Sensing Death:

Variations in the Sensorium of the Old Norse, Anglo-French, and Middle English Tristans

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the description of sensation in the scenes immediately before, during, and following the death of Tristan in variations in the Tristan cycle from the 12th through the 15th centuries. Using a sensory studies approach, the project considers these scenes as they are translated and transmitted from Thomas de Bretagne's *Tristan* to the Old Norse *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* and *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd* and into Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, the last, great medieval treatment of the Tristan story. The scenes are understood in the context of the texts' sensoria as defined by their cultural and historical contexts and the texts' underpinning in philosophical and theological thought on the senses. The thesis project argues that the specific cultural preferences and usages of the senses can be made apparent through the comparison of Thomas's *Tristan*, the Norse translations, and Malory's text. Taken together, they show the importance of considering medieval translation when comparing the appearance of the senses in written artefacts from the Middle Ages. The sensory engagement with texts is deeply tied to the making of meaning and ethics in medieval literary works. The differences in how the senses are prioritized and framed suggest a larger variance within European Christian philosophical and theological thought on the senses and provide a potential framework for exploring this phenomenon in other medieval literary cycles.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

When considering the construction of a sensorium, it is tempting to consider the senses as acting separately from each other. However, any sensorium is built on a network of interconnections. These interconnections are culturally defined and shape the perceptions of those within a culture. Often these senses can be organized hierarchically within a culture depending on cultural values or moral connotations assigned to the senses. Within recent scholarship, the growth of sensory studies enables these sensoria to be the object of study and the means of inquiry. Sensory studies does not examine the sensorium in strictly biological terms and acknowledges that the senses do not occur on a regular continuum, much like the conceptions of time and space (Howes, "'To Summon All the Senses'" 3). At the same time, it is important to keep in mind that the Western episteme has maintained a bias towards the visual and textual and this can often be taken for granted as the rule in cultural settings, rather than one mode of sensorial emphasis.

Such variations in perceptual hierarchies can alter domains of cultural expression, such as the means of social organization, conceptualization of the universe, morality, the individual, and the regulation of emotions (Howes, "'To Summon All the Senses'" 3). In contrast to the Western aesthetic, David Howes notes that one of the most central questions in the construction of the anthropology of the senses is "what is the world like to a culture that takes actuality in less visual, more auditory or olfactory, gustatory or tactile, terms than those to which we are accustomed" ("'To Summon All the Senses'" 6). With this shift away from the visual, an anthropologist can consider more fully the interplay of the senses present within a given culture. In his introduction to *The Varieties*

of Sensory Experience: A Sourcebook in the Anthropology of the Senses, Howes notes that there are three points that are central to an anthropology of the senses: that "it is possible to conceive-perceive the world as constructed" in manners other than the Western visual-spatial mode, that "signifiers can function independently of their signifieds" and that anthropologists should pay more attention to the media they use to gather information as the "medium may well be the message" ("'To Summon All the Senses'" 10).

In order to delve deeper into the construction of a culture's sensorium, it is important to recognize that the senses may vary in their relation and categorization within a given culture as even the more "practically important" senses can maintain different cultural importance. This importance is dynamic and can change over time, even within individual parts of a given society. When conducting literary research, direct observation may not always be possible. Thus, Howes and Classen suggest that a study of this sort should begin with the extraction of "all the references to the senses or sensory phenomena from the source in question" (261). Following this, they suggest that all the references to the senses should be analyzed after being divided into intra-modal sets. This will then allow a literary researcher to analyze the relations between the modalities to recognize how these senses contribute to the understanding of experience and ascertain the hierarchy of the senses maintained within a society (Howes and Classen 261). It is important in this sort of research to seriously consider the ethnographer's own biases that may influence selection.

The interrogation of a culture's sensorial network can be examined through the analysis of the layers of a constructed society. This includes investigation of a culture's

lexical designations for the difference senses, its lexical variety of words for the senses, and their use in metaphorical and expressional discourse. Similarly, consideration should be given to a culture's aesthetic ideals, the usage of artifacts, environmental construction, and how a culture interacts with the available media. This includes how a society may repress certain senses in child rearing or relate them to the body and its moral or physical deformation. In all, these considerations recognize that the senses are not merely passive receptors of stimuli, but they actively play a role in knowledge generation and worldly understanding. This active role can be seen in great detail within the course of recent scholarship on the Middle Ages.

Within the medieval sensorium, the senses can be said to have considerably more agency than those seen in the contemporary Western conceptions of the senses. This agency in the medieval sensorium had "important ethical implications for the evaluation of the validity and reliability of sensory information generated in the process of understanding the world" (Newhauser, "The Senses" 1560). These ethical implications were characteristic elements in understanding the sensoria of the medieval period. This emphasis emerged through a considerable amount of textual production throughout the Middle Ages in such genres as the bestiary, treatise, and sermon. The medieval epistemology based on the Aristotelian tradition created a perceptual model in which the senses are the first steps in cognition. Paradoxically, this model occurs simultaneously with the Christian moral tradition in which the senses emerge as objects of suspicion. In this way the Christian moral tradition treats the bodily senses as a means through which individuals connect too much with the physical world. Thus, in the Christian conceptualization they act as potential portals of sin that can render the will incoherent.

While this paradox can potentially destabilize the processes of cognition, these modes of perception will ultimately hold coherence in the medieval period. Through the education of the senses, the senses can be reframed in the reception of sensory data. This education enabled sensation to be progressively guided. Since the senses provide raw material for cognition, an individual could obtain the preferred moral coherence with human effort and grace (Newhauser, "Introduction" 14). This edification of the senses then proved useful for those at all levels of society. Through the stability of well-established knowledge, this sensorial education could be used in the training of professions where an understanding of touch or taste could assist in the creation of accurate assessment in information gathering. While this edification could vary due to social station, Christian theological thought heavily guided this sensorial education.

The classification of the external senses was inherited by the Middle Ages from Aristotle through Cicero. Early Christian writers of late Antiquity then built upon Aristotle's work and were later re-informed by translations of Avicenna and Averroes (Jütte 46-7). In these successive iterations, the most frequent hierarchy placed sight and hearing at the top, followed by the "corporeal" senses of taste, smell, and touch. Sight found its place at the top given its cognitive value for Aristotle. Later writers in late Antiquity and the medieval period elevated sight for its universality and ability to discern the good and inferior (Jütte 64-5). Hearing was often paired with sight as it has primacy in religious instruction and the knowledge of divine truth. In this way, hearing, like sight, had the ability to receive from beyond the body and aid in the guiding of the senses. Taste, smell, and touch were considered more corporeal for their perceived closeness of

sensorial range and its potential connection to bodily sin given their proximity to the temporal.

Aristotle was the first to include touch as a discrete sense in his classification of the senses (Jütte 38). And touch has been maintained in frequent enumerations of the senses in Western epistemology following his work. The addition of touch along with the variety of hierarchies in the Middle Ages further suggest that the senses were less rigid and could vary according to ideological and cultural constructions of meaning. These blurred boundaries allowed for a greater multisensory experience that relied less on distinct combination of senses. Instead, greater emphasis was given to how this multisensory experience was interpreted. Such can be seen in the work of Anslem of Canterbury. There, Anselm used the refectory and marketplace as multisensory places that monks could potentially indulge in dangerous sin through their over eagerness to taste food or know what they will eat which drives their mind away from the contemplation of the divine (Newhauser, "The Senses" 1572). Much like the multisensory experience of the marketplace, reading itself is bound in sense from the physical interaction which allows the reader to touch, smell, and see the book. Beyond the physical, the audience of such literature may hear the sensorially diverse story when it is read aloud or performed.

With this theoretical prelude in mind, this thesis will focus on the description of sensation in the scenes immediately before, during, and following the death of Tristan as it is translated and transmitted through variations in the Tristan cycle from the 12th-15th centuries. The analysis will occur within the context of the medieval sensorium of the texts' cultural contexts and the texts' underpinning in philosophical and theological

thought on the senses. However, it is important to note that the theological and philosophical texts referenced in this thesis such as those by Augustine, Hildegard of Bingen, and others, inform and are indicative of later-medieval thinking on the senses and should not be taken as direct influences on the authors/translators of the Tristan cycle. Specifically, this thesis will focus on the relevant scenes as they are translated and transmitted from Thomas de Bretagne's *Tristan* to the Old Norse *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* and *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd* and into Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, the last, great medieval treatment of the Tristan story. The translation and transmission of the Tristan romances uniquely allows us to open the veil between cultures. Medieval approaches to translation (*translatio*) enabled translators to reconfigure and adapt the source text into their preferred modes of cultural expression and sensation. Through these acts of transmission and translation, the authors/translators were able to shape their content into local modes of perception that enable a reader to more effectively generate meaning out of their experience with the text.

While all four texts appear in cultures adhering to a Pre-Reformation European Christianity, their unique cultural contexts inform each text's assumptions of how the senses have been educated. The first chapter of this thesis will examine the conception of the senses in Thomas de Bretagne's *Tristan* (c. 1155-60) and put these conceptualizations in conversation with those of Thomas's contemporaries as the senses are established with reference to the works of Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux, Boethius, and Hildegard of Bingen. Thomas's *Tristan* establishes a multisensory experience in which the senses play off of each other to establish a mediated reality for the imagination of the reader. This worked in tandem with the interplay of the senses in the performance and physicality of

the work itself to establish a powerful and all-encompassing experience. This experience then played off of the audience's guided response to the text via their instinctual moral judgement. The sensual interplay within this romance firmly integrated it into the Western Christian sensorium and gave it status as a captivating work that instructed the audience in the moral action of the higher classes as a model for emulation and self-betterment.

This instructional capacity lent the work a high cultural currency that was recognized by countries that sought to further establish themselves as a legitimate power akin to those in Western Europe. Norway under the rule of King Hákon IV was one such power. After generations of friendly contact with England, Norway undertook a massive translation project of works from Latin and Old French into Old Norse. These translations, which began with the translation of Thomas's *Tristan* in 1226, served as a move by the Norwegian monarch to culturally assimilate with Western European high culture and further argue for Norway to be seriously considered as a major European power. The second chapter takes up the resulting translation, *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*, in order to look at how the senses in Thomas's work were altered to fit Scandinavian preferences for the senses of Sight and Sound. While the Norse sensorial mode appears similar to the medieval Western European aesthetic, the Norse translation displays a heavier emphasis on sight as the model for the education of moral action and emotional display.

The third chapter follows the development of Tristan within Scandinavian literary models. The transmitted saga based on the Norwegian translation, *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*, shows an increased assimilation of sensory data into particularly Icelandic

means of sensing through the indigenous saga form. This use of foreign culture as it was adapted into domestic models of sensation enabled the resulting Icelandic saga to become a model itself. The Icelandic nobility on the edge of first the holdings of the Kingdom of Norwegian and then on the edge of the Kalmar Union after 1397 could learn through their education with a more domestic sensorium to justify their own status to those abroad and those close to the seat of the Norwegian and later Kalmar power. This justification leaned heavily on a weaving of Norse sensory modes with Christian customs of education. This hybrid model transformed the Norwegian translation into a less faithful transmission of the saga that infused Western romance motifs assimilated through the Scandinavian balladic tradition. The resulting *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd* then used hearing and sight to educate the hopeful nobles on how they could navigate a wider and more (racially and religiously) diverse world with Christian morality.

The fourth and final chapter moves away from the tradition that follows Thomas's *Tristan* and turns instead to Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*. Malory's translation and adaptation of the Tristan content from the French prose *Roman de Tristram* provides both a point of contrast in conceptualization of the Tristan material and understanding of Tristan's death. Malory's minimization of the sensorial experience of Tristan's death appears as a challenge to courtly love and recasts it in a custom of earthly knighthood, whose tenets are framed as relying on misperception and ambiguity in order to uphold and gain further honor. With the threat of a potentially fraught nature of perception in earthly knighthood, Malory's use of sight and hearing highlights the tensions between sacred and secular knighthood. His depictions of an ambiguous ethical system for the

achievement of worship highlight that the aspiring knight walks a fine line between worthy action and destructive behaviors.

Taken together, the following chapters aim to give insight into what translation can reveal about cross-cultural understandings of the senses and provide a potential framework for exploring this phenomenon in other literary cycles and periods. When scholars conduct literary research, translation enables a glimpse at the continuity and differences between culture groups. The medieval approach to translation then facilitates a more direct venue through which the choices and intent of the translator becomes even more present. Within the context of medieval English literature, the differences in how these authors/translators prioritize and frame the senses suggest a larger variance within European Christian philosophical and theological thought on the senses. More so, translation offers a venue to further explore how medieval authors/translators utilized the senses to create a meaning that is emphasized by the holistic experience of "reading" the text.

CHAPTER 2

THOMAS'S TRISTAN IN THE CONTEXT OF SENSORY STUDIES

Conceptions of sensory experience in the twelfth century endowed the senses with more agency than twenty-first century conceptions of the senses. This agency held important ethical implications for the process of understanding the world through the evaluative faculties which determine the validity and reliability of generated sensory information (Newhauser, "The Senses" 1560). The Christian moral tradition's framing of sense objects as potential objects of suspicion enabled sensory experiences to be connected with ideological conceptions, such as nationalistic, cultural, and behavioral ideals. Through this sensorial education, the senses could be reframed in how they interpret sensory data. While poetic writings relied on listener interpretation over a writer's expressed intent, a writer could take advantage of the listener's sensorial education to further guide and shape their interpretation of the poetic imaginative experience. Thomas in his *Tristan* makes use of this sensorial education to characterize the morality of Tristan, Queen Isolde, and Isolde of the White Hands and further develop the English political consciousness pushed during Henry II's reign by employing Tristan, the exile, as a stand-in for the Anglo-French nobility. By showing the nobility's preference for their homeland in Normandy over England, Thomas problematizes their desires and comes down in favor of the divine unity of the lovers and the Henrician state.

During the rule of Henry II, in which Thomas wrote his *Tristan*, the estate-holding Normans did not regard themselves as belonging to England. Rather, they conceived of 'home' as being across the Channel and the place in which they preferred to

be buried, despite the amount of time and investment they gave to England (Legge 139).[1] In light of this, Henry II's reign proved successful in fostering "an identification of his dynamic and political interests with the perceived concerns of an emerging English political consciousness" (Meecham-Jones 2). The success of this identification came in part through the writers associated with Henry II's court and beyond, whose literary production helped to further this institutional goal (either intentionally or unintentionally). This trend in literary production ultimately arose from two shifts: the recognition of the polemic and propagandistic potential of literature by the Anglo-French elite and the shift from an oral culture to a text-based literary culture.

This constructed identity further concretized the shift from the importance of oral culture to a preference for a literate one in the second half of the twelfth century. By transferring the preceding oral compositions in England to text, the court of Henry II was able to give authority to the written word. While oral performances, such as those of the troubadours, remained common at the king's court both in England and Normandy, there was an added focus to giving voice to oral composition beyond its demotic origins (Short, "Literary Culture" 359-60). For instance, Marie de France's *Lais* were able to give authority to Celtic creative works due to their newly gained textual form and allowed them to be considered within the book culture of Latin and French authors. This is not to say that these written texts were not also performed. Rather, their textual form allowed

[1] Interestingly, Henry II also worked to gain more French territory in order to have a greater inheritance to offer his sons. While this could be read as territorial expansion, Henry II's actions can be seen as stemming from a similar desire as the landed Normans in England.

writers in and around King Henry II's court to adapt and build on this content to further the project of forging a multi-ethnicity in this Anglo-French-Celtic culture.

No matter the content of Anglo-French works, there was an implicit recognition of the ability of these texts to be utilized as a part of the cult of personality cultivated under Henry II. This use of texts aligned with the monarchy's continued efforts for those in power to self-define the reign of Henry II. Writers and patrons within the Anglo-French ruling elite took advantage of how potent literature can be when used as propaganda and polemic and were aware of the implicit ethical and artistic demands of this project (Meecham-Jones 3). Particularly, the Henrician elite noticed that these ethical demands worked to disguise or reform the vices of the contemporary world in a manner that would be consistent for the construction and self-identification of the Anglo-French kingdom. Therefore, patrons were able to invest "actions and reputations with the sheen of divine justification or inevitability" (Meecham-Jones 12). Most of the textual structures that were utilized were matters of authorial, racial, and national identity which were disrupted by tropes of exile.

