

Mad for Love – Chivalric Hero's Deterioration of Mental Health Due to Love

di
Kosana Jovanović

1. Source material

The Tristan story is among the oldest of the French Arthurian romances and is probably one of the most well-known in the modern world. It has generally been agreed that the extant versions of the Tristan romance have been derived from a lost French version of the story, now commonly known as the 'estoire', and dated to the middle of the twelfth century at the latest. There are two existing verse romances that are thought to have been closest to the original: the Middle High German version of Eilhart von Oberg thought to have been composed around 1170,¹ and a French poem, written around the last decade of the twelfth century by Beroul, a poet of Normandy. Regrettably, the only surviving copy of Beroul's version is incomplete, a fragment from the middle of the poem. Historiography concludes that Eilhart's poem, which has survived in three twelfth-century fragmentary manuscripts, three fifteenth-century manuscripts, two of which are complete, and a prose version, corresponds for the most part to the version given by Beroul, although the latter does contain certain episodes not found in Eilhart's poem. It has been suggested that, while how Beroul ended his poem is still a matter of conjecture, the versions of Eilhart and Beroul were both based on a common original.² The poem written by

¹ EILHART VON OBERGE, *Tristrant und Isalde*, DANIELLE BUSCHINGER, WOLFGANG SPIEWOK (eds.), Göppingen, Kümmerle, 1986. For more on the German version of Tristan see in MARIANNE E. KALINKE, "Eilhart von Oberg", in NORRIS J. LACY (ed.) *The New Arthurian Encyclopedia*, New York, Garland, 1991, pp. 127-128.

² BEROUL, *The Romance of Tristan*, introduction and translation by ALAN S. FEDRICK, New York, Penguin Publishing Group, 1978.

an Anglo-Norman cleric known only as Thomas d'Angleterre and believed to have been composed between 1155 and 1185, also only exists in fragmentary form, and, in fact, only 3, 150 lines have survived. This version of the Tristan romance diverges from the others in its courtly treatment of the story and in the psychological approach towards its characters which the author employs.³

Until the rediscovery of Beroul's and Thomas' poems, it was chiefly through the French prose version of Tristan, generally called *Le Roman de Tristan de Leonois*, that the romance of Tristan and Yseut was made known to the modern world. Immensely popular in the Middle Ages, as is evident from the great number of surviving manuscripts, this work of monumental proportions, written between 1215 and the second half of the thirteenth century, only devotes a small portion to the original Tristan story, which it combines with the knightly tradition of Arthurian romance.⁴

The greatest influence upon the composition of the *Prose Tristan* has been judged to have been the *Prose Lancelot* since the author borrowed from this latter many characters and episodes for his romance and has considerably enlarged the character of Tristan to elevate him to the level of Lancelot in matters of chivalry. The *Prose Lancelot*, which comprises *Lancelot proper*, *Queste del Saint Graal*, and *Mort Artu*, was probably written between 1215

³ THOMAS, *Les fragments du Roman de Tristan, poème du XIIIe siècle*, BARTINA H. WIND (ed.), Paris, Minard, Geneva, Droz, 1960. For more on the French versions of Tristan see KEITH BUSBY, JANE H.M. TAYLOR, *French Arthurian Literature* in NORRIS J. LACY (ed.) *A history of Arthurian scholarship*, Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 2006, pp. 95-121.

⁴ *Le Roman de Tristan en prose*, vols. 1-3, RENÉE L. CURTIS (ed.), Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 1963-1985; *Le Roman de Tristan en Prose*, vols. 1-9, PHILIPPE MÉNARD (ed.), Geneva, Droz, 1987-1997; *The Romance of Tristan: The Thirteenth-Century Old French Prose Tristan*, translated by RENÉE L. CURTIS, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994. For more on the prose version of Tristan see KEITH BUSBY, *Prose Tristan* in NORRIS J. LACY (ed.) *The New Arthurian Encyclopaedia*, cit., pp. 374-375.

and 1230, and forms the central part of the *Vulgate Cycle*.⁵ Although there are two other sections of the *Vulgate Cycle* that precede the *Prose Lancelot*, *Estoire del Saint Graal* and *Vulgate Merlin*, these are not considered to have been included in the original plan and are thought to have been added later to round out the *Cycle*. Out of all the five books in the *Vulgate Cycle*, which span over a thousand pages, *Prose Lancelot* occupies the largest part, and its length exceeds the volume of all the other books put together. Although not formally divided into several separate parts, this large corpus of stories within a cycle can be thematically divided into three, sometimes even five parts.⁶ Although part of the *Lancelot* is influenced by Chrétien de Troyes' *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* the Prose version differs from the original as it contains a vital part of the Lancelot story, and that is the search for the Grail.

Chrétien de Troyes wrote *Yvain, Le Chevalier au Lion* between 1177 and 1181, simultaneously with his *Lancelot, Le Chevalier de la Charrette*. It survives in eight manuscripts and two fragments.⁷ Although we do not know the source for this Old French poem, the story seems to bear many similarities to the hagiographical *Life of Saint Mungo* (also known as Saint Kentigern). The *Life* was written by Jocelyn of Furness in c. 1185 and is thus slightly younger than Chrétien's text, but not influenced by it.⁸ *Yvain* had a huge impact on the literary world, with medieval authors from Germany, Wales, England and Scandinavia all comprising their versions of the story.

