesirable marriage: “He shall never be your husband, not if all the world had sworn it!”⁹

The situation had serious legal conflicts at its heart. The King is honour bound to keep his word, whether he wished to take it back or not. Since his promise clearly stated that he was pledging to give his daughter in marriage, he probably presumed it was his right to do so. Ecclesiastical laws had, however, by now concluded that no marriage could take place without the consent of the spouses-to-be. Gratian, for example, stated very clearly what the rights of a daughter were when a father tried to coerce her: “A girl whose own agreement has not been shown is not required by the

⁸ Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*, p 159.

⁹ *Ibid.* p 164.

oath of her father to marry.”¹⁰ Nevertheless, such a situation cannot have been very clear as the authority of the father, and especially of a king, was such as to override the concerns of the daughter. As Corsano has noted, in her study of fourteenth-century marriage cases, girls’ understanding of their legal rights in consenting to a marriage was hazy at best. Obedience was a virtue and girls usually expected to eventually marry someone whom their father chose anyway. Thus refusing a father’s choice was clearly wrong and many girls would have remained unaware that they could avoid a marriage by simply stating that they did not consent to it.¹¹

Through the diligent efforts of Isolde and her mother, Tristan is eventually found and identified as the dragon-slayer. He disputes the steward’s claim and the evidence of the tongue shows that he was indeed the one who killed the dragon, as the tongue was removed before the head.

Unfortunately, Isolde and her mother have also found out Tristan’s true identity and are not happy about Isolde marrying the king of an enemy country. The Irish King himself and his court are glad of the marriage, as the ending of the hostility between Cornwall and Ireland benefits everyone.

Isolde, however, cannot forgive Tristan for killing her uncle and she is also incredibly distraught about leaving her family and home behind to go to a strange new country. Her anxiety seems very real and probably reflects concerns that many young women had upon getting married, as wives always left their home to go to a new house and location. It is interesting that after all the effort of avoiding a marriage to the steward, Isolde still ends up having to marry someone she would rather not. The words of bitterness Gottfried puts into her mouth show how upset she is about being forced to the situation she is in, as well as her distress over leaving everything familiar to her: “I have no idea what fate I have been sold into, nor what is going to become of me!”¹² Tristan tries to comfort Isolde by showing that at least this marriage will bring her great honour, as Mark is truly a

¹⁰ “Gratian: Canon Law on Marriage” in *Women’s Lives in Medieval Europe: A Sourcebook*, p 81.

¹¹ Karen A. Corsano, *Custom and Consent: a Study of Marriage in Fourteenth-Century Paris and Normandy Based on Records of Ecclesiastical Courts*, a thesis submitted to the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Licentiate of Mediaeval Studies, Toronto, 1971, p 28.

¹² Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*, p 193.

worthy man, where the steward was not: “I shall soon give you a king for your lord in whom you will find a good and happy life, wealth, noble excellence and honour for the rest of your days.”¹³ This is reminiscent of Andreas Capellanus’s philosophy according to which a lady had no good reason for refusing to love a man who was entirely worthy of her love.¹⁴ Tristan’s words of reassurance, moreover, have an ominous ring to them, as anyone familiar with the story realises that the happy life envisioned here by Tristan will never come to pass because of their falling in love.

The love potion is concocted by Isolde’s mother. She managed to prevent her daughter’s marriage to the unworthy steward, but can do nothing to stop the marriage to Mark. While Isolde does not embrace the prospective of this second groom, he is still entirely suitable for her, and there is little a mother can do to ease her daughter’s discomfort under the circumstances. Therefore, Isolde’s mother brews the potion to try to ensure her a happy life with love and passion with her new husband: “the prudent Queen, was brewing in a vial a love-drink so subtly devised and prepared, and endowed with such powers, that with whomever any man drank it he had to love her above all things, whether he wished it or no, and she love him alone. They would share one death and one life, one sorrow and one joy.”¹⁵ Ultimately, Gottfried is here already imagining the love between Isolde and Tristan as indicated by his repetition of the elements of their love discussed in his prologue: “If the two of whom this love-story tells had not endured sorrow for the sake of joy, love’s pain for its ecstasy within one heart, their name and history would never have brought such rapture to so many noble spirits!”¹⁶ Nonetheless, it seems natural to put the wish of a life full of love for one’s daughter in the mind of a mother. The ability to choose one’s spouse, implied in the Church’s consent theory, is in many ways taken away from Isolde and Tristan twice, as she is first

¹³ Ibid. p 194.