The romance genre in particular lent itself well to facilitating this mediated identity. While individual romances would follow a typical narrative trajectory, the genre as a whole proved very pliable. Romance authors can modify, alter, and rework the romance repertoire in order to speak more intimately to the contemporary concerns of the audience. Chism, quoting Helen Cooper, notes that the best conception of romance is that of a family. It branches and evolves in various directions that do not establish themselves as clones of the "original" (Qtd. In Chism 57). Romance's ability to be culturally present

allows romance authors to grapple with difficult problems from a safer and mediated distance. Thus, matters such as the history of Artur helped to assimilate "Anglo-French interests with the traditions of their subjects" (Meecham-Jones 17).[2] The discourse in this mythological and romantic matter forged a flexible model of an inclusive, yet mediated, identity that promoted a hybrid "national" identity, which merged the interests of Anglo-French elites and those they ruled through careful moral and sensorial education.

Similar to many of the romances developed in Anglo-French England, it is likely that the romances incorporated motifs from different cultures. As Bruford notes, "it is dangerous to be too dogmatic about the sources of episodes in medieval romance; so much of the relevant material must have been lost" (Qtd. In McCann 4). Thus, it is important to be careful before too quickly deciding that a motif that appears in French is the earlier source for the motif in English just because it appears at an earlier date. Such a conclusion can miss the deeper linguistic and cultural meanings and examples of the motifs that may have been lost over time. It is therefore important to be aware that what may appear to be the source more directly may be a step in the overall development in the transmission of a motif. Exactly this situation arises when considering the potential sourcing and development of the Tristan legend.

For *Tristan*, there have been two major lines of arguments about its potential source(s). One, put forward by Karl Heinrich Graf in 1869, suggests that the Tristan

[2] The extent of the identity concretizing power in romance can be further seen through the further sharing of Thomas's *Tristan* by the descendents of Henry II. Legge notes that his daughters were likely responsible for introducing versions to Spain, German, and Sicily, and his grandson, Henry III, likely introduced it to Norway through his friendship with Haakon IV (58).

legend may have a connection to the 11th-century Persian romance, *Vis and Ramin* (McCann 6). Proponents of this theory argue that the transmission came either through the Reconquista in Spain or overland through Greece via transmission or Crusaders. The comparison with the Persian romance is largely driven by perceived connections between specific scenes within the two romances. On the other hand, others consider *Tristan* to originate from Celtic sources. Although it is unclear what tradition may be the particular source, Loomis and Rhys began to document this potential Celtic transmission from the Welsh versions which have been further expanded to include Cornish and Old Irish sources as well (Johnson 9). While there are several potential texts connected to *Tristan* both by motif and linguistic evidence, it is unclear whether the Celtic texts that survive influenced or were influenced by the Tristan legend, which could render the texts inadmissible as evidence. This is all to highlight that while it is likely the Tristan legend has a multicultural past, a large part of the evidence is circumstantial at best (McCann 34). What is clear is that many writers in and around the Henrician court were aware of the Celtic oral composition and the larger centers of European cultural production and made use of both these cultures in textual creation.

Now, despite the potential connection with eastern sources, Isolde of Brittany's epithet provides a glimpse into how Thomas's *Tristan* retains a connection with Celtic culture. Throughout the poem, she maintains the epithet 'of the white hands' (*aux Blanche Mains*). Newstead suggests that the epithet itself originates from the Welsh *Essylt vynwen* (Isolde of the white neck). *Vynwen* is a variant of *menwein,* which means "slender" or "fair" (Newstead 155-6). Both variants maintain the word *wen*/*wein* which is a variant of *gwyn* (white) and this implied paleness draws a direct connection between her

epithet and Isolde's beauty. Similarly, white hands likely indicate a mark of beauty to the medieval reader. This beauty further emphasizes her nobility, as the lack of dirtiness on her hands would suggest a lack of manual labor and a certain ease of life. Her epithet then sets Isolde of Brittany as a mirror of Queen Isolde (Mitsch 77). However, Isolde of Brittany's epithet denotes a stark difference between herself and Queen Isolde, namely her purity. The whiteness of her hands and implied cleanliness suggests a certain purity through her retention of her virginity. Her second epithet, the maiden (*meschine*), further highlights her virgin status, which is retained throughout the poem and works in tandem with the whiteness of her hands. The image of virginity, purity, and nobility underscores a notable innocence in Isolde of the White Hands.

At first glance, Isolde plays upon an assumed positive morality associated with her epithet's presented image. Thus, her betrayal of Tristan would appear as an uncharacteristically malicious act that contradicts her apparent innocence and willingness to love Tristan without questioning his motives for not consummating his marriage with her. This, however, may not wholly be the case in this instance. André Ott notes that *blanc* can also carry the notion of flattery and danger.[3] These generally less positive meanings may underscore a darker side to Isolde of Brittany that could prefigure her betrayal of Tristan. It may also serve to highlight the moral opposition of the two Isoldes. While she appears to be innocent and noble, she serves as a distraction that traps Tristan and ultimately prevents him from rejoining the one whom he is meant to pursue. This

[3] For a more detailed discussion, see André Ott's chapter on blanc in *Etude sur les couleurs en vieux français* (pp. 1-18). The chapter also explains the meanings that blanc inherit from Latin and can be a good source for the deeper nuances in the word's history.

moral ambiguity that results from the obfuscation of the senses maintains the initial Welsh connotation and renders Isolde a character of suspicion that the reader would be right to mistrust due to the Old French *blanc*.

Within each word itself, the medieval reader had a twofold conception of the letter. It was seen to have an acoustic side as well as a semantic side to it (Vogt-Spira 52). When experiencing the semantic side of the text, the reader would experience a range of sensorial experiences. In the realm of touch, the reader would experience the vellum or the paper and the leather binding. Through the sense of sight, the reader would experience the letters as they are on the page, the manuscript's illustrations, and the paratextual adornments (Gillespie 153). The text then has a material agency, whose multisensory nature further calls the reader into the test to the sound and smell of the pages as the reader touches the page they are turning. Through this collaboration with the agentive text, the medieval reader could experience the text with a potentially deepened context for the text as these individual sensorial aspects pursue a guided interpretation of how to read and how to understand the text itself with the context of the illustrations (Borland 220). Particularly, these experiences can then educate and inform how the reader would present and emphasize parts of the text when reading aloud.

As a result, verse romance was not thought of as fixed in its visuality; rather, it was noted for its performative and acoustic elements (Cruse 45). The medieval reader was considered to be heard and to have spoken with the *voces paginarum* (voices of the page). Thus, as they would taste the shape and sharpness of consonants and vowels, they would engage in an imaginative and performative act that allows the listener to surrender

to the text's sensory world (Gillespie 153). Manuscripts would often be prepared for reading by strategies such as word-clustering, abbreviation, and punctuation. These strategies allowed the writer to anticipate how the texts could be vocally delivered and how rhetorical strategies could be employed to keep attention and imagination (Cruse 45). A common example of this technique can be observed in the narratorial voice's asides to the listener. These often are used to highlight notable moments in the narrative, from which the listener may draw lessons.

Thomas's *Tristan* utilized its poetic form and meter in order to facilitate these *voces paginarum* with which medieval readers spoke and heard. Thomas employed the octosyllabic couplet, a convention of romance, which helped to clue readers in to the genre of the subject matter. Thomas appears more archaic than Beroul through his rarely broken couplets and use of the caesura. In order to keep the reader's attention, Thomas avoids monotony through variety in his placement of the caesura, aligning it at times with the natural break at the end of a sentence and others within the sentence. Similarly, he employs linear divisions to distinguish between parties in debate or to signal a change between dialogue (Legge 58). The effectiveness of these strategies at keeping the reader's and listener's attention can be witnessed through the frequency with which Anglo-French writers employed them and from their influence on later English meter.

Beyond the meter, the poetic form itself provides a means to speak about the world, not in a descriptive way, but rather in a manner that divides or splits the reference (Ashe 221). Gillespie notes that in the 12th and 13th centuries, poetic discourse was considered as a special branch of logic (156). This discourse creates a "presence" through

its replication of the real which appeals to the emotions and senses through the imagination (Vogt-Spira 64). Thus, the generated image can play on these appeals to provoke instinctive moral judgements in its listener. Given that the aspects of being that poetry alludes to are not directly stated, it is hard to mediate what judgements are being made in the listener's mind. As Gillespie notes, "the moral center of gravity had to lie in the response of the reader [or listener] rather than the intention of the author" (162). This reliance on response for the conveyance of knowledge gives poetry a greater depth of power and also makes it potentially more dangerous in a moral sense than rhetoric.

The danger of an observer's reliability occurs both physically and metaphysically in the scene of Tristan's treatment after returning home from his wounding. Thomas introduces the doctors through their attention to Tristan and their wish to work to cure him, whether by creating plaster, crushing plants, and picking herbs for medicine. However, their labors are contrasted with their failure to perceive. What is translated here as to perceive (*aparceü*) can be taken to mean to perceive, understand, catch sight of, notice, or see (Thomas, "Le Roman de Tristan" 444). This noticing does not just hint at a general misperception; rather, it comments on a systematic failure of professional tools. As Newhauser notes in his "Introduction: The Sensual Middle Ages" the professions relied "more directly on the evaluation of their senses to gather information and they had to train themselves to act on accurate assessment" (15). Thus, the doctors looking after Tristan's health lack the necessary training of their senses rather than making any notable mistake.

The failure of these doctors to notice the poison then becomes apparent even to non-professionals as Tristan's symptoms are exaggerated as his health deteriorates. Thomas emphasizes this deterioration through an appeal to the multisensory. He describes Tristan as pale, livid, with bones showing, swelling inside and out, and a stench being emitted from his wound (Thomas, "Le Roman de Tristan" 444-6). In the midst of the description of Tristan's pain, Isolde is introduced as the one who has the perceptive abilities to cure him. The building of the vividness of Tristan's symptoms is first only visual and they grow into the olfactory after the shift to Isolde's ability to heal. This added description emphasizes his suffering and makes his need visceral to the listener. However, as Gillespie noted, there is little else to further guide the listener's interpretation. The medieval listener would then be queued by Tristan's suffering to see the Christian purification through suffering that is emphasized through the escalation of the sensory experience of Tristan.

This scene draws an additional parallel between Tristan's need for Isolde and the destined and necessary joining of Normandy and England. Around the time of *Tristan*'s composition much of the Anglo-French nobility held lands in France and had social and familial ties to French lands and nobility. This connection helped to foster a longing and nostalgia for living and returning to France. These feelings manifested in the nobility's desire for French holdings and their willingness to both die and be buried in France. With this context, *Tristan* can be read as a nationalistic text in which the Isoldes are the Anglo-Celtic and Anglo-French physical and cultural holdings. Thus, Tristan acts as a stand-in for the heart of the Henrician nation itself. The desire for a French return then presents as a threat to the nation which could poison the Henrician state into fragmentation and

disloyalty. This threat of fragmentation echoes the succession crisis following Henry I's death, which saw Henry II take the crown after Stephen of Blois denied the ascension of his Henry II's mother, Matilda, to the throne. Consequently, Isolde is the only one who can heal Tristan because of her ability to restore his connection to the larger English kingdom. While this fragmentation is not as visible initially, as Tristan's suffering grows, even the doctors who fail to perceive the poison in Tristan's wound could now recognize something more serious is afoot than they initially perceived. At the same time, the suffering can be similarly considered as a suffering that purifies and revives the English nation with greater strength.

The danger of sensual perception does not just lie in the hands of those lacking training in the senses. Perception undertaken by those with unworthy aims can potentially create a danger within itself. Following the worsening of his symptoms, Tristan clears the room after calling Kaherdin to him. His wife, Isolde of the White Hands, leaves with the rest of the household. However, she is taken with a curiosity for what he will say to Kaherdin about his plans for the near future and the end of his life. Thomas notes that she wonders if he will choose to become a monk or canon, which leaves her greatly worried. Isolde's curiosity to the medieval reader could signify a morally dangerous act. Augustine, in his *Confessions*, notes that curiosity is born in the lust for knowledge. Through the desire to know, curiosity manifests as "the object of the senses" as it is through the senses that the desired knowledge can be gained. Its sinful nature then comes from the fact that the seeker lusts for the knowledge of a matter rather than having a need for that knowledge (Augustine, *Confessions* 160-7). In her sinful *curiositas,* her soul uses her sensory organs to be able to give into the object of her flesh's love, namely,

discovering Tristan's dying wants (Hildegard of Bingen, *Book of Divine Works* 120). Thus, she has a member of her household keep watch, while she aligned her ears with the placement of Tristan's bed, so that she would hear the words shared between Tristan and Kaherdin.

Rather than keeping away from what she was not intended to know, Isolde of the White Hands leaps at the chance to quell her worries. While her worry comes from an arguably good place, her placement of the lookout suggests that she knows that she is indulging a curiosity that she should not. Thus, her eavesdropping gives her the knowledge of Tristan's love for Isolde at her expense. It is through this action that Isolde of the White Hands's desire for revenge finds its momentum. Hildegard of Bingen in *Book of Divine Works*, highlights a similar state of mind when she notes that "in the knowledge of evil, it [the wings that give the soul eyes], flies back to do evil" (120).[4] So too, the discovery of the wrongs against her leads Isolde to further pursue her deceitful revenge, which then causes Tristan's death. Her perception, born in sin, then is not dangerous in the hearing itself, but the circumstances and intentions under which the hearing was undertaken prove to be dangerous.

In contrast to Yseult's eavesdropping, Kaherdin and Tristan's interaction on the other side of the wall display a scene which can be considered more sensually pure. Isolde of the White Hands can only be passive in her hearing because her position does

[4] The four wings of the soul (the senses, knowledge, will, and understanding) guide the soul and act as its eyes. By embodying the highest of the senses (for Hildegard), the soul is able to recognize and fly towards goodness. However, when the eyes know evil instead of discerning the good, the wings fly backwards to create evil acts.

not permit a more active role. However, Tristan is able to use his speech to command action. He directs Kaherdin's attention by telling him to listen. The pair then go through a scene of shared pain where they speak, listen, weep, and embrace as Tristan relates to Kaherdin what he needs from him. Rather than focusing on the image of Tristan as he suffers, the scene focuses on the pair's interaction. This move forces the listener to filter out the room at large and only notice the pair's interactions, just as Isolde's focus is trained on them. This paralleled focus forces attention onto the dichotomy between the two scenes' relation to the senses.

These paralleled scenes serve to build the spatial sense of the narrative. While they are separated physically, they are filtered in a way that allows the two scenes to play off each other. In this manner, they are able to be read as sensorially coherent and simultaneous to the listener. Yet, these scenes are shaped at the same time by the perception of Isolde of the White Hands who bookends the scene between Tristan and Kaherdin. Her impressions and wants are then framed to shade the moral good of the scene between Tristan and Kaherdin with her *curiositas* and wrath. This enables the scenes to play out similarly to the three-dimensional space in which these scenes occur. The wall that divides Isolde's sensation from Tristan's and Kaherdin's conversation is then manifested through the narrative's framing. Thus, the listener is able to perceive the spatial divisions and shift focus to various parts of this space.

This sort of spatial perception was understood by the medieval listener in the middle of the twelfth century as being understood through a *sensus communis* (common sense). This sense which originated from Aristotle and was transmitted through

Augustine amounts to qualities that are perceived in various manners through the external senses and includes movement, rest, shape, size, and number. The object was not just perceived, but it was also assigned a particular mental attitude through the *sensus communis* (Jütte 39,46). The text utilizes this sense for the listener and pushes the listener to conceive more directly the shape and size of the perceptive field within Tristan's room and the hallway behind it through its description of where Isolde places herself in respect to Tristan's bed. This detailed placement allows the listener to become further engrossed in the scene and move this sensory data into what Augustine called the inner senses, a general sensibility which took information from across the senses and synthesized them into a coherent perception (Augustine, "On the Free Choice of the Will" 38).

Despite the lack of physical matter, perception can arise from the presence of an object rather than direct contact. Thus, what is sensed can continue to be sensed by the sense organs within the imagination (Boethius 86; Jütte 38). The poetic form (and literature more broadly) is able to key into these imaginative faculties that do not rely solely on the senses, but work beyond them within the mind. As Boethius notes through his character Philosophy, the imagination begins by seeing and forming figures. However, these sensations are held in an imaginative manner, not in a sensory mode of knowing (Boethius 87). Imagination acts as a "bridge between the senses and intellect" and through a process of abstraction and refinement it can come into a mode of knowing (Gillespie 155). *Tristan* helps to immerse the listener through the presentness of the scene, which renders the reader present as they are placed in a perceptual lens similar to Isolde of the White Hands. The present framework allows the listener to feel the anticipation of Isolde and pushes the readers into the realm of her sensorial action.

