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# ‘Mistical Unions’: Clandestine Communications from Tristan to Twelfth Night

George W. Eggers

*University of Connecticut - Storrs*, [will.eggers@gmail.com](mailto:will.eggers@gmail.com)

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‘Misticall Unions’: Clandestine Communications from *Tristan* to *Twelfth Night*

George William Nordholtz Eggers III, PhD

University of Connecticut, 2015

This dissertation argues that important modes of self-definition in the Renaissance draw on the linguistic uncertainty in medieval literary constructions of lovers. Just as in Renaissance texts, medieval lovers such as Tristan and Isolde fashion themselves as a “misticall union”: a conglomerate self that shares one mind and erases all distinctions between sender and receiver as well as grammatical subject and object. This unity expresses itself in the lovers’ inexplicable ability to interpret correctly the most arbitrary of messages from one another while misleading those around them. Considering Shakespearean lovers in this context suggests how deeply this model of self-definition and self-abnegation – as well as its foundation in language – penetrated into Elizabethan England and eventually into the work of John Donne. This dissertation explores the social and theological roots of the idea of mystical connections between lovers, as well as the generic conventions that stem from these roots.

‘Misticall Unions’: Clandestine Communications

from *Tristan* to *Twelfth Night*

George William Nordholtz Eggers III

B.A., Occidental College, 1988

M.A., University of Connecticut, 1999

A Dissertation

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Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation

“Misticall Unions”: Clandestine Communications from *Tristan* to *Twelfth Night*

Presented by

George William Nordholtz Eggers III, B.A., M.A.

Major Advisor

---

Robert Hasenfratz

Minor Advisor

---

Fiona Somerset

Minor Advisor

---

Thomas Recchio

Minor Advisor

---

Jean Marsden

University of Connecticut

2015

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
On the Edge of Reception	39
Obscure Sender, Obscure Meaning	92
“We Two Being One”: One Body, One Soul, One Language	139
Constructing Senders, Constructing Meanings	205
Coerced Consent	233
Appendix: Tristan Dates	257
Bibliography	258

## INTRODUCTION

I wish that you knew that when I said two sugars  
I actually meant three.  
– Kate Nash “Nicest Thing” (2007)<sup>1</sup>

“Rið braut héðan, þú ókunni riddari,” segir hún, “ok fá þér  
herbergi ok dvel ekki vára ferð.” En sem Tristram sá gullit,  
kendi hann ok undirsoóð.

[“Ride off strange knight,” she said, “find yourself lodging  
and stop holding up our journey.” But when Tristram saw  
the ring, he recognized it and understood her meaning.]  
– Norse *Tristan* (13c.)<sup>2</sup>

Marie de France’s *Chevrefoil* opens with Tristan exiled by his uncle King Mark for love Queen Isolde. Missing her terribly, Tristan looks for an opportunity to meet with Isolde. Discovering that she will be travelling to Tintagel, Tristan hides in the woods along her route in the hopes of meeting with her. Tristan faces the challenge of communicating his love for her and his desire to meet without alerting any of the queen’s travelling companions. To communicate secretly, the knight chooses a code they have used in the past, the carving of his name on a twig. From this one word, Isolde gleans a complex message that includes the metaphor of their love as

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<sup>1</sup> Kate Nash, “We Get On.” *Made of Bricks*. Fiction Records, Cherrytree Records, and Universal Music Group. Release date August 5, 2007. CD.

<sup>2</sup> Brother Robert. *Norse Romance I: The Tristan Legend*. Ed. and Trans Marianne Kalinke. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2012), 200.

the intertwined branches of chevrefoil and honeysuckle.<sup>3</sup> How does she make this seemingly miraculous interpretive leap? Is it realistic for him to expect her to understand him that completely from such a minimal message? As only Isolde properly unweaves the message, how much meaning is produced by her, rather than Tristan? How is it that the lovers take advantage

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<sup>3</sup> Queunges ot ilex esté  
 E attendu e surjuné  
 Pur espier e pur saver  
 Coment il al peüst veer  
 Kar ne pot nent vivre sanz li;  
 D'euils deus fu il [tut] autresi  
 Cume del chevrefoil esteit  
 Ki a al codre perneit:  
 Quant il s'i est laciez e pris  
 E tut entur le fust s'est mis,  
 Ensemble poënt bien deserver,  
 Li codres mueri hastivement  
 E li chevrefoil ensemment.  
 "Bele amie, si est de nus:  
 Ne vuz sanz mei, ne mei sanz vus."

Marie de France. "Chevrefoil." *Marie de France's Lais*. (Gallimard, 2000), 53-4.

Citations are from the edition bilingue de Philippe Walter of *Marie de France's Lais*.

[He had been there a long time  
 He had waited and remained  
 To find out and to discover  
 How he could see her,  
 For he could not live without her.  
 With the two of them it was just  
 As it is with the honeysuckle  
 That attaches itself to the hazel tree:  
 When it has wound and attached  
 And worked itself around the trunk,  
 The two can survive together;  
 But if someone tries to separate them,  
 The hazel dies quickly  
 And the honeysuckle with it.  
 "Sweet love, so it is with us:  
 You cannot live without me, nor I without you."]

Marie de France. *The Lais of Marie de France*. Trans. Robert Hanning and Joan Ferrante. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995). 63-78.



of the ambiguity of language to communicate one message to one another and a different one to others?

The lovers make unrealistic yet correct interpretive leaps – precisely the sort of communication that has become such an important way of talking about love.<sup>4</sup> The queen – presumably Isolde – encounters a message from her lover Tristan. The entirety of the message consists of his name carved in the branch of a honeysuckle tree. None of the others in Isolde’s party understand or even acknowledge the message, but Isolde gleans sixteen lines of verse from that one word. Perhaps even more remarkable is that she is correct; one word offers enough information to establish a secret meeting in the woods. This scene will be discussed in detail in a later chapter, but for now the important element to take from it is the incompleteness of the message and the unrealistic nature of the interpretation. Within the lai, only two characters participate in this elevated communication: the queen and Tristan. Even the audience is left in the dark as to how the one word became so full of meaning because the text of the lai offers only the text and the interpretation without offering any Rosetta Stone. To some extent, we have no evidence that the specifics of her interpretation are correct save the fact that the two lovers do, in fact, meet. Perhaps most interestingly, the lai presents the emotional content that Isolde finds in the message without any of the nuts and bolts of how the assignation’s details are established. The motivation for excluding these mundane details would seem clear; it makes for bad storytelling when the lai is primarily focused on emotions. The lai’s emphasis on such emotional connections at the expense of the actual details of day to day communication, however, teaches readers that such details are less important than feelings; in fact, it suggests that a sufficiently strong emotional connection will substitute for linguistic clarity.

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<sup>4</sup> Marie de France. “Chevrefoil.” *Marie de France’s Lais*. (Gallimard, 2000), 53-4.

What is remarkable about this understanding is not that relational semantics are used. It is now an academic commonplace since Ferdinand de Saussure's 1916 *On the Nature of Language* that all communication has always been relational.<sup>5</sup> What is remarkable is that a twelfth-century writer has consciously constructed her text in a way that shows a working knowledge of what we would call relational semantics. Exploration of relational semantics in early works is limited, perhaps because the Middle Ages offer us few clear examples of theoretical articulations such as Saussure's. More recent scholars, however, have challenged the notion that medieval writers had no knowledge of the relational qualities of language. Recent scholars, including Stephen G. Nichols, have made this point by emphasizing that the lack of a formal articulation does not exclude a conscious use of relational semantics.<sup>6</sup>

Richard Waswo, for instance, in *Language and Meaning in the Renaissance* (1987) argues that Renaissance English writers had a clear sense of the relational qualities of language due to the Reformation and the attendant expanded translation of formerly Latin texts into the vernacular.<sup>7</sup> Waswo argues that the dualistic sign/referent model, whereby a sign has a stable relationship to the referent, was replaced in the Renaissance by a model where meaning is always contextual and triadic – including the signifier, signified, and receiver. Waswo points out that

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<sup>5</sup> Ferdinand Saussure, "Nature of the Linguistic Sign." *Course in General Linguistics*.

Ed. Charles Bally and Albert Reidlinger. Trans. Wade Baskin. (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959).

<sup>6</sup> Nichols, Stephen G. "Writing the New Middle Ages." *Neohelicon* XXXIII (2006) 1, 141–169.

<sup>7</sup> Waswo, Richard. *Language and Meaning In The Renaissance*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

Renaissance literary practice raced far ahead of theory, as the rhetorical texts of the period do not reflect this change<sup>8</sup> Waswo's ideas have come under pressure from Marcia L. Colish, who counters Waswo's assertions on both sides of what she calls a Burkhardtian divide by pointing out counter-examples in both periods.<sup>9</sup>

Elizabeth Eisenstein's *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (1979) also identifies relational semantics in the Renaissance, attributing it, as indicated in her title, to the expanded availability of texts due to the printing press.<sup>10</sup> Eisenstein's definition of the Renaissance extends into the eighteenth century, and she argues that the Renaissance got under way before print, but many of its achievements were "reoriented," if not made possible, by print. In particular, the wider circulation of texts allowed for greater collaboration and clarity in scientific endeavors. Interpretation of the Bible, however, became less clear as more people read Scripture in the vernacular and then circulated their opinions in print. Stephen G. Nichols' "Writing the New Middle Ages" connects medieval explorations of linguistic contingency with similar intellectual explorations in the twentieth-century, discussing the idea of a medieval post-modern sensibility regarding language.<sup>11</sup> Building on Howard Bloch's analysis of Marie de France's

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 80-1.

<sup>9</sup> Colish, Marcia L. "Review of *Language and Meaning in the Renaissance* by Richard Waswo." *Speculum*. Vol. 63, No. 4 (Oct., 1988), pp. 1008-1011.

<sup>10</sup> Eisenstein, Elizabeth. *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe, Volumes I and II*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1979).

<sup>11</sup> Nichols, Stephen G. "Writing the New Middle Ages." *Neohelicon XXXIII* (2006) 1, 141-169.

*Lais* and Daniel Heller-Roazen's analysis of the *Roman de la Rose*,<sup>12</sup> Nichols identifies the twelfth century as a period fraught with anxieties about how language could represent truth. These scholars trace these anxieties to the conflict between grammar and logic, the conflict of which appears in the Nominalist-Realist debate where Nominalists questioned the certainty of a Neo-Platonic understanding of the universe. While literary works like the *Roman de la Rose* address the radical contingency of language implied by the rigorous application of logic, few works in what might be called theoretical fields explore the same issues in such depth. The relative lack of exploration in these fields may be because of the Western philosophical tradition's emphasis on the truth, looking for the truth-value.<sup>13</sup> Literature, however, needed no such connection to the "truth," and this offered the freedom to explore more radical approaches to language.<sup>14</sup>

Important responses to these anxieties appear in some literary works of the time, as they attempt to address the bleak complexities – and radical contingency – of life in ways that,

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<sup>12</sup> Bloch, Howard. *The Anonymous Marie de France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). Heller-Roazen, Daniel. *Fortune's Faces: The Roman de la Rose and the Poetics of Contingency*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

<sup>13</sup> For more on the Western philosophical tradition's emphasis on truth-value, see Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method*. Trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. (New York: Continuum, 1996).

<sup>14</sup> This is despite the vigorous defenses of the importance of literature's allegorical truth made by authors such as Geoffrey VinSauf. VinSauf, Geoffrey. "Poetria Nova." *Three Medieval Rhetorical Arts*. Trans. and ed. by James J. Murphy. (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1971).

according to Nichols, religious texts do not.<sup>15</sup> Bloch argues that Marie de France responds directly to these philosophical concerns about language as she negotiates the formation of meaning, authority, and identity – specifically in the vernacular. Heller-Roazen presents a more radical literary device used in the *Roman de la Rose: performative mimesis*. Performative mimesis occurs when texts create experiences in their flesh-and-blood audiences that mimic the interpretive complexities explored by the characters in the texts. One example of this occurs in the English morality play *Mankind*.<sup>16</sup> During the play, several devils fail to tempt the character of Mankind to commit a range of vices. In response, the devils announce that they will call forth a greater devil to tempt Mankind, but only if the audience pays them. While appearing to simply ask for payment, the devils are asking for the audience to literally pay for the damnation of Mankind. When the audience members pay, they become complicit in an allegorical experience of their own. In this way, audience members help to construct the experience. Nichols implies an affinity between the breaking of the fourth plane in examples like this one to post-modern techniques used in the twentieth century.<sup>17</sup>

At the heart of linguistic *performative mimesis* stands relational semantics. Relational semantics explores communications that are contingent, dependent upon how the message is received to establish meaning; as such, the listener plays an almost equal role to the speaker in creating meaning. Relational semantics stands in opposition to referential semantics. Referential

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<sup>15</sup> Nichols, 154.

<sup>16</sup> Anonymous. “Mankind.” *The Macro Plays*. Ed. Mark Eccles. (London: Oxford UP, 1969. 158-184).

<sup>17</sup> Nichols refers primarily to Heller-Roazen’s analysis of the character Faux Semblant in *Roman de la Rose*.

semantics privileges the intent of the speaker in communication; the listener's job is to find the proper reference to determine the speaker's intent. *Roman de la Rose* uses linguistic ambiguity in speeches by the character Faux Semblant to force readers to participate actively in creating what the words mean.

By emphasizing the idea that emotions should make mundane communication unnecessary, *Chevrefoil* relies upon the notion that communication is relational, meaning that words' meanings are essentially arbitrary and dependent upon context. As such, differences in listeners' biases can lead them to interpret the same word – even when heard at the same time – in different ways. Unlike *Roman de la Rose*, however, *Chevrefoil* places readers in a different interpretive position. Rather than establishing the radical contingency necessary to inspire *performative mimesis* in her readers, Marie offers readers a partial glimpse – in the form of Tristan's intent – into the lovers' process. Giving the partial glimpse leads to a more sympathetic reading of the lovers, as the message emphasizes the elevated parts of their relationship. Withholding the specifics of her decoding process, however, establishes the mystical quality of their communication. This lack of clarity places readers in a position somewhere between the lovers and the strangers.

My dissertation describes a less radical deployment of relational semantics. Rather than engaging readers in communications informed by relational semantics, the literary representations of lovers shows characters engaging relational semantics within the text. In a way, the contingency in these lovers' communications may be seen as a transition between the *performative mimesis* of works like *Roman de la Rose* and the relatively unambiguous deployment of lovers' communications by the end of the Renaissance.<sup>18</sup> The lovers in these medieval and Renaissance romances encounter communications that include ambiguity that is

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<sup>18</sup> Discussions of these conventions will be at the heart of the following chapters.

seemingly irresolvable. Literary representations of lovers' responses to these ambiguities grow progressively less complex; early works on Tristan include a range of responses, both positive and negative, to represent the lovers, while later works like *Twelfth Night*, represents appropriate lovers using only positive representations.

In my discussions of language, I would like to expand upon the work of Waswo, Eisenstein, Colish, and Heller-Roazen, looking for important precursors to the trends they identify in the Renaissance. An off-shoot of this dissertation's primary thesis about generic conventions of communication between lovers, therefore, will be to extend the observations of these scholars to an earlier period, suggesting that a working knowledge of relational semantics can be identified as early as the twelfth century in England.

My work matches well with Nichol's assertions, by placing a working knowledge of relational semantics earlier than previously thought and by examining primarily literary works rather than rhetorical texts. Unlike Waswo, however, I do not want to merely establish a new, earlier originating date for this pre-knowledge of Saussurean semantics. Rather than a break, I see a continuity that appears in a relatively distinct manner. My goal is to identify the wider circulation of these ideas in the literature of medieval England and, perhaps, a more aggressive approach to language within the relative freedom of literature in contrast to the limitations of medieval philosophy. Within my work, these limitations consistently appear when one considers ideas of the divine, wherein all meaning – by definition – resides. The primary distinction for me, then, is not chronology but the specifics on heterosocial communications in an environment particularly concerned with the status of women, law, and consent. In essence, I want to answer

the question David Quint raises whether medieval and Renaissance men and women were capable of conceiving of language in ways they did not articulate.<sup>19</sup>

Tristan becomes a central figure as literary representations of lovers' communications form in the face of anxieties about language combine with consent in marriage. Most representations of Tristan include each of the primary discourses about lovers' communications, good and bad; by the end of the Renaissance, these discourses are used singly to identify the relative merit of separate potential lovers. Tristan and Isolde's communications often include elements of each of the following interpretive situations:

- 1- The communication is all in their heads.
- 2- The communication is miraculously effective, due to their love.
- 3- The imagined communication goes contrary to evidence.
- 4- The imagined communication goes contrary to evidence in a way that silences and/or coerces the beloved.

Within the character of Tristan, we see a range of responses that anticipate Renaissance literary lovers' communications, some admirable and others troubling: the solitary imaginings of the *Old Arcadia's* Gynecia, the miraculous interpretive leaps of Romeo, the self-involved ruminations of *Twelfth Night's* Malvolio, and the coercive silencing by *All's Well That Ends Well's* Helena. All of these seemingly contradictory conventions appear in the figure of Tristan; over time, works tend to show the conventions in different characters. The characteristics of

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<sup>19</sup> Quint, David. "Review of Language and Meaning in the Renaissance. by Richard Waswo. *Renaissance Quarterly*. Vol. 42, No. 3 (Autumn, 1989), 535.



“Western culture’s epitome of love – heterosexual, adolescent, secret, foredoomed”<sup>20</sup> – stem from the specific conditions of lovers in twelfth century Anglo-Norman society, hiding their interior, private, passionate love from society. The modes of communication used in these conditions increasingly also represent idealized behaviors. What, in twelfth century versions of Tristan and Isolde, is represented as morally ambiguous becomes isolated, with individual characters taking on different modes of communication. Tristan has a privileged connection with Isolde, but also one that may be merely in his mind, and may also, in other ways silence her. In later works, the ideal characters have privileged communications while less worthy lovers imagine or silence those they claim to love.

A close look at the literature of the Middle Ages and our modern period shows many – perhaps surprising – similarities. Most surprising may not be that the Renaissance continues to use discourses that look back to the previous period only to disappear; instead, the Middle Ages actually introduces many discourses we consider modern long before any period we identify as “modern.” The examples at the top of this chapter show a particular discourse about love that does not appear in the English tradition before the Middle Ages, specifically the eleventh and twelfth centuries.<sup>21</sup>

The line from Kate Nash’s 2007 album *Made of Bricks*, when she says that she wants her lover to know that she wants three sugars when she asks for two, may seem unremarkable. In fact, it is likely that the line has gone unremarked since its release because it shares – with many

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<sup>20</sup> Peter Holland. *The Complete Pelican Shakespeare*. Ed. Stephen Orgel and A.R. Braunmuller. (New York: Penguin, 2002), 1255.

<sup>21</sup> Like Jaeger, I argue for a shift in attitudes about love starting in the eleventh and the twelfth centuries.

other love songs of the early twenty-first century – what has become a common-place sentiment about love. “Nicest Thing” expresses a desire for the comfortable intimacy of a beloved who has observed Kate closely over time and noticed the disparity between her request for sugar and her actual practice of taking more. Nash places this line within a long sequence of things that she wants from her lover, summarizing her list by saying “basically, I wish that you loved me.” Within this list, she defines love as the ability of her beloved to know what she wants even when her words say something else. This definition of love – not unique to Nash – sets a dangerous precedent that what she says is not what she means, paired with the equally dangerous expectation that if her beloved does what she says rather than what she means, it must not be love.

It is not unreasonable to wish that your loved one knows you so well that you do not have to ask for what you want; it is only unreasonable when you expect it to happen. Despite this, modern movies and television shows are filled with examples of lovers who have such insight into the ones they love that each pair seems to share a psychic connection. Seeing relationships like these – even in fiction – helps to create the sense that one’s own relationship is lacking, assuming the comparative element of Glenn Firebaugh’s studies on happiness and economic status can be applied to this situation.<sup>22</sup> Put simply, happiness is determined in comparison to

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<sup>22</sup> Firebaugh, Glenn. “Relative Income and Happiness: Are Americans on a Hedonic

Treadmill?” *American Sociological Association Centennial Annual Meeting*, August 14.

Studies have shown that happiness with one’s economic status is relative or relational. Families of similar objective wealth but in different social circles perceive their situations differently. These studies show that it is possible to be in a very elevated economic class and still feel that one is poor.

what we see around us, and seeing others with this kind of insight sets up unrealistic expectations.

Where, then, did these expectations arise? At the very least, these expectations begin to appear in the English literary tradition during the twelfth century, as seen in the translation of the exchange between Tristan and Isolde above. Much like Nash, Isolde tells her lover one thing, to ride off, when she wants him to stay and meet with her later.

The medieval period still serves as the era against which European and American modernity is measured. When, in *Pulp Fiction*, Marsellus threatens to “get medieval,” he means to inflict violent, unthinking, depraved violence on someone.<sup>23</sup> When one describes another person’s attitudes as medieval, one generally means simple-minded, superstitious, and outdated.<sup>24</sup> Even the name medieval stands in for the Middle Ages, suggesting that one thousand years of European culture served merely as a holding place for the return of culture from the Classical period to the Renaissance – the rebirth of a dead culture – or Early Modern – the start of the characteristics by which modern people define themselves. The attitudes are, perhaps surprisingly, perpetuated by scholars, reproducing attitudes inherited from a Tudor

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<sup>23</sup> *Pulp Fiction*. Dir. Quentin Tarantino. By Quentin Tarantino. Prod. Lawrence Bender. Perf. Samuel L. Jackson and Uma Thurman. Miramax, 1995. Perf. By Ving Rhames.

<sup>24</sup> Dinshaw, Carolyn. *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999). Carolyn Dinshaw’s *Getting Medieval* extends these characteristics to suggest that the phrase invokes a sado-masochistic heteronormative violence that supposedly echoes the “ritualized sexual torture” of the Middle Ages.

monarchy attempting to justify its political ambitions.<sup>25</sup> Jacob Burkhardt provides the most famous articulation of the differences between the periods, consistently viewing the Renaissance in a favorable light.<sup>26</sup> By portraying the Middle Ages as savage and ignorant, our culture effectively colonizes the period, depicting this past using the same discourses that European colonists used to represent the tribal people they encountered in the New World.<sup>27</sup> The redoubtable Harold Bloom's 1999 *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* articulates this position most unequivocally, arguing that the Renaissance – and Shakespeare specifically – creates the modern idea and expectations of changeable, individual humans.<sup>28</sup>

While some scholars continue to work on assumptions about the Middle Ages established in the early fifteenth century, others have challenged this position. My work is hardly the first to identify the importance of the twelfth century. As early as 1927, C.H. Haskins argued that the increase in humanism seen in the Renaissance of the fifteenth and sixteenth century can be seen

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<sup>25</sup> Sharpe, Kevin. *Selling the Tudor Monarchy: Authority and Image in Sixteenth-Century England*. (London: Yale University Press, 2009).

<sup>26</sup> Burkhardt, Jacob. *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*. (London: Penguin, 1990. Orig. 1860).

<sup>27</sup> Edward Said discusses these discourses in his seminal work on colonialism. Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. (New York: Vintage, 1971). Stephen Greenblatt notes how similar discourses are applied to tribal Americans. Greenblatt, Stephen. *Marvellous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World*. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1991).

<sup>28</sup> Bloom, Harold. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. (New York: Riverhead: 1999).

as early as the eleventh century.<sup>29</sup> Haskins' work has opened the door to a strand of criticism that puts pressure on this periodization. John Dagenais and Margaret Rich Greer directly question the use of colonizing discourses directed at the Middle Ages,<sup>30</sup> while other scholars indirectly pressure colonizing discourses by identifying important continuities between medieval and Renaissance works. Paul Strohm's work, contextualizing the discourses of the two periods, carefully identifies both continuities and breaks in the way issues were framed.<sup>31</sup> Simpson's *Reform and Cultural Revolution* reverses preconceptions about the increasing complexity of Renaissance literature by noting how Early Modern works often simplify and codify generic expectations from the Middle Ages.<sup>32</sup> C. Spehan Jaeger's *Ennobling Love In Search of a Lost Sensibility* places a key shift in discourses of love in time between the twelfth and fifteenth

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<sup>29</sup> C.H. Haskins. *The Twelfth Century Renaissance*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1927).

Resistance to Haskins can be found widely, perhaps most famously in Urban T. Holmes, Jr. "The Idea of a Twelfth-Century Renaissance." *Speculum*. (Vol. 26, No. 4 (Oct., 1951), pp. 643-651).

<sup>30</sup> Dagenais, John, and Margaret Rich Greer. "Decolonizing the Middle Ages: Introduction." *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*. (Vol. 30, Number 3, Fall 2000). 431-448.

<sup>31</sup> Strohm, Paul. *Politique: Languages of Statecraft Between Chaucer and Shakespeare*. (Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame P, 2006).

<sup>32</sup> Simpson, James. *Reform and Cultural Revolution*. *The Oxford English Literary History Volume 2: 1350-1547: Reform and Cultural Revolution*. Ed. Jonathan Bate. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004). Simpson continues to probe the boundaries between the periods in articles such as "The Reformation of Scholarship: A Reply to Debora Shuger," by *The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 42 (2012): 249-68.

centuries. Jaeger argues that a previously public, virtuous performance of generally homosocial love for the excellence and virtue of another person changes to a more private, passionate heterosocial love.<sup>33</sup> By identifying how complex generic medieval conventions about lovers' communications become deployed more simply in Renaissance literature, my work follows in the tradition established by these scholars.

It is tempting to view the current emphasis on communication and equality in heterosocial love relationships as the result of expanded cultural, legal, and economic status of women in modern times, particularly since the latter half of the twentieth century. A look at the literary tradition, however, shows that the idea that lovers have a seemingly mystical ability to transcend the difficulties inherent in language begins to circulate widely in twelfth century Anglo-Norman England.

Consent to marry can be fraught with linguistic challenges. First, verbal consent may be forced, using either social or physical coercion. To account for this difficulty, the church changed its definition of marriage to include as a necessary component of marriage the inner consent of the potential spouses. Linguistically, this change in policy reflects an awareness of potential disparities between what one says and what one means. Second, the speaker's status is changed by this speech act from an individual to a corporate – married – identity.<sup>34</sup> A lover's relations are determined by this linguistic act.

As it turns out, the linguistic challenges in establishing consent involve a specific model of communication identified now as relational semantics. Relational semantics can be best described in contrast to referential semantics, the model of interpretation circulating most widely

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<sup>33</sup> Jaeger, C. Stephen. *Ennobling Love: In Search of a Lost Sensibility*. (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania, 1999).

<sup>34</sup> Austin, J.L. *How To Do Things With Words*. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1962).

in medieval treatises on interpretation. Referential semantics asserts that communication consists primarily of a speaker's intended message; meaning derives from the intent of the speaker. Meaning is in the hands of the speaker.

In contrast, relational semantics – appearing in the communications of the literary lovers in this study – highlights the importance the listener plays in constructing – and even determining – meaning. As seen through the lens of relational semantics, the act of communication is collaborative. Relational semantics becomes most clear when a message is deeply ambiguous – even radically contingent – and the listener provides meaning by choosing to adopt one interpretation by reading in a particular context or contingency. Literary lovers often take advantage of the ambiguity of language to communicate one message to their lovers and another to the public. The disparity between the two meanings highlights a disparity between an interior and exterior view of the world.

A range of influences comes together to influence literary lovers' communication in eleventh and twelfth century England, including the increased importance of consent of lovers,<sup>35</sup> the increased notion of private lives,<sup>36</sup> anxieties about language – brought on in part due to increased literacy among laity,<sup>37</sup> anxieties about gender and particularly about the potential for influential women such as Eleanor of Aquitaine to upset traditional gender power dynamics, and

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<sup>35</sup> Irvn M. Resnick "Marriage in Medieval Culture: Consent theory and The Case of Joseph and Mary," (*Church History*, June 2000) 350 ff.

<sup>36</sup> Duby, Georges. *A History of Private Life: Revelations of the Medieval World*. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap P, 1988).

<sup>37</sup> Galloway, Andy. "Authority." *A Companion to Chaucer*. Ed. Peter Brown. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

an already thriving tradition of literature that Stephen G. Nichols describes as *performative mimesis*, a process whereby audience members and readers are led into experiences that parallel those of the characters.<sup>38</sup> While most of the romances in my study do not manipulate readers with the complexity and sophistication characteristic of *performative mimesis*,<sup>39</sup> these romances offer a model of characters in somewhat realistic settings engaging with relational semantics.

More specifically, particular twelfth-century permutations of the Tristan and Isolde myth establish a series of literary conventions about lovers' communications. These initial explorations are ambiguous, reflecting cultural ambiguities about the status of communication, marriage, and adultery, as these literary conventions form around anxieties about language that become prevalent in twelfth century England due in part to changing definitions of consent within marriage law. By the end of the seventeenth century, however, many of these interwoven and therefore ambiguous strands have separated into less ambiguous conventions, ones that are still in wide circulation today. The conventions tend to fall into four patterns:

- 1- *Obscure Sender*. The first convention, a contextual critique of language focusing on uncertainty about the sender's identity, includes a lover struggling to interpret a message without a clear knowledge of the source of the message.

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<sup>38</sup> Nichols, Stephen G. "Writing the New Middle Ages." *Neohelicon* XXXIII (2006) 1, 141–169.

<sup>39</sup> Huot, Sylvia. *Dreams of Lovers and Lies of Poets: Poetry, Knowledge, and Desire in the Roman De La Rose*. (London: Legenda, 2010). Huot focuses on the complex relationship between the reader and the *Roman de la Rose*.



- 2- *Self-involved*. The second convention, a critique of self-involved interpretation focusing on discourses, includes a lover struggling to determine whether an interpretation is intended by the sender or imagined by the lover.
- 3- *One mind*. The third convention presents lovers as able to overcome the first two challenges due to their often unrealistically privileged knowledge of one another.
- 4- *Coerced consent*. The fourth convention represents concerns about the idea of lovers having privileged communications, raising the possibility that the idea of sharing one mind may be merely a means of coercion; this final convention develops into the convention that a rake may be reformed, that the lover knows better than the beloved what the beloved wants.

Looking at literary representations of lovers in the process of interpreting one another's messages will show the assumptions written into these characters, show how these assumptions interact with the assumptions built into other social roles, and show the ideal to which readers should aspire. Literary constructions of social roles are particularly effective barometers and mediators of social taste, and the romances in this study, because of their wide readership and idealized heroes, are particularly useful in identifying social trends.

This dissertation argues that important modes of self-definition in the Renaissance draw on the linguistic uncertainty in medieval literary constructions of lovers. Just as in Renaissance texts, medieval lovers such as Tristan and Isolde fashion themselves as a "misticall union": a conglomerate self that shares one mind and erases all distinctions between sender and receiver as well as grammatical subject and object. This unity expresses itself in the lovers' inexplicable ability to interpret correctly the most arbitrary of messages from one another while misleading

those around them. Considering Shakespearean lovers in this context suggests how deeply this model of self-definition and self-abnegation – as well as its foundation in language – penetrated into Elizabethan England and eventually into the work of John Donne.

## Chapter One                      Introduction

The introduction you now read proposes a model of communication in order to explain the workings of communications between literary loves in medieval and Renaissance romances and places these communications in a broader scholarly context.