¹⁴ See above, Second Chapter, pp 37-38 and Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*, translated by John J. Parry, W.W. Norton and Company, New York, 1969.

¹⁵ Ibid. p 192.

¹⁶ Ibid. p 44.

of all forced to marry someone she does not want and then the love potion compels her to love someone not of her choosing.

Isolde's mother is involved in arranging her daughter's marriage, even if she has little official authority in the matter. According to Hostiensis, the thirteenth-century canon lawyer, the concept of matrimony had more to do with women than men, as it affected their life more visibly. He breaks down the word *matrimonium* to meaning mother's duty, as he sees motherhood as the purpose of becoming a wife and the duty of looking after the household and children as the central part of matrimony.¹⁷ Women's lives focussed to an enormous extent on marriage. They were prepared for becoming wives all their young lives and then they would usually spend the rest of their lives as wives and mothers. Isolde's mother, however, specifically wants romantic love for her daughter to ensure her personal happiness in marriage. The Church, which advocated sex only for the purpose of procreation, would have disapproved of this concept. The fact that such an aspiration is given to Isolde's mother already suggests that the Church was fighting a losing battle in expecting people to show such restraint in sex.

During the sea voyage to Cornwall, Tristan and Isolde accidentally drink the love potion on a hot day. There are clear indications of their prior interest in one another throughout the romance, but honour and propriety would have kept them under the surface, had it not been for the potion. They still refrain from showing their love for a little while after drinking the love philtre, because they are ashamed of their feelings and fear losing their honour: "When Tristan felt the stirrings of love he at once remembered loyalty and honour, and strove to turn away."¹⁸ It should be emphasised that while Christian modesty plays a part in their restraint, the main apprehension is the secular idea of losing one's honour. Eventually, their feelings are too strong to ignore. The fear of scandal

¹⁷ Hostiensis, *Summa 'Copiosa'*, text provided by Dr Lynette Olson, translation by the teaching staff at the University of Toronto Department of History.

¹⁸ Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*, p, 195.

and disgrace remain in the air, but the love itself is a happy thing for the couple, even if it causes distress to their confidante, Isolde's companion Brangane: "Let this scandal remain a secret among the three of us. If you spread it any farther it will cost you your reputations. If any other than we three comes to hear of it you are lost, and I together with you."¹⁹ Again, instead of reprimanding the couple for sinning, Brangane is concerned about the possibility of scandal, which would ruin their reputations. Once the lovers and Brangane agree to keep the affair a secret, Tristan and Isolde are free to express their love, and regardless of all their other concerns, this makes them happy.

Gottfried's views on sex seem to have been very permissive. He does not seem to believe that there is anything wrong with extra-marital sex, if it is motivated by true love. Perhaps he is only willing to be so accommodating in a literary work, but he treats the subject with such ease that it appears likely he believed what he wrote. Gottfried believes many people expect love to be the fulfilment of their lives, but because they are ashamed to express it, love instead becomes a cause for frustration: "we sow seed of deadly nightshade and wish it to bear lilies and roses!"²⁰ He also advocates love sustained by friendship "which never fails to comfort us and bears roses as well as thorns and solace as well as trouble. In such friendship joy always lurks among the woes; however often it is clouded it will bring forth gladness in the end."²¹ Gottfried is against refraining from sexual intercourse because he believes the joy of it to be good for lovers: "Now that their shyness was over they gloried and revelled in their intimacy, and this is wise and sensible. For lovers who hide their feelings, having once revealed them, who set a watch for their modesty and so turn strangers in love, are robbers of themselves."²²

¹⁹ Ibid. p 201.

²⁰ Ibid. p 202.

²¹ Ibid. p 203.

²² Ibid. p 204.