⁵ *The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances*, vols. 8, OSKAR H. SOMMER (ed.), Washington, Carnegie Institution, 1908-1916. For more on the Vulgate cycle see KEITH BUSBY, JANE H.M. TAYLOR, "French Arthurian Literature" in NORRIS J. LACY (ed.) *A history of Arthurian scholarship*, cit., pp. 95-121.

⁶ See more in ELSPETH KENNEDY, *Lancelot and the Grail: A Study of the Prose Lancelot*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, New York, Clarendon Press 1986.

⁷ CHRÉTIEN DE TROYES, *Le chevalier au lion ou Le roman d'Yvain*, DAVID HULT (ed.), Paris, Lettres Gothiques, 1994. For more on the story of Yvain see KEITH BUSBY, JANE H.M. TAYLOR, *French Arthurian Literature*, in NORRIS J. LACY (ed.) *A history of Arthurian scholarship*, cit., pp. 95-121.

⁸ JOSEPH J. DUGGAN, *Afterword*, in CHRÉTIEN DE TROYES, *Yvain, the Knight of the Lion*, BURTON RAFFEL (ed.), Yale, Yale University Press, 1987.

2. *Madness as a disease in the Middle Ages*

A study of medieval madness requires an analysis of the contemporary understanding of body, mind, and 'bodily spirits'. Not only does such understanding elucidate medical theories of madness, but it is also a necessary primer to considerations of Canon Law. The medieval concept of 'bodily spirits' can be traced back to the Stoic school of the fourth century BC, which was influenced by Aristotle. An answer was needed to the question of how the material body was made physically animate under the control of the immaterial soul. The explanation offered by Stoic philosophers was that the soul operated through the agency of *pneuma* (spiritus), or bodily spirits. These animating spirits could be witnessed by the physician in the air that was breathed in and out of the body. *Pneuma* was material, but its form was finer than that of other elements, allowing it to express the soul's intentions through the physicality of the body. The Stoics placed the source of *pneuma* in the heart (the hydraulic model), but Hippocratic thought located it in the brain and connected it with the three faculties of imagination, reason, and memory.⁹ The Galenic understanding of cognitive processes involved a tripartite model of the brain, where imagination was in the warm and dry front, reason in the warm and moist middle, and memory in the cold and dry back. Thus, the areas of the brain also correspond to three of the four humors (only phlegm is left out), with imagination associated with choler, reason associated with blood (a sanguine nature), and memory associated with melancholy.¹⁰ Isidore of Seville, in his sixth-century *Etymologies*, used the tripartite model of the brain to provide a model of mental illness under the heading of Chronic Diseases, dividing the general category of madness into three specific types: epilepsy, mania, and melancholy, which arise from imagination, memory, and reason, respectively. Bartholomeus Anglicus followed this same effort to tie types of madness to different areas

⁹ CLAIRE TRENER, PEREGRINE HORDEN, *Madness in the Middle Ages* in GREG EGHIGIAN (ed.) *The Routledge History of Madness and Mental Health*, London, Routledge, 2017, p. 64.

¹⁰ ALEKSANDRA PFAU, *Medieval Communities and the Mad - Narratives of Crime and Mental Illness in Late Medieval France*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press B.V., 2021, p. 57.

of the brain, but for him, mania, otherwise known in medical discourse as *amance*, was an injury to the imagination, melancholy was an injury to the reason, and lethargy was an injury to the memory.¹¹

According to the humoral theory, madness, like any other disease, was caused by an imbalance of the humors, but particularly an extreme excess of any one of them. Thus, madness could result from an increasingly serious case of another disease. In this sense, the illness was understood to be physiological. Although madness was concentrated in the brain, where they believed the mind was located, physicians also saw it as a disease that affected the entire body of the individual.¹² Medical texts described four distinct types of madness: frenzy, mania, melancholy, and lethargy, each of which corresponded to an excess in one of the humors. Avicenna's work on melancholy made it the source for all types of madness, breaking down the separation of the humors and explaining that all four humors, when burnt, could turn into melancholy. Each type of burnt humor created a particular type of madness, however, with blood creating joy and laughter, phlegm creating sloth, yellow bile creating frenzied violence, and black bile creating 'great thoughtfulness and less agitation and frenzy except when the patient is provoked and quarrels or nourishes a hatred which he cannot forget'.¹³

Constantine the African's *Liber Pantegni* gives us insight into the symptoms and healing techniques of these afflictions. Frenzy was caused by a hot brain abscess, most often comprised of yellow bile, which upset the natural coolness of the brain. Primarily affecting the imaginative faculty at the front of the head, the face and head would usually become warm to the touch. Sleep was disturbed and the patient could awaken in the night, screaming. In this state of unrest, the patient was prone to bouts of inexplicable laughter or crying and breathlessness. Treatment relied upon the medieval principle that opposites cure, thus the coolness of the brain could be restored by lowering the temperature of the head. One technique

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² EDITH A. WRIGHT, "Medieval attitudes towards mental illness", *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, vol. 7, no. 3, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1939, pp. 352-356.

¹³ ALEKSANDRA PFAU, *Medieval Communities and the Mad - Narratives of Crime and Mental Illness in Late Medieval France*, cit., p. 59.

was to shave the head and drench it in water or oil. If the patient's general health allowed for it, the artery to the head could be phlebotomized to draw hot blood away from the brain.¹⁴ Both mania and melancholy were chronic conditions. Mania was characterized by frantic behaviour. It was associated with the stupor of the mind, a condition also connected with frenzy. Physicians observed that, because the symptoms of mania often seemed inexplicable, the condition could be associated with a demonic or divine activity. One theory put forward by medical writers themselves was that mania was the result of an excessive diet, and thus purgatives that would induce vomiting or sweating were used to restore humoral balance. Melancholy could also result from a humoral imbalance. Excess black bile in the form of vapour could rise from the stomach to the brain, affecting a patient's understanding of the rational faculty. Melancholic patients were often sad and suspicious, and their inability to rationalize the world around them left many in a worrying predicament. Hallucinations and delusions were common, with some patients barking like dogs and others crowing like roosters. Various herbal remedies could be applied with the intention of restoring humoral balance to the patient through purging.¹⁵

¹⁴ CONSTANTINE THE AFRICAN, '*Liber Pantegni*' in ISAAC ISRAELI (ed.) *Opera Omnia*, Lyons, Trot, 1515, pp. I-CXLIV, fol. xlvj., fol. xcviijr.

¹⁵ Ivi, fol. xcicv, fol. xlv, fol. xcixv, fol. xliijv, fol. xlijr, fol. xcixv.

3. *Mad hero trope*

The study of madness in French literature is the focal work of Sylvia Huot, who explores literary madness as a form of 'otherness', which triggered various responses, including 'fascination, fear, laughter, pity, and revulsion'.¹⁶ Huot uses this starting point to unravel the role of the literary madman/madwoman, who could both be employed as a figure of comedy and as a vehicle of tragedy.¹⁷ She also discusses the function of 'madness' as a literary metaphor for 'death'.¹⁸ The mad character 'dies' a symbolic death and a new identity is constructed for him/her, which allows the narrative to take a different trajectory.¹⁹ This was a common trope in Arthurian literature. Madness could be used as a form of redemption for the mad character who, after alienating himself or herself from society, was able to find spiritual renewal.²⁰ Renée Curtis has explored the role of feigned madness in this process.²¹ Madness, even when feigned, resulted in rejection from human society, and thus could act as a moral punishment and a means by which the character could reconnect with God.²²

So how does a hero become afflicted by such illness? The entire plot of a 'mad hero' arises because the hero is driven mad through desperation in his love for the Queen or a lady. Emphasized here is the wild condition of the mad hero. When they believe that they have been slighted in love, these warriors have a way of breaking all bonds, sometimes stripping themselves and, regularly resorting to exile in the woods, expressing their sadness and

¹⁶ SYLVIA HUOT, *Madness in Medieval French Literature: Identities Found and Lost*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 1-9.

¹⁷ Ivi, p. 2.

¹⁸ Ivi, pp. 136-209.

¹⁹ Ivi, p. 180.

²⁰ CORINNE SAUNDERS, "The thoughtful maladie": Madness and Vision in Medieval Writing, in CORINNE SAUNDERS, JANE MACNAUGHTON (eds.) *Madness and Creativity in Literature and Culture*, Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, p. 74.

²¹ RENÉE L. CURTIS, *Tristan forsené: the Episode of the Hero's Madness in the Prose Tristan*, in ALISON ADAMS, ARMEL H. DIVERRES, KAREN STERN, KENNETH VARTY (eds.) *The Changing Face of Arthurian Romance: Essays on Arthurian Romance in Memory of Cedric E. Pickford*, Woodbridge, Boydell, 1986, pp. 10-22.

²² Ivi, p. 11.

degradation by leading the life of the wild man. Having lost the ties that bound them most strongly to courtly society, they find the wilderness the only environment congenial to their sense of disorientation and often shun contact with other humans. Superhuman strength and violent nature are also characteristics of this state.

The motif of the hero's madness in medieval literature is considered within the sphere of study of the literary and artistic creation which denotes the so-called 'wild man'. This originally ape-like version of man came to be dealt with by the medieval writer as a degenerated specimen of humanity, not created by God in this wild state, but reduced to it by floss of mind, by upbringing among beasts, or by outrageous hardships, all conditions which tended to depress man into something less than human. From this view of the 'wild man' arose the introduction of insanity as a rational explanation for the wild man's behaviour.²³ One of the earliest medieval examples of the application of this conception of the insane wild man is Merlin, a creation of Geoffrey of Monmouth, who, in the *Vita Merlini*, describes Merlin's insanity and its cure. The kind of insanity portrayed here is intermittent, punctuated by periods of lucidity.²⁴

Another example of folie present within the Arthurian literature is that of a 'fou' at King's Arthur court, Dagonet. This character appears in the *Lancelot* and *Tristan Prose*, as well as other works, such as *Les Prophecies de Merlin* and *Guiron le Courtois*, and in all of them it embodies another aspect of madness. From being recognised as a 'fou naturel' and 'fol par amour' in *Lancelot* and *Tristan Prose*, this tragic character's destiny becomes a source of amusement, sometimes sent to provoke another knight.²⁵ However, his role changes in *Les Prophecies de Merlin* where this mad hero is given rule over Arthur's court in the king's absence, and here his madness becomes a

²³ For more on the topic of wild man see RICHARD BERNHEIMER, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages, A study in art, sentiment, and demonology*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1952.

²⁴ GEOFFREY OF MONMOUTH, *Life of Merlin (Vita Merlini)*, translated by BASIL CLARKE, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1973, pp. 121–123.

²⁵ *Lancelot do Lac: The Non-Cyclic Old French Prose Romance*, ELSPETH KENNEDY (ed.), Oxford, Clarendon, 1980, pp. 267–268; *Le Roman de Tristan en Prose*, PHILIPPE MÉNARD (ed.), Geneva, Droz, 1987-1997, vol. I, pp. 248-249.

reflection of the decaying court and chivalric values.²⁶ In *Guiron le Courtois* his role is once again transformed into a mad hero who has lost his sanity through the loss of his beloved wife. Here Dagonet becomes 'fol par amour' or mad for love.²⁷

Apart from these examples of folie, a more sophisticated development about mental illness in the courtly romances was the motif of 'love madness', which became a standard cause for the transformation of the hero into a wild man. Yvain, Lancelot, and Tristan are particular examples of this category. When they encounter love problems, these warriors have a way of breaking all bonds, shunning contact with other humans, sometimes stripping themselves naked, and invariably taking camp in the woods, expressing their sadness and degradation by leading the life of the wild man. In the delirium that gripped them, the heroes usually either refuse to eat or drink or survive on the raw flesh of wild animals, which further aggravates the situation. It is interesting to emphasize that the method of refusing food and drink is used as the most common motive to describe the physical deterioration of the character, or possible desire to end their own lives. There they wander aimlessly through the glades, subsisting on wild animals or having the alms handed to them by pious hermits.

But how did the heroes find themselves in such conditions? In the case of Yvain, the hero seeks to avenge his cousin Calogrenant. To avenge his cousin, Yvain defeats the knight who slighted him, Esclados, and in the process falls in love with the knight's widow Laudine. With the aid of Laudine's servant Lunete, Yvain wins his lady and marries her. However, their marital bliss is short-lived because his cousin Gawain convinces him to embark on a chivalric adventure. Laudine assents to her husband's departure but demands he return after a set period of time. Yvain becomes so enthralled in his knightly exploits that he forgets his lady, and Laudine

²⁶ *Les Prophecies de Merlin*, LUCY ANN PATON (ed.), London, OUP, 1926, vol. I, p. 389.

²⁷ *Guiron Le Courtois: Roman Arthurien En Prose Du XIIIe Siècle*, VENCESLAS BUBENICEK (ed.), Berlin, De Gruyter, 2015. For more examples of mad heroes see SARAH LOWSON, *Madness in Medieval Arthurian Literature* in CATHERINE DOUSTEYSSIER-KHOZE, PAUL SCOTT (eds.) *(Ab)Normalities*, Durham, University of Durham, 2001, pp. 77-86.

bars him from returning. Desolate from the refusal of his lady, Yvain goes mad with grief and lives naked in the woods living on wild animals.²⁸

In *Lancelot*, our hero, tricked by a servant named Brisiane into lying with her mistress, the daughter of King Pellès, is discovered in *flagrante delicto* by Guinevere. With the arrival of King Pellès's daughter at court, Guinevere has allowed her and her ladies to share part of her quarters. That same evening, she planned to have Lancelot come to spend the night with her, and these plans are overheard by Brisiane, who, having promised her mistress that she would bring Lancelot to her, pretends to be the Queen's messenger, and takes him to the bed of her mistress. Believing her to be Guinevere, he is duped and only when Guinevere discovers them later, Lancelot realises that he has been tricked. The Queen, naturally enough, believing that her lover has deliberately betrayed her love, harshly rejects him, and dismisses him from her presence forever. Overcome by grief and remorse Lancelot leaves Camelot to wander in the forest nearby.²⁹

Tristan's friend Kahedin, who has fallen in love with the beautiful and gracious Yseut, becomes ill from his love for her and sends her a letter begging her to save his life by returning his affections. Not wishing to offend her lover's friend by harsh rejection nor to lose his friendship, she replies kindly to him. Tristan, however, discovering Yseut's letter of reply, is convinced that she has betrayed him by showing affection for Kahedin, and crazed with jealousy, he attempts to kill his friend. Due to Kahedin's quick action, he fails, but he then confronts Yseut, accusing her of infidelity. Tristan is then banished from court by King Mark for his violent behaviour. Upon his departure from the court, the hero seeks refuge in the forest and spends a period of time there lamenting his misfortune, before finally becoming insane.³⁰

All these incidents arise out of the same circumstances: the hero is driven mad through desperation in his love for the Queen or lady, reducing

²⁸ CHRÉTIEN DE TROYES, *Le chevalier au lion ou Le roman d'Yvain*, cit., pp. 69-80.

²⁹ *The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances*, cit., vol. 5, 380, pp. 15-17.

³⁰ *The Romance of Tristan: The Thirteenth-Century Old French Prose Tristan*, cit., pp. 202-226.

him to a pitiful, almost bestial, state in his insanity, which results from frustrations in his all-consuming love for the Queen or lady.

The parallels between the three stories are most evident in the episode of the hero's time spent in the woods, as a wild man. All three heroes shun their previous chivalrous appearance and became a beast-like madman.

Yvain's madness is caused by a multitude of emotions. He is affected by shame, dishonour, sorrow, regret, and the loss of his lady's love. Yvain's despair is so immediate and deep that he abandons his fellow knights, along with all trappings of knighthood and courtliness, and lives as a wild man in the forest where he hunts with the bow and arrow taken from a villain, consuming his kills raw. Yvain's state is clearly caused by the shock, guilt and despair that suddenly overcame him, and his behaviour can be interpreted as a rejection of courtly society and the expectations placed on knights such as himself.³¹

In the same instances, Lancelot and Tristan also wander the woods, first without any sustenance (Lancelot for three days, and Tristan for eight), and later face even more dire circumstances. The heroes roam like wild animals in the forest, and with Lancelot's condition becoming progressively worse, as does Tristan's, their appearance changes at this point to approximate that of a 'wild man'. Dishevelled, malnourished from eating raw animals, naked or dressed in rags the heroes abandon every aspect of their past lives, and slowly descend into madness. In their utter despair at their mental state, the heroes sometimes attempt drastic measures. For instance, Tristan tries to commit suicide, but finding no weapon with which to do away with himself, he finally becomes completely insane.³²

The violent nature of these heroes is often emphasized during these episodes. The heroes engage in several battles, with men, animals (Lancelot with a boar), or even mythical creatures (Yvain with a dragon, Tristan with a giant), resulting more often than not in heroes being harmed. Mad

³¹ ALEXANDRIA KRAUSE, *The Problem of Chivalry: Yvain's Suffering in Chrétien de Troyes' Le Chevalier au Lion*, in ANJA A. DRAUTZBURG, JACKSON OLDFIELD (eds.) *Making Sense of Suffering: A Collective Attempt*, London, Brill, 2013, pp. 107-116.

³² *The Romance of Tristan: The Thirteenth-Century Old French Prose Tristan*, cit., p. 229.

heroes often respond violently and challenge sometimes completely non-threatening characters to unnecessary combat, which the heroes mostly fail to win.

These wild men often lament their misfortunes, attracting attention. Some of that attention is unwanted by the hero, who, even in the state of progressing madness, still holds a modicum of lucidity. Tristan's lamentations for example attract the attention and pity of a maiden, who tries to comfort the sorrowing hero, but those unwanted attentions are repeatedly rejected.³³ However, sometimes the offered help is well received by the hero. They mostly stumble upon a benefactor or a hermit that provides assistance or in some cases even cures the hero of his madness. During his wanderings, Lancelot arrives at Bliant's tent, and Bliant decides that it could be a good deed to try to cure him of his madness. On the advice of his brother, Bliant takes Lancelot to his castle and takes care of him for two years.³⁴ Similarly, Tristan also resides with a benefactor for some time.

However, after a period of time, the heroes in their frail mental state abandon their benefactors. Lancelot leaves Bliant's castle in pursuit of a boar with an insane urge to overcome it. In this ill-matched combat, Lancelot is almost killed by the boar which, having mauled to death the hounds that pursued it, as well as Lancelot's horse, turns on Lancelot, who is seriously wounded in the thigh before being able to kill the wild animal.³⁵

In a similarly uneven combat, Tristan begins to contend with a giant, Taulas de la Montagne. Yseut has previously forbidden Tristan to fight this giant, fearing for her lover's life. Taulas, however, having learned that Tristan is missing, and quite possibly dead, gives free rein to his wrath, doing as much damage as he can in Cornoaille, an activity hitherto prevented by his great fear of Tristan. He attacks a knight at the fountain frequented by Tristan and the shepherds, and so Tristan, goaded by the shepherds, attacks Taulas.³⁶ His madness accounts for the facility with which they can persuade him.

³³ Ivi, p. 231.

³⁴ *The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances*, cit., vol. 5, pp. 17-20.

³⁵ Ivi, pp. 1-5.

³⁶ *The Romance of Tristan: The Thirteenth-Century Old French Prose Tristan*, cit., pp. 290-292.

As a result of his wounds, Lancelot is unable to rise to his feet, and he is offered assistance by a hermit who asks him to accompany him to his hermitage for aid for his wounds. Lancelot refuses violently and the hermit realises he is mad and has even more pity for him. He has Lancelot brought to the hermitage regardless, where he is taken care of.³⁷ Tristan also encounters a hermit who gives him food,³⁸ and this occurrence parallels more directly that described in Chretien de Troyes *Le Chevalier de la Charette*.

As can be observed, the hermit, in both instances, willingly helps the mad hero and risks his life to save the hero from himself, as, for example, in the case where the hermit takes Tristan's sword from him.³⁹ In *Lancelot*, however, the hermit takes much more care of the ailing Lancelot and eventually cures him of his wounds.⁴⁰

After he departs from the hermitage, Lancelot makes his way to Corbenic, where, when it is noticed that he is insane, he is mocked.⁴¹ Tristan is similarly received when he arrives in Tintagel. Mark, who has not yet recognised his nephew, takes him back to court, so that he may serve as an amusing diversion, a jester.⁴²

Finally, the hero is recognised and is cured of his madness. In the case of Yvain, the hero is cured by Morgan's healing balm rubbed on his temples. Yvain is helped out of his melancholy through the power of massage.⁴³ Interestingly, in some of the versions of the Yvain story, he is depicted as Morgan's son.

In another heroic episode, Yvain rescues a lion from a dragon, and the wild animal proves to be a loyal companion as well as a symbol of knightly

³⁷ *The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances*, cit., vol. 5, pp. 26-29.

³⁸ *The Romance of Tristan: The Thirteenth-Century Old French Prose Tristan*, cit., p. 289.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances*, cit., vol. 5, pp. 34-37.

⁴¹ *Ivi*, pp. 5-19.

⁴² *The Romance of Tristan: The Thirteenth-Century Old French Prose Tristan*, cit., p. 301.

⁴³ 'She rubbed so well in that hot sun his temples and his whole body, that from his brain issued all the rage and the melancholy'. CHRÉTIEN DE TROYES, *Le chevalier au lion ou Le roman d'Yvain*, cit., pp. 79-80.

virtue and helps him complete his quest, which includes defeating the giant Harpins and two demons. A cured hero, along with his faithful companion, the lion, returns to his wife.⁴⁴ Interestingly, it is the women of the tale and not Yvain's comrades-in-arms who restore him to his former state and reconcile him with Laudine, as without their wisdom and noble actions, Yvain would remain in a state of suffering.⁴⁵

In Lancelot's case, it is King Pelles's daughter who recognises the hero. He is taken to the Corbenic (Palais Aventureux) where he is miraculously cured of his insanity by the Holy Grail.⁴⁶ Less spectacularly perhaps, Tristan is recognised by his faithful dog Hudenc and sometime after this, a cure is effected for him by Yseut. Tristan is so changed by his suffering and long separation from his love that he is actually mad, or on the point of madness. This explains why even Yseut cannot recognize him, as he appears so weakened, vulgar, and dishevelled due to his reduced state.⁴⁷

After he is cured, the hero sometimes leaves and goes into exile. In Lancelot's case, exile is self-imposed. On awakening after a night's sleep in the Palais Aventureux (Corbenic), Lancelot learns of the condition he has been in, and, humiliated and ashamed, he decides that he cannot return to Logres without the Queen's permission but must retreat alone to hide his shame.⁴⁸ He retires to the Isle de Joie accompanied only by King Pelles's daughter. Tristan however is forced into exile by Mark, who commands him to leave Cornoaille forever. Accompanied by his companion Gouvernal, he sets off for King Arthur's court.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Ivi, pp. 111-120.

⁴⁵ ALEXANDRIA KRAUSE, *The Problem of Chivalry: Yvain's Suffering in Chrétien de Troyes' Le Chevalier au Lion*, cit., pp. 107-116.

⁴⁶ *The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances*, cit., vol. 5, pp. 5-30.

⁴⁷ *The Romance of Tristan: The Thirteenth-Century Old French Prose Tristan*, cit., pp. 296-297.

⁴⁸ *The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances*, cit., vol. 5, pp. 15-20.

⁴⁹ *The Romance of Tristan: The Thirteenth-Century Old French Prose Tristan*, cit., pp. 298-304.

4. Mad for love and love mad

As shown earlier in the paper, the Middle Ages regarded psychosis and mental illness as curable illnesses, caused primarily by an emotional upset, but frequently complicated by physical elements. In line with this perspective medieval romances reflected the views on mental illness. The romances presented both physical and emotional causes for the state of insanity, and accordingly often advised a combination of physical and mental treatment such as sleep, rest, baths, ointments, etc. In addition, a magical aspect of curing the illness is not uncommon.

Out of the four distinct types of madness that medieval physicians considered (frenzy, mania, melancholy, and lethargy) our heroes display all four. Melancholy is the most common type of madness present in romances, with the heroes' exhibiting signs of sadness, emotional instability and most of all irrational, often violent, behaviour. These "betrayed" knights demand that they be left alone so that they can mourn the love they consider lost. Gradually, such behaviour, where they slowly withdraw from their social surroundings, i.e. now enter the shadow realm, will lead them to forget and deviate from their own identity, living literally and figuratively on the edge of society. Thus, they now become those who reject social conventions and orders, and in their disturbed state of mind live like half-humans, savages.

However, the romance narratives also provide them with opportunities to regain their identity and re-express their courage and values. By affording defence to their benefactors who are slowly healing them, they are reintroduced into the society from which they fled for love. This draws a parallel between the selfless love shown to the knights by their saviours, which has no romantic connotation, and the selfish one. The first type of love returns the knight to the right path, towards the realization of the knightly ideal, while the other, the selfish or romantic one, by its destructive nature, distances him from that ideal.

Furthermore, as medieval medical texts suggest, there must be a remedy implemented so that the hero can be brought back to his original state of mind and body, be it herbal remedies or magical interventions. As is the case with Yvain, there is a suggestion of fullness, where the melancholy

and rage filled his brain and must therefore be removed by a medicinal remedy so that he can return to his balanced state. In addition, a connection between mental disturbance and emotion as rage and melancholy were both also associated with passions. The same can be seen in the Tristan and Lancelot stories, driven mad by love problems these heroes experience a mental breakdown, that must be cured by a remedy. Tristan receives a cure when he drinks a potion made and administered by Yseut, while Lancelot is cured by the mere presence of the Holy Grail.

As shown earlier the predominant cause of the heroes' madness and wild-man state is love or lack thereof. Incidentally, the narratives once again fall in line with the medieval medical practice of opposites cure, and state that the hero can be fully cured only by receiving the love he once lost. This brings us to question whether the narratives were moralizing about heroes, who construct a part of their chivalric identity as suffering protagonists, aided and abetted by love, or do they simply view them as men who descend into madness because of unrequited love? The narratives suggest that the romance's reasoning leans towards the first premise as they emphasize the cathartic transformation of the hero after his wild-man episode. This transformation is in turn with the chivalric ideal, which requests the hero to display faith, prudence, temperance, truth, diligence, and valour, to name a few. Without the suffering caused by love, the hero would not become mad, and subsequently, there would be no need for a transformative step towards his embodying the true essence of a chivalric ideal.

In conclusion, we can state that the three stories, although different in their narratives possess a certain degree of similarity in that they attempt to convey particular messages to their intended audiences. To connect the three main points of this thesis, madness as the heroes' true identity, madness seen as a pivotal moment in the heroes' transformation, and madness understood as a panacea for the heroes' illness, we can draw a parallel with Foucault's view on madness and the way it is perceived as a social construct.⁵⁰ At first,

⁵⁰ MICHEL FOUCAULT, *History of Madness*, translated by JONATHAN MURPHY, JEAN KHALFA, New York – London, Routledge, 2006, pp. 100-135.

madness was thought of as a physiological problem, like other diseases that affected the body. As we mentioned earlier in the text, during the Middle Ages theories developed of nerve damage and humors, or fluids circulating in the body that might get blocked and lead to madness. Eventually, Foucault states, madness was viewed as a more psychological phenomenon, related to people's mental lives rather than physical bodies. This led to theories about becoming mad out of a feeling of guilt over something they had done wrong, for instance. Such a psychological view also made it possible to think of madness as a sign of moral failure, more than physiological weakness. But at the same time, Foucault argues, this distinction which is apparent to us today was blurred during the defined by him as the classical period. That's because madness was thought of as a language that included the body and the mind together. During the Middle Ages madness was taught as something divine and sacred, and thus something beyond reason. Madness is usually defined as something outside of civilization, something that breaks from the social norm, equating madmen with poor vagabonds, criminals, and deranged minds. If we associate this theory with the presented narratives, we can see the resemblance. The isolation, shunning any social contact, transforming into a beastlike state, and transforming their appearance and speech to the point of being unrecognizable gave the heroes a way to reform their past lives. This madness is portrayed as a hero's true, albeit hidden state, which causes madness to become a part of his identity for this moment in the story. This makes sense as a hero is madly in love, as is seen by his symptoms of lovesickness and losing any ability to reason. This madness serves also as a transition point, allowing the hero to lose all aspects of his humanity in order to construct himself anew. This is most evident in Yvain where the new identity and name the hero makes for himself as the Knight with the Lion is reflective of such a change, eventually serving to bring him back into the graces of Laudine. And lastly, love is the cause of the hero's mental deterioration and his subsequent descent into insanity, but it also presents itself as a cure for the mad hero, regardless if that love represents a quasi-maternal love (Yvain-Morgan), a transcendent love (Lancelot-Holy Grail), or the love of an unattainable lady (Tristan-Yseut). Love, as a way of curing

the hero of this wretched state, signals his re-entrance into society at which point the stabilization of the social structure occurs.

Bibliography

RICHARD BERNHEIMER, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages, A Study in Art, Sentiment, and Demonology*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1952.

BEROUL, *The Romance of Tristan*, introduction and translation by ALAN S. FEDRICK, New York, Penguin Publishing Group, 1978.

KEITH BUSBY, JANE H.M. TAYLOR, *French Arthurian Literature*, in NORRIS J. LACY (ed.) *A history of Arthurian scholarship*, Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 2006, pp. 95-121.

KEITH BUSBY, *Prose Tristan* in NORRIS J. LACY (ed.) *The New Arthurian Encyclopedia*, Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 2006, pp. 374-375.

CHRÉTIEN DE TROYES, *Le chevalier au lion ou Le roman d'Yvain*, DAVID HULT (ed.), Paris, Lettres Gothiques, 1994.

CONSTANTINE THE AFRICAN, 'Liber Pantegni,' in ISAAC ISRAELI (ed.) *Opera Omnia*, Lyons, Trot, 1515, pp. I-CXLIV.

RENÉE L. CURTIS, *Tristan forséné: the Episode of the Hero's Madness in the Prose Tristan*, in ALISON ADAMS, ARMEL H. DIVERRES, KAREN STERN, KENNETH VARTY (eds.) *The Changing Face of Arthurian Romance: Essays on Arthurian Romance in Memory of Cedric E. Pickford*, Woodbridge, Boyell, 1986, pp. 10-22.

JOSEPH J. DUGGAN *Afterword* in CHRÉTIEN DE TROYES, *Yvain, the Knight of the Lion*, BURTON RAFFEL (ed.), Yale, Yale University Press, 1987.

EILHART VON OBERGE, *Tristrant und Isalde*, DANIELLE BUSCHINGER, WOLFGANG SPIEWOK (eds.) Göppingen, Kümmerle, 1986.

MICHEL FOUCAULT, *History of Madness*, translated by JONATHAN MURPHY, JEAN KHALFA, New York – London, Routledge, 2006.

GEOFFREY OF MONMOUTH, *Life of Merlin (Vita Merlini)*, translated by BASIL CLARKE, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1973.

- Guiron Le Courtois: Roman Arthurien En Prose Du XIIIe Siècle*, VENCESLAS BUBENICEK (ed.), Berlin, De Gruyter, 2015.
- SYLVIA HUOT, *Madness in Medieval French Literature: Identities Found and Lost*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003.
- MARIANNE E. KALINKE, "Eilhart von Oberge", in NORRIS J. LACY (ed.) *The New Arthurian Encyclopedia*, New York, Garland, 1991, pp. 127-128.
- ELSPETH KENNEDY, *Lancelot and the Grail: A Study of the Prose Lancelot*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, New York, Clarendon Press 1986.
- ALEXANDRIA KRAUSE, *The Problem of Chivalry: Yvain's Suffering in Chrétien de Troyes' Le Chevalier au Lion*, in ANJA A. DRAUTZBURG, JACKSON OLDFIELD (eds.) *Making Sense of Suffering: A Collective Attempt*, London, Brill, 2013, pp. 107-116.
- Lancelot do Lac: The Non-Cyclic Old French Prose Romance*, ELSPETH KENNEDY (ed.), Oxford, Clarendon, 1980.
- Le Roman de Tristan en prose*, vols. 1-3, RENÉE L. CURTIS (ed.), Cambridge, D.S. Brewer, 1963-1985.
- Le Roman de Tristan en Prose*, PHILIPPE MÉNARD (ed.), Geneva, Droz, 1987-1997, vol. I.
- Le Roman de Tristan en Prose*, vols. 1-9, PHILIPPE MÉNARD (ed.), Geneva, Droz, 1987-1997.
- Les Prophecies de Merlin*, LUCY ANN PATON (ed.), London, OUP, 1926, vol. I, 389.
- SARAH LOWSON, "Madness in Medieval Arthurian Literature" in CATHERINE DOUSTEYSSIER-KHOZE, PAUL SCOTT (eds.) *(Ab)Normalities*, Durham, University of Durham, 2001, pp. 77-86.
- ALEKSANDRA PFAU, *Medieval Communities and the Mad - Narratives of Crime and Mental Illness in Late Medieval France*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press B.V., 2021.
- CORINNE SAUNDERS, "The thoughtful maladie": Madness and Vision in Medieval Writing," in CORINNE SAUNDERS, JANE MACNAUGHTON (eds.) *Madness and Creativity in Literature and Culture*, Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, pp. 65-85.

The Romance of Tristan: The Thirteenth-Century Old French Prose Tristan, translated by RENÉE L. CURTIS, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994.

The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances, vol. 5, OSKAR H. SOMMER (ed.), Washington, Carnegie Institution, 1912, pp. 5-37.

THOMAS, *Les fragments du Roman de Tristan, poème du XIIIe siècle*, BARTINA H. WIND (ed.), Paris, Minard, Geneva, Droz, 1960.

CLAIRE TRENER, PEREGRINE HORDEN, *Madness in the Middle Ages* in GREG EGHIGIAN (ed.) *The Routledge History of Madness and Mental Health*, London, Routledge, 2017, pp. 62-80.

EDITH A. WRIGHT, "Medieval attitudes towards mental illness", *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, vol. 7, no. 3, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1939, pp. 352-356.