Tristan und Isolde: Gottfried's Paradigm for Emancipation

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TRISTAN UND ISOLDE: GOTTFRIED'S PARADIGM FOR EMANCIPATION

by

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The romance is seen as a paradigm for emancipation in which Gottfried von Strassburg deals with the search for self-actualization and individualism which began to manifest itself in Western medieval society. The paradigm consists of two phases, entailing six consecutive steps of interaction between individual and society: the first poses the problem of alienation and is initiated by (1) the education of the individual which leads to (2) his/her isolation from mainstream society and ends in (3) the individuals attempt to gain full integration; the second phase deals with the consequences of alienation and brings a solution in that (4) the individual's attempt to integrate him/herself fails and leads to (5) the disruption of the established society which (6) brings the necessary rejection of the old norms.

Gottfried shows how human values and interactions become a private matter which leads to the collision between individual and establishment and brings about the protagonist's isolation from social acknowledgement which, in its final result, initiates the breaking down and restructuring of accepted social norms.
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Elvira Borgstädt
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The following study of Tristan und Isolde by Gottfried von Strassburg was undertaken after my initial reluctance—to add to the immense scholarship—was overcome by the realization that the story provides some insight into the evolution of Western society; that, as a matter-of-fact, it provides a paradigm for the process of the intellectual emancipation of the individual which, paralleled by political emancipation, in actuality took place. The term "intellectual emancipation" is to be understood as the political term applied to the intellectual realm. Gottfried does not really concern himself with emancipation from socio-economic restraints, i.e. he does not turn his protagonists into autonomous members of society, but instead frees them from intellectual oppression in that he sets off a mechanism which ultimately negates social control. His emphasis on the intellectual realm may be due to the fact that he wrote for an audience, largely consisting of that social class which was basically free to make choices, but which needed to be awakened to the realities of the intellectual and emotional coercion that kept its members, especially the women, in bondage. The series of incidences that cause the coercion to fail, represent a mechanism that can easily be
seen as a paradigm or model for emancipation; the mechanism does not only support the struggle for individualism but it ingrains it by disrupting the established structure of society. Both Tristan and Isolde are caught up in the mechanism and consequently reach intellectual freedom. Through their emotional and intellectual growth—which in the case of Isolde leads to full maturity—the protagonists learn to discard social norms and their rewards, and form values of their own by setting their own priorities.

One major difficulty in dealing with literature that has been explored as extensively as the Tristan, presents itself in the categories of prior analyses which have attached themselves rather firmly. In the case of the Tristan it is the notion of "courtly love" which is most troublesome because it tends to fix the focus of subsequent interpretation on conventions that rarely existed as social realities. For what is courtly love if not a cover-term used by scholars to sum up a phenomenon as diverse as the intellectual exploration of love.

In agreement with other scholars¹ Jackson comes to the conclusion that "there is, in fact, no such thing as courtly love."² He does not, however, discard the term "courtly love" altogether, but finds it useful in coming to understand the works of individual authors. In order to do so, he restricts the meaning of the term even more than it has ever been. "Courtly love," he says, "is a social matter:"
Whatever our view of the existence of the courtly code, of a type called courtly, there is no denying that the French romances and many of their German imitators see love as part of a system of social behavior. It bestows dignity and honor on a man, it gives respect to a woman. Without it both knight and lady are incomplete members of society.3

Seen in this light, the love of Tristan and Isolde differs from the norm. It is a private matter which collides with the codes of society4 and can be read as Gottfried's denial of the prevalent notion that self-fulfillment is found in social acknowledgement.5 Gottfried endorses the claim that exploration of the self takes precedence over the rewards that come from submitting oneself to the well established norms of morality and values. It is in this respect that his romance does not fall into the category of courtly literature but creates a class of its own. Even though the Tristan deals with what is conventionally considered a courtly love theme, namely courtly intrigue and adulterous love—it yields its most important meaning outside of the confines of the courtly love analysis. The following study will, therefore, take a look at the romance in disregard of courtly love and its conventions. Instead, the study will focus on Gottfried's romance as indicator of social change.

With the Tristan, Gottfried contributes to the literary acknowledgement of the rise of individualism6 which, in the long run, has had a unique effect on the political and intellectual history of Western society. Gottfried is the
champion of a new world order in that he disconnects Tristan from the intellectual confinement of his society and makes him—as individual—the measure of all things. Freeing the individual from the necessity of psychological and political subordination to a clan has the effect of emancipating not only the male but also the female from social restraints. As both Robertson and Benton point out, medieval society saw the worth of woman largely in her potentiality as bearer of "legitimate" offspring and regarded her as an asset in political schemes; all of which is reflected in literature, where, as in real life, she often had the status of object. The chivalric codes of behavior seldom encouraged a genuine respect for the woman as individual, but regarded her largely as a means to enhance the honor of the man. Tristan, however, rejects the pursuit of conventional honor by ignoring the chivalric codes and herewith advances Isolde's status to that of equal partner. He does not desire her for social functions, as does Mark, but sees in her the perfect partner for love which, to him, represents the totality of existence.

The changes which Gottfried imposed on the Tristan-Isolde story are a paramount expression of the changes that were taking place within the intellectual climate of his time. In his romance, Tristan and Isolde emerge as two individuals who, in opposing social norms, seek to engage in the only true and worthwhile interaction between man and woman: unencumbered love, which leads to the psychological and
emotional equality that arises with the emancipation of both. And it is here that Isolde emerges—contrary to the conventional literary treatment of women—as an emotionally and psychologically mature partner to Tristan. For Gottfried Isolde represents "woman as equal partner to man" in a society which is basically centered on the needs of men.

The paradigm for emancipation that arises out of Gottfried's portrayal of both, Tristan and Isolde, will be the main focus of this inquiry. The thesis brought forth is that his romance is an important literary expression of the quest for human equality in Western society. I will not go as far as to claim that Gottfried was by conviction an emancipist. My claim, however, is that literature is a mirror of change in social attitudes and that Gottfried's exploration of the Tristan-Isolde theme prepared the way for personal freedom.
Individualism is a uniquely Western phenomenon which brought the commitment to human rights to this society. In its final form it has ingrained the West with the political notion that the individual has inalienable rights which society can not take away. The historical process that led to this commitment was born in the social fermentation of the Middle Ages and involved all aspects of human life. In the context of interpreting Gottfried’s *Tristan und Isolde* as a paradigm for emancipation it is important to understand the historical process and to read the *Tristan* within the full scope of the socio-economic climate of the time in which it was written. This chapter will sketch an outline of the conditions that fostered the birth of individualism and briefly explore the ways in which it was expressed.

The two pivotal studies, Ullmann’s *The Individual and Society in the Middle Ages* and Morris’s *The Discovery of the Individual, 1050-1200*, give a thorough account of the process of individualization, and revise the conventional notion that attributes the rise of individualism to the fifteenth century Italian Renaissance. Ullmann differentiates between the individual as subject and the individual as citizen and traces the origin of new modes of thinking and
the formulation of "basic doctrines affecting the relations between the individual, society and its government"¹ to a period much earlier than the fifteenth century. His analysis deals exclusively with political individualism, particularly with the emergence of the citizen, who, possessed of his or her own rights and equal before the law, "is a full, autonomous and constituent member of society." Morris seconds Ullmann's theory and expands upon it by taking into account aspects of medieval society which, concurrent with the political changes, eventually led to the "respect for, and interest in, the individual."²

Medieval society proved to be a fertile ground for emancipation even though the people of the lower strata of society were seen as mere recipients of the law and received little doctrinal consideration. It was their transacting of public business which, "in conjunction with the feudal form of government, was to provide some secure foundation for the later emergence of the doctrine of the individual as a full-grown citizen."³ Several factors served as an "invisible platform" from which the gradual emergence of the individual, as entity in his/her own right, could begin: (1) customary law, and (2) the feudal form of government which was practiced all over Europe and found its distinctive mode of operation in all essential levels of society. Both systems consisted of forms of social interaction which provided the basis for the changes that became paramount
during the economic revival of medieval Europe. Customary law was a result of practices which, by common consent, regulated the matters concerning daily life and seems to have been of greater importance to the people than the still somewhat isolated legislative enactments by the authorities of the time.4

To begin with, there were throughout the Middle Ages numerous associations, unions, fraternities, guilds, and communities which in one way or another considered the individual a full member. What these truely numberless associations exhibit is the urge of individuals to combine into large groups for reasons of pursuing common interests and mutual insurance which provided opportunities and the security that otherwise may have been lacking. The vital point about this is that the members elected their officers themselves, that they decided on their own regulations and managed their own affairs. Which means that the idea of mutual consent was acted upon even if it was not yet expressed in any doctrinal form.6

In addition to the element of consent, the element of reciprocal obligation played an important part in according the individual considerable standing. Once feudalism had lost its military trappings it became a viable system of government which, characterized by the bond between lord and vassal, was marked by legal rights and duties on both sides. The fact that there was a contract between the two individuals meant that within the feudal precincts there was some kind of equilibrium between the upper and the
One thing seems clear, and that is that the feudal arrangement, at whatever level it was practiced, of necessity presupposed the responsibility of the individual. It was not just a matter of receiving a command or a law, but it was necessary to employ one's own critical faculties. Facts, situations, circumstances, ways of means, and so forth—all had to be weighed and assessed properly if lord and vassal were to co-operate.

The emphasis on co-operation, on the give and take between lord and vassal, strongly suggests that feudalism contributed greatly to the change of attitude concerning the individual; that in a way it was the bridge between the assumed inferiority of the individual and his/her gradual emergence as an autonomous member of society.

The political background, as thus described by Ullmann, offered possibilities for change which during its economic revival altered medieval Europe vitally and brought about a social mobility that had never existed before. It was during the eleventh century that the masses who previously had been tied to agricultural serfdom found alternative ways of life. These alternatives arose with the increasing activity of commerce and trade after the invasions of central Europe by the Scandinavians, Scaracens, and Hungarians had been brought under control.

During the time of the raids, commercial life had almost completely stopped and the economy was basically confined to small scale agriculture with occasional local trading. Fortresses in the form of fortified manors and towns were
built, which after the subsiding of the invasions became booming centers of trade and industry. Beginning with the eleventh century, Europe experienced a rapid expansion of economic growth which was the bearer of new occupations for the landbound population. The coming-about of large industries—as for example the cloth production in Flanders—and the resulting trade freed the people, who became artisans and merchants, from the servile status of the agricultural worker.\textsuperscript{10}

Commerce and industry, which up till then had been merely the adventitious or intermittent occupations of manorial agents, whose existence was assured by the great landowners who employed them, now became independent professions. Those who practiced them were incontestably 'new men'.\textsuperscript{11}

The most indispensable need of these "new men" was personal liberty. Without liberty, that is to say, without self-government and autonomy of legislation, the pursuit of their occupations would not have been possible. It was, therefore, inherent in the new economy that both the towns and the guilds made their own regulations which were perceived as the law proper.\textsuperscript{12}

Freedom became the legal status of the bourgeoisie, so much so that it was no longer a personal privilege only, but a territorial one, inherent in urban soil just as serfdom was in manorial soil. In order to obtain it, it was enough to have resided for a year and a day within the walls of a town.\textsuperscript{13}

Hence the German expression "Stadtluft macht frei."

The increase in freedom and importance of the individual was, thus, necessitated by the changes that took place in
the political and economic structure of medieval Europe. The changes created a social mobility which did not only provide a range of previously inconceivable occupational choices but it also, and more importantly, became the seminal ground for the intellectual emancipation of the individual, born into the lower strata of society.

Christianity turned out to be a major force in the process of intellectual emancipation in that it made the most fundamental claim toward it during the Middle Ages. With its confidence in the value of the individual, which is implicit in the doctrine of life after death and the belief in a God who has called each person by name, it emphasized the human interior. The central belief, that the "word" became "flesh" for the salvation of humankind, is in itself an affirmation of the dignity which encompasses all individuals. This kind of affirmation of the individual could hardly be surpassed because its principal ethical precept is that all humans are equal by nature and therefore equally worthy of being redeemed by God.  

Viewed against this background one finds a growing interest in intellectual and artistic expressions of the new, introspective, and self-centered world view. If church doctrine provided the initial sanction of the concern for persons--because of their intrinsic value--it also contributed to the ways of expressing the new individualism. From early on the Church became the patron of the arts and fos-
tered learning. By assigning a high value to the individual and stressing the virtue of self-knowledge it encouraged a strong interest in personal character which found its natural expression in the arts. Portraiture played an increasingly important role and literature moved rapidly away from its epic dimensions toward the romance—that is to say it moved from being largely a drama of circumstance to becoming the drama of character. Southern points out that this movement reflects a change of attitude in which "we find less talk of life as an exercise in endurance, and of death in a hopeless cause; and we hear more of life as a seeking and a journeying."  

It is the element of self-discovery, stressed in the personal experience of Christianity, that is at the root of the emerging changes in medieval literature. During the twelfth century the imagery of journeying, namely the quest, became a popular expression which mirrored the new awareness that was based on the growing introspection.

It meets us on all sides—in the Arthurian Romance, in allegories of love, in descriptions of the ascent of the soul toward God. The imagery of movement seemed at this time to lay hold on the imagination, and it invaded secular as well as religious literature.  

The quest was a crucial theme for the majority of the medieval writers because it constituted a medium in which the creative imagination could best explore the problem of alienation and order which came with the rise of individualism. Chretien de Troyes, whose romances contributed great-
ly to the earliest exploration of the theme, seems to have been primarily concerned with the personal development of the individual within the restrictions of a still firmly established social structure. Often called "the father of the novel" because of his apparent attempt to deal with the psychological motivations of his characters, he is fully aware of the fact "that alienation from society is not a simple situation, and [that] it arouses echoes within the experience of the individual, influencing his most intimate relations with others." This finds its full expression in his romances *Erec et Enide* and *Yvain*, in which both heroes set out on a quest in order to explore their individuality outside of the socially expected behavior. Yet after establishing themselves in their own minds they find themselves as outcasts and are forced to undergo trials in order to regain their (altered) place within the boundaries of acknowledged social norm.

Chretien, who makes great strides in dealing with the theme of individual vs. social norms, does, however, in the final analysis retreat into conformity. Not so Gottfried von Strassburg; his protagonists, Tristan and Isolde, both learn to reject social norm in the full realization that it means separation, isolation, loss of legal rights, and finally death. In other words, Gottfried goes a step further. He insists on a complete disregard of social norms in favor of self-expression. His irreconcilable attitude takes the
literary expression of individualism one vital step further in that his romance becomes a paradigm for emancipation. It leads the reader to the realization that a total break with convention is necessary, even if it means death. It is a call to active participation of the person who cherishes his/her individual meaning more than the rewards which established society is willing to offer. Gottfried emphatically states that the individual attempt for self-realization is always a gain—if not immediately so—it will be a gain for the future:

...und sin si lange tot,
ir stözer name der lebet iedoch
und sol ir tot der werlde noch
ze guote lange und iemer leben,
...
Ir leben, ir tot sint unser brot.
sus lebet ir leben, sus lebet ir tot.
sus lebent si noch und sint doch tot
und ist ir tot der lebenden brot. (11. 222-240)
CHAPTER III
GOTTFRIED'S TRISTAN AND ISOLDE AS INDIVIDUALS

Having seen how the rise of individualism influenced the literary expression of the Middle Ages, we may now turn to Gottfried's Tristan und Isolde. The Tristan-theme itself constitutes a landmark within the thematic changes of medieval literature. It moves beyond the exploration of the quest for individuality and meaning that we find in other romances and becomes the symbol for a society in search of human rights. Mohr calls Gottfried's version the "Höhepunkt der mittelalterlichen Tristandichtung," because it is expressive of

Ein neues Menschentum, das sein Menschenrecht nicht auf das Herkommen sondern auf den eigenen personalen Wert und auf das Recht des eigenen edlen Herzens gründet,... Für eine Gesellschaft, der ein solches Menschentum denkbar geworden war, ist er geschaffen. Er bedarf nicht der Traditionen der feudalen Familiengeschichte--wie die Chanson de gest--oder der christlichen Heilsgeschichte--...Er schafft sich seine eigene Tradition als freie Schöpfung im Raum poetischer Sinnbilder. In diesem Roman von Tristan ist es noch so, dass die Aussenseiter der Gesellschaft, die ihr Recht auf ihre persönliche "Genialität" und die Innerlichkeit ihres Herzens gründen, ihre Welt gegen die Gesellschaft der Berechtigten verteidigen müssen und dabei unterliegen.

Gottfried's Portrayal of Tristan and its Implications.

Beginning with the unusual circumstances of his birth everything concerning Tristan is unique and points to his

15
individuality. Like his father before him, Tristan lives outside of the secure boundaries of his clan. His name is void of all family-tradition and belongs to him alone; it symbolizes the circumstances of his birth instead of drawing from the status of his bloodline. As a matter-of-fact, the name which indicates the separation from his heritage is given to him, not by a blood-relative, but by someone who carefully weighs the circumstances of his birth and decides to name him Tristan—wherby he initiates the direction in which the orphan's life will proceed. The etymology of the name, given by the poet, hinges on the importance of the child's individuality. In Tristan's case it is not important that he is the son of Riwalin and Blanscheflur, or that he is of noble birth; what is important is that

Tristan's name is symbolic merely of the life of its carrier; there is little reflection of family-status, no
historical importance, no folk mythology—little guides the hearer to any association outside of the personality (as the names of other heroes like Siegfried or Brunhild, etc. indeed do) which is found in the carrier himself. The name of Tristan is biographical only of himself, his family remains mostly in the dark because it is the person Tristan who is of importance. He is the focus of the new society in that he becomes the measure of the new values.

The intensive education given to him by Rual li Foitenant becomes the solid foundation on which Tristan's character is built. Never before in the history of literature did any poet put such emphasis on the "education" of the protagonist. This is due to the fact that never before was it meaningful to show that the hero's nobility of character and physical adeptness was anything else but the outcome of his "natural" heritage. Not so with Tristan: his merits and consequently his importance lie primarily in his "individuality."

Gottfried stresses that point with his elaborate discussion of Tristan's childhood, in which he "concentrates on the aesthetic attainments, on the development of a cultured personality, and dwells on two aspects of Tristan's training in particular, his skill in languages and his power in music."

Gottfried emphasises that the beginning of Tristan's education marks his first departure from freedom:

daz was sin erstiu kere
uz siner vriheite:
do trater in daz geleite
betwungenlicher sorgen,
die ime da vor verborgen
und vor behalten waren. (ll. 2068-2073)

With "sin erstiu kere/ uz siner vriheite" Gottfried surely means Tristan's first departure from his carefree childhood which has to be understood as the forced beginning of his self-awareness. The intensive study "der buoche unde der zungen (2094)" confines the freedom of the natural child and by doing so prepares the way to intellectual freedom. Yet, intellectual freedom is not the only thing Gottfried is concerned with; in addition to the study of books, languages, and music, Tristan learns

mit dem schilte und mit dem sper
behenecliche riten,
daz orf ze beiden siten
bescheidenliche rtderen,
von sprunge ez vreche vderen,
turnieren und leisieren,
mit schenkeln sambelieren
reht und nach ritterlichem site. (ll. 2104-2111)

He becomes adept in the chivalric arts, learns to hunt and often seeks recreation in all the courtly pastimes:

hie banket er sich ofte mite
wol schirmen, starke ringen,
wol loufen, sere springen,
dar zuo schiezen den schaft, (ll. 2112-2115)

So much and so well does he learn that "aller hande hovespil/ diu tet er wol und kunde ir vil (2121-2122)."

But Gottfried does not stop here: as final touch to Tristan's education he is send off to travel.

der marschale in hin heim do nam
und hiez in zallen ziten
This multifaceted education is what Gottfried means when he talks about Tristan's first departure from freedom. It is evident that Tristan received the best education possible. Not only is he trained in intellectual subjects but he also learns the ways of chivalric society. Gottfried's primary emphasis is on the mastery of intellectual skills which finds its completion in travels that help to apply them and to broaden the understanding of the world. Hence, Tristan represents Gottfried's ideal of the well-rounded individual who can truly come into his own through the acquisition of skills and a fostered nobility of mind.

The consequences of Tristan's education, however, are far-reaching. Education renders him not "equal" to courtly society but "superior" in everything he does and results in his alienation from society. Tristan's superiority is mirrored in his personal traits: his well shaped body, his refined demeanor, and his mastery of intellectual and physical skills. It draws immediate attention to his person everywhere he goes and initiates his alienation in a pattern that becomes quite predictable. The pattern establishes itself in the following mode. (1) Tristan's superiority arouses astonishment and praise which soon turns to mistrust and jealousy. This leads to his rejection, to attempts on his life, and finally to his isolation from society.
(2) His self-awareness enables him to deal with the aroused enmity effectively; he outwits everyone and survives through the careful manipulation of his environment. The abduction is a good example of the pattern which is repeated in variations on a larger scale when he reaches Mark's court.

After the initial welcome at Mark's court the barons, who represent courtly society,

stilisieren Tristan als Zauberer zurecht, als unberechenbaren, skrupellosen Aussenseiter; dessen Fremdheit und Ausserordentlichkeit nicht länger hingenommen und be staunt werden darf, weil sich gezeigt hat, dass dieser vermeintlich politisch harmlose Wunderknabe einen Rechts anspruch auch gegen mehrfache Übermacht durchzusetzen und einen mit Gewalt nicht bezwingbaren Todfeind [Morold] durch tollkühne Listen zu paralysieren imstande war.4

Courtly society, once it has outgrown its fascination with Tristan's marvelous achievements, sees him as an impending threat to its established structure. Even though Tristan's ambition is not geared toward commonly desired social reward such as status and power, but toward emotional fulfillment and self-expression, his actions are interpreted as attempts to gain political standing. The barons, i.e. courtly society, defend themselves by trying to oust him from their midst. Tristan understands the danger that lies in the isolation from society with which he is faced and tries to turn the tide in that he attempts to please everyone (he fetches Isolde from Ireland to prove that he has no interest in becoming Mark's heir), but the process of alienation—once initiated—cannot be stopped. Tristan as individual who does not abide by the established rules but
makes his own and as superior achiever by necessity constitutes a threat to established social norm.

Isolde's Emancipation and its Effects

As seen above, Tristan's fate is determined before he ever lays eyes on Isolde; yet Isolde has to enter his conflict with society in order to give expression to the full dimensions of the struggle.

Isolde is another individual whose life begins with education; her education, however, follows a family tradition:

...ein pfaffe...
der was der küniginne
meister unde gesinde
unde hæte si von kinde
gewitzgeget sere
an maneger guoten lere,
mit manegem vremedem liste,
den si von im wiste.
ouch lerter ie genote
ir tohter Isote, (ll. 7697, 7708-16)

Consequently her education is not all-encompassing, as Tristan's had been, but merely provides the young woman with the skills necessary to ensure her the esteem of courtly society. Her study of "beidiu buoch und seitspiel (7727)," thus, becomes an asset to her future as queen. Isolde is trained in order to fill the role of "first lady," she learns to entertain courtly society (8036-8131) and to become a healer like her mother. And like her mother she carries the name of Isolde, a name which is indicative of all the superior traits of her heritage. Isolde is
beautiful, she is talented, she is trained in the arts of healing, all of which are attributes that make her into a most desirable asset for any man of nobility. Her education therefore becomes a device for the perpetuation of the existing social structure.

The function assigned to Tristan as Isolde's tutor lies in enhancing and broadening her education. Through him she learns "theory" that is to say she masters her subjects of study beyond their superficial application. Her mind is opened to a deeper mode of learning—to "moraliteit"—an understanding which touches the essence of human life:

\[
\begin{align*}
& \text{ir lere hat gemeine} \\
& \text{mit der werlde und mit gote.} \\
& \text{si leret uns in ir gebote} \\
& \text{got unde der werlde gevallen:} \\
& \text{sist edelen herzen allen} \\
& \text{zeiner ammen gegeben,} \\
& \text{daz si ir lipnar unde ir leben} \\
& \text{suochen in ir lere;} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(11. 8010-8017)

Even though there is no absolute interpretation of the term "moraliteit" I take it to mean the general application of knowledge which helps to make intellectual choices about one's conduct in society. And therefore, by teaching "moraliteit," Tristan introduces Isolde to intellectual thought and initiates her into the realm of self-awareness which signals the beginning of her awakening as an individual.

Isolde's growth into a self-aware individual takes on a different form from that of Tristan. While the circumstances of Tristan's birth set the pattern for his growth toward
individuality (before he entered society as a member) we see in Isolde a different pattern; Isolde's individuality is born out of her maturation within the established social structure. Her emergence as individual, therefore, represents the counterpart to Tristan's; or seen more appropriately, the two can be viewed as complementary aspects of the process of emancipation. Isolde constitutes the passive aspect--growth from within the established norm--while Tristan is the active agent who proceeds from without.

In order to illuminate the statement that Isolde "represents the passive aspect of individualization," one has to look at the full process that leads to her maturity. As seen above, Isolde's education began as a family tradition which assigned certain tasks to women as participators in courtly society. Women represented the "refined" aspects of courtly life in that they were the carriers of culture with which courtly society was entertained. The learning in books, languages, and music was therefore seen as a tool to enrich the pastimes and to make women more attractive to prospective suitors.

nu gevogetez sich dicke also,
ir vater so der was vrüudehaft
oder alse vremediu ritterschaft
da ze hove vor dem künige was,
daz Isot in den palas
vür ir vater wart besant;
und allez daz ir was bekant
höfschlicher liste und schöner site,
da kürzetes ime die stunde mite
und mit im manegem an der stete.
swaz vrüde si dem vater getete,
Yet Isolde’s education is carried beyond this practical point: her mother, wishing only to complete Isolde’s formal education, indirectly initiates the additional two phases through which Isolde eventually reaches full maturity and becomes an individual in her own right.

The first phase begins when Isolde is handed over to Tristan. In order that he refine her applied skills, the mother urges him:

so la dir wol bevolhen wesen
diese jungen maget Isote,  
diu lernet ie genote 
diu buoch und dar zuo seitspil  
und kan des ouch billiche vil
nach den tagen und nach der vrist,  
as si derbi gewesen ist,  
und kanstu keiner lere  
und keiner vuoge mere
danne ir meister oder ich,  

That Tristan does more than refine her conventional education has already been discussed. He lays the ground work
into which Isolde can integrate the teachings of the second phase: the acquisition of manipulative skills which enable her to survive in the society of Mark's court that grants her no power to command and no legal protection. This second phase—also initiated by the mother—is carried out by Brangaene who proves to be a master of these skills due to her own station in life. In each of the two incidents Isolde's mother has only one motive guiding her action, she is determined to provide the best and most secure circumstances for her daughter's adult life. Her intent is to assure Isolde a high position within the structure of courtly society, namely the position of queen.

After Tristan has won Isolde for the marriage with Mark, and Gurmun has given his consent, Isolde enters the second phase of her education. As with Tristan, the separation from the secure environment of her childhood marks the loss of her freedom which constitutes the foundation of emancipation. By leaving the court of Ireland she becomes an outsider, like Tristan, who is no longer under the protection of a family clan; she will now have to make due with the goodwill of the society into which she is tossed. Realizing the vulnerability of Isolde's legal status at Mark's court, the mother invokes magic in order to assure her daughter's safety:

'Brangaene' sprach si 'niftel min, 
la dir die rede niht swære sin, 
du solt mit miner tohter hin;
With the help of a love-potion the mother tries to extend her protection of Isolde by insuring that Mark's love will become her shelter. But not putting her whole trust into the potion, she pleads for Brangaene's protection of her child.

And with this final effort to provide for her child, the mother fades from the story, she can no longer contribute to the life of Isolde.

Again, ironically the mother's intent to integrate Isolde into the established structure of courtly society fails. Brangaene is not able to prevent the misuse of the love-potion in spite of her willing acceptance of that responsibility. She blames herself for the accident (11686-11705) and soon realizes that she can no longer protect Isolde, but that Isolde must learn to help herself.
herzevrouwe, [she says] schöne Isot,
iuwer leben und iuwer tot
diu sin in iuwer pflege ergeben;
leitet tot unde leben,
als iu ze muote geste. (ll. 12149-12153)

In this sense, the misuse of the love-potion has the same
effect on Isolde's life as the abduction has had on Tristan's.
Both signal the protagonists' entry into society, which
due to its circumstances becomes the battleground for sur-
vival and leads to emancipation.

In the above context the love-potion episode— one of
the most controversial points in Tristan scholarship—
sheds light on the internal changes in Tristan and Isolde.
To both, the drinking of the potion comes at a crucial
time in which they recognize that their lives are insepa-
rably interwined. Jackson sums it up in the following way:

Tristan and Isolde come to love each other on the
ship. There are no special circumstances which bring
about their love except that the close conditions
on shipboard throw them together. The ground has
long been prepared, and Isolde has already given
evidence that she is in love with Tristan, although
the reverse cannot be said to be true. If the love
potion means anything, it is that a wave of conscious
physical attraction sweeps over them both. They are
aware of love and, each for different reasons, struggle
against it.7

Even though I agree with Jackson's basic evaluation of the
situation, I believe that the love-potion serves a greater
purpose; the potion functions on three levels: (1) It's
intended function is to provide protection for Isolde in
a foreign country where she will be isolated from the legal
sphere of her clan. The ultimate expression of the lack of
legal protection is actually shown in the "ordeal of the hot iron" which is the result of Mark's withdrawal of protection from her. Isolde, in her self-defense, makes the point absolutely clear:

> ine möchte niemer sin verswigen, 
> ine müese werden bezigen 
> unvuoige und missewende, 
> durch daz ich bin allende 
> und endarf hie niender vragen 
> nach vriunden noch nach magen: 
> mirst leider 1dgetzel ieman bi, 
> der mines leides leidic si. 
> ir alle und iuwer iegelich, 
> ir sit arm oder rich. 
> ir geloubet vil gereite 
> miner dörperheite. (11. 15491-15502)

(2) The misuse of the love-potion becomes the symbol for Isolde's vulnerability in the life she faces as Mark's wife: she obviously cannot invoke his unremitting protection because she is not able to love him. And (3), in its real function the potion acts as a catalyst in the process of emancipation, in that it constitutes the irreconcilable break with society. Langer acknowledged this function in the following passage of his article:

> Die zweite Irlandfahrt ist der grossangelegte Versuch Tristans, durch eine Glanztat die drohende gesellschaftliche Isolation abzuwenden, seinen Frieden zu finden durch Friedensstiftung. Der Ausgang der aventiure erbringt aber nicht die erhoffte Integration in die höfische Gesellschaft, sondern ist der Beginn eines Kampfes gegen sie. Subjective Intention und tatsächlicher Verlauf der Ereignisse klaffen auseinander.

The love-potion is important because of the impact it has on the lives of the lovers. For both of them it constitutes the step beyond which there is no reconciliation with
traditional society. Isolde finds herself in an awkward position because she is not prepared to deal with the impending alienation from society. Unlike Tristan, she needs to be instructed in the method of survival. Brangaene, being aware of Isolde's state and feeling responsible for it, makes it her own obligation to teach Isolde and thus carries out the second phase of her education.

In this phase, Isolde learns how to "get her way" without having the power to command, and Brangaene is a most capable teacher of the art, because she too "is an underling," "she is practiced in the arts of concealment, dissembling, and subterfuge. ...All her efforts are bent on making effective her advice to Tristan and Isolde: 'lat diz laster under uns drin/ verswigen unde beliben sin' (12143f.)."

Consequently, the thrust of Brangaene's teaching is the application of "list" in the manipulation of the courtly environment. Tristan, however, did not have to be specially tutored in this art; he was ready for it due to the understanding of the world which he had gained in the course of his all-encompassing education.

There are two kinds of skills Brangaene ingrains in Isolde, the first is, what Caples calls, the art of "ambiguous speech." When Mark sets his first snare to test Isolde's fidelity she proves to be totally innocent and lacks all awareness of any possible deception. Brangaene confronts her with the impending danger and shows her how to recognize
it in the future:

Brangæne sprach do: 'vrouwe min,
lieget mir niht und saget mir,
so helfe iu got, wen ieschet ir?'
Isot seit ir die warheit,
reht alse ez da wart uf geleit.
'a tumbe!' sprach Brangæne do
'war umbe sprachet ir also?
swaz si hier angeredet ist,
daz hære ich wol, daz ist ein list,
und weiz vür war, daz disen rat
der truhsæze uf geleget hat.
hie mite so wellents iuch ervarn.
ir sult iuch her nach baz bewarn. (ll. 13730-13742)

Under Brangenes tutelage Isolde is able to undermine the
attempt made on her by using "list" now for her own protec­tion much in the same way Tristan had learned to employ it.

den stric, den er ir rihtete
und uf ir schaden tihtete,
da vie diu küniginne
den künec ir herren inne
mit ir Brangænen lere.
da half Brangæne sere;
da vrumetin beiden samet, daz list
wider list gesetzet ist. (ll. 13861-13868)

The second art, that of "protective speech"11, Isolde
learns through observation during the very puzzling episode
in which she tries to have Brangaene killed.

Brangaene introduces this trick into the story by
concealing Isolde's guilt in her plea to her poten­tial assassins. The association of Isold's new
deceptive powers with a crucial episode of loyalty
robs them of their potentially invidious character
and instead reminds us of earlier demonstrations
of selfless faith.12

During the assignation by the brook Isolde protects Tristan
much in the same way as Brangaene had protected her in the
assassination attempt. She uses language which disguises
but does not deny the truth:

und gihes ze gote, daz ich nie
ze keinem manne muot gewan
und hiute und iemer alle man
vor minem herzen sint verspart
niwan der eine, dem da wart
der erste rosebluome
von minem magetuome. (11. 14760-14766)

On the surface these lines are true, but only the person who knows the reality of Mark's wedding night realizes that the context in which the lines are uttered alters their meaning vitally. The incident proves Isolde's mastery of Brangaene's teachings and indicates the completion of her education. From now on she faces her trials alone, and quite successfully, as the episode of the ordeal shows. Isolde's education is now complete, she has reached full maturity and is able to fend for herself in the pursuit of her true desire: her love for Tristan.

The episode of the cave of lovers becomes the ultimate expression of the lovers' equality. Isolde has fully matured, she has risen to Tristan's level of self-awareness and is now able to be a full partner in the pursuit of true love. While Isolde, in the Petitcreiu episode, showed that she was worthy of his love (16359-16391), she now proves her full equality by contributing equally to the dialogue of love:

si beredeten unde besageten,
...si wehselten ummuoze
mit handen und mit zungen:
si harpheten, si sungen
leich unde noten der minne.
si wandelten dar inne
ir wunnenspil, swie si gezam:
sweder ir die harphen genam,
so was des anderen site,
daz ez diu notelin dermite
suoze unde seneliche sanc.
ouch lutete ietweder clanc
der harphen unde der zungen,
sos in ein ander clungen,     (ll. 17187, 17208-20)

The idyllic state in which the lovers live at the cave
(16815ff.) paints the serene picture of life that is totally
free of social restraints and consequently needs no dis-
guises, no justification and no "list." It is a free life
in which the lovers--having learned to find the meaning of
their lives in the love they feel for each other and not in
the rewards that society offers in the form of esteem, power,
and riches--have come into their own. Seen within the larger
context of the lovers' struggle with society the cave re-
presents the fiction of the ideal society toward which Tristan
and Isolde are striving.
CHAPTER IV

THE PARADIGM

The claim, that Gottfried's Tristan und Isolde represents a "paradigm for emancipation," may at first glance be a questionable assertion. Conventional scholarship views the piece as Gottfried's "thorough study of the love phenomenon, of the relation between the sexes in all its aspects—physical, intellectual, social, and artistic."¹ Like other romances it is largely seen as an exploration of the theme of human sexuality with which Western society had struggled since the awakening of Christian thought. This struggle found its expression in the vast body of medieval literature which attempted to deal with the ambivalence toward the full scope of human love. The spectrum ranged from the mystical pursuit of union with the essence of love—which gave expression to the total denial of the body and is best illustrated "in the utterances of Mechthild von Magdeburg and the brilliant, if more restrained interpretation of the Song of Songs by St. Bernard"²—to the various attitudes expressed in the writings of the courtly tradition. Here, one finds Andreas Capellanus supplying the evidence "that the possibility of non-sensual heterosexual love was being seriously considered, that it was possible for a man to love a woman as a woman, and not
merely as another Christian soul, without committing sin"$^3$; a position, which found its full exploration in the lyrics of troubadours. The chivalric romances also dealt with the problem of "the proper way of love." Yet, the love expressed here envisions the physical union of the sexes and consequently deals with the justification of such a love. In order to accomplish this, the tendency developed to show the lady "as being of superior qualities whose love inspires rather than degrades her lover."$^4$ As Jackson asserts:

These various attitudes to love shade into each other, and it is pointless to look for any specific source for the ideas found in one type of poetry and still more pointless to set up a system of courtly love compounded of elements from many sources and attempt to trace its origins in medieval terms. By the end of the twelfth century, there were as many attitudes as there were authors.$^5$

What they have in common, however, is that they all seem to have felt the necessity to legitimize love which included sexual union.

Modern scholarship acknowledges the fact that Gottfried's intention must have gone beyond the struggles as stated above—that unlike most of his contemporaries he addressed the general problem of the conflict between love and society, and not merely the question of the sinfulness of physical love.$^6$ Yet to stop here in the interpretation of his story, means to neglect one of its most important aspects: its contribution to the growth of the intellectual awareness that personal freedom must be asserted as a right. Gottfried uses the pursuit of "true" love as a vehicle to explore the
conflicts that arise with the assertion of individualism within the restricting norms of well-established society.

Gottfried's version of the Tristan-Isolde theme represents a model for the struggle toward an ideal society in which each individual is a full member, with rights, responsibilities, and the freedom to explore his/her own individuality. It constitutes a paradigm for emancipation with which Gottfried speaks out against society's emotional and intellectual coercion of its members. It is his call for the active defiance of the system that encourages behavior which oppresses all, whose only ambition it is to explore life in full sincerity. The paradigm consists of a mechanism that entails six consecutive steps of interaction between individual and society and is divided into two phases: the first (A) poses the problem of alienation from society, while the second (B) brings its solution. (A) is initiated by (1) the education of the individual which leads to (2) his/her isolation from mainstream society and ends in (3) the individual's attempt to gain full integration, as has been shown in the above chapter. (B) deals with the consequences of alienation and brings a solution which unfolds in the following way: (4) the individual's attempt to integrate him/herself fails and leads to (5) the disruption of the established society which (6) has lasting consequences for both, individual and society.

The first phase is best understood as Gottfried's expo-
sition of the most pressing problem of his time: the emerging conflicts which the rise of individualism—with its inherent emancipation—brought to an outdated social structure. In Tristan one sees the "individual" struggling to find his proper place in society. That his complete integration is impossible becomes self-evident with the outcome of his education. There is no proper place for a person like him at this point in time; society is not able to accept a "Tristan" into its ranks because its very structure is founded on the denial of self-actualization. Yet Tristan is the epitome of self-actualization. His education renders him incapable of engaging in anything else but self-expression.

In the episodes connected with Morold, Tristan's effort to become a full member of the courtly society has an adverse effect; he is rejected as potentially dangerous to the existing order and finds himself isolated from the mainstream of society. The complete realization of the impending danger which lies in this situation prompts him to actively seek his reconciliation with society. But what is intended to assure his integration in actuality constitutes the final break which initiates the second phase of the paradigm. Here, Gottfried supplements the action of the story with three digressions on the meaning of love, which, as shown by Urbanek, "presents a high degree of correlation in structure and message as well as a rhetorical execution of each according to
one of the three medieval genera praedicandi such as to allow us to consider them as one integral text conception. Gottfried's intention in it is to supply a more theoretical explication of the problem of erroneous social practices which prohibit the self-expression of the individual.

The digressions appear in pivotal places and coincide with steps four, five, and six of the paradigm. The first excursus, "die rede von minnen folgt unmittelbar auf die erste Liebesnacht von Tristan und Isolde" which symbolizes their failure to integrate themselves in the structure of society (step four). The second, "die Minnegrottenallegorie erscheint in der Waldlebenepisode, als die Liebenden im Zenit ihrer Minne stehen" and indicates the disruption of established society (step five). And finally, the third excursus, "die rede von huote und minne erfolgt unmittelbar vor ihrer Entdeckung durch Mark" during the time in which Tristan and Isolde have returned to court and live with the full consequences which re-entering society has brought to them (step six). Thus, each of the digressions correlates with one of the steps in phase two of the paradigm.

The love-potion, its effects, and the "rede von minnen" constitute part four of the paradigm in which Gottfried expounds the necessary failure of the individual's attempt to integrate him/herself into society. The deed with which Tristan hoped to bring about his integration, namely fetching Isolde from Ireland as Mark's bride, has the ironic
effect of accomplishing precisely the opposite. On the journey homeward Tristan and Isolde drink the potion which was to ensure Isolde's proper integration into the society of Mark's court by assuring the mutual love between the king and queen. The misuse of the potion turns it into a catalyst which completes the protagonists' alienation from courtly society. It constitutes the point of irreconcilable difference between the lovers and society, in that it symbolizes their full awareness of the consequences which the fulfillment of their love for each other will bring. To choose fulfillment in love over their loyalty to Mark means that Tristan and Isolde consciously choose self-expression over the expected conformity to social standards, which would prohibit the expression of their mutual love. Thus, knowing precisely what the effect of their action will be, namely that it moves them outside of the legal boundaries of society, they consciously and willingly choose to live with the impending alienation from society.

Gottfried sanctions the lovers' decision with his "rede von minnen" in which he reproaches society for its distorted notion of love. This notion perverts love to such a degree that it necessitates the choice Tristan and Isolde had to make, because what in its natural form would be ideal love—the kind sought by the lovers—society distorts with its calculating restraints. In lines 12280-12417 of the excursus Gottfried states his main argument. He speaks of a love
which is not worthy of its name "wirn haben an ir niwan
daz wort (12282)," and which shorn of all honor and dignity
sneaks begging from house to house "und treit von laster-
lichen siten/ gemanicvaltet einen sac,/ in dems ir diube und
ir bejac/ ir selbes munde verseit/ und ez ze straze veile
treit (12292-12296)"); on which Urbanek comments:

Die von Gottfried gebrandmarkte Scheinminne ist die
zu seiner Zeit rein utilitaristisch, quasi kommerziell
geschlossene und entsprechend praktizierte Standes-
und Besitzehe besonders der Adeligen und höheren
Patrizier, an die sich ja sein Epos richted.11

Gottfried speaks out against the delusion of his contempo-
raries with their distorted notion of love which allows the
union of man and woman to serve only one purpose: social
gain. Channeled in such a way, love supports the existing
socio-economic structure and is conducive to its perpetua-
tion. Hence, the pursuit of genuine love— which cares only
about its self-actualization— poses a danger in that it is
likely to upset the existing order.

Tristan's and Isolde's love poses such a danger after
their failure to integrate themselves through conformity.
The episode of the "Minnegrotte" symbolizes the disruption
of established society in that it represents the fifth
stage in the paradigm for emancipation. The lovers' idyllic
existence at the cave provides the reader with a vision
of the ideal society in which life is humane in all of its
aspects. Tristan and Isolde are free from the restrictions
of Mark's court, no one holds watch over them, no one tries

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to harm them out of jealousy. They are left totally to their own resources, they are free to explore their love—physically as well as spiritually—in an environment that is perfectly suited for a life of self-expression. And the self-expression which the lovers seek has only one goal—to spend life in the realms of sincere love—and not a life as was practiced at court which consisted of perpetual striving for favors and social advancement. Tristan's and Isolde's life at the Minnegrotte renders a utopian model of the new society which all "noble hearts" in Gottfried's audience recognize as the only life worthwhile to be pursued.

At the highpoint of Tristan's and Isolde's togetherness, during their idyllic life at the cave of lovers, Gottfried offers an explanation of the meaning of the cave. In his second digression (16923-17138) he allegorizes the place in which the true expression of love finds its natural, unimpaired fulfillment and herewith assigns a special significance to it. The allegorical description of the grotto gives it the features of the medieval church and becomes a metaphor for the "sakral entrückte Wunschbild leibseelischer Vollkommenheit der Minnetugenden. Zu diesen gehören die ethisch-sozialen Werte des hohen mutes, der einvalte, staete, güete, diemuete, ere ebenso wie die... erotischen Fähigkeiten." With these attributes of real love Gottfried counters the negative aspects of the dis-
torted love as practiced by society. The final point of his negation of the conventional pursuit of love is found in his interpretation of the grotto's secluded location.

Ouch hat ez guote meine,  
daz diu fossiure als eine  
in dirre wwesten wilde lac,  
daz man dem wol gelichen mac,  
daz minne und ir gelegenheit  
**niht uf die straze sint geleit** (ll. 17071-17077)

Gottfried insists that love is a private affair which should be conducted between the people in love and not, as custom prescribes it, as a social and economic enterprise. And thus,

> gegen das Bild der gebückt an der Erde kriechenden lasterhaften Minne in [the first excursus] (si swachet und swaeret/ ir selber uf der erde;/ diu erlose unwerde;/ si glichen under husen biten... 12288ff.) stellt die Grottenrede das Wunscbild der 'hohen' Minne: diu hohe deist der hohe muot,/ der sich uf in diu wolken tuot;/ dem ist och nhetes ze vil/ die wile er sich gehaben wil/ hin uf, da sich der tugende goz/ ze samene welbet an ein sloz (16939ff.).

But the utopia of the Minnegrotte cannot be maintained indefinitely because it is a utopia of the mind and not of reality:

> si hæten hof, si hæten rat,  
> ir dienest was der vogele schal;  
> ...  
> diz gesinde diende zaller zit  
> ir oren unde ir sinne.  
> ir hochzt was diu minne,  
> ir vrudten übergulde, (ll. 16879ff.)

The difficulty lies in the fact that Tristan and Isolde have to deal with the realities of living as social outcasts. Even though they find intellectual and emotional
fulfillment and bliss in each other, they are still faced with a hostile world that wants their final submission or destruction. As Langer points out, "In dem Übergangsabschnitt 16871-16877, der noch einmal die Autarkie des Lebens am Lustort beteuert, befremdet der abschliessende Satz: sin hæten umbe ein bezzer leben/ niht eine bone gegeben/ wan eine umbe ir ere (16875-16877)." Yet these lines are not inconsistent with the situation, they merely foreshadow the necessity to face reality and to return to society. The cave is able to supply everything the lovers need for daily life, except "ere":

was soltin bezzer lipnar
ze muote oder ze libe?
da was doch man bi wibe,
so was ouch wip bi manne;
wes bedorften si danne?
si hæten daz si solten,
und waren da si wolten. (11. 16902-16908)

But "ere," the component that is amiss, is vitally important to the safety of the individual in the realms of established society. "Sie ist der Panzer, der die verwundbare Selbständigkeit der Individualität schützen soll. Der Ehrlose ist friedlos, vogelfrei. Das Fehlen von Ehre bedeutet demnach für das Wunschleben tödliche Bedrohung." Tristan and Isolde must return to society at this point in their development because they are not yet able to choose total separation from it. The maturity, such a choice necessitates, comes at a later stage of life when the lovers are truly altered through their suffering as they are separated from
each other. But for the moment:

Die höfische Gesellschaft ist auch für die Liebenden in der Minnegrotte kein gleichgültiges, fernes Draussen, sondern unmittelbare, reale Bedrohung. Das Bedürfnis der Ehre indiziert ihre Hilflosigkeit und die Notwendigkeit, von der Macht der zusammengeschlossenen einzelnen, die als Recht auftritt, anerkannt zu werden.6

Hence, the poet's interjection as the lovers return to society; he remarks that the two "wurden in ir herzen vro./ die vröude hætens aber do/ vil harter unde mere/ durch got und durch ir ere/ dan durch iht anders, daz ie wart (17695-17699)."

The return of Tristan and Isolde indicates their acceptance of the reality of their present situation. They return with the full awareness that their struggles will continue, that again they become part of society without the benefits of full integration. This leads to the sixth and final stage of the paradigm which deals with the consequences that the process of emancipation has for both, individual and society. It is introduced by Gottfried's third excursus which centers on huote, the surveillance of women and is a sharp critique of the practice and the attitude that lies at its roots.

Gottfried makes it absolutely clear that surveillance accomplishes nothing but the precise opposite of its intended result.

diu huote vuoret unde birt,
da man si vuorende wirt,
niwan den hagen unde den dorn;
daz ist der angende zorn,
der lop und ere seret
In a society which finds it necessary to put women under surveillance in order to protect the husbands' interests, women have only two ways available to themselves. They can either live chastely even though they are not loved with sincerity, or they can elude their husbands and find secret lovers who will satisfy their need for true love. Yet either way dooms them to dishonesty: with the first they act against their nature and with the second against their natural desire for personal honor. The ideal woman as envisioned by Gottfried, can therefore only exist in a society in which she is free from restraint. Only as a fully acknowledged individual is the woman able to be true to her ideal nature which automatically becomes the solace for everyone around her. The woman closest to the ideal is Isolde who, in spite of her oppressive surrounding, finds a way to truly love Tristan. Isolde, thus, becomes a model for everyone who seeks the true life and Gottfried firmly believes that "ez lebeten noch Isolde,/ an den man gar vünde,/ daz man gesuochen künde (18112-18114)."

The arguments set forth in the third digression on love form the background against which Gottfried brings the paradigm to its full conclusion. He continues to focus on Isolde even though Tristan stands in the center of all activity. With the way Isolde conducts herself during the
final separation from Tristan Gottfried proves that she has reached her full individuality; she is mature both emotionally and intellectually; and since she does not merely stand for herself, but represents Gottfried's ideal woman, she has to be interpreted as his proof of woman's ability to be equal to man. In many respects he even implies that Isolde is superior to Tristan because it is only she who is able to deal with the final separation in a constructive way. Isolde accepts the separation with the full understanding that her love for him will never cease: "wart Isolde mit Tristan/ein herze unde ein triuwe,/ so ist ez iemer niuwe,/ so muoz ez iemer stæte wern (18330-18333)." She has grown beyond the stage in which the physical union with Tristan is necessary to maintain her love; hence, she is able to love him on a level that is removed from the passionate—a level on which love endures forever because it is centered on the essence and not on the body. Tristan never reaches this state of transcendence, but instead continues at the level of physical love. His future away from Isolde turns into a perpetual search to regain her in her full person. This search leads him to the point in which he justifies his involvement with a girl—also by the name of Isolde—with the shallow excuse that Isolde the queen has surely forgotten him:

ich swende an ir lip unde leben
und enmac mir keinen trost geben
ze libe noch ze lebene.
It seems somewhat ironic that it is not Tristan, but his former student Isolde, who comes to embody the new person: the individual who has reached the state of complete self-awareness.

In terms of the paradigm, the separation of the lovers and its results constitute the final stage. The individual who is enveloped in the process of emancipation has to live with the reality of never finding unrestricted freedom because the forces of social prohibition are too strong. The only way in which one can escape them is by breaking out of society—completely and single-mindedly—as Isolde does when she is faced with the message that Tristan is mortally wounded.\(^1\) Her decision to come to his rescue
represents the point at which she breaks with society in the full awareness that she can not return to Mark's court; that having left, there would no longer be a normal life for her.

Isolde's choice makes her the paramount expression of the total individual who lives with oppression as long as possible, but when she is faced with having to either acknowledge or deny her individuality she is willing to choose isolation and even death. She defies all common values as she rushes off to live or die with Tristan, and her action impresses an awareness in the consciousness of society which renders it unable to retain the claim that one can find meaning only within its strict limits. From here on society is openly confronted with the impending changes which the rise of individualism and its intellectual emancipation brings. The existence of the conflict which Gottfried's Tristan und Isolde brings to a society in search of new norms constitutes proof in itself. With the lives of his protagonists, and especially Isolde's action, Gottfried supplies a tangible model which proves that life is not worth living unless one can truly be oneself. This realization, once established in the minds of the people, will not be lost but will always act as an encouragement for them to follow the path.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Gottfried's *Tristan und Isolde* is a high-point in the literary expression of the quest for self-actualization and individual equality which began to manifest itself on all levels and in all aspects of medieval society. The socio-economic conditions of twelfth-century Europe set the stage for the intellectual evolution of the individual from mere subject of state to the full-fledged citizen who possesses both rights and responsibilities. The change found its most vivid expression in the arts which do not only mirror social themes but also offer a testing ground in which the creative imagination can explore possibilities for change. The *Tristan* constitutes such a theme in search of a new social structure in which the needs of the individual person are accommodated.

Gottfried uses the Tristan-Isolde theme to denounce the social order of his time because it oppresses the individual with notions of the necessity of personal submission to established norms. He sees this structure as artificial and calls for the active defiance of the old system. Thus, he addresses his poem to a new society, the "noble hearts," and offers them a paradigm for emancipation in the form of a romance which has two protagonists: a man and a woman,
who both actualize themselves through love. Tristan begins the process before he enters society but never fully reaches the stage of entire individualization—while Isolde, growing from within the social structure, becomes Gottfried's example of the fully mature, self-aware, and self-realized individual.

It is important to note that neither Tristan nor Isolde set out to change society. Gottfried puts the whole emancipation scheme into the framework of a mechanism which is called into existence by the changes in society (i.e. the economic revival and its consequential social mobility). For both, Tristan and Isolde, education initiates the process of self-awakening and is put upon them by representatives of the "establishment." The intended purpose of this education, which, in its instruction goes beyond the conventional scope, was merely to ensure the children a high station in life. Neither Rual nor Isolde the mother could foresee that this kind of "liberal" education must by necessity lead to conflicts with established society.

Gottfried surely had plenty of evidence of these conflicts in his immediate surrounding—he may indeed have felt their impact on his own life. His poem acknowledges the conflicts brought on by the rise of individualism and shows their inevitable solution: the necessary rejection of the old norms. In the form of his paradigm, Gottfried shows how human values and interactions become a private matter which lead
to the collision with the establishment and bring about the protagonist's isolation from social acknowledgement with its legal as well as emotional support; which in its final result initiates the breaking down and restructuring of accepted social norms.

Gottfried's poem is an encouragement to all who strive for a better live, a life of self-expression and freedom. His version of the Tristan mirrors the social fermentation of his time so perfectly that it still arouses in the reader the excitement which it must have brought to its contemporary audience. It is truely a masterpiece for it combines beauty of form with the significance of content, a combination which will keep it alive in the imagination of Western culture.
CHAPTER I

Notes to Pages 1-5


3. Ibid., p. 72.


5. R. W. Hanning, in his book The Individual in Twelfth-Century Romance, claims that the chivalric romance expresses the awakening of individualism by centering itself on the protagonist's quest for self-fulfillment; this brings about his "active acceptance of life as an adventure, rather than as a battle for endurance or an attempt to protect hard-won security (p. 3)," and leads him "into situations which challenge his acceptance of social values and therefore offer an alternative to an identity defined by focus outside himself (p. 3)." Even though I agree with Hanning on the point that the chivalric romance is an early indicator of individualism in Western society, I do not see how the romance frees its protagonist from the necessity of defining himself in terms of social acknowledgement. It seems obvious that the chivalric knight, Chretien's Erec and Yvain for example, does step outside of the boundaries of social acceptance, but he never remains there. On the contrary, in each romance, the knight undergoes trials in order to regain the balance that has been jeopardized by his initial negligence to conform to socially accepted modes of behavior.

6. For details see Chapter II.

CHAPTER II


4. Ibid., pp. 59-62.

5. Ibid., p. 56.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid., pp. 63-64.

8. Ibid., p. 65.

9. For more details on the influence of feudalism on legal doctrine see Ullmann, pp. 66-104.

10. See Henri Pirenne's *Economics and Social History of Medieval Europe* for details.

11. Pirenne, p. 44.


14. See also Morris.


16. Ibid.

17. Morris, p. 137.


CHAPTER III

Notes to Pages 15-32


3. In the case of the merchants, jealousy is expressed in terms of their greed. It separates Tristan from his own society and has the same effect as the jealousy of the barons which later isolates him from the mainstream of courtly society. Tristan's manipulative power asserts itself for the first time when he finds himself abandoned by the merchants. He is aware of his own vulnerability and proceeds to secure his safety by carefully evaluating the situation and coming up with a solution.


5. Her training in music goes beyond merely "playing" an instrument; she learns to improvise in composition.

6. "Ungemein schwer zu bestimmen ist die Motivation der Minne bei Tristan und Isolde; vor allem, ob diese Minne schon vor dem Trank im Keim angelegt war (Ranke, Schwietering), oder erst durch diesen entsteht (Fürstner, Hatto, Schröder), lässt sich hier nicht beweisen. Was Tristan und Isoldes Beziehung vor dem Trank betrifft, könnte man diese, um Binswangers personal-ethische Termini anzuführen, allenfalls als 'Zusammentreffen', nicht aber als 'Begegnung' bezeichnen." In Gerrit J. Oonk's "Eneas, Tristan, Parzival und die Minne," p. 23.


11. Again a term used by C.B.Caples in his article "Brangaene and Isold."


13. Ibid.

CHAPTER IV
Notes to Pages 33-47

2. Ibid., p. 3.
3. Ibid., p. 6.
4. Ibid., p. 2.
5. Ibid., p. 6.
8. Ibid., p. 348.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., pp. 359-360.
12. Ibid., p. 350.
13. Ibid., p. 351.
15. Ibid., p. 31.
16. Ibid.
17. See also Urbanek, p. 367.
18. I realize that Gottfried's poem breaks off before Isolde is faced with this choice. But even though it is open to speculation, I believe it safe to assume that Gottfried would have continued to follow Thomas's outline of action.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Wright, Thomas. Womankind in Western Europe. London: Groombridge and Sons, 1869.