Gottfried's views are refreshing, compared to the strict outlook of the Church. It is understandable that the Church wished for people to limit sexual relations to marriage, as this reduced the likelihood of sinful behaviour and also had the societal benefit of restricting children to wedlock. Clearly defined marriages were the best way to ascertain who were responsible for the upkeep and raising of children and this promoted a stable, safe society where everyone was looked after. However, the Church took the restriction of sexual behaviour farther in also placing controls on how married people were to have sex. St Augustine of Hippo illustrates the point by explaining that the only reason sex is allowed in marriage is for the production of offspring and thus any other kind of copulation was distasteful: "The union, then of male and female for the purpose of procreation is the natural good of marriage. But he makes a bad use of this good who uses it bestially, so that his intention is on the gratification of lust, instead of the desire of offspring"²³ Having sex with one's wife because of sexual desire was not a great sin the way extra-marital and pre-marital sex were, but it was still a sin.

There were theologians in the twelfth century who took a milder view of marital passion, focussing rather on curbing over-indulgence and immoderation, than simply desiring one's spouse. Robert Courson, the student of Peter the Chanter, a famous Parisian theologian from the very end of the twelfth century, concluded that it was precisely the immoderation that made gratifying lust such a great sin. Desire for offspring and rendering the marital debt were sinless ways of having sex within marriage. Avoiding fornication by indulging in marital sex was a tolerable evil, but immoderate desire was entirely sinful. It seems still somewhat unclear to me why spouses would desire one another to render the marriage debt if not for lust, but the Parisian theologians concentrated on the idea that what made sex sinful was the lack of self-control. Robert Courson also gracefully acceded that the common man could not, however, be expected to know of the

²³ "St. Augustine of Hippo: On Marriage and Concupscence (423 A.D.)" in *Women's Lives in Medieval Europe: A Sourcebook*, p 27. (Source: *St Augustin: Anti-Pelagian Writings*, translated by Peter Holmes, Robert Ernest Wallace and Benjamin B. Warfield, *Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene fathers*, Ser. 1, Vol. 1, New York, 1893).

subtle difference between satisfying one's lust and the acceptable rendering of the marriage debt or curtailing fornication. Therefore, despite stern ecclesiastical writings on controlling marital passion, the clergy and the theologians were at least sometimes willing to allow lay people their sexual joy if it remained in wedlock.²⁴

Obviously, not all contemporaries thought that Tristan and Isolde's deep love justified their adultery. Wolfram von Eschenbach, for example, in his prologue to the romance *Parzival*, answers Gottfried's criticism of him in *Tristan*²⁵ by taking a stab at his major work's heroine, Isolde: "The beauty of many has been praised far and wide; but if their hearts be counterfeit I rate them as I should as a bead set in gold." (my underlining).²⁶ In spoken German the words "Ich solde", translated to "I should", shortened to "I solde" giving us a thinly veiled reference to Gottfried's female protagonist. While modern readers can be relieved when they discover Gottfried's relaxed attitudes to sex, it must be remembered that many of his contemporaries probably adhered more to Christian prudence than he did. Gottfried's outlook confirms, along with Andreas Capellanus's views, that not everyone in the Middle Ages was inhibited about sexual matters, but it should not be applied to the other extreme to indicate that everyone was as easy-going as Gottfried was.

In conclusion, Gottfried's *Tristan* is an example of the culmination of a trend evident in twelfth-century literature, which emphasised personal happiness over societal demands. Isolde's mother's involvement in her daughter's marriage arrangements particularly shows what hopes mothers might have had for their children. Isolde's mother makes it abundantly clear that the thing most important to her is for Isolde to be happy in her marriage. She makes sure Isolde marries a

²⁴ John W. Baldwin, "Five Discourses on Desire: Sexuality and Gender in Northern France around 1200" in *Speculum*, vol. 66, no. 4 (October 1991), p 803.

²⁵ Gottfried's *Tristan* contains a "literary excursus", where he ridicules his contemporary fellow-poets, particularly Wolfram, pp 104-110.