By connecting the sensory experience to the listener's own drive for action, the text manifests the intellectual generalization that enables the listener to translate particular observations and specific sensations into a kind of universal knowledge (Gillespie 155). For Augustine, this sensory experience would be filtered through an inner sense which works between the senses and reason and shares a capacity for judgement with reason. It is reason then that uses deductive reasoning in order to determine absolute truths through this filtered logic (Augustine, "On the Free Choice of the Will" 42). This sort of practical intellect excites the listener and provokes them into a state of moral action (Gillespie 160). The dichotomy of the scene then helps to emphasize to the listener the deep moral implications implicit in Isolde's action. It also pushes the listener to recognize the isolation that surrounds Isolde's sinful behavior.

Her isolation and spatial/moral division from Kaherdin and Tristan who weep together draws a parallel to the Anglo-French nobility who prefer Normandy. The scene itself separates Isolde from the structures of power in Brittany and anticipates the tragic result of her shift from lover to avenger. Thus, her actions further the notion that the Anglo-French nobility who cling to their preference for Normandy may also be acting against Henrician rule. Their preference is then tinged with the immorality of Isolde of the White Hands' actions. Meanwhile, Tristan through the assistance of Kaherdin is reaching out to connect with the Anglo-Celtic Isolde, who can offer him the perceptive abilities that would enable him to heal at their reunification. In this way, the potential wants of members of the Anglo-French nobility become paired with the moral implication of Isolde of the White Hands through this pairing of her sin with a particular engagement with the senses. This pairing in turn allows the spatially complex and

multisensorial narratives to activate the listener's trained associations with the moral attributions of the senses.

It is worth noting that the imagination was understood to build upon the senses at a fundamental level. Medieval sensory perception in the twelfth century that was brought about by the external world was not experienced as a different sensory experience than one provoked through texts and imagination. Thus, the key to the moral understanding of this experience is an elimination and disregard of perceptual difference (Vogt-Spira 54). This lack of perceptual difference leads the senses to be seen as what informs "the reason and all powers of the soul" (Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias* 123). This process highlights that the form of perceiving understood in the Middle Ages was not passive. Instead, the senses actively worked in the formation of knowledge (Newhauser, "Introduction" 21). This not only includes the basic connotations built from a sensation. The active senses were also consistently interrogated for their reliability of perception.

The senses were recognized as potentially fraught in their ability to understand what is perceived. While the focus of sensation tends to be on the interpretation of sensory data in moral models of perception, sensual unreliability can also occur at the level of sensory data collection. When Isolde of the White Hands was eavesdropping on Tristan's and Kaherdin's meeting, she relied solely on her sense of hearing. Their conversation unfolds without issue for their eavesdropper until Tristan unveils what he wishes Kaherdin to convey to Queen Isolde, saying:

> Dites li saluz de ma part, / Que nule en moi senz li n'a part. / De cuer tanz saluz li emvei / Que nule ne remaint od mei. / Mis cuers de salu la salue, / Senz li ne m'ert santé rendue; / Emvei li tute ma salu. / Cumfort ne m'ert jamais rendu, /

> Salu de vie ne santé, / Se par li ne sunt aporté. / S'ele ma salu ne m'aporte / E par buche ne me conforte, / Ma santé od li dunc remaine, / E jo murrai od ma grant peine; / En fin dites que jo sui morz / Se jo par li n'aie conforz. (Thomas, "Le Roman de Tristan" 450)[5]

At its heart, the message appears to be Tristan's plea for help and hope to relate how dire his health really is. However, when heard and without larger context, the message could be potentially confusing to the unintended listener. The key to this confusion is the heavy use of the word, *salu*. *Salu* can be taken to mean health and cure or it can be used as a salutation or greeting. The two meanings are played off of each other from the start in rather ambiguous ways. Their ambiguity is then heightened by the close proximity and frequency of the word's use.

This intentional confusion of meaning may have been meant to confuse anyone who overheard the conversation between Kaherdin and the Queen, yet in its initial relation, it makes Isolde of the White Hands's eavesdropping potentially fraught and prolongs her sinful *curiositas* without giving a clear answer to her worries. Typically, the greater the distance between the perceiver and the object of perception was, the greater the cognitive moral and aesthetic advantage was it considered to be for the medieval perceiver (Newhauser, "The Senses" 1565). Without sight, which was conceived by Hildegard of Bingen as a means of distinguishing the good and inferior, Isolde of the White Hands had to rely on a sense which was a step further from the divine (Hildegard of Bingen, *Book of Divine Works* 130). This distance further complicates Isolde's

[5]1196-1212. "Tell her I hope she is in good health, / for without her there is no health in me. / My heart sends out to her so many wishes for good health / that no health is left behind here in my body. / My heart conveys to her wishes for good health, / for without her I shall not be restored to health. / I send her every wish for good health, for no comfort shall ever be mine again, / no hope of life, no health of body, / if they are not brought here by her. / If she does not bring to me my good health / and comfort me with her lips / then my health will remain with her / and I shall die of this great pain I feel." Thomas, *Tristan*, p. 127.

perception as she is unable to confirm and further establish the true state of what Tristan's relation to Queen Isolde is. Through her potential confusion, the text is able to highlight the potential false ends of her *curiositas* and emphasize the importance of intentional authoritative hearing, like that of God or king.

Likewise, the right sensation can benefit the perceiver. While Queen Isolde was deemed to have a better perceptual ability in medicine than the doctors called to Tristan, Tristan's message to her suggests that healing can also come from hearing. He notes that Queen Isolde could heal and console him *par buche* (by speech/words) (Thomas, "Le Roman de Tristan" 450). This phrase highlights the power of language to settle and unsettle the body. Medieval medical writers note how disruptive and loud sounds, even from everyday life, can inhibit the ability for the ill to heal. Similarly, they note that pleasant sounds, namely music, can aid in the healing process (Wallis 150). Here, Isolde's healing voice is part of what enables her to be so much more effective than Tristan's doctors. Her words have the capacity to help settle the malady within Tristan by connecting to his soul and potentially to divinity.

While Tristan awaits these healing words, his lack of mobility prevents him from watching for Kaherdin's return. Instead, he must rely on Isolde of the White Hands for her perceptual ability. This reliance comes about in the narrative through his push to verify if Isolde is certain about what she has seen. Unable to perceive for himself, he is forced to trust her fully and when she reports a black sail on Kaherdin's ship, he believes that he will go unaided. While not a loud or ambient noise, this negative sensory experience via the ears unsettles his body. Tristan cannot bear what he hears and turns to

the wall, which limits the range of his gaze, his sensory perception. This allows him to focus inward, lament his death, long for Queen Isolde's sweetness, and call to her as his love before he dies. Even when distance prevents healing, Queen Isolde's sweetness calls back to her verbal power, playing off of the conception of "sweet" in the Middle Ages, which could be taken as a quality that embraces all the senses and expresses what was desirable in the divinity (Newhauser, "Introduction" 5).[6] At the same time, Isolde's sweetness has a double existence as something both good and evil. While the source of his potential healing, her sweetness appears to also be the source of his demise in that moment. Through Newhauser's discussion of the use of sweet sensations in the works of John Gower, he notes that "one can find almost as many complaints about how humanity honours sin because of the sweetness it creates" (Newhauser, "John Gower's Sweet Tooth" 754). In this sense, Tristan's reliance on her words to heal him may stem in part from their adulterous relationship and the sweetness experienced within it. Tristan then loses his will to live because he believes wrongly that she and the sweetness experienced through their sinful relationship are the only cure to his ailment.

As *Tristan* nears its and his end, this divine desirability becomes increasingly present. Even after Tristan's death, it is carried through and emphasizes a climax in the text as Queen Isolde, surrounded by lamentation, searches for Tristan. It first becomes palpable to the listener as Queen Isolde is unable to reach land. She sees the land she has longed to see and is unable to reach it, just as the ship she is on. Thomas describes those

[6] Hildegard of Bingen notes picks up on sweetness in her *Book of Divine Works* with particular respect to sweet smells, saying "sweet smell extends over all things and urges wisdom to learn and recognize whatever is here and what manner of thing we have to contend with," (p. 130).

on shore as waiting in a similar bind, yet unlike the ship, they are unable to see those on the sea. The means of perception and Tristan's and Isolde's desire is extended beyond their bodies here and placed into the ship and people more generally. It is at this point that the connection between the two is placed as the joining force between the Anglo-Celtic (ship coming across the Channel) and Henrician Normandy (personified by those on the shores of Brittany) sharing in their longing and their active desire to be joined as a single political, if not divinely sweet, entity.

However, this union is denied by the vengeance of Isolde of the White Hands. Her actions prevent the pair from ever actually reuniting in life. When Queen Isolde finally disembarks, she is met by a cacophonous country filled with the loud and great lament of the household and knights and the ringing of church bells. The cacophony of the country then becomes muted after she learns of Tristan's fate. She becomes speechless from grief and seeks his body. Before she comes to his body, the sensations jump between the crowd who witness her uncloaked beauty and Queen Isolde who is going towards Tristan. The following scene then increasingly plays on closer, more physical senses. Isolde then speaks, facing east, of what sweet words she could have spoken and what could have been. The scene ends with her embracing Tristan's corpse with hugs, kisses, and stretching out on him.

The successive sensorial shifts leading to Queen Isolde's death draw the reader in with the initial cacophony and impress a sense of climactic importance. The text then engages the reader through the sense of sight, which is placed at the top of the medieval Christian sensorial hierarchy for its perceived closeness to God. Gradually, the reader is

drawn to touch with the emphasis on the personal and close nature of the sense. These shifts in sensation push the reader to feel with Queen Isolde and to recognize Tristan's death as a real death. This shared grief is not necessarily the mutual engagement with grief for Tristan. Rather, the meaning of grief is emotionally born "with the understanding that grief is essentially an isolating emotion" (Ashe 236). Much as the lovers grieve and die apart, the listener cannot grieve with them. The isolation of the emotion rejects sharing and pushes the listener to a personal level in which this particular grief "merely reminds one of one's own, equally individual, sorrows" (Ashe 236).

The work done with the story as a whole is not manifested within the story itself; rather, it is meant to occur within the listener (Ashe 236). The senses as they are built through the performative and imaginative aspects of the textual experience of *Tristan* develop a rich sense-scape through which the listener can gain access to the moral nature of medieval sensorial experience. This heavily mediated sensorial space was intended to guide/educate the listener's interpretation of the poetic. The moral implications of Isolde of the White Hand's sinful sensing in its juxtaposition with Queen Isolde's sweetness and healing abilities enable the listener to access not only a morally complex model of love, but also a nationalistic image which sets Isolde of Brittany to stand in for the Anglo-French nobility who during Henry II's reign still long to remain with Normandy. The story increasingly personalizes the sensorial and emotional experience of the text to complicate these nobles' desires and push the interpretation that they were causing this deep grief which prevents the state's perfect, if not sweet/divine, unification.

CHAPTER 3

TRANSLATION OF SENSATION IN FRIAR ROBERT'S TRISTRAMS SAGA OK ÍSÖDAR

Thirteenth-century Norway and King Hákon IV's reign, which took just short of half the century, saw a massive effort to consolidate Norwegian identity, including culture, politics, and religion. This consolidation, which came on the heels of the Norwegian civil war era, occurred in part through Hákon's attempts to have Norway enter into the European continental mainstream. Chief among these efforts was his translation project of continental literature beginning with the translation of Thomas's *Tristan* which aimed at displaying the high cultural production of Norway and impart continental European chivalric values upon Norwegian nobility. These translations adapted and refashioned their source text through medieval *translatio* into Norse cultural genres and sensorial modes which were conceived of as additive to Norwegian culture. In the medieval context, *translatio* indicates the translator's action in refiguring the source text through transference and interpretive reception. With the strong shift from the multisensorial Tristan to a text that prioritized sight and hearing, *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* takes advantage of these senses' connection to the Christian revelation of knowledge in order to establish a thinned liminal space between the temporal and eternal worlds. This shift in sensorial prioritization allowed the text to help crystalize the shift of Norwegian conceptualizations about kingship, argue for a unified Norway, and shift the values of Norwegian nobility through imparted chivalric values.

The Christianization of Norway was a piecemeal process that occurred initially in a top-down manner. While there had been attempts by missionaries since the 9th century,

the process was set in motion by Olaf Trygvasson (c. 960-1000). After deposing Jarl Hákon, he founded Niðaróss (Trondheim) as his base. From there, he worked to Christianize the populace of Norway, including the Jarl of Orkney and the inhabitants of the Orkney Islands. He also worked to expand the Norwegian realm by demanding submission and conversion of Jarls and lagthings in Norway.[7] This conversion by force did not hold up well as Olaf died in battle five years into his reign which prevented him from consolidating power in a lasting manner. King Sveinn Forkbeard of Denmark and his allies who had defeated Olaf at the Battle of Svolder split Norway amongst themselves and showed little interest in continuing the forced conversion effort.

It was not until 15 years later that King Olaf's project would be meaningfully continued with King Olaf II (St. Olaf). St. Olaf's reign oversaw the consolidation of Norway and a greater conversion effort. He had spent time fighting alongside King Æthelred of England against the invasion of King Sveinn Forkbeard in 1013 and even joined Æthelred during his exile in Normandy. His time in England gave him a deeper knowledge of Christian society and it is seen as the time when he determined to unify Norway. In 1015 he returned to Norway, declaring himself king. Olaf II proved successful in establishing himself as the first king of all of Norway.[8] Assisted by his English Bishop Grimkell, King Olaf II is credited with the codification of Christianity as a legal religion in Norway. He additionally worked to establish church organization on a broader scale, which helped to structure the enforcement of Christianity inland.

[7] Derry, p. 38.
[8] Derry, p. 39.tra

Following his death in 1030, his image and lasting popularity was maintained by his canonization as the patron saint of Norway a year after his death.

While there is some cause to be skeptical of the specifics and later narratives about these conversion efforts, what is clear from the efforts of Olaf and Olaf II is the shift from the passive and piecemeal conversion efforts on ground that had been ongoing since the early 10th century (if not earlier) to a more intentional consolidation of the Christian conversion effort. This consolidation occurred alongside a growing missionary and religious learning effort that established and molded religious communities in Norway. This effort largely took form in the organization and growth of Norwegian parishes which were organized in a similar manner to the English model. This clerical presence is notable in its connection to wider Western European Christian structures and culture. Clerics who had received their education at European universities helped to carry this Christian continental European culture into Norway, including the importation of the technology of writing by the latter half of the 12th century. This deepening of cultural ties was further strengthened by the establishment of monasteries by the Benedictines and the Austin canons near larger cities such as Bergen and Niðaróss.

It was not until the civil war era (1130-1227/40) that the Church was able to gain meaningful power in Norway. Prior to this, the Church was largely under the control of the Norwegian kings. Following the rule of Harald Hardrada (1046-66), it was common for kings to share rule in Norway. This agreement helped to solve multiple claims to the throne and to ensure smooth transitions of power. It was not until the death of King Sigurd the Crusader that there was a meaningful breakdown in this arrangement, when his half-brother, Harald Gille (Harald IV) broke his promise to allow Sigurd's son,

Magnus, to take the throne. The resulting period saw 13 rulers ascend to the Norwegian throne and a number of pretenders who revolted against the claims. This conflict largely occurred between the Baglarr and Birkibeinar factions who came to support several claimants during the ongoing conflict.

The Baglarr faction arose in opposition to King Sverre (claimed 1177, r. 1184-1202) and was formed largely by Bishop Nicholas Arnesson of Oslo and Archbishop Erik Ivarsson of Niðaróss around Inge Magnusson's claim to the throne. The party represented church interests in Norway and was backed by papal authority. This move came after the introduction of the coronation rite following the coronation of King Magnus V, Inge's father. In response to King Sverre's usurpation, Pope Innocent III laid Sverre and his followers under interdict. Their position then supported the monarchy as a secular institution "through which Rome's influence could be most effectively exercised" (Derry 44). In this light, Sverre's usurpation of the throne could be read as an act that ignores the church's position in determining a sanctified ruler and threatens their position as an independent power alongside the state. Through the civil war era the apparent growth of Church power allowed the institution to define itself outside of the monarchy and legitimize political power in the country.

The Birkibeinar, on the other hand, was initially created in opposition to King Magnus V and in an effort to keep power in Niðaróss. The major point in their contention was the project of centralization which was begun by Magnus V's father Jarl Erling which could determine where the seat of power would be based in Norway. They were shown to be largely successful in maintaining rule after King Sverre's rise to power and worked to continue his family's reign. Notably, they also protected King Sverre's

grandson and King Hákon III's illegitimate son, Hákon Hákonnarson during his journey to Niðaróss at a young age. There, he was able to be protected and educated at a cathedral school in Niðaróss until the death of the Birkibeinar King Inge II, who had established a short peace with the Baglarr faction in 1208. This peace lasted for nine years until his death in 1217.

Incidentally, the Baglarr-supported Filippus Símonsson died in the same year leaving the Baglarr without a clear claimant to support. His death made it easier for the Birkibeinar faction to reconcile with the Baglarr and reunify the kingdom under King Hákon IV Hákonnarson. The ascension of Hákon IV by no means ended all revolts against the throne. However, it was during his reign that the last of the pretenders to the throne were subdued and power was able to be more effectively consolidated. These efforts for consolidation resulted in a sustained attempt to grow the power of the Norwegian monarchy and define Norway as a European power. Militarily, Hákon IV strengthened the Norwegian fleet and grew the Norwegian maritime empire. This included strengthening Norway's hold on Shetland and the Faroes, as well as forcing Greenland and Iceland to submit to Norwegian rule. During his reign, Norway reached the zenith of its imperial power.

The power of his fleet and his desire to be active with the Church at Rome led Hákon IV to be involved in European politics abroad. The church at Rome initially refused to recognize Hákon IV given the interdict laid upon his grandfather and his status as an illegitimate son to his father. In order to strengthen ties with the papacy, he vowed to go on crusade. This vow led to Hákon IV waging war against the Karelians in 1241 in order to subdue and convert those who moved west fleeing the Mongol invasion.

Following Hákon's crusading, Pope Innocent IV gave him royal recognition in 1246 and sent a cardinal to crown Hákon in 1247 all in a bid to gain allies during the pope's struggle with Emperor Frederick II. A year later, Louis IX of France invited Hákon IV to join him on crusade and offered him a position as the commander of the crusader fleet. However, Hákon declined the invitation in favor of strengthening his own power within Europe.

This desire to be recognized within Europe caused Hákon to be very active in international affairs. Within the conflict between the pope and Emperor Frederick II, King Hákon managed to ally himself with both sides of the conflict, which helped him gain favor with Rome and maneuver himself against the Danish who supported the Guelphs. Hákon often utilized these kinds of strategic maneuvers to strengthen Norway's position and force other powers to the bargaining table. Such can be seen when he took advantage of the Mongol invasions to get his way with Novgorod and his alliance to secure grain from Spain in order to work around supply issues caused by the Hanseatic League. Much like his dealings with Spain, Hákon IV was willing to use the marriage of his children to forge stronger alliances. This tactic was most effective close to home where he married his two sons to Swedish and Danish nobility. This served to ease tensions between the three nations and laid the groundwork for the close ties that would set the stage for the later Kalmar Union.

The most meaningful and long-lasting alliance Hákon maintained during his reign was his friendship with Henry III of England. This friendship did not begin with Hákon; rather, it began with Hákon's grandfather Sverre. Sverre and John I of England had maintained such a close relationship that when Pope Innocent III laid King Sverre

under interdict, the pope was unsuccessful in dissuading John I from maintaining his association with Sverre (Wanner 81-2). Thus, when Hákon took the throne in 1217, he devoted the early years of his reign to maintaining and capitalizing on the past relationship between Norway and England by offering peace and friendship to the young monarch who took the throne just a year before him. The friendship between Henry III and Hákon IV gradually built from the exchange of exotic gifts until their courts reached a formal trade agreement in 1223, the first of its kind seen by either nation (Wanner 82). This deep relationship was well maintained and may have given rise to the translation project undertaken by Hákon's court not long after this trade agreement.

Hákon's ongoing project which aimed to thrust Norway into the European mainstream was not only focused on international affairs. By the mid-1220s Hákon intentionally began to cultivate a culture at his court that was comparable to the courts of continental rulers. His time spent as a student in Niðaróss trained him in Latin and the vernacular, and he may have also been trained to some degree in Old French, which would have given him exposure to a variety of continental works largely filtered through English and French literary works (Wanner 81). With the translation of Thomas's *Tristan* in 1226, Hákon began a larger translation project which sought to import largely French and English literary texts in an effort to provide models for the social mores of French chivalry and their literary texts. The resulting translations encompassed Marie de France's *Lais*, the *Chansons de Geste*, and the available metrical romances, such as *Tristan* and *Yvain*. Given the increased use of some of these translations for the training of Norwegian noblemen in chivalric ideals, these texts worked domestically in enforcing

the redefined Norwegian conceptualization of kingship, which shifted from a kingship focused on charismatic support from below to a divinely instituted office (Wanner 78,84).

Given the trajectory of his reign, it is then important to ask why King Hákon IV chose *Tristan* as the work that would start his translation project so early in his reign. It is one of a handful we know to have been commissioned by Hákon directly. Paul Schach notes that "it is tempting to connect the *Tristan* manuscript with this exchange of gifts [between Henry III and Hákon IV]" (Qtd. in Wanner 83). M. Dominica Legge likewise suggests that Henry II of England's family were likely responsible for introducing versions of Thomas's *Tristan* to Spain, Germany, and Sicily, just as his grandson, Henry III, who likely introduced it to Norway through his friendship with Hákon IV (58). This theory would appear reasonable given that much of Norway's interactions with the continent were through its connection with England and that England by the early 1200s had a literary culture that was deeply influenced by France. Additionally, Thomas's *Tristan* may have been seen as helpful in Hákon's ongoing efforts to consolidate power between the factions of Norwegian nobility, given the text's effectiveness as a narrative that articulated and moralized noble behavior in a way that aimed to assuage conflicting loyalties of the Angevin nobility under Henry II.

There is evidence that Hákon commissioned five translations: *Elis saga, Ívens saga, Möttuls saga, Strangleikar,* and *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*. When discussing translation here, it is worth noting that the medieval approach differs from modern approaches to translation. These Norwegian translations, also called *riddarsögur* (sagas of knights), utilize a process of medieval *translatio* in which the translator refigures the source text through transference and interpretive reception. This approach lends itself to

creating an adaptive and recreative target text rather than a replicative one (Copeland 42-3). Medieval translators inherited a translation theory from ancient rhetoric which treated translation as a larger project of rhetorical imitation. This "ideal of imitation was figured largely as an intracultural, intralinguistic project, based not on rivalry with a foreign culture but rather on a pattern of generational transmission, a pattern of kinship, legacy, and growth within the same culture" (Copeland 44-5). So too, Hákon's project sought to build upon continental literature in a manner that strengthened and grew Norway culturally. This move would then explain why some of these translations gave more focus to chivalric behavioral instruction than the source text did.

Two of these works commissioned by Hákon, *Tristrams saga* and *Elis saga*, were translated by a Brother Robert.[9] His first language, whether Old Norse or Old French, is unclear, but there is evidence of apparent misunderstandings/mistranslations which may suggest that Old French was not his first language (Barnes, "Riddarsögur: 2. Translated" 531). It is, however, hard to be definitive in these claims given this mode of invention through imitation which characterized this medieval translational approach. As Stefka Eriksen elaborates in her chapter, "Translating Christian Symbolism into Old Norse Mythology in Thirteenth-Century Norway," translation can be regarded as a hermeneutical interpretation that was akin to original composition because "it would have been legitimate to utilize all the tools available in *grammatica*, such as the use of mythological references" (312). Such can be seen in *Elis saga* where the Cross, which is taken as a Christian symbol for eternity and regeneration, is replaced or removed in favor

[9] *Elis saga* cites its translator as an Abbot Robert. These Roberts are taken to be the same person who received a promotion sometime before the translation of the later *Elis saga* (Eriksen, p. 311).

of the local parallel of mead. While this choice on its face may be taken as a mistranslation, it may instead suggest a perceived translatability between Old Norse mythology and Christian Latinity that enables translation of these symbols (Eriksen 311). This equivalency then allows translators in Norway to assimilate these texts into the local cultural modes, such as the saga form.

Apart from the issues inherent in replicating poetic meter in translation, the translation of Thomas's *Tristan* into the saga form corresponded with a shift in Norwegian courtly taste and literacy. Beginning in the late twelfth century, skaldic poetry lost a considerable part of its courtly audience (Wanner 75). Part of this shift stems from the kingly embrace of the saga manuscript as a means of praise and commemoration. Skaldic performance was a momentary performance in which the cultural good would likely be converted into a material reward. The saga, however, provided kings an object-gift that they could physically own (Wanner 77). This change of preference follows with the growth of literacy, which allowed kings to revisit the textual experience at will. Unlike the skaldic dependence on orality, this physicality enables these written products to no longer require the presence of their producer and could be repeated beyond their initial bestowal.

The power inherent in the physical manuscript of the saga may stem from this ability to be repeatedly engaged. The didactic intent of the translated *riddarsögur* could then be opened up aurally to the court whenever it was deemed fit. Hearing here would have been of particular importance given that through hearing, content can be taken more directly into the soul. As Bernard of Clairvaux notes, the ears summon "the soul so that it can 'leave' the body and hear" (251). The proximity of the soul was conceived of as

enabling the hearer to more quickly process what they hear into their higher mental faculties. The strength of hearing as a tool of learning was conceived through its connection to religious learning. Hildegard of Bingen picks up this notion in her *Book of Divine Works*, writing: "God opens up to us through our ability to hear all the sounds of glory about the hidden mysteries and angelic hosts by which God is continuously praised" (130). While hearing in the medieval European sensorium often was second to sight in the sensory hierarchy, it did offer a means of learning and working through the mysteries of the divine. In this way, the moral lens that often mediated the medieval senses could then be tied to chivalric action and then assimilated as a part of positive religious action.

This moral mediation is then constructed through the intentional choices made by the translators of *riddarsögur*. These translators tended to rely on reduction and amplification to frame their translated content (Kalinke, *King Arthur: North-by-Northwest* 135). Reduction of the source text for these translations took form largely in the omission of some authorial narration as well as some characters' internal dialogues in order to refocus the reader. This omission was then enhanced by "the stylistically and medially developed motif of sound" whose soundscape amplified the text's dramatic moments when read aloud (Qtd. in Ríkharðsdóttir, *Emotions in Old Norse Literature* 50). Translators would use devices such as alliterative pairs to emphasize key moments of the text and draw attention to implicit messages of harm and unhappiness. These strategies were also employed at a linguistic level where the present participle is used to create an effect comparable to end rhyme and to highlight a depth of emotional experience that at times evokes a deliberate sense of strangeness, as is seen in the ending of *Tristrams saga*

(Ríkharðsdóttir, *Emotions in Old Norse Literature* 49-50). These intentional translational choices, when taken together, highlight an intentionally constructed soundscape that largely conforms to and challenges the audience's stylistic cultural preferences in composition and sensation as a means of facilitating their engagement with the text.

This engagement with the saga as something seen (for reading and as gift recognition) and heard (as read aloud and shared) highlights the importance of the two senses in the construction of the Norse sensorium. Like the continental European Christian sensorium, the Norse sensorium appears to prefer the sense of sight and hearing over the senses of taste, touch, and smell. This prioritization is highlighted most clearly in the frequency and importance of dreams and prophecy in Norse indigenous literature. Often these dreams are connected to foresight which enables individuals to gain knowledge of an individual's location or their fate. While dreams and prophecy could offer insight to any individual, it was often connected to those of non-Christian faiths, such as the Sámi, the semi-human other, and followers of the Norse gods. Such prophecies can be seen in *Örvar-Odds saga*, where a *völva*, seeress, predicted that Örvar-Odd would live for three hundred years until he was killed by a snake in the skull of his horse, Faxi. Odd's feelings of grief and fear from this news inspires Odd to avoid his prophesied fate and actively test his mortality as a means of testing its truth.

This intersection between dreams, prophecy, and fate do not only occur within the *fornaldarsögur*, legendary sagas, but also across the saga genres. Similarly, these dreams did not only occur in a non-Christian context. In *Fóstbræðra saga*, Grímr, who was hiding Þormóð, an outlaw in Greenland, had a dream of St. Olaf, who revealed Þormóð's identity and instructed him on how to help Þormóð so that he could safely return to his

service. St. Olaf's appearance in Grímr's dream works to emphasize his connection to God and enforces Þormóð's fate.[10] The dream, here, is adapted from the pre-Christian context to emphasize the sensation of the liminal space, that is between the eternal world and the temporal. It is then in these dreams that the eternal is typically heard and seen, rather than interacted with by the more corporeal senses.

As was noted previously, hearing in the Christian context was perceived to be connected with the revelation of hidden mysteries. Hildegard similarly notes that God reveals through sight "the knowledge by which God foresees and knows everything in advance" (*Book of Divine Works* 130). The connection of these senses with the obtaining of hidden knowledge of the past, present, and future is linked by medieval theologians to their placement on the highest points on the body and their ability to receive stimuli without direct interaction. Similarly, their proximity to the mind, which Bernard of Clairvaux calls the seat of the soul and the seat of God's love, suggests a close relationship between these senses and an individual's understanding of the temporal and eternal reality (252-3). Thus, sensation as it is related to dream and literary performance appears at this time to largely revolve around the voice's ability to stimulate and clarify these senses.

With the reduction of some of the textual qualities as Thomas's *Tristan* was translated into Old Norse, the loss of the multisensorial landscape of the text increased the translation's focus on hearing and sight as means of learning and knowing that was filtered through the saga's authorial voice. David Lawton notes that voice in medieval

[10] It is worth noting here that in the saga, St. Olaf's appearance emphasizes his sainthood as he was still alive at the time, he appeared to Grímr.

literature is taken to have a double meaning, that of the cited authority and of independent human utterance (3). The merging of textuality and orality can be taken as a perceived expression of identity by the audience through which the reader delivering the text would embody (Ríkharðsdóttir, *Emotions in Old Norse Literature* 21). This voice then carries within it a split of political and discursive authority which belongs to all possible readers. As a result, voice is encapsulated in the new authorial voice of the translation which appears more matter of fact in a manner that has led many of the sagas to be misconceived as "coldly unemotional," despite their deep and often indirect emotionality (Miller 89).

Such can be seen in the revision of the scene where Tristan's wound is examined by doctors. In Thomas's version, the doctors are described in detail as they try different methods to heal Tristan and despite their efforts, they are unable to perceive the poison within. The efforts are described in *Tristrams saga* with a lot less detail. The authorial voice merely states that "none of them could help him, because they didn't know how to heal poisonous wounds or even to draw out the poison, which was necessary" (Brother Robert 213). While the translation maintains the passage's general intent, this loss of touch as a means of professional perception in favor of a direct report removes the vividness of the passage which was provided by the deep sensorial interaction of the scene. This shift may suggest a differentiation in prioritization of the text as their lack of perception remains important, but not necessarily the means by which the reader discovers this lacking of professional perception.

The same can be seen in the scene where Isolde eavesdrops on Kaherdin and Tristan. The translation maintains Isolde's initial worries about Tristan's future and her

care to post someone to keep watch. Yet, the underlying fabric of this scene is lost. The shift from Isolde to Tristan and Kaherdin appears shortened in an effort to prioritize Tristan's and Kaherdin's emotions and plan of action. This reduction loses the potentially fraught nature of her eavesdropping and overlooks the danger of how Isolde enacts her sinful *curiositas*. Her wrongdoing then becomes a sin of omission in emphasis and anticipation of her wrathful revenge as she purposefully conceals the fact that she is aware of Tristan's true love.[11] While this may suggest a limitation in the translator's ability to recognize or render the Old French puns in Tristan's speech, it appears more likely that this aspect of the Christian sensorial theology was prioritized to a lesser degree by Brother Robert. The focus on her anticipated behavior contrasts Isolde with Tristan's chivalric action. He honors Kaherdin's friendship and acknowledges fully the one he loves who is the key to his survival. However, she rejects the chance to act honorably in the face of this slight. This tension climaxes during the scene of Isolde's betrayal where Tristan asks her to confirm that she truly sees what she claims in a last attempt to assure whether or not Queen Isolde would come. Isolde's words break Tristan's will to live as he suffers greatly from his grief and ultimately surrenders his spirit having lost the will to go on.

Despite these potential shifts in the emphasis of the scene, Brother Robert's translation maintains Thomas's overall unifying message that proved useful in dissuading divided loyalties within Henry II's court. The translation of the last scene of the lovers in

[11] This shift also notes a further loss of the ambiguous nature of Isolde's understanding which worked in Thomas's *Tristan* to confuse the audience in an effort to build suspense and more fully embody the sensorial experience. The shift complies more with the Norse preference for direct explication in storytelling, as saga literature tended to prefer character emotionality as related and witnessed in description of emotion's somatic affect upon a character.

Thomas's *Tristan* retains a relatively high amount of the source text as Queen Isolde undergoes the same successive sensorial shifts leading to her death. These shifts draw the reader in with the initial cacophony and impresses a sense of climactic importance that ultimately builds from the sense of touch to sight. For Brother Robert, this scene is not the end of the lovers or *Tristrams saga* as Isolde of the White Hands still has more revenge to wreak. After their death, she has the lovers buried on separate sides of the church to assure their eternal separation. Thus, the lovers and so too the two sides of Norway that had chosen to battle each other during the recent civil wars would be eternally split by Isolde's wrath.[12]

In the end, the lovers are shown to be able to survive even this threat as "an oak or other large tree sprouted from each of their graves and grew so tall that their limbs intertwined above the gable of the church" (Brother Robert 223). This growth serves as a testament to how great their shared love was. The constructed image replicates the multisensory nature of the lovers' death through its combination of sight and touch, yet it more directly places their love above the church and renders it something eternal and something of God. This divine nature of the image of the intertwined tree compares the couple's lasting love to the spiritual sense of divine love, that is the feeling of love comparable in nature to God's love for man. For Bernard of Clairvaux divine love is connected directly to sight. Just as "sight is a certain pure, forceful, sheer power of the soul," so divine love is powerful as it enables the accomplishment of great things when pure (252). If one aspect of the process that commits what is seen into reason and

[12] This scene may also suggest a commentary on the problematic nature of feuding in Norse culture, which was seen to pose a potential threat to the larger community as a whole.

memory is faulty, sight will fail just as divine love fails without its necessary parts (Bernard of Clairvaux 253-4). The image of the intertwined trees emphasizes the force and purity behind Tristan and Isolde's love. Their love may have been used in the saga to further emphasize that a unified Norway is the only means by which Norway can survive.

The intertwining of the Baglarr and Birkibeinar factions under Hákon's rule can then be taken as the means through which this divine love can be manifested within the state. The intertwined trees may recall the tree of life which stood on either side of the river of the water of life whose leaves were meant for the healing of nations (Revelations 22:2). The implied imagery emphasizes the shift to the conceptualization of Norwegian kingship as a divinely instituted office and connects the seat of this new *rex iustus* to the throne of God from which the river of the water of life flows (Wanner 78). In this frame, the nation's unity, like the unity exhibited by the lovers' post mortem embrace, becomes the moral right of Norwegian chivalric action in their attempts to emulate the ideals embodied and emphasized in Brother Robert's translation.

While Hákon put much effort into international affairs during his long reign, these attempts to justify Norwegian cultural, religious, and political power and identity effectively consolidated these conceptual shifts within the Norwegian court as well. The integration of clerical production via saga and translation of continental literature enabled *Tristrams saga* to be utilized as a means to further the project of unification within the nation under the divine office of kingship. What may seem an initial sensorial loss in the reduction of certain scenes serves instead to refocus the narrative following Tristan's wounding in an effort to contrast his righteous and chivalric actions from the wrath of Isolde of the White Hands. The use of sight and sound to impart knowledge and the

breakdown the liminal space between the temporal and eternal, the king and God, similarly prioritize the physical and spiritual senses in an effort to moralize these shifts in the conceptualization and establishment of a new narrative for Norway after Hákon.

CHAPTER 4

ALTERATIONS TO THE THOMAS TRADITION IN THE SAGA AF TRISTRAM OK ÍSODD

Following the translation of Robert's *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*, the tale of Thomas's *Tristan* is transformed into the 15th-century Icelandic, *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd*. The saga itself is the only work of indigenous Icelandic Arthurian literature and arises with the Tristan balladic tradition that spread across Scandinavia following Robert's translation. In turn the Icelandic saga appears more similar to the native literary modes and less like the courtly mode that produced it. Furthermore, the senses portrayed in the saga conform more to an Icelandic focus on the body as seen and heard. While the saga would have been read as more indigenous given the change in sensorium, the focus on hearing and seeing aligns closely with Western European models of education. This enables the saga to expand on the balladic tradition and add a racial connotation to the dichotomy of Isolde the Light and Isolde the Dark. The use of sight and hearing from Tristan's wounding to the end of the saga enables the *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd* to impart religious and moral connotations to the Isoldes' complexions in an effort to educate Icelanders on how to act in accordance with continental moral and chivalric norms and bridge the gap between the Icelandic periphery and the Norwegian and Christian centers.

During the medieval period, Norway maintained some degree of influence over Icelandic affairs from the settlement of Iceland in the late 9th century to the late 14th century. This influence was largely due to the majority of settlers being Norwegian and the manner in which Norway maintained its presence in the North Sea. At the peak of

their influence, the Norwegian King Olaf Tryggvason assisted in pushing Iceland to adopt Christianity. However, in the earlier part of their influence, Norway largely exerted influence through trade and individual agents sent by its kings. This influence significantly changed in 1262 after the signing of *Gissurarsáttmáli*. The *Gissurarsáttmáli,* also referred to as the Old Covenant, placed Iceland under Norwegian rule, which lasted until the formation of the Kalmar Union with Denmark and Sweden in 1397 (Carter 78-9). During this period of direct rule following the *Gissurarsáttmáli*, Norway held a more direct influence over cultural and religious affairs and worked to integrate Icelandic economic and political systems into existing Norwegian structures (Carter 71).

Notably, the Norwegian influence affected the balladic tradition in Iceland in the late 13th century until the emergence of significant Danish influence at the turn of the 15th century. Jonsson notes that around this start date, the balladic tradition began to more definitively appear in Scandinavia. While he traces the inception of it back to earlier iterations of end rhyme in Skaldic verse of the 10th century, there is no conclusive evidence to prove the presence of the balladic tradition before the latter 13th century (Jonsson 13-4). It is not surprising then that the appearance of the balladic tradition in Iceland overlaps with the period of Norwegian rule immediately following *Gissurarsáttmáli*. At this time, Iceland likely received a good portion of its ballads through trade with West Norse speakers in Norway and the Faroe Islands not long after their first appearance in Norway (Ólason, "Ballads - 4. Iceland" 32; Ólason, "The

Icelandic Ballad" 70).[13] Through their continuous contact in this period, the Tristan balladic tradition in Scandinavia also finds its way to Iceland.

Ballads of the Tristan tradition in Scandinavia move west to Iceland in the 14th century resulting in a series of ballads, including *Tristrams Kvæði*.[14] It then seems likely that the *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd* developed alongside this balladic tradition in the 15th century. The saga itself maintains similarities to the Thomas line, while being further integrated into indigenous literary models. With this integration comes an added interest in genealogy at the end of the saga, as well as an increased agency amongst the saga women (Kalinke, "Female Desire" 80-1). These changes aided the Tristan cycle's movement to Iceland and enabled the saga to be incorporated into the larger corpus of Icelandic literature. Due to its assimilated form, the saga was able to have a more direct influence on indigenous literary models. Thus, the saga transferred several motifs that influenced later sagas, such as the ambiguous oath that appears in the Greek episode in *Grettis Saga* and the abduction motif in *Kormaks Saga* (Kalinke, "Female Desire" 76-9).

While the influence of the *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd* is well recognized in scholarship, the purpose and form of the saga itself is rather disputed. Henry Goddard Leach suggests that the saga is a rustic and imperfect retelling of *Tristrams Saga ok Ísöndar* (Hill 657).[15] Nearly 40 years later, Paul Schach refutes Leach by asserting that

[13] During this time, the Faroe Islands were also under Norwegian rule. They as well as the Norwegians met Icelandic traders and would have shared these ballads with Icelanders in the ports of Bergen, Trondheim, and the Faroe Islands.
[14] There is some dispute for the exact date for *Tristrams Kvæði*. This paper follows the argument of Vésteinn Ólason that the ballad was composed before *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd* and thus originates from before 1400.
[15] See, Leach, Henry Goddard. *Angevin Britain and Scandinavia*. Harvard University Press, 1921.

the saga was itself a burlesque intended to critique Robert's translation given its focus on character reversals and its insistence on the good motives of Tristram and Ísodd. His argument in effect suggests that the writer could not have been rustic; rather, they would have been well versed in the saga literature and style (Schach, "The Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd" 352). Marianne Kalinke expands on Schach's assertions, noting that the author was attempting to create a playful commentary on Arthurian romance (Kalinke, *King Arthur, North-by-Northwest* 199). This commentary largely occurs through the exaggeration of Arthurian motifs.

Kalinke sees this parody manifesting in the saga writer's depiction of love as sudden, exclusive and overwhelming. This love leads to several changes from the Norwegian version, including Tristan's depiction as a clumsy secret lover, the couple does not recognize their surroundings due to amorous intensity, and the shift in early focus from Tristan's father to Tristan's mother, Blenziblý (Kalinke, *King Arthur, North-by-Northwest* 199-205). Thus, one of the main drives in the saga seems more likely to serve as a commentary on the wider genre. However, this line of thinking has been questioned more seriously by M.F. Thomas who rejects the notion of the Icelandic saga as parody. Instead, Thomas suggests that the saga contains an internal narrative cohesion that suggests it should be considered in terms of other European traditions (M.F. Thomas 64). Geraldine Barnes agrees with Thomas that the *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd* should not only be considered in comparison to *Tristrams saga*. Instead, she suggests that the saga should be considered in the context of a late medieval Iceland (Francini 250).

Considering the *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd* in late medieval Iceland, the saga developed alongside the balladic tradition that distilled the essence of the love story and focused on the final separation and union of the lovers (Kalinke, *King Arthur, North-by-Northwest* 205). The wider Tristan group of Danish and Icelandic ballads stems more directly from the Norwegian translation of Brother Robert and likely predates the Icelandic saga. In their form, these works tend to be shorter and focus more on more localized motifs. These balladic creations tend to condense the events of the Norwegian saga, given the limitations of their local forms. Due to the short nature of these works, the author of the *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd* potentially sought to build on and explain the events of the Tristan story. In this way, the saga could be acting as an expansion on the events within the balladic works to incorporate them into the larger network of the Tristan cycle. Thus, the Norwegian translation may have functioned more as one of the author's sources rather than the definitive source. The author's use of "the one who composed this story" to allude to themselves, a trait frequently employed by medieval continental poets, would have been utilized to report findings and an understanding of the Thomas branch beyond the balladic sources (Schach, "The Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd" 351). Furthermore, this approach would explain the compressed appearance of the saga, which can come across as rustic and clumsy from the perspective of the Norwegian-translation-as-source and the ease at which its author accepts deviations from the Norwegian saga that appear in the ballads themselves, like that of the King Fulsus episode.

Now, the saga appears in its earliest recorded version in the 15th-century manuscript AM 489 4to. Its precise point of origin has not yet been determined, given

that the bill of sale denotes "af Magnuse Magnussyne ä Eyre i Seydisfirde" (Ólafsson and Kålund 662-3).[16] Like many of the Eastern Icelandic coastal towns, the town of Seyðisfjörðr grew due to Danish trading after the period of Norwegian rule. Thus, it is unlikely that the manuscript originated in that place. Beyond this primary piece of evidence, there is little else to determine its precise origins. However, there are clues within the manuscript itself that may suggest author and purpose. The *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd* shares the manuscript with five other sagas: *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*, *Kirialax saga*, *Hrings saga ok Tryggva*, *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr*, and *Ívens saga*. The content of these sagas, like much of the *riddarasögur* (sagas of knights), suggest that they are clerical compositions, given their focus on learning, particularly language learning and the liberal arts curriculum (Barnes, *The Bookish Riddarasögur* 19; Barnes, "Romance in Iceland" 270).[17] While this is not present to the same degree in the *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd*, this is a notable trait in the sagas that share the manuscript with it. Despite the *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd*'s lack of focus on language and liberal arts education, the saga itself may still be concerned with teaching chivalric action and conveying a moral message.

Geraldine Barnes notes that if an ethos could be applied to the *riddarasögur*, "it is that knowledge acquired and exercised within its proper sphere is both power and virtue" (Barnes, *The Bookish Riddarasögur* 19). In this way, the *riddarasögur* can be seen as an attempt by Icelanders to understand their place on the periphery of first Norwegian and

[16] My translation: "from Magnus Magnusson on Eyre in Seyðisfjörðr"
[17] See also Kalinke, Marianne E. "The Foreign Language Requirement in Medieval Icelandic Romance." *The Modern Language Review*, vol. 78, no. 4, 1983, pp. 850-61 for a more in-depth discussion on the importance of language learning in *riddarasögur*.

then Danish rule and provide a frame and means by which the Icelanders can act to bridge the gap between the new periphery and the distant political center. After the establishment of the covenant with Norway, the law codes were revised to eliminate the offices of *goðar* and *höfðingjar* (chieftains) and establish members of the fifteen most powerful families into new positions for the royal administration in Iceland. This included twelve *sýslumenn* (sheriffs), two *lögmenn* (lawmen), and one *hirðstjóri*, who was to lead the royal retinue. Thus, the former chieftains and merchants made rich by the booming fishing trade made up a new vice-regal retinue in Iceland (Barnes, "Romance in Iceland" 269). This growing audience of landed gentry and those aspiring to climb the social ladder would likely look to the *riddarasögur* as a justification of how a powerful monarch can stabilize a state "through the destruction of hostile, alien or marginal forces" and thereby justify the political changes that came when Iceland surrendered its sovereignty (Barnes, *The Bookish Riddarasögur* 19).

At the same time, *riddarasögur*, such as the *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd*, provide their audience with a metric of how to use power and be virtuous. Icelanders likely understood virtue in a manner consistent with contemporary medieval continental Christianity, given that excerpts of Alcuin's *De virtutibus et vitiis* were cited in the late 13th-century law code, *Jónsbók*, and the translation and adaptation of continental homiletic writing for an Icelandic audience. Building on these texts, this genre of sagas would act to translate this social and religious understanding of these wealthy and aspiring Icelanders into a Norwegian and continental socio-political context. Icelanders were deeply aware that they were on the periphery and the farthest position of Christendom in the north. Unlike similar isolated societies, Iceland maintained an acute

awareness of and worked to bridge the distance between itself and the center rather than place itself at the center of the world (Barnes, *The Bookish Riddarasögur* 23). The mixture of indigenous themes with the content of foreign romances enables the *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd* to explain continental knightly behaviors and moral considerations in a manner that resonated with an Icelandic audience and gave them a meaningful guide on how to interact abroad.

The heroes of the *riddarasögur* are set up as "examples of royal and chivalric virtue" as they are beautiful, noble, refined in manner, well learned, and strong (Barnes, "Romance in Iceland" 279). They tend to deviate from the chivalric idealism that characterizes much of European romance in favor of a heavier emphasis on physical prowess as the defining element of monarchic power and an increased concern for family inheritance (Barnes, "Romance in Iceland" 277). On the whole, the *riddarasögur* focused primarily on virtuous action in secular matters. Thus, encounters between Christians and Saracens focused more on restoration of inheritance and fulfilling the bridal quest rather than crusading fervor (Barnes, "Romance in Iceland" 276).[18] Instead, groups were rendered "other" on the basis of their hereditary characteristics and/or the environment that shaped them. These qualities were used as tropes to indicate certain characters' physical, intellectual, and moral qualities and to categorize saga characters economically, politically, and socially (Cole, "Racial Thinking in Old Norse Literature" 21; DeMello 101-2). These tropes then help to educate and inform their Icelandic audience on how to navigate difference in a wider European context.

[18] Few Icelanders participated in the Crusades, which also suggests that the population was not as invested or did not fully see the danger continental Christians perceived in their religious adversaries.

The sensorium of the *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd* supports this educational context in a manner that models Western instructional pedagogy. This pedagogy employs the senses of sight and hearing via instruction, mass reading, and chant to deliver content to students. The epistemology of the Aristotelian tradition maintains that sensory perception is the first act through which cognition is achieved (Newhauser, "The Multisensoriality of Place" 207). For Aristotle, the act of perception permits the least amount of falsehood. However, this true perception may be led to falsehood in its association of other attributes with what is perceived and then in the application of the perceived to universal perceptions (Aristotle 161-3). Education in this context enforces the culturally preferred associations within the literature in order to urge potential perceptions that are in accordance with the culture's moral judgements. Education would then be a progressive action that helps guide the senses through an interpretive process that can assist in the edification of the senses (Newhauser, "Introduction" 12).

For Aristotle, the sense of hearing has the largest contribution to wisdom. He notes that this indirect process contributes so heavily due to its relation to discourse. Discourse causes learning through its audible medium. However, this discourse is not directly audible. Rather, discourse is speech which is composed of words and these words are rational symbols that are heard (Aristotle 219). Through this sense, a subject is able to best collect the core of the discourse from these rational symbols and their networks of meaning and understand the imparted wisdom. Aristotle takes this conclusion further to note that without the means of perceiving discourse, there is less wisdom in the deaf and dumb than the blind. In the *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd*, the voice that carries this

discourse appears on two levels a) through the reading of the text and b) through the speech of saga characters.

Unlike contemporary norms, medieval readers primarily read aloud. Thus, the saga would have been equally useful in an educational context, whether read to an audience or read to a tutee. The romance genre had a similar history of being read aloud. Cruse notes in his article, "Matter and Meaning in Medieval Books" that regardless of verse or prose, the Old French romances "indicate ways in which writers anticipated vocal delivery of their texts and employed rhetorical devices that would seize an audience's aural attention and imagination" (Cruse 45). Just as in Brother Robert's translation of *Tristrams saga,* the *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd* displays asides to the audience. However, the *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd* has a redundant and shortened style that resists the tendency of other translated *Riddarasögur* to adopt Latin syntax. Additionally, the saga's reliance on litotes generates a soundscape that mirrors indigenous Icelandic genres, such as the *Íslendingasögur* (sagas of the Icelanders) (Francini 260-1). Given the vocal delivery employed in the Scandinavian balladic tradition and *Tristrams saga,* it is then likely that the *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd* maintained this performative modality.

Tristan's speech is primarily foregrounded within the text itself. The majority of the other characters that speak in the scenes leading to Tristan's death are heard only indirectly. This forces the audience to focus on Tristan's speech over the speech of all others, given that they only passively hear other voices. The silence around Tristan's speech emphasizes the importance of Tristan as the source of the sound through which

the audience should learn. In this way, the saga establishes him as a source of moral action and as worthy of his high status. As a good and just lord, who has proven himself in past acts of valor and religious victories over non-Christian actors, his words become worthy of being heard over all others. Thus, he calls the brothers who have driven Tristan the Stranger from his lands to battle in order to emphasize his fearlessness to perform deeds of arms, while the stranger is unheard. Similarly, he announces the uncertainty of his kingdom's future after he has been wounded in an act that suggests that his first thought is to his kingdom and the wellbeing of those who serve him. The scene's emphasis on Tristan's physical suffering and the worry for his people allows Tristan to emulate the Passion of Christ at the same time that his thought remains free from devilish influence (Bernau). These speeches allow Tristan to be the example contrasted only by silence and a few supplementary voices.

There are only two other points of direct speech in the time immediately preceding, during, and after Tristan's death: his kinsmen's words and Isolde the Dark's. The first serves merely to establish their willingness to serve him in his errand to call Isolde the Light to heal him. This speech helps to highlight both the positive relationship between his kinsmen and their lord and their agency in their service of Tristan. The scene can be read both as a guide on how those aspiring to be in service of a lord should act and the lengths to which they should be willing to go to fulfill the tasks of the just. On the other hand, Isolde the Dark speaks only to lie to Tristan about the color of the ship's sail. Whereas the kinsmen speak to highlight the moral good inherent in their choice to serve their lord, Isolde the Dark's speech emphasizes her betrayal of Tristan and draws the audience's attention to the consequences of her action. This speech similarly calls

attention to Isolde the Dark's morality. In comparison to Isolde the Light, who journeys to heal Tristan, Isolde the Dark acts unjustly and immorally towards the man she is meant to support. While the saga does not directly emphasize the unjust actions of Isolde the Dark to the degree seen in Thomas' *Tristan* and Brother Robert's Norwegian translation, her association with dark features and potentially Moorish appearance serves to highlight her speech act as particularly immoral, if not born in sin.

Within the context of the senses, hearing is often considered to be less effective than sight. Many ancient and medieval writers designate sight as the highest of the sense faculties, both physically and metaphysically (Gillespie 154). For Aristotle, the object of sight is color and whatever is visible is color (Aristotle 103). This vision is dependent on the effect of the object on a subject rather than refraction of light (Jütte 39). Colors can denote more than just an objective quality of a fabric or a person. As with Isolde of Brittany's epithet, 'of the white hands' (*aux Blanche Mains*), white hands likely indicate a mark of beauty to the medieval reader. This beauty further emphasizes her nobility, as the lack of dirtiness on her hands would suggest a lack of manual labor and a certain ease of life. For the medieval audience, beauty was the result of the negotiation between outer perception and self-construction. These cut across both the individual and social dimensions in a person (Cabre). Thus, these perceived attributes can offer a glimpse of both the character's physical appearance and their private behavior to a reader. Her second epithet, the maiden (*meschine*) further highlights her virginal status and works in tandem with the whiteness of her hands. The image of virginity, purity, and nobility underscore a notable innocence in Isolde of the White Hands.

Thus, her betrayal of Tristan would appear as an uncharacteristically malicious act in contrast with her innocence and willingness to love Tristan without questioning his motives for not consummating their marriage. However, it may not be as uncharacteristic as it appears in this instance. André Ott notes that *blanc* can also carry the notion of flattery and danger.[19] These generally less positive meanings may underscore a darker side to Isolde of Brittany that could preempt her betrayal of Tristan. It may also serve to highlight the moral opposition of the two Isoldes. While she appears to be innocent and noble, she serves as a distraction that traps Tristan and ultimately prevents him from rejoining the one whom he is meant to pursue. The notions of her virginity, purity, and nobility are maintained, but to a much lesser degree.

As the Thomas tradition develops into the Norse, Isolde of Brittany's epithet does not survive Brother Robert's alterations.[20] Descriptions of her nobility and beauty appear initially, when Tristan at first pursues Isolde, but becomes less frequent after their marriage. Like Thomas's *Tristan*, Isolde is also called the maiden (*jungfrú*), however, this seems to highlight only that she is unmarried, given that it only appears once before her marriage to Tristan and is then replaced with the title, Tristan's wife. Yet, it is in the works of the Scandinavian balladic tradition, such as the 14th-century Icelandic *Tristrams Kvæði*, that the epithets of the two Isoldes take on a more explicit moral connotation.

[19] For a more detailed discussion, see André Ott's chapter on blanc in *Etude sur les couleurs en vieux français* (pp. 1-18). The chapter also explains the meanings that blanc inherit from Latin and can be a good source for the deeper nuances in the word's history.
[20] In Brother Robert's translation, Tristan's primary love is called Ísönd and both Tristan's wife and Ísönd's mother are called Ísodd. This serves as the main differentiation between the Isoldes.

This additional moral connotation then sets the stage for a further shift in *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd*, where it takes on an additional racialized connotation.

The ballad, *Tristrams Kvæði*, recounts Tristan's death following his wounding by a "heathen dog" in a battle on the London bridge.[21] Each stanza is followed by the haunting refrain "they had no other fate than to be parted."[22] In the ballad, the two Isoldes are set up in opposition to each other. Queen Isolde is given the epithet, the bright (*bjarta*) and Isolde of Brittany is called *svarta*, literally translated as "the black" and often translated as the dark by recent translators. This bright/dark dichotomy is well seen in Old Norse literature and carries with it recognizable connotations for the Icelandic reader. "Bright" tends to signify a goodness, a beauty, and in some cases humanity. On the other hand, "dark" can indicate a certain inhumanity, ugliness, and potential malintent (Cole, "Racial Thinking in Old Norse Literature" 23).

Egils Saga highlights this dichotomy through the description of the brothers Skalla-Grim and Thorolf Kveldulfsson. The saga describes Thorolf as an attractive and popular character who was highly accomplished.[23] His light hair and fair skin establishes him as the standard of male beauty, which was further emphasized by his strength.[24] On the other hand, Skalla-Grim appears to be the exact opposite of his older brother. He is ugly, swarthy (*svartr maðr*), and like his father in both appearance and temperament.[25] It

[21] Heiðinn hund (Cook 230). Likely indicates the Islamic faith rather than worshipers of the Norse polytheistic tradition.
[22] Þeim var ekki skapat nema skilja (Cook 230)
[23] Var Þórólfr manna vænstr ok gerviligastr; hann var líkr móðurfrændum sínum, gleðimaðr mikill, örr ok ákafamaðr mikill í öllu ok inn mesti kappsmaðr; var hann vinsæll af öllum mönnum. (Einarsson 1)
[24] Cabre.
[25] Grímr var svartr maðr ok ljótr, líkr feðr sínum, bæði yfirlits ok at skaplyndi (Einarsson 1). Translation of *svartr* from Scudder's translation of *Egil's Saga* (3-4).

is through his father that Grim obtains the trollish/non-human qualities. Kveldulf is thought to be a shape-changer given his terrible temper in the evenings. Thus, the saga suggests that Grim maintains this similar trollishness both through his actions and his close companions, which are largely trollish themselves.

This contrast of bright/dark is a motif that also has its roots in the early Norse mythology. The Eddic poem, "Rígsþula" ("Lay of Ríg"), describes how Ríg (Heimdall) becomes the progenitor of the three classes: thrall, churl, and earl. Thrall is the first child that Ríg has upon his travels with a great-grandmother. Like Skalla-Grim in *Egils Saga*, the poem describes the child as swarthy (*svartan*), ugly, and physically strong. These associations with *svartr* are deepened with the recounting of the names of Thrall's children, which largely include names that indicate traits such as, Lustful, Lout, and Whiner or appearances such as, Eagle-Nose and Lumpy-Leg. The generations of thralls that these children of Thrall beget sets the stage for a moral judgement based on the physical attributes that could indicate thralldom. This connotation may also suggest a reversal for the other Isolde who goes from the cleanliness of white hands, to the potentially darkened complexion conceived of belonging to a non-noble and labor-intensive class. Meanwhile, the earl born to a mother is light in locks and fair in cheeks and his description focuses heavily on his knowledge of warfare and mysteries.

Tristrams Kvæði implies a similar dichotomy between the two Isoldes and thus it provides a framework in which each Isolde is expected to act. Isolde the Bright appears as the true lover, bound by fate, who hopes to heal Tristan. For her there is an emphasized tragedy implicit in her aims, foreshadowed to be ultimately futile by the

looming refrain. Meanwhile, Isolde the Dark bears well the dark side of this dichotomy. Although English translators tend to use "swarthy" to translate *svarta*, utilizing that translation in the ballad can be rather problematic as it carries with it some additional implication that typically does not fit the Norse meaning. In the ballad, there are notably limited descriptors to suggest that she is swarthy or notably ugly, like Skalla-Grim. Therefore, translating *svarta* as "dark" helps to highlight the malintent that her epithet encompasses.[26] Thus, Isolde the Dark works in opposition to the two to betray the lovers through her determination to prevent the lovers from being together both in their lives and in their afterlives.

However, Isolde the Dark in *Tristrams Kvæði* lacks the denoted otherness implicit in the bright/dark dichotomy. It is in the Icelandic *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd* where Isolde the Dark seems to take on this othered and rather racialized connotation. This shift comes within the context of a Felskian translation of *Tristrams saga* following balladic tradition. Through the adaption of *Tristrams saga* to the Icelandic saga, the saga comes to make manifest many of the "already composed acts of connection, negotiation, and transformation" that were apparent to a lesser degree within *Tristrams Kvæði* (Felski 752). When compared to both *Tristrams Kvæði* and *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*, the *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd* does not appear as a faithful, transparent, or complete translation of those that came before (Felski 752). Instead, the shift of emphasis draws a greater

[26] It is important to keep in mind that despite the determination here, female beauty tended to be more dependent on physical appearance, whereas male appearance depended more on moral action (Cabre). This tendency may alternatively suggest an argument for using swarthy in the translation, but it seems best to treat this more conservatively here, in absence on strong evidence to the contrary.

contrast between the moral connotations that are associated with each of the Isoldes through their appearance, potential religious beliefs, and an added racial distinction.

Now, the epithet, *svartr*, would be typically read to indicate that a character has black hair, as it appeared as a descriptor for Skalla-Grim. However, Bernard Schudder in his English translation of *Egil's Saga*, translates *svartr* as "swarthy" rather than black haired to describe Skalla-Grim. This translation choice offers a look at a secondary aspect to *svartr*, namely a darkness that can also denote complexion. Within the *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd*, Isolde's epithet does not seem to imply only hair, but also complexion, as it is suggested to mean in Schudder's translation. In the saga, Isolde's homeland moves from Brittany to Spain and so too does the construction of Isolde's race. In this added racial connotation, Isolde the Black becomes a Spanish Moor and takes on an otherness that was not explicit in *Tristrams Kvæði*. This move is further indicated from the change in Queen Isolde's epithet from "bright" to "fair" (*fögr*). While *bjarta* can also indicate complexion, *fögr* more explicitly indicates a fairness of persons or the body.[27] Thus, the whiteness of Isolde the Fair is placed in opposition to the blackness of Isolde the Black.

The conception behind this blackness seems to be a melding of the Icelandic *blámaðr* and the conceptions of bodily color in the southern chivalric romances. For Icelanders the *blámaðr* could be employed to denote a racial, religious, or even demonic otherness. Their otherness is conceived of as unnatural and thus this unnatural nature is not shaped by beliefs, but blood (Cole, "Racial Thinking in Old Norse Literature" 28).

[27] See entries for "Fagr" and "Bjartr" in Cleasby & Vigfússon.

This genetic otherness is then set within the chivalric romance's employment of bodily color as a tool for distinguishing knight from villain. The knight, Isolde the Fair, would be seen as the being of light, who is contrasted by the dark-skinned villain, Isolde the Black, whose appearance would indicate their lack of well-born, honest, and good Christian character through her lack of light skin (Pastoureau 80-1). This battle between the Isoldes would align with the author's movement of the desired object from Isolde the Fair to Tristan in the *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd*.

In the context of the larger saga, the battle of the Isoldes appears to mirror an earlier battle between the Islamic King Fulsius and Tristan. Tristan went to war against King Fulsius, after the king had begun raiding England. He then prays to God that he would leave his affair with Isolde, if God would grant him victory in battle against the king. During this episode, King Fulsius is severely dehumanized and demonized, as his faith becomes the sole marker of his identity. This leads him to be called a heathen hound and he is ultimately sent to hell.[28] In the end, Tristan wins and is forced to move away from Isolde the Fair. While the desired object moves from Queen Isolde to Tristan, the opposition of the two Isoldes recalls a similar negative connotation around Isolde the Black. Here, Isolde the Black forces Isolde the Fair and Tristan apart on three levels. While emotionally unavailable to her, Tristan does marry Isolde the Black and has a child with her. This allows her to establish a family with Tristan that Isolde the Fair could never achieve. She also separates them spiritually through her lie that kills Tristan which prevents the lover's reuniting and dying together. Once both lovers are dead, she then

[28] Heiðinn hund (Jorgenson 282). Given the similar language, there are some theories that King Fulsius is the same person referred to in *Tristrams Kvæði*

attempts to assure their permanent spatial separation by burying them on opposite ends of the cathedral.

If Isolde is so negatively racialized, it seems strange then that her son Kalegras Tristramsson would be so easily accepted, despite the perceived unnatural nature of his mother's blood.[29] Kalegras is described as being like his father, accomplished, a just ruler, and married to the daughter of a Saxon emperor, who was second in appearance only to Isolde the Fair. His life shows that he was accepted and well regarded in Western Europe. As Appiah notes, the criteria for race can leave vague boundaries at any time (Appiah 105). The racial label, once applied to people, can have both social and psychological effects. Through the process of identification, the individual shapes their conception of the good and their life plans with reference to available identities and labels (Appiah 105). Rather than the individual shaping their life, the saga author appears to construct Isolde the Black's and Kalegras's characters according to connotations the saga author's attaches to aspects of their identity. Kalegras's Irish sounding name would code him as closer in nature to the Irish rather than to unfamiliar other, which while still considered dark of skin for the Icelanders, tended to be more acceptable. Thus, Kalegras is able to be so well accepted, given that he takes after his father in appearance, and can be coded as in alignment with him morally.

Similarly, it is necessary that Isolde the Black disappears as her son gains renown. Isolde the Black is portrayed as an unfamiliar other which represents a maladaptation to

[29] The name Kalegras does seem to have an Irish flavoring to it, which may indicate a conflation between Spanish and Irish. This would appear to be consistent with Icelandic literature's tendency to look unfavorably upon Irish people and generally considering them to be dark of skin.

continental European cultural milieux. This milieux, consisting of chivalric mores and morality, represents a totalizing force which potentially threatens Tristan, if it is poorly adopted. With the text's shifting of the desired object from Isolde to Tristan, the Isoldes' competition for Tristan seems to represent the moral threat threatening those who fail to assimilate with these customs. Isolde as other becomes a visual and audial reminder of the potential danger of indulging in her company. Her words become lies that lead individuals astray and her body becomes a reminder of this sub-, if not nonhuman nature that pairs with identity markers of Spanish, Moor, Saracen. Isolde the Black's othering casts her as this failure to adjust or wandering from the necessary chivalric action. While Isolde the Black may have consumed Tristan in her revenge, Tristan and his exemplary chivalry survive through Kalegras.

Considering that Icelandic literature existed on the periphery of the larger European political and cultural center, the two would then act as minority literature in Europe. Thus, they act to cross-fertilize outside of the center in a fashion that did not allow for a homogenized translation. This move to translate and racialize aspects of Thomas's *Tristan* into the Icelandic literary corpus not only functions to identify and understand a racial other. It also appears to function as an Icelandic attempt to define itself against the political center which moved from Norwegian rule to the Kalmar Union at the end of the 14th century, as well as the cultural production of France. The national consciousness that persisted through literary creation in Iceland helped foster an Icelandic understanding of their place in the wider world (Cole, "Racial Thinking in Old Norse Literature" 38). Spain then acts as a safe multicultural space that enables the saga author to work out these challenges that the fairly isolated, homogenous population of Iceland

had not experienced to any large degree in a space analogous to Iceland, given its periphery position to the perceived center of cultural production.

In the *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd*, Tristan works as a stand in for the traveling Icelander, who proves himself abroad. His success in forming and maintaining lordly bonds allow him to stand as a model of moral and social behavior for Icelanders wishing to understand how to act abroad in a new socio-political dynamic brought about by Norwegian rule. Similarly, Kalegras Tristramsson and the saga itself serve as examples of successful Icelandic hybridity. The saga author looks to the future with Kalegras, as the progeny who can successfully navigate between the established Icelandic and Southern European societal archetypes and the inherent nature of the perceived genetic archetypes. In this way, Kalegras undergoes a purification that renders him as purely his father's son, ultimately ignoring his mother's traits. While Kalegras remains a cultural and racial hybrid, the saga's focus on his deeds and moral action, rather than his body, is an attempt to refocus the Icelandic audience from the connotations of his physical appearance to the inherited moral and noble deeds. This move seems to position Kalegras as an Icelandic model and suggests to the Icelandic reader the persistence and importance of Icelandic national identity despite the wider world.

The acceptance of Kalegras's character and the rejection of Isolde the Black functions as an Icelandic call for recognition through Kalegras's individual ethnic identity, which functions as a component of his "collective dimension" and presents a potential hope for Icelandic cultural and genetic survival in an Iceland that lacked political independence and witnessed increase foreign cultural influence (Appiah 124). The Icelandic audience would then be placed in the position of Kalegras and meant to

inherit the deeds of their forefather (Tristan), as they apply his model into the world. This model could then be read as both a nationalistic and familial duty for the growing Icelandic elite to act morally and assimilate with the layered power structures of Norway and Western Europe without losing their Icelandic culture. On the other hand, it seems apparent that Isolde the Black's character represents both a mistrust of the non-Icelandic other and a hope that these others may be successfully assimilated into an Icelandic cultural milieu. Implicit in this is a message of hopeful adaptation through hybridization in a larger and more diverse world.

The reliance on the typical Western educational senses, sight and hearing, allowed the Icelandic author to mobilize the Tristan romance as a means of educating the growing wealthy class in Iceland. By connecting this class more deeply with the Norwegian and continental the Icelandic elite sought to understand the proper ways of interacting in this complex and international social hierarchy and maintaining awareness of the connotations and perspectives behind moral action. Their focus on a western learning model, grounded in the Aristotelian sensorium displays a greater synthesis with the continental sensorium. Unlike the Norwegian *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*, whose translation comingles the Scandinavian and Western European sensorium, this synthesis is likely the result of a gradual integration of modes of continental artistic expression. Paired with an increasingly Christian and continental content the *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd* is able to assimilate these extended contexts into indigenous models.

CHAPTER 5

CONTINUITY AND USE OF TRISTAN'S DEATH IN MALORY'S LE MORTE D'ARTHUR

Up to this point, this thesis has been focused on Thomas' *Tristan* and its afterlife in northern Europe. These medieval texts largely worked to evoke the senses as means of promoting engagement and assimilation with the cultural and political centers in the contexts in which they were produced. However, not all of the medieval works on Tristan utilized the Tristan romance to this end. In Western Europe, some texts understood the courtly love presented in the Tristan legend as revealing the dangerous and destabilizing effect that results from taking courtly love to its logical conclusion. The paradigm established by the Tristan legend in these cases became something that must be worked against. Such can be seen in Chrétien de Troyes's *Cligès*, which works against the narrative present in Thomas's *Tristan* by understanding Thomas's lovers as people who appear to have chivalric traits, while lacking the requisite morality at their base. Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* retains this challenge to courtly love and recasts it in the context of earthly knighthood, whose tenets are framed as relying on misperception and ambiguity in order to uphold and gain further honor. Within *Le Morte D'Arthur*, Malory utilizes the senses of sight and hearing to highlight the threats that linger in the potentially destructive nature of an earthly knighthood that relies on the obfuscation of the senses to earn and maintain worship. Both senses are also used to demonstrate how through education of the senses one can create a sacred, curated knighthood.

Tristan's main appearance in the *Morte d'Arthur* occurs within the "Tale of Sir Tristram de Lyones." For this tale and the Tristan content at large, Malory relies on

source material from the French prose *Roman de Tristan*. However, it is not clear what version of the prose *Tristan* Malory may have used. While all extant manuscripts for the prose *Tristan* vary greatly between each other, the manuscripts largely fall into two categories. The first category, often called the Vulgate or Luces de Gast version, is characterized by its shorter and barer plot with embellished treatment of certain episodes. The other category is the common or cyclic version which contains the basic Tristan story and incorporates a version of the *Quest of the Holy Grail*, as well as large segments of both the *Lancelot* and *Mort Artu* romances (Rumble 125-6). Even in Tristan's death, there is some variance between the manuscripts of the *Roman de Tristan*. Most have Tristan die by Mark's hand in Cornwall. Yet, there is a manuscript that retains the ending seen in earlier versions of the Tristan story, where Tristan dies with the Other Isolde (Rumble 126). The high amount of manuscript variance makes it difficult to ascertain which specific manuscript Malory may have been working from and may also suggest a degree of intentionality in how Malory chose what to translate and build on in *Le Morte d'Arthur*.

Malory's incorporation of the Tristan material appears more intentional than just a simplification of the material to fit into his work. Movements such as Mark's treachery against Tristan are built into the dynamic between Tristan and Mark, rather than maintaining his history of treachery from the prose *Tristan* (Rumble 132). Malory similarly fashioned the Tristan content to highlight where he wanted Lancelot's plot to go. While the prose *Lancelot* material reached its fullest stage earlier than the prose *Tristan*, *Lancelot* was based on the motifs present in early *Tristan* poems which led to a

similar development in the two works.[30] Thus, some changes like Tristan's absence in the Grail section were likely a result of Malory's desire to retain Lancelot as the main pursuant of the Grail. Overall, Tristan's and Lancelot's similarities reinforce each other and it is this comparison at play that emphasizes the difference in how their stories end (Rumble 124; 182). These similarities also bring Tristan's relationship with Isolde and Lancelot's with Guinevere into conversation with each other, which enables Malory to show that while the courts of Arthur and Mark share the same morality, their respective honor differs greatly through the continual degradation of Mark's character. This difference in honor helps to lessen the reader's sense of disapproval towards Lancelot and Guinevere's relationship. With the placement of Tristan's death after the Grail section of Malory's text, the courts' variance in honor helps to further emphasize that the fall of Arthur's court is due to the breakdown of the chivalric system as a whole in both their social and sexual relationships (Rumble 182-3).

Beverly Kennedy in her article "Adultery in Malory's 'Le Morte d'Arthur'" asserts that there are three ethical ideals of knighthood that coexist in Malory's chivalric culture: heroic knighthood, worshipful knighthood, and true knighthood. Heroic knights, like Gawain, are characterized by their belief that any gained honor or dishonor is familial and shared by family (Kennedy 63-5; 71). Unlike the heroic knight, the demands of worshipful knighthood view honor as negotiated between individuals, with vassal and familial relations falling into a vast network of social relations. Knights such as Arthur and Tristan would fall into this category as their early adulterous relations against Lot and

[30] These motifs included Chrétien's re-adaptation of the Tristan material to build the Lancelot-Guinevere romance and the usage of numerous incidents of arms and romantic encounter that were borrowed from the Tristan cycle (Rumble, p. 124).

Segwarides respectively showed a lack of the knights' dishonor because Lot and Segwarides were found to be lacking in their loyalties to king or God and therefore were unworthy of honor (Kennedy 67). Finally, the true knight holds his relationship to God as a measure of a knight's honor and is exemplified in the successful Grail knights, Percival and Galahad. This focus on religious achievement rather than interpersonal negotiations allows this type of ethical valuation to have the potential to avoid the systemic breakdown that led to the fall of Arthur's court because it would not condone the adultery of Arthur and Tristan (Kennedy 71).

While the early adultery of Arthur and Tristan seems to be fairly minor when each happens in the text, their significance comes from their direct correlation to the systemic breakdown of Arthur's court. For Tristan, his episode of early adultery is placed in the context of its conflict with Mark from the beginning. Mark is first noted as loving the same lady as Tristan, but he does not have her love in return like Tristan does. Following this description of love, Tristan espies that Segwarides's wife was "passynge fayre" and then the paragraph concludes with Mark's confirmed jealousy (Malory, *Malory: Complete Works* 244).[31] Within the framing of this description there is a particular attention paid to Tristan's gaze. Peter of Limoges in his *The Moral Treatise on the Eye* notes that the "eye of the body is gatekeeper of the heart," which if unchaste will allow entrance to all that desires entry (Peter of Limoges 98-9). Thus the unchaste eye can give way to lust, like that which Tristan and Mark bear for Segwarides's wife.

[31] Similar language is used when Arthur meets King Lott's wife (p. 27), so it seemed redundant to mention both episodes in depth here.

For Peter of Limoges this process of corruption through lust happens in gradual steps associated with four of the senses. Sight is the second corrupted sense in which a woman transfixes the viewer in their spiritual tracks and causes them to forget the pursuit of heavenly things (Peter of Limoges 105). These steps ultimately lead to a spiritual corruption that can destroy an individual. By this visual corruption through his early adulterous experience, Tristan can be considered corrupted in a sense by his lust, which then potentially foreshadows his long-lived relationship with Isolde. Similarly, by framing Mark's perception and growing dislike of Tristan, Malory implies Mark's gaze as well and it is his resulting jealousy of Tristan that bears out the destruction of Mark's soul too. This destruction manifests in Mark's continued campaign to do wrong against Tristan, which ultimately leads to Tristan's death at Mark's hands.

Tristan's adulterous affairs are not only used to highlight the growing tension caused by Mark's jealousy and unhappiness. The courtly love present in Tristan's relationship with Isolde also provides a threat to the stability of Mark's power. Despite imbibing the love potion, Isolde and Tristan are not said to sleep together until Mark sentences her to be burnt as a result of Sir Lamorak bringing Morgan Le Fay's horn unto the Cornish court. By falling for this misperception induced by Morgan, Mark commits treachery against Isolde and this treachery serves to dishonor him when his barons overrule his judgement. For the worshipful knight's secular code of honor, Mark's dishonoring of both Tristan and Isolde breaks the social ties between Mark and the lovers. With their social bonds broken, Tristan does not feel honor-bond to maintain loyalty to Isolde's husband in this regard (Kennedy 70). Tristan and Isolde's relationship further dishonors Mark the longer it goes on as their relationship is a direct subversion of

his power and denies him the honor due to him by position. Given that the worshipful knight's code is recognized and validated by other knights, Mark is limited in what he can due to prevent Tristan's adultery because of the support Tristan receives.

Since much of knightly renown stems from this communal valuation and recognition of deeds, as Tristan's renown grows both through his true love to Isolde and his feats of arms, Mark is less able to avenge himself on Tristan given his popular support. When Mark catches Tristan talking to Isolde in a window by the report of Sir Andred, Mark tries to kill the "false traytowre" and when he proves unable to do it, he commands his men to do so. However, "there was nat one that wolde meve for his wordys" (Malory, *Malory: Complete Works* 267). Even after Mark retreats to move against Tristan again, his barons advise that Mark make accord with Tristan because "men woll holde with sir Trystrames" (Malory, *Malory: Complete Works* 268). The lack of ability to act further dishonors Mark and highlights the support Tristan has gained through his knighthood. In this way, Tristan's pursual of courtly love serves to render Mark's kingship weak and ineffective and interrupts the governing institutions in Cornwall. Mark's only venue to prevent the destruction of his own government is to try to remove Tristan secretly so that he can avoid any major loss of honor. In this case, knightly renown functions much like confession wherein the confessor was encouraged to focus on the sins that could come through the eyes and in particular, those actions that could constitute sin if observed by others (Woolgar 176). Thus, when Mark seeks to destroy Tristan he is forced to hide the deeds so that he cannot be recognized as their initiator.

To achieve this, Mark would need to successfully prevent others from perceiving his deeds, whether it be moving Tristan to a dungeon under the cover of darkness or sneaking into England under disguise to kill him. This obfuscation of the senses relies on the inability of other knights to clearly sense his presence. Such attempts at obfuscation can be seen when King Mark travels to England in order to kill Tristan. Mark does not disclose his identity and requires Sir Amant not to disclose his name in order to prevent others discovering his presence in the country. Mark, as in many of his endeavors, is quickly foiled when he is recognized by other knights and experiences further shame when Sir Amant charges him with treason before King Arthur for the killing of Sir Bersules. He is then brought before King Arthur and commanded to make amends with Tristan. Even here, Mark in his assent to Arthur's terms tries to obfuscate perception of his true intent as "he was a fayre speker, and false thereunder" (Malory, *Malory: Complete Works* 365). While largely unsuccessful in his attempts, King Mark works to confuse and deceive other knights. His plot to kill Tristan in England relies on the inability of other knights to perceive who he is or tell that he is lying.

This reliance on obfuscation of hearing and sight accords with the senses that are often considered closest to God in the medieval hierarchy of the senses. Seeing in itself was conceived of as an act of great power as sight was a form of perception by the soul. Given its connection to the eternal being of the soul, sight presented a means through which divine truth could be revealed (Woolgar 148; 178). Looked at against the background of the sense of sight, we can say that without further concealing himself, Mark was not able to prevent all of the knights he encountered in England from recognizing him and similarly was not able to prevent Lancelot from tracking him down.

He was seen for what he was. In regards to medieval conceptions of hearing, the word acted as "the messenger of reason" which resonated within a person's soul. Similarly, hearing was the means through which people could learn the knowledge of God. Hearing then was also the way through which a person could be known in both their identity and their ethics (Woolgar 63-4; 93). While they lacked the foreknowledge or identifiable markers to know they were speaking to King Mark, Sir Lamorak and other knights that Mark encountered were able to recognize his nationality by his speech. Beyond recognition, hearing was also considered a means of hearing the divinely inspired truth. This nature of the truth in hearing could also be subverted with the refusal to say one's identity or by fair speech which can be taken for truth given its sweetness.

This obfuscation of the higher senses characterizes the "Tale of Sir Tristram de Lyones" well and mirrors the morally ambiguous nature of earthly knighthood. While a large portion of these books are devoted to chivalric action and knightliness, the books carry within them an ominous sense that "the worst treachery comes from within" (Cooper 185). During the "Tale of Sir Tristram de Lyones," knights often take on disguises or withhold their identity in order to accomplish their aims. Most of these actions result from a desire to gain renown, which leads a knight to fight against his lord or those in his fellowship as a means to further grow his honor. Dorsey Armstrong notes that beyond the concepts of honor and chivalry, "the more important drive that is operational here in terms of knightly behavior is fear" (257). This fear is not only for loss of individual honor, but also for identity, "not just as a particular knight, but as a man" (Armstrong 257). This drive to maintain identity then becomes a never-ending cycle of proving power and retaining one's place with or exceeding one's peers.

The importance of identity is further emphasized by the 'visual vocabulary' displayed by the various knights. This included heraldic devices, such as those painted onto helmets and shields that would indicate identity and allegiance. The display of this knightly 'visual vocabulary' allowed knights to be immediately recognized in combat and enabled knights to make a quick valuation of another knight's ability (Woolgar 181). With this ability to quickly evaluate the skill and renown of one another, the knights in the "Tale of Sir Tristram de Lyones" turn to concealing themselves in order to prevent such a estimation of their abilities. The ambiguity of their insignia would then enable the concealed knight to court a certain risk and unpredictability which would invite public scrutiny and potentially increase recognition of their deeds (Zeeman 66-7). With this public scrutiny, there is also an implicit danger in recognition for a knight. In the constant striving to maintain and exceed honor, the line between honorable and recreant knight is fluid and hard to define as one can easily and unknowingly slay one's kin, comrade, vassal, or lord.

Such can be seen in the battle between Sir Percival and Sir Ector de Maris. After Percival comes across a knight whom he cannot identify due to a broken helm and shield, he makes himself ready to joust with the knight. The knight's identity is withheld from both Percival and the reader until the pair have grievously wounded each other and lie near death. The reader then learns with Percival that he has nearly killed Sir Ector de Maris and thus they are set up to feel regret with Percival. Beyond the pity they then show each other, their battle suggests a real danger present within this purposeful obfuscation because without the ability to recognize the other, the Knights of the Round Table risk killing each other in a potentially dishonorable or feud-generating victory.

Peter of Limoge highlights this danger in sight when he recognizes that there are many "who see in temporal matters and are blind when it comes to divine ones" and through this blindness only moderately apply themselves in moral matters (48). This potential danger of acting dishonorably through honorable intentions is largely driven by the same public scrutiny as knights who conceal themselves because their impact and valuation is negotiated through the reliance on their peers recognizing their acts as honorable deeds. The ambiguity inherent in this form of earthly knighthood has a potentially destabilizing effect like that of courtly love. The willing obfuscation of the senses renders it difficult to understand or perceive the reality of a knightly encounter because the heard and seen identity remains a partial image.

While there are times where the names of knights may be withheld from the reader, the larger part of the Winchester manuscript works against these hidden identities through its rubrication. K.S. Whetter notes that the rubrication of names and marginalia in the Winchester manuscript highlights the deeds and names of the earthly knights (105). By focusing on actors and acts, the manuscript draws the reader's attention in an effort to encourage recognition and memorialization of each knight's deeds. In this way the manuscript exerts its influence on the reader by highlighting the secular agency of the actors in *Le Morte d'Arthur*. Even when prayer is rubricated, it is calling Jesus to action. Such can be seen at the end of the "Tale of the Sankgreal" where Malory writes: "…by Sir **Thomas Maleorré, knyght. O Blessed Jesu, helpe hym thorow hys myght! Amen**" (Malory, *Le Morte Darthur* Folio 409r). Here too, the text is focusing on Jesus as actor. However, it is worth noting that the tone has changed slightly as Malory incites action

rather than reports action, which leaves the outcome less certain and suggests a lack of action more than a completed action.

While there is some rubrication of prayer, the rubrication of names and marginalia seems to clarify the ambiguous knightly identities in the "Tale of Sir Tristram de Lyones." The manuscript assures that the reader knows who is acting. Thus, the reader is in a position to see each knight's deeds and even follow a knight by his actions through the text. This vision mirrors the gaze of God which provides the highest judgement and to whom all acts and vices are open and laid bare (Peter of Limoges 190). Structuring the text in this way allows Malory to shift the responsibility of moral interpretation onto the reader as readers are free of the obscured vision of the knights themselves (Cherewatuk, "Christian Rituals in Malory" 88). Equally important is these individuals' full story, including their deaths. The way Malory shapes the end of individual characters suggests something about their lived practice. Thus, while the framing appears largely secular in nature, it in fact allows the reader to consider both secular and sacred ideals which are deeply integrated in the systems of ethical knightly valuation at play within the text. Such can be witnessed in the aftermath of the battle of Sir Ector de Maris and Sir Percival. While they both were lamenting their wounds, Sir Percival prayed to Jesus and they were both saved by the Sankgreal. Both knights knew the Sankgreal was there to heal them, but Sir Ector was unable to specifically observe the Grail itself. Only Sir Percival, who initiated the prayer and was a "parfyte mayden," was able to see, distinguish, and recognize the divine nature of the Sankgreal (Malory, *Malory: Complete Works* 495).

In order to see why sight and hearing are important in Malory's treatment of Tristan, we should first evaluate the treatment of the senses elsewhere in Malory's work.

Sir Percival's clarity of vision occurs as part of a narrative shift that moves from the last two books in the Tristan section in preparation for the "Tale of the Sankgreal." With the Feast of Pentecost, the "Tale of the Sankgreal" marks a shift from the obfuscation of hearing and sight that involves the hidden identities of the Tristan section to an educated sensorial landscape that holds the potential to achieve visional clarity. This explicit focus on religious content is a shift from the ambiguous world of earthly knighthood. Much of the content Malory uses for this section comes from *La Queste del Sainte Graal* in the French Vulgate Cycle. His translation of his French source comes with a shifted intent for characterization and the religious content. In this section, Lancelot's primacy among earthly knights is maintained and strengthened. However, Lancelot is allowed to fail in the Grail quest as he has shown to maintain earthly values (Moorman 191-2). It is also in this section that Lancelot can begin his penance and can redeem himself as a true knight who works towards God. With the maintenance of Lancelot as one of the primary characters in the Grail quest, it also is understandable that Malory chose not to include Tristan in this section. Tristan's own Grail quest in the prose *Tristan* would cause conflict in storyline between Lancelot and Tristan. This conflict largely stems from the similar development of the Tristan and Lancelot source material and from Malory's intentional use of Tristan as a point of comparison to increase Lancelot's renown and lessen the gravity of Lancelot's adultery.

Lancelot's apparent failure along with many of the other knights of the Round Table also serves to show that he too is complicit in the communal failure that causes the systematic breakdown of Arthur's court. The clarity apparent in the "Tale of the Sankgreal" gradually ties together the various storylines that will climax with the fall of

Arthur's court. After the Grail appears to the knights of the Round Table at Pentecost, Sir Gawain in his avowal to seek out the grail notes that they "myghte nat se the Holy Grayle: hit was so preciously coverde" (Malory, *Malory: Complete Works* 522). Arthur's knights' eagerness and assumption that they can achieve the sight required suggests a prideful undertone that may explain their lack of vision. Peter of Limoges explains the lack of vision in his discussion of pride in *The Moral Treatise on the Eye*, where he notes that while some may have humble eyes on the outside, their inner eye may be excessively haughty (Peter of Limoges 77). This immoderation in their haughtiness can lead them to "disdain facts, while at the same time they also want to examine curiously the hidden matters of God" (Peter of Limoges 77). In this case, this could cause these hopeful knights to lose their internal vision in their search.

Arthur's cry to Gawain that "ye have berauffte me the fayryst and the trewyst of knyghthode that ever was sene togydir in ony realme of the worlde. For whan they departe frome hense I am sure they all shall never mete more togydir in thys worlde, for they shall dye many in the queste," suggests the heavy loss of those knights who are unworthy to glimpse the Grail in its true visage (Malory, *Malory: Complete Works* 522). This pursuit of true, if not sacred, sight allows the "Tale of the Sankgreal" to focus on repentance and revelation. Largely, this process required a hermit or holy person who would educate various knights on how to interpret what their visions had meant, as well as providing further instruction for how they should proceed or take penance thereafter. Within these explanations, Malory removed much of the theological explanations that were present in his sources for this section, while retaining the moral emphasis in the content. This paring down of religious content allowed Malory to present a focused and

concise core message to both the knights present in a scene and to the reader who can connect these messages to the names of the rubricated actors (Moorman 187).

These messages often came to various knights in the form of visions. With sight's proximity to the mind, visions would have been seen as a further connection to the foresight of God. Bernard of Clairvaux notes that sight aims to mimic the mind and memory. Since the mind is the seat of the soul and the seat of God's love, sight could be seen as elevated through the mind in a vision through which a knight may glimpse the reality about to be or reality as it truly is (252-3). When Gawain and Sir Ector have visions in their sleep during the Grail quest, the pair determine they will need to see a hermit in order to understand their dreams. While the pair understands that there is gravity to what they saw, they recognize their lack of tools to comprehend or interpret their visions. Instead, they choose to rely on a hermit to educate them on what this sensory data means.

In the case of Sir Gawain, Nacien the hermit interprets Gawain's vision of the 150 bulls. He explains to Sir Gawain that the black and white bulls stand for those who have undertaken the Grail quest. To Nacien the three white bulls are those who will achieve the quest, Sir Galahad, Sir Percival, and Sir Bors, and the remaining bulls are knights of the Round table "which for their synne and their wyckednesse bene blacke" as well as for their lack of "good vertues or works" (Malory, *Malory: Complete Works* 561). Given that knights were beings of light whose bodily color and appearance would indicate their good will and chivalric nature, this scale of the two fully white bulls, one that is white with a black spot, and the black remnant suggests a visible regression of past corruption to the observer (Pastoureau 80). Once educated in how he could morally interpret his

vision, Gawain's sight is able to be restored in a sense as, despite his blinding pride, here he has the potential to realize the futility in his seeking of the Grail and the sinful manner in which he, as one of the black bulls, conducts himself. Given that Sir Gawain leaves Nacien in the midst of his counsel, it is likely that this blindness largely remained within him.

This scene between Sir Gawain and Nacien is emblematic of the "Tale of the Sankgreal." The Grail material appears to function as a chance for sensorial education and redemption for the prideful knights who embarked on the quest unworthily. While some, like Lancelot, take the route of penance, Gawain refuses Nacien's counsel and returns to his "knightly" deeds with Sir Ector. The mixed success of knights adopting or recommitting to the system of ethics that follow true knighthood furthers the notion that Arthur's court falls from the collective action of the knights in his realm rather than just one or a handful of knights who have been led astray. The lack of largescale success in the Grail quest manifests in a return to the ambiguity seen in the Tristan section as knights return to their hidden identities and love affairs. The 'Tale of Lancelot and Guinevere' then follows up the Grail material as a return to an earthly "normalcy" in Arthur's court. However, this "normalcy" is accompanied by a thinned veil which is realized by an increased recognition of hidden bodies that forces knights to face the consequences of their deeds.

Some of this recognition includes the scene where Gawain recognizes Lancelot by his riding style while he is in disguise during the tourney at Winchester. This allows Gawain to track down Lancelot's movements and ultimately creates repercussions for Lancelot's deeds, including the death of the Fair Maid of Astolat and Guinevere's anger

with Lancelot for bearing the token of another woman. Along with these scenes of recognition comes the reporting of Tristan's death as a consequence of Mark's jealousy. Tristan's death in Malory appears as a pared down version of the death of Tristan common to the prose *Tristan* manuscripts. In the prose's death scene, Mark stabs Tristan while Tristan is harping, which leads Tristan to slowly die under the watch of Mark. Tristan's death in the prose *Tristan* is placed within the Grail content before the deaths of Sir Percival and Sir Galahad at the peak of the Grail quest. Here, his death functions as a juxtaposition to the holy knights' deaths (Traxler 178). Given the ideals of the quest, the lovers die in "an unapologetic and overwhelming passion… an adultery unadulterated with pious thoughts" (Traxler 177). Thus the couple can be seen as inseparable and set as emblematic of an earthly knighthood that is blind to the divine.

While Malory maintains much of the symbolism in this scene of Tristan's death, he also notably reduces the content. Rather than a long death scene in which Tristan says his final words to his closest companions and Mark repents for and regrets what he has done, Malory reports the death by sharing how Tristan was wounded in order to emphasize the treachery of Mark without providing the empathy that Tristan's dying speech incites. This intentional reduction of the sensory material serves to mold Tristan's death to Malory's purposes in *Le Morte d'Arthur*. Malory prevents the reader from experiencing Tristan's death and connecting more with it. Instead, the two accounts of Tristan's death in *Le Morte d'Arthur* are reported and experienced as heard news. The first account appears in the 'Tale of Lancelot and Guinevere' during the healing of Sir Urre among the list of those who attempted to heal the wounded knight. In this section, Tristan's death is brought up as an aside that in part explains Sir Bellangere's killing of

Mark. This description reports how Mark dies and informs the reader that Isolde died with Tristan, but largely avoids further comment.

The second account of Tristan's death occurs in the "Tale of the Death of Arthur" during Lancelot's deliberation with his kin and allies about whether or not he should rescue the queen from her burning. In response to Sir Bors, Lancelot brings up Tristan's death as a means to express his anxieties of what would happen when he brings Guinevere to Arthur again. Unlike the report of Tristan's death in the healing of Sir Urre which relied on information shared outside of the scene, Lancelot's recollection of Tristan's death is organically used in conversation between knights. This connection between the characters allows for the conveyance of a stronger and more direct emotional reaction rather than the reported emotion in the first mention of Tristan's death. Lancelot's regret and worry about Tristan's death shows a recognition of mortality on the part of Lancelot. The pair were often compared in skill and renown throughout Malory's text and Tristan was established as second to Lancelot. Lancelot's recognition of this close relationship forces him to consider the potentiality that his death may result from his saving the queen. While Lancelot's speech may be quickly calmed by Sir Bors's assurances, the speech itself would have held importance for the medieval reader because speech was considered to tell the meaning of the soul's thoughts (Woolgar 84). In this manner, the speaker could be considered "an instrument of the holy spirit" and would thus be engaging in an ethical act wherein good words held sacred power (Woolgar 63; 90). Lancelot's speech then lays bare his fear and displays the stakes of his ethical choice between the temporal honor of a fulfilled courtly love and his means of repenting his adulterous behavior.

Lancelot's mentioning of Tristan's death does more than serve to explain his worries. The second appearance of Tristan's death also foreshadows Arthur's end. This foreshadowing reminds us of the first report of Tristan's death where Mark's death was also noted at the end of Malory's report. While this notion of the double death of Tristan and Mark is called to mind again, the comparison at play is not between Mark and Arthur, but between Tristan and Arthur. As Beverly Kennedy notes, Arthur and Tristan have similar ethical systems as they both are worshipful knights who prioritize individual relationships over God and family (Kennedy 67). Similarly, the pair both had early adulterous relationships, which they justify on the basis of their holding greater honor than their lover's husband. This adulterous relationship also caused their ultimate death. For Tristan, he was slain by Isolde's jealous husband Mark and for Arthur, he was slain by his incestuous and covetous child of the affair, Mordred. While Arthur may be "*Rex quondam, Rexque futurus*," Arthur's death results from his own inability to rise above the faults that lay obscured by an ambiguous structure of knightly morality (Malory, *Malory: Complete Works* 717). After Lancelot return Guinevere to Arthur, Arthur chose to go against his desires to be accorded with Lancelot and instead gives into Gawain's desire to avenge the deaths of Gaheris and Gareth. Thus, Arthur rejects Lancelot's unending loyalty in order to lay siege to Lancelot's holdings in France. By fueling Gawain's wrath, Arthur gives Mordred the opportunity to use the discontent of the English people and Arthur's absence to seize the throne.

It is Arthur's fixation on the earthly world and its politics which leads him to maintain his engagement with an ethics that ignores or minimizes an individual's relationship with God. In his refusal to obey the warning that Gawain gives Arthur in his

dreams, Arthur in effect expresses a similar willful blindness as Gawain did when he thought himself better and in need of no further counsel from Nacien the hermit. This blindness establishes Arthur's resulting death as similarly earthly, despite his death's similarities to Christ's.[32] While the scenes surrounding Arthur's death are shown in the narrative, this earthly death mirrors Tristan's death: their dying moments are left to the silence between the pages. In Malory's world of commemoration and the eternal nature of deeds, Arthur and Tristan are denied their ability to pass on in a Christian way and as a result die "unconfessed, unhouseled, and unanointed" (Cherewatuk, "Christian Rituals in Malory" 88). In effect, this relegates Arthur and Tristan to the chains of temporality and further draws a contrast between Arthur's and Gawain's death. Gawain, who received his last rights, reaches an eternal and heavenly state as he is able to engage with Arthur post mortem through Arthur's soul's sight (Arthur's dreams). Unlike Gawain, Tristan has only the reports of his life to maintain his existence and Arthur has only his tomb. Both are set to fade, and within the story they do. Tristan is largely forgotten after the Grail Quest and while Lancelot struggles to move on, Malory's work largely ends with the sense of the world moving on as Constantine ascends to the throne and Lancelot's men work to move on from Lancelot's death, not Arthur's.

Malory's use of sight and hearing highlights the tensions between sacred and secular knighthood through his depictions of an ambiguous ethical system for the achievement of worship in which the aspiring knight walks a fine line between worthy action and destructive behaviors. Tristan's death then serves to show the destabilizing

[32] Cherewatuk notes that these similarities occur between Bedivere's action with Arthur's sword and Peter's denial of Christ as well as the suggestion of Christlike resurrection that was conveyed through his status as the once and future king ("Christian Rituals in Malory: The Evidence of Funerals," p. 88.)

power of courtly love and chivalric action when taken too far. Similarly, the following reports of Tristan's death allow Malory to question the efficacy of Arthurian ethics and the negative effects of the eternal struggle to maintain and grow worship. These problems of Arthur's court are shown to not be due to one person alone. Instead, these actions are the result of many knights acting individually to achieve their own worship and allowing themselves to fall into sin either through obfuscating their appearance, lying, or taking on holy quests with their own vision blinded. Unlike the Thomasian tradition of Tristan texts, Tristan is not the center of the urge for consolidation of individual and stately action for Malory. It is instead Lancelot and the Grail knights whose true knighthood allows them to overcome or seek penance for moments of moral failing in an effort to work towards both the benefit of their realm and God. Through the comparison between the death of Tristan and the survival of Lancelot, Malory is able to urge readers to see that through the retained clarity of his senses, a knight can keep his senses focused on what is sacred and best serve on Earth and in the afterlife.

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