## Chapter Two                      On the Edge of Reception

Building on as well as putting pressure upon the ideas of Richard Waswo, this chapter raises the issue of relational semantics and just how far it had penetrated into medieval thinking. Several fields approached an articulation of relational semantics but were limited in the extent to which they could explore the instabilities of language. The most famous discussion of these issues appears in the Nominalist-Realist debate but rhetorical tracts, medieval cognitive models, and even definitions of sin draw close to articulating relational semantics.

## Chapter Three                      Obscure Sender, Obscure Meaning

This chapter identifies the genre of romance as a site where the linguistic concerns discussed in the first chapter can be explored more fully than in the previous chapter's fields. By focusing primarily on secular human relations, the romance raises possibilities for meaning to be determined in negotiation with a sender's intention. The medieval debate over consent becomes a flash point for uncertainties about language due in no small part to the potential for coerced

statements. Twelfth century romances pick up these concerns and one of the most widely circulated of these romances is *Tristan and Isolde* in its various forms. Tristan and the works that follow in this tradition present situations where intent is inaccessible, leaving receivers to construct meaning from available clues. Works such as Marie de France's *Eliduc*, Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, and Sidney's *Old Arcadia* transmit and explore these anxieties about language. These linguistic instabilities appear at first in the lovers' own communications; presenting uncertainty in lovers – who are assumed to have privileged interpretive insight into one another – suggests concerns about language generally. By the time of Shakespeare, however, these interpretive instabilities appear more prominently in suitors who are somehow inappropriate as evidence of their unsuitability.

#### Chapter Four                    'We Two Being One': One body, One Soul, One Language                    *One Mind*

This chapter presents one response to the anxieties about language presented in the second chapter. Lovers are presented as having an almost miraculous insight into one another, allowing them to correctly interpret even the most unstable communications between themselves. This convention starts to appear at the same time the church begins to emphasize inner consent as a defining characteristic in marriage. The language used to describe the lovers echoes the language of the wedding ceremony from the Old Sarum Missal in use since the Norman Conquest and continuing unchanged through the Prayer Book of 1552 through the Renaissance. These miraculous communications become a defining characteristic of the relationship between Tristan and Isolde in its early forms, including Marie de France's *Chevrefoil*. By the time of *Romeo and Juliet*, the idea of lovers sharing one mind is presented as a defining characteristic of

proper matches. This idea of a radical collective identity becomes central to John Donne's poetry.

#### Chapter Five                      Constructing Senders, Constructing Meaning – *Self-involved*

The idea of lovers sharing miraculous interpretive insight into one another is initially presented alongside examples of these same lovers – Tristan, for example – clearly imagining meanings that have no connection to their beloved sender's intent. The fact that Tristan carries on entire conversations with a statue of Isolde undermines the certainty of the seemingly miraculous communications discussed in the third chapter. These uncertainties include language taken from medieval and Renaissance cognitive models that emphasize a difference between the faculties of the fantasy and the imagination. Works such as *Tristan and Isolde* and *Troilus and Criseyde* raise concerns about whether the lovers' miraculous interpretations are merely imagined. Later works such as *Old Arcadia* and *Twelfth Night* deploy this discourse differently, however, by having proper lovers imagine correctly and improper ones incorrectly. As such, this convention develops from one that destabilizes the convention that lovers share one mind to one that reinforces it.

#### Chapter Six                      Willful Misreading                      *Coerced Consent*

Early works in this tradition, stemming once again from the emphasis on consent in *Tristan and Isolde*, consistently present the idea of attempting to force another to marry in a negative light. Works such as Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale* expand on the legal discourses in *Tristan* as a form of coercion, ignoring a sender's clear intent in favor of the interpretation desired by the receiver. In later works, however, the conventions of uncertainty and sharing one mind come together into the idea that a true lover may know the mind of her beloved better than

he knows himself. *All's Well That Ends Well* raises the possibility that the beloved has an inner consent not known even to himself. Later drama continues this in the trope of the rake reformed.

The overall goal of this work is to explore the development of generic conventions portraying extra-linguistic communication between lovers. As such, it fits within scholarly trends that follow the development and transmission of literary conventions and their wider societal impact. Any work that attempts to trace how the definitions of love change over time owes a debt to Denis DeRougement's *Love in the Western World* and *Love Declared: Essays on the Myths of Love*.<sup>40</sup> His discussion of the growth in Western Europe of passionate love follows a similar trajectory to my analysis, though DeRougement discusses the Tristan myth primarily in archetypal and psychological terms while I will focus more tightly on specific acts of communication.

Lawrence Stone's *Family, Sex, and Marriage in England 1500-1800* traces the development of an ideal marriage that includes compatibility and companionship. Over time, this idea became popular across classes. Relations in marriage become more egalitarian and affectionate. In fact, one could argue that these new conditions offered the potential for importing the discourse of love I discuss in this dissertation into marriage. Given that the linguistic conventions used by literary lovers were used to escape the limitations of monogamy, it may be surprising that marriage begins to incorporate these ways of speaking. The potential for increased equality in marital discourses opened the potential for much-needed reform.

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<sup>40</sup> DeRougement, Denis. *Love in the Western World*. Rev. ed. Trans. Montgomery Belgion. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983) and *Love Declared: Essays on the Myths of Love*. Trans. Richard Howard. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1963).

Responding to discussions started by Stone, Frances Dolan's *Marriage and Violence: The Early Modern Legacy* identifies the roots of unequal modern marital discourses in the early modern period.<sup>41</sup> Dolan focuses on the Protestant and particularly Puritan ideal of the married couple becoming one flesh with the male as the head of that collective body. Dolan then discusses the conflicts that arise when one body has two minds, and the subsequent potential for violence; after all, "the idea of the self is incompatible with the idea of marriage as fusion."<sup>42</sup> She identifies connections between Renaissance discourses of marriage as seen in sermons and conduct books and the modern Promise Keepers whose men promise to reassume the reins of power in their marriages. Dolan's analysis provides an excellent companion to this work, as she traces the attempts to reconcile the ideal identified in this dissertation with real life practice. While using different texts, this dissertation could easily be seen as following in her "*presentist historicism* that attempts to denaturalize present arrangements by identifying their roots in the past."<sup>43</sup>

By tracing the progression of literary motifs across the medieval/Renaissance divide, Helen Cooper's *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* argues for important precursors to definitions of love that are often

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<sup>41</sup> Frances Dolan, *Marriage and Violence: the Early Modern Legacy*. (Philadelphia: U of Penn P, 2008). Also, Stone, Lawrence. *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England: 1500-1800*. (New York: Harper and Row, 1977).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

discussed as though they originate in the Renaissance or Early Modern period.<sup>44</sup> Cooper looks to romances for these precursors for much the same reason as I do, that the relative generic freedom of the form encouraged explorations not often seen in other genres. She also identifies the various Tristan tales as “foundational”<sup>45</sup> for female desire. Cooper’s discussion of love focuses primarily on women’s desire rather than communication between the lovers. As such, this dissertation complements her work by expanding the connections that can be traced across these periods.

#### LITERARY TRANSMISSION OF LOVERS SHARING ONE MIND

The similarity of modern literary lovers’ experiences to medieval ones is not hard to establish, but the transmission between the periods may seem less clear. Transmission of these themes – particularly the central one that lovers share one mind – is not simple or always linear. It is not specific tales that are transmitted but the underlying ideas about lovers’ communication; manifestations are period-specific. Attitudes toward the idea of sharing one mind change over time as well but the essential ideas continue to circulate. As such, this model of lovers is not trans-historically formalist nor mythic but continues to be reproduced and transformed by the cultures that inherit it.

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<sup>44</sup> Helen Cooper. *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare*. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004). Cooper refers to, among others, Germaine Greer as incorrectly attributing to Shakespeare’s originality motifs clearly evident in earlier medieval works (218).

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

Two qualities of this model for communication suggest that the connection is not merely incidental. First, and most importantly, communication does not work like this on a daily basis. Second, these interpretive leaps appear very rarely in literature other than between lovers; when they do appear, the abnormality of the insight is highlighted. Three groups are shown able to understand others in this way: psychics, close family members such as twins or mothers toward their children, and lovers. Of these three types, only one – lovers – is represented as having this ability without exceptional psychic powers.

By the time of Shakespeare, most of the literary conventions of lovers' communication had stabilized into a few specific forms. The stabilization of these conventions is important because the most widely circulated medieval tales incorporating these ideas are the various forms of the Tristan tale, a tale that wanes in importance from Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* until Wagner. The importance of the Tristan story is not, as Denis DeRougement would have it, that the tale itself is foundational to Western European culture. Rather, I argue that the Tristan tales articulate a model of communication between lovers that continues to circulate because many of the social conditions that determine heterosexual relations have remained very similar. Each of these conditions helps to form specific literary conventions and will be discussed in later chapters.

As this dissertation provides a detailed discussion of the formation, transmission, and stabilization of these literary conventions up to the poetry of John Donne, this chapter will only identify texts that bridge the gap between the literary works of the late seventeenth century literature and the late twentieth century. This chapter is not meant to be exhaustive, either in texts or what might be called literary periods. It merely attempts to provide a plausible case for



the continued circulation and popularity of the idea that lovers share a privileged understanding of one another.

Many eighteenth-century literary works, with their emphasis on rationality, tend to deemphasize the miraculous nature of lovers' communications. However, the most popular romance of the eighteenth century, Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*,<sup>46</sup> relies upon conventions established hundreds of years earlier. As widely noted, the novel can be seen as Mr. B's education in how to be open to Pamela's ideas: how to enter into an open conversation with her through her letters. In a passive (perhaps passive aggressive) manner, Pamela convinces Mr. B that she is worthy of his love. More specifically, she convinces him that he is worthy of her love; she knows that he will respond to her moral behavior when he doesn't. Linguistically, Mr. B says he will despoil Pamela and intends to despoil her though he does not. By showing that Pamela knows Mr. B better than he knows himself, Richardson's novel draws upon the same convention that merges power and knowledge in Shakespeare's *All's Well That Ends Well*, where Helena convinces Bertram to love her.<sup>47</sup> As will be discussed in chapter six, *All's Well That Ends Well* transforms the negative medieval tradition of imposing one's will on another into a positive model of reforming the lover by combining it with the idea of lovers sharing one mind – or at least with her sharing his. Rather than drawing on the specifics of Shakespeare's play, Richardson draws upon a shared set of literary conventions still in circulation over one hundred years later.

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<sup>46</sup> Samuel Richardson, *Pamela*. (London: Penguin, 1981).

<sup>47</sup> William Shakespeare, "All's Well That Ends Well." *The Complete Pelican Shakespeare*. Ed. Stephen Orgel and A.R. Braunmuller. (New York: Penguin, 2002),

One of the most popular nineteenth-century novels, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, includes as its climax an act of miraculous communication between Jane and Rochester. Brontë introduces the idea that certain tones should be "audible to the ear of love alone."<sup>48</sup> The woman's failure to hear these words then suggests a failed relationship, a suggestion that pans out over the rest of the narrative. In contrast, Jane notes later in the novel that "Mr. Rochester has sometimes read my unspoken thoughts with acumen to me incomprehensible."<sup>49</sup> While this example could be explained by a great familiarity, Rochester's famous cry for her transcends the limitations of space and time<sup>50</sup> Brontë takes great care to establish that this communication happens only between two lovers as in tune with one another as Jane and Rochester.

In fact, one modern television adaptation of *Jane Eyre* emphasizes the lovers' remarkable communication even more than Brontë. The 2006 Masterpiece Theater production modernizes and expands upon Brontë's language for Jane in the example above.

I do have a friend. Someone who, when I talk to them,  
they understand everything I say. They would laugh if  
I told them about Mrs. Reed. They are so in tune with  
me, they know my thoughts before I think them, certainly  
before I've put them into words.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre: A Norton Critical Edition*. Ed. Richard J. Dunn. (New York: Norton, 2001), 121.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 375 and in recap 381.

<sup>51</sup> Sandy Welch, *Jane Eyre*. Dir. Susana White. BBC. Television. Sept. 24, 2006.

This modern adaptation by Sandy Welch adds the idea that Rochester knows Jane even better than she knows herself, much like Helena in *All's Well That Ends Well* or Richardson's Pamela. Welch also adds a pair of twins to the screenplay allowing her to introduce the following question into the script. "Do you think it so unusual that two minds can be so in tune they can communicate across the country? They can call out to one another across space and time?"<sup>52</sup>

Such idealized, unrealistic representations of love lay the foundation for feelings of failure when they are not met, when real people need tell their lovers what they want. One could argue that J. Alfred Prufrock is looking for just the kind of transcendental, extra-linguistic connection when he cries out that it is impossible to say just what he means and hopes that he will be understood nevertheless.

#### CIRCULATION OF EARLY ENGLISH TEXTS SHOWING THIS CONVENTION

I have chosen the medieval and Renaissance literary works at the heart of this dissertation for much the same reason that I have chosen the works above; they were widely circulated and therefore had a disproportionate effect upon their culture. I have worked upon the assumption that a wider circulation allowed for a greater impact on society. Because the patriarchal, stratified culture consumed mostly works by white men, most of the works in this dissertation are not inclusive in a modern sense. In no way does this indicate a belief on my part that these works of the traditional canon have any more interest than less canonical ones; rather, their wide circulation allows me to suggest two things. First, the values behind the work likely supported the dominant discourses of their times. Second, it is likely that other authors could have been

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

influenced by such widely circulating works even without making direct references to them as sources.

To determine the circulation of these works, I have relied upon the simple method of identifying works that have many surviving manuscripts or that we have some evidence of continued circulation and/or performance. Perhaps the best example is the Tristan tale, which appears in many manuscripts and many languages. Thomas's Anglo-Norman version survives in eight fragments from five different manuscripts. Gottfried's version survives in eleven "complete" manuscripts and in a dozen fragments of others. The prose *Tristan* perpetuates this circulation, surviving in seventy-five manuscripts as well as eight printed editions from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

I am generally skeptical when any scholarly work tries to identify specific times that themes such as this one – the idea that lovers should share one mind – find their origins. For this reason, I hesitate to identify twelfth century England as such a place and time. Certainly, classical works play an important role in the circulation of ideas about relational semantics. Ovid establishes a secret code with his lover allowing them to communicate while she is with her husband. This clearly indicates an awareness of the arbitrariness of communication, but it does not move on to suggest an interpretive awareness beyond normal language.

Likewise, early Irish tales contain elements that appear in the lovers within later English romances. Early Irish literature placed greater importance on themes of heterosocial love than contemporary continental works did.<sup>53</sup> Great passion is shown in works such as *Exile of the Sons of Uisliu* and well-defined women appear in works such as *The Tragic Death of Muirchertach*, but no communication between the lovers is emphasized. Even the probable source for the

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<sup>53</sup> Jean Markale. *The Epics of Ireland*. (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1992), 16.

Tristan myth, *The Pursuit of Diarmuid and Graine*, contains none of the linguistic play between the “lovers” that appears in later Tristan tales, nor does it present them as what we would call lovers.<sup>54</sup> Likewise, these works give little attention to the idea of compatibility between lovers other than to point out that they should be of similar ages. Dick Davis argues for an alternate, Persian source for the Tristan myth in Fakhraddin Gorgani’s eleventh century *Vis and Ramin*.<sup>55</sup> In so doing, Davis follows Pierre Gallais’ *Tristan et Iseut et son Modèle Persan*.<sup>56</sup> For the purposes of this study, however, the *Vis and Ramin* does not highlight the same model of communication central to the Tristan romances any more than the Irish does.

Romances of twelfth-century England, however, devote much time to the communication between lovers than either the continental or the Irish tradition even when the tale can be traced to an earlier work, as in Tristan from Diarmuid. Several factors seem to contribute to this shift. First, a powerful patroness of the arts comes to power at this time in Eleanor of Aquitaine, leading to works with her as dedicatee and, it can be assumed, as a target audience. Second, theologians were beginning to engage in the Nominalist-Realist debates about language. Third, debates over a woman’s consent in marriage began to give greater importance to her wishes. These elements combine in the romances, particularly in the communication between men and women, reinventing the expectations of love at the time.

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<sup>54</sup> The works’ Irish titles are *Longes mac n-Uislenn*, *Aided Muirchertach Meic Erca*, and *Tóraigheacht Dhiarmada agus Ghráinne*, respectively.

<sup>55</sup> Gorgani, Fakhraddin. *Vis and Ramin*. Ed and trans by Dick Davis. (New York: Peguin, 2008).

<sup>56</sup> Gallais, Pierre. *Essais sur Tristan et Iseut et son Modèle Persan*. Paris, 1974.

The expectation that love is private – even to the point of private interpretation – seems to gain a foothold in the twelfth century. As such, these modes of communication anticipate and help to form what Anthony Low identifies as John Donne’s reinvention of love. Donne “invented a new kind of private love: idealized, Romantic, mutual, and transcendent in feeling.”<sup>57</sup> In particular, Low defines this shift as move from “something essentially social and feudal to something essentially private and modern.”<sup>58</sup> I would like to extend his argument by reframing Donne as the realization and epitome of a tradition that has its roots in the twelfth century establishment of private, extra-linguistic understanding between lovers.

Such private communication and its connection to consent in – or outside of – marriage also provides an important literary precursor to what Lawrence Stone identifies as companionate marriage.<sup>59</sup> There seems little doubt that, regardless of church ideals of consent, twelfth century parents still held greater power than potential spouses in establishing marriages, so I do not take exception to Stone’s idea that companionate marriage expands radically in the eighteenth century. I would argue, however, that this change, brought about by shifting economic conditions in the eighteenth century, sees important precursors in medieval lovers. The fact that these lovers often stand outside traditional marriage merely reinforces the idea that marriage without love is somehow lacking. Furthermore, I would highlight Stone’s assertion that the

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<sup>57</sup> Low, Anthony. *The Reinvention of Love: Poetry, Politics, and Culture from Sidney to Milton*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993), 6.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>59</sup> Stone, Lawrence. *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England 1500-1800*. (New York: Harper and Row. 1977).

transfer of power from parents to spouses had an equalizing effect upon relations between husband and wife.<sup>60</sup>

The twelfth century romances central to this dissertation give equal importance to senders and receivers of messages. This less-gendered potential equality does not address social inequities between lovers but it at least presents equal roles as an ideal. Such interpretive equality complicates the idea that the traditions of courtly love as identified by C.S. Lewis force the woman into the position of a passive object of affection.<sup>61</sup> However, having a privileged relationship with only one other person becomes a different form of social containment, enforcing emotional – if not necessarily marital – monogamy.

It is not within the scope of this dissertation to offer an answer as to why these particular manifestations of lovers' communications have continued to exert such a powerful hold for such a long time. My goal is to identify the conditions in the twelfth century that helped produce these conventions and the conditions that led to their relative stabilization in the seventeenth century. Other potentially fruitful future explorations of this theme might consider two general conditions shared by the twelfth and the late twentieth centuries. First, both periods are produced by cultures where a clear disparity of economic and political power exists between men and women, even as the ideal communication between lovers implies equality. Second, both periods reflect anxieties where this status quo is challenged in ways that allow women to be heard. In the twelfth century, women were allowed greater power to withhold consent; in the 1980's, women's greater economic power offered them greater self-determination and political voice. The important characteristic of the change in women's status is that the change is in

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 325.

<sup>61</sup> Lewis, C. S. *Allegory of Love*. (London: Oxford UP, 1936).

relation to men. It has been a commonplace that the Anglo-Saxon period was a golden age for medieval women but scholars such as Jennifer Ward have challenged this position.<sup>62</sup> If these conditions are indeed central to the circulation of discourses of privileged communication between lovers, then one potentially fruitful area of exploration might be in American literature during the 1920's, when women earned suffrage, and the 1940's, when women entered the workplace in new ways due to the war .

Considered together, these discourses define love in ways that are unrealistic and mutually exclusive. If two lovers are supposed to share one mind, how is it possible for the lover to know his beloved better than she knows herself? Since not sharing one mind indicates inappropriateness in love, how does one address a “failed” love? When compared to these literary conventions, real life would seem to be an exercise in disappointment. The lovers in this study may provide us with answers, but tragedy is must more appealing on the stage than it is in real life.

### CONSIDERING OTHER POTENTIAL LENSES

The discourse at the heart of this dissertation has the potential – both good and bad – to obscure important differences in gender, class, race, and religion. Any discourse that implies some sort of equality between people in different conditions opens the potential for such equality to be accepted. But it also suggests that all relationships and the people in them should be judged by a model that is now white, middle-class, heterosexual, and Christian.

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<sup>62</sup> Ward, Jennifer. *Women in England in the Middle Ages*. (London: Humbeldon Continuum, 2006),



Because this dissertation identifies the literary construction of a mode of communication that blurs the relative power available based on gender, it may give the impression that this indicates a real shift in power relations between the genders, particularly in marriage. First, it is important to note that although these medieval and Renaissance literary lovers adopt marital discourse, they are often not married as they engage in their shared communications. Second, these are literary conventions, and while they convey values and/or ideals, we have little indication that they were considered any more realistic than modern movies about love.

Like modern movies, however, early romances circulate these ideas and help to provide a model of love to which one can aspire, defining success or happiness in love/marriage by establishing a standard, if an unrealistic one. David R. Shumway points out, “the fact that romance narratives are usually consumed as entertainment and often explicitly regarded as fantasy does not limit the degree to which readers are likely to accept them as true,... this skepticism may not prevent a repeated pattern found in these texts from functioning as a model.”<sup>63</sup> One could argue readers are encouraged to engage in a reading process not unlike the one the lovers share, whereby one becomes the other. Shumway describes the reading process by noting how readers “will live with and through the characters for the duration of the narrative. In surrendering to the story, the reader or viewer typically accepts the point or points of identification that the text offers. So readers, male or female, of *Jane Eyre* usually identify much more with Jane, the narrator and protagonist, than with any of the other characters.”<sup>64</sup> When one combines this with current scholarship indicating that happiness is relative, it is possible that

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<sup>63</sup> David R. Shumway, *Modern Love: Romance, Intimacy, and the Marriage Crisis*. (New York: New York UP, 2003), 5.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

repeated exposure to these unrealistic discourses of communication might lead to dissatisfaction with the reality of one's relationship.<sup>65</sup> The idea that couples should strive for both equality and intimacy, as noted by Stephanie Coontz, would seem to find its roots and ideals in the idea of a privileged communication between lovers.<sup>66</sup>

Much as this dissertation does not explicitly trace the real conditions of gender equality, it does not explicitly emphasize the real conditions of class. As with gender, the mode of communication I discuss holds the potential for radically leveling members of different classes. Rarely, however, is it deployed this way. Most often, members of different classes are shown to be incorrectly imagining insight into the ones they love. Stone and others associate the linking of romantic love and marriage to the rise of the bourgeoisie. Shumway argues that by the latter half of the twentieth century, the bourgeoisie have reverted to aristocratic patterns of marriage for financial gain, with romantic love and particularly intimacy being promoted among the petite bourgeoisie and professional managerial class.<sup>67</sup> Such a widely circulating discourse would have circulated across class lines both in marriage and in love.

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<sup>65</sup> Firebaugh, Glenn. "Relative Income and Happiness: Are Americans on a Hedonic Treadmill?" *American Sociological Association Centennial Annual Meeting*, August 14. For more on the relative nature of happiness, see work by Ruut Veenhoven, including "Sociological Theories of Subjective Well-Being." *The Science of Subjective Well-Being*. Ed. M. Eid and R. J. Larsen. (NY: Guilford Press, 2008), or work by Richard A. Easterlin, including "Explaining Happiness." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science* (2003) 100: 11176-11183.

<sup>66</sup> Coontz, Stephanie. *Marriage, A History: or, From Obedience to Intimacy or How Love Conquered Marriage*. (New York: Viking, 2005).

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

Most of the modern American constructions of lovers discussed in this dissertation similarly erase or ignore differences in religion. The differences between Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, and Catholic marriage practices are most often represented in the past fifty years as problems to be overcome in the face of a couple's compatibility, such as in *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*,<sup>68</sup> or simply ignored, as in the largely secular *When Harry Met Sally*.<sup>69</sup> One of the primary conflicts arises, however, when a particular religious group looks to maintain hierarchical relations between the sexes or it seeks to limit interfaith marriage.

Defining a successful relationship by modes of communication – an extension of the consent debate – rather than consummation opens the door to same-sex relationships being represented as ideal. This is a field that I would love to see explored further, looking at same-sex courtship in modern cinema. With no potential for same-sex marriage in the Middle Ages, the idea of same-sex mutual consent did not register in the same way. George Chauncey argues that a transformation in how good relationships are defined is occurring in the twenty-first century, with increased interest in same-sex marriages.<sup>70</sup> Despite the potential for a discourse of radical compatibility to open doors for same-sex relationships, many of the literary lovers discussed in this dissertation are heteronormative, often verging on homophobic. Applying this literary construct to members of the same sex has the potential, however, to simplify or misapply gender roles and ignore the discrimination faced by those in same-sex relationships.

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<sup>68</sup> Nia Vardalos. *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*. Dir. Joel Zwick. Playtone Films, Universal. April 19, 2002. DVD.

<sup>69</sup> Nora Ephron. *When Harry Met Sally*. Dir. Rob Reiner. Castle Rock. July 14, 1989. DVD.

<sup>70</sup> Chauncey, George. *Why Marriage? The History Shaping Today's Debate Over Gay Equality*. (New York: Perseus, 2004).

There is an equal danger when one tries to apply this ideal – an ideal of love with roots in twelfth-century England between nobles of largely the same race – to other ethnic groups. Ann DuCille argues that love and marriage appear differently in films and novels by African Americans because of the impact of slavery and oppression.<sup>71</sup> She highlights in particular the disparity between the promises of the marriage ideal and the social conditions that make it unlikely for many black Americans. We have to be careful not to merely slap a coat of paint on a Barbie and assume that Snow White and “Snow Black” are the same. Medieval discussions of “other races” are in any case vague, such as in *Horn* when Swedes are referred to as Saracens.

All of these fields offer vistas for future scholarship, determining how deep – if at all – the idea of two people becoming one has penetrated into the various communities above. Gender and class provide the primary backdrops for this analysis, one that brings into the foreground language and how it defines how we interact with the world.

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<sup>71</sup> DuCille. Ann. *The Coupling Convention: Sex, Text, and Tradition in Black Women's Fiction*. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994).

## CHAPTER TWO ON THE EDGE OF RECEPTION

Amor conduce noi ad una morte.  
[Love led the two of us unto one life and death]  
- Francesca in Dante's *Inferno*<sup>72</sup>

Changes in the church's attitudes towards consent and marriage in twelfth-century England help establish conditions that highlight the importance of listeners in establishing the meaning or meanings of communications. By placing an emphasis on the inward consent of the betrothed rather than the will of his or her parents, church law gave voice to those who might previously have been ignored. Church law, however, did not entirely supplant centuries of legal precedents that valued only the voice of the father. Given the continuing power of the parents, the potential for a disparity between the choice of the child and the choice of the father, and limited access for the youth to communicate freely, conditions were ripe for the youth to use one

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<sup>72</sup> Alighieri, Dante. *Inferno*. Trans by Allen Mandelbaum. (New York: Bantam, 1980), V.106.

Their experience relates to the later chapter on sharing one mind in two ways. First, they share "one death," which resembles the shared linguistic experiences of lovers. Second, one wonders whether Dante was playing with multiple meanings, suggesting they shared a "little death" as well; if so, Dante's deployment of multiple meanings has an almost relational quality to it. See the section on rhetoric within this chapter for more. While the specifics of Dante's vision of *Inferno* were not circulating until, of course, he composed the poem, similarly grisly images were associated in earlier visions of Hell as well.

phrase to communicate one message – in a clandestine manner – to each other and a different meaning to their guardians.

Understanding the impact of these changes on language and identity becomes clearer once one isolates each step in the process of communication. Describing the process, however, poses some obstacles, as neither medieval nor modern linguistics highlight perfectly the key steps. The problems with applying the theoretical linguistics of the Middle Ages and Renaissance stem primarily from an almost universal neo-Platonic understanding of language and the search for certainty at the heart of that mindset.

The problems with applying modern linguistic models, other than anachronism, stem from modern assumptions about communications as being independent of human relations.<sup>73</sup> More specifically, the most prominent modern models of linguistics erase important interpersonal dynamics in order to present the most broadly applicable model.<sup>74</sup> Interpersonal

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<sup>73</sup> The idea of the public sphere was articulated by Habermas as a freely critical interpretive environment where ideas took precedence over the source of the ideas, at least partly isolating ideas from the identity of the person asserting those ideas. Habermas' idea that listeners should not passively accept what they hear – especially if the speech is from someone in power – matches well with my model; the potential; erasure of the source, however, erases important information in lovers' communications. Jurgen Habermas. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Trans. Thomas Burger. (Cambridge: MIP UP, 1991).

<sup>74</sup> Ferdinand Saussure. "Nature of the Linguistic Sign." *The Critical Tradition*. Trans. Bu Wade Baskin. Ed. David Richter. (Boston: Bedford, 1998). Originally published in his *Course in General Linguistics*, 1916.

dynamics, however, play an inordinately important role in understanding communications in these romances.

In lovers' communications, relational semantics are literally relational: defined by and defining the relationship.<sup>75</sup> While every step in every act of communication reflects – perhaps determines – the identity of the participants, we will focus on steps emphasizing the importance of reception in determining meaning.

Looking closely at the development of literary representations of the expectation that lovers should share privileged communications with one another offers insight into the development of interiority. Interiority implies a distinction between one character's interior perceptions of the world in contrast to the perceptions of the larger community. Self-image offers one door to interiority. Literary lovers work with the knowledge that their love offers them a shared interiority; they know of their identities as lovers while others do not.

Establishing terms. My goal here is to articulate explicitly the tacit assumptions about communication that appear in literary works from the medieval and early modern periods. As noted before, no clear articulation of relational semantics exists from the period we are discussing, so I would like to propose a vocabulary of modern terms to explain the interpretive framework within which I will be considering these literary texts. This section will expand upon

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<sup>75</sup> For the purposes of this study, lovers will refer to characters with a romantic interest in other characters. This stands in contrast to the definition offered by C. Stephen Jaeger. *Ennobling Love: In Search of a Lost Sensibility*. (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1999).

a seven-step model. While these steps may seem obvious, making sure to isolate each will help in the analyses to follow.

- 1- Intended speech-act conceived
- 2- Articulation or encoding of intention into speech-act
- 3- Reception of speech-act (sound or text; assumption of intent –my emphasis)
- 4- Decoding speech-act via a shared code (or codes-my emphasis)
- 5- Receiver reacts, activating or indicating the message as it was received
- 6- Sender confirms meaning(s) to intended audience(s)
- 7- (these last steps continue, serving as a continuing series of communications)

Intention. The working assumption in communication is that the speech-act is intended to communicate something to another person. This step may seem both obvious and certain, but considering this element of communication as its own step opens the door to examining previously underexplored instabilities. First, the sender may not know his own mind. Second, the sender's intentions may change over time. Third, the sender conceives of his intentions in relation to the anticipated response from the receiver.