²⁶ Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, translated by A.T. Hatto, Penguin Books, London, 2004 (original translation 1980), p 16.

husband appropriate to her station and even concocts a love philtre to ascertain she has individual fulfilment in her marriage as well. While the love potion can be seen as robbing Isolde of the ability to choose her feelings, it must be borne in mind that the goal of it was to make her happy. The accident which leads to Isolde and Tristan drinking the potion, instead of Isolde and Mark, is nothing but a turn of fate in the end, perhaps symbolising the unpredictability of who one loves. This unpredictability of love is emphasised also in Chrétien de Troyes' *Cliges*, which does not even use the literary device of the potion to allow for the main couple's inappropriate love. Sexual or romantic attraction was definitely on people's minds in marriage considerations, even if the Church would rather have ignored that aspect. Even secular society would have preferred level-headed matches recommended by advisors or family members to the randomness of desire, idealised by many romance authors. Throughout, Gottfried's *Tristan* it is obvious that the inherent sinfulness of the adulterous affair of Tristan and Isolde, while acknowledged, is not the main concern. The couple's misbehaviour threatens their honour, because they are acting against their natural impulse of loyalty towards their lord Mark. If that secular sin were to become public knowledge their lives would be marred by scandal. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries Christianity was influential enough to guide lay morality, but it was certainly not the only director of behaviour. Secular society had its own rules which were supported and transformed by Christian morality, but the strong theme of personal honour shows that lay society had structures to discourage marital infidelity separate from the religious concern for sin.

Conclusion

The moral decisions of medieval romance characters show that adultery was an extremely serious matter. Chrétien's Fenice and Cliges feared the inevitable scandal that had the potential to ruin their lives. Bérout's Tristan and Iseut feared the unavoidable wrath from Iseut's husband Mark and his legal right to take vengeance. Gottfried's Tristan and Isolde, while not as fearful of scandal and revenge as the other pairs, knew that if they were caught, they would certainly be separated forever. Romance literature was created to entertain, but any good entertainment has something to say about the society it is created in. There was no possibility for the love of Tristan and Isolde to exist in an acceptable way, when she is compelled to marry another man, and therein lies the tragedy of their story. The love affair of Fenice and Cliges tells the same tale, where the main couple is unable prevent the unwanted marriage to Alis. Fenice, of course, undermines the marriage entirely, by preventing its consummation in order to avoid begetting children to Alis. Nonetheless, the eventual marriage between Fenice and Cliges has more to do with lucky coincidence and supernatural themes, than any legal grounds for dissolution. The thing most striking about the three romances discussed in this thesis is that the perception of why adultery was wrong is more embedded in the secular concept of personal honour than in religious morality. The sanctity of marriage is constructed more as a social responsibility than a religious duty.

Undoubtedly Christianity influenced people's views of marriage. The Church very vocally insisted upon the indissolubility of marriage and the consent of the parties. The indivisible nature of marriage was also legally enforced by ecclesiastical courts, at least by the end of the thirteenth century, and the romances discussed show signs of accepting the reality of the indissolubility for a

legally valid marriage. Fenice's marriage only ends upon the death of her husband and in both Tristan stories there is a significant push towards the reconciliation of Isolde and Mark, even after Isolde has run away with Tristan. The concept that a marriage was meant to last until death parted the couple is evident in romance despite the fact that the twelfth century still saw high-profile divorces.¹ Consent, on the other hand, seems to have been harder to incorporate into lay society. Marriages had such far-reaching political and communal functions that personal consent automatically played a smaller role in aristocratic marriage negotiations. As we see in all three romances discussed in this thesis, Fenice and the two Isoldes are powerless to stop their marriages, which advance the political plans of their fathers and their husbands.

The romances also show a growing concern for personal happiness not related to the demands of religious institutions or societal expectations. All of Fenice's actions are based on the fact that she loves only Cliges and wishes to prevent him being disinherited. Their love is sudden and while they continue to act according to the rules of the society they live in, all their actions are directed at the possibility of being together for their own happiness. Since societal structure has no particular interest in indulging their personal desires, they manipulate its rules to gain their goals. Béroul's *Tristan*, despite having a more worldly tone than the other two, seems to advocate the religious ideal of allowing sinners to repent. Béroul's story does, however, paint a particularly vivid picture of how adultery affected the entire community, especially if the offenders were of high standing. Despite a distinct theme of spiritual repentance, Béroul's lovers' main source of guilt is the social transgression of offending their lord Mark and thus losing their position in society. The matter of personal happiness is most evident in Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan*. For his Tristan and Isolde

¹ Peggy McCracken, *The Romance of Adultery: Queenship and Sexual Transgression in Old French Literature*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1998, p 1, Eleanor of Aquitaine's first marriage to Louis VII of France ended in a separation based on consanguinity, and she later re-married.

all manner of lying and sinning is allowed because of their deep love for each other. Even though not all contemporaries would have agreed with Gottfried's idea that all was fair in love, the existence of his work and its popularity show that the concept was at least fascinating to his contemporaries, if not entirely acceptable.

