Chapter Four

Measuring Conventions of Courtliness

The relation of baronial ideals to feudal, national, and religious principles is not the only concern of insular romance. A further subject of importance to insular as well as continental poets is ideal love and its relationship to noble life. The ascendency of romances of love and chivalry in the later Middle Ages has disturbed some modern readers, because it seems to represent a rejection of historical and political concern. W. P. Ker complained that even in the finest twelfth-century romances “the glimpses of the real world are occasional and short and then the heavy-laden, enchanted mists of rhetoric and obligatory sentiment come rolling down and shut out the view.” Erich Auerbach found them “entirely without any basis in political reality” and concluded that “courtly romance is not reality shaped and set forth by art, but an escape into fable and fairy tale.”

The romances of love are indeed conventional, do use artful rhetoric, and do present characters who are idealized—clearly superior to real people in their personal attributes and in their ability to execute their purposes and achieve their desires. These characters, like the stories of their lives, have a perfect, polished wholesomeness that stimulates admiration and aesthetic pleasure. In contrast to the romances of English heroes and the pious romances, the


Anglo-Norman romances of love have narrators who are strongly conscious of their status as fabricators. They make themselves interpreters of subtle visions of ideal behavior, mediators between their poetry and the audience their poetry personifies. Tristan and Ipomedon exist as poetic objects at a considerable remove from historical reality, and their artfulness demands our attention.

Yet Ker’s and Auerbach’s analyses miss the distinctive and extensive relations these works have with their times. In attending to emotional development and individuality, romances of love engage issues fundamental to the twelfth-century renaissance. Their concern with personal fulfillment in relation to public duty—with people as social beings—offers far more than mere “escape into fable and fairy tale.” Like other romances in this study, the insular romances of love and chivalry assess ideal patterns of behavior (here the cultural formations of courtoisie and fine amor) in relation to conflicting images of conduct. But the historical situation of these romances changes more than that of other insular romances: the earlier poets of love and chivalry examine an ideal system that had far less importance to social behavior than did religion or feudal and national principles, but their Middle English successors saw literature’s courtly ideals widely followed in social practice.

Courtly Literature and the Insular World

The cultures where the poetry of love and chivalry first flourished were distant from England, and twelfth-century poets responded to this literature with both enthusiasm and resistance. On the one hand, Anglo-Norman poets are quick, even precocious, in their acceptance of courtly procedures such as praise of ladies, depiction of rich clothing and objects, and delineation of fine manners and generous behavior. Thomas of Britain’s version of painful love recalls the troubadours, although transferring that love from lyric to narrative form distances his work from Provençal aesthetics and aligns it with northern French romances. But the insular poets are uneasy about their participation in the literature of love and chivalry. Thomas’s Tristan and Hue de Rotelande’s Ipomedon share a fur-
damental objection to continental romance that is answered in the later Amadis de Gaule and in Middle English romances. Rejecting the ideal play of reconciliation typical of Old French romances, Thomas and Hue hazard the most extreme tensions between private and public selves and between images of love's code and of human behavior. These Anglo-Norman poets establish an important line of questioning for later poets of love and chivalry in England. In a process similar to their compatriots' incorporation of Christian elements into romance, the insular poets of love at first resist much in courtly convention, then gradually accept it more fully while adapting it to suit insular literary purposes and social ideals.

In saying that these romances diverge from the norms of courtly romance, I do not endorse the widespread judgment that insular poetry often fails to be "courtly" altogether. Constance Birt West, for example, found much in Thomas "non-courtois" and declared of Hue that "though he is familiar with the language of courtoisie, he does not really express its point of view." W. O. Evans extended to the Middle English romances West's conclusion that Anglo-Norman romances often abandon "courteous conventions"; and Gertrude Mathew agreed that some English tendencies, such as making loves equal and showing love in marriage, are "completely uncourtois." These judgments assume that the literary tradition of noble love is monolithic and prescriptive, an assumption that can no longer be upheld. Andreas Capellanus was not an influential master for poets of love.

Even the strictest canon of Old French romances includes works with conflicting postulates, so that what is courtly cannot be narrowly defined: "There is not one courtly romance but twenty or thirty of them." This conclusion sounds almost paradoxical given the proscriptive history of the term amour court­tois; thus the terms fine amor, bone amor, and vera amor, which poets frequently used to describe varied manifestations of refined love, suit better our recognition that love in the romances is not one thing but many. Fine amor is especially evocative in its oxymoron of "intense" and "refined" in the adjective fine. To describe a love (whether of a woman or of God) that is impassioned but also elevating, poets often choose the collocation fine amor. The Anglo-Norman and Middle English romances have appeared "non-courtois" because they diverge energetically from supposedly rigid generic norms. But on the whole, insular detachment from continental romances of love is not best described as a failure to be courtly. Just as the nature of vera amor is shaped and reshaped in various plots and poetic arguments but retains a general sense of refinement and intensity, so too courttois varies in specifics from text to text while generally signifying a complex of social and chivalric virtues instilled by noble education and the experience of noble love. Insular poets demonstrate in many ways that they are aware of courtly tradition and committed to producing idealized, inspiring visions of noble life. In so doing, they resist certain elements of received continental literature and undertake a coherent revision of romance's generic norms.

Part of that revision, as we have seen, reduces tension between the hero and the political structures of his society. While Old French romances and gestes de récits discover important conflicts between noble aspirations and social restraints, the romances of English heroes tend to equate heroic desire with communal ones. The insular barony's experience of political systematization, particularly in the twelfth century, was less debilitating and contentious than was the continental experience. The romances of English heroes, in turn, could plausibly develop an ideal version of political heroism that located conflict in aberrant forces challenging hero and community together.

With regard to the role of cultural ideals in poetic depictions of noble behavior, the Old French and insular romances diverge again. In French romances dissonances between noble ambition and social restraint can be resolved within ideal chivalry and love. Internalizing the conflicts of violence versus pacification and passion versus control, protagonists work out emotional and behav-

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Early insular poets resist these inner resolutions, and later poets modify them extensively.

Fine amor, in continental narratives, tends to provide a positive experience of growth and integration. The fictional lovers are remarkable for the grace of their conduct and the sublimation of their sexual desires. Despite the French poets' tendency to ironize, bene amor typically guides its adept toward perfect happiness and harmony with their world. "Et fallait embellir la vie, lui donner un rythme et des tonalités rares, mais aussi se soumettre à toutes les exigences propres à la rendre collectivement possible, agréable et utile." This process is not primarily or centrally painful, but rather responds to sources of stress by dissolving them. Prowea serves love and quells rebellion, winning union and peace. Lovers engage primarily in self-discovery rather than in collective endeavors. In their high refinement, these works claim to initiate their audience into the "normes d'une manière parfaite d'aimer," and hermetic style expresses their restrictive impulse. The elevated rhetoric of the twelfth-century romances speaks only to "un auditoire initié" that can understand its ornaments and complexities of meaning. "Au trobar clús respon un récit clos." Critics argue that these typical features of Old French romance work to validate the condition of the aristocracy and reconcile audiences to that condition. Eugene Vance analyzes the French romances, along with court ceremonies, as "a system of signs that engage the acquiescence, if not the collaboration, of other sectors of society." Reviewing much scholarship on the subject, R. Howard Bloch agrees that romances have "ideological effect" but argues that the effect is ultimately to undermine rather than to support the French aristocracy's desire for military power and class solidarity; through courtly literature, this class "came to embrace the very ideals which assured its own decline" — ideals of peace, individuation, and self-development guided by moral principle. Even in their disagreements such analyses insist that Old French romances were not merely escapist entertainments; the pleasure of imaginatively transforming one's world speaks of markers of class status and value or as agents of change in the aristocracy's gradual submission to monarchy.

Insular poets draw unevenly on this literature. Thomas writes an orthodox récit clos elevated far beyond simple discourse by its dense rhetorical ornamentation, its terms assigned special and unusual significance, and its doubled meaning in conte and commentaire. Yet he employs this exclusive style to resist the conventional idea that love is the key to reconciliation between desire and principle and between self and noble milieu. Thomas's lovers must accept their own fallibility and prepare themselves not for social integration but for death. Hwe de Rotelande undermines his thoroughly conventional plot with a laughing, casual, often earthy commentary. Ipomedon simultaneously endorses and questions the principle that love and chivalry are mutually inspiring. Amadis et Ydane and many Middle English romances tend to avoid high style and to reduce French heroism to something more accessible: in these works, love and chivalry are compatible with domesticity, economy, and good sense.

To some extent these departures from continental norms were invited by poets. Translatio studii, proposing that literature continually reforms itself, encouraged poets to make每一 romance a new argument on the nature of love. But the departures taken by the insular romances lead in one direction, suggesting that something more than poetic experimentation was guiding them. From Thomas's Tristan in the twelfth century through the Middle English romances of the fourteenth, insular romances of love gradually move from resisting courtly tradition's implausible claims about refinement and harmony to perceiving a stronger relationship between courtly literature and practice. The thread uniting all the

10. Le Gentil, "La Légende de Tristan," p. 126; Le Gentil contrasts the Tristan story to this norm, which "n'accomode mal du tragique et de la violence, reste enfermement sociale" (p. 127).
14. Bobo's survey concludes similarly that "Courtly Love was a literary movement and an ideology with ethical implications" (Courtly Love, p. 128).
15. Both functions are plausible and not incompatible; Georges Duby stresses the connection between rapid social change and the articulation of ideologies. "Idéologiques formaient réveille to the historien in period of tumultuous change. In such grave times, the custodians of the word speak incessantly." (Three Orders, pp. 128-31; see also Everett, "Culture and Law," pp. 81-95)
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There was no good to dwelling in England except for the gentle landlords and those who cared nothing for errantry; but whoever wanted to excel in errantry and tourneying used to be sent off to Brittany or Normandy in order to practice chivalry.

The younger Henry was an inspiration to the continental cult of chivalry, but also its victim. To maintain the extravagant largesse that produced in later twelfth-century England a relatively peaceful barony rather than a warring one, a society less rigidly divided by class than continental society, a nobility less threatened by the emergence of royal power, and not so concerned (or so able) to define itself as separate from humanity at large. The conflict between Henry II and his own heir, Henry the Younger, illustrates the differences between England and France in this period. The young Henry died at Martel in 1183, during his second rebellion against King Henry. While he lived he was the darling of northwest France's nobility, who scorned England as a dull place for gentleman farmers where tournaments were forbidden.

There was no need to see Henry IPs tight control extended from England into France. Troubadours celebrated young Henry's aggression and his enrichment of small nobles, and greater nobles supported his frivolities and his rebellions insofar as they confounded Henry II's desire to impose "Angevin standards of law and order." 16

Henry II, who was in closer contact with Anglo-Norman society than the rest of his family, was apparently uninterested in courtly fashion. 17 Walter Map's court commentary, De Nugis Curialium, contains only one story that might be associated with a lay and mentions nothing of courtly performances or literature in the daily life of the Anglo-Angevin court. Henry seems to have taken a political interest in Arthurian relics and history when they could justify his kingship or win prestige from the Capetian court. 18 But his zealous crusade to extend royal power over the barony could hardly endorse the ris fainantes of romance, Marc and Arthur, or approve the romances' images of knightly self-determination. He was the England to Henry the Younger's France, the more matured and settled kingdom confronting the rebellious turbulence of an adolescent continent.

From this historical perspective the French romances would have been only slightly more congenial to the insular barony than to Henry II. The crisis gripping the French aristocracy in the later twelfth century as Capetian and Angevin control began to tighten was past history in England, where royal power had been firmly entrenched since the Conquest. Insular audiences, aware that this particular struggle had long since been lost to the king, would have cast a somewhat jaundiced eye on the idealization of that struggle in Old French romances—whether they interpreted the romances as attempts to validate aristocratic claims to power or as attempts to reconcile aristocracy to a new ideal of peaceful order and self-interest.

control. The Anglo-Norman barony, accustomed to royal systematization and to litigation as a means of protecting their families' interests, would have been disposed to dismiss romantic claims for the boundless rewards of individual responsibility and the ineffably joys of morally informed prowess. The skepticism of Thomas and Hue on these points is consonant with the peculiarities of England's situation in the twelfth century.

The early insular poets react to courtly conventions critically and even negatively, but later insular poets gradually develop alternate models of love and chivalry that are more in touch with romance's insular situation. Thus while Hue and Thomas find a troubling and preoccupying disjunction between romance ideals and their assessments of plausible reality, the later poets cheerfully assert a rapprochement of the plausible and the ideal. In part, the ideal was revived; in part, behavior was. What seemed a great gulf between literary model and contemporary practice in the twelfth century was no longer so great by the fourteenth.

In its presentation of ceremony, setting, and behavior, early courtly literature does not reflect but rather transforms noble practice. Courts in England, particularly, did not much resemble those of romance.23 In this period tournaments were lethal melees for profit, outlawed where possible by church and state. Yet by the fourteenth century courtiers frequently composed love poems and engaged in such public formalizations of love as the parties of Leaf and Flower (Philippa of Lancaster seems to have been a Flower; Deschamps switched his allegiance from Flower to Leaf; Chaucer refused to take sides).24 Likewise, the tournament changed in these centuries from "a graveyard of good fighters and a meeting-place for rebels" to a carefully controlled "round table" that was "made the occasion of much fantastic pageantry" drawn from romance.25 Earlier romance poets invested glorious images that represented noble behavior in strictly imaginative terms, but later poets saw those images realized in actual practice—a curious illustration of

23. Barber, Knight and Chivalry, p. 291; Cline, "Tournois"; 720 McKinnack, Fourteenth Century, p. 250.
24. R. S. Loomis, "Imitations," p. 79. Benton is similarly moved to quotation when noting that "courts of love apparently did exist by the fourteenth century. As Valery put it, Imaginer, c'est se souvenir de ce qui va être" ("Collaborative Approaches," pp. 486.
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concerns on local affairs, addresses Protheleclas to the local baron Gilbert FitzBaderon, and in Ipmemod takes a tone of jocular familiarity with his Herefordshire neighbors. Hue's evident devotion to Credenhill and Herefordshire establishes his isolation from even the English royal court, to a degree consonant with his poetry's unconventionality. In contrast, many critics propose that Thomas's Tristan was written for the Angevin court, even specifically for Eleanor of Aquitaine. But it is unlikely that Tristan was written for this court.

Some critics find analogies between situations in Tristan and those of the royal family, and others argue that the Angevins' political use of Arthuriana makes their court a likely milieu for Thomas's romance. One passage in the extant fragments, Thomas's praise of London as a great trading port (D 579-99), could have been written in a court work. However, attributing the genesis of romances to specific political occasions is problematic, and the proposed analogies are weak arguments indeed: Henry II would hardly have approved his equation to either a cuckolded king or an outcast lover, and Thomas's severity toward Isolt could not have been calculated to praise Eleanor's change of husbands. Thomas's description of London suggests he wrote for an insular public but does not restrict his work to Henry's or Eleanor's patronage. A poet resident in England long enough to have acquired traits of Anglo-Norman dialect could obviously have visited London's harbor, heard Arthurian stories, and seen Henry's arms without being attached to the royal court.

The situation of the royal family further undermines the patronage hypothesis. Although Henry II's political program involved

26. Protheleclas, ed. Klaucke, lines 1968-74. Hue's second romance will not be considered here since it is less concerned with love than Ipmemod and has no ME descendant.

27. E.g., R. S. Loomis, "Tristan," Wind edition, pp. 13, 15-17; Lejeune, "Rôle littéraire de la famille d'Aliénor," p. 334; Schrader, Patronat, pp. 19-20; Tristram's coat of arms is not necessarily Henry's (Gay, "Heraldry").

28. For theories connecting political occasions to courtly romance, see Fourrier, Courant réaliste, 22-25; Blumenfeld-Kosinski, "Narrative Genres"; Kôhler, "Quelques observations," pp. 28-30. Such connections are widely rejected; however, see "Quelques observations," pp. 31-36 for opinions of Jean Fapprin, Aurelio Roncaglia, and Karl Ferdinand Werner.

29. See, e.g., Fourrier, Courant réaliste, pp. 43-45, 54, 64, 95-96; a full argument against royal patronage of Tristan is found in Harris, "Cave of Lovers," pp. 475-76.

30. Many scholars argue for restraint when attributing patronage to Henry and especially to Eleanor e.g., Brown, "Eleanor of Aquitaine," pp. 16-19; Richardson, "Letters and Charters"; Breich, Patronat, pp. 34-36; Haskins, "Henry II.


33. Continuer of Richard le Poitevin, quoted by Labande, "Alienor d'Aquitaine," pp. 213-14. On the Angevins' lesser interest in England, see Benardou, "Institutions," pp. 33-34; and Poole, Domesticity Rest, p. 318. On England's isolation from the continent, see: pp. 1-3; and Poole, Domesticity Rest, pp. 317-34. On England's isolation from the continent, see: pp. 1-3; and Poole, Domesticity Rest, pp. 317-34.

34. Kluckow, lines 12698-741. Hue's second romance will not be considered here since it is less concerned with love than Ipmemod and has no ME descendant.
Angevin family's continental orientation, argue that his Tristan's origins lie outside the royal court.

Although we know much more about Henry II's court than about other centers of culture in England, it is clear that various cultural milieus did exist. Hereford was one center of learning, and Hue de Rotelande writes a romance of great wit and elegance from this provincial setting. Sylvia Harris argues that Thomas composed Tristan "within the Earldom of Gloucester rather than at any of the courts of Henry II in England." Although Thomas may have drawn some material from works composed for the Angevin court, and Hue may have owed his familiarity with romance motifs to the continental works introduced into England during Angevin rule, both poets write strongly against the grain of convention. Their extraordinary works establish a lineage of romances that measure literary models of love and chivalry against changing social practice in England.

Tristan: Love and Suffering

Thomas and Hue are so different in poetic temperament and approach that their romances sometimes read like opposites. Thomas argues, for example, that Tristan's desire to marry the second Isolt is shamefully false, even though the hero is far from his beloved, despairing of her love, and without any prospect of living near her again. For Thomas Tristan's desire exemplifies the inconstancy of humanity in general: "trop par aiment novelerie / Homes et femmes ensement" [both men and women love novelty too well] (Sn, 292-93). Ipomedon similarly finds himself in a land far from his beloved, where a foreign queen gives him goodnight kisses and desires to do more. But when Ipomedon ignores her advances, Hue laughs that he himself, or better his friend Hugh de Hungrie

35. "Lords, this story is very diversely told, and for this reason I have made it coherent in my verses, and tell as much of it as is right, and leave the rest aside. I do not wish to say too much in a unified work." In "En uni dire" Kelly discusses this passage in relation to numerous episodes altered or omitted by Thomas.


37. The eight extant fragments of Thomas's Tristan are abbreviated as follows: Cambridge (C), first and second Sneyd (Sn, Sn), first and second Turin (T, T), first and second Strasbourg (Str, Str), and Douce (D).
terms that have been truthfully exposed. Telling "the whole truth" is a separate compositional activity of the poet, his adherence to the received "estorie" as opposed to his imposition of the significance that makes the work exemplary. This opposition holds the central challenge to Thomas's art. His "exemple" for lovers is not simply a negative one, yet his material is only partly suited to the elaboration of a love that could be called fine—refined, intense, elevating.

The traditional Tristan episodes show no growth in the social or emotional lives of the characters that might have given Thomas's romance its dynamic. In many twelfth-century romances, love grows through the heroes' experience of noble life, as they discover ways to integrate their loving desire and their station in the world. The Tristan legend is not structured in this way: its love is permanent and unchanging; its events display unending conflict between love and society.  

To some extent Thomas can accommodate his material to conventional patterns. Certain episodes become knotty adventures; inexplicable marvels are replaced with psychological motivations; scenes of court society are decked out in fashionable details of luxury, gentle conversation, and chivalrous amusements. Thomas's attention to richness of style, especially his endowment of particular words with profound significance and his long question d'amor appealing to the judgment of his audience of lovers, ally him to Provençal and Old French poets of love. These modifications demonstrate Thomas's interest in conventional love poetry, but they are relatively superficial gestures that do not touch the fundamental difficulties of the story: Tristan and Isolt cannot be reconciled with the received "estorie" as opposed to his imposition of the significance that makes the work exemplary. This opposition holds the central challenge to Thomas's art. His "exemple" for lovers is not simply a negative one, yet his material is only partly suited to the elaboration of a love that could be called fine—refined, intense, elevating.

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of allegorized interior monologue, of physical gesture that might heighten emotive appeal, even of the personification of amor into a force or a philosophy independent of the lovers’ own sentiments. The language of argument dominates the poem. Abstract terms, learned syntax, and syllogistic reasoning contribute to a general impression of detachment, of intellectual analysis. Multiple repetitions give almost pedantic emphasis to problems and conclusions. Thomas’s sententiae are general observations, often clerical in origin, never proverbial in tone; his descriptions and explanations are technical, scrupulously ordered, and probing rather than visual or emotive.

However rigorous Thomas’s rhetoric may seem to modern eyes, it is eminently suited to the exposition of a love whose meaning lies in its own dialectic of pain against pleasure, asceticism against passion, jealous doubt against fanatical analysis. This is how the poet makes love the dramatic subject of the Tristan story—not through love’s development or its testing, because it is born full-blown and unchangeable, but through an inner dynamic of perpetual conflict between joy and sorrow.

Tristan’s decision to marry Isolt of Brittany (Sn, 1–648) illustrates how Thomas draws from his material a particular conception of amore. The poet attributes a double motive to Tristan’s act of marriage: his sexual need and his jealous doubt that Queen Isolt still loves him. The sexual pressure Tristan feels is reflected in the great variety of terms he applies to satisfaction—fui, assembler, delit, natural fuit, erre, fuisse (Sn, 165, 175, 315, 316, 523, 525)—but its source is his very love for Isolt as she is weakly mirrored in Isolt of Brittany, who shares her name and her beauty. These reflected traits and the maiden’s desire for Tristan, echoing the queen’s love, intensify unbearably Tristan’s love-longing (Sn, 197–204, 28–34) and lead him to attempt to reduce his pain by marrying Queen Isolt’s shadow. Thus his sexual motive for marrying is a function of his love for Queen Isolt; and only the marriage itself is “encontre

44. On conventional romance gestures (avoided by Thomas) see Lotman, “Trauer und Schmerz,” on the widespread convention of allegorizing or personifying love see Frappier, “D’amours,” and Mosacina, “Psychological Allegory.”
and in conflict with their spouses (D 86–92, 102–3, 1124–32). They recognize the legal injustices their spouses endure on their account, Marc by his wife's adultery and Isolt of Brittany by her husband's failure to consummate their marriage (Sn, 165–70, 413–16, 445–28). At times this recognition is colored with heartfelt guilt. 

Under the great stress of these felt wrongs, the lovers sometimes regret their love or feel anger and despair over it (Sn, 39–46, 866–88, T, 5–32, D 99–101, 588–90, 604–14).

It can be argued that the tensions between love's demands and all others are merely stages in dialectic processes reemphasizing the supremacy of love. Nonetheless, in Thomas's inner psychological drama, the lovers' moments of miserable guilt, their fits of anger, their jealously, doubts, and ill-directed passions challenge ideal love with the ordinary vagaries of living souls. In response Thomas makes a radical attempt to reconcile ideal love with human frailty. The bridge he builds between them is one of penance, suffering, and death, a bridge perfectly suited to his own sober morality and to the demands of the story material.

Many stories of love have tragic circumstances, but few celebrate a love that itself contains and embraces death. Thomas incorporates this element of the Tristan legend into his version of fine amor by extending the idea of ultimate fatality to a corollary idea of temporal suffering in love. A love both painful and fatal is better suited to conveying Thomas's interest in problematic weakness than the fine amor of most courtly romances, which tends to remain an optimistic, delicate conception of harmonious existence, "l'affirmation de la volonté, du désir de vivre en beauté; . . . l'enlèvement de l'âme au bonheur." Even the Norman Tristan of Beroul denies that

48. Josset accepts Brangien's accusation that in continuing to love Tristan after her judicial oath she is "Femmetre d'et puzanne" (death-breaking and perjured) (D 213–30, 305–6). Tristan fears that if he fails to consummate his marriage, his fault will be moral as well as social: "De ses parentz, des altres tuiz / Hainz e hauniz en sereie, / E envers Deu me mesfreie" ["I would be hated and shamed by her relatives and all others and be dishonored before God"] (Sn, 500–502, cf. 525–34).


50. That is, Thomas does not simply stand back and let the legend play havoc with fine amor, the accusation of Courteveille, Photin, p. 116; and Bedier, ed., Tristan par Thomas, II, 30–32, 318. Nor does he show a lack of concern for morality, as Payen accuses ("Lancelot contre Tristan," exp. p. 632). For Thomas's moral observations on narrative events, see Sn, 213–14, 345–52, 753–80; D 1235–37; also Vitez, "Desire," pp. 227–34.

51. Le Boéridone, Amour profond, p. 31 (her italics).

48. \(\text{amor,}\) II, 50–52, 318. Nor does he show a lack of concern for morality, as Payen narrative events, see Sn, 233–304, 345–52, 753–80; D 1323–35; also Vitz, "Desire," accuses ("Lancelot contre Tristan," esp. p. 622). For Thomas's moral observations on morality as well as social: " 'De ses parenz, des altres tuiz / Haïz e huniz en sereie, / E envers Deu me mesfreie' ["I would be hated and shamed by her relatives and all others and be dishonored before God"] (Sn, 500–502, cf. 525–34). Tristan fears that if he fails to consummate his marriage, his fault will be moral as well as social: "De ses parentz, des altres tuiz / Haïz e huniz en sereie, / E envers Deu me mesfreie' ["I would be hated and shamed by her relatives and all others and be dishonored before God"] (Sn, 500–502, cf. 525–34).

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51. Le Boéridone, Amour profond, p. 31 (her italics).
weakness. Suffering becomes an ascetic discipline, the reverse face of love's pleasure. For the lack of his marriage, Tristan imposes upon himself the "penitance" of chaste contact with his wife, hoping that its double pain will permit Queen Isolt to pardon him (Sn, 570–88). When she comes to understand his state, Isolt "Partir volt a la penitance" [wishes to share the penance] (D 746): she foregoes many pleasures and wears an ascetic's leather corselet beneath her clothes (D 741–71). The religious terminology, the corselet, the physical torment on which the actions turn, and the greater spiritual happiness to which the lovers aspire associate their discipline of suffering to religious purification. The devotional quality of the lovers' penances is further suggested by the strict secrecy with which they are performed. Through these penances Thomas unfolds his comprehensive fine amor into its exalting and debasing movements, and shows these movements achieving a higher plane of balance. "Partir volt" is repeated three times in presenting Isolt's action (D 746, 748, 753); the lovers' secret sharing of penance forms a bond of communication between them during their long separations. At this stage their love, by mortifying its weaknesses, begins to resist the physical in anticipation of its final state. Temporal suffering unites human nature to ideal love, but death is the form the fully realized union takes.

In Thomas's version of the Tristan story love and death are inextricable because Tristan and Isolt are unable to exist outside their relationship. Whether as cause or only by metonymy, the love drink gives form to their fatal interdependence as well as their devotion: "'E1 beivre fud la nostre mort, . . . / A nostre mort l'avum bed'" ['Our death was in that drink, . . . to our death we drank it'] (D 1223, 1228). Waiting for Isolt, Tristan complains that without her he cannot survive and that he continues to live only in hope of her arrival (D 1544–53). Just as waiting for her keeps him alive, believing she will not come kills him: "Quant a moi ne volez venir, / Pur que je n'aime et vous estre vus / Quant jo sui m'estuet murrir'" ['Since you do not wish to come to me, I must die for love of you'] (D 1761–62). Isolt's knowledge of healing arts is only an external manifestation of her vital role in love: Tristan's physical ailment is subsumed within his spiritual need for her presence.

How perfect a resolution does this love reach in death, since even their great suffering, their intense passion, and their awe-inspiring devotion cannot keep the lovers from dying, indeed from dying through their own incapacity? The two sails of the legend, one black and one white, symbolize for Thomas not so much the two possible answers of Queen Isolt as the double qualities of doubt and faith in Tristan's love that allow him to believe his wife's lie. There is throughout the fragments a sense of strain, of a great gap to be bridged between the lovers' humanity and their impulse toward perfect love. One example is the ironic episode of Tristan's death wound, in which Tristan le Nain asks the aid of "Tristran l'Amerus" (D 927) in rescuing his bele amie from seven giants. When Tristan accepts the adventure but asks for a delay in setting forth, Tristan le Nain denies that so hesitant a reply could come from the real Tristan: "Jo sai qo, si Tristran fusset, / La dolur qu'ai sen­tisset" ['[I know that if you were Tristan, you would feel my suffering'] (D 970–80). Not only is pain the essential mark of love, but Tristan, already legendary in stature, is the one lover who above all others lives that truth. Tristan's apparent insensitivity to sorrow therefore negates his very identity, as he himself realizes: "'Pent grant reisun mustre l'avez / Que jo dei aler ove vus, / Quant jo sui Tristran le Amerus'" ['[You have shown most reasonably that I must go with you, since I am Tristan the Amorous'] (D 1012–14). As Tristan loses or only uneasily keeps contact with his epithet "l'Amerus," Thomas strains to hold the legend and his ideal of love together. Often his voice is his only recourse and only his words seem to argue, analyze, or gloss great love and natural frailty into harmony. The poet's own struggle is one source of the romance's power: "Cette insécurité latente, loin de nuire au texte de Thomas, l'enrichit au contraire de résonances humaines plus vraies et plus profondes." Thomas does not find transcendence in the lovers' death, but in the full humanity of the experience gained through the many telling episodes and their final meeting. As Bedier notes, "holy love is the one that will not be conquered by the end" (Insular Romance, p. 258).

58. Le Gentil, "Interpretation," p. 179; see also Le Gentil, "Epilogue." Thomas's commitment to a love that is obviously troubled seems to inform the AN. Duet de amoris (ca. 1180), ed. Paris. In this dialogue two lovers compare each other to Tristan and Isolt: "I know that if you were Tristan, you would feel my suffering."
story, but he insists on its “verur” and “contort” (Sn 2828, 836). If
the lovers’ death is not the apotheosis of perfect love, it does mark
the point at which fallible romantic love finds its absolute achieve­
ment. Tristan and Isolt are by this episode so entirely focused on
each other, so perfectly free of impulses other than toward union in
love, that the element of frail mortality in their love frees them from
mortality itself.

During the last hours of their separation, Tristan’s anguish is
such that “A poi que del desir ne muert” [he nearly dies of his de­
sire] (D 1738), echoing the anguish of Isolt who “A poi ne muert de
sun desir” (D 1728). Their communion in suffering now expands to
a final communion in death, as both die by choice, unable to toler­
ate their isolation from each other. Isolt’s last words declare that
her death is an act of veraie amor— “׳jo frai cum veraie amie: / Pur
vos voil murir ensement’” [“I will behave like a true lover: I want
to die likewise for you”] (Sn 807–8). Their final embrace unites
physical love to death:

Embrace le, si s’estent,
Baise la buche e la face
E molt estreit a li l’embrace,
Cors a cors, buche a buche estent,
Sun espirit a itant rent,
E murt dejuste lui issi.
(Sn 809–14)

She embraces him and stretches herself out, kisses his mouth and face
and draws him tightly to her, body to body, mouth to mouth she lies; now she
gives up her soul and dies thus next to him.

The sober and even clinical precision of these verses gives great au­
thenticity to a love so intense that Isolt seems physically to draw
Tristan’s death into herself.

That Thomas considers this version of fine amor to be a valid ideal
is less clear in the death of the lovers, which is both attractive and
frightening. From this they may take great comfort against changeability, against error,
against trouble, against sorrow, against all the vagaries of love!

These changes, wrongs, pains, and vagaries resonate in signifi­
cance from legend to text to listeners. Retrospectively, these terms
recall the external vagaries of fate that opposed the happiness of
Tristan and Isolt in legend. With regard to Thomas’s interpretation
of the legend these terms retrace the lovers’ own wrongs that have
struggled against love’s merits and the pains that have accom­
plished love’s penitential purification. In addition, as Thomas di­
rects these terms prospectively to his listeners’ experience, their
meaning extends to all sorrows as they oppose lovers’ happiness in
general. But in this final passage, they are no longer active forces;
their power is checked in the face of, “encuntre,” love’s power to
comprehend them. Thomas’s fine amor now reaches its fullest ex­
pression, as it incorporates not simply joy but life’s central diffi­
culties—suffering, wrongdoing, mortality. In confronting these
forces and subsuming them, the love of Tristan and Isolt reaches
the heights of power: it is proof against the very changes, wrongs,
pains, and vagaries that it has enclosed.

60. These interpretations of enveisiez and purvers are worked out by Baumgartner
and Wagner, “’Enveisiez.” Even if the passage is interpreted more strictly, the
types enumerated are diverse: in A. T. Hatto’s translation, “the sad and the amorous,
the jealous and the desirous, the gay and the distraught, and all who will hear these
lines” (p. 353).
Ipomedon: Love and Pleasure

While Thomas of Britain commits his poetic energies to bridging the gap between images of ideal love and earthly imperfection, Hue de Rotelande observes the same chasm like a casual sightseer and finds humor in the distance separating the realm of romance from his own Herefordshire. His irreverent, even parodic approach to Ipomedon differs from Thomas’s serious and committed stance, but like Thomas, Hue contemplates the disparity between certain ideal conceptions of romance and his authorial conviction of human folly. Hue refuses until the last moment to synthesize these contradictory movements, juxtaposing romance conventions to an antagonistic vision of experience throughout his elaborate plot.

The date of Hue’s Ipomedon accounts in part for its perspective on romance. Thomas’s Tristan, difficult to date but perhaps quite early (ca. 1160), has the exploratory feel of a generative work. Hue’s references to contemporary events place the composition of Ipomedon in the 1180s, more than two decades after Tristan, by which time the genre had accrued a stock of familiar motifs. Some of Hue’s episodes appear to be drawn from the romances of antiquity—Thèbes, Trist, and Enda—but in part through intermediary romances such as Partenopeus de Büns. The three-day tournament could be imitated from Cligès but also occurs in other romances; Ipomedon’s skill at hunting and his disguise as a fool recall Tristan and the two Folies Tristan. Like his contemporaries, Hue uses traditional material in self-consciously new ways and takes pains to distinguish his production from the corpus of already successful works. Yet Hue is unique to his century in his profoundly ironic detachment from the very traditions he adopts.

Generally in continental romances of the twelfth century ironic perspectives and distancing laughter coexist with serious treatments of ideals of love and chivalry. Literary historians have traced the information leading Holden (edition, pp. 7-11) to date (“Rôle littéraire d’Alienor,” pp. 33-35) and by Wind (edition, pp. 14-17). Among Fourrier’s relatively late dating of 1172-74; the 1150s are also favored by Lejeune 1180s are the siege of Rouen (1174), lines 5348-58; and the address to Gilbert Fitz-

romance’s ironic effects from their beginnings in rhetorical theory to their parodic inversion and denial of the genre in the thirteenth century. Hue de Rotelande collapses this history by juxtaposing serious treatment and parodic inversion well before the turn of the century. Standing at the border of the genre’s territory, Hue can endorse romance’s power even as he questions its conventional assumptions. Ipomedon’s plot is remarkable for its familiar, even cliched quality. Ipomedon, prince of Apulia, is attracted to the court of the Duchess of Calabria by its reputation for elegance and by the duchess’s reputation for pride: her vow to marry only the best knight in the world has won her the nickname of “la Fière” (the Proud). During three years of anonymous service in Calabria, Ipomedon begins to fall in love with la Fièrè, but perceiving this, the lady communicates her displeasure that Ipomedon shows no interest at all in chivalric exploits. Ipomedon departs immediately, though both young people are now deeply in love. On a brief return home, he learns that he has a lost brother who will recognize a ring given to him by his mother. Ipomedon travels widely winning prizes at tournaments until he hears that la Fièrè, at the insistence of her barons, will take as husband the victor of a three-day tournament. In order to attend the tournament in secrecy, Ipomedon attaches himself to the court of Meleager of Sicily in the role of “dru la reine” (3073), a knight who attends the queen and may kiss her once in the morning and once at night. Under the further cover of hunting parties, Ipomedon attends the tournament each day in different armor (white, red, and black) and each day is victorious. He lets la Fièrè know who he is through her squire each day but always departs without seeing her.

Rather than accepting the marriage he has won, Ipomedon chooses to pursue his life of chivalry, even rejecting his father’s crown and the hand of a king’s daughter won by his prowess. Finally, disguised as a fool from Meleager’s court, he returns to Calabria to challenge la Fièrè’s monstrous suitor Leolin d’Inde. He defeats Leolin and prepares to depart secretly again, now disguised as Leolin himself, but Meleager’s nephew Capaneus attacks the presumed villain. The two fight until Capaneus recog.
Thomas, the poet/persona distinction is not as productive in treating his work as the assumption that the poet and audience considered the two functions inseparable. See Rowland, "Pronuntiatio." Readers who take the plot as the only subject of Hue's attention typically find the work "assez mediocre dans son ensemble" or even pointless and confusing. Of Ipomedon's departure after the tournament, Sarah Barrow protests that "the reader finds himself in la Fiere's stumbling revelation of her lover's identity, Hue's false claims to truth, and his obscene epilogue bidding farewell to all lovers. But these parodic moments do not fully account for the poet's mockery of these practices shakes the foundations of his work.

The narrator voice develops the story in traditional terms for both a sophisticated conventional treatment and a critical re-assessment of romance ideals. This second perspective in Ipomedon reaches us primarily through the voice of the narrator, indistinguishable from that of the poet. The narrating voice enlivens the narrator's transmission of events and at the same time takes us out of the course of the story he has just told is the source of the Roman de Thèbes (10541-50). Hue takes on and puts off the mantle of authorial diginity more ostentatiously when he interrupts the narrative to declare that he always tells the truth—or almost always—or at least he is no worse a liar than Walter Map (7773-88). Because source-citing and assertions of truth establish validity in romance, the poet's mockery of these practices shakes the foundations of his work.

Hue's style often takes proverbial or colloquial turns that suit his informal rapport with story and audience. On la Fiere's anxiety over the baronial demand that she marry, Hue comments, "Ki chaust? Cument k'il seit alté. Niemen n'ont pas tut uable. De purveur lur part avant. Je qui k'il se purverai tant. K'el sufferit la padre als oït. E as jolnes e as plus veolz. Nel feat als del tut endart. K'el en avra mut bien sa part." The poet names himself at lines 33, 7176, 10552-53, and 10561. His poetic personality (laughing, sensual, etc.) may constitute a persona, but as in the case for Thomas, the poet/persona distinction is not as productive in treating his work as the assumption that the poet and audience considered the two functions inseparable. See Rowland, "Pronuntiatio."
Parodic episodes also juxtapose what we expect of romance with another, reductive and humorous, approach. Ipomedon’s disguise as a fool echoes Tristan’s, but no secret suffering, no metaphoric identification of lover and outcast, no compelling need to reach the beloved enrich the disguise: Ipomedon simply keeps his own counsel and mocks the ignorance of all others. His role as the queen’s duc similarly diminishes its prototypes, the hidden adulterous relationships of Tristan and Lancelot. These and other imitations locate the story of Ipomedon among the romances while also suggesting that its apparent orthodoxy conceals other possibilities. 72

From one perspective Ipomedon is a handsome treatment of romance’s most common subject, the relationship between love and chivalry—or more accurately, the young lovers’ growing understanding of what they desire from both emotional experience and public standing in their courtly society. At first both Ipomedon and la Fiere respond to ideal standards of love and chivalry rather crudely, by swallowing them whole or revolting against them, but eventually the lovers find expressions for their desire that are consonant with the rigid codes of their noble world.

The powerful voice of court society establishes standards of merit in Ipomedon: men should engage in chivalry to be worthy of love, and women should accord their love only to the chivalrous. La Fiere subscribes to these standards absolutely in making her proud vow, which even the court finds excessive (133–38), and in rebuking her anonymous suitor for his lack of prowess (966–968). Refusing to give up the vow because “I’dunc s’en gabereient tuz; ... A tuz dis serrie hunie” “[then everyone would joke about it; I would be ashamed forever]” (2480, 2484), she makes a second, contradictory vow in secret to marry none but the “vadlet estrange” (1524, 1525).

73. On Ipomedon’s reductive imitations of romance see Menard, Rire et le sourire, pp. 168–49, 244–47. Holden, editions, pp. 46–57.

As in many other passages, Hue’s blunt expression of amoral sensuality coexists with his tolerant explanation of Ipomedon’s principled self-denial.
Insular Romance

Both vows are exaggerated reactions to the code of love and prowess, the first as completely accepting as the second is rebellious. But subsequently, by manipulating her barons and providing Ipomedon with opportunities to prove himself, she encourages the events that bring her two vows into harmony, allowing her to sustain both her secret love and (after some confusion) her public dignity.

Ipomedon, in response to la Fiere, confronts courtiers' standards of judgment for knights. Stricken with self-reproach for not having shown his prowess (1173-82), the hero withdraws from himself into disguises until his inner conviction of merit matches his record of chivalric successes. But he also asserts his superiority by reproaching noble society even as he fulfills its rigid code. The court's censure, as befits a society of manners, always takes the form of ridicule: its weapons are ris, suzris, gabs; words spoken en deduit, par eschar, en ramponsant. Ipomedon chooses a response appropriate to this society's own tactic of censure through mockery. Although he accepts the justice of la Fiere's rebuke (1154-55), his life of chivalry turns the courtiers' ridicule—and la Fiere's—back upon themselves. As the queen's who seems too foppish to risk his skin but in fact wins the three-day tournament, and as the laughable fool-knight who turns out to be the only courtier willing to fight Leonin for la Fiere, the hero continually demonstrates the superficiality of society's judgment: "Teus tent suvent pur fol au-trui / Ke asez est plus fol de lui" [often one who holds another foolish is far more foolish himself] (7923-24).

Although Ipomedon can be read as a conventional story of two lovers asserting their personal worth while complying with the standards of court society, every turn in this apparently orthodox plot is subverted by misappropriation of stock patterns, parody, and ironic commentary. A rich conventional picture of the young lovers' emotions and symptoms establishes their relationship, but Hue's personal, colloquial voice is at odds with the lovers' impassioned flights of rhetoric:

De penser la color lui mue,  
Mes qe chaud? Mult par estêt sage  
E se combat od son corage.  

Her color changed with her thoughts, but so what? She was very sensible and fought her feelings. Damn her fine good sense!

Tost est l'oë la ou est l'amur,  
Le dei la ou l'en sent dolur.

The eye goes quickly where love is, the finger where it hurts.

Ceo say mult bien, de troq amer  
Ne vint for mal . . .

This I know for certain, only bad ever came from loving strongly.

Hue's description of la Fiere's beauty extends a scrupulously ordered effictio to an indecorous extreme, inviting his audience to speculate on her hidden attractions: "K'en dites vus de eel desuz / Ke nus apelum le cunet? / Je quit qe asez fut petitet." [What would you say of that part beneath, which we call the cuntlet? I think it was tiny enough] (2268-70). Comments like these are pervasive; as Philippe Ménard documents, "aucun conteur n'aime autant dire je cuit que Huon de Rotelande." Nor are these simply the comments of a wiser narrator on the ignorance of young lovers. Hue counters the heroes' high seriousness with casual laughter and their dignity with pure sensuality. At times the lovers are even put at odds with their own voices. La Fiere recalls other lovesick heroines when she tries to reveal in sighing syllables that she loves her valet. But whereas Lavinia's stammered "E—ne—as" works magnificently, la Fiere must interrupt her sighing to explain to her maid Ismene that she hasn't finished yet, and then that "Va—ha—let," the syllables plus the sigh, is not a proper name: "'Nai, ostez le suspir en mi, / Dune l'avrez vus bien entendu'" ["No, take out the sigh in the middle, then you'll understand it"] (1518-19). Ismene's comical misappre-
hension and la Fière's technical explanations undercut the emotional intensity that such scenes achieve in other romances. 79

During the three-day tournament, la Fière is similarly vexed. Although she repeatedly and properly speaks of her devotion to Ipomedon and her hope that he will be the victor, she is nonetheless attracted to each of the three anonymous victor knights (who are in fact Ipomedon) and on each day persuades herself that one or the other would be a good substitute for her beloved:

En sun quer mut se cumforta
E mut suvent se purpensa,
Se ele ad sun dreit ami perdu
Del neir vassal ferat sun dru. 80

In her heart she comforted herself well and thought often to herself that if she has lost her true friend, she would make the black knight her lover.

Her fickle confusion coexists with her love for Ipomedon, and Hue ironically endorses both her purposefulness (2576-82) and her vacillation (5961-74). Even Ipomedon plays on her shifting affections, by leading her to believe each day that she has lost her beloved and should devote herself instead to the new day's victor.

In all, Hue's romance provides a disorienting set of assertions about love and chivalry. Fine amor does operate as a traditionally inspiring and perfecting force in Ipomedon (e.g., 7931-36, 8293-96, 10385-404), yet Hue insists that the sentiment is more passionate than refined, more violent than ennobling:

Mut ad grant valur amur fine
Ki set danter rei e reïne. . . .
Quant force ne vaut ne beauté,
Sens ne coïntise ne bunté,
E qe vaudra dune cuntre amur?
Certes, ren nule al chef de tur. 81

Great is the power of amur fine, which can overcome kings and queens. . . . When strength cannot prevail, nor beauty, wisdom nor prudence nor goodness, what then can prevail against love? Surely, in the end, nothing at all.

79. Enéas, Partenopeus de Blois, and Yder take seriously the topos that Hue undermines here (Holden, edition, pp. 55-56; Fourrier, Courant réaliste, p. 335; Legge, Anglo-Norman Literature, pp. 92-93).

80. With this passage compare 3755-72, 3865-78 (la Fière's attraction to the white knight) and 4793-806 (attraction to the red knight).

The consistent mark of love's power is that it cannot be manipulated as a reward for merit, even when women seek consciously to do so. Like la Fière, the queen of Sicily and Ismene are determined not to love the hero in his disguises as coward and fool, but they are unable to resist. 82 Both their courtships belie models of women's aloofness in love, of love as a pervasively refining principle, and of reciprocity between male chivalry and female mercy. J. D. Burnley observes that for Hue "fine amur has the intensificatory significance which is found in the fabliaux," manifesting "the wryly humorous, gently cynical, treatment of consuming sexual passion." 83 This effect moves from minor to major characters: the queen's inability to douse her love according to chivalric merit parallels la Fière's inability to resist the appeal of nameless knights, and Ismene's essentially physical desire foreshadows the lovers' happy marriage, in which Ipomedon and la Fière "se entreaiment tant par amur / Ke il se entrefoutent tute jur" [love each other so truly that they fuck all day long] (10515-16).

The three female characters, unable to make faithful love consonant with proofs of valor, act out a dislocation between love and chivalry. Male characters, for their part, experience the relation of love and chivalry as annihilating—perpetually violent rather than constructive. Greely carries at the tournament for la Fière's hand in marriage is the ironic fulfillment of the knights' sexual desire (2264-66, 2555-63):

N'i ad si membre ne si sege
Ki gueses pont de mariagie . . .
Tesz quidout espurer la Fere
Ke Turn d'elc porte en sun bere;
Une noxxe si cher achateees
Ne furent ne tant cumperees. (6935-36, 9411-44)

81. The queen's unfortunate love is a source of much humor for Hue, who often describes her desire blindly (3277-80, 3377-18, 4895-14, 5431-35, 5509-22). Her initial aloofness, when she cannot love her servant because he is not valorous (3085-86), only emphasizes her love's irrational disregard for the reciprocity of prowess and esteem; in the end she adores the hero: "Coment k'il fut de hardement. . . . Amur ne quert fors sun delit, / Mult valt le juster enz el lit" [regardless of how brave he was. . . . Love seeks only its own pleasure; jousting in bed is what counts] (4308, 4313-14). Similarly, Ismene is ashamed of loving a fool and afraid he will kill her, but she creeps up to his bed in spite of herself, obliging Ipomedon to drive her off by pretending to want to eat her hand or to cut it off when she touches him (8837-56, 9149-72).

There was none, however wise or prudent, who gave any more thought to marriage. . . . Some who had thought to marry la Fière were carried from there on their biers; never was a wedding bought or paid for so dearly. The knights' violence and in particular Ipomedon's death-dealing answer la Fière's demand that love spring from evidence of valor, but expose the destructiveness latent in such an ideal of love. For Ipomedon submission to the ideal is isolating rather than integrative. He refuses to claim la Fière as prize of the tournament because he believes it would interfere with his prowess (6650-52); soon after, he even refuses to claim his patrimony because he prefers to wander "cume soldeer / Ke pris e los vult purchacer" [like a professional soldier eager to win renown and praise] (7239-40). For Ipomedon to choose the life of a mercenary at this point is an alienated, aggressive rejection of his properly won place in society.

Readers who consider the romance to be traditional argue that Ipomedon's departure after the tournament shows him "making amends for his earlier unsatisfactory conduct" or "compensating for his initial lack of fulfillment" of the vow.83 A conventional and pleasing whole inheres in this distention of the plot only to the extent that Ipomedon and la Fière achieve subsequently a better understanding of their love and a fuller concord between emotional life and action. The second half of the romance, in Ipomedon's chivalric progress from tournaments to war to defense of la Fière's people, who pray for him (9415-20) and for whom he feels "mut grant pité" (9625), is reminiscent of how Chrétien gives Yvain a course of greater service to good causes.

But again, despite the plot's fully orthodox possibilities, Hue's presentation offers a second, fully ironic reading as well. Ipomedon's good causes are oddly subverted. To succeed the carnage of tournaments, he joins a war against Daire of Lombardy—who was apparently already killed by the hero himself during the three-day tournament, a striking instance of Hue's "attitude désinvolte" for narrative integrity (note to line 7270). His next cause, the defense of la Fière and her people against Léonin d'Inde Majeur, is functional and meritorious. Yet despite his pity for the people as he fights, Ipomedon conceals his victory and even teases the citizens and la Fière cruelly by pretending to be Leonin himself and to have vanquished their champion:

As portes vent de la cite,
A haute voiz ad aple
E sovent a la Fiere escrie:
'Bele, or vus avrai a amie,
N'en poez mes fere danger,
Vencu ai vostre chevaler;
Ffetes tost si vus aprestez,
En Inde ensemble od mei iree!' (9931-38)

He came to the gates of the city and called loudly, crying often to la Fière: "Beauty, now I will have you for my lover, you can't put me off any longer—I have conquered your knight. Hurry and get yourself ready; you'll go with me to India!"

The citizens are left weeping, tearing their hair, falling in faints, crying and groaning (9939-54)—hardly the responses an orthodox protector would strive to inspire in his beneficiaries.

La Fière is similarly shaken by her encounters with Ipomedon. She does abandon her heritage rather than marry the supposed Leonin, but she appears more to be fleeing Leonin's monstrousness (7701-12) than affirming her love for the hero. Were it not for Hue's assurance that she, like all women, is more than capable of looking after her own interests (1911-24, 2139-46, 2576-82), the course of events would seem to reduce her to a powerless walking antiphrasis, as she continues to be known only as "the Proud" even after reforming this quality in herself (4584-614, 5237-58, 6359-72). Like the condition of her people, la Fière's total humiliation hardly seems the objective of a benevolent hero.

What, then, is the relation of Ipomedon's love to his actions? With great artfulness the poet has given us two answers at once, two readings of Ipomedon's life. In one reading, Ipomedon is motivated by love for la Fière and a need to fulfill her vow, and he is so consumed by those desires that only the rediscovery of his own blood (when Capaneus reveals they are half-brothers) can bring him to awareness of his achieved identity as perfect chivalric lover. But in another reading, Ipomedon is a detached manipulator of literary ideals and of the public that propounds them. This is the hero who...

83. Spensley, "Ipomedon," p. 351; Bruckner, Narrative Invention, p. 165; see also Hanning, Individual in Twelfth-Century Romance, pp. 126, 134, and 288 n.38, on the growth of Ipomedon and la Fière through their experiences.

who controls multiple disguises, makes la Fière believe over and over that she has lost him, and warns Leonin that "De parfunt sens ad cil petit / Ke creit quanke femme li dit" ["he has little wisdom who believes everything a woman tells him"] (9489–90). The double capacity of Ipomedon to act as faith-holding lover and as disabused educator makes him an elusive, even paradoxical hero.

Ipomedon's doubleness dramatizes the work's two narrative stances as well as connecting the story's two meanings. The protagonist is a vehicle for Hue's serious commitment to his material, but also for Hue's detached manipulation of traditional patterns. The poet, like the hero, is elusive. That Hue invents multiple disguises and evasions for Ipomedon expresses in the plot his own relationship to courtly material as outsider, mocker, and dissembler. Yet despite his air of nonchalance Hue says much about human weakness that Thomas of Britain says too: that people are by nature changeable, self-ignorant, weak of will, and sensual. The resonances between humor and insight, and between the coherent image of noble ideals and the vivid depiction of foolish conduct, enrich the work just as the hero is enriched by the confluence in his character of starry-eyed dedication and informed disenchantment.

There is no separating these paradoxical elements in Ipomedon. They coexist throughout, and Hue finally constructs between them a rapprochement of sorts, though hardly on Thomas's model.

In part Hue's portrayal of selfishness and folly within a conventional scheme of ideals seems to please him just for its incongruity, its feast-of-fools confounding of system and order. But in part as well Hue may acknowledge the power of natural impulses so cheerfully, rather than somberly as Thomas does, simply because he finds the fulfillment of those human impulses adumbrated in the ideal. Perhaps, Hue suggests, traditional fine amor and ordinary selfish desire are not contradictory forces. Perhaps they share a secret kinship. R. Howard Bloch finds the same connection in the thirteenth-century fabliaux, Roman de Renart, and Jean de Meun's Roman de la Rose: despite the elements that distinguish these works from courtly literature, "the selfish individualism of rapacious animals, promiscuous wives, luxurious priests, and deceptive suitors is nonetheless latent in the alienation of the chivalric hero and lyric lover." Hue anticipates the discoveries of his successors without abandoning the structures of romance. He reforms romance's typical premise that the lover's search for selfishhood is essentially a journey toward responsible maturity and social integration. For Hue the full discovery of selfishhood invites the freeing of love's energy in purely autonomous gratification. This is what Hue's epilogue states more directly than the work as a whole. Rather than urging on us, as Thomas does, lovers who scourge the fallen soul to make it ready and clean for love, Hue reveals that promiscious enjoyment is the lesson of Ipomedon's story.

In what appears to be an imitation of Thomas's parting words to lovers, Ipomedon concludes:

Ipomedon a tuz amanz
Mande saluz en cest romanze,
Par ceste Hue de Rotelande;
De part le des d'amor cumande
Des ou mes lealment amez.

Ipomedon sends greetings in this work to all lovers, through this Hue of Rhoddan, and commands them on behalf of the God of Love to love loyally from now on.

The God of Love, excommunication, and absolution make of the epilogue a little allegory of love that recalls Thomas's congregation of devout listeners. Thomas avoids openly religious analogies but does invite his audience to absorb his work as proof against love's wrongs and changes, as if his text could be distributed like the Host to renew both faithful and faltering lovers. Ipomedon closes with a similar claim, but the soaring desire for purification in Tristram seems to be an imitation of Thomas's parting words to lovers, as Holden argues that Hue consciously imitates this passage (editions, pp. 51, 56).
In the final interpretation offers a more consistent "métaphore scabreuse" (Holden, edition, p. 572n.) than does embriever. Holden interprets also as Godefroy's Dictionnaire (to rush into, cast upon). The sec­embriver (to inscribe), resulting in some obscurity; but which Holden takes as embriever (10578), which enbrever.

See also Susskind, "Love and Laughter," p. 657. At Credenhill in my house I have a license to give absolution; if there is any lady or virgin or fine widow or maiden who does not want to believe that I have it, let her come there, and I'll show it to her before she turns from there the document will be pressed upon her, and it won't be too bad if the seal hangs from her ass.91

This boisterous conclusion derives from the premise that the romance hero is self-determining. The miniature allegory of love's God, excommunication, and absolution that closes Hue's work re­calls the rigid social code to which Ipomedon and la Fière gradually accommodate their desires, like many other romance heroes facing construe of ideal love and chivalry. But Hue is convinced that ro-

89. "And if anyone withdraws from loving before achieving his goal, then such a one will be excommunicated and will have full permission to take his pleasure where he can; be who gets the most will be absolved" (10565-70). Holden notes the apparent illogic of these verses (edition, p. 571), which is surely part of Hue's joke: "The document in this phallic metaphor is a letter patent with bishop's or pope's seal granting power of absolution, such as Chaucer's Pardoner carries: "Our lige Lady set on my patent. / That showeth I first, my body to wanton." (Works, ed. Robinson, Pardoner's Prologue, lines 337-38). Such documents were rolled to the seal, as shown in the Reims cathedral fresco reproduced by Jadart ("Peinture mu­dale," pl. VII, p. 38; a scribe holds a rolled letter with pendent seal). The phallic

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In the end most critics see continental romances balancing these inner conflicts and affirming the value of their ideals for their audience, but some critics insist on the romances' simultaneous awareness that the opposition between individual and community is not fully resolvable and that the lover's desire for resolution is thus troubling and isolating.94

These features ally Tristan and Ispandion to romance tradition but are greatly extended and modified in the two insular works. Thomas makes an inescapable contradiction of the latent tension between public and private loyalties, refusing optimistic harmony for a tragic vision of love refined by inner torment. His strained but magisterial union of humanity to absolute love recognizes an opposition deeper than the typical interplay of courtly code and adventuring knight. Hue's treatment of the interdependence of love and chivalry strikes at the motif's heart by reading the plot doubly and by giving the alternate reading a world of its own, a local milieu that engulfs the traditional reading. There is nothing in twelfth-century romance to match Hue's full context of anecdotes and attitudes enclosing and commenting on the characters' world.

Yet Thomas and Hue remain committed to the principle of heroic self-determination and to the process of confronting heroes with challenges raised by their own aspirations. That commitment allies them with the deepest impulses of romance, making their doubts about the means and processes of heroic achievement the more striking. While courtoisie and fine amor may have functioned metaphorically as cultural ideals or as social resolutions in the continental provinces of their origin, they did not carry immediate conviction for Anglo-Norman poets. Soon, however, Thomas's doubt and Hue's laughter were to fade from the insular poetic repertoire, as poets gradually turned from resisting courtly tradition to reforming it.


Chapter Five
Adapting Conventions of Courtliness

Two young men seeking brides illustrate what happens to ideas of love and chivalry between the twelfth and the fourteenth centuries. The first, Arnulf of Guines, pursued a very wealthy widow, Countess Ida of Boulogne. The Guines family chronicler recounts boldly that Arnulf either loved Ida—or only pretended to love her—"virilia prudentia et cautela" ["in his masculine sagacity and cunning"] because "ad terram tamen et Boloniensis Comitatus dignitatem, veri vel simulati amoris objectu recuperata ejusdem Comitissae gratia, aspiravit" ["in seeking the favors of the countess by this true or pretended love, he aspired to the land and the dignity of the county of Boulogne"].

Arnulf's conventional gestures (exchanging secret love-messages with Ida) are merely implements of his calculated acquisitiveness.

Substantially different is the conduct of William Marmion just over a century later, during Edward II's Scottish wars. While this Lincolnshire knight sat feasting, "un damoisel faye" [a fairy damsel] presented him with a golden helmet and "vn lettre de co-mandement de sa dame qil alast en la plus perillous place de la graunt Bretaigne et qil feist eel healme estre conuz" [a letter of love and the promise of the land] to the hero he aspired to the land and the dignity of the county of Boulogne.

1. Lambert of Ardres, Chronicon Ghisnense et Ardense, ed. Menilglaise, pp. 205-7; trans. in Duby, Medieval Marriage, p. 108. Duby comments, "All the posturing ultimately served only as a cover for the ruthless pursuit of a policy strictly designed to further the interests of the lineage" (p. 109).