Early English literary characters, particularly those in medieval texts, are analyzed often in ways that deemphasize these potential instabilities. Many modern analyses are still informed by the notion that medieval literary characters and perhaps even people did not exhibit interiority.<sup>76</sup> Humoral models also suggest a potentially stable self, and these ideas circulate

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<sup>76</sup> Harold Bloom's *The Invention of the Human* (New York: Riverhead, 1998) is perhaps the most widely discussed and most explicit of these works. Harold Bloom. Katherine Eisaman Maus' *Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995)



widely from ancient times through the Middle Ages and Renaissance.<sup>77</sup> Finally, allegorical understandings of the self literally make public and exterior the feelings and thoughts that modern people consider to be interior.<sup>78</sup> In contrast, analysis of modern literary works includes the commonplace gesture of examining disparities between a character's conscious actions and what might be called his subconscious. Subconscious motivations can be difficult to detect in texts that do not highlight interior thoughts clearly enough to show a disparity between these thoughts and actions that run counter to these intentions. As seen in Abelard's discussion of

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argues that interiority is characteristic of the Renaissance. Building on Colin Morris's *The Discovery of the Individual, 1050-1200* and , Robert W. Hanning's *Individual in Twelfth-Century Romance* scholars such as Suzanne Verderber explores the connection between the development of subjectivity and its relationship to power and language (4). More specifically, she highlights the development of how subjection of the self involves the "folding" of power, the development of internalized values that invite people to police their own actions; the romances of the twelfth century can best be seen as instances of "pastoral power appropriated and repurposed by the 'individual'" (16). Morris, Colin. *The Discovery of the Individual, 1050-1200*. (Toronto: U of Toronto P. 1987). Robert W. Hanning's *Individual in Twelfth-Century Romance*. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1977). Verderber, Suzanne. *The Medieval Fold: Power, Repression, and the Emergence of the Individual* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

<sup>77</sup> Ben Jonson's comedies come to mind, as they work on a stable humoral self.

<sup>78</sup> Such assumptions hinder a close look at allegorical figures such as Gluttony in *The Vision of Piers Plowman*. A fluid analysis of Gluttony's attempt in Passus 5 to confess himself of himself leads one to the idea that Gluttony is only this allegorical figure while in that state of sin and will return to an individuated state should he ever actually make it to confession.

intent, there were medieval precedents for such a disparity, and the presence of canon law that accounts for a lack of internal consent suggests that ideas of concealed intentions circulated outside theological circles as well.<sup>79</sup>

The expression of an idea is linked to the assertion of self into the world; one articulates identity through communications.<sup>80</sup> One's self concept filters and frames the desires to be articulated, the assertions to be made, and the ideas to explore. Each speech act becomes an articulation of the self. Each speech act also works with an assumed audience or audiences, imagined by the sender. Targeting this audience involves anticipating how to best communicate the desired message, including the best code or codes. Most importantly, imagining how to best communicate one's ideas to these audiences requires the sender to define a relationship between him- or herself and the audience(s). As such, each speech act is an act of attempted self-definition.

Articulation into a code. As noted before, the sender must choose a code into which he or she wishes to convey the intended message. The code must be known by the intended audience. For a broader audience, a widely used code should be used. Many of the communications between lovers must be clandestine, however, and therefore a private code would allow particular readers to understand while others do not. The adoption of a particular

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<sup>79</sup> Abelard. "What Sin and Vice Consist in (From *Know Thyself* or *Ethics*)." Trans. D.E. Luscombe. Ed. Richard Bosley and Martin Tweedale. (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview, 1998). (*Scito te ipsum*). 549-559.

<sup>80</sup> These ideas echo those found in Howarth, Caroline. "Representations, identity and resistance in communication." *The Social Psychology of Communication*. Ed. Hook, Derek and Franks, Bradley and Bauer (London: Martin W. Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

code, as seen in Robert Le Page's discussion of code-switching,<sup>81</sup> is an act of self-representation that conveys group identity.<sup>82</sup> In addition to including the desired audiences, this adoption of a code may exclude outsiders. Basil Bernstein's discussion of restricted codes as a means of excluding outsiders and establishing personal identity, while originally used to define differences in language was used by different socio-economic classes, offers a lens for considering how presented to consider the formation of identity through specific modes of speech.<sup>83</sup> The use of public and private codes applies within the context of lovers in that a message can carry one meaning in the commonly accepted, public, *elaborated* code while at the same time carrying a different message in the privately adopted, *restricted* code. The primary difference is that the community established by the restricted code numbers only two members.

*Decoding of intended message via a shared code or codes.* The audience for any speech act assumes that someone is attempting to convey an intended meaning; essentially, it is not meaningless noise. The attempt to determine intent appears centrally in medieval discussions of language. Determining the sender's identity – and the inherent assessment of character – plays an important role in interpreting any messages. Determining the intended audience is also paramount, particularly if the intended audience is not the one attempting to interpret the message.

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<sup>81</sup> Le Page, R.B. "The Evolution of a Sociolinguistic Theory of Language." *The Handbook of Sociolinguistics*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 113.

<sup>82</sup> Wardaugh, Ronald. *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

<sup>83</sup> Bernstein, Basil. "Social Class, Language and Socialization." *Language and Social Context: Selected Readings*. Ed. Gigolioni. (Harmondsonsworth, England: Penguin, 1972).

In addition to allowing for communication, the ability to decode correctly the message from another suggests the potential for a shared group identity, though such an identity-group may be so large as to be the entirety of those who speak English. This identification helps to establish one's status in society. Merely decoding and replying can be, on a minor scale, an *inexplicit performative* in the sense that the statement's truth-value judgment may be less important than how, generating a response, it changes one's status in society.<sup>84</sup> As identified by J.L. Austin, the most famous of *performative* speech-acts is when a celebrant announces "You are now husband and wife." This statement changes the status of the betrothed but is not essentially true or false in that this status may eventually change. In this case, the response is the key, making the *perlocutionary act* itself *performative*.

Even an almost uselessly large group such as "English speakers," however, has subsets; vocabulary and accent may differentiate Nigerian English from Jamaican English, for instance.<sup>85</sup> For the purposes of my argument, an even more limited group identity would be indicated by a vocabulary shared by two. This decoding, however, may be partially or entirely unrelated to the intended message. This disparity (the term "error" seeming to go against the model of linguistics seen in the romances) can have at its root either an incompleteness in the message or the application of a code other than the one that was intended.

Any message includes some incompleteness or imprecision. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the medieval thinkers identified this contingency. The modern framework for

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<sup>84</sup> Austin, J.L. *How To Do Things With Words*. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1962).

<sup>85</sup> For more on this, see Gunnel Melchers and Philip Shaw. *World Englishes*. (London: Arnold, 2003). See also Jan Svartvik and Geoffrey Leech. *English: One Tongue, Many Voices*. (New York: Palgrave, 2006).

discussing such imprecision draws heavily on Derrida's notion of *différance* (with an a).<sup>86</sup> *Différance* combines the two notions of difference, where one word's meaning can only be established via opposition to other words (rather than to any essential *presence*), and deferral, where meaning is always in a process of establishing differences and therefore can never truly be stable or certain.<sup>87</sup> Derrida critiques, however, the idea of certainty rather than exploring real world communications; as such, he makes philosophical observations.

In contrast, the literary works in this study explore attempts to bridge these interpretive gaps. The most useful vocabulary for exploring this process comes from Hans-Georg Gadamer and Wolfgang Iser.<sup>88</sup> Gadamer's model incorporates the imprecision of language by stating that one must first accept the idea that the result of a true conversation is unknown. "No one knows in advance what will come out of a conversation."<sup>89</sup> This involves the acknowledgment that the speaker does not know everything, and that there is a "horizon" beyond which the speaker's knowledge does not extend. "In order to be able to ask, one must want to know, and that means

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<sup>86</sup> Derrida, Jacques. "Difference." *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. Eds. Julie Rivken and Michael Ryan. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 385-407. Derrida emphasizes the a in *différance* in an effort to emphasize the dual role of differing and deferring, by including in one word both definitions.

<sup>87</sup> "The other sense of the 'to differ' [*differer*] is the most common and most identifiable, the sense of not being identical, of being other, of being discernible, etc." (Derrida 390).

<sup>88</sup> Iser, Wolfgang. *The Implied Reader: Patterns in the Prose Communication from Bunyan to Beckett*. (Baltimore: John's Hopkins P, 1978).

<sup>89</sup> Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*. Trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. (New York: Continuum: New York, 1996), 383.

knowing that one does not know”,<sup>90</sup> or that there is a horizon beyond which one’s knowledge does not extend. A conversation, then, involves “fusing the horizons” of the two participants to form a larger, single “horizon of interpretation,”<sup>91</sup> that of the conversation. “*The fusion of horizons that takes place in understanding is actually the achievement of language.*”<sup>92</sup> This fusion is not immediate. Rather, it is an ongoing process of encountering the other person’s ideas and growing gradually closer to that intended meaning even as that meaning may change as the person’s ideas shift. “All writing is a kind of alienated speech, and its signs need to be transformed back into speech and meaning. Because the meaning has undergone a kind of self alienation through being written down, this transformation back is the real hermeneutical task”.<sup>93</sup> In this way, Gadamer provides a vocabulary for the deferred nature of language as well as the uncertain, negotiated qualities of communication.

The process of fusing these horizons may best be described as using the imagination to fill interpretive gaps, as described by Wolfgang Iser. Iser discusses primarily the reading of texts in absence of a physically present sender and the ability to receive direct signals as to the similarity between the sender’s intent and the receiver’s interpretation. “The activity of reading can be characterized as a sort of kaleidoscope of perspectives, preintentions, recollections. Every sentence contains a preview of the next and forms a kind of viewfinder for what is to come; and this in turn changes the “preview” and so becomes a “viewfinder” for what has been read.”<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 363.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 397.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 378. Gadamer’s emphasis.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 393.

<sup>94</sup> Iser, 279.

Particularly when texts present us with gap, “the opportunity is given to us to bring into play our own faculty for establishing connections - for filling in the gaps left by the text itself.”<sup>95</sup> We fill in the gaps using our knowledge of generic and linguistic conventions but there exists the potential for disparities.

Confirmation or denial of interpretation. The last three steps outlined above involve the continuing process of attempting to determine how closely the receiver’s interpretation matches the sender’s intention. This can occur in a few different ways.

- a- *Silence implies consent.* Lacking any indication that the receiver’s response was wrong, the receiver will continue as though the message were transmitted clearly.
- b- *Reply clarifies code.* In a conversation, the receiver replies to the message; if there has been any misunderstanding, the sender can then clarify the original intent.
  - a. *Public or private code.* Troubles may arise when one person assumes a private meaning and another assumes a public one.
- c- *Extra-linguistic signal gesture toward a meaning.* If the sender is not present, then one is limited to other signals, either within the text or in the broader context. If these do not match, then one should alter one’s interpretation.

The tools we use to anticipate the text are “first, a repertoire of familiar literary patterns and recurrent literary themes, together with allusions to familiar social and historical contexts; second, techniques or strategies used to set the familiar against the unfamiliar.”<sup>96</sup>

One of the important contexts at our disposal is that of the literary conventions that teach readers how to anticipate readings and then alter them in the face of new evidence. When one

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 280.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid 288.

does not alter in the face of contradictory evidence, interpretations grow further from an act of communication and grow closer to a narcissistic act of imagination. This acknowledgement of a disparity between an outer reality and an interior one has been seen as the characteristic of interiority, and it will appear in many of the literary works in this study. Described in medieval cognitive terms, imaginary intended messages overwhelm contrary evidence available to the sense (processed by the fantasia).<sup>97</sup>

Not surprisingly, each of these steps holds the potential for disparities to arise between sender and receiver(s). Perhaps more surprising is that many of the widely circulating early English texts explore these disparities in the communications between lovers. Each remaining chapter in this study highlights one potential for misinterpretation as seen in the literary lovers. The third chapter focuses on the absence of a sender and how this can affect interpretation. The fourth chapter explores the literary fiction of a privileged interpretive relationship between lovers that bypasses all of the imprecision in language. The fifth chapter focuses on filling interpretive gaps and then failing to reassess in the face of new information. Finally, the sixth chapter focuses on the dangerous idea that it is romantic for one person to coerce another into consent despite a clear rejection.

Lovers provide an excellent testing ground for communications because love is contingent and performative. It has become a commonplace notion that lovers have privileged insight into one another. Relationships between lovers are emotionally contingent, both in

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<sup>97</sup> The difference between the imagination and the fantasy, as defined in medieval and Renaissance understandings of cognition will be explored later in this chapter.



courtship and in maintenance. In courtship, one looks for signals of acceptance or rejection, and these signals may involve an ongoing process of negotiation. Despite the fairytale convention of living happily ever after, attaining consent is not the end point for this process; while the default position becomes consent within a relationship, this consent may be withdrawn in the face of other events or feelings.

The performative element of communication becomes more prevalent between lovers when one is trying to move the other into consent.<sup>98</sup> If consent is offered, the lovers' statuses – and identity – change, even if only privately. In some cases, no clear response is interpreted as consent, when a lover sees a desired answer. In other cases, wishful thinking colors a lover's response to clear rejections, leading to misinterpretations.

There is some evidence that suggests people in love are more sensitive than non-lovers to those they love (or, perhaps, desire). When feeling desire, the body produces a variety of chemicals that help the lover to bond to the beloved.<sup>99</sup> The combination of dopamine, norepinephrine, and phenylethylamine inspires feelings of bliss and encourages the lover to imprint all of the tiniest details of the beloved in the mind of the lover. In addition, the pupils dilate, allowing for greater reception of details. One benefit in communication between lovers would be in paralinguistics, the indirect element of communication conveyed through gesture and tone. A greater sensitivity to minimal signals would allow lovers a code to consider when trying to interpret message. One potential hindrance to lovers would be the chemical

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<sup>98</sup> Austin defines this attempt as a perlocutionary act. The acceptance would be performative.

<sup>99</sup> Frederickson, Barbara. *Love 2.0: How Our Supreme Emotion Affects Everything We Feel, Think, Do, and Become*. (New York: Hudson Street, 2013).

reinforcement from a neutral or negative verbal response perceived as a confirmation; this would encourage wishful thinking.

Early English literary texts present lovers as behaving as though under the influence of these reactions even though the medical reasons were unclear. Sidney expresses an awareness of heightened sensitivity in his *Old Arcadia*, noting that “Desire holds the senses open, and a lover’s conceit is very quick” (101).<sup>100</sup> The behavior of Tristan and Isolde after they take the potion follow very closely the symptoms of an influx of dopamine, norepinephrine, and phenylethylamine. The fading of the potion’s response shows astute observation of human behavior, in that a different set of chemicals takes over – often around seven years – for long-term commitment. Oxytocin, released in orgasm, and vasopressin seem to encourage monogamy but also interfere with the neural pathways of dopamine and norepinephrine. This leads to a lessening of the emotional highs, replaced by a more chemically sedate response and perhaps, less attentiveness to paralinguistic detail.

These discussions of language overlook the differences that the status of men and women bring to the table in their interpretations. Linguists such as Robin Lakoff have tried to identify modern linguistic trends and the impact of gender on those trends.<sup>101</sup> Studies of the Asantee (Ashanti) tribe in Ghana, however, seem to confirm these assertions as the men adopt more passive roles as they attempt to curry favor with the matrilineal powers-that-be.

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<sup>100</sup> Sir Philip Sidney. *The Countess of Arcadia’s Arcadia (The Old Arcadia)*. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), 101.

<sup>101</sup> Lakoff, Robin. “Talking Like a Lady.” *The Routledge Language and Cultural Theory Reader*. Eds. Lucy Burke et al. (London: Routledge, 2000). (originally published in 1975).

More specific to the early English romances, however, is that the linguistic patterns of the ideal relationship support an equal role in creating a message and in receiving it. Leveling the interpretive power of the sender and the receiver offers more control to those who were traditionally forced to listen and accept rather than assert. This equality comes to a head in the notion of a shared linguistic group of two and will be discussed in the chapter on “one mind.”

Despite the lack of a clear theoretical framework or vocabulary, the early English literary works in this study indicate a working knowledge of the mind, the body in love, and even relational semantics. While most of the early English theoretical thinkers were engaged in the search for stable certainties, the literary tradition moved in the opposite direction, exploring presenting interpretive fissures in ways that may have predated our modern understandings of language and love.

#### MEDIEVAL ANXIETIES ABOUT LINGUISTIC INSTABILITY

La bufera infernal, che mai non resta,  
Mena li spirit con la sua rapina;  
Voltando e percotendo li molesta.  
Quando giugon davanti a la ruina,  
Quivi le strida, il compianto, il lament.

[The hellish hurricane, which never rests  
Drives on the spirits with its violence;  
Wheeling and pounding, it harasses them.  
When they come up against the ruined slope,

Then there are cries and wailing and lament.]

- The fate of lovers in Dante's *Inferno*<sup>102</sup>

The intellectual climate in twelfth-century England was primed for the articulation of relational semantics, but no clear articulation of these ideas was made. Thinkers in various fields approached the topic in ways that if followed to their logical conclusions would lead to the idea that language is inherently unstable. Rhetoricians took great pains to account for different receptions from different audiences. Sign theorists acknowledged that human language relies upon socially agreed upon conventions. Translators debated whether translations should be word-for-word or sense-for-sense. And, in the Nominalist-Realist debate, theologians explored Biblical language in ways that raised potentially radical conclusions. Each of these fields drew perilously close to what is now called relational semantics – the understanding that a reader or listener contributes to the meaning of any writing or speech. As we will explore in this chapter, however, none of these fields took this extra step and articulated what might be described as a modern understanding of relational semantics.

Drawing close to relational semantics could literally be perilous in the period discussed because the punishments available to medieval authorities were impressively intimidating, as seen in the description from Dante. The selection from Dante portrays frightening – eternal – fates believed to await those like Francesca who had sinned against God. In addition to lovers like Francesca, who are punished for placing their individual perspectives above all, abusers of

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<sup>102</sup> Alighieri, Dante. *Inferno*. Trans. Allen Mandelbaum. (New York: Bantam, 1980), V.31-35.

While the specifics of Dante's vision of *Inferno* were not circulating until, of course, he composed the poem, similarly grisly images were associated in earlier visions of Hell as well.

language, most notably flatterers, spend an eternity face down in excrement, deep in the eighth circle of Hell. The price for transgressions might easily have deterred those who wanted to raise orthodox positions such as the potentially destabilizing notion that speakers do not control the meaning of their words.<sup>103</sup> Institutions, after all, function primarily as speakers and hope to have listeners accept intended meanings.

Deterrence is not the only explanation, of course. Some ideas become so widely accepted in societies that they are rarely, if ever, examined closely.<sup>104</sup> Anselm of Canterbury's exploration of the nature of sin in *Cur Deus Homo* provided the theological foundation for a radically expanded role of the individual in his or her salvation, yet his Ontological Proof of the existence of God is limited by widely shared assumptions.

1. God is a being than which no greater can be thought.
2. The idea of God exists in the mind.
3. A being which exists both in the mind and in reality is greater than a being that exists only in the mind.
4. If God only exists in the mind, then we can conceive of a greater being—that which exists in reality.
5. We cannot be imagining something that is greater than God.

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<sup>103</sup> Foucault explores the deterrent capabilities of such punishments in *Discipline and Punishment*.

<sup>104</sup> Foucault's discussion of disciplinary mechanisms describes the process of internalized values in the "Panopticism" chapter in *Discipline and Punishment*.

6. Therefore, God exists.<sup>105</sup>

This argument depends on several widely held social assumptions, all of which were attacked by Gaunilo Marmoutiers.<sup>106</sup> The first assumption is that something exists beyond the collective experience of humans. Here, Anselm works with the socially accepted idea that individually faulty perceptions mean that collective perceptions are equally faulty. The second socially accepted assumption defines that which is outside human experience is greater. The third socially held assumption is that if something is outside human experience and therefore greater – both unproven – then that greater outside thing is “God.” While the proof does not state explicitly the characteristics of God other than greatness, using the word God carries connotations that match socially constructed ideas of God as revealed in the Bible and other

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<sup>105</sup> This summary relies upon the selection of Anselm’s *Proslogion ch. 1-4* in *Basic Issues In Medieval Philosophy*. Eds. Bosley, Richard and Martin Tweedale. (Peterborough, Ont., Canada: Broadview, 1997), 105-107. Anselm addresses the conceptual qualities of language in this section as well, asserting that “in one sense an object is thought when the word signifying it is thought, and in other when that object (i.e., its essence) is understood” (106). Here Anselm elevates essential “understanding” over words. This fits well with prevailing ideas of Neo-Platonic forms. These ideas will be discussed later in this chapter in the section on Nominalism and Realism.

<sup>106</sup> Gaunilo of Marmoutiers. “Reply on Behalf of the Fool.” *Classics of Western Philosophy*. Ed. Stephen M. Cahn. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995. 394-397.

religious texts.<sup>107</sup> Anselm's argument is not flawed because he is concerned about punishments; rather, his argument seeks to reaffirm an internalized, foundational notion of his society.

Deterrence and the affirmation of social ideals, however, do not fully explain the absence of relational semantics in all of these fields. When one considers the goals of these thinkers, it becomes clear that few were interested in exploring the idea that language itself is a negotiation between sender and receiver. For one, each thinker was using language to convey an intended meaning; if language was a negotiation between sender and receiver, this would open their own texts to unintended interpretations. It is more important to consider the goals of these texts. Philosophical explorations on language sought to explore the nature of God (or reality) rather than to question the idea of certainty in God. Texts on translation considered how best to convey one's ideas or those of the one's religion. Rhetorical texts were designed to teach how to effectively convey meaning, not to consider the idea that meaning might be a negotiated process. Medical discussions of the mind were more interested in explaining how it worked, how it could be flawed, and how to repair these flaws. If these thinkers could meet their goal without extending the logic of their arguments beyond these goals, we can hardly fault them for it.

By asserting the position that none of these traditionally scholarly fields fully articulates the importance of the receiver in determining meaning,<sup>108</sup> this chapter enters into a debate over

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<sup>107</sup> While not stated explicitly, the medieval notion of God built upon the idea from Genesis that humans were made in God's image. As such, Anselm's argument flirts with the pathetic fallacy: attributing human characteristics to things that are not human.

<sup>108</sup> The importance of the listener in determining, rather than merely understanding, meaning is the key difference between referential and relational semantics.

the relationship between nominalism and literature. Most participants in what is called the Nominalist-Realist debate can be split into two camps. In their simplest forms, Nominalists argued for the importance of individual instances of all things, while Realists argued that the physical properties of individual things were mere accidental qualities, flawed realizations of Platonic ideals. Scholars in one camp have proposed that nominalism had profound effects on English literature, particularly in the fourteenth century works of Chaucer since a direct transmission of nominalist ideas could be traced from Chaucer's nominalist-leaning friend, Ralph Strode.<sup>109</sup> Sheila Delany exemplifies this position, arguing that Chaucer abandons allegory for individuated characters because he knows nominalist ideas on the radical contingency of the universe.<sup>110</sup> A more radical position has been staked out by scholars such as J. Stephen Russell, who describes both Ockham and Chaucer exhibiting knowledge of language that nearly approximates what we would now identify as Saussurean linguistics.<sup>111</sup> This position often identifies nominalism as a radical interpretive split from the neo-Platonic Realist position on language. Holly Wallace Boucher explicitly applies the split term of signifier and signified as

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<sup>109</sup> Utz, Richard J. "Late Medieval Nominalism." *An Oxford Guide to Chaucer*. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005), 179.

<sup>110</sup> Delany, Sheila. "Undoing Substantial Connection: The Late Medieval Attack on Analogical Thought." *Medieval Literary Politics: Shapes of Ideology*. (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1990).

<sup>111</sup> Russell, Stephen J. *The English Dream Vision: Anatomy of a Form*. (Columbus, OH: Ohio UP, 1988).



well as the idea of an infinitely regressing signifier in her analysis of the subject.<sup>112</sup> Frederic Jameson also connects this understanding of nominalism to Derrida in *Postmodernism: or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*.<sup>113</sup> Daniel Heller-Roazen applies a similar mode of analysis to the *Roman de la Rose*, tracing elements of scholastic ideas about contingency within the text.<sup>114</sup>

Another camp is more cautious about the direct application of radical nominalist ideas to the interpretation of medieval literary texts. Richard J. Utz identifies three potential relationships between nominalism and literature: direct nominalist influence, late-medieval Zeitgeist, and modern interpretations that seek to equate medieval nominalism with modern theories, arguing that the second is most promising.<sup>115</sup> Utz is particularly critical of what he sees as an anachronistic application of modern linguistics to these medieval literary texts.<sup>116</sup> Stephen Penn argues that many analyses suffer from a misinterpretation of nominalism, particularly the notions that nominalism was a radical break from previous medieval philosophers and that this radical

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<sup>112</sup> Boucher, Holly Wallace. "Nominalism: The Difference Chaucer and Boccaccio." *Chaucer Review* 20. 213-20.

<sup>113</sup> Jameson, Frederic. *Postmodernism: or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1991).

<sup>114</sup> Heller-Roazen, Daniel. *Fortune's Faces: The Roman de la Rose and the Poetics of Contingency*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2003).

<sup>115</sup> Utz, Richard J. *Literary Nominalism and the Theory of Rereading Late Medieval Texts: A new Research Paradigm*. (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen P, 1995), 10.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

break was almost as thorough a critique of language as Jacques Derrida's.<sup>117</sup> As Stephen Penn notes, Paul de Man argues that rhetoric, because it was concerned primarily with language itself, "was always a potential threat to the stability of the medieval system of knowledge... Provided [rhetoric] was kept subordinate to grammar and logic, knowledge remained secure. When, however, discourse itself became the focus of inquiry, all claims of certainty were lost."<sup>118</sup> Penn acknowledges the radical potential of these ideas but emphasizes that medieval thinkers such as Ockham explore not the limitations of God but of human action.

I enter into this debate with a foot in each camp. Like the second camp, I am not convinced that the theoretical models from the twelfth to sixteenth centuries articulate a clear understanding of what we would identify as relational semantics and its extension, deconstructionism. However, the medieval literary tradition does adopt a radical position in relation to language and contingency due to a range of sociopolitical influences that become more prevalent from the twelfth century on in England, including changes in marriage law on

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<sup>117</sup> Penn, Stephen. "Literary Nominalism and Medieval Sign Theory: Problems and Perspectives." *Nominalism and Literary Discourse: New Perspectives*. Ed. by Hugo Keiper, Christophe Bode, and Richard J. Utz. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994). Penn's critique notes that the "closest pre-Renaissance analogue to the Saussurean signified is found in the philosophy of the Stoics, whose definition of the "thing signified" (the *lekton*), unlike that of Aristotle and the Scholastics, is linguistic rather than conceptual. See Tzvetan Todorov, *Theories of the Symbol*, tr. Catherine Porter (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982), 19-20" (Penn 165, note 26).

<sup>118</sup> Stephen Penn,. "Literary Nominalism and Medieval Sign Theory: Problems and Perspectives." *Nominalism and Literary Discourse: New Perspectives*. Ed. by Hugo Keiper, Christophe Bode, and Richard J. Utz. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994), DeMan qtd. in Penn, 126.

consent as well as wider literacy among the laity.<sup>119</sup> As such, these literary texts articulate and circulate a cultural skepticism in anticipation of theoretical articulation.<sup>120</sup> As I will discuss in the next chapter, literary texts are more open to radical explorations of language because they do not have as their goals the explanation of contingency, the establishment of provisions to limit misunderstandings, or the assessment of truth-value.

Relational semantics is the understanding that any act of communication involves more than merely decoding the intent of the sender; meaning is at least partly constructed by the listener as well. “What a text means,” therefore, does not reside solely in the sender’s intent. This is more radical than it might at first seem, since it does not mean merely that the listener has partly or wrongly interpreted a message; it is more like Schrodinger’s cat, living in two (or more) states at once. This is far more indeterminate than having one text that has different encoded messages within it.

A clear articulation of relational semantics did not appear until Ferdinand de Saussure’s *On the Nature of Language* in 1916. Relational semantics defines language as the interaction between a speaker, code, and listener.<sup>121</sup> Meaning comes from the interaction of all three

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<sup>119</sup> Clanchy, M.T. *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979).

<sup>120</sup> As such, I will be tacitly agreeing with the methodology of Richard Waswo, if not his precise conclusions or representations of medieval philosophers. Waswo, Richard. *Language and Meaning In The Renaissance*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987.

<sup>121</sup> For clarity, I will use the term speaker and listener though the ideas apply equally well for written texts.

elements. The speaker chooses specific words within a code to convey his intent. Assuming the listener shares this code, she then uses her understanding of the code to form an interpretation of the speaker's words. The goal in this simple scenario is for the listener to understand what the speaker intended.<sup>122</sup>

As noted earlier on page 42, a more comprehensive model for effective communication would involve seven steps rather than the three implied by Saussure. The third step – reception – opens the door to variant interpretations. The potential inherent in using dual codes offers dual meanings, often to different audiences; this is characteristic of how many of the lovers in medieval romances communicate their affections secretly. This is also the first kind of multiple interpretations that usually come to mind, as they are really just a variation on understanding the sender's intent(s).

The fourth and fifth steps are only possible if the sender and the receiver are in each other's presence or if the two engage in a sustained correspondence. These steps build upon Hans-Georg Gadamer's idea that a true conversation is interactive, with all participants being open to alternate interpretations and potential corrections.<sup>123</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin incorporates a similar understanding of the interactive qualities of communication, noting that speech-acts are inherently responsive, and made with the expectation of a response.<sup>124</sup> The sender's

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<sup>122</sup> For a more theoretical discussion of this material, see Talbot J. Taylor's *Theorizing Language: Analysis, Normativity, Rhetoric, History*. (Amsterdam: Pergamon, 1997).

<sup>123</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer. *Truth and Method*. Translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. (New York: Continuum, 1996). Originally published in 1960.

<sup>124</sup> Bakhtin, Mikhail. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Trans. Vern W. McGee. (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1986).

confirmation is usually only mentioned when there is an interpretation that differs clearly from the sender's intent; silence in the face of a receiver's response is generally considered consent. Within the tradition of lovers sharing one mind, responses that silence the beloved are most often portrayed in a negative light.

The fourth and fifth steps are not often considered when discussing communications, but they provide an especially important framework for understanding the kinds of variant communications seen in medieval romances and how these early fictional works explore – and in some ways define ways of thinking about – relational semantics. Each speech act is both performative – confirming or denying the status and identity of the sender – AND perlocutionary – proposing a continuation or change in status. The consent of a beloved is both performative and perlocutionary.

Because of its impact on all future speech-acts, a speech-act considered as continuum has greater potential for being what J.L. Austin defines as performative, changing one's status in society. When combined with the implied consent in silence (stage five), this kind of communication becomes potentially important in relationships that are both performative and require consent: marriage or affairs. Both are central to medieval romances and will be discussed in greater detail throughout this dissertation.<sup>125</sup> Desire – important in romances – colors reception of speech-acts and highlights the potential conflict between what different participants want particular texts to mean.

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<sup>125</sup> Marriage often confirms the overall romance theme that a particular hero is worthy as a ruler (tied to older traditions of marriage to the land) and will establish a line of heirs. The courtly love tradition serves a similar function, though the merit of the knight is often shown to be greater than that of the husband.

Sometimes, however, situations arise where that intent cannot be confirmed by the listener. The most common situation is with the written word, where the speaker (writer) is absent. One popular example of this is if we encounter a piece of paper with only this one word: POLISH. Without external clues of syntax, context, or clarification by the writer, the intent and therefore meaning is unavailable. Any meaning therefore is determined by the listener/reader. This is not strictly speaking communication. A sense of connection between the sender and the receiver may be imagined but any match between the imagined meaning and the intended meaning is coincidental.<sup>126</sup>

At the time the medieval romances were written, society was making the transition to a more widely literate culture,<sup>127</sup> a transition that would be accelerated by the printing press. With a greater percentage of the population encountering the textual difficulty of determining the intent of an absent writer, a greater interest in linguistic uncertainty appeared in the literature.