How well does Georges Duby's theory of the two models of marriage apply to the discussed romances? If we presume that the romances represent the lay model of marriage, then they should, at least to an extent, describe the society they were created in. Arthurian romances do not generally attempt to recreate the medieval courtly world, but instead show a literary ideal where love was the world's main concern. Nevertheless, romances show us something of what people were thinking: how they thought about their lives and how they thought marriages could be or should be. In that sense if romances are sources for the lay idea of marriage, then they should correspond, to an extent, to Duby's idea of what the lay model was. There is no evidence of preference for endogamous marriages in the discussed romances; however, there is a distinct disregard for consanguinity rules, which fail to play any part in the condemnation of Tristan and Isolde or Cliges and Fenice. It seems fair to presume that the lay society, by and large, paid little heed to the Church's excessive consanguinity rules, since the focus of the Tristan and Isolde relationship never shifts to accusations of incest. There is a decisive trend in the discussed romances towards indissolubility of marriages, which was an ecclesiastical ideal. Either the concept of the indivisibility of marriage had permeated lay society by the twelfth century, or the extent of allowed divorce in lay society has been overemphasised. Obviously, it seems the Church's insistence on consent in marriage was ignored by many. Nonetheless, there is notable evidence that the authors of romances were much more permissive of sexual pleasure in marriage and that they thought

desiring and loving one's husband passionately was more likely create a happy marriage. In fact, Isolde's mother's love potion was designed to allow her daughter to eventually not regret her reluctant marriage as her passionate love for her husband would have erased any previous doubts. It seems then that Duby's theory on what the lay idea of marriage consisted of, is quite accurate in regard to the romances discussed in this study.

The ways the authors attempt to gain sympathy for their lovers, shows that they have Christian morality at their heart. Despite the comedic nature of *Tristan*, Bérout feels for Tristan and Iseut because he believes true repentance is more important than punishment. Fenice's adulterous designs on Cliges are largely excused by the fact that Alis is not someone who she thinks could ever please her. If the Church's insistence on letting the spouses choose each other and willingly consent to the marriage were to become a reality, a situation like Fenice's would not occur.

Similarly, Gottfried's Isolde is also unwilling to marry Mark, especially once she falls in love with Tristan. Since she is unable to control her feelings, but also unable to marry him, she has no choice but to remain in an adulterous love affair. The implication is that if a woman did not want to marry the man chosen for her, how could she be expected to remain a faithful wife to him? The emphasis is not so much on the fact that Isolde could not pick whom she loved, as the potion stripped her of free will to an extent, but that she should have been allowed to marry the one she loved.

The reactions to adultery within the romance show that most of the time the concerns were entirely secular in nature. Duty and honour were at the core of the disapproval, as Tristan and Isolde's adultery failed to respect the rights of Mark, Isolde's husband and Tristan's lord and uncle. Throughout duty and honour are, however, enmeshed with respecting the expectations of the

Christian Church, which required fidelity and modesty from all Christians. Religious ideals of lay behaviour did not exist in isolation of secular political and ideological structures. The Church came to see marriage as a spiritual matter that came under ecclesiastical jurisdiction, but in taking over such a traditional part of secular life, it had to adapt its laws and practices to accommodate lay customs. The romances show us that all through the period when the medieval Church was consolidating its jurisdiction over marriage, people continued to conduct their lives as they always had, but slowly began to include Church ideology into the marriage philosophy. Finally, the Tristan and Isolde story in all its forms fascinated people, both as light entertainment and as a didactic tale either inciting them to love more fully or beware of the fate of the adulterous lovers. Love and marriage were of interest in the Middle Ages, as they are now. The conflict at its heart is between Tristan and Isolde's duty to other people in their lives and to their own feelings. This is precisely what makes the story so relevant to the study of marriage, as it examines the contemporary society's rules on marital fidelity. Whether to be true to oneself or to adhere to social responsibility is a question which has not lost its importance even today.

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