

## CHAPTER THREE

### HISTORY AND THE LOVE STORY: ARCHIVAL TOPICS IN *TRISTAN*

#### RETROSPECTION

Whenever Gottfried talks about love stories, he implies that they have a historical dimension: whoever narrates them directs his gaze backwards, on to people who really lived in the past. So it is with Tristan and Isolde, the characters 'von den diz senemaere seit . . . al eine und sin si lange tot' (211, 222), and it evidently holds for the genre as a whole; in an excursus berating the abuse of Minne in his own day and age, Gottfried speaks of the solace afforded by love stories in general:

swaz ieman schoener maere hat  
von vriuntlichen dingen,  
swaz wir mit rede vür bringen  
von den, die wilent waren  
vor manegen hundert jaren,  
daz tuot uns in dem herzen wol. (12320–25)

The historical dimension of love stories is evoked for a third time when the author describes how Tristan and Isolde themselves tell such stories as part of their daily routine during their stay in the cave of lovers:

und triben ir senemaere  
von den, die vor ir jaren  
von sene verdorben waren. (17184–86)

The objects of this particular exercise in retrospective narration, whom Gottfried goes on to name as Phyllis, Canacea, Biblis, Dido (17189–96), are all to be found in Ovid and Virgil.<sup>1</sup> Yet Gottfried does not mention these poets by name, making these ill-starred lovers appear to be not literary figures, but women who really did live a long time ago.

Are we to conclude that for Gottfried love stories, including that of Tristan and Isolde, are history? We ought to distinguish between the lovers and the stories told about them, for Gottfried insists only that the characters in these narratives really existed, and from there it does not follow that the stories

themselves are necessarily historically true down to the last detail.<sup>2</sup> The terms by which he designates these narratives, 'senemaere', 'schoeniu maere von vriuntlichen dingen', are not recognizable as names of historiographic genres. Like the historian, the narrator of love stories looks back to the past, but while the former strives to produce a 'narratio rei gestae, per quam ea, quae in praeterito facta sunt, dinoscuntur' (Isidore of Seville's definition of *historia* in *Etymologiae*, I.41.1), the latter's retrospection gives rise to a narrative whose value as an instrument of historical cognition is not specified. So far as Gottfried is concerned, it seems that while love stories have a foundation in history, they are not reducible to history; only the personages in what is otherwise a non-historiographic narrative are taken from the archive.

That is how a twelfth-century *accessus* to Ovid understands the relationship of history to narrative in the *Heroides*, on which work Gottfried's catalogue of tragic lovers draws. It is called the *Heroides* or *Epistolae*

propter hanc causam, quia diversae sunt epistolae in hoc volumine, quae poterant mitti vel mittebantur grecis viris in obsidione Troiae manentibus vel illuc tendentibus aut inde redeuntibus, cuique de uxore sua . . . Unde quidam intitulant eum Ovidium Heroum, id est matronarum, vel Librum Heroidos . . . Ideo autem sic intitulatur, quia scriptus est sub personis illarum grecarum nobilium mulierum, quarum viri demorabantur in obsidione Troiae et quia heroides excellentiores matronae erant in Grecia, a quibus et maxima parte amatoribus suis hae epistolae mittebantur.<sup>3</sup>

The historical context of the epistles — the Trojan War and the consequent separation of the women from their menfolk — is only a point of departure, for these are letters that, if they were not actually sent, could be sent in the circumstances ('quae poterant mitti vel mittebantur'). An act of imagination is required in the understanding of the epistles, which are located in history without needing to be read as historical documents.

### ISTORJE, GESTE AND THE SENEMAERE

Where Gottfried does use explicitly historiographic terms, it only confirms our impression that if there is a link between the love story and history, there is also an irreducible difference. He is, from the lexicographical evidence, the first author in Germany to use the vernacular terms *istorje* and *geste* for Latin *historia* and *gesta* or Old French *estoire* and *geste*.<sup>4</sup> It is noticeable that he only ever calls sources, and never his own work, by these names.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the information he claims to have derived from historical records is background, names, and circumstances that do not constitute the narrative proper. Thus, of King Mark and King Gurmun respectively we are told that

ouch saget diu istorje von im daz,  
daz allen den bilanden,  
diu sinen namen erkanden,  
kein küneec so werder was als er; (450–53)

der do zIrlanden künic was,  
 als ichz an der istorje las  
 und als daz rehte maere seit,  
 der hiez Gurmun Gemuotheit  
 und was geborn von Affrica  
 und was sin vater künic da. (5879–84)

In the *Historia Regum Britanniae* (xi.8–10) Geoffrey of Monmouth recounts how Gormundus, king of the Africans, conquered Ireland and was then called over to England by the Saxons to assist them in their war against Keredic, king of Britain. With an army of 160,000 Africans Gormundus besieges Keredic in Cirencester, captures the town and chases the enemy into Wales, ravaging the entire land. He then hands Loegria (all of England apart from Cornwall) over to the Saxons. Gottfried's report of Gurmun's political and military career has the following points in common with Geoffrey: Gurmun's status as king of Africa (5885–87); his conquest of Ireland (5915–19); the invasion of Britain, including England and Cornwall, which Marke then rules as Gurmun's tributary (5924–30). Geoffrey's account is repeated by Wace in the *Roman de Brut* (lines 13381–656); it has been supposed that from there the story found its way into Gottfried through the intermediacy of Thomas,<sup>6</sup> although it is also conceivable that Gottfried also knew Geoffrey or Wace at first hand, since in the prologue to *Tristan* he claims to have done research 'in beider hande buochen/walschen und latinen' (158–59). There are however details in Gottfried's version (and, presumably, Thomas's) that are not present in either Geoffrey or Wace, in particular the account of how Gurmun obtained permission from the Romans to rule his foreign conquests as their client (5905–11).<sup>7</sup> This divergence has given rise to speculation that Thomas and Gottfried might have drawn on oral or lost written traditions about Gormundus that are independent of Geoffrey.<sup>8</sup>

Another point of contact between Gottfried and Geoffrey or Wace is the name 'Corineus', Describing how Tristan had discovered the cave of lovers while hunting in the wilderness, Gottfried adds:

daz selbe hol was wilent e  
 under der heidenischen e  
 vor Corineis jaren,  
 do risen da herren waren,  
 gehouwen in den wilden berc. (16689–93)

Corineus figures in the *Historia* as the leader of a group of fugitives from Troy; he accompanied Brutus on his occupation of Britain, landing with him in Cornwall and driving the original inhabitants, giants, into caves in the mountains. Cornwall is said to be named after him.<sup>9</sup> Gottfried thus anchors his cave in British prehistory and, for those who recognize the allusion, gives the sack of Troy as a reference-point for establishing its antiquity.

The authority of the 'istorje' is invoked on two more occasions, once in order to introduce the giant Urgan and, finally, during a brief sketch of the military situation of Duke Jovelin in Arundel:

Als uns diu ware istorje seit  
 von Tristandes manheit,  
 so was des selben males  
 dem lande ze Swales  
 ein rise bi gesezzen; (15915–19)  
 dem haeten, als uns diu istorje saget,  
 sin umbesaezen starke  
 sin gerihte und sine marke  
 verurliuget unde benomen; (18692–95)

The 'geste' is referred to by Gottfried once only:

wider daz tal zAnferginan;  
 daz was des trachen heimwist,  
 also man an der geste list. (8940–42)

It is impossible to determine whether the 'geste' and the 'istorje' are one and the same, since we cannot identify the source or sources that lie behind these terms with any certainty. It is possible that Gottfried is referring to Thomas on every occasion, or (in the case of Gurmun) to Geoffrey or Wace, or to some other unknown work of history. Whatever the ultimate source of these references, it is important to Gottfried that they should have an authoritative aura,<sup>10</sup> for even though they provide only background information, their effect is to suggest that the entire *senemaere* of Tristan and Isolde is underpinned with history.

## THE PATH THROUGH THE ARCHIVES

Of all the passages that could be cited as evidence of Gottfried's archival orientation, the most famous is the account, in the prologue, of his research into the sources of the Tristan story. Here, it has been maintained, Gottfried rejects the many unreliable versions of the legend that are in circulation in favour of the historically authentic version offered by Thomas, whom he follows.<sup>11</sup> By a close reading of these lines I hope to show that Gottfried vests authority in a version of the story that uses historical information, but is not necessarily historiographic in intention.

Gottfried's attitude to narrating the story of Tristan and Isolde promises to be archival: he is aware of standing in a tradition whose diversity requires the author to separate the correct from the incorrect by means of painstaking research. The account he gives in the prologue of his labours in the archives is, nevertheless, characterized by a simultaneous evocation and evasion of the idea of an authoritative source. He begins:

Ich weiz wol, ir ist vil gewesen,  
 die von Tristande hant gelesen;  
 und ist ir doch niht vil gewesen,  
 die von im rehte haben gelesen. (131–34)

Many have gone before Gottfried in telling the story of Tristan, but few of them have told it aright.<sup>12</sup> This is a form of the exordial *topos* of denigrating one's rivals,<sup>13</sup> though Gottfried is careful to temper his criticism with generosity, immediately adding that even if these other poets were wrong, they nevertheless deserve recognition for their good intentions (135–45). This *topos*, with which authors hope to win the audience for their own version of the story, usually operates by applying the test of historical truthfulness to the versions of rival storytellers, and rejecting them for being based on unreliable sources<sup>14</sup> (though Chrétien changes the criterion to an aesthetic one in *Erec*, when he contrasts his 'conjointure' to the garbled confusion of his competitors; see above, p. 32). It is not clear what constitutes the correct way of narrating for Gottfried: does 'rehte lesen' mean to tell the story according to an authoritative historical source, or can it signify narration guided by certain other, purely literary, precepts? And if so, what precepts? Gottfried continues:

aber als ich gesprochen han,  
 daz si niht rehte haben gelesen,  
 daz ist, als ich iu sage, gewesen:  
 sin sprachen in der rihte niht,  
 als Thomas von Britanje giht. (146–50)

Correct narration ('rehte lesen') consists in speaking in the right way ('in der rihte sprechen'), as did a certain Thomas of 'Britanje' (which may denote either Britain or Brittany). That would be a tautologous argument (the others were wrong because they were not right) if Gottfried did not go on to explain why conformity with the account given by Thomas should be the standard by which all other versions are to be judged:

der aventiure meister was  
 und an britunschen buochen las  
 aller der lantherren leben  
 und ez uns ze künde hat gegeben. (151–54)

The turn of phrase 'aller der lantherren leben' suggests that the British (or Breton) books read by Thomas were historical sources; one thinks, for instance, of the genealogical and dynastic literature that chronicled the history of individual noble houses and was establishing itself in France from the eleventh century.<sup>15</sup> The implication is that the principal characters in the Tristan story (who else might the 'lantherren' here be?) belonged to historical reality. Thomas then passed on the information he had gleaned from his historical research, which means, presumably, that he made use of it in his own work. From there it

does not follow, however, that Thomas's narrative consists exclusively of such information as he might have read in these sources, whatever they were. Nor does it follow that Thomas deserves to be imitated for the single reason that his version is historically accurate. Gottfried commends Thomas because he was 'aventureur meister', a formulation that does not obviously translate as 'a master historian', but conceivably might allude to the French author's pre-eminence in the experimental genre of romance. It is difficult to determine whether the clause introduced by 'und' in line 152 is intended to explain the assertion that Thomas was a master of adventure or whether it is meant to supplement it. In the latter case, the careful research into 'aller der lantherren leben' would be no more than an — admittedly indispensable — aspect of Thomas's consummate skill as a storyteller, and there would be more to the exemplary mode of narration than accuracy in matters of historical fact. Gottfried does not say exactly what that something more might be (though the phrase 'aventureur meister' may imply skilful handling of literary fiction), but it would at any rate be the case that he only connects, and does not wholly identify, Thomas's model account of the exploits of Tristan with history. The input to his narrative would be 'aller der lantherren leben', the output a masterful 'aventureur'.<sup>16</sup>

Having established Thomas's exemplarity, which cannot be proved to rest on historical scholarship alone, Gottfried next speaks of his own relationship to the French author:

Als der von Tristande seit,  
 die rihte und die warheit  
 begunde ich sere suochen  
 in beider hande buochen  
 walschen und latinen  
 und begunde mich des pinen,  
 daz ich in siner rihte  
 rihte dise tihte. (155–62)

Because the version of Thomas is correct and true — and from the foregoing argument it is evident that the terms 'rihte' and 'warheit' cannot be reduced to historical accuracy and truth, although these notions are certainly implicated — Gottfried has decided that he will direct his own poem along the same lines. This is a declaration of orientation, not of dependence.<sup>17</sup> What this can mean in practice is revealed on the only occasion outside the prologue when Gottfried appeals to the authority of Thomas by name: certain storytellers, says Gottfried, maintain that Tristan's father comes from Lohnois, but this is incorrect, because Thomas assures us that he is a native of Parmenie (324–30). As far as we can make out from the Old Norse and Middle English adaptations of Thomas's romance, in the French version Riwalin's homeland must have been called 'Ermenie', not 'Parmenie'.<sup>18</sup> 'Gottfried is here ironically hoodwinking his audience: at the very moment when he implies his slavish loyalty to a source

whose historicity he underlines, he goes his own way and makes his personal alterations.<sup>19</sup>

While acknowledging his debt to his predecessor, Gottfried simultaneously stresses that he has done his own painstaking research into the story of Tristan and Isolde. We are told nothing about the nature of the books Gottfried says he has scoured, except that they are in Romance and Latin. One interpretation of these lines is that they describe Gottfried's quest for a manuscript of Thomas.<sup>20</sup> The difficulty with this reading is that Gottfried would have no need of examining Latin sources in order to locate a work in French (Schröder, p. 308), unless one assumes that when he began his search he did not know in what language Thomas's version was written.<sup>21</sup> Another possibility is that Gottfried is claiming to have gone back to the very sources used by Thomas, double-checking the French author's account as it were. We have already seen, in the preceding section, that the story of Tristan draws some of its historical background from Geoffrey of Monmouth, Wace, and possibly other sources of information unknown to us; it is conceivable that Gottfried was not content to rely on Thomas as the bridge between him and these Latin and French books, but read them for himself. Such an interpretation would of course have to reconcile Gottfried's claim to have read books in 'walsch' and 'latin' with his statement that Thomas's sources are 'britunsch'.<sup>22</sup> A third interpretation, therefore, is that Gottfried is claiming to have conducted his own independent research, using books that Thomas did not know. However one reads these lines, it is evident that Gottfried attaches great importance to his thorough work in the archive, which will establish him as a reliable narrator in his own right.

Gottfried's researches lead to the discovery of a single book on which his version is allegedly based:

sus treip ich manege suoche,  
unz ich an eime buoche  
alle sine jehe gelas,  
wie dirre aventiure was.  
waz aber min lesen do waere  
von disem senemaere:  
daz lege ich miner willekür  
allen edelen herzen vür. (163–70)

We are not told the name of this book, nor in what language it is written (it might be in Latin or a Romance vernacular), and we do not know what kind of source it is. It is not necessarily identical with Thomas's romance, for Gottfried's declaration that in this book he read everything the French author had asserted ('alle sine jehe') leaves open the question whether the source did not contain more besides. It evidently provided Gottfried with information about the 'aventiere' and 'senemaere' (not the 'leben') of Tristan and Isolde. This terminology suggests that it may not be a history-book. Because, however, it is

in some way related to Thomas's romance it presumably reflects the historical research that the latter conducted.

The sum of our reading of this passage is: Gottfried says that his love story is based on an unnamed book, which stands in some unclarified relation to Thomas, who had read about the lives of the great nobles and included this information in his narrative, which is not necessarily a work of pure historiography. The argument reveals a curious double movement: as Gottfried's account takes us ever deeper into the archive, so it leads us ever further away from a precise identification of the source. The path through the archives begins with the many 'die von Tristande hant gelesen', to terminate at the particular, the single book; at the same time there is a progressive blurring of focus so that the book, whose location, genre and exact contents remain obscure, is the least tangible of all the sources Gottfried mentions. This effect may of course not be calculated authorial strategy, but a reflexion of the fact that we, almost eight hundred years after Gottfried, are severely restricted in our ability to reconstruct his references. Nevertheless, three things emerge from Gottfried's critical account of the Tristan tradition. First, the only clear historiographic reference in the prologue is to the books that Thomas read, and however much this historical information may have been subjected to literary treatment, there remains a connexion between the *senemaere* and history, however attenuated. We are brought back to our original proposition that Gottfried presents the story of Tristan and Isolde as founded on, but not reducible to, history. Second, the fact that Gottfried should discuss his sources at such length is an indication of how important it is to him that the audience should know about the extensive work he has done in the archives, as though they must be assured of the historical foundations of the *senemaere*.<sup>23</sup> Third, there is scope for authorial interpretation of archive material. Gottfried presents his version of the story, taken from the book, as 'waz . . . min lesen do waere'; does that mean he will follow his source faithfully, or is the emphasis on the possessive pronoun: *my* reading, *my* interpretation of what I found there?<sup>24</sup>

## MEMORIA

History is an act of retrospection or recollection; it is also a discursive form communicating information about the past to the present. The word that unites these two aspects of the discipline is *memoria*, which since classical times denoted the faculty or act of memory as well as the form in which remembrance of the past is preserved for posterity, a monument, record or document.<sup>25</sup> This double meaning of the term is illustrated by Isidore of Seville, whose definition of history may be taken as an expansion of the semantic possibilities concentrated in the classical formula *memoria rerum gestarum*.

Haec disciplina ad Grammaticam pertinet, quia quidquid dignum memoria est litteris mandatur. Historiae autem ideo monumenta dicuntur, eo quod memoriam tribuant rerum gestarum.<sup>26</sup>

History, as an intellectual discipline, concerns itself with whatever is worthy of memory; here *memoria* signifies an act of intellection, the recollection of the past by the historian or — for Isidore is not specific — by the reader of works of history. Histories, on the other hand, the individual writings in which such recollection is fixed, provide a record ('memoriam tribuant') of anterior events.

The first word of Gottfried's poem is 'gedachte', from *gedenken*, 'to remember'. The prologue begins (and here I prefer the reading of most of the manuscripts to Ranke's edition):

Gedaechte man ir ze guote niht,  
von den der werlde guot geschiht,  
so waerez allez also niht,  
swaz guotes in der werlde geschiht. (1–4)<sup>27</sup>

Remembrance is evidently a desired attitude, for otherwise whatever good things happen in the world would be as nothing. It is a *topos* in historiography to contrast *memoria* with its opposite *oblivium*: the historian records the past lest it should be forgotten.<sup>28</sup> With Gottfried, however, it is not so clear who ought to be remembering, or what the object of recollection is. Perhaps Gottfried means that it behoves him as an author to record people or things that have benefited the world: Tristan and Isolde or, more likely, their story, which later on in the prologue is presented to the 'edele herzen' with the commendation 'ez ist in sere guot gelesen' (172). Perhaps, in anticipation of the end of the prologue, where literary reception is formulated as a kind of sacred communion between the living and the dead, he means that his public should listen to or read the story in a spirit of pious commemoration, and perhaps he is even insinuating that they should hold dear the memory of him, Gottfried, in recognition of the good he has done them (he describes the efforts of other authors at telling the Tristan story as undertaken 'mir unde der werlt ze guote' (142) and thus deserving of appreciation).<sup>29</sup> I see no reason why he should not mean all of these senses at once. In so far as Gottfried's words intend the recollection by author and public of the story of Tristan and Isolde, literary production and reception alike would be a matter of *gedenken*, of historical consciousness. But the *senemaere* through which the lovers are commemorated does not necessarily represent them as they were in historical reality. By the time Gottfried and his public come to remember them, Tristan, Isolde, and their fate have already passed into and been modified and shaped by the literary tradition of the beneficial love story. The historians' recollection of the past has been subtly transformed into the recollection of literary representations of people who lived in the past.

Towards the end of the prologue Gottfried returns to the theme of commemoration:

von den diz senemaere seit . . .  
 al eine und sin si lange tot,  
 ir süezer name der lebet iedoch . . .  
 wan swa man noch hoeret lesen  
 ir triuwe, ir triuwen reinekeit,  
 ir herzeliep, ir herzeleit,  
 deist aller edelen herzen brot.  
 hie mite so lebet ir beider tot. (211–34)

Long dead though the lovers are, they have been saved from oblivion by the literary tradition, which preserves their *name*, meaning not just their names, but also their renown, the *fama* celebrated by historians and kept alive by their writings.<sup>30</sup> There is a further echo of a historiographic *topos* in Gottfried's wish that the lovers' death should live for ever ('lange und iemer leben'), for the good of the world (224–25); the historians strive to secure for their subject-matter *memoria aeterna* or *perpetua*.<sup>31</sup> Most important of the *topoi* associated with the concept of *memoria* is the claim that what the historian writes down is *dignum memoria*, worthy of commemoration, for this criterion determines what material should be included in a history-book.<sup>32</sup> The preliminary connexion made by Gottfried between the act of remembrance and its object defined as 'swaz guotes in der werlde geschiht' already evokes the notion; later on in the prologue he says of his protagonists:

von den diz senemaere seit,  
 und haeten die durch liebe leit,  
 durch herzewunne senedez clagen  
 in einem herzen niht getragen,  
 son waere ir name und ir geschiht  
 so manegem edelen herzen niht  
 ze saelden noch ze liebe komen. (211–17)

Tristan and Isolde exemplify an ideal amatory practice, and owe their continued celebration in narrative to this fact; their name and story would never have endured were they not worth recollecting. No doubt the quasi-liturgical tone of Gottfried's language in the prologue derives at least in part from his conviction that the story of Tristan and Isolde is a tale truly worth the telling.

Gottfried begins his prologue with the idea of remembrance and in the course of the argument cites *topoi* associated with the concept of *memoria* in history. But he divorces the concept and its topical armature from their legitimate historiographic object, *res gestae*. The entire prologue does not contain any formulation that might be interpreted as a vernacular equivalent or allusion to the Latin term. Gottfried's *gedenken* is brought to bear instead on people or things 'von den der werlde guot geschiht', an indeterminate category so far as its status as historical reality is concerned. Since Tristan and Isolde, people who for Gottfried once existed, are included in this category, the act of remembering must have a

historical dimension, but the identification of the good with the *senemaere* transforms this historical *gedenken* into a literary process. It is therefore permissible to deduce a historiographic intention from Gottfried's unmistakable appropriation of the historians' *memoria*.<sup>33</sup> One need only look at the prologue to the third part of Wace's *Roman de Rou*, thought to have been composed in the early 1170s, in order to see how great the difference is between Gottfried and an unambiguously historiographic programme. Wace begins, like Gottfried, with the theme of remembrance:

Pur remembrer les ancesurs  
 les fez e les diz e les murs . . .  
 deit l'um les livres e les gestes  
 e les estoires lire a festes. (I, 161; lines 1–6)

Unlike Gottfried, Wace spells out the nature of his commemorative project: *memoria rerum gestarum*. Indeed, the entire prologue is an extended commendation of history and the work performed by 'les bons clers ki ecristrent/e les gestes as livres mistrent' (104–05). Without written history and the clerics who are its custodians, the past would be forgotten:

Si l'escripture ne fust faite  
 e puis par clers litte e retraite,  
 mult fussent choses ubliees  
 ki de viez tens sunt trespassees. (7–10)

This is the *topos* 'commemoration saves the past from oblivion' employed in its full historiographical force; not only the former names of places, but Thebes, Babylon, Troy, Nineveh, Nebuchadnezzar, Alexander, Caesar: all would be forgotten without history (11–130). There follows the commonplace that the historian secures *memoria aeterna* for his themes:

Bien entend e cunuis e sai  
 que tuit murrunt e clerc e lai,  
 e que mult ad curte duree  
 enpres la mort lur renumee,  
 si par clerc nen est mis en livre  
 ne poet par el durer ne vivre. (137–42)

The similarities to Gottfried's description of the literary afterlife of Tristan and Isolde are striking: the objects of narration outlive death, because their *fama* ('name', 'renumee') is preserved by literature for ever ('lange und iemer leben', 'durer (n)e vivre'). The difference is that Wace uses this *topos*, and all the others, within the framework of what is essentially the Isidorean definition of history as the recollection and the written transmission of the past; Gottfried on the other hand employs the same commonplaces without an explicit historiographic intention, in the context of narrating a *senemaere*.

HISTORY IN THE POETICS OF THE *SENEMAERE*

The past constitutes a point of departure for Gottfried, whose concern is to narrate a *senemaere*, not to reconstruct history. Over and above the pieces of information directly attributed by him to the *istorje* and the *geste*, it appears that Tristan and Isolde, as well as the other protagonists of the story (if these are indeed the 'lantherren' about whose lives Thomas is said to be so well informed), belong for Gottfried to historical reality, as does the lovers' tragic passion, without which there would be no story: in the prologue Gottfried reasons that if the pair had not actually suffered in love as they did, then their name and their story would not have survived for such a long time (211–17). But no tale is constituted merely by the names of its principal characters or even by its dominant theme; the characters must interact in, and the theme must be developed into a narrative sequence. At this point, it becomes uncertain whether Gottfried considers history to have a hold on the direction taken by his retelling of a traditional theme, for he never implies that entire episodes actually took place as recounted. The love story and its alleged basis in history remain irreducibly distinct, never quite merging.

It would be tempting to conclude that Gottfried is playing fast and loose with history, inventing sources and pretending that his characters lived long ago because otherwise his audience would not accept the truth of what is really a fictional story. In this case, history would perform the function of smokescreen, the ruse of a cunning author who must pay lip-service to the historiographic tradition and thereby forestall his rigorous critics. Such an interpretation is, I think, unsatisfactory, on three counts. First, it obliges us to impute insincerity to Gottfried when we have no clear indication that he does not really believe in the historical existence of Tristan and Isolde. Second, it too readily assumes that the Middle Ages were monolithic in their rejection of poetic figment, when, in fact, the romances of Chrétien or Hartmann suggest a sophisticated appreciation of literary fiction among certain audiences at least. Third, it relegates history to the periphery of Gottfried's poetics, when on the contrary it seems that a form of historical consciousness is at the very centre of his undertaking. One of the keynotes in the prologue is that literary production and reception alike are a matter of commemoration, *gedenken*. Even if Gottfried has diverted the *memoria* of the historians into the non-historiographic project of the *senemaere*, it is still the case that the literary process is initiated by a turn to the past, when Tristan and Isolde are supposed to have lived. That would mean that history, whether it is an imaginary construction or not, functions as the necessary precondition of Gottfried's literary enterprise. This suggests that we should interpret the asymptotic relationship between history and the love story not as evasive disingenuousness on Gottfried's part, but — so I have implied throughout this chapter — as the sign of a poetics in which history provides the indispensable

raw material for a process whose output, a love story, does not belong among the genres of historiography. There would be no need to see the two things, history and the love story, as incompatible: since such stories are the imaginary or experimental transformation of the initial data retrieved from the archive of the past, the good narrator of love stories must also be a conscientious archivist. That, to my mind, is what the archival topics in *Tristan* are intended to express. Thus Thomas, the 'aventuremeister', is praised above all other storytellers for diligently studying 'aller der lantherren leben'; thus Gottfried, whose ultimate aim is to serve his public of *edele herzen* with a *senemaere*, presents himself as the careful reader of an *istorje* and a *geste*.

An interim characterization of Gottfried's poetics is to describe it as the use of history without historiographic intentions. In the following chapters, I shall try to refine this working definition and, by examining the models that possibly underlie it, set it in a literary historical context.

#### NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

1. Phyllis: *Heroides*, II; Canacea: *Heroides*, III; Biblis, *Metamorphoses*, IX; Dido is also in *Heroides*, VII. See Peter Ganz, 'Tristan, Isolde und Ovid: Zu Gottfrieds "Tristan" Z. 17182ff.', in *Mediaevalia litteraria: Festschrift für Helmut de Boor zum 80. Geburtstag*, edited by U. Hennig and H. Kolb (Munich, 1971), pp. 397–412.
2. The distinction between character and story is not always made by Carl Lofmark, *The Authority of the Source in Middle High German Narrative Poetry*: 'Gottfried, too, sees the heroes of romance as real people who lived long ago' (on lines 12320–25); 'Heinrich von Freiberg plainly speaks of Parzival, Iwein, Gawain and others as historical figures. Courtly society might not believe all they had heard about such characters, but neither did their stories belong to the realm of fiction. The genre to which they belonged was history' (pp. 38–39).
3. *Accessus Ovidii Epistolarum*, in *Accessus ad auctores*, edited by R. B. C. Huygens (1970 edition), pp. 31–33 (p. 31).
4. According to the material collected by Hugo Suolahti, Gottfried's *Tristan* contains the earliest attestation for MHG *istorje*, and the only one for *geste*: 'Der französische Einfluss auf die deutsche Sprache im dreizehnten Jahrhundert', 2 parts, *MSNH*, 8 (1929), 1–310, and 10 (1933), 1–485 (part I, pp. 96, 106–07). See also Joachim Knape, 'Historie' in *Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit: Begriffs- und Gattungsuntersuchungen im interdisziplinären Kontext*, *Saecula Spiritalia*, 10 (Baden-Baden, 1984), pp. 111–15.
5. On Gottfried's source references in general, see Albert Blumenröder, 'Die Quellenberufung in der mittelhochdeutschen Dichtung', pp. 19–20, 49–50; Ilse Clausen, 'Der Erzähler in Gottfrieds *Tristan*' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Kiel, 1970), pp. 27–33; Uwe Pörksen, *Der Erzähler im mittelhochdeutschen Epos*, pp. 61–75.
6. Ferdinand Lot, 'Gormond et Isembard: Recherches sur les fondements historiques de cette épopée', *Romania*, 27 (1898), 35–43, and *Le Roman de Tristan par Thomas*, edited by Joseph Bédier, SATF, 2 vols (Paris, 1902–05), I, 72–77.
7. Apart from Gottfried, the only other source from which we can reconstruct Thomas's account of Gurmun is the Old Norse saga, which relates that the tribute England pays to Ireland had previously been rendered to Rome (*Tristrams Saga ok Isondar*, edited by Eugen Kölbing, (Heilbronn, 1878), p. 30); the Middle English *Sir Tristrem* provides no background to the tribute.
8. Ernst Erich Metzner, 'Wandalen im angelsächsischen Bereich? Gormundus Rex Africanorum und die Gens Hestingorum', *Beiträge* (Tübingen series), 95 (1973), 246–60.
9. I.12–II.4. Also in the *Roman de Brut*, lines 779–1410.
10. Knape, p. 115, writes of Gottfried's designation of his sources by the Latin 'Gattungsname historia': 'Wenn er ihn verwendet, spricht er seinen Quellen damit besondere Dignität zu'.
11. See, for instance, Gustav Ehrismann, *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur bis zum Ausgang des Mittelalters*, II, 2, i: *Blütezeit* (Munich, 1927), p. 302: 'Im Prolog 131–166 nennt G. seinen

- Gewährsmann: Viele haben die Geschichte von Tristan erzählt, aber nur wenige haben sie richtig erzählt, in der Weise wie *Thomas v. Britanje*, der sie in britischen Chroniken gelesen hat'.
12. There is some controversy among scholars about the appropriate translation of the verb *lesen*, which occurs six times in Gottfried's account of his story's relationship to tradition (132, 134, 147, 152, 165, 167 — in the last occurrence as gerund, 'min lesen'). According to the *Mittelhochdeutsches Wörterbuch*, vol. 1, cols 1007b–1008a, the MHG verb can mean 'to read', 'to recite' and thus 'to tell, narrate'. In lines 152, 165, and 167 the context makes it clear that *lesen* must mean 'to read' or 'reading', while in the remaining occurrences the translation 'to tell' makes better sense. This is the solution adopted by the *Mittelhochdeutsches Wörterbuch* and by some of the editors of Gottfried (see p. 123, for full bibliographical details): Peter Ganz, nn. to lines 132, 152, 165 (thus revising Bechstein, who insisted that line 132 should be translated 'to read'), Gottfried Weber, p. 549, fn. 10, and Rüdiger Krohn, in the parallel translation to his text. In his translation of Gottfried into modern English, A. T. Hatto also follows this pattern, though with the exception of rendering the verb in line 134 as 'to read' (p. 43). Against this consensus, Werner Schröder, 'Die von Tristande hant gelesen: Quellenhinweise und Quellenkritik im "Tristan" Gottfrieds von Straßburg', *ZfdA*, 104 (1975), 307–13, argues that *lesen* should be translated as 'to read' throughout the passage. He points out that the *Mittelhochdeutsches Wörterbuch* does not explain why, if *lesen* has its NHG meaning in lines 152, 165, and 167, it should not also have it in the preceding occurrences; he also claims that Gottfried does not criticize his rivals for being bad narrators, on the contrary, 'si sprachen wol' (140), and that when he maintains 'daz si niht rehte haben gelesen' (147), he means that they did not trouble to read reliable sources. To the first of Schröder's arguments I would object that in lines 132, 134, 147 the context is surely one of telling, not reading, stories (consider 'bemaeren' in line 125, 'sage' in line 137, 'sprachen', 'gesprochen', lines 140, 149, all words expressing narration rather than archive study). His second argument rests on the assumption that Gottfried distinguishes between *sprechen* as denoting the act of telling and *lesen* as meaning the research that goes into a story; that Gottfried makes no such distinction is demonstrated by his usage in the lines 'daz si niht rehte haben gelesen,/daz ist, als ich iu sage, gewesen:/sin sprachen in der rihte niht' (147–49), where good sense surely requires *lesen* and *sprechen* to mean the same thing.
  13. See Tony Hunt, 'The Rhetorical Background to the Arthurian Prologue', in *Arthurian Romance: Seven Essays*, edited by D. D. R. Owen (Edinburgh, 1970), p. 3, and also Lambertus Okken, *Kommentar zum Tristan-Roman Gottfrieds von Strassburg*, 1, 19: 'Wie ein Normal-Historiker seiner Zeit will der Dichter gearbeitet haben, und wie ein Anbieter, der seinen Kunden die Konkurrenz verleiden möchte, gebärdet er sich im Vorwort'.
  14. For instance, in the following examples collected by Ulrich Mölk, *Französische Literaturästhetik: nos iv (Aiol), v (Destruction de Rome), ix (Anseis de Carthage), xxii (Antioche)*.
  15. See Georges Duby, 'Remarques sur la littérature générale en France aux XI<sup>e</sup> et XII<sup>e</sup> siècles', in *Hommes et structures du Moyen Âge: Recueil d'articles* (Paris, 1973), pp. 287–98; for the Empire see Hans Patze, 'Adel und Stifterchronik: Frühformen territorialer Geschichtsschreibung im hochmittelalterlichen Reich', *BfdL*, 100 (1964), 8–81 and 101 (1965), 67–128. Thomas himself says that others who tell the story of Tristan are wrong, because they do not follow a certain Breri 'Ky solt les gestes e les cuntés/De tuz les reis, de tuz les cuntés/Ki orent esté en Bretaingne' (*Les Fragments du Roman de Tristan: Poème du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, edited by Bartina H. Wind, TLF, 92 (Geneva and Paris, 1960): Douce Fragment, lines 849–51), and it is possible that these remarks provided the model for Gottfried's lines 'und an britunschen buochen las/aller der lantherren leben'; see Bédier, II, 38, and Schröder, p. 315.
  16. Christoph Huber goes too far in his reading of lines 151–54 in my opinion when he concludes: 'So sind Tristan und Isolde Helden, die gelebt haben, und ihre Autoren Geschichtsschreiber' (*Gottfried von Straßburg, "Tristan und Isolde": Eine Einführung*, p. 36).
  17. Gerd-Dietmar Peschel, *Prolog-Programm und Fragment-Schluß in GOTFRITs Tristanroman*, Erlanger Studien, 9 (Erlangen, 1976), p. 82.
  18. In *Sir Tristrem*, edited by George P. McNeill, Scottish Text Society (Edinburgh and London, 1886), line 74 refers to the hero's father as 'þe child of ermonie'; according to *Tristrams Saga ok Ísöndar* (ed. Kölbing), p. 27, Kanelangres (as Tristan's father is called) comes from 'Bretland', in which country there is a city named 'Ermenia'.
  19. D. H. Green, 'Oral Poetry and Written Composition', p. 211. Hatto suggests that Gottfried 'added a "p" to avoid confusion with Armenia, i.e. Armenia in Asia Minor, well known from the crusades' (translation of Gottfried, p. 357n.).
  20. Blumenröder, p. 49; Helmüt de Boor, *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, vol. II: *Die höfische Literatur: Vorbereitung, Blüte, Ausklang 1170–1250* (Munich, 1953), II, 129; Kurt Ruh, *Höfische Epik des deutschen Mittelalters*, II, 208–09.

21. Ruh, *Höfische Epik*, II, 208: 'Daß Gottfried nicht nur in französischen, sondern auch in lateinischen Büchern nach seinem Stoffe suchte, darf nicht überraschen, wenn man sich vergegenwärtigt, daß bedeutende epische Stoffe lateinisch tradiert waren, so Troja- und Alexanderroman, König Arthur in Geoffreys von Monmouth "Historia Regum Britanniae" . . . oder dessen "Vita Merlini".'
22. If 'britunsch' designates geographical provenance, then the books that come from Britain or Brittany might be in either French or Latin; on the other hand, when Gottfried uses *britunsch* again in line 3627, it is plain from the context that he means 'the Breton language'. Ottmar Carls surely strains the notion of stylistic variation when he maintains that *britunsch*, *walsch*, and *latin* are 'Wortvariationen' of the same thing ('Die Auffassung der Wahrheit im "Tristan" Gottfrieds von Straßburg', p. 18).
23. An eighth-century fragment *De historia* observes: 'verae res sunt, si rerum acturam vetustas et obscuritas diligenter exploretur'; quoted by Samuel Jaffe, 'Gottfried von Strassburg and the Rhetoric of History', in *Medieval Eloquence: Studies in the Theory and Practice of Medieval Rhetoric*, edited by James J. Murphy (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1978), p. 316, fn. 40.
24. Walter Haug, *Literaturtheorie im deutschen Mittelalter*, p. 208: 'Wie man immer dieses literarische Spiel beurteilen mag, Gottfried schafft sich damit ebenfalls genügend Freiraum für die eigene Version.'
25. *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*, VIII, cols 665–84.
26. *Etymologiae*, I.41.2. The formula *memoria rerum gestarum* is used to describe the pursuit of history in, for instance, Sallust's prologue to his *Bellum Iugurthinum*, edited by J. C. Rolfe (London, 1921), IV.1 and 6.
27. In Ranke's edition the first two lines read 'Gedaechte mans ze guote niht/von dem der werlde guot geschihht', with a masculine or neuter singular pronoun as object of 'gedaechte'. None of the MSS has this reading: in line 1, MHWBNRSP have 'ir' ('der' E), and in line 2 all the MSS have the plural 'den', with the exception of HS ('dem') and M, which omits the line altogether (see the apparatus in the edition by Karl Marold, revised by Werner Schröder (Berlin, 1977)). Ranke evidently preferred HS for line 2 and consequently was led to emend 'ir' in line 1 to the enclitic singular '-s', for which change the justification must have been that the word 'ir' in M appears to be a correction of an original 'des'. (See the apparatus in Ranke's edition of selections from Gottfried, and also Peschel, pp. 26–28, whose re-examination of the MSS reveals that 'ir' in M might equally well be a correction of original 'der', which would be an additional reason for rejecting Ranke's emendation.) The editions of Karl Marold and Reinhold Bechstein, *Deutsche Klassiker des Mittelalters*, 7–8, fourth edition, 2 vols (Leipzig, 1923), and the revision of the latter by Peter Ganz, *Deutsche Klassiker des Mittelalters*, Neue Folge, 4, 2 vols (Wiesbaden, 1978), adopt the reading with the plural pronoun.
28. See Gertrud Simon, 'Untersuchungen zur Topik der Widmungsbriefe mittelalterlicher Geschichtsschreiber bis zum Ende des 12. Jahrhunderts', part II, p. 98, fn. 20.
29. Further possibilities are considered by Peschel, pp. 26–27.
30. The connexion between recollection, renown, and oblivion is exemplified in the preface to the early twelfth-century *Chronicae Polorum*, quoted by Simon, part I, p. 82: 'Numquam enim fama vel militia Romanorum vel Gallorum sic celeberrima per mundum haberetur, nisi scriptorum testimoniis memoriae posterum et imitationi servaretur'.
31. Expressed for instance in the twelfth-century *Annales* of Vincent of Prague, cited by Simon, part I, p. 82, fn. 162, and part II, p. 99, fn. 28: 'Multorum autem fortium gesta virorum ex venerabili scriptorum memoria perpetuum durare, tamquam nuper sint facta, est certissimum'; 'excellentie itaque vestre gesta regalia scriptis digna . . . ut eterna potiantur memoria, scriptis mandare dignum duximus'.
32. Simon, part I, p. 78; Marie Schulz, *Die Lehre von der historischen Methode bei den Geschichtsschreibern des Mittelalters*, pp. 69–74.
33. Compare Jaffe, pp. 301–18, who presents Gottfried unproblematically as a would-be historian and argues that his exordial technique belongs to a historiographic tradition whose great model is the prologues of Sallust.