The modern debate whether intent or reception is more important has penetrated so deeply into the popular discourses that some comedians address the issue directly. Richard Pryor and George Carlin took opposing positions on the issue regarding the most prevalent pejorative word for African-Americans. Carlin argued that meaning should be determined primarily from the speaker's intention; according to Carlin, one can use the word if the speaker's intention is not derogatory, citing instances where African-Americans use the term to refer to one another. The fact that Carlin is a Caucasian-American leads him to adopt this position in relation to language; not only is he spared the negative connotations of the word, but he is part of the group that has for so long been the primary determiner of meaning in American society. Richard Pryor was

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<sup>126</sup> Stanley Fish's work echoes the idea that communication is coincidental.

<sup>127</sup> See Clanchy.

more sensitive than Carlin to the reception of the word. Pryor argues that, due to its long history and wide usage, the word always carries with it dehumanizing, hostile associations, particularly for African-American listeners. I liken this to a situation where you trip and drop a brick on someone's toes; it still hurts even if you didn't mean it. This debate has expanded into, among other things, court cases involving the teaching of Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*. While both sides generally agree the Twain's intent was anti-racist, those who focus on reception argue that the frequent use of the word carries so many racist connotations for readers that it may undermine any anti-racist intent by Twain.

The modern, non-specialist public debate over how language works has become even more relevant when addressing the language of oppression. enacted between two comedians, which is important to the overall agenda of this work for three reasons. First, it is a popular forum for debate and not necessarily theoretical; this means that the ideas are in wide circulation. Second, the terms of their debate nearly parallel similar debates by specialists in linguistics. Talbot J. Taylor discusses this issue in Lewis Carroll's Humpty Dumpty, who asserts that a word means "just what [he] choose[s] it to mean – nothing more and nothing less" before raising the question of whether the sender or the social system – broadly conceived receiver (Saussure's *langue*) – has mastery over meaning.<sup>128</sup> Talbot traces to the eighteenth century this shift in linguistic analysis from a voluntaristic concept of signification to an institutionalist one.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Taylor, Talbot J. *Theorizing Language: analysis, normativity, rhetoric, history*.

(Amsterdam: Pergamon, 1997). Carroll qtd. Talbot, 121.

<sup>129</sup> "Voluntarism takes language to be a voluntary act performed by individual agents, agents who themselves bear the responsibility for the success of their linguistic acts... [and that] linguistic acts will only be successful if individual agents submit their linguistic freedom to the

Third, their debate is motivated not by the traditional goal of philosophical thinkers on language; these philosophers generally search for truth-value or attempt to explain the nature of contingent language in order to better understand truth-values. Linguistics is not the goal; their linguistic positions serve other purposes. Carlin hopes to make listeners who hear that word less sensitive to its painful impact while Pryor hopes to make speakers of that word more sensitive to its painful impact. Both positions, however, note the importance of both sender and receiver in establishing meaning; they merely place the importance on different sides of the process.

More radical theories of interpretation have become prevalent since the twentieth century, arguing that one should consider to a greater degree the importance of the receiver in constructing meaning. In one of the most reader-centric texts, Stanley Fish's *Is There a Text in this Class?* expands the idea of linguistic instability to the level of text rather than merely a single word.<sup>130</sup> Fish leaves a set of random words on the board for a graduate class on modern literature and asks them to unpack it. The students then form interpretive bridges between unrelated words and concepts. In this case, meaning is determined – created – entirely by the listeners, as there is no intent to discover.<sup>131</sup> Fish's goal was to explore the workings of within interpretive communities, where a group determines meaning based on a shared set of

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constraint of norms... Institutionalism, on the other hand, focuses on language (or a language) as and institution that exists *independently* of the individuals who perform linguistic acts.

Individual agents, with or without political power, have no say in determining the features of that institution (eg. What a given word signifies)" (Talbot 121-2).

<sup>130</sup> Fish, Stanley. *Is There A Text In This Class?* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1982).

<sup>131</sup> One could argue that the intent was Fish's and he intended to confuse.



assumptions and practices, but his work also raised the issue of linguistic instability given a text without intent.

In contrast, medieval treatises on rhetoric, theology, and translation do not move beyond the description of contingency because they have specific goals, each interested in limiting uncertainty. Most widely-circulated medieval thinkers on language would have encouraged readers to read like Fish's students, interpreting the words with the assumption that they were meant to communicate something. Like these students, most medieval thinkers worked on the assumption on an intended meaning. In medieval rhetoric, theology, and translation, the search for meaning is the search for intent. That meaning could be the intention of the speaker, the intention (not cognitive) of an animal's cry, or, as perhaps above, a natural sign of the intention of God. Within this medieval framework, a human's search for certain meaning will never be resolved fully, but no speech-act is devoid of meaning.

A clear articulation of relational semantics is not made by medieval and early Renaissance thinkers for two reasons. The first reason is that medieval and Renaissance thinkers consistently consider their discussions of the nature of language within the context of its relation to an omniscient divine.<sup>132</sup> By definition, all meaning resides in God. While human perspective is relative, God's meaning is not.<sup>133</sup> Any resemblance to relative meaning is merely the product

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<sup>132</sup> The three necessary elements of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic monotheistic God are omnipresence, omnipotence, omniscience.

<sup>133</sup> One theological example highlighting the proposition that God's perspective is always correct appears as the foundation for Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*, which relies upon the idea of human perspective as limited in relation to the divine perspective. Anselm of Canterbury, Saint. "Cur

of faulty human perception, as God knows the true meaning of any speech-act. The second reason is that the various texts have agendas that sought to limit interpretive instability. As discussed later in this chapter, these medieval thinkers are hardly alone in their reluctance to embrace indeterminacy; as Hans-George Gadamer points out, the largest portion of the Western philosophical tradition is a search for a stable, certain truth; his ideas, however, place pressure upon that idea.<sup>134</sup>

As noted earlier, the fourth and fifth in the process of communication steps – the decoding and response to the original message – place the receiver in a position to help determine the meaning of any speech-act. Placing this interpretive power in the receiver undermines the idea of a stable meaning tied to the sender's intention. As such, these communications do not follow a Platonic, referential pattern. Key components in a listener-based, almost relational, model of communication include a shared set of perceptions and a shared context for the speech – including the identity of the sender. Identity in this case is not limited to a name, but also the sender's self-image in dialogue with his or her public image. The chapters of this dissertation tie specific anxieties about language, from philosophy and translation to medicine and rhetoric, to specific literary conventions.

Philosophers questioning a Platonic understanding of the world raise questions about referential semantics, opening the door to an alternate understanding. Likewise, concerns about

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Deus Homo.” *Saint Anselm: Basic Writings*. Trans. by S. N. Deane. (Chicago: Open court, 1962).

<sup>134</sup> Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*. Translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. (New York: Continuum, 1996).

translating from one language to another raise more specific questions about differently applied discourses. The larger questions raised by philosophy and translation lead to more specific explorations of how discourses will be received, including different identities and how individual perception matches with collective perceptions. The chapter on the *obscure sender* critique of communications focuses on the importance of the sender's – perhaps imagined – identity in interpretation. The chapter on the *critique of self-absorption* of communications focuses on the importance of individual perception and imagination in interpretation. The idea that lovers share *one mind* provides an alternative to both anxieties, bypassing questions of both identity and misperception. Finally, the final chapter on *coerced consent* presents problems with the assumptions built into the model of lovers communicating as though with one mind.

## THEOLOGY/PHILOSOPHY

Medieval anxieties about linguistic certainty extend back at least as far as Patristic writers such as Augustine. The Platonic foundation of many early Christian philosophers came under increased pressure in the face of the Nominalist-Realist debate raised in the twelfth century by Abelard and extending through the fourteenth century most famously by William of Ockham. Theologians such as Augustine, much earlier, also appear to approach the idea that meaning may not be wholly determined by the speaker but do not press the radical conclusions suggested by this thinking. In the thinking of thirteen-century rhetorician Geoffrey Vin Sauf, the intended meaning of the sender seems to take on a stable role in what Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana* defines as the *res* (thing) signified by a *signa* (sign).<sup>135</sup> Ross G. Arthur's *Medieval Sign Theory*

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<sup>135</sup> Augustine. *On Christian Doctrine*. Trans. D.W. Robertson, Jr. (Indianapolis: Bobbs

Merrill, 1958), 8-9. For more on VinSauf, see the section on rhetoric.

and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* explores four potential relationships prevalent in the Middle Ages between the word and the thing, two of which are particularly relevant to the matter at hand.<sup>136</sup> Arthur describes medieval discussions of how signs cause different ideas to appear in the mind of listeners, adding that these discussions all agreed that “key poetic symbols have often quite different effects on the minds of people.”<sup>137</sup> Arthur also mentions medieval thinkers debated whether the “word signifies the thing itself or the mental image, which then signifies the thing.”<sup>138</sup> While Arthur suggests that the relationship in either case is one of simple equivalence, the fact remains that the debates to which he refers – centered around William of Ockham in the Nominalist-Realist debate – raise serious questions about that simple equivalence. Combining these two ideas suggests that the relationship between the signifier and both its signified and its received signified are potentially unstable and therefore should be examined in relation to a truth-value.<sup>139</sup>

In this way, the philosophers are limited by their goal of searching for stable knowledge or, more precisely the truth-value of assertions in relation to an omniscient divine. The search

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<sup>136</sup> Arthur, Ross G. *Medieval Sign Theory and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1987).

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>139</sup> The other two characteristics also suggest potential slippage in meaning. One discussion of how meaning can change due to usage in the sentence, called the *suppositio* (man being an individual or the entire race, for instance). The other discussion raises the idea of how ones location could potentially change meaning, for instance in different nations.

for truth-value can be traced to the continuing circulation of Aristotle's *De Interpretatione*. As described by Heller-Roazen,

‘Spoken sounds... Aristotle explains, are signs of impressions on the soul, which in turn, are the images of things. Speech is thus tied, in two steps, to the world of things... *De Interpretatione* determines the canonical form of speech as ‘meaningful utterance’... and, more precisely, a ‘proposition’... bearing truth or falsity, and once it situates truth and falsity in the composition of autonomous elements, the conclusion is inevitable: the paradigmatic form of speech must be that of a ‘statement of one thing concerning another thing’.<sup>140</sup>

The meaningfulness of the utterance comes from the producer of the speech, much as the meaning in the world comes from the utterances of God. Mavis G. Fionella describes the medieval reception of Aristotle's position, asserting

God's immediate, transparent speech articulated material reality and formed the basis of its intelligibility. In consequence, meaning and being flowed from the Outside, and the sensible, temporal world became a system that, rightly read, signified divine intentionality or Providence.<sup>141</sup>

As the divine producer of speech/reality, the omniscient God contains all meaning, leaving humans the responsibility to “rightly” read divine intent. Given these assumptions, Fionella

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<sup>140</sup> Heller-Roazen, Daniel. *Fortune's Faces: The Roman de la Rose and the Poetics of Contingency*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2003), 11.

<sup>141</sup> Mavis G. Fionella, Mavis G. *Studies on Themes and Motifs in Literature: New Approaches to Medieval Textuality*. Ed. Mickle Dave Ledgerwood. (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), 107.

concludes that “Christian subjects do not produce meaning but receive it.”<sup>142</sup> God not only produces meaning that is ultimately inscrutable to humans but, in contrast to humans with limitations, has “effortless transcendence of the boundaries that frustrate human knowledge.”<sup>143</sup>

Boethius’ commentaries on *De Interpretatione* expand on Aristotle’s ideas of contingency, placing pressure upon the appropriateness of assessing the truth and falsity of statements about an indeterminate future. Boethius’ emphasis is that meaning stems from the necessity of the thing (event) and that a future contingent is not necessary. Heller-Roazen argues that Boethius’ position suggests that language itself becomes contingent when describing potential futures; language does make actual statements until it has a definite referent and therefore is “not yet itself.”<sup>144</sup>

The early medieval philosophers do not develop the radical logic and linguistic consequences implied by Boethius’ analysis of future contingents. When Anselm of Canterbury, for example, considers what it means to predicate the future of a thing (*futurum dicitur de re*), his concern is to establish that divine omniscience, although necessary, in no way compromises the freedom of the will (*libertas voluntatis*). He does not call into question the specific truth value of statements concerning future contingents, for he supposes that, insofar as they are known by God, future contingents are in some sense necessary.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>143</sup> Katharine Eisaman Maus. *Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance*. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995), 10..

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 21-22.

Given divine omniscience, no statement can be truly contingent; each event is known beforehand and will necessarily occur. This conclusion obviates the need to explore how receivers help construct meaning. Anselm does not pursue the logic of this argument to its radical conclusion because his goal is not to explore human's contributions to meaning.

Abelard begins to explore the radical elements of Boethius' argument. Intention becomes the final determiner of meaning in the medieval debate over signs, even eventually in the case of a dog's bark which is likened to the wail of the infirm.<sup>146</sup> Describing human speech in his *Dialectica*, Abelard uses the term *institutio*, a decision which precedes the speech-act and "meaningfulness and could be defined as quite close to "intention." In fact, words are meaningful by virtue of the institution of the human will<sup>147</sup>." The bark of the dog, however, derives its institutio from God, of a more natural order. In both cases, the interpretive act becomes an attempt to uncover the institutio at the heart of a communication, one human and the other divine. Abelard's goal is to consider the most difficult acts of communication to discover how communication itself does work, not how it fails or involves negotiation.

The nominalists of the fourteenth century, referred to by Ross G. Arthur, aggressively probed the limits of language, questioning the very Platonic assumptions of their philosophical traditions, but never fully articulated relational semantics because these thinkers retained as their goal the search for truth-value, and more particularly the idea that such truth-value was held/known by an omniscient God. The moderate Platonism we see in Anselm, Abelard, and Aquinas is built on the idea that universals – Platonic Ideals – exist, but do so beyond the clear

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<sup>146</sup> For a more extended discussion, see Umberto Eco's *On the Medieval Theory of Signs*. (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1989).

<sup>147</sup> Eco, 15.

recognition of human beings. The bracketing off of universals from human perception stems from the debates over realism and nominalism in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Realists, following a Platonic model, held that universal concepts in the mind have strict parallels with universal things in nature. Nominalists held that only particular objects – called accidentals – exist; general ideas are only names or words used to make connections between individual objects.<sup>148</sup> Moderate realism – the idea that universals exist but that humans have limited access to them – was the widely accepted solution to this debate.

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<sup>148</sup> Paul Vincent Spade, in his introduction to *Five Texts on the Medieval Problem of Universals: Porphyry, Boethius, Abelard, Duns Scotus, Ockham* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), provides a useful illustration:

“Consider these two capital letters: **A A**. Ignore everything else about them and for now observe only that they are the same color; they are both black.

“As you look at the two letters, how many colors do you see? Two different answers are plausible. You may want to say that you see only *one* color, here, blackness. You see it twice, once in each of the two capitals, but it is the same color in both cases. After all, did I not just say the two letters were “*of the same color*”? Isn’t that obvious by just looking at them? This single blackness is the kind of entity that is *repeatable*, found intact in both letters at the same time; it is what philosophers call a “universal.” If this is your answer, then you believe in the reality of at least one universal, and are in that sense a “realist” on the question.

“But now reset your mental apparatus and look at the two letters again. On the second glance, isn’t it obvious that you see *two* colors here, two blacknesses: the blackness of the first **A**, *this* blackness, and then the blackness of the second **A**, *that* blackness? The two colors look exactly alike, yes, but aren’t they visually as distinct as the two letters themselves? If this is your



Nominalism was initially a debate over language and did not imply a position in relation to the realists at all. Rather, the nominalists argued that nouns and verbs in different tenses and moods held a unitary significance, which could lead to the conclusion that what was true once is always true.<sup>149</sup> Other “modern” scholastics followed Abelard by noting how different terms signify in different propositional contexts, thus gaining the name of “terminists.” One of the key distinctions made was between *signification* – which we could describe as referential semantics, in that a word refers to a specific object – and *supposition*, which involves the connotations as well as the denotations of the term.<sup>150</sup> Supposition can describe classes as well as the individual members of a class. While not relational semantics, supposition does allow interpretive

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answer, then you do not believe in the reality of universals (at least not in this case) and are a “nominalist” on the question” (vii).

<sup>149</sup> Colish, 275. Abelard uses this idea of language to argue that God can do no different than he does because “verbs in propositions stating the goodness of God are univocal with verbs in propositions describing the goodness of His creative activity” (Colish 275). In an attempt to suggest the primacy of God’s goodness while maintaining Abelard uses a close reading that emphasizes the different meaning a sentence has based on the placement of a noun as either subject or object. Abelard uses as an example the case of a false witness, where “the judge ought to punish the person even though the person ought not to be punished by the judge” (22); in other words, the person deserves to be punished, but the judge, in following the law, should not punish the person. Taking this thinking to God, God may have the power to save all men, but all men do not have the capacity to be saved by God.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 276.

flexibility by including a variety of connotations, not all of which will be understood by all readers.

Taken to its logical conclusion, this definition of supposition sets the stage for the nominalist-realist debate, or the debate over universals. Rather than merely a minor semantic debate, the theological questions raised are far-reaching; after all, what is God, if not a universal? When one debates whether universals have an existence separate from particulars, then one questions whether God is external to humanity and reality – both composed of accidents – as we perceive it.<sup>151</sup> Such a conclusion is defused of its radical potential by moderate Platonism's bracketing off from humans the realm of Forms, a realm available only to God. By definition, all meaning is contained in an omniscient God. Even natural signs' meanings find their *institutio* in God and it is man's job to correctly interpret God's intent.

The primary means of understanding Gods' will in the natural world was by means of analogy, and the nominalist critique made such understanding contingent. Utz argues that, in a "visible world [that] no longer had analogical signifying power to point towards the invisible ideas of the Creator,... the cause and effect of things would have to be attributed to human action."<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> It is important to remember that none of these thinkers – even nominalists like William of Ockham – seem to question the reality of God as twenty-first century nominalists do; it would therefore be misleading to suggest that this debate that flirts with agnosticism.

<sup>152</sup> Utz, Richard. "Philosophy." *The Oxford Guide to Chaucer*. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005), 171.

## THE PROBLEM OF TRANSLATION

Anxieties about translating the Bible raise questions about how best to construct the meaning of a text. The translator constructs one meaning for a text and then articulates it in a different code, or discourse. In a similar way, lovers' communications rely on disparities in interpretations based upon different discourses in order to communicate in a clandestine manner. Jerome's discussions of translation, while still privileging the intent, or sense, of the sender, explicitly comment on how the same word in two languages – codes – can convey different meanings. Jerome's ideas on translation suggest the uncertainty to be found in human language, even when expressing the divine word. Jerome's *Letter to Pammachius* raises the possibility of interpretive contributions from the listener by emphasizing the need to translate the sense of the original rather than following it precisely word-for-word.<sup>153</sup>

Jerome's defense of his translation responds to an unnamed critic who claims Jerome, "in translating another man's letter [... has] mistakes through incapacity or carelessness...either an involuntary error or a deliberate offence."<sup>154</sup> Rather than admitting to either error or offense,

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<sup>153</sup> Rita Copeland traces Jerome's translation practices to those of Cicero. Copeland, Rita. *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991).

<sup>154</sup> Jerome. W.H. Fremantle, from *A Select Library of Nicene and post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, second series, vol. 6 (New York, 1893), 1. Latin text is from Jerome. *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. 22. Ed. J. P. Migne, (Paris, 1859). The Latin reads, "quae obiicit mihi vel ignorantiam, vel mendacium; si aut nescivi alienas litteras vere interpretari, aut nolui: quorum alterum error, alterum crimen est."

Jerome acknowledges minor changes like using “‘dear friend’ in place of ‘honourable sir’.”<sup>155</sup> Instead, when Jerome ‘render[s] sense for sense and not word for word,’<sup>156</sup> he emphasizes first the importance of attempting to understand the intention of what was said, and second the potential for misinterpretation due to differences in language. Logically, then, the translator has some control in determining the sense of a passage. Despite this, Jerome holds the ideal that connotation matches the intent – what Abelard might call the *institutio* – more than a referential denotation of the words. Interpretation for Jerome, then, also finds its foundations in intention.<sup>157</sup>

Given the religious framework of these medieval thinkers, it is not surprising that they encountered a point beyond which their assumptions would not reach, no matter how strong the logic. The assumption of an omniscient God precludes the kind of interpretive instability implied by these ideas and, as the proper goal of all these fields was to explore the relationship of man to God, none explored much further. At the heart of all these analyses is the idea of a true meaning linked to the speaker’s intent because, even when this intent is beyond human grasp, that intent is still available to God.

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 2. “Pro honorabili dixisse carissimum.”

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 4. “Non verbum e verbo, sed sensum exprimere de sensu.”

<sup>157</sup> Rita Copeland suggests that some translators turned the establishment of sense into a site for re-appropriation of pervious materials, but Copeland does not argue against the assumption of medieval translators that meaning resides in God. Copeland, Rita. *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991).

## RHETORIC

Following the classical tradition, medieval rhetoricians come very close to implying that listeners help to construct meaning, most specifically by highlighting potentially different receptions based upon how different discourses are interpreted in different contexts by different receivers. Lovers consider a word within a different context than members of the public hearing the same speech-act. Anxieties about how a listener interprets messages inform these works on rhetoric; concerns about how a listener defines the sender play into the romances within the obscure sender tradition. Rhetorical arts such as Geoffrey de Vin Sauf's *Poetria Nova* devote most of their time to describing the impact that tropes will have on listeners; he is particularly sensitive to using a style appropriate for the material and audience.<sup>158</sup> Handbooks on sermon writing like the *Fasciculus Morum* are careful to point out that one must take into account the interpretive abilities of one's audience in order for the message to be properly received.<sup>159</sup> Books on letter-writing are careful to delineate different means of address for different estates and requests. Perhaps most indicative of the awareness that listeners might not interpret works as the speaker intended are the wide range of literary works with direct addresses to the audience; like Chaucer, many authors of the time instruct readers as to the desired response.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> VinSauf, Geoffrey. "Poetria Nova." *Three Medieval Rhetorical Arts*. Trans. and ed. by James J. Murphy. (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1971).

<sup>159</sup> Anonymous. *Fasciculus Morum A Fourteenth-Century Preacher's Handbook*. Ed. And trass. By Seigfrie Wenzel. (University Park: Penn State UP, 1989).

<sup>160</sup> Wogan-Browne, Jocelyn et al. *The Idea of the Vernacular: And Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory 1250-1520*. (University Park: U of Penn State P, 1999).

Priority in establishing meaning in each case, however, is given to the speaker; readings that deviate from authorial intent are presented as error. Widely circulating *Ars dicitiminis* of the eleventh and twelfth centuries often follow Ciceronian rhetoric in highlighting the importance of determining the sender's intent in communication, particularly letters. One anonymous twelfth century Bolognese *Rationes dictandi* defines a letter as

...a suitable arrangement of words set forth to express the  
intended meaning of its sender. Or in other words, a letter  
is a discourse composed of coherent yet distinct part  
signifying fully the sentiments of its sender.<sup>161</sup>

The most significant element in this quotation is its emphasis on the sender's intent and sentiments as the final determiner of meaning. Providing that the writer has effectively constructed the text coherently, these sentiments are "fully" available to readers, making any disparity an error on the reader's part.

The rhetorician Geoffrey Vin Sauf also presents an understanding of language that places meaning in the sender's intent; despite this, he offers somewhat more interpretive freedom to the reader.

The speaker wished his point to be compared to the exemplum.  
And since he cleverly gave only part of his meaning to the ear,  
he saved part for the [listener's] mind ...<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Anonymous of Bologna. "*The Principles of Letter-Writing (Rationes dictandi)*." *Three Medieval Rhetorical Arts*. Trans. and ed. by James J. Murphy. (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1971), 7..

<sup>162</sup> Vinsauf, 88.

Geoffrey quickly follows up, however, by noting that this “is the method for a man of skill – to compass in half a speech all the force of a whole speech.”<sup>163</sup> It is not that the listener contributes half of the meaning, merely that he must work to finish what the speaker intends. Vin Sauf’s goal, then, is to instruct his readers in how to cleverly give enough information to lead the reader to the proper, intended conclusion.

In the thirteenth century *Summa dictaminum*, Ludolph von Hildesheim likewise promotes the idea that letters express what the “intellect, having composed... in the mind, express vocally,” which explicitly links meaning to the writer’s intent (qtd. in McKinnell 77).<sup>164</sup>

Ludolph continues,

The discovery of letters originated from those who wanted their wishes to be clear to those who were absent from them, and because they could not speak aloud to them without an intermediary, it was necessary for them to speak by some other

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Ludolph von Hildesheim qtd. in McKinnell, John. “Letters as a Type of Formal Level in *Troilus and Criseyde*.” *Essays on Troilus and Criseyde*. Ed. by Mary Salu. (Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk UK: St. Edmundsbury Press 1980), 77.

The Latin for the second quotation is: “Invencio autem litterarum ortum habuit ab hiis qui voluntatem suam absentibus esse voluerunt manifestam. Et quia viva voce immediate eis loqui non poterant, oportuit ut aliquo medio loquerentur. Causa autem invencionis litterarum fuit negligencia nunciorum et occultacio secretores.”

means. However, the cause of the discovery of letters was the negligence of oral messengers and the (need for) concealment of secrets.<sup>165</sup>

Like the other authors of *artes dictaminis*, Ludolph emphasizes the importance of the wishes of the writer in establishing meaning, adding the potential for an intermediary to interfere in conveying these wishes, perhaps coloring the words with the intermediary's bias. The greater privacy afforded by letters also provides some protection from discovery.

While Vin Sauf and the other authors of the *artes dictaminis* raise issues with transmission and reception of the sender's intent, the goal of these texts is to provide practical means to clarify the sender's meaning and limit ambiguity. Meaning is not in the hands of the receiver or the intermediary; any ambiguity is either a failure in the receiver's interpretation or on the sender's message.

## MEDIEVAL COGNITION AND INTERPRETATION

Medieval understandings of the mind's workings likewise suggest a system of linguistic instability, but this instability is generally represented as an individual, *self-involved* interpretive failure by the listener rather than a failure in language itself. While medieval cognitive models made a clear distinction between things perceived in the senses and things occurring only in the mind, this distinction becomes less clear upon closer inspection. Such a blurring might lead logically to questions about the importance of the receiver in creating meaning.

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 77. For the original source, see Ludolph von Hildesheim. "Summa dictiminum I." *Breifsterlle und formel bücher*. Ed. by L Rockinger. (New York: Quellen un Erörterungen zur Bayerischen und Deutschen Geschichte, 1961). For a contemporary English rhetorician, see John of Garland.



In theory at least, the “fancy” addressed those things physically present, while “imagination” addressed those only in the mind. The traditional progression is as follows:

- |                    |    |               |
|--------------------|----|---------------|
| 1- Communis sensus | OR | 1- imaginatio |
| 2- Fantasia        |    |               |
| 3- Cogitivia       |    |               |
| 4- Memoria         |    |               |

Fancy played one of the most important roles in medieval understandings of human cognition. In scholastic psychology, fancy – a contraction of fantasy or phantasia – took the raw information gathered by the senses and brought them together into a pattern recognizable to the viewer. “Ȕat place [Ȕe brayn] is propre instrument of ymagynacioun Ȕe which resceyveȔ Ȕinges Ȕat comprehendȔ of fantasie [*res a phantasia comprehensas*]”.<sup>166</sup> Fancy comprehends or perceives things and this perception is then passed on to the imagination. Fancy allowed the consideration of raw sensory data by the intellect. This late fifteenth-century manuscript represents the primary medieval model of cognition. The information from the common senses passes through the imagination, fancy, and cogitative power on its way to the memory.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> *Lanfranc’s Chirurg.* 113, circa 1400, cited in *Online OED*. “Fantasy” descends from the Greek Φαντασία, literally “to make visible” through the Latin “phantasia” to the romance languages. Also cited in the *OED*: Oresme in Meunier *Ess. sur Oresme* 179 (circa 1382) “Il entent par fantasie apprehension ou cognoissance sensitive des choses presentes.”

<sup>167</sup> Nancy Siraisi carefully notes that cogitative power is not reason (*Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1990, page 82-3). For other discussions of this process, see John E. Murdoch’s *Album of Science: Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (New York: Charles Scribner and sons, 1984), p. 325-7, and E. Ruth Harvey’s *The Inward Wits*:

The distinction between fancy and imagination is a fine, but important one. Trevisa notes “The þridde hat ymaginacion: þerby þe soule biholdeþ þe liknesse of bodily þingis þat beþ absente.”<sup>168</sup> In contrast with fancy, which forms images from sensory data, the imagination forms images of things in absence. This explains its presence before the fancy in this illustration, as the pattern that emerges from the imagination – either imagined from nothing or recalled from memory (“þingis þat beþ absente”) – serves as the raw data in cognitions involving the imagination. These medieval cognitive models use the fancy and imagination to account for disparities between an inner reality and an outer (commonly accepted) one.

Despite this clear theoretical distinction, in practice the distinction between the fancy and the imagination is muddier due to potential overlap and interaction. In the above quotation, the fancy formed the image of the bodily thing. In the thing’s absence, the imagination recalls an image formed initially from the fancy. In even the simplest observations, this cognitive model emphasizes how the mind (fancy) must form a pattern from the sensory impressions (common senses). While the common senses are shared (common), the patterns formed by each reader’s fancy need not be the same. At what point does the act of forming a pattern begin to overtake the actual perceptions? This is precisely the question that these literary texts raise regarding remarkable lovers’ communications: at what point is the communication all (or primarily) an act of imagination?

Confusion between the fancy and the imagination appears frequently among medieval theorists and non-experts. An entire branch of the field worked on a four-tier model, essentially

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*Psychological Theory in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (London: The Warburg Institute, U of London, 1975), p. 43-5.

<sup>168</sup> *Barth. De P.R.* III. Vi. (Tollem, MS., cited in *OED Online*.

lumping together the fancy and the imagination into one function or, as in other examples, replaced the communis sensus with the fantasy. Despite a theoretical blurring that eventually equates fantasy with imagination in English, medieval and Renaissance thinkers are reluctant to let go of the idea of a sensible reality outside the mind. While Descartes touches upon the issue, it is not until Emmanuel Kant that such a radical position is circulated widely. Much like earlier thinkers discussed here, however, Kant refuses to follow his thinking to its logical conclusion. Instead, he adds to his model the *noumenon*, an outer reality. In this case, both the medieval thinkers and Kant hold onto the cognitive model that matches with their senses, not their logic.

The English tradition of debate over these issues was vigorous and sustained, with John Blund (1175-1248), Robert Kilwardy, Archbishop of Canterbury (1215-97), and Walter Burley (1275-1344). Burley's *De Sensibus* (1337) discusses explicitly the relationship between the senses and cognition, asserting that "the common sense distinguished the information [the senses] supplied; cognition distinguished the accidents – colour, number, and shape."<sup>169</sup> Debates arose over "how the sense organs worked, the functioning of the common sense – that is the internal sense that the received the information from the external senses – and how the information was transmitted to them, as well as how the imagination and memory created or recalled sensations."<sup>170</sup> The broadly understood imagination, on the other hand, "allowed medieval man to conjure before him and create the reality of the events of the past," or of things never seen physically.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Woolgar, C.M. *The Senses in the Middle Ages*. (New Haven: Yale UP, 2006),21.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 187.

Once again, these discussions of cognition do not fully explore the instabilities inherent in language that lead to an articulation of relational semantics. These treatises' primary concern is to provide a model of how the brain does work in ways that are predictive, hopefully allowing for accurate diagnosis or spiritual guidance.

The idea that outward appearance and inward reality may not match extends as far back as pre-Socratic philosophers.<sup>172</sup> The agenda of these previous philosophical explorations, however, "are designed to address disparate philosophical problems;" the Aristotelian tradition focusing on appearance and essences, the Stoics on inward virtue isolated from inessential externals, and Christian thinkers focusing on the soul over the body.<sup>173</sup> None of these models focuses primarily on inter-human communication, instead attempting to define reality or virtue.

Twelfth-century England, however, brings together a series of influences that expand the population for whom these observations are relevant. "The twelfth and thirteenth centuries brought new opportunities for speaking in public and a rise in professionals whose task this was..., [whereas] previously public speaking had been confined to bishops, abbots, monarchs, and a few members of the aristocracy."<sup>174</sup> Private communication in absentia, likewise, begins to appear more frequently in the literature, suggesting another realm of "speaking" where potential errors in communication may be found. Communication via intermediaries and letters between lovers, of course, will be the primary concern of this work, particularly how they contrast with direct communication with all the attendant physical cues available to receivers.

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<sup>172</sup> Maus cites C.B. Schimdtt in "The Rediscovery of ancient Skepticism." *The Skeptical Tradition*. Ed. Myles Burnyeat. (Berkeley: U of California P 1983), 12.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>174</sup> Woolgar, 95.

More specific to my analysis and as will be discussed in the chapter on sharing one mind, placing a greater importance on mutual consent in marriage raises many of these same issues but does so with an emphasis on humans understanding the inner consent of others even though outward acts may not accurately represent true feelings. The romances that form the object of study in this dissertation, then, anticipate many of the issues of inwardness that appear in Renaissance drama, as noted in Maus' *Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance*.

## DESIRE AND COGNITION

Even the earliest literary works note a disparity between inward and outward realities of lovers due to the impact of desire, both physical and mental. Gerard of Berry's *Glosses on the Viaticum* (c. 1236) describes the disease of love as a cognitive failure of the estimative faculty, that which "makes 'instinctive' judgments about what is to be pursued or avoided."<sup>175</sup> Gerard asserts that lovesickness is

error uirtutis estimatiue que inducitur per intentiones sensatas ad apprehendenda  
accidencia insensata que forte non sunt in persona. Unde credit aliquam esse  
melioram et nobiliorem et magis appetendam omnibus aliis... [prompter] aliquod  
sensatum aliquando occurrit anime ualde gratum... unde si qua sunt sensata bib  
conueniencia occultantur a non sensatis intentionibus anime uehementer infixis.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Wack, Mary Francis. *Love-sickness in the Middle Ages: the Viaticum and its Commentaries*. (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1990), 56.

<sup>176</sup> Gerard of Berry. In Wack, Mary Francis. *Love-sickness in the Middle Ages: the Viaticum and its Commentaries*. (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1990), 198.

[A malfunction of the estimative faculty, which is misled by sensed perceptions into apprehending non-sensed accidents that perhaps are not in the person. Thus it believes some woman to be better and more noble and more desirable than all others...[because] some sensed object appears very pleasing... Any unfitting sensations are, as a consequence, obscured by the non-sensed intentions [i.e. that the person is more noble, better, etc. – emphasis by Wack] deeply fixed in the soul.]<sup>177</sup>

As described by Wack, Gerard's position is that in

lovesickness the estimative faculty malfunctions because it is misled by an excessively pleasing sense perception, so strong that it eclipses other sense impressions that might contradict it... Because the estimative faculty is working too hard, innate heat and *spiritus* rush to the middle ventricle where the faculty resides, leaving the first ventricle, the site of the imaginative faculty too cold and dry – melancholic, in fact... The image adheres abnormally strongly on the "screen," so to speak, of the first ventricle; as Gerard puts it, the imaginative faculty becomes fixated on the image.<sup>178</sup> (Wack 56)

Marion A. Wells adds that the phantasm that inspires affection should become "increasingly abstract, losing its materiality by the time it passes through the estimative faculty – a process Avicenna aptly calls *denudation*. This process of sublimation is disastrously interrupted when the estimative function is overwhelmed by the pleasing power of the phantasm conjured by the

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<sup>177</sup> Wack, 199.

<sup>178</sup> Wack, 56.

imagination and recalled by the memory.”<sup>179</sup> Wells continues that the “derangement of the melancholy lover’s ability to judge the world correctly (according to reason) draws attention to the fundamental ontological instability of the subject.”<sup>180</sup> I would add that this instability plays out in a number of ways in the romances, most notably in the construction of a collective self that incorporates lovers. Gerard’s description of the impact that desire has upon perception and cognition becomes important when applied to communication for several reasons.

First, any interpretation must consider the source of the message. Without a clear indication of the sender, the receiver will often imagine a sender. If a man has a fixed image of the sender as being in love with him, then he will interpret all messages with this idea as a starting point. Only strong contrary signals will counter this assumption.

Second, these contrary signals may be ignored in favor of the fixed image of a loving sender, eliminating the important interpretive step of objectively reconsidering textual signals in the light of new signals from the original sender (step 5 as described earlier in this chapter); the listener hears what he wanted to hear. Using medieval cognitive terminology, the listener places a greater importance on the imagination and “non-sensed intentions” than on those grounded in the fantasia and sensed signals. Such interpretation is self-referential and any literary work that shows a character interpreting in such a manner suggests that the relationship may be all in the head of the lover.

Third, this discussion makes irrelevant whether the lover’s feelings are reciprocated. Those who are loved are subject to the same interpretive errors as those that are not loved,

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<sup>179</sup> Wells, Marion A. *The Secret Wound: Love-Melancholy and Early Modern romance*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2007), 43.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

namely, that the image inside their minds may replace the actual words. Gerard is concerned with whether the outer reality as noted by the *communis sensus* matches with the inner reality as (re)constructed by the *fantasia* and compared to images in the *memoria*. The specific information of a previous mutual consent is only of a secondary interest to Gerard.

Gerard's cure for love-melancholy is "*coniunctionem*" or intercourse.<sup>181</sup> This might suggest that if the lovers have consented to join themselves together and then consummated their love, they would be free of the disease; this might, however, serve to reinforce the faulty estimation of these mental images. After all, Gerard also recommends "*consorcium et amplexus puellarum, plurimum concubitus ipsarum, et permutation diuersarum*" [consorting with and embracing girls, sleeping with them repeatedly, and switching various ones]."<sup>182</sup> This sexual variation, combined with listening repeatedly to disparaging remarks about the beloved is supposed to restore the reason to the love-stricken subject, returning the lover to an acceptance of communal assessment over individual judgment. Within this model, communal assessment is assumed to be the truth.

The medieval fields of theology, translation, rhetoric, and cognition tend to focus on truth-judgment in order to assess meaning; in other words, each looks to stabilize meaning in a specific truth. The search for a stable truth does not match well with relational semantics, given the fluid nature of the relationships that forge meaning in a relational setting. While the logic behind each of these models might lead to an articulation of relational semantics, the goals of each eventually move discussions in different directions.

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<sup>181</sup> Gerard, 200. The oddity of the proposed solution suggests it may perhaps had a satirical bent.

<sup>182</sup> Gerard, 202.



Literature, however, by trying to express truth through lying (fiction), had far fewer limitations placed upon it. For a variety of reasons, to be explored in the next chapter, romances began to explore these anxieties in ways other genres did not. Since romances explore relationships between humans, the communications in these poems often reflect the fluidity of meaning between people of different relationships or as relationships change.

The following chapters will explore how communications between literary lovers address anxieties about language seen generally in theology and translation, as well as specifically in rhetoric and medicine. Issues about interpretive context and discourses inform the *obscure sender* tradition, issues about individual interpretive bias and discourses inform the *self-involved* tradition, while the *one mind* tradition attempts to address these concerns even as it raises new issues of *coerced consent*.

CHAPTER THREE  
OBSCURE SENDER, OBSCURE MEANING

Le blanc siglë unt amunt trait...  
 Quë hum se paise aparcever  
 Quel ço seit, le blanc u le neir...  
 Vent sa femme Ysolt devant lui,  
 Purpensee de grant engin...  
 Tristan...dit a Ysolt: “Amie bele,  
 Savez pur veir que c’est sa nef?  
 Or me dites quel est le tref.”  
 Ço dit Ysolt: “Jol sai pur veir,  
 Sachés que le signle est tut neir.

-Thomas’ *Tristan*, 12<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>183</sup> (2969-3023)

[[Kaherdin and Yseut] hoisted aloft the white sail...  
 So that people could distinguish  
 which one it was, the white or the black...  
 Yseut [aux Blanche Mains] came before him,  
 With a cunning scheme in her mind...  
 Tristan...said to Yseut [aux Blanche Mains]: “Fair companion,

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<sup>183</sup> Thomas. “Tristan.” *Early Tristan Poems, Vol.2*. Trans. Stewart Gregory. Ed. Norris Lacy. (Cambridge: Brewer, 1998), 2969-3023.

Do you know for certain that it is his ship?  
Tell me now, that kind of sail it has.”  
Yseut replied: “I am certain indeed  
I’ll tell you why: the sail is completely black.”]

Literary explorations of lovers’ communications often work on the assumption that communication becomes difficult, if not impossible, without a clear knowledge of who sends a message. Knowing the sender of message is vital in clandestine communication, indirect communication, and consent, elements important to many medieval romances. Absent, falsified, disguised, or distorted senders create expectations in readers that lead to faulty interpretations. Linguistic concerns about being unable to determine meaning from a sender’s intended meaning appear in medieval romances as well as medieval theology and rhetoric. The conditions in medieval romances, requiring both secrecy and communication, explore situations where knowing the identity of the sender – not merely the name of that person but how that person identifies him- or herself, whether the sender is a lover, a patron, or, as is often the case in romances, both. Early works in what I will call the *obscure sender* tradition highlight how even the closest of lovers struggle to properly interpret one another without clear signals, suggesting a systemic problem. Later works in the tradition present only flawed lovers interpreting incorrectly. In these later *obscure sender* works, the ability to interpret correctly is no longer presented as systemic but as a litmus test for potential lovers; one’s inability to properly interpret indicates a flawed potential lover.

Knowing the sender of a message can make a large difference to how one interprets a message. In the 1999 comedy-drama set in a sports news show, writer Aaron Sorkin uses the

uncertainty of interpreting without a clear sender in an exchange between the two anchors on the show.

Casey: Suit yourself, but you should know I play squash three times a week and my calves have been called shapely.

Dan: Casey?

Casey: Yeah?

Dan: Who's been calling your calves shapely?

Casey: My mom.

Dan: Okay. Don't talk to me for the rest of the show.<sup>184</sup>

Withholding the identity of the mother allows for a wide range of meanings, but choosing a sensual word such as “shapely” suggests a sensual appreciation of his calves. The absence of a clearly identified sender leads the listener, Dan in this case, to imagine a person admiring Casey’s calves in a romantic manner. Discovering that the source is a mother radically alters the meaning, both by minimizing the sexual content and the potential for an unbiased opinion.

The medieval example is doubly uncertain because Tristan is ignorant of the true sender of this message. Tristan, though longing for his beloved Yseut, has married a different Yseut – called Yseut of the White Hands. Facing death, Tristan has sent a message asking his beloved Yseut to come heal him. In order to keep the communication secret, Tristan establishes a code: his love Yseut will raise a white sail if she will come and a black sail if she refuses. His wife overhears the secret code and transmits to Tristan the wrong message, essentially falsifying the sender and intent. The information – a black sail – shows awareness of the secret code he has

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<sup>184</sup> Sorkin, Aaron. *Sports Night*, “Napoleon’s Battle Plan,” April 12, 1999. Perf. Peter Krause and Josh Charles.

established with his beloved Yseut. His wife, Yseut aux Blanche Mains – the transmitter – offers no clue that she understands the secret meaning; because of this, Tristan assumes the transmission is transparent. The second level of uncertainty arises from Tristan's ignorance of Yseut aux Blanche Main's anger; he does not know she wants to hurt him with a "cunning plan." Tristan is willing to die in the face of a rejection from his beloved Yseut in a way that he would not be for his wife. Yseut's message – or more accurately, Yseut aux Blanche Mains' message – remains beyond his reach because of his limited knowledge.

Jacques Derrida's terminology would seem to illuminate this passage. Meaning in this message never has *presence* for Tristan. He has a desire for – and perhaps assumption of – linguistic *presence* as discussed in the chapter on "one minds" but such *presence* is shown to be an illusion or, at the very least, dependent upon paralinguistic details available to lovers that others do not have the information to decode.

While medieval literary works address instabilities in language in a manner that leads to conclusions reminiscent of Derrida, they focus less on paradigms of language and more on specific, contextualized speech-acts. Despite the remarkable similarities, we must be cautious not to identify the Tristan poets and Shakespeare as providing a direct path to Derrida's ideas. McDonald asserts that

many critics have yielded to the temptation to see in Shakespeare the radical kind of linguistic skepticism that would appear in the work of Thomas Hobbes in the middle of the seventeenth century; others go so far as to turn the Renaissance playwright into a proto-modernist who happened to anticipate our own (sensible)

opinions by some four centuries. We should not allow ahistorical errors to go unchallenged.<sup>185</sup>

McDonald's historicizing of Shakespeare's attitudes toward language is well-grounded and encourages us to consider carefully any similarities we may find. There are important differences in goals and methodology that separate these early writers from modern theorists.

Put simply, Derrida explores the relationship between words and things and follows directly on the trajectory that Augustine and those interested in the Nominalist-Realist debate explore in depth. The goal of these theorists is to consider certainty and contingency in language. Derrida critiques language as a medium for certainty. Likewise, there is a tendency to focus on Renaissance rhetoricians who seek models of language in order to teach the skills necessary for clarity. In an effort to explore these notions in depth, these thinkers adopt methodologies designed to form an abstract relationship between words and things or words and God.

The romance authors, in a parallel trajectory, explore the relationship between words and people. Relationships are contingent and as such any attempt to communicate within them is shown to be uncertain. As noted by Russ McDonald, Renaissance linguists including George Puttenham also emphasized the play of language, using a complex system of classifying ambiguity to discuss a signifier's ability to point toward multiple signifieds. McDonald notes how Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew* emphasizes the affinity of Petruchio and Katherine in

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<sup>185</sup> McDonald, Russ. *Shakespeare and the Arts of Language*. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001), 180-

their similar use of linguistic ambiguity.<sup>186</sup> Linguistic skepticism is incidental to the primary concern over relationships. These acts of communication are *performative* as described by J.L. Austin, as each attempts to define, redefine, or reaffirm one character's status in relation to another.<sup>187</sup> The absence of one participant raises serious questions about a relationship with an absent participant, and a remarkable number of early English romances include scenes where one participant is not only physically absent but completely unrelated to particular speech-acts. There are two levels of potential instability: first, speech-acts without intent (no sender, for instance) and second, speech-acts from characters who do not know their own intentions. Both of these lacks highlight a potential disparity between inner reality (consent, for instance) and outer reality (words, actions, etc.). By presenting speech-acts with absent senders, these romances raise skepticism about language, critiquing the idea of defining oneself as a collective entity with another person.

As seen in the previous chapter, twelfth-century anxieties about language appear in a range of scholastic fields. Each of these fields is limited, however, in its explorations by modeling all language primarily on the relationship between God and man. Working from this

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<sup>186</sup> "For Petruchio and Katerhine, verbal facility implies mental acuity, pride in one's own perception and sensitivity, and the ability to keep others at a distance. And yet their verbal volleys also function as a sign of affinity, a vehicle by which the playwright resemblance and sympathy between the characters" (McDonald 144 – referring to 2.1.109-16). McDonald includes in this discussion the manner in which Viola/Cesario and Olivia extend the each other's metaphors of amorous compliments as holy writ (145).

<sup>187</sup> Austin, J.L. *How To Do Things With Words*. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1962).

assumption leads to a model of interpretation where determining meaning comes from discovering a “speaker’s” intent (what Abelard calls *institutio*). Within heterosocial relationships, intent grows in importance during the twelfth century due to the debate over consent in marriage.<sup>188</sup> The church, in particular, begins to emphasize consent as one of the defining components in deciding whether a marriage is valid. While consent of the family head played an important role in Roman law, the twelfth century begins to define it as the mutual consent of the potential spouses. Determining consent for someone in a subordinate position, however, is notoriously tricky. A young woman, for instance, may be coerced through physical or social pressure into saying the words of the ceremony and even of consummating the relationship without giving her inner consent.<sup>189</sup> This potential disparity led to the adoption of a definition of consent as an “internal disposition of the will,”<sup>190</sup> a definition that continues to circulate through the eighteenth century. Twelfth-century romances build on this idea of self-

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<sup>188</sup> Irven M. Resnick “Marriage in Medieval Culture: Consent theory and The Case of Joseph and Mary,” (*Church History*, June 2000) 350 ff. This tradition continues into the Renaissance under the term “hand-fasting.” See also Riddy, Felicity. “Middle English Romance: Family, Marriage, Intimacy.” *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*. Ed. Roberta L. Kreuger. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000). Riddy draws on James a Bridgane’s *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*. (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1987) and Neil Cartlidge’s *Medieval Marriage: Literary Approaches 1100-1300*. (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1997).

<sup>189</sup> Menuge, Noel James. “Female Wards and Marriage in Romance and Law: A Question of Consent.” *Young Medieval Women*. Ed. By Katherine J. Lewis, Noel James Menuge, and Kim M. Phillips. (New York: St. Martin’s, 1999).

<sup>190</sup> Resnick 351.



determination and establish literary conventions of love that become central themes in a wide range of Renaissance genres, including Shakespeare's drama and Donne's poetry.<sup>191</sup>

Romances, more focused on human relations and "argu[ing] for the legitimacy of secular concerns" (Elizabeth Leigh Smith 13), are not as constrained by theological concerns as are the genres of theology and cognition discussed in the previous chapter.<sup>192</sup> Many of the early romances – what Matilda Tomalyn Bruckner identifies as *romans d'antiquité* – focus on - justifying Anglo-Norman conquest (35).<sup>193</sup> Despite being initially deployed to justify patrilineal rule, the hero's relationship to a woman quickly becomes a site for exploring private concerns. As "romances contemplate the place of private identity in society at large" (Crane 11), it comes as no surprise that romance lovers' language reflect this concern at a linguistic level, setting the lovers' private codes in dialogue with more widely adopted – public – codes. The secular emphasis of the genre and its subsequent freedom from neo-Platonic assumptions allow romances to explore the instabilities inherent in language more fully than logical scholastic texts.

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<sup>191</sup> While beyond the scope of this dissertation, a cursory examination suggests that this trend of marital self-determination continues in an even more extreme form up to the current day.

<sup>192</sup> Smith, Elizabeth Leigh. *Middle English Hagiography and Romance in Fifteenth Century England*. (Lewiston: Edwin Mellon, 2002).

<sup>193</sup> Baswell, Christopher. "Marvels of Translation and Crises of Transition in the Romances of Antiquity." *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000).

Some of the early romances are either informed by scholastic ideas or express parallel evolution of ideas; specifically, Beroul's *Tristan* seems informed by Abelard.<sup>194</sup> Sahar Amer argues that Beroul attempts to redefine marriage in such a way that, according to consent theory, Tristan and Isolde have a stronger claim to marriage than Mark and Isolde.<sup>195</sup> This consent is complicated by the potion and its role in controlling the lovers' feelings.<sup>196</sup> The Anglo-Norman Thomas's *Tristan* also owes a debt to scholastic thought, as seen in the lengthy self-examination Tristan inflicts upon himself before marrying the second Isolde. Tristan is not sure why he is marrying the second Isolde and even considers the possibility that he is marrying the second one only as a substitute for the first. In both Beroul's and Thomas' versions, Tristan's consent and therefore his intent is uncertain.

Scholastics such as Abelard had also considered the idea that our conscious intent may not match with our inner consent; in essence, we may not know our own intentions. The idea that one may not know one's own intent can be gleaned from Abelard's definition of sin, circulating at the time the early versions of *Tristan* were being written. Similar to his position on nominalism, Abelard's definition (see below) centers on the idea of intent.<sup>197</sup> The idea that one

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<sup>194</sup> Jean-Charles Payen. "Beroul et l'Abelardisme." *Romania: Revue Consacree a l'Etude des Langues et des Literatures Romanes*, 1982. 374-375.

<sup>195</sup> Amer, Sahar. "Redefining Marriage and Adultery in Beroul's *Tristan*." *Romance Languages Annual*, 2000. 1-5.

<sup>196</sup> Amer argues against prevailing opinion that the lovers' feelings preceded the potion.

<sup>197</sup> Abelard. "What Sin and Vice Consist in (From *Know Thyself* or *Ethics*)." Trans. D.E. Luscombe. Ed. Richard Bosley and Martin Tweedale. (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview, 1998). (*Scito te ipsum*). 549-559.

human can never fully know another human appears in theological debates over the nature of sin that come to a head at the same time *Tristan* was composed.<sup>198</sup> Abelard constructs the most skeptical model of sin circulating in the twelfth century. He wrestles with the problem that events may appear moral or virtuous depending on the context or the person judging them. At the heart of his attack on Platonism is the idea – seen in medieval cognition – that human perception is inherently faulty and therefore has little practical access to the stable meaning that Platonic ideals afford. This definition of sin argues for the essential unknowability of another person.

Abelard's idea that sin is defined by inward consent places definitive judgments of people's behavior beyond human perception. According to Abelard, sin is when we "are inwardly ready, if given the chance, to [commit the sinful action]. Anyone who is found in this disposition incurs the fullness of guilt; the addition of the performance of the deed adds nothing to increase the sin."<sup>199</sup> The "inward" readiness determines whether the soul "earns damnation or

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<sup>198</sup> Abelard works with a definition of sin that contrasts with the traditions of Augustine and Anselm. Augustine, in *City of God*, makes a distinction between sin in thought and sin in action, with only the latter qualifying as sin. Augustine of Hippo. *City of God*. Trans. Henry Bettenson. (New York: Penguin, 2004). Anselm of Canterbury defines sin as choosing that which seems good to the individual, rather than focusing on the eternal. Anselm of Canterbury. "Cur Deus Homo." *Saint Anselm: Basic Writings*. Trans. S.N. Deane. (Chicago: Open Court, 1962). Colish identifies the difference as subjective certitude versus truth with rectitude (169). Abelard's definition of sin is tied to inner consent.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 551.

is made guilty before God.”<sup>200</sup> It is no sin to desire to sin if “he represses his desire; he does not extinguish it, but because he is not drawn to consent, he does not incur sin.”<sup>201</sup> Abelard’s definition of sin clearly delineates between divine judgment and human ones, because only God can know the inward readiness of a person. The human inability to perceive the inner workings of another’s mind means that people can never really know another person’s guilt. In this way, every person’s actions have an indeterminacy that resembles the workings of a relational semantics. “People do not judge the hidden but the apparent, nor do they consider the guilt to a fault so much as the performance of a deed.”<sup>202</sup> An action can signify guilt within the context of human justice and law at the same time it signifies innocence within a divine context, and vice versa.<sup>203</sup> The disparity between two interpretations of the same sign (in this case, an action) suggests the kind of interpretive instability at the heart of relational semantics even though Abelard’s discussion builds upon the assumption of a concrete, perhaps Platonic, truth determined by inward readiness. This truth, however, is beyond human ken, which means that people interact with the world (and the signs therein) as though in a relational context, even though the greater, divine frame holds a stable – if inaccessible – meaning. Non-divine observers are left to respond to people’s actions as though to a sign without a clear, stable meaning. Abelard’s definition of sin, therefore, by sequestering observers from clear referential

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 549.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 551.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 557.

<sup>203</sup> Abelard discusses just this situation and its opposite in the very section from which these examples are chosen.

meaning, forces observers to interpret events in the same way that referential semantics forces readers to interpret signs<sup>204</sup>.

Abelard's definition of sin raises the possibility that one may not know one's own intentions. Key to this is Abelard's idea – attacking the notion of sin as an act of the will – that sin need not be voluntary.<sup>205</sup> “There are people who are wholly ashamed to be drawn into consent to lust or into a bad will and are forced out of the weakness of the flesh to want what they by no means want.”<sup>206</sup> Without being in a position to act on one's consent, however, one may not know whether one has given inner assent. In Abelard's example of the servant who is

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<sup>204</sup> It is worth noting, however, that Abelard's construction of sin was not the dominant one at this time. Most medieval thinkers continue to work with Augustine's idea that sin is to be determined by “culpable cupidity” (qtd. in Tweedale 527). All seek to live without fear, but the “good seek it by diverting their love from things which cannot be had without the risk of losing them. The bad are anxious to enjoy these things with security and try to remove hindrances so as to live a wicked and criminal life which is better called death” (qtd. in Tweedale 527). In Augustine's model, it is possible to determine guilt with some certainty. In his discussion of a slave who murders his master to avoid torture, Augustine relies upon the act being performed. In Abelard's discussion, inward consent, *not* action, determines whether an act is sinful. Despite the fact that Abelard's ideas were not the dominant model of sin, they reflect a newfound attention to relational perceptions of the world.

<sup>205</sup> Abelard uses as an example that is not a sin the monk bound in chains and brought to pleasure. As this is made necessary by nature and beyond his control, it is not a sin.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, 551.

inwardly ready to kill his lord, the servant himself may not know until the moment of truth whether he has previously – and perhaps unwillingly – given his inner consent.

Thomas consciously explores the issue of unknowability – and therefore undecidability – when Tristan contemplates marriage to Yseut aux Blanche Mains. Tristan's tortured exploration of his decision to marry Yseut aux Blanche Mains has its foundations in the fact that he does not know her feelings. He asserts at one point that "she has forgotten me entirely, for her feelings have changed"<sup>207</sup> and she must no longer love him.<sup>208</sup> Immediately afterward, Tristan expresses the opposite, suggesting "she has the wish [to do my will] if only she has the means."<sup>209</sup> Both times, he states that he would know if her feelings had changed, but his doubts about her reflect his uncertainty. These observations end with the assertion "if she does not do my will, I *do not know* how much that irks her" (my emphasis).<sup>210</sup> Yseut's feelings, in absence, are unknowable – even undecidable – to Tristan. Tristan seems to be ruminating on the issue in the hopes that he will gain more insight, insight that will be discussed in the next chapter on how the lovers share "one mind."

The fact that Thomas's Tristan does not know his own motives for marrying the second Yseut can be seen in the number of reasons he offers. First, he justifies his marriage by stating "since I cannot have the object of my longing, / I can but take what is in my grasp."<sup>211</sup>

Following an inconclusive discussion of whether the first Yseut has forgotten him, he suggests

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<sup>207</sup> Thomas, 301.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 301

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 302.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 89-90.

that it is the noble position to withdraw from the field when she chooses another.<sup>212</sup> He considers the possibility that he will learn to love the second woman,<sup>213</sup> coming to the position that it might make him forget the first.<sup>214</sup> Finally, Tristram says that he does it to “try the life [the first Yseut] leads.”<sup>215</sup> After this long monologue, the narrator offers another motive, that Tristram marries the second Yseut because she shares “...pur nun d’Isolt” [that very name Yseut].<sup>216</sup> As noted, she becomes a substitute for his true beloved. Most importantly, Tristram does not propose this to himself, suggesting that he does not know one of his motives, perhaps the most important one. In this way, meaning is even bracketed off from Tristan himself.

Intent is bracketed off, in fact, from almost all of the communications in the relatively short extant fragments of Thomas’ *Tristan*. The romance’s climactic episode – where Yseut aux blanche mains lies to Tristram – is built around a message where intent is obscured by making unclear the sender of the message. Tristram asks Kaherdin to go to Yseut with his ring “Ço sunt enseignes entre nus”<sup>217</sup> [as a token of recognition] and ask his lover to come and heal the wounds no one else can heal. If she is to return with him, Kaherdin is to unfurl a “Blanc siglez”; if not, a “nëis siglë” [white sail” and “black sail,” respectively].<sup>218</sup> When Yseut returns with Kaherdin, they do unfurl a white sail. Unfortunately, Yseut aux Blanche Mains has overheard Tristram’s

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 214.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 225.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 251. “...pur nun d’Isolt.”

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 2455.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 2563-5.

instructions to Kaherdin, “Ben ad ente-ndu chaüm mot”[understanding each].<sup>219</sup> When Tristran – who cannot rise from his bed – asks her what kind of sail flies above the ship, Yseut aux Blanche Mains concocts a “grand engine” [cunning scheme], telling him “Le sigle est tut neir” [the sail is completely black].<sup>220</sup> The sender of this message is best thought of as Tristan’s wife Yseut aux Blanche Mains, intending to fool Tristran, but from Tristran’s perspective it is sent by his beloved Yseut. While the role of the imagination will be explored in a later chapter, the key for now is that intent is bracketed off from Tristan because his knowledge of the message’s true sender is concealed from him.

While not entirely empty of intent, Yseut aux Blanche Mains’ willful intrusion into the original Yseut’s message via the sail indicates how the same words can be have their intent changed from an original message, particularly when the sender is unknown. The original Yseut unfurls a white sail to let Tristran know she is coming to heal him and Yseut aux Blanche Mains tells Tristran that the sail is black, leading to Tristran’s death. Tristran assumes that the sender is the original Yseut, leading him to conclude that the intent is to make a clear denial.<sup>221</sup> The original communication, however, has been replaced by Yseut aux Blanche Mains’ opposite one; her intent is to hinder the lovers. The same message has no inherent meaning therefore, meaning different things within different contexts to different people along its transmission. Intent in this case is completely bracketed off from Tristran, as he mistakes his wife’s intent for his beloved Yseut’s. The message no longer signifies what the original sender meant, nor does it signify

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 2607.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 3010 and 2023.

<sup>221</sup> Similarly, Chaucer’s *Man of Law’s Tale* uses intercepted and forged letters to present ambiguity of sender.



what the receiver expects; neither the first sender nor the eventual receiver control the meaning of the message. The message has been rewritten in transmission.<sup>222</sup>

The statue sequence – seen only in the Turin fragment and Brother Robert’s Norse translation of Thomas – presents Tristran “communicating” with the statue of Yseut. Later chapters will address this episode again, considering respectively the ideal of unrealistic interpretive leaps in lovers and the role of the imagination, but for the purposes of this chapter, we will focus on how these “messages” are divorced from any meaning outside Tristran’s mind. Unlike the monologue mentioned above, this scene presents Tristran responding as though engaged in conversation with the actual Yseut.

Thomas’ references to the hall of statues in the Turin fragment become particularly poignant – and unsettling – when one considers the interpretive absence of a sender. Given that there is no intended meaning from the statue to Tristran, all meaning is determined by the imagining Tristran. All meaning is a supplement. The statue – and the responses Tristran imagines for Yseut – replaces the absent Yseut.

Por iço fist [Tristran] ceste image  
Que dire li volt son corage,  
Son bon penser, sa fole error,  
Sa paigne, sa joie d’amor,  
Car ne sot vers cui descobrir  
Ne son voler ne son desir.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> A similar but less extreme example of an intermediary who colors messages is Pandarus, who romanticizes the messages he transmits back and forth from Troilus and Criseyde.

<sup>223</sup> Turin, 986-91.

[Tristran] made that statue  
because he wanted to tell it what was in his heart  
His good thought, and his wild misconceptions,  
The pain he felt, and the joy of love,  
Since he knew not to whom to disclose  
His longing and his heart's desire.

Here, Thomas substitutes the statue for the original Yseut. The statue becomes a physical substitute for his love as well, even physically as he “Molt la baisse” (946) [kissed it often].<sup>224</sup> He imagines her as an active participant that makes him jealous by forgetting him or finding some other lover.<sup>225</sup> This jealousy prompts Tristran to “muster a l’image haiur” [vent his hatred on the statue].<sup>226</sup> Looking at the expression on the statue’s face, however, he “Hidonc plurië e merci crie” [crie[s] and beg[s] forgiveness].<sup>227</sup> Clearly, the statue’s expression means nothing; without any sender, the implied communication here is totally empty of intent. One could describe the statue scene as infinitely open or perfectly closed. Keeping in mind the medieval attention to intent, the messages are infinitely open because there is no intent behind the traces. In contrast, the messages are closed; they are best understood as messages from Tristan to himself. Both understandings of the statue scene erase the sender, negating the presence implied by intent. Thomas’ representation of how Tristran creates meaning where there is none will be

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 946.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 950-1.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 982.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

addressed in a later chapter, but the final scenes further emphasize the importance to interpretation of knowing the sender.

It is important to note that these difficulties in communication occur 1) after a previously indicated form of consent between lovers and 2) between the romantic leads. Even the fragments of Thomas' version include a scene that indicates a mutual consent to love. The *Cambridge MS. D.D. 15.12* fragment of Thomas' *Tristan* shows Yseut offer a ring to Tristan "Por m'amor, amis, le gardés" [to remind [him] of [her] love].<sup>228</sup> Later renditions of Thomas' *Tristan* – Brother Robert's Norse translation and Gottfried's freer adaptation – include earlier episodes that indicate mutual affection. The first instance – when the lovers first admit their love – introduces the difficulty in determining the intent of another person. Tristan sees her troubled and asks what ails her and she responds *l'ameir*. As these texts note, she could have meant any of the three homophones love, bitter (as in poison), or the sea.<sup>229</sup> When asked, Isolde clarifies that she does not mean the latter two. Gottfried expands on this notion of consent with a lengthy discourse on how the two shared one heart and mind,<sup>230</sup> an idea to which he returns frequently.<sup>231</sup> The idea of lovers sharing one mind will be discussed in another chapter on its centrality to lovers' communications, but for this chapter the key is that it helps to establish mutual assent.

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<sup>228</sup> Thomas, *Cambridge*, 53. This manuscript is incomplete, containing one leaf

<sup>229</sup> Gottfried von Strassburg. *Tristan*. Trans. Arthur Thomas Hatto. (London: Penguin, 1967), 199. All translations of Gottfried are Hatto's. Strassburg, Gottfreid von. *Tristan. Band 1: Text*. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyer, 2004).

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 230, for the most explicit example. This will be discussed in another chapter.

The fact that these difficulties occur between the romantic leads suggests that the difficulties are in communication itself rather than the lovers. As will be discussed in the next chapter, lovers in these tales are presented as the best interpreters of one another. If, as the tale suggest, the most privileged of communications – between lovers – is challenged, then by extension so are all messages. The difficulties, then, arise from the communication itself.

Thomas' *Tristan* is not alone in linking the difficulties of communication to lovers and consent. The Anglo-Norman *Romance of Horn* addresses similar issues several times, with the clearest episodes centering around a ring the lovers exchange.<sup>232</sup> Rymenhild offers Horn a ring in language that suggests marriage. The later *King Horn* uses language that, as Felicity Riddy notes, sounds remarkably like “consent which, if followed by intercourse, constituted a legal marriage according to medieval canon law –even if the declaration is private.”<sup>233</sup> Despite the intimate knowledge this suggests, Rymenhild does not recognize Horn when he returns dressed as a beggar. As Rymenhild fails to recognize Horn when he returns, she is unable to correctly identify the sender, which prevents her from seeing the intent that is specific to her. While the specific process by which she creates meaning will be discussed in a later chapter, the key relevance can be found in how many specifics in the scene parallel *Tristan* and in the way that the poet makes the communication undecidable without a clear knowledge of the sender. Like

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<sup>232</sup> If current dating stands, *Horn* may even be a direct response to Thomas' *Tristan*. The similarity of communication supports this hypothesis.

<sup>233</sup> Riddy, 241.

Tristan, Horn dresses as a “beggere”<sup>234</sup> and “makede him[self] unbicomelich”<sup>235</sup> in order to approach Rymenhild publicly in a manner that would reveal himself only to her. Also paralleling the Tristan episode, one lover uses a ring to activate the intended message; Horn hopes it will help to establish his identity for her by tossing it into her drink.<sup>236</sup> The humor of the situation arises from readers’ greater knowledge of what Horn is trying to communicate. Horn’s message carries a balance of signals that confirm and contradict his identity as Horn. While Horn tries to suggest his identity to Rymenhild by mentioning shared experiences, he balances this by stating and confirming his own death, eliminating “Horn” as a potential sender.

Following generations of romances present lovers facing similar interpretive difficulties before they have expressed their mutual consent and/or affection; in fact, these communications begin to be *used to in the process of establishing consent*. In these early works, it is still the primary lovers – such as Tristan and Isolde – who must navigate these difficulties. In these situations, the lovers have even less information to determine the sender in that the sender’s attitude is unknown as well.

Roughly fifty years after Thomas’ *Tristan* and the *Romance of Horn*, Marie de France’s *Eliduc* brings together the romance themes of communication, consent, and the idea that one may not even know one’s own intent. The lovers’ difficulty communicating seems to come from the fact that *Eliduc* explores the role of communication in courtship, before mutual consent has been

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<sup>234</sup> “King Horn.” *Four Romances of England*. Ed. Robert B. Herzmann, Graham Drake, and Eve Salisbury. (Kalamazoo: TEAMS, 1999). 1141.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, 1073.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, 1168-70.

established between the lovers. Unlike the lovers in *Tristan*, *Eliduc*'s lovers can not fall back upon an assumed consent to help determine intent.

*Eliduc* tells the story of two women who loved the same knight, Eliduc. Eliduc marries and lives happily with the first until he is banished unfairly by his lord.<sup>237</sup> Eliduc leaves his wife behind and goes to another nation, gaining favor for his successes. He falls in love with Guilladun, who likewise loves him. When Guilladun sends messages indicating her love as well as clear love-tokens, Eliduc returns responses that could indicate mere loyal affection or more passionate love. Eliduc's former lord sends a message calling him to return, forgiven. Before leaving, the knight admits his love to Guilladun, who begs to go along. He does not bring her, but they exchange rings. He is distant with his wife as he helps to win the war, then returns to Guilladun in order to bring her with him. On the return trip, they encounter a difficult storm, leading a sailor to threaten throwing her overboard because he already has a virtuous wife. Guilladun faints upon hearing he is married. Eliduc throws the sailor overboard and comes to his home shore with a comatose Guilladun. He visits her daily, growing ever more sad, until his wife discovers the woman. Thinking more of their happiness than her own, the wife revives Guilladun with a magic flower then takes the veil as a nun to free their path to marriage. Later in life, Eliduc gives himself up to serve God, and places Guilladun with his wife in the convent, where the two women live as sisters.

Marie places a great emphasis on communication between lovers in *Eliduc* as the Guilladun tries to clarify his feelings for her. As Robert Hanning notes, many of Marie's *lais*

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<sup>237</sup> Because the wife's name, Guilladuc, resembles so closely the lover's name, Guilladun, I will refer to the first as the wife and the second as Guilladun. I do this for clarity and because I discuss the lover more frequently.

complement one another, and *Eliduc* is often discussed as a companion to *Chevrefoil*.<sup>238</sup> *Chevrefoil* provides an example of the privileged communication that idealized lovers share, showing Isolde understand a complex message and establish a tryst based solely on one word carved in wood, Tristan's name. Marie spends the bulk of the lai on the act of communication, glossing quickly over even the lovers' evening together. Marie's *Chevrefoil* indicates that she was familiar with the Tristan tales and sensitive to the importance of communication. In *Eliduc*, Marie inverts the generic expectations of ideal communication between lovers seen in *Chevrefoil*. Interpretation in *Eliduc* is hampered by Eliduc's lack of clear intention in his responses to the woman who loves him. Writing one lai that lionizes privileged communications between lovers, and another lai that questions those conventions, Marie follows in the same tradition as Tristan, ambivalent and anxious about lovers' communications.

Marie's *Eliduc* emphasizes even more aggressively than Thomas' *Tristan* concerns about the lack of certain intent in lovers' messages.<sup>239</sup> *Eliduc* presents the loving Guilladun with messages that are undecidable because they lack subtext and therefore the potential to determine intent. In contrast to *Chevrefoil*, *Eliduc* shows characters that love one another but do not gain any privileged understanding. Guilladun, in particular, gains no insight from her affection. Eliduc's responses to Guilladun's advances retain their undecidability by erasing any indications as to the role he is adopting in his response: servant of the king or lover. For purposes of determining meaning, she does not know who accepts her gifts.

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<sup>238</sup> Hanning, Robert and Joan Ferrante. *The Lais of Marie de France*. Trans. Robert Hanning and Joan Ferrante. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995), 19.

<sup>239</sup> Marie de France. *Lais: Édition bilingue de Phillipe Walter*. Saint-Armand: Gallimard, 2000.

Guilladun tries to indicate clearly her affection for Eliduc through her gifts. She clearly states “S’il ne m’aime par amur / Murir m’estuet a grant dolur” [if [Eliduc] does not love me with real love, I must die in great sorrow].<sup>240</sup> To show that she wants him “par amur, amer” [with love, to love], Guilladun sends to Eliduc via her chamberlain seemingly clear traditional symbols of affection, a belt and a ring.<sup>241</sup> Guilladun offers a belt which, strapped around the waist, implies physical intimacy and suggests an embrace. She also gives Eliduc a ring, which carries several associations with intimacy: it can imply an embrace, the female genitalia, and even betrothal or marriage. All of these associations ask Eliduc to define himself as Guilladun’s lover, and the fact that so many are deployed makes her desire for him to acknowledge and accept this role almost over-determined.

Precisely because Guilladun’s gestures are over-determined, Eliduc’s refusal to respond clearly to any of her cues introduces ambiguity into their communications. Eliduc puts on the ring and belt<sup>242</sup> but says “nothing more.”<sup>243</sup> The fact that Eliduc accepts the items suggests interest, but Eliduc’s silence is unusual enough to pointedly undermine the acceptance. Faced with an unusual response, Guilladun must consider other possibilities. Marie forces Guilladun to

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<sup>240</sup> Marie, 349-50. As Hanning and Ferrante note, “the expression Guilladun uses throughout this passage is *par amur amer*, “to love with love,” presumably with passion, desire, not just as a vassal would his lord’s daughter” (205, note3). Guilladun shows her passion once again in an internal monologue (387-400).

<sup>241</sup> Ibid., 379-80.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid., 408-10. “La chevalier l’ad mercie. / L’anelet d’or mist en sundei, / La ceinture ceint entur sei; / Ne li vadlet plus ne li dist, / Nē il nient ne li request / Fors tant que de[l] suen li offri.”

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., 56. “Ne li dis plus nē il a mei.”



consider the same ambiguity that Isolde uses when trying to mislead others with the ring (as discussed in the first chapter). By refusing to acknowledge the context of her gifts, he erases any implied subtext.

The chamberlain's presence highlights the abnormality of Eliduc's responses in two ways. First, Marie makes it clear that Eliduc's reticence is not a character trait – of rudeness, say – but a conscious choice; after all, the knight engages in normal relations with the messenger. Eliduc thanks the man<sup>244</sup> and makes the appropriate offer for service.<sup>245</sup> In contrast, Eliduc does not send his thanks to the lady nor does he convey a sense of obligation. Second, Marie emphasizes the failed communications by having Guilladun discuss the matter with her chamberlain. Following the chamberlain's advice, the princess notes optimisitically that “Mes nepurquant pur lesemblant / Peot l'um conustre li alquant” [by a reaction, one can know something].<sup>246</sup> Guilladun presses the chamberlain to answer the salient question, whether Eliduc “Nel receut il pur drüerie?” [accepts it as a love-token]<sup>247</sup> but the chamberlain admits that he doesn't know. All he can say is that Eliduc's acceptance is a good sign<sup>248</sup> and that Eliduc seems to be of good character.<sup>249</sup> In order to establish the intent, the chamberlain looks to establish the character of the sender, therefore substituting context (Eliduc's apparent character) for content.

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<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 408.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid., 413.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 375-6.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid., 431.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid., 433.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 421-4.

The uncertainty of Eliduc's response prompts Guillardun to probe for the context of his acceptance in an effort to determine a clear intent. She knows he likes her but wants to know the extent of this affection, so she meets with him in person. Direct communication offers potentially a variety of indirect signals that might make clear his response. While he is physically present, Eliduc does not offer any signals of his intent. Who is speaking? Is he speaking as Eliduc the loyal subject or as Eliduc the lover? Both lovers are afraid to speak until Eliduc finally thanks her and tells her he'd "Unques mes n'ot avoir si chier" [never had anything more dear].<sup>250</sup> This response, however, keeps his intentions inscrutable: "chier" can mean both emotionally dear or financially dear. In an effort to force his hand, Guillardun's response to Eliduc makes her position even clearer, saying she "l'amat de tel amur ... [et] Jamés n'avra humme vivant" [loved him with such love... [and] would never have a living man] other than him.<sup>251</sup> When it is time to reveal his desire,<sup>252</sup> Eliduc begins with an expression of gratitude that her love "grant joie en ai" [gives him great joy],<sup>253</sup> but ends with the statement that he will leave once his years' service to her father is over because he doesn't wish to remain.<sup>254</sup> Eliduc's communications are ambiguous about the role he is adopting in relation to her; because of this ambiguity, his communications are as unclear as messages with an absent, unclear, or falsified sender.

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<sup>250</sup> Ibid., 507. E il dutë a li parler / Fors tant kë il la mercia / Del present que el li enveia; /  
Unques mes n'ot avoir si chier.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid., 513, 517

<sup>252</sup> Ibid., 518. Or li redie sun talent.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid., 520. .

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 530. "...remaneir / Si cuné puis de vus avoir."

Marie has Guillardun press the issue a second time, making these failed communications centerpieces for the lai. Guillardun clarifies that the ring is an expression of a lover's love and in so doing attempts to clarify how Eliduc understands the item's meaning. Eliduc, however, continues to emphasize the potential ambiguity of the items by choosing words that are flexible enough in meaning to account for both a lover's lover and for a vassal's love of a lord's daughter. This ambiguity also appears structurally in his speech. He spends the first six lines expressing his gratitude and joy and the last seven describing his obligation to her father. Concluding with his desire to leave also suggests a reluctance to consent to be with her exclusively. While the scene concludes with the two lovers making pledges to each other,<sup>255</sup> Eliduc's pledge merely agrees to "decide... what to do with [Guillardun]."<sup>256</sup> He refuses to adopt a stable position in relation to her. The lack of a clear relationship undermines the clarity of the responses. The inability to know what role he is adopting in relation to her obscures the message. Unlike in the examples from *Tristan*, Guillardun's love gives her no insight into the priority of roles: loyal servant or lover.

Furthermore, Eliduc's reticence can be understood as an accurate reflection of his own ambiguous feelings; if so, then two intentions are likeliest. The first is that he wishes to avoid committing – a form of consent – in order to perpetuate the status quo. The second is that he is truly undecided on the issue. These two intentions coexist perfectly well with one another, so one does not need to choose one in order to emphasize the deep undecidability in these communications. In fact, Marie has constructed these communications so that even Eliduc's undecidable intent is itself undecidable. In Abelard's terms, Eliduc does not even know his own

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<sup>255</sup> Ibid., 537. "Bien s'esteent aseüré."

<sup>256</sup> Ibid., 534-5. Guillardun states "Bien avrez purveü ainceis / Quei vus vodriez fere de mei."

mind. These communications, at their foundation, have no meaning. Meaning does not fall apart merely at the linguistic level but at the level of composition, in the mind itself.

These themes continue to inform relationships within medieval romances throughout the late Middle Ages. Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* brings together anxieties about communication and intent in the primary lovers, complicating the generic expectations he has inherited. *Troilus and Criseyde*, however, includes communications that lack clear indications of intent both pre-consent and post-“consent”. The expanded use of letters in the later Middle Ages to convey messages between lovers allows writers to expand the critique of an absent intent by emphasizing the difficulty of interpreting without all of the non-verbal clues that a present sender would communicate. Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, in particular, emphasizes the difficulty of establishing intent in the absence of a sender by having letters – and Troilus' interpretation of them – play pivotal roles in the romance. The indeterminacy of Criseyde's assent makes the intent behind her letters even more unclear to Troilus.

Chaucer's portrayal of the first letter Criseyde sends Troilus highlights the absence of clear intent and the importance of interpretation in such a case. Troilus has finally written to Criseyde, declaring his love in the most passionate and unmistakable terms. Criseyde's letter in response is so ambiguous that even the hopeful Troilus registers its mixed messages.

But ofte gan the herte glade and quake  
Of Troilus, whil that he gan it rede,  
So as the wordes yave hym hope or drede.<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>257</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer. “Troilus and Criseyde.” *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Ed. Larry Benson. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 2.1321-1323.

As he reads, Troilus encounters some words that give him “hope” and others that cause him to “drede” and his heart begins to “glade or quake” in response to these different messages.

Whatever meaning Criseyde intended – and this is left unclear in the section describing her composition of the letter – Troilus has no access to it, because she hides her meaning as though hidden “under [a] sheld”.<sup>258</sup> Chaucer makes it clear that Criseyde’s letter withholds information important to Troilus in establishing what the letter means. Unambiguous signals of Criseyde’s interest in Troilus are absent. Making the matter worse, Criseyde’s absence also eliminates any non-verbal clues Troilus might “read” to clarify her words. Instead, Troilus is left with a gap where her answer might be. Without a clear intent and sender, Troilus is forced to construct meaning where there may be none.

Chaucer echoes Criseyde’s absence as a sender in the final book as well, signaling the connection with the phrase “hope and drede” in relation to his “herte.”<sup>259</sup> The phrase reappears to describe Troilus’ feelings on the tenth day of waiting for Criseyde to return. The only judgment Chaucer’s narrator offers is that Troilus’ “hope alwey hym blente.”<sup>260</sup> Chaucer’s source in Boccaccio, on the other hand, offers readers much clearer signals about how to read the absent Criseida, both at the gates and in her initial letter. Boccaccio’s narrator describes Troilo’s hopes at the gate as “foolish.”<sup>261</sup> Similarly, Boccaccio presents her first letter to Troilo in less ambiguous terms. Boccaccio provides a heading that makes clear both the ambiguity and her

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<sup>258</sup> Ibid., 2.1323. Criseyde’s text is never revealed to readers.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid., 5.1207.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid., 5.1195.

<sup>261</sup> Giovanni Boccaccio. “Book of Troilus.” *The Story of Troilus*. Trans. Ruth K Gordon. (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1998), 374.

intent. “Criseida replies to Troilo in a way which, while neither committing herself nor releasing herself from obligation, cautiously lets him suspect her love.”<sup>262</sup> Her intent is clear and an explanation for her ambiguity is offered. In contrast, Chaucer’s indirect presentation of the material, combined with the lack of clear narrative assertions about her intent, emphasizes the importance of Troilus’ reception of the material, a reception that has been colored by the romanticizing lens of Pandarus

Several times, Chaucer presents Troilus speaking to an absent, imagined Criseyde, much as Tristan spoke to his statue. Having just fallen in love, Troilus says to himself a thousand times

Good goodly, to whom serve I and laboure

As I best kan, now wolde God, Criseyde,

Ye wolde on me rewe, er that I deyde!

My dere herte, allas, myne hele and hewe

And lif is lost, but ye wol on me rewe!<sup>263</sup>

Troilus’ cries for mercy here and later are, as Chaucer notes, seemingly for nought, as “she herde nat his pleynte.”<sup>264</sup> Pandarus, however, does overhear Troilus’ complaints. It is one of these seemingly misdirected messages that leads Pandarus to instigate the affair. In fact, Pandarus is witness of several of Troilus’ complaints to an absent Criseyde. After Criseyde fails to appear at

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<sup>262</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>263</sup> Chaucer *Troilus*, 1.456-62.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid., 1.544.

the gates and Troilus has his dream, Troilus calls out for Pandarus. Troilus addresses the absent Criseyde by name three times, asking “whi leet I you from hennes go?”<sup>265</sup>

Chaucer explicitly raises the issue of intent in Troilus’ final speech to an absent Criseyde. Once again, Troilus calls for Pandarus to witness his speech. Troilus asks the absent Criseyde, “was ther non other broch yow list lete/ to feffe with youre newe love.../but thilke broch that I yow gave as for remembraunce of me?”<sup>266</sup> Despite his love, Troilus does not have any insight into Criseyde’s mind. He answers his own question using the process of elimination. The only answers that Troilus can imagine are spite and to openly show her intent.<sup>267</sup>

The connection between intent, interpretation, and sin comes together in Chaucer. Chaucer’s interest in the role of *entente* and sin is clear in *The Friar’s Tale*. Chaucer’s definition of sin in this tale is determined about one’s inner consent more than one’s words. In the story, a corrupt human summoner encounters a travelling devil and, seeing a kindred spirit, agrees to travel with him. When they pass an angry cart driver cursing his horses, the summoner asks why the devil does not take them. The devil replies that the driver’s words did not accurately reflect what he really desired; rather, the driver was merely indicating frustration. Later, the summoner attempts to extort money from an old woman who calls for him to be taken to Hell if he does not repent. The summoner indicates no willingness to repent, and he is taken to Hell. Her words, unlike those of the driver, accurately reflect her inner consent. This definition of sin, taken from the tradition established by Abelard, presents a situation where one’s intent is revealed more through one’s thoughts than one’s words. This definition of intent, as noted before, may

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<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 5.1261.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid., 5.1688-90.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid., 5.1693-4.

sometimes be unclear to the speaker. The cart driver is merely angry when he curses his horses and, as the devil notes, “he spak oo thing, but he thoghte another.”<sup>268</sup> A more accurate assessment might be that the driver withheld his inner consent to damn the horses, even though he meant to say what he said. While the supernatural devil correctly sees this, the driver’s inner intent is unknown to the human summoner.<sup>269</sup>

Troilus’ speeches are best understood as general statements about his emotional state rather than as messages he expected Criseyde to understand.<sup>270</sup> Unlike Tristan, Troilus does not imagine specific responses for Criseyde.<sup>271</sup> Troilus does, however, perform these speeches for Pandarus, which raises issues that will become important in the Renaissance about declarations of love being overheard by non-lovers. Like many of the other texts using relational semantics

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<sup>268</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer. “The Canterbury Tales.” *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Ed. Larry Benson. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), III.1568.

<sup>269</sup> One might assume that the devil, being supernatural, is more perceptive, though common sense might also serve. In addition, Chaucer complicates the issue of sin and intent by having the corrupt summoner consciously confirm his evil, following an idea of sin that echoes Augustine.

<sup>270</sup> A future study might, however, explore Troilus’ speeches in relation to the unrealistic hope that she would understand his emotional state anyway.

<sup>271</sup> Similar to Tristan, however, Troilus does kiss one of his letters (2.1090); this is the letter that Pandarus shoves down Criseyde’s blouse (2.1155).



to question the ideal of collective individualism, *Troilus and Criseyde* presents as problematic the construction of an imagined sender in the mind of the receiver.<sup>272</sup>

As the tradition of lovers' consent and communication continues into the Renaissance, the idea that lovers have an affinity that shows in their communications even before they have consented to love one another allows it to serve an additional function. As we have seen, the early works have the lovers show consent first; as will be discussed in the next chapter, any misinterpretation by non-lovers therefore serves primarily to reinforce the lovers' compatibility. Before the lovers have mutually agreed to their role as lovers, the ability to determine intent becomes even more difficult. This difficulty is made even more important due to the fact that, used before lovers have given mutual consent, the interpretive process becomes the means of *establishing* compatibility and consent rather than merely *reflecting* these qualities.

Because of their wide influence, Sidney's *Old Arcadia* and its subsequent versions become the means of transmitting into different genres the convention linking consent and communication between lovers.<sup>273</sup> In addition, Sidney includes the newer practice of showing unrequited prospective suitors misunderstand the messages from those they love. These misinterpretations are understandable and will be discussed in greater depth in the following chapters, but for the purposes of this chapter, the key is that lovers and non-lovers are being shown in the same – difficult – interpretive position. The lovers' greater insight, then, sets them apart from those whose affections are not returned. Rather than critiquing language, these later

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<sup>272</sup> Criseyde also delivers one message to an absent Troilus. This speech is the only time she states directly that she is severing their relationship (5.1072-77).

<sup>273</sup> Sir Philip Sidney. *Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia (Old Arcadia)*. Ed. Katharine Duncan-Jones. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994).

texts set the lovers' communications outside traditional language. The error is in the individual rather than in language itself. One could argue through extension that Sidney's *Old Arcadia* establishes the convention that one mind communication is the condition that defines true lovers.<sup>274</sup>

Sidney's romance obscures linguistic intent by obscuring the sender in disguises. These disguises introduce taboos of class and/or gender, further obscuring communication. Musidorus

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<sup>274</sup> A discussion of this sort stands apart from most scholarship on the *Arcadia*, which focuses more on politics, rules of courtly behavior, and gender. Regarding politics, the *New Arcadia*, with its revised book 3, particularly emphasizes these themes. Combing all three themes, Clare R. Kinney points out the broader impact that a fixation on love can have. Regarding Amphialus, Kinney mentions on page 345 that "the horrors of his surroundings cannot "seem ugly to him whose truly-affected mind did still paint it over with the beauty of Philoclea." Amphialus's "painting" of his beloved continues to occlude the reality of the dismembered body politic. As noted in "Chivalry Unmasked," while the narrative that contains Amphialus relates the dire public consequences of the uncontrolled passion of a princely individual, Amphialus refigures his experience in terms of a private erotic quest. Here, we see an analog to the triadic reading process that medieval and Renaissance lovers enact. Unable to process what he sees, Amphilanthus imposes his desires / prejudices upon his experience. Kinney, Clare R. "Chivalry Unmasked." (*Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, Winter 1995), 35. For a discussion of gender, particularly male homo-social and -erotic bonds, see Benjamin Scott Grossberg. "Politics and shifting desire in Sidney's *New Arcadia*." (*Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, Winter 2002), 63. For female-female relationships, see Richard A. Levin. "What? How? Female-female desire in Sidney's new *Arcadia*." (*Criticism*, Fall 1997), 463.

is forbidden to Pamela because she thinks Musidorus is a shepherd and Pyrocles/Cleophila is forbidden to Philoclea because she thinks that Pyrocles is a woman.<sup>275</sup> Another complication that Sidney adds to the communications between lovers is that the characters' poems are often composed as though to the poet himself or to an absent, general audience. Especially when combined with an unknown sender but even when the author is known, this generalized intent opens up the range of potential interpretations radically. Sidney erases the sender by confusing the issue of whether declarations of love are general, gnomic observations or are directed to an individual.

One of the most destabilizing interpretive moments in *OA* occurs when Pyrocles – dressed as the Amazon Cleophila – overhears a plaintive poem called aloud in a cavern. The unknown poet (Gynecia) has no way of knowing that Pyrocles – the object of her affection – will overhear her laments. Gynecia directs her first lament toward “ghosts” and “furies.”<sup>276</sup> Here, Sidney highlights the absence of Gynecia's literal audience (spirits never appear in the work) and her desired, but seemingly absent, audience (Pyrocles). It is this lack of a specific audience that opens the poem up to alternate responses, such as the two that Pyrocles experiences. From Gynecia's perspective, this is a poem with a missing receiver, but when Pyrocles reads it, he receives it as though from an absent or obscured sender.

Pyrocles experiences Gynecia's poem first as a general connection that holds the potential for a personal one, and then as a personal one where he withholds his consent. Hearing

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<sup>275</sup> For clarity, I will call Pyrocles by his given name and use the masculine pronoun rather than follow Sidney's practice of calling him by his feminine name of Cleophila when dressed as an Amazon. Likewise, I will call for Musidorus by his given name.

<sup>276</sup> Sidney, *OA*, 159.

these verses, Pyrocles calls out “who is this so well acquainted with me, that can make so lively a portraiture of my miseries?”<sup>277</sup> As the poet’s miseries are the same as his, Pyrocles implies that the poem indicates some meaningful connection between the unknown poet and himself, a connection that may be similar to the conventions of a mystical connection between two lovers. At the very least, Pyrocles believes the two are “fellow prentices to one ungracious master.”<sup>278</sup> Here, the language suggests a shared experience similar to the ones described in previous romance. Pyrocles’ emotional connection to the poet is severed when he discovers that the poet is Gynecia. Gynecia, the mother of his beloved Philoclea, has repeatedly and aggressively pursued Pyrocles – even when he is dressed as a woman. Pyrocles never consents to accept Gynecia’s love,<sup>279</sup> telling her that granting the woman’s pleas is a “direct impossibility.”<sup>280</sup> Unknown, the author of these verses is a kindred spirit; known, the singer of these verses is an object of irritation. Pyrocles’ interpretation of the verses, therefore, hinges on his knowledge of the sender. Most importantly, Pyrocles responds to the verses in a manner resembling collective individualism even though, at the start, he does not know whether he shares a love for the speaker.

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<sup>277</sup> Ibid.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid. The master in this case describes either the love that his unrequited or the despair stemming from the love’s lack of fulfillment.

<sup>279</sup> Later, he pretends to accept her love, but does so only in order to protect his relationship with Philoclea. In this case, he clearly withholds his inner consent even as he offers his verbal consent.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid., 161.

In addition to having his primary lovers assuming a privileged relationship without mutual love/consent, Sidney shows Philoclea unable to determine with any certainty the object of a verse composed by her beloved Pyrocles.<sup>281</sup> One barrier to her understanding is due to confusion over the sender. Even though she knows the speaker, she does not know that Pyrocles is truly a man. Philoclea has mused over her “unlawful desires” for Pyrocles/Cleophila and “wish[ed] to herself (for even to herself she was ashamed to speak it out in words) that Cleophila might become a young transformed Caenius,” an Ovidian character that is transformed from a woman into a man.”<sup>282</sup> Philoclea senses a compatibility that is hindered only by the fact that the sender is – she thinks – a woman. An intended, specific declaration of love, even one hidden within a general declaration, would be improper coming to her from another woman.

The second barrier to Philoclea’s understanding stems from the fact that it is impossible to determine whether she should respond as though the poem were composed about love generally or about her specifically. Pyrocles directs his laments to a stream<sup>283</sup> but also introduces the idea that he composed the poem solely for himself, adding that his words “with echo’s force rebound / and make[s] [him] hear the plaint [he] would refrain.”<sup>284</sup> The “echo” makes this literally a “song to [himself].”<sup>285</sup> Despite the private nature of this composition, Philoclea feels a connection between herself and the poet. Hearing him, Philoclea is “content to hear words

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<sup>281</sup> Ibid., 103-4.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid., 74.

which she thought might with more cause have been spoken by her own mouth.”<sup>286</sup> She views her experience as one shared with the poet but nothing seems to set apart her connection to Pyrocles from the one Pyrocles has assumed in relation to Gynecia. In both cases, the idea of a privileged relationship seems constructed in the mind of the lover; how the lovers construct meaning will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. Since Pyrocles does not know he is overheard, his declarations have no communicative intention.

Sidney introduces the idea that the beloved will know a lover’s intent from a general declaration of love without any specific clues, prior consent, or even the intention for the beloved to hear. Lovers are expected to understand secret inner monologues that their beloveds may never have intended to be heard. Sidney, here, then flirts with the idea that making correct interpretive additions to a lover’s words is what sets apart lovers from non-lovers, even before mutual consent.

In contrast to the carefully balanced undecidability of earlier medieval examples, *OA* provides the transition into an error-based model. Instead of two coexisting interpretations, one meaning is clearly correct while the other is in error. Given the idea that proper interpretation defines proper lovers, those suitors that believe erroneous meanings, therefore, are shown to be unsuitable.

Perhaps the best example of a handbook that explores the importance of establishing meaning through the identity of the sender is Buoncampagno de Signa’s *Rota Veneris*.<sup>287</sup> This

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<sup>286</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>287</sup> Boncampagno de Signa. “Rota Veneris.” *Correspondence: Models of Letter-Writing from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century* by Roger Chartier, Alain Boureau, and Cecile Dauphin. Trans. Christopher Woodall. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997).

handbook describes the necessity of conveying lovers' identities through "hidden signs in their salutations, to represent, in symbols, their names [...] should the letter end up in someone else's hands."<sup>288</sup> While this distinction is made in a section directed toward clerics who wish to send love-letters, Buoncampagno states that this applies to "women and men of whatever station"<sup>289</sup> who need to remain anonymous because of social limitations or taboo.

The ability to correctly interpret the secret object of another person's affection returns us to the idea expressed in handbooks of love-letters – such as Buoncampagno's – that a letter, particularly in its salutation, should convey enough information to inform the beloved while appearing general enough to conceal specifics from others.<sup>290</sup> Sidney seems to present a situation where even a message without such specific clues declaration will reach the beloved.

One key distinction between the communications in the medieval romances and Sidney's *OA* is that Sidney gives the audience/reader access to the "proper" meaning rather than having that meaning withheld. Sidney offers the inner emotional states of his characters at each of these moments, while the Anglo-Norman Thomas and Chaucer do not present definitive interpretations. As such, Sidney seems to be working within the framework of moderate Platonism, with a stable meaning that may be beyond humans. Meaning in Sidney and the following Renaissance writers is not essentially relational; it is merely relational for the characters. Readers, like God, have access to the truth. Looking closely at Sidney's *OA* in this light reverses Waswo's and others' assumptions that Renaissance language is characterized by having greater contingency than medieval language.

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<sup>288</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

<sup>290</sup> For more on Buoncampagno and rhetoric, see Appendix II.

Sidney's presentation of lovers in *OA*, therefore, shows true lovers having that access, even when they do not trust it. One of the key elements that separates true lovers from selfish ones is that the instinctual connection of true lovers has to overcome skepticism rooted in taboos of gender or class. Two components set true lovers apart: inner consent and openness to the other's consent.

Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* presents Astrophil as thinking he has a privileged knowledge of Stella's consent when he does not. Sidney raises the issue of Astrophil's clouded judgment when he reads Stella's actions. In sonnet 67, he addresses Hope, concluding, "Well, how so thou interpret the contents, I am resolv'd thy error to maintaine, Rather then by more truth to get more paine."<sup>291</sup> As it turns out, Astrophil consciously chooses to read her actions through the lens of his hope (or desire).<sup>292</sup> After 85 sonnets, it comes as quite a shock when we finally hear Stella's responses to Astrophil's declarations of love, which turn out to be, "no, no no, no, my Deare, let be" (6<sup>th</sup> line of each stanza).<sup>293</sup> In the *Ninth Song*, Astrophil seems to acknowledge the gap between her loving words and what he finally concludes is her intent, that "she hates [him]."<sup>294</sup> By the *Eleventh Song*, Stella's pragmatic and singularly unsympathetic response does not match whatsoever with the impression Astrophil has conveyed of her. First, she offers the advice that "in absence [his love] will dy"<sup>295</sup> and ends with her saying "be gone, be

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<sup>291</sup> Sir Philip Sidney. "#67." *Astrophil and Stella*. *Sir Philip Sidney: The Major Works*. Ed. Katharine Duncan-Jones. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004), 12-4.

<sup>292</sup> Astrophil's hopeful thought processes will be discussed in another chapter.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid.

<sup>294</sup> Sidney, *AS*, *Ninth Song*, 41.

<sup>295</sup> Sidney, *AS*, *Eleventh Song*, 11.



gone, I say, lest that *Argus*' eyes perceive you."<sup>296</sup> Astrophil's education would seem to be complete when he once again addresses his "false, flattering hope"<sup>297</sup> in sonnet 106, this time to reject it. His new-found acknowledgment of their different opinions of one another appears here, as well, when he responds to her advice in the *Eleventh Song* and he addresses the sonnet to his "absent presence,"<sup>298</sup> Stella. Just as in *OA*, the model is based on error and correctness, rather than on uncertainty. In both cases, error stems from an inability to determine the sender: more specifically, whether the sender consents to be a lover.

The debt that Sidney owes to romances such as *Tristan* sets his sonnets apart from their Petrarchan roots. Sidney's poems do not merely reflect an inner state. By acknowledging potential responses to his poems, Sidney's Astrophil turns his sonnets into messages to Stella. In the first sonnet, Astrophil announces the desired response of the cycle. Key to this progression is that it ends in Stella's consent to love him. Also key is that Stella herself never offers this consent; Astrophil has written her response, erasing her ability within the poem to deny consent. The character of Stella is absent from the process.

Shakespeare explores communications that likewise seem to involve absent, constructed senders. Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* places Malvolio in an interpretive situation where not knowing the sender of a letter makes a letter's intent unclear.<sup>299</sup> Love-letters rely upon their ability to conceal from others while transmitting messages between lovers. *Twelfth Night* clearly

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<sup>296</sup> Ibid., 41-2.

<sup>297</sup> Sidney, *AS*, #106, 2.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>299</sup> William Shakespeare. *The Complete Pelican Shakespeare*. Ed. Stephen Orgel and A.R. Braunmuller. (New York: Penguin, 2002).

echoes the conventions – established in works such as *Troilus* and its precursor *Tristan* – of messages where no clear meaning is available to the reader. The letter is clearly constructed to encourage Malvolio to interpret the letter as though he were a lover with a privileged interpretive connection to Olivia. Like the works discussed in this chapter, however, the letter's real intent – to make a fool of Malvolio – is obscured from Malvolio. Much like the statue in *Tristan*, the person Malvolio imagines has written the letter – a loving Olivia – doesn't exist. The letter is written by an imaginary character that declares her love for no one. The sender here is absent, but more importantly, the sender's identity is a constructed deception, which raises different questions.

The letter to Malvolio and his response to it draw on a tradition of salutations seen in letter-writing handbooks from the twelfth century and extending deep into the nineteenth century, such as Buoncampagno de Signa's *Rota Veneris*, that explore the importance of salutations in establishing the identity and intent of the letter-writer, particularly for taboo or clandestine messages.<sup>300</sup> Certainly, the difference in class between Malvolio and Olivia would make a relationship between them equally taboo and necessarily clandestine. Malvolio's knowledge of this convention adds fuel to fire his imagination with visions of an Olivia who loves him but can only reveal herself to the one person who can understand.

Shakespeare here uses the convention of communications without a clear intention to identify Malvolio as a bad lover. Malvolio's encounter with the letter is undecidable for him because his knowledge of the sender is obscured. Even more than in Sidney's *OA*,

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<sup>300</sup> Buoncampagno de Signa. "Rota Veneris." *Correspondence: Models of Letter-Writing from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century* by Roger Chartier, Alain Boureau, and Cecile Dauphin. Trans. Christopher Woodall. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997).

Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* offers the audience clear indicators of how Malvolio avoids a correct meaning. This roots the message's uncertainty in moderate Platonism rather than in the nominalist tradition prevalent in earlier texts.

The troubling scene of Malvolio's incarceration makes more sense when one considers his actions in the context of his self-involved communications: Malvolio's interpretation is presented by Shakespeare as flawed, but a common sense reading of the play suggests that Malvolio's reading is sensible, particularly given the fact that Maria has constructed it to appear real. The letter's extended salutation to a secret, forbidden lover concludes with by stating that "M.O.I.A. doth sway my life."<sup>301</sup> Malvolio then proceeds to unpack the clues that will lead him to think he is loved by his mistress, Olivia. Malvolio quickly leaps to the connection between the first letter and the first letter of his name, but becomes frustrated by the fact that A should come next. Rather than accepting the evidence suggests he is not the object of affection, Malvolio notes that if he "crush[es the letter] a little, it would bow to him, for every one of these letters is in [his] name."<sup>302</sup> Given the other references, particularly to a "steward,"<sup>303</sup> his assumptions make sense.

Malvolio's error becomes clearer when considered in the context of the emphasis on contingency in communications. He leaps to "crush" the letter before he encounters the reference to a steward. The overtly sexual references seen in Malvoio's interpretation of "Olivia's" writing provide a signal of this self-involvement, as he is blinded in part by his desire.

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<sup>301</sup> Shakespeare, William. "Twelfth Night." *The Complete Pelican Shakespeare*. Ed. Stephen Orgel and A.R. Braunmuller. (New York: Penguin, 2002), 2.5.62.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid., 2.5.78.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid., 2.5.79.

When he does reassess his interpretation, Malvolio never refers to any evidence outside himself; in this way, he relies on his imagination rather than his fancy, creating a “sender” that matches his preconceptions. After the initial letter, this “communication” – if it can be called that properly – is entirely contained within his head. As will be discussed in the chapter on the imagination, once he gets it into his head that she loves him, Malvolio no longer compares his interpretation to external evidence such as Olivia’s responses. In this way, Malvolio’s fixation parallels that seen in those suffering from “lovesickness” which is, as described by Gerard of Berry, as

error uirtutis estimatiue que inducitur per intentiones sensatas ad apprehendenda  
accidencia insensata que forte non sunt in persona. aliquod sensatum aliquando  
occurrit anime ualde gratum... unde si qua sunt sensata bib conueniencia  
occultantur a non sensatis intentionibus anime uehementer infixis.<sup>304</sup>

[A malfunction of the estimative faculty, which is misled by sensed  
perceptions into apprehending non-sensed accidents that perhaps are not in the  
person...[because] some sensed object appears very pleasing... Any unfitting  
sensations are, as a consequence, obscured by the non-sensed intentions].

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<sup>304</sup>Mary Frances Wack. *Love-sickness in the Middle Ages: the Viaticum and its Commentaries*.

(Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1990), 198. Translated by Wack.

Malvolio's self-involvement can be seen when he presents evidence of his love in the form of yellow stockings to Olivia. Rather than offering any confirmation, Olivia expresses confusion and identifies as madness what modern readers might identify as a delusional state.

Shakespeare also emphasizes more clearly the privileged relationship of true lovers when interpreting messages from those who love them. Viola, in particular, embodies the ability to correctly interpret a message because she properly identifies the sender. Viola, dressed as the youthful man Cesario, correctly 'reads' a ring that Olivia has sent to 'him' as a clandestine declaration of love.<sup>305</sup> Olivia obscures both herself as the ring's sender and her intent by claiming that she received it from Viola and wishes to return it as a rejection. When Viola refuses it, Malvolio finishes delivering it, stating, "Come, sir, you peevishly threw it to her, and her will is it should be so returned."<sup>306</sup> Malvolio then tosses the ring on the ground and departs. Confused, Viola notes that neither she nor her lord sent Olivia a ring.<sup>307</sup> In direct opposition to the meaning she has been offered, Viola very quickly – and correctly – comes to the conclusion "she loves me, sure!"<sup>308</sup>

Viola's correct conclusion, given the conflicting signals of this message, suggests that lovers' openness to others – not merely to one another – allows them greater access to a sometimes obscured truth. Olivia's assigned message is built on a lie: that she was given the

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<sup>305</sup> For clarity, I will refer to Viola by her name rather than as her character Cesario.

<sup>306</sup> Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, 2.2.9-10. Malvolio's alterations to Olivia's original message will be addressed in another chapter.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.2.12 and 2.2.19.

<sup>308</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.2.17.

ring.<sup>309</sup> Despite this, a simple, referential ‘reading’ of the ring’s message either takes Olivia (via Malvolio) at her word, accepting that the ring is a rejection, or sees the error, rejecting the message outright. Rather than accepting either option, Viola asks “What means this lady?”<sup>310</sup> and looks for contextual clues. Viola’s first hypothesis is that her appearance might have “charmed [Olivia].”<sup>311</sup> This interpretive leap depends upon knowledge of the tradition – traced in this chapter – of lovers exchanging objects as clandestine expressions of affection, with all the association of lust and marriage. Working from this initial assumption, Viola then tests her hypothesis against evidence rather than working from an *a priori* assumption, thus using induction rather than deduction. Armed with the knowledge of Olivia’s affection, Viola reassesses when Olivia “made good view of [her]” (2.2.14) and “[spoke] in starts, distractedly” (2.2.16), seeing these now as signs of love confirming her hypothesis. Viola, then, follows the conventions traced throughout this chapter and negotiates what would seem to be an undecidable text, linking her to the lovers discussed in the first chapter who make remarkable interpretive leaps. Viola’s experience does not follow the tradition of lovers interpreting each other effectively; rather her lover’s empathy, combined with an openness to consider the evidence skeptically, leads her to make correct conclusions about the messages in the play.

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<sup>309</sup> Viola’s response, acknowledging that “[Olivia] took the ring of me” (2.2.8) may also be a lie. One popular performance of this line has Viola presenting as a question, asking incredulously, “she took the ring of *me*”? This alters the line’s punctuation and eliminates the causal relationship with the second half of the line, which might be paraphrased as “She took it, therefore I won’t have it.”

<sup>310</sup> Ibid., 2.2.12.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid., 2.2.13.

Returning to Malvolio's interpretive progress, we see that – from his perspective – his progress follows closely that seen in Sidney's *OA*. The primary exception is that Malvolio misses an entire interpretive level, that of the pranksters. Considering Malvolio within the context of the messages without clear intent clarifies both the assumptions that inform his mistaken interpretation and the specifics of his transgression. Malvolio has been written to show that he considers it more likely that his mistress would cross class lines in order to love him than for someone to pull a prank on him. The specifics of how he makes this leap will be discussed in the chapter on cognition, but it is enough for now to point out that he considers himself to be interpreting insightfully when he is truly in error.

Shakespeare consistently shows characters not living up to the ideal of love by having them misinterpret – often due to a lack of generosity – texts that are unclear because the sender is unknown. Bertram has no way of knowing that Helena controls the ring's meaning in *All's Well That Ends Well*. Posthumus has no way of knowing certainly the reason that Imogen gives the ring in *Cymbeline*. Othello has no way to properly interpret the exchange of the handkerchief because, much like Isolde of the White Hands, Iago has substituted an imagined figure to reject Othello and replace the previously shared consent. Each of these cases presents the audience with a correct reading and shows characters “misreading.” Such texts emphasize the failure of the individual rather than the failure of language; Malvolio is wrong, even sensibly so, but the audience does not share his confusion. Given the frequency with which he deploys this technique and the popularity of his work, one could argue that Shakespeare is central in stabilizing the conventions of communication and consent as an error-based model. Shakespeare has taken this technique, seen in Sidney's *Old Arcadia*, and translated it into drama, expanding its circulation.

Redirecting the focus of the critique from post-consent lovers to pre-consent non-lovers reflects a shift in attitudes toward language, at least within the romance tradition. As discussed in this chapter, earlier, medieval works undermine the very foundations of communication in relation to intent and knowledge of the sender. No one – not even the best of lovers – is exempt from this uncertainty, as intention is changeable and difficult to recognize. In contrast, later versions betray an error-based model, where one understanding is clearly marked as correct. As such, the problem lies not with language or even with the idea that lovers have privileged interpretive access to one another, but with the individual who fails to understand properly. Meaning is stable, tied to intent, and essentially referential, if ambiguous. This implies that the problem then is individual, not systemic. Looking at these romances leads to the unexpected conclusion that medieval texts can commit more fully to a deeper contingency and indeterminacy than Renaissance texts.



## CHAPTER FOUR

“WE TWO BEING ONE”:

ONE BODY, ONE SOUL, ONE LANGUAGE

Together. Yes. Transplant my brain into your body.

The two of us, together. Fused. We’ll be one complete person.

Isn’t that what love is?

- Cyberwoman, *Torchwood*<sup>312</sup>

...in beiden

nie mê wan ein herze unde ein muot;

ir beider übel, ir beider guot,

ir beider tât, ir beider leben

diu wâren alse in ein gewebe;

swaz ir dewederem gewar

des wart daz ander gewar;

swaz sô dem einem sanfte tete,

ses des empfant daz ander an der stete.

sie wâren beide under in zwein

mir übele und mit guote al ein.

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<sup>312</sup> Russell T. Davies and Christ Chibnall. “Cyberwoman.” *Torchwood*. BBC. Television. Nov. 5, 2006. DVD.



The humor in the opening quote from a current BBC science fiction series relies upon the widely understood assumption that lovers become one person and more specifically that their two brains come together in a meaningful way. The writers of the show use the cyberwoman's inability to understand the metaphorical nature of this description as a sign that she is no longer human; rather, she interprets literally, which is the common assumption of how computers work (AI research notwithstanding). In addition, the primary assumption is that computers are unable to make the imaginative leaps necessary for such interpretive insight. In a perhaps unintended fashion, however, the Torchwood writers highlight the oddity of defining love as a melding of two minds into one whole.

As seen in the quotation from Gottfried's *Tristan*, the literary convention of two lovers sharing one mind can be traced at least as far back as the twelfth century. This chapter will identify radical collective individualism as the defining characteristic of many literary lovers in texts from the twelfth to the seventeenth centuries. The lovers define themselves as having one mind, one soul, and one language – as essentially a collective individual that stands apart from the rest of society. These are lovers who share a profound knowledge of one another that others – particularly those who would keep the lovers apart – can not comprehend. The clearest examples of this collective individualism appear in John Donne's poetry, but Donne draws on a tradition that extends back through Shakespeare to the Anglo-Norman Thomas' twelfth-century version of *Tristan and Isolde*. Thomas' idea of a collective individual grows from medieval debates over language and marriage, where consent appears indirectly in the form of remarkable interpretive leaps by lovers. This construction does not remain constant in its transmission,

however. While medieval versions of collective individualism include serious reservations about language and marriage, most Renaissance versions present the lovers' private communications in a more favorable light. By the time of Donne, showing how the lovers share "one mind" becomes an important characteristic in defining ideal lovers.

The connection between Renaissance texts and medieval ones is analogous rather than specifically referential; the Renaissance texts work with a cultural construction of lovers that draws on elements seen in medieval lovers such as Tristan and Isolde.<sup>317</sup> The cultural construction of lovers in both groups includes an almost mystical, privileged understanding between the lovers that separates them from others in an act of radical collective individualism. Some, including Donne, take this mystical understanding beyond the realm of language and into an almost psychic ability of lovers to know the thoughts of each other.<sup>318</sup> Like the medieval

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<sup>317</sup> As quintessential lovers, Guinevere and Lancelot might seem to offer the potential for sharing one mind, but representations of them, such as in Mallory, include few examples of the kind of communication discussed here.

<sup>318</sup> DeRougemont argues against a mystical union of this sort, identifying it, as I discussed in an earlier chapter, as communion, rather than union (the ability to achieve "essential union with God" (*Love* 157)). Denis de Rougement. *Love in the Western World*. Trans. Montgomery Belgion. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983). DeRougemont clarifies these terms in his discussion of the difference between Eastern and Western approaches to the divine. He works with Rudolph Otto's assertion that Eckhart describes "a mysticism of exaggerated emotion where the "I" and the "Thou" flow together in a unity of intoxicated feeling" (qtd. in deRougemont *Love* 154). Otto can be found in translation in *Mysticism East and West*. Trans. Bertha L Bracey and Richenda C. Payner. (New York: Quest, 1987). In contrast, DeRougemont defines Master

texts, the Renaissance texts in this tradition share a concern with consent in marriage. In addition to analogical connections, both periods share potential influences: a shared wedding ceremony, stories of lovers from medieval romances using miraculous communication that are still read, and a working knowledge of relational semantics. Renaissance England builds on lovers' almost mystical relational semantics to create a radical collective individualism wherein lovers define themselves as one mind.

This chapter will have three primary goals. First, it will identify the late Renaissance version of lovers' collective individualism in John Donne's poetry and Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. These works define lovers as sharing an ability to understand correctly one another that is privileged over those who would oppose the lovers. The two elements important to this construction are privileged understanding akin to sharing one mind and a concern with marital self-determination in the form of consent. Second, this chapter will show how lovers' collective individualism occurs in language and arises as a response to twelfth-century concerns about consent in marriage. Adding the idea of mutual consent to definitions of marriage alters the original, legal meaning of spouses sharing one flesh. Originally, this standard places control in the hands of the husband, but adding the woman's power of consent allows literary works to apply this definition more broadly, suggesting the merging of two minds into one. Some

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Eckhart as communion (*Love* 155), quoting "the soul escapes from its nature, its being and its life, and is born into the Divinity, no distinction remains but this: the Divinity is still God, and the soul is still a soul" (qtd in deRougemnt *Love* 155). This quotation is originally from Eckhart's sermon *Nisi granum frumenti*. For more information on medieval mystics' responses to the erotic, romantic *Song of Songs*, see Bernard McGinn's multi-volume *The Presence of God: A History of Western Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1991).

romances then use this marital language to highlight how elevated extramarital relationships can better embody marital ideals than marriage itself. This second section will identify the roots of this privileged understanding in medieval literary representations of lovers' clandestine communications, perhaps the most prevalent example of which appears in the various versions of Tristan and Isolde. Tristan and Isolde's communications reveal a working knowledge of relational semantics, where the lovers' words have one meaning for themselves and a different meaning for others. While the lovers' understanding may seem magical, the versions of Tristan and Isolde consistently highlight the interpretive, rather than the mystical, nature of the messages. Third, this chapter will discuss the difficulties faced by the lovers as they face intrusions into their private communications, and how the lovers' private meaning comes to be given greater importance than public meaning. The conflict in each of these works centers around who determines consent and therefore controls meaning. Much of this chapter will be spent on the Tristan myth, as this tale best establishes and – through its wide circulation – transmits the conventions of collective individualism.

John Donne's poetry provides the most explicit representations of one lover defining himself – and an ideal lover – as a collective individual.<sup>319</sup> The conceits in "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" illustrate the narrator's statement to his beloved that "our two souls therefore ... are one."<sup>320</sup> Donne illustrates this unity by comparing the two as one thinly beaten

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<sup>319</sup> Morrison, Karl F, "*I Am You*": *The Hermeneutics of Empathy in Western Literature, Theology, and Art*. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1988).

<sup>320</sup> John Donne, "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning." *The Longman Anthology of British Literature*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Ed. David Damrosch (New York: Longman, 2003), line 21.

sheet of gold and as a compass. The compass, in particular, takes two units – the legs – and shows them combined into one unit.

*The Canonization*'s narrator refers to "we two" lovers as "being one" (24), extending this reference to include the idea that the lovers combine "both sexes" into "one neutral thing" (25), much like the mythical phoenix. Donne's description of the lovers as a collective phoenix is particularly striking because it stands in contrast to the Petrarchan analogue in *Rime Sparse* 135, where Petrarch describes the solitary lover "con la fenice" [like the phoenix] (15),<sup>321</sup> making explicit the image from a few lines earlier:

Là onde il dì ven fore

Vola un augel che sol, senza consorte,

Dì volotaria morte

Rinasce et tutto a viver si rinnova.

[There whence the day comes forth flies

A bird that lives alone, without consort, after voluntary death, is

reborn and all renews itself to life.]<sup>322</sup>

Silvia Ruffo-Fiore notes that in this case Donne "exceeds Petrarch's idealism... Donne's love here is mutual, rational, transcendental, and confidently self-immortalizing."<sup>323</sup>

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<sup>321</sup> Petrarch, Francesco. "Rime Sparse 135." *Petrarch's Lyric Poems: The Rime Sparse and Other Lyrics*. Trans. and edited by Robert M. Durling. (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1979), 15.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid., 5-8.

<sup>323</sup> Ruffo-Fiore. *Donne's Petrarchism: A Comparative View*. (Firenze: Grafica Toscana, 1976), 84-5.

In “The Ecstasy,” love mixes the lovers’ souls and “makes both one,”<sup>324</sup> even “abler” than those souls apart.<sup>325</sup> Donne’s “Good Morrow” presents a similar model of shared self when he proposes to his beloved “Let us possess one world, each hath one, and is one.”<sup>326</sup> This line uses ambiguous grammar to suggest a collective. Donne begins with a collective imperative to share one world before introducing the two – “each” – encompassed in this collective. The motif continues in the two hemispheres<sup>327</sup> – each one half of a collective whole, and in the assertion that their love should be mixed in equal parts, with each half combining into a whole.<sup>328</sup> The singular verb in the final phrase refers grammatically back to “each,” describing potentially two different worlds that become one by the end of the line. The repetition of “one” also creates a sense of unity between the lovers; this repetition echoes the language of older romance texts that describe lovers as sharing one heart and one mind, a trend that will be discussed at length later in this chapter. Donne presents the idea of collective individuality most simply in “A Valediction: of my Name, in the Window,” when his narrator declares to his beloved “Here you see mee, and

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<sup>324</sup> Donne, “Ecstasy,” 36.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>326</sup> Donne, “Good Morrow,” 14.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid., 19.



I am you.”<sup>329</sup> In addition to clearly equating the two, the image of his name and the reading lover’s reflection in the window overlap and merge, visually becoming one.<sup>330</sup>

This desire for extra-linguistic communication echoes the desire to achieve perfect unity with another person. Lacan describes this desire as an attempt to reclaim a perceived loss of unity once the subject passes the mirror stage and enters into the symbolic order. Donne’s immediate “knowing” would allow access to what the Other desires (denoted by S(A) in his 1960 text “Subversion of the Subject and Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Subconscious” – note the slash through the A indicates how the A (big A Autre or Other) is unavailable according to Lacan). Within the symbolic order, language has the fundamental property of being separable from the object it represents. The one object that, in the mind of the subject, escapes this alienation of speech Lacan identifies as *objet a* (or *petit a*). Within the concept of romantic love, *objet a* is the other lover within a pair, which builds from the idea generally that “a man relates to a woman only as the missing “*objet a*,” a phantasm of wholeness or totality.”<sup>331</sup> As will be discussed in another chapter, this illusion, despite the idea of wholeness, establishes a relationship within the mind of the lover, with the lover playing both parts. Lacan asserts that “The Other is, therefore, the locus in which is constituted the I who speaks *with* him who

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<sup>329</sup> Donne. “Window,” 12.

<sup>330</sup> Donne’s speaker, later in the poem, imagines her reading a letter from another lover (lines 49+). In so doing, the speaker echoes the convention self-absorption, complicating the notion of the lovers sharing one mind.

<sup>331</sup> Clark, Michael P. “Jacques Lacan.” *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Michael Groden and Martin Kreiswirth. (Baltimore: the Johns Hopkins UP, 1994). 453.

hears.”<sup>332</sup> The desire for the Other described in this relationship is both the desire for the Other and experienced as the Other’s desire.

DeRougmont’s discussion of Tristan and Isolde builds on a similar set of assumptions, suggesting that the lovers

do not love one another... *What they love is love and being in love.* They behave as if aware that whatever obstructs love must ensure and consolidate it in the heart of each and intensify it infinitely in the moment they reach the absolute obstacle, death.<sup>333</sup>

DeRougmont’s analysis relies on the assumption that the “full possession” of each other would destroy the intensity of their relationship. As such, he portrays the lovers as self-destructively searching for that which harms them most. DeRougmont’s description of the lovers focuses on negative constructions, painting their experience as individual and imaginary, including the self-destructive “preference for whatever *thwarts* passion, hinders the lovers’ ‘happiness,’ and parts and torments them.”<sup>334</sup>

Donne’s language, however, does not focus on the self-involved elements potential in such a relationship, nor does it suggest that the lovers’ passion is predicated on its transgressive, self-destructive properties. *The Good Morrow* presents this love not as the return to a missing whole but as a move forward into a perfectly balanced collective adulthood. The image that Donne’s narrator desires before he encounters his beloved suggests the realization of a Platonic ideal or, as Donne describes it, an expansion, rather than an essential lack.

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<sup>332</sup> Lacan, Jacques. *Ecrits: a Selection*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. (New York: Norton, 1982), 141.

<sup>333</sup> DeRougement, 41.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

Ilona Bell, in *Elizabethan Woman and the Poetry of Courtship*, argues that Anne More – rather than a male coterie – should be considered Donne’s primary audience.<sup>335</sup> In this case, More’s eventual consent to marry Donne indicates her consent to accept a definition of herself as laid out in part by John, specifically to be part of a collective whole. In so doing, More adopted a definition of herself – or allowed herself to be defined – outside class and station, since she was of aristocratic upbringing and he was not. Their love can also be considered in contrast to social standards as her father never approved of the marriage and, in fact, withheld her dowry. By all accounts, the two remained loyal and loving despite financial and personal hardships.

Karl F. Morrison argues that the primary audience for these poems may be Donne’s fellow religious student Edward Tilman. According to this reading, the sense of a collective self is then primarily a religious one. Morrison’s reading does not necessarily contradict the more romantic one introduced in this chapter. The two discourses certainly play off one another in these poems; the primary difference is whether the religious or the romantic is to be read as primary. Donne, even in his early poetry, uses religious language to enrich the descriptions in what are generally considered his secular love poetry. This chapter will place Donne’s secular poems within a tradition extending back at least to Gottfried von Strassburg’s *Tristan* that elevates secular love through the use of religious discourse. This elevated discourse serves to ennoble the lovers’ experience in comparison to those who do not love in this particular way.

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<sup>335</sup> Bell, Ilona. *Elizabethan Women and the Poetry of Courtship*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998). For a scholar arguing that Donne wrote primarily for a coterie audience, see Arthur Marotti, *John Donne: Coterie Poet*. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986).

In John Donne's poetry, lovers are judged by their ability to understand one another as though sharing one mind. Donne often uses the lovers' willingness to accept a definition of themselves as a collective individual to determine a lovers' worth. "Good Morrow" makes this explicit, presenting the collective individualism as a condition to be met; the narrator states that none can die only "*if* our two loves be one" (my emphasis),<sup>336</sup> or that they both choose to conceive of themselves as a collective individual. In "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning," Donne's narrator describes those who "cannot admit absence" as "dull sublunary lovers."<sup>337</sup> In fact, it is the acknowledging of absence that shows their love to be inferior; dull lovers would not need to admit absence if they were part of a collective individual like beaten gold expanding or like two legs making up one compass.<sup>338</sup>

Non-lovers – particularly those who oppose the lovers – are shown to be different from the lovers because the lovers share a deeper understanding than the non-lovers. The narrator of "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" states that it would be a "profanation of our joys to tell the laity of our love."<sup>339</sup> The lovers are here elevated to saints because they can understand such a deep love. Telling other, "dull, sublunary lovers" is profanation because the non-lovers would not understand. This lack of understanding by non-lovers relies on the notion that humans only

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<sup>336</sup> Donne, "Good Morrow," 20.

<sup>337</sup> Donne, "Forbidding," 13-15.

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.*, 21-28.

<sup>339</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.

have access to shadows of ideal, Platonic forms,<sup>340</sup> while the lovers see and/or embody the Platonic ideal. A similar strategy of othering the non-lovers while elevating the lovers because of the lovers' shared understanding appears in "The Canonization." When the lovers "die and rise the same," they appear "mysterious by this love" to those who do not understand.<sup>341</sup> As Jesus' resurrection proves incomprehensible to earthly humans, the lovers' relationship proves a mystery to those not touched with a divine love. In the "Canonization," those non-lovers eventually grow to understand and therefore "shall approve [the lovers] canonized for love."<sup>342</sup> The one who previously would not "hold [his] tongue, and let [the narrator] love"<sup>343</sup> ends the poem recognizing in the lovers a pattern of love from above, much like a neo-Platonic form or ideal. In "The Ecstasy," "weak men" may look only on "love revealed,"<sup>344</sup> the outward manifestation of the lovers' mystical unity; in contrast, the lovers share a deeper understanding of this unity. The characteristics that Anthony Low identifies when he asserts that Donne "invented a new kind of private love: idealized, Romantic, mutual, and transcendent in feeling."<sup>345</sup> In particular, Low defines this shift as move from "something essentially social and

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<sup>340</sup> One prominent exploration of John Donne's Platonism appears in Karl Morrison's *"I Am You": The Hermeneutics Of Empathy In Western Literature, Theology, And Art* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1988).

<sup>341</sup> Donne, "Canonization," 26-7.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid., 35-6.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>344</sup> Donne, "Ecstasy," 70.

<sup>345</sup> Low, Anthony. *The Reinvention of Love: Poetry, Politics, and Culture from Sidney to Milton*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993), 3.

feudal to something essentially private and modern.”<sup>346</sup> Shullenberger discusses images of spectatorship in Donne’s poetry, presenting the idea that for Donne’s narrators, the private must be observed by a member of the social order in order to contrast the lovers. The lovers reflecting in each others’ eyes “seems to crystallize the erotic wish that motivates the poems: a moment of loving intensity that takes the loving self outside itself.”<sup>347</sup> Poetically, however, the connection cannot be shown unless an outside perspective is offered, usually in the form of a friend, but sometimes appearing as objects like the sun. Donne articulates this definition of love as a transcendent connection, but in so doing, he builds upon a tradition of communication extending back at least as far as the first extant Tristan tales as transmitted through writers like Shakespeare.

Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* relies upon a similar othering of non-lovers by showing how characters other than the lovers do not understand properly. Whereas in Donne, one narrative voice describes the mystical unity shared by the lovers, Shakespeare shows the lovers’ mystical understanding by having the lovers interpret correctly each others’ assertions on a first meeting.

ROMEO:      If I profane with my unworhiest hand

This holy shrine, the gentle sin is this:

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<sup>346</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>347</sup> Shullenberger, William. “Love as a Spectator Sport in John Donne’s Poetry.” *Renaissance Discourses of Desire*. Ed. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth. (Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1993), 52.

My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand

To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.

JULIET: Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,

Which mannerly devotion shows in this;

For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch,

And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss.

ROMEO: Have not saints lips, and holy palmers too?

JULIET: Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer.

ROMEO: O, then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do!

They pray; grant thou, lest faith turn to despair.

JULIET: Saints do not move, though grant for prayers' sake.

ROMEO: Then move not while my prayer's effect I take.

Thus from my lips, by thine my sin is purged.

*[Kisses her.]*

JULIET: Then have my lips the sin that they have took.

ROMEO: Sin from my lips? O trespass sweetly urged!

Give me my sin again.

*[Kisses her.]*

JULIET: You kiss by th' book.

NURSE: Madam, your mother craves a word with you.<sup>348</sup>

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<sup>348</sup> William Shakespeare. *The Complete Pelican Shakespeare*. Ed. Stephen Orgel and A.R.

Braunmuller. (New York: Penguin, 2002), 1.5.94-113.

Romeo and Juliet's spontaneously composed and broken double sonnet embodies the best of "Western culture's epitome of love – heterosexual, adolescent, secret, foredoomed."<sup>349</sup> The play presents these two characters as so completely in tune with each another that they can create a perfectly formed sonnet despite the fact that they have never met before. As Edward Snow points out, Romeo and Juliet "are tuned to the same imaginative frequency, and imply the existence of a single world of desire encompassing the two lovers' separate longings."<sup>350</sup> Snow's observation is borne out on an even broader scale than perhaps intended; Romeo and Juliet share not merely a single world of desire, but a single set of preconceptions that allows them to make interpretive leaps that defy easy decoding. As such, the lovers require some contextual knowledge outside the words themselves – a characteristic of relational semantics – to make these interpretive leaps. These leaps indicate an exceptional connection between the lovers, setting them apart from non-lovers. In this sequence, then, Shakespeare provides a concrete example of what Donne describes: how this kind of privileged communication elevates the lovers' connection.

It is important to note that the construction of love in *Romeo and Juliet* is firmly grounded in the time and place of its composition. As Dymphna Callaghan correctly points out, we must be wary of any construction of love that presents itself as timeless and universal, adding that "what is extraordinary about the version of familial and personal relations – of desire and identity and their relation to power – endorsed by *Romeo and Juliet* is that they are in our time so

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<sup>349</sup> Peter Holland. *The Complete Pelican Shakespeare*. Ed. Stephen Orgel and A.R. Braunmuller. (New York: Penguin, 2002), 1255.

<sup>350</sup> Edward Snow. "Language and Sexual Difference in *Romeo and Juliet*." *Romeo and Juliet: Critical Essays*. (New York: Garland, 1993), 372.



fully naturalized as to seem universal.”<sup>351</sup> In many ways these personal relations – though perhaps not the familial ones – drew upon ideas that came to prominence in the twelfth century and became naturalized by the time of *Romeo and Juliet*. Jonathan Goldberg warns against reading the lovers’ enactment of naturalized ideas as “a unique manifestation, the locus of all kinds of intensities and transcendentalities.”<sup>352</sup> In fact, Shakespeare drew on a long tradition of remarkable communications between lovers when constructing Romeo and Juliet’s exchanges. This tradition – and audience’s previously held notions that remarkable communication helps to define lovers compatibility – allows the play in nineteen lines to elevate the lovers’ budding relationship.

One literary device to illustrate lovers’ mutual consent and compatibility is to show them either creating spontaneously intricate codes and/or making interpretive leaps that defy direct – referential – decoding. In the absence of a clear code, the lovers appear to share one set of preconceptions unavailable to other characters in the work and often unavailable to readers as

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<sup>351</sup> Dympna Callahan. “The Ideology of Romantic Love : The Case of *Romeo and Juliet*.” *New Casebooks: Romeo and Juliet*. Ed. R.S. White. (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 87. Callaghan is particularly skeptical of psychoanalytical readings of the play for this very reason.

<sup>352</sup> “*Romeo and Juliet*’s Open R’s.” *Queering the Renaissance*. Ed. Jonathan Goldberg. (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1994), 221. While I do not follow this observation, as Goldberg does, by emphasizing a gay reading of the poem, the interpretive leaps of the men in his reading do seem to echo those of Romeo and Juliet. In fact, one could argue that Mercutio attempts to establish the kind of privileged communication with Romeo that Romeo has with Juliet. Certainly, the interpretive leaps described by Goldberg suggest this, as does the fact that not everyone is privy to this meaning.

well, and the relational semantics inherent in their communications justify and exalt the lovers' relationship.

The sonnet's exchanges are seemingly easy to decode according to the pilgrim conceit, even though each exchange redefines one component of the previous line by considering the word in a new context. Romeo's gambit to change the holding of hands into a kiss is reversed by Juliet when she takes his mention of "pilgrims" and returns it to the context of hands, matching it to "holy palmers' kiss." Romeo moves from hands to lips once again and she responds by mentioning hands' proper usage in prayer. He finally builds on her reference to saints, placing the kiss within an innocent, spiritual context. This final context places the kiss both within the secular, Petrarchan, neo-Platonic world of love and within sanctified world of pilgrimage.

The end point of the first sonnet therefore embodies the two worlds reconciled within the wedding ceremony: an institution that includes both religious and secular components. The play thus blurs boundaries between things potentially perceived as distinct: the secular and the religious, as well as sex and death, as noted by Colin G. MacKenzie.<sup>353</sup> Lines of communication that suggest a transcendental connection fit precisely within this pattern.

Mentioning marriage also provides an acceptable context for the desired kisses. The emphasis on hands converts the sonnet additionally into a kind of hand-fasting, an official declaration of intent to marry usually performed in public. The private quality of what is usually a public gesture raises both the issue of the conflict between public and private pressures and the relational – or contextual – quality of communication.

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<sup>353</sup> Colin G. MacKenzie. "Love, Sex, and Death in *Romeo and Juliet*." *English Studies* (Vol. 88, No. 1, February 2007), 23.

More remarkable than the embedded marital component of the sonnet is that the creation of this code is spontaneous. Their joint composition of the sonnet – a “shared activity”<sup>354</sup> – reflects further the sixteenth century wedding ceremony’s marital ideal of “one mind.” Their joint leap to a kind of marriage involves more than a superficial reworking of accepted conceits. It relies on associations and implications rather than simple decoding and therefore reveals to the audience a truly special interpretive connection.

Composing spontaneously a sonnet by oneself is difficult enough without having to respond to another person’s lines. While apparently some poets were able to spontaneously compose sonnets, Romeo would not seem to be one of them. Mercutio describes the poor quality of Romeo’s poetry about Rosalind as “groaning for love.”<sup>355</sup> The key moment, however, in their mutual composition occurs at the start of a second sonnet when Juliet takes over for Romeo in the middle of the line.<sup>356</sup> The remarkable quality of this instinctual communication in the sonnet serves to highlight how compatible the two lovers are.<sup>357</sup> Making their connection even more unique is the fact that the sonnet as a form traditionally voices the inner workings of one mind –

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<sup>354</sup> Holland, 1252.

<sup>355</sup> 2.5.88. As many note, Mercutio mocks Romeo’s poetry 2.1.10-21 and 2.4.37-45, then expresses his pleasure when Romeo has hit wit return.

<sup>356</sup> 1.5.112.

<sup>357</sup> Juliet’s comment on the conventional nature of Romeo’s kissing by the book complicates the lovers’ sharing of one mind, but it is hard to ignore the fact that Romeo’s poetry has improved upon meeting her. More importantly, he responds to Juliet’s words and ideas in a way that he never does with Rosalind. Romeo’s love with Rosalind might better fit in the tradition of self-absorption, discussed in chapter five.

here one mind that the two characters share. Both lovers also share the same goal: a kiss; this shared goal shows how like-minded they are. The sonnet explores different contexts for this kiss, ending on marriage in a way that echoes the sense that marriage unites two people into a larger collective person.

The ideal of one mind shown in *Romeo and Juliet* echoes elements in the Prayer Book of 1552's wedding ceremony emphasizing the unity of the wedded couple. The wedding ceremony in the Prayer Book of 1552 – approved by Elizabeth I – describes a “misticall union”<sup>358</sup> and “unitie”<sup>359</sup> between the husband and wife parallel to that “betwixte Chryste and hys Church.”<sup>360</sup> The husband and wife are “made one”<sup>361</sup> and he is exhorted to “loue his owne wife, euen as himselfe.”<sup>362</sup> The language of this ceremony equates the two spouses by elevating the woman's status to that of the man.

In *Marriage and Violence: The Early Modern Legacy*,<sup>363</sup> Frances Dolan traces the development of what became the dominant discursive interpretation of the ceremony, with the man as the head and the woman in a subservient role. As Dolan notes, the marital ideal of equality doesn't match well with Puritans ideal of masculine leadership. Lines of communication in this relationship would place all meaning and authority in the man's hands

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<sup>358</sup> *The First and Second Prayer Books of Edward VI.* (London: J.M. Dent, 1949), 410.

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid.*, 415.

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.*, 410.

<sup>361</sup> *Ibid.*, 414.

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid.*, 415.

<sup>363</sup> Frances Dolan, *Marriage and Violence: The Early Modern Legacy* (Philadelphia: U of Penn P, 2009).

with the role of consultant the only one open to women. Dolan then notes how this inherent contradiction leads to potential conflict and then both violence and the discourse of violence associated with marriage. Here Dolan expands upon Anthony Fletcher's observation that the "puritan notion of marriage as a deep union of bodies and souls [in] Robert Snawsel" serves to justify marital violence.<sup>364</sup> In contrast, the marital/love ideal presented in romantic tales like *Romeo and Juliet*, the poetry of Donne, and earlier medieval romances, posits a relationship outside language, societal constraints, and inequalities of class and gender.

The everyday realities of wives in the Renaissance did not live up to the marital ideal of a husband loving his wife even as himself, in part because this ideal was promoted by the church more than by secular authorities and in part because the church itself held conflicting views on the subject of women's role in marriage. These everyday realities did nothing, however, to prevent the circulation of an *ideal* that women and men could share one mind. The wedding ceremony's language attempts to serve as a corrective to two components of the marital process that disempowers women. First, it suggests – despite the wide range of misogynous conduct books to the contrary – that husbands should consider their wives as a part of themselves and therefore worthy of equal consideration. Second, it places a greater importance on the spouses' consent; while young male suitors benefit from this as well, the impact on young women is greater due to their vulnerability in a patriarchal culture such as Renaissance England.

*Romeo and Juliet*'s sonnet carries all of these undertones into its composition. First, the poem embodies this marital "unity" perfectly; the lovers are so truly one that they can finish not

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<sup>364</sup> Anthony Fletcher. *Gender, Sex, and Subordination in England 1500-1800*. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1995), 199.

only each others' thoughts but their own lines of iambic pentameter. Second, the nurse's interruption for Juliet's mother suggests at a micro level the play's larger theme of young lovers set apart from larger society by their remarkable connection. The nurse's interruption reflects the resistance of parents and society to consensually but privately chosen spouses, a resistance predicated on society's inability to understand as well as the lovers. In this way, we see an example in Shakespeare's play of lovers that are as misunderstood by the dull, sublunary people around them as Donne's lover claims to be.

The language of the wedding ceremony used widely in England at the time of *Romeo and Juliet* comes largely unchanged from the Old Sarum Missal wedding ceremony in use since the Norman conquest.<sup>365</sup> This wedding ceremony – and the changing political climate under William I's reign – reflects the greater emphasis on a woman's consent in twelfth-century England.<sup>366</sup> Roman law and patristic writers both included the idea that spouses share one body and one mind – those of the husband. Twelfth-century England, however, expands this definition to include a more important role for women. Jennifer Ward challenges the previously held notion of a “Golden Age for late Anglo-Saxon women,” noting that “in reality, women benefitted from the long-term changes in the years between 1000 and 1200 over the formation of marriage.”<sup>367</sup> For the purposes of my study, the key element is one that Ward implies but does

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<sup>365</sup> Eric Josef Carlson's *Marriage and the English Reformation*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1994. 47.

<sup>366</sup> William I appointed as bishop of Old Sarum (Salisbury) the Norman Osmund, who composed a new wedding ritual that combined the Anglo-Saxon and Norman liturgical traditions.

<sup>367</sup> Ward, Jennifer. *Women in England in the Middle Ages*. (London: Humbeldon Continuum, 2006), 17.

not state, that this improvement occurs *in relation to men*, in contrast to the relative independence seen in late Anglo-Saxon England. The expanded role for women comes from a greater emphasis on a woman's consent.<sup>368</sup> As noted by J.M. Anderson, Bérout's *Romance of Tristan* brings together Abelard's definition of intention with consent law in a way that portrays romantic love as a natural right.<sup>369</sup>

Many romances from the twelfth century give more autonomy to their heroines as a result of the greater power they potentially hold in refusing their consent. In particular, remarkable communicative leaps between lovers serve to illustrate the lovers' consent – or shared mind – and therefore justify relationships that are often outside traditional moral boundaries.<sup>370</sup>

The tradition of Tristan and Isolde<sup>371</sup> – built upon the Anglo-Norman Thomas' *Tristram* – uses remarkable communication as both the foundation of and the justification for their relationship, even going so far in the Norse version to state,

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<sup>368</sup> The church places a greater emphasis on a woman's consent at this time. For more on this, see Philip Lyndon Reynolds' *Marriage in the Western Church: The Christianization of Marriage During the Patristic and Medieval Periods*. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994) and Eric Josef Carlson's *Marriage and the English Reformation*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

<sup>369</sup> Anderson, J.M. "Romantic Love as Natural Right in Bérout's *Romance of Tristan*." *Comitatus*. 2008. 41-61.

<sup>370</sup> Denis DeRougemont's assertion seems to run counter to mine. DeRougemont states that the love of Tristan and Isolde is antithetical to marriage – that "once she became his wife... he would no longer love her" (*Love* 45).

<sup>371</sup> For clarity, I will use Tristan and Isolde for a generic reference to the characters and will refer to the appropriate variants when discussing specific texts.

Svá var mikil kraptr ástar þeirar sem þau hefði bæði einn hug  
ok hjarta (my emphasis).

[Such was the great power of their love that they both possessed one heart and  
one mind]” (my emphasis).<sup>372</sup>

Romeo and Juliet have been connected with their medieval predecessors Tristan and Isolde at least since Denis de Rougemont’s *Love in the Western World*. Julia Kristeva builds on this correlation in “Romeo and Juliet: Love-Hatred in the Couple,” replacing societal pressures with the Superego and highlighting the importance of opposition to the lovers’ desires.<sup>373</sup> I expand on Kristeva’s idea by adding that, in addition to identifying society’s opposition to the lovers, one should also consider non-lovers’ inability to understand the lovers. This inability allows the lovers to define themselves as a unit separate from society, the most extreme form of which is as one collective person. It is important to note that the adulterous love of Tristan and Isolde is more transgressive than the familial defiance seen in Romeo and Juliet. The need for secrecy, however, is similar, and leads to a similar need for clandestine communications.

Much like Romeo and Juliet, Thomas’ Tristran and Isond – and their analogs in versions by Gottfried von Strassburg and the Norse Brother Robert– seem to create extremely intricate codes on the spot. Thomas’ version survives only in fragments, but two loose translations composed relatively soon after Thomas’ Gottfried von Strassburg’s Middle High German

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<sup>372</sup> Brother Robert, *Norse Romance I: The Tristan Legend*. Ed. and Trans Marianne Kalinke. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2012), 132. The complete phrase is “Svá var mikil kraptr ástar þeirar sem þau hefði bæði einn hug ok hjarta, allt til þess kom á o aðrir undruðu.”

<sup>373</sup> Kristeva, Julia. “Romeo and Juliet: Love-Hatred in the Couple.” *Tales of Love*. (New York: Columbia, 1987).



version and Brother Robert's Norse version are so similar in details of plot – though not in incidental commentary – that they highlight the remarkable communication at the center of Thomas's lovers' relationship. Even Tristan tales not directly derivative of Thomas's version – including Beroul's, which seems to be composed parallel to Thomas's – include amazing feats of interpretation by the lovers. Tristram and Isold's coded messages to each other are even more resistant to simple decoding than Romeo and Juliet's sonnet; the seemingly arbitrary nature of their communications suggests that only by sharing one set of preconceptions – sharing one mind – could the two understand each other. Different versions within both the courtly and non-courtly traditions vary in specifics, but the core plot shows the lovers making remarkable interpretive leaps correctly even as these same communications mislead those around them. In these cases, Tristan and Isolde approach these communications with a single dominant prejudice that sets them apart; they consistently read every sign first through the lens – or prejudice – of their love.

Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner observes that the lovers conceive of themselves as one, noting that “shared experience furnishes knowledge of self and other that leads to oneness, the identity of the couple as a unit.”<sup>374</sup> Whenever the lovers notice a difference in their experiences, they attempt to regain that unity by copying each other's experiences. Extending Bruckner's observation makes clear how this conception of unity appears in the lovers' communications. Perhaps the most remarkable symptom of this collective individualism is that the lovers are able to overcome the randomness of language and understand one another when such communication seems unlikely.

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<sup>374</sup> Bruckner, Matilda Tomaryn. “The Representation of the Lovers' Death.” *Tristan and Isolde: A Casebook*. Ed. Joan Tasker Grimbert. (New York: Routledge: 2002), 98.

Of the various versions of the tale, Gottfried van Strassburg's *Tristan* announces most explicitly the centrality of the lovers' communication in defining the unity of their relationship. Gottfried emphasizes the relational hermeneutics at the heart of Tristan and Isolde's communications. The lovers are able to communicate secretly

in er menege under under liuten

Dâ blicke sullen tiuten

Und wehlselmære meinen.<sup>375</sup>

[in the crowd and in the presence of others,

where glances are full of significance and

mean whole conversations].<sup>376</sup>

In addition, they are able to do so without danger of observation. In addition, the lovers embroidered their public conversation "mit klebeworten und erweben"<sup>377</sup> [... with words that were meant to stick].<sup>378</sup> Meanwhile,

Es gedâhte aber nieman niht

Daz ir wort und ir geschiht

An liebe hæten keine kraft

Wan eine von der mâcschaft,

Die man sô grôz erkande

Under Marke und Tristande.<sup>379</sup>

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<sup>375</sup> Gottfried *Tristan* 12983-12985.

<sup>376</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>377</sup> *Ibid.*, 12997.

<sup>378</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

[nobody had any idea that their words  
and actions hid any force such as love,  
were inspired by anything other  
than Tristan and Mark's kinship].<sup>380</sup>

In this section, Gottfried highlights the possible disparities between the public and private meanings of the same words and gestures. The lovers' knowledge of more potential meanings sets them apart and seemingly above other characters in the poem.

In addition to the explicit description of relational semantics above, Gottfried's *Tristan* includes several examples of single, important words that carry several meanings, given the fact that multiple contexts for interpreting these words are equally applicable. In an effort to retain the multiplicity of meanings, Gottfried retains the original Anglo-Norman words from his source, Thomas d'Angleterre.

Within Gottfried and presumably in Thomas' version, the first declaration of love from Isolde is built upon a multiplicity of meanings and relies upon Tristan's application of relational semantics. On the boat to marry Mark, Isolde suffers once she has taken the potion and fallen in love with Tristan. When Tristan asks her what troubles her, Isolde replies, "*Lameir*."<sup>381</sup> As Tristan recalls to himself, "*l'ameir* meant 'Love', *l'ameir* 'bitter', *la meir* the sea."<sup>382</sup> Tristan avoids the first definition of love and probes her for clarification of whether she means

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<sup>379</sup> Ibid., 13001-13006.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid.

<sup>381</sup> Thomas. "Tristan." *Early Tristan Poems, Vol.2*. Trans. Stewart Gregory. Ed. Norris Lacy. (Cambridge: Brewer, 1998), 199.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid.

something bitter or the sea. This conscious evasion reveals his preconception as much as it highlights her feelings. In fact, all three definitions apply for Isolde, depending on the perspective one wishes to emphasize. When Isolde chooses to emphasize the definition “love,” she does not openly state the object of her love. Instead, she relies upon him to fill in this gap. Tristan’s ability to do so correctly carries several implications. The primary implication is that Tristan understands her correctly but wants confirmation of her consent. A contrary implication is that he is filling in this interpretive gap incorrectly by imagining the response he desires; for more on this interpretation, see the chapter on imagination and interpretation.

Gottfried retains the ambiguity of the Anglo-Norman word for potion from Thomas. At the heart of the potion is also a semantic ambiguity that reflects the tale’s moral ambiguity. In Anglo-Norman, the word “potion” means both “potion” and “poison.”<sup>383</sup> Not only does poison play an important role in bringing the lovers together – her mother must heal Tristan of a poisoned wound – but also suggests that the potion has poisoned their minds. This linguistic gesture has led to a wide range of scholarly responses to the lovers, each response choosing to highlight a particularly context as the primary one. While there seems to be little doubt that all of the versions express some sympathy for the lovers, one can never escape their transgressions.<sup>384</sup> Even when Susan Crane emphasizes the lovers’ “repugnant behavior – subterfuge, murder, betrayal, faithlessness,” she adds that “their legendary devotion to each other

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<sup>383</sup> As noted by A. Hatto in the introduction to his Penguin translation, p.7. A. Hatto. *Tristan* (New York: Penguin, 1960).

<sup>384</sup> Alan Lupack in his introduction to the TEAMS *Sir Tristrem* argues that this thirteenth century Middle English version parodies the Thomas tradition. Alan Lupack. *Sir Tristrem*. (Kalamazoo: TEAMS, 1994).

is striking [and...] invites poetic idealization.”<sup>385</sup> Crane’s judgment relies on the assumption that the judgments of the broader social context take precedence over the private context the lovers attempt to establish. Thomas reinforces the primacy of the lovers’ interior realm by turning “from the objective realm of events to the subjective, interior realm of thought and feeling.”<sup>386</sup> Crane depicts as a repugnant subterfuge the very interpretive gesture that establishes that the lovers share one mind.

The conflict at the heart of these ambiguities – between private and public judgments – also appears at a linguistic level when Thomas and Gottfried use a “mystical vocabulary”<sup>387</sup> to describe the lovers’ relationship. Sarah Kay points out that “Gottfried represents love as in conflict with the demands of the outside world, but in accord with the dictates of a higher, more mysterious power.”<sup>388</sup> While Kay describes a careful balance between lay and clerical values in Gottfried, she does link the lovers to a higher power, suggesting an eventual bias in favor of the lovers – a bias that privileges the lovers’ understanding over the non-lovers’ understandings. Linking the lovers’ interpretations to a higher power, however, erases the relational semantics at the core of the lovers’ relationship, tying interpretation instead to a neo-Platonic certainty. After all, communications with God suggest an imbalance not seen in descriptions of these literary lovers. Given the mystic nature of the relationship as described by Gottfried and noted by Sarah

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<sup>385</sup> Susan Crane, *Insular Romance: Politics, Faith, and Culture in Anglo-Norman and Middle English Literature*. (Berkeley: U of California P: 1986), 149.

<sup>386</sup> Crane, 149.

<sup>387</sup> Sarah Kay. “Courts, Clerks, and Courtly Love.” *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*. Ed. Roberta L. Kreuger. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), 93.

<sup>388</sup> Kay, 93.

Kay, it is surprising to note that the no mystic vocabulary is deployed to describe the communications themselves.

All of the courtly versions of Tristan emphasize the fact that the lovers share one set of assumptions and desires. *Tristrams Saga ok Ísöndar* – Brother Robert’s 1226 translation into Norse of Thomas’ c.1173 Anglo-Norman version – makes the idea that the lovers share assumptions and desires explicit, stating that the “power of their love was such that they possessed one heart and one mind.”<sup>389</sup> Gottfried von Strassburg’s translation of Thomas’ *Tristan* emphasizes the shared mind even more frequently than the Brother Robert’s Norse version.<sup>390</sup> As soon as the lovers admit and “perceive” their *l’ameir* – “love”, they understand that they have “one mind, one heart, and but a single will between them.”<sup>391</sup> Tristan even refers explicitly to Isolde as “his other self.”<sup>392</sup> Gottfried repeats this later in the stylistically virtuosic idea that “their thoughts and wishes were in concord: it was ‘yes’ and ‘yes’ and ‘no’ and no’ with them

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<sup>389</sup> Brother Robert. *Norse Romance I: The Tristan Legend*. Ed. and Trans Marianne Kalinke. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2012), 132. The original: “Svá var mikil kraptr ástar þeirar sem þau hefði bæði einn hug ok hjarta, allt til þess kom á o aðrir undruðu.”

<sup>390</sup> Like Brother Robert’s, Gottfried’s translation is generally considered faithful to Thomas’, though Gottfried made stylistic emendations and commentary on elements he considered implausible.

<sup>391</sup> Robert, 200.

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid.*, 282.

[...] Yea or nay, they were both of one mind.”<sup>393</sup> Gottfried repeats and extends this idea of a mutual consent later, noting

...in beiden  
nie mê wan ein herze unde ein muot;  
ir beider übel, ir beider guot,  
ir beider tôt, ir beider leben  
diu wâren alse in ein geweben;  
swaz ir dewederem gewar  
des wart daz ander gewar;  
swaz sô dem einem sanfte tete,  
ses des empfant daz ander an der stete.  
sie wâren beide under in zwein  
mir übele und mit guote al ein.<sup>394</sup>

[The two of them now shared  
One heart and one mind  
Both their ill and their weal  
Both their death and their life  
Was but one single texture.  
Whatever afflicted one of them  
Equally hurt the other.  
When one obtained some soothing,

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<sup>393</sup> Gottfried, 212.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid., 14332-342.

The other at once enjoyed relief.

The two of them, sharing all,

For ill and weal were united.]

Gottfried's description of the lovers here blurs the line between physical pleasure or pain and emotional ones. Gottfried's blurring of body and mind here makes a connection between the wedding ceremony's inclusion of the shared body but does not explicitly mention one mind.

The idea of sharing one heart, one mind, and one body is central to the medieval idea of marriage, building on St. Paul's *Letter to the Ephesians*, which states that "they shall be two in one flesh."<sup>395</sup> The traditional understanding of this phrase is that the shared body also has only one mind, that of the man, who is "the head of the wife."<sup>396</sup> Tristram and Isond provide an alternative to this, a merging into one mind, one that defines the collective mind as less dependent on male domination than it is on perfect compatibility. The lovers' compatibility shows in their shared assumptions and interpretations. In contrast, the king's inability to interpret correctly the messages and signs he sees indicates, at the very least, his incompatibility with Isond. Such an incompatibility raises the possibility that Isond has refused her inner consent.

In both Robert and Gottfried – and by extension their source in Thomas – the lovers' astonishing communication can be traced to a shared set of preconceptions, allowing them to interpret perfectly any linguistic ambiguity in messages to one another. Brother Robert's Norse version presents the definitive example of Tristram and Isond spontaneously composing and understanding a message that defies simple decoding. In this exchange, the ring that Tristram

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<sup>395</sup> St. Paul's *Letter to the Ephesians* 5.31.

<sup>396</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.23.



and Isond pass back and forth changes the content of any message they exchange, but even with this signal, their interpretive leaps are difficult enough to escape the others.<sup>397</sup>

Isond immediately recognizes her beloved Tristram when he approaches her caravan. Worried that her husband, King Markis, will also recognize Tristram, she tosses on the ground to her beloved the ring they exchanged between them.

Ok þegar jafnskjótt tók hún þat sama gull, sem jafnan hafði þeira ímilli farit með  
sendiboðum, ok kastaði til Tristrams, svá ti hans talandi: Rið braut héðan, þú  
ókunni riddari,” segir hún, “ok fá þér  
herbergi ok dvel ekki vára ferð.” En sem Tristram sá gullit,  
kendi hann ok undirsoóð.<sup>398</sup>

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<sup>397</sup> As the Anglo-Norman version – Thomas’ – only exists in fragments, I refer to Brother Robert’s and Gottfried’s versions in order to clarify the Anglo-Norman one; the similarities suggest that they follow Thomas very closely. Brother Robert follows medieval ideas of transmission, freely truncating for emphasis. While his translation is generally considered faithful to Thomas’s, it seems as though Brother Robert has trimmed some of Thