

CHAPTER SEVEN

TRISTAN AS NARRATOR

Gottfried's handling of the Morold episode not only comments on the facts of the combat, it modifies the substance of tradition. As well as reinterpreting the traditional account of Tristan's encounter with Morold, the fictional and experimental argument transforms it from a duel into a veritable conflict of armies. The argument is 'vür war', so credibly presented that it replaces the original archival 'warheit'. In a similar way, Tristan transforms his historical identity (or what he takes to be his historical identity) when he assumes various disguises. It is characteristic of Gottfried's hero that he is always inventing stories about who he is and where he comes from. To the pilgrims he encounters shortly after he has been abandoned in Cornwall by the Norwegian merchants he pretends to be a native of that country who has lost his way while hunting (2694–721); to the king's hunting party he presents himself as a merchant's son from Parmenie (3096–123); in Ireland he says he is a merchant by the name of 'Tantris' (7559–606, 8796–869, 9517–44), and with Gandin he assumes the disguise of an Irish harpist (13297–305).¹ All of these stories project fictional identities, which nevertheless are 'vür war vernomen' by the hero's interlocutors and form the basis of his dealings with them. There is however one most important difference between the stories Tristan tells about himself in Ireland and to Gandin and the ones he had invented earlier on in Cornwall: in Ireland, and with Gandin, there is an obvious reason why Tristan should tell lies — he needs to disguise his true identity from his enemies and adversaries; in Cornwall, on the other hand, the motive behind his storytelling is far from clear.

The gratuitous nature of Tristan's tall stories has caused some scholars considerable embarrassment and dismay:

Das Bezeichnende ist, daß bei Tristan kein einziges Mal auch nur der Schein eines Gewissenskonfliktes entsteht: Frisch und fröhlich wird immer sogleich zur Lüge gegriffen. Als z. B. der ausgesetzte und verirrt Tristan den beiden Pilgern begegnet und sie als 'guote liute' erkennt, die ihn nicht in Bedrängnis bringen werden, als also jeder Anlaß gegeben wäre, diesen Pilgern mit offenem Vertrauen entgegenzutreten, da besinnt sich Tristan keinen Augenblick, ihnen statt der Wahrheit ein kluges Lügenmärchen zu erzählen.²

The theory of *argumentum*, of the 'res ficta quae tamen fieri potest' can, I believe, throw some light on these problematic stories within the story.

Tristan's first narrative is triggered off by a question from the pilgrims: 'vil liebez kint, wannen bist du / oder wer hat dich da her braht?' (2690–91). He reflects for a moment before answering:

Tristan der was vil wol bedaht
und sinnesam von sinen tagen,
er begunde in vremediu maere sagen. (2692–94)

He relates that he is a native of these parts and was to have ridden out hunting in the forest that very day; however, without knowing quite how, he became separated from his party and lost his way. His horse bolted and so he made his way on foot along the path that has led him to his present location, which he does not recognize. He asks the pilgrims where they are headed; they reply that they are going to Tintagel and willingly let him come along with them (2695–730).

There are four points to notice about these 'vremediu maere'. First, the story is fabrication, consisting of *res fictae*, from start to finish.³ Second, there is no obvious reason why Tristan should not tell the truth about himself. He has nothing to fear from the pilgrims: although on first catching sight of them he is afraid that they might capture him (2659), once he has observed them more closely he concludes 'diz mugen wol guote liute sin; / ine darf kein angest von in haben' (2668–69). His circumspection and reflexion are thus oddly inappropriate to the situation. Third, the story nevertheless explains plausibly to the pilgrims how he, whose attire and manners reveal him to be a courtier (2672–77, 2739–50), comes to be wandering alone in a forest. Although the narrative is invented, it pays attention to reality. Fourth, the story is effective, in that the pilgrims offer to accompany Tristan to Tintagel and so fulfil his desire to be returned to the security of human society, a desire he had evinced when, not long before this scene, he implored God to bring him back to civilization and proposed to climb a hill in order to survey the surrounding land for signs of habitation (2493–99, 2522–32).

The last two points, the plausibility and expediency of Tristan's storytelling, have been emphasized by Gisela Hollandt. The 'vremediu maere' are said by her to represent Tristan's calculated response to the needs of the moment, which are to satisfy his interlocutors' curiosity by giving some account of himself, and to find shelter in human society; she goes so far as to explain the hero's behaviour in terms of these two features: 'Alle Auskünfte, die er den Wallfahrern gibt, dienen einzig dem Zweck, zur nächsten Wohnstätte zu gelangen. Infolgedessen ist es gleichgültig, was er erfindet, vorausgesetzt, daß es seinem Ziele dient.'⁴ This is really a description of what Tristan does with the pilgrims, not an explanation, because it begs the question why he should go to the trouble of making up a

story at all, when he could easily achieve his aim by telling the truth.⁵ There is something excessive about his behaviour, for the circumstances do not require him to use his inventiveness and ingenuity as he does. Neither the hero's situation nor his character can account for his behaviour adequately: attempts to explain his predilection for inventing stories about himself as a manifestation of his personality as a *homo ludens* fail to convince, because ultimately they rest on the tautology that Tristan tells lies because he is a liar.⁶

The difficulty encountered by critics is, then, that the episode of Tristan and the pilgrims provides no clue about why the hero should invent a story about himself. A fresh perspective on the problem has been suggested by Winfried Christ, who also observes how verisimilar Tristan's stories are and draws a parallel between this and Gottfried's own narrative technique:

Tristan ist wie sein Schöpfer Gottfried nicht Annalist, sondern ein 'vindaere' von 'aventiuiren', und wie bei diesem ist Wahrheit nicht identisch mit positiver Historizität, sondern mit sowohl plausiblem wie bedeutungsvollem Sprechen. Was Tristan gegenüber den Pilgern . . . unternommen hat, scheint also recht genau die Situation des Adapteurs Gottfried abzubilden, nämlich nicht eine Geschichte Wort für Wort, so wie sie vorliegt, nachzuerzählen, sondern auf ihr aufbauend 'sinnesam' und 'sinnecliche' eine Textur zu entwerfen, die sowohl glaubwürdig ist als auch neue Bedeutungen setzt . . . Vor allem in diesem genauen Sinn des 'aventiuire'-Erzählens wird man von Tristan dem Künstler . . . sprechen dürfen, in dem die Situation des Dichters und etwas von der Poetik seines Erzählens gespiegelt erscheint. (*Rhetorik und Roman*, p. 325)

In effect, Christ locates the motivation for Tristan's behaviour outside the logic of the narrated scene, seeking to explain it as a reflexion of the relationship between Gottfried, his work, and his audience. From this point of view, Tristan's ingenuity and circumspection, which seemed excessive and inappropriate to his situation, fall into place: it is really the narrator Gottfried who, through his character Tristan, and at an early stage in the romance, is having his narrative poetics enacted. Where however Christ characterizes the narrative technique of both Gottfried and Tristan as 'plausibles, bedeutungsvolles Sprechen', I would make a specific connexion between their practice and the rhetorical theory of *argumentum*, for fictional and real narrator alike are concerned with representing a 'res ficta quae tamen fieri potest'. I would also want to take Christ's suggestive line of interpretation further and read the scene of Tristan and the pilgrims as a demonstration that is intended above all to give Gottfried's own audience an understanding of their role in the argumentative mode of narration.⁷

A comparison with the same episode as recounted by *Tristrams saga* reveals how Gottfried is at pains to ensure that the hero's tale is plausible. In the saga, Tristram tells the same story about having lost his hunting companions, but when the pilgrims announce that they are on the road to Tintagel, he declares that he has urgent business in that city and powerful friends there, who will give them all a hospitable reception when they arrive.⁸ It is, as Felix Piquet remarks,

'un récit abondant en étrangetés'; it is strange that Tristram should suddenly have pressing business in town when he is supposed to be spending the day out hunting, and it is rash of him to make a promise he cannot be sure of keeping and which, if he does not fulfil it, will expose him as a liar.⁹ If the saga reproduces Tristan's story as it stood in Thomas, Gottfried's source, then the force of Gottfried's adaptation is clear: it omits all the elements that would imperil the success of Tristan's fictional story as a *verisimile argumentum*.¹⁰

If Tristan resembles Gottfried as narrator, might it not also be possible to draw a parallel between the behaviour of the pilgrims, Tristan's fictional audience, and the role Gottfried envisages for his real public? What strikes us first, however, is not so much a parallel as an important difference between the two audiences in respect of how well informed they are. Tristan, unlike his counterpart in the saga, is careful to give an account that his interlocutors can neither verify nor falsify and, indeed, is so plausibly narrated that they have no choice but to believe him. Gottfried's audience, on the other hand, has heard the whole story of the hero's birth and childhood and is in a position to recognize that Tristan is not telling the truth about himself. But the point of this, it seems to me, is not that Gottfried's readers or listeners should allow themselves to feel superior to the pilgrims, who are taken in by Tristan's ingenious narration; there is not even a suggestion that these pious men are intended as figures of fun. Rather, if they compare the pilgrims' situation with their own, they will recognize that, when it comes to determining the truth of any discourse, they rely on the same experimental method as the audience within the narrative. The pilgrims evaluate Tristan's story against what they are able to observe about him and find that his account rings true; Gottfried's audience measures the hero's 'vremediu maere' against what it has already heard about him from Gottfried and finds his story false. The conclusions diverge, but the process by which they are reached is in each case the same: the measuring of each new experience, textual or empirical, against previous such experience. Even if Gottfried's audience can see that Tristan's story is false, it is bound to acknowledge that it is nevertheless a plausible story and, because of this, one that has real effects. The episode of the pilgrims is, it seems to me, an object-lesson in how, in a narrative mode based on verisimilitude, the only reality that matters is virtuality, the reality that consists not in fact, but in the effect of a discourse. The audience recognizes that its experience of the story is the place where meaning is made.

Walter Haug argues that authors of Arthurian romances had difficulty in formulating explicitly the principles of their fictional poetics. The vernacular languages had not yet developed the theoretical vocabulary to express these principles, and the existing Latin terminology was inadequate, since the experimental fiction of romance was an independent creation of vernacular literature that had nothing in common with learned fictional modes such as allegory and intendment. Authors such as Chrétien, Hartmann and Wolfram resorted

instead to adumbrating their new poetics by using Latin terms in a context that made clear how the terminology fell short of what they, the authors, were attempting to do: Chrétien alludes to integumental theory and its premise that the fictional text cloaks a true meaning when he pairs terms such *conte* and *conjointure* (*Erec*) and *matiere* and *san* (*Lancelot*); Hartmann in the prologue to *Iwein* mentions the *lere* to be had from the story and so evokes the *prodesse* of didactic tradition; Wolfram's simile of the bow in *Parzival* takes up a metaphor of biblical exegesis (*Literaturtheorie*, pp. 103–05, 125–26, 167). It seems to me that, faced with the same difficulties, Gottfried could be trying to demonstrate his 'argumentative' poetics by having it enacted within the narrative representation. And indeed, what more appropriate way can there be of explaining this new, experimental mode to an audience than by treating them to a textual experience of it?

Tristan's story about how he became separated from his party becomes narrative reality in the very next episode, in which he and the pilgrims cross paths with King Marke's huntsmen (2759–72). Far from being proof that Tristan was telling the truth, unconsciously, about himself (Jupé, p. 67), the effect of this, to my mind, is to render ambiguous the status of Gottfried's own narrative. How is the audience to know whether Gottfried is following his source (in fact he is, but only the reader who can compare him with Thomas will recognize that)¹¹ or simply incorporating Tristan's fictional account into his own narrative? The distinction between the history told by the narrator and the fable invented by the character is lost, as both levels of narration merge into an identical verisimilitude. Gottfried insists that he is announcing the approach of Marke's huntsmen 'als uns daz ware maere saget' (2763). Here I think he is enjoying a joke: so plausibly has Tristan narrated his 'vremediū maere' that they are a virtual 'warez maere' which he, Gottfried, might as well use himself. As Tristan continues to reinvent his identity for Marke's courtiers, we enter deeper into a narrative world whose reality is constituted by verisimilitude.

The huntsmen are curious to know who the foreigner, who teaches them new and sophisticated arts of the chase, is and where he comes from (3084–89). Tristan anticipates a direct question and prepares to tell another story about himself:

diz nam in sine trahte
 der sinnesame Tristan.
 vil sinnecliche er aber began
 sin aventiure vinden.
 sin rede diun was kinden
 niht gelich noch sus noch so. (3090–95)

'Vinden' calls to mind the rhetorical term *inventio*, defined by the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (1.2.3) as 'excogitatio rerum verarum aut veri similibium, quae causam probabilem reddunt'. Again Tristan's story is fictional, and once more the

resourcefulness and cunning that he puts into his narration are out of keeping with his character and his circumstances: his tale is far in excess of what one might expect of the average fourteen-year-old and, since he has already won the admiration of the Cornishmen, who feel privileged to have made his acquaintance, there is little reason for him to be so guarded with them.

It is plain that Tristan cannot repeat the story he had told the pilgrims if he wants to be believed. Accordingly, he invents another tale to suit his new audience. He tells them that he comes from Parmenie, where his father is a merchant who saw to it that he received a good education. The visits of foreign traders kindled in him a longing to see the world, until he ran away from home and sailed with merchants to Cornwall (3097–123). This narrative covers all the points about which the Cornishmen might be curious, and gives a plausible explanation of them. Unlike the first of Tristan's stories, it is not completely invented: it is true that Tristan comes from Parmenie; his father, admittedly no merchant, did devote great care to his son's education; and he was indeed brought to Cornwall by merchants, though not of his own free will, as he represents. His account is a fictional elaboration of his history, taking elements from reality and setting them in a new context. Both Bernard of Utrecht and Conrad of Hirsau allow that the poet's vocation may consist in making a mixture of true and false: 'poetae sunt qui falsa immiscent veris: poetes enim fictor vel formator sonare videtur', 'poeta fictor vel formator dicitur, eo quod vel pro veris falsa dicat vel falsis interdum vera commisceat' (Huygens (1970), pp. 59, 75). There is thus some theoretical recognition of a kind of poetry that, like Tristan's 'aventure', is an imaginative reworking of history.

Like Gottfried with his argumentative transformation of the archival account of the fight with Morold (see above, pp. 104–07), Tristan has succeeded in refashioning his inherited identity into a new, experimental one, which is accepted by his audience because to them it sounds 'vür war'. Tristan is aware of how the truth-value of his story depends on its reception; he concludes it with the words 'nu habet ir al min dinc vernomen. / ine weiz, wiez iu gevalle' (3122–23). If the story is felicitous, and corresponds to the public's expectations of verisimilitude, it will be as good as the truth.¹² As if to emphasize that the virtual truth of a fiction is realized in its reception, Gottfried devotes great attention to the huntsmen's reactions to the story. Tristan's representation of the circumstances of his leaving Parmenie surrounds him with an aura of venturesomeness, which endears him to his listeners:

'a trut kint' sprachens alle
 'ez was an dir ein edeler muot.
 unkünde ist manegem herzen guot
 und leret maneger hande tugent.' (3124–27)

The Cornishmen evidently believe the story: they react with words of wonderment and praise for the country where there are merchants who show so

much concern for the education of their sons (3128–33), and a little later they repeat the same narrative to King Marke (3277–82). Despite the occasional hint of skepticism, nobody at the Cornish court calls Tristan's assumed identity into question (3283–88, 3599–600). It is as a merchant's son that he rises, with great rapidity, to high position at court; first he is appointed master huntsman (3370), and finally he becomes an intimate companion, or 'trut gesinde', of the king (3725, 3743). The status Tristan attains is very real; the account of the early stages of his career at Marke's court is thus an illustration of how the hero deals effectively with reality on the basis of a fictitious identity.

The truth catches up with Tristan, however, when his foster-father Rual arrives in Cornwall and reveals to king and court who the merchant's son from Parmenie really is. To Marke's question 'wer ist Tristan?' (4170) Rual replies with a lachrymary account of Tristan's life 'gar von ende her' (4263), from Riwalin's first arrival in Cornwall to his own travels in search of his abducted foster-son (4172–261). This is a very different kind of story from the ones Tristan had been telling; its truth-value is a function not of its plausibility (indeed to the court Rual's tale must appear more extravagant than anything Tristan has hitherto invented), but of its historicity, which is guaranteed by a token, the ring that Rual produces and once belonged to Blanscheflur. Marke immediately recognizes the ring as the one he had inherited from his father and given to her; he now has no doubt that Rual is telling the truth and Tristan is his sister's son (4284–98). Rual's revelation of the truth calls a halt to Tristan's playing with fictitious identities, for the time being at least; his identity fixed, he loses the freedom to manage his relations with the rest of society on a basis of his making. In the next phase of his career, which begins with his investiture as knight, he is seen discharging the duties that attend his true station in life: he avenges his father and settles his affairs in Parmenie. The play with identity only resumes when he has a new audience, in Ireland.

Rual's story is a revelation not only to the court, but also to Tristan himself, who discovers that what he had believed to be his true identity, namely that he was Rual's son, is a fiction. He has lost 'vater unde vaterwan' (4231, 4371), has learned of the death of Riwalin, his real father, and been robbed of the illusion that his father was Rual. Now, at the latest, it should be clear that truth and falsehood are not appropriate terms to apply to Tristan's previous story-telling, since he could never have told the truth even if he had wanted to; he had only the choice between one verisimilar account or another. What he had thought of as the truth about himself was in fact a fiction, made plausible by Rual's careful efforts to ensure that he and his wife were seen to be observing all the rites and duties of parenthood, from Floraete's simulated confinement, labour and churching to the baptism, nurture and education of their foster-son. In this way all the world, including Tristan, believes that things are as they have been made to appear (1894–2148). As we witness the shedding of Tristan's illusions, we are

also reminded of the finiteness of human perception, a theme that was already present in the scene with the pilgrims, when Gottfried's audience had the opportunity of comparing its situation with the pilgrims' and recognizing that there can be no absolute guarantee that what one is hearing (or telling) is the truth, because knowledge is limited by experience. Rual is in the privileged position of having experienced it all, and in this respect he is like the narrator who knows the world he has created. Indeed, Gottfried stresses the resemblance between Rual and himself when he remarks that Rual tells the tale 'als ich iu e seite' (4245). But Gottfried's narrative world, which Rual knows, is not an entirely historical world reconstructed from the archive; it is an experimental and argumentative treatment of history, and the historicity of Rual's account is a function of its identity with this narrative world. Viewed solely from the perspective of its relationship to Tristan's stories, Rual's tale appears as the truth that dispels fiction, but from the perspective of its relationship to Gottfried's story, it is just another argument which differs from all the other accounts of Tristan's identity we have been treated to only in so far as it is the one that coincides with the master-argument of the author.

Marke and his court are evidently unconcerned about the difference between truth and falsehood. Tristan is not even rebuked for having lied to them. On the contrary, the prevailing mood is that 'all's well that ends well' (4358–59). Rual points out to his foster-son that he will enjoy more than adequate compensation for his loss of 'vater unde vaterwan':

ja bistu von der künfte min
 werder, dan du wandest sin,
 und bist ir geret iemer me
 und hast doch zwene veter als e,
 hie minen herren unde mich. (4381–85)

Indeed, the position at court to which Tristan had advanced as the son of the obscure merchant from Parmenie is not undone, but enhanced, as now in addition he will reap the benefits of being the king's nephew: Marke assumes his new responsibilities as uncle by declaring he will place his land, people and property at Tristan's disposal; shortly afterwards, when Tristan has been dubbed a knight, he announces that he is to be his heir (4446–88; 5152–61). By its actions, the court allows both versions of Tristan's identity, the true and the fictitious, to stand. Tristan's new position, made possible by Rual's revelation of the truth, is not a radical break with, but rather a culmination of, the brilliant career that had begun under false pretences. Fiction and truth evidently rank as equals in the creation of social relationships.

In a recent study of the poetics of Old French lyric and narrative Sylvia Huot describes what I have been calling archival narrative poetics in terms of a lineage

of texts: 'The conventional romance narrator of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries mediates between his audience and a real or posited preexistent text or texts, usually identified in books and often in Latin.'¹³ The story's present teller is merely the latest in an entire line of narrators who have handed it down through successive generations of books. Furthermore, as Huot points out, many of the narratives are themselves stories of succession, not of books, but of the heroes whose genealogies are traced backwards and forwards in time. This genealogical consistency also runs through manuscript compilations of several narratives:

To the succession of writers such as that leading from Homer, Dictys and Dares through Benoît de Sainte-Maure to the scribe Jehan Madot, there corresponds a succession of heroes such as that leading from Priam, Hector and Aeneas through Brutus and the Roman Caesars to the houses of medieval Europe. Textual and historical continuity — the history of civilization itself — are striking themes of many romance anthologies. (Huot, p. 85)

In medieval German narrative writing this correspondence between the lineage of the book on the one hand and the lineage of the hero on the other is forcefully illustrated by Heinrich von Veldeke's *Eneasroman*. The narrative closes with an exhaustive genealogy of Aeneas, listing all his descendants, the kings and emperors of Rome, down to the time of Augustus, which Veldeke sees as the turning-point in human history because it was during this reign that God's incarnation took place.¹⁴ This section is immediately followed by the epilogue, in which Veldeke identifies himself as the author of this epic, which he read in French books (he presumably means the *Roman d'Eneas*) which in their turn are based on the *Aeneid*. The truth of his story depends on the truth of his sources, which, following the tradition of archival topics, he claims to have followed scrupulously.¹⁵ What is most striking about this passage is the ease with which Veldeke can move from enumerating the royal and imperial line inaugurated by Aeneas to setting out the textual lineage of the story, which leads from Virgil, through the *Roman d'Eneas*, to the present German book.

With Gottfried we witness a turn away from the textual and genealogical continuity of which Huot speaks and which Veldeke so neatly exemplifies. Our analysis of archival topics in *Tristan* showed that it was impossible to trace an unbroken line of descent from the *istorje* and the *geste*, the sources Gottfried claims to have used, to his own *senemaere*, or from the unnamed book he mentions in the prologue to his personal 'lesen von disem senemaere' (see above, pp. 49–53). As far as the lineage of the hero is concerned, one of the most striking things about *Tristan* is that he is constantly breaking away from his origins and along with it the fixed identity and social position that are conferred by being the scion of a noble house. He refuses the role of Rual's son: once in Cornwall he shows no desire to return to Parmenie, preferring to invent a new identity for himself and stay at Marke's court. He is also reluctant to play the

part of Riwalin's son for any length of time: no sooner has he returned to Parmenie and avenged his father's death than he assembles his people and announces to them that he is leaving his hereditary possessions in the hands of Rual and his sons, while he will follow his uncle's wish and return to Cornwall (5746–811). Yet for all that he displays no particularly strong attachment to his position as king's heir and nephew: he is quite ready to renounce his rights in order to avoid the jealousy and hatred of Marke's barons (8379–85, 8426–32). Tristan is a hero who denies ties of kinship, who moves from land to land without putting down roots, often under the guise of merchant and minstrel, professions that symbolize this very rootlessness; on his first trip to Ireland he professes to be a 'höfscher spilman' turned merchant venturer (7560–73), and on the second, when he again pretends to be a merchant, he describes the hazardousness of his lifestyle to the queen thus:

nu ist ez uns also gewant:
wir müezen dicke vremediū lant
heinlichen unde buwen
und enwizzen wem getruwen. (9527–30)

Tristan ends his days in exile, indeed throughout his career is characterized by Gottfried as 'der ellende' (2483, 2487, 2862, 2921 ('der ellende gast'), 3254, 8215, 8876, 18752).¹⁶ He leaves no heir, for his relationships with women are childless.

Tristan does not continue his line biologically; he perpetuates himself instead in his art. Near the point at which Gottfried's narrative breaks off, during the hero's exile in Arundel, he is depicted as he passes the time composing lays and melodies, which have been popular ('wol geminnet') ever since (19196–99). One of his compositions is singled out for special attention:

er vant ouch zuo der selben zit
den edelen leich Tristanden,
den man in allen landen
so lieben und so werden hat,
die wile und disiu werlt gestat. (19200–04)

Tristan's *memoria aeterna* or *perpetua* is ensured not by the continuity of his lineage down to the present day, nor by his commemoration in historiography (the provenance of these *topoi*; see above, p. 55), but by what he has invented ('vinden') about himself. It is interesting that Tristan's self-testimony is not a written memorial which, preserved in some archive, will be used by later authors as the source of their retellings of the story; as a musical composition the lay is essentially something that lives by its continuing realization and appreciation in performance. And it is precisely as a performer that Tristan, the composer of this lay, had led his own life. Ingrid Hahn uses explicitly theatrical terms to describe the typical relationship of Tristan to other characters in Gottfried's romance:

Sein Verhältnis zu den Personen seiner höfischen Umwelt ist vielmehr das von Akteur und Zuschauern. Von Anfang bis Ende der Dichtung, vom Schachspiel mit den Norwegern (2270–95) bis zu dem Gesangsvortrag am Hof zu Karke (19205–21), steht Tristan immer wieder im Mittelpunkt einer solchen bewundernden Zuschauerschar.¹⁷

The lay of Tristan, repeatedly realized and renewed in performance, is the fitting signature of a hero who throughout his life re-invents his identity for each new audience he encounters. After the self-inventions in Cornwall, which we have discussed at some length, come the stories he tells in Ireland as the minstrel-cum-merchant Tantris (7559–606, 8796–869, 9517–44); his final exile, recounted in the fragments of Thomas, is punctuated by his visits to Isolde, disguised first as a pilgrim, then a leper, then a penitent.¹⁸

Tristan with his identity, Gottfried with his narrative: what they have in common is that they adapt what they have inherited from the past to the horizons of the present and there invent new identities, new meanings. Tristan's inherited identity — and this comes to include images of himself he has previously projected — constitutes an archive or repertoire of material with which he experiments. Thus the 'aventure' he narrates to the huntsmen makes use of the historical facts that he is a native of Parmenie and his father took care of his education; his disguise in Ireland as a courtly minstrel whose music beguiles all who hear it builds on a role he has already played at Marke's court (3547–645; 7513–23). Tristan's identity is always experimental, a function of the time and place of his performance, for he is as he perceives circumstances allow him to be and as his audience experiences him. Likewise Gottfried is the narrator who is 'zitic ze lebene' (42), conscious of living in the present, and 'gewerldet' (44), existing in and for the world of his contemporaries; for their sake he has undertaken to tell the story of Tristan and Isolde (45–46), calling it up from the archive and renewing it, experimentally and argumentatively, for the audience of 'edele herzen' in whose world above all he wishes to be 'gewerldet' (65). As with Tristan's lay so with Gottfried's romance it is in the ever-contemporary horizons of its reception that the story becomes 'süeze und iemer niuwe' (219). Tristan and Isolde, long dead though they are for Gottfried and his audience (222), are perpetuated in a literary afterlife that is not to be confused with the continuity of the textual transmission of their story; rather this afterlife is the result of the story's continuing to have meaning in the consciousness of successive generations of readers and listeners. This is what Gottfried wishes to ensure through his poetics, which is aimed at opening the archival matter of Tristan and Isolde to experimental significance, and it is this process of the old story's coming to life again with each new experience of its narration that I think he is trying to capture with his eucharistic metaphor in the prologue. As long as their story, which is bread — life-giving sustenance — for the noble hearts, continues to be heard and told, Tristan and Isolde live:

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.
 wir lesen ir leben, wir lesen ir tot
 und ist uns daz süeze also brot.
 ir leben, ir tot sint unser brot.
 sus lebet ir leben, sus lebet ir tot.
 sus lebet si noch und sint doch tot
 und ist ir tot der lebenden brot. (230–40)

NOTES TO CHAPTER SEVEN

1. See Siegfried Grosse, 'Vremdiu maere: Tristans Herkunftsberichte', *WW*, 20 (1970), 289–302.
2. Georg Keferstein, 'Die Entwertung der höfischen Gesellschaft im Tristan Gottfrieds von Straßburg', *GRM*, 24 (1936), 421–40 (p. 437). His judgment is typical of the moral repugnance expressed by earlier scholars of Gottfried at the hero's use of cunning and ruse; see Rosemary Picozzi, *A History of Tristan Scholarship*, Kanadische Studien zur deutschen Sprache und Literatur, 5 (Berne and Frankfurt, 1971), pp. 82–88, and Reiner Dietz, *Der 'Tristan' Gottfrieds von Straßburg: Probleme der Forschung (1902–1970)*, *GAG*, 136 (Göppingen, 1974), pp. 139–51.
3. Tristan's statement 'von diesem lande ich bürtic bin' (2696) is considered by Wolfgang Jupé to be the truth: 'Damit sagt er, wenn auch unbewußt, die Wahrheit, er ist tatsächlich aus diesem Lande gebürtig. Demzufolge treffen auch die anderen Verse auf ihn zu' (*Die 'List' im Tristanroman Gottfrieds von Straßburg: Intellektualität und Liebe oder die Suche nach dem Wesen der individuellen Existenz* (Heidelberg, 1976), p. 64). This would mean interpreting *gebürtic* broadly, 'having close ties through birth', and not in the narrow sense of actually being born in a certain place (it is true that Tristan's mother came from Cornwall and that he was conceived there); even so, it does not follow that because one thing a person says happens to be true, everything else must be as well.
4. Gisela Hollandt, *Die Hauptgestalten in Gottfrieds Tristan: Wesenszüge — Handlungsfunktion — Motiv der List*, *PhStQ*, 30 (Berlin, 1966), pp. 84–86 (p. 85).
5. Grosse, p. 294; Jupé, p. 64.
6. George T. Gillespie ('Why Does Tristan Lie? A Study of Deception in Gottfried's *Tristan*, with Some Reference to Felix Krull and Other Writings of Thomas Mann', *Trivium*, 12 (1977), 75–91) seeks to answer the question with an appeal to Huizinga's concept of the play instinct in man (see p. 88 in particular). This describes Tristan's behaviour, it does not explain it.
7. Christ does remark once that 'Der höfische Roman hat sich darum zwischen den Kategorien der "historia" und der "fabula" auf der Ebene des "argumentum" angesiedelt' (p. 327), but does not really exploit this insight to the full: the only source he mentions for the theory of *argumentum* is the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, and he does not draw connexions between the theory and specific aspects of Gottfried's narrative practice in individual scenes.
8. *Tristrams saga ok Isondar*, edited by Eugen Kölbing, p. 21 (chapter 20): "'Vinir", kvað hann, "ek em af þessu landi ok félagá minna leitandi, ok em ek öngan þeirra finnandi. Vér várum hér ídag at veiðum ok hafa þeir fylgt dýrunum, en ek em einn eptir, ok munu þeir brátt hér koma á þenna veg, sem vér heiman förum. Nu segit mér, hvert þér stefnit ok hvar þér vilit niðr koma, ok munum vér svá fylgjast at mínum vilja!" Þeir svöruðu: "Í Tintajölborg vildum vér herbergjast." Þá mælti Tristram: "Ek hefi ok þangat skylt erindi ok þar fyrir öruggan vina styrk; er vér komum þar at kveldi, vér skulum með guðs vilja finna ríka ok góð hýðili er oss munu gøra nógan góðvilja'.
9. Piquet, *L'Originalité de Gottfried de Strasbourg dans son poème de Tristan et Isolde: Étude de littérature comparée*, *Travaux et Mémoires de l'Université de Lille, Nouvelle Série*, 1, 5 (Lille, 1905), p. 101.
10. Joseph Bédier uses the version of the saga as it stands in his reconstruction of Thomas's original (*Le Roman de Tristan par Thomas*, 1, 42); Piquet remarks of the result of Gottfried's alterations that 'ici tout s'enchaîne, tout est logique et vraisemblable' (p. 103).
11. *Tristrams saga*, p. 21; *Sir Tristrem*, lines 445–51; Bédier, 1, 43.
12. Christ, pp. 324–25. Compare Wolfram's words addressed to his audience: 'ich ensagez iu niht nâch wâne: / gebietet ir, sô ist ez wâr' (*Parzival*, 59, 27–28).

13. Sylvia Huot, *From Song to Book: The Poetics of Writing in Old French Lyric and Lyrical Narrative Poetry* (Cornell, 1987), p. 84.
14. *Eneide*, lines 13321–428. See above, pp. 19–20.
15. Lines 13491–528. The editors (Schieb and Frings) consider the intervening lines 13429–90 inauthentic and follow MS G in placing them after line 13528; see their introduction, p. cv.
16. See Ingrid Hahn, *Raum und Landschaft in Gottfrieds Tristan*, pp. 86–118, for an illuminating discussion of the contrast between ‘die Seßhaften’, such as Marke, who lead settled lives on land, and ‘der ellende gast’ Tristan, whose wandering existence is intimately connected with the sea; also Wolfgang Mohr, “‘Tristan und Isold’ als Künstlerroman”, *Euphorion*, 53 (1959), 153–74 (p. 155).
17. Hahn, *Raum und Landschaft*, p. 84; the classic discussion of Tristan as performer is Mohr, “‘Tristan und Isold’ als Künstlerroman”. Gottfried’s interest in the artist’s relationship with his audience was registered by earlier scholarship; Werner Schwartzkopff for instance remarks on ‘das bei kaum einer wichtigen Szene G.’s fehlende Publikum’ (*Rede und Redeszene in der deutschen Erzählung bis Wolfram von Eschenbach*, Palaestra, 74 (Berlin, 1909), p. 66).
18. *Les Fragments du Roman de Tristan*, first Strassburg fragment (compare *Tristrams saga*, p. 100), Douce Fragment, lines 501–723, 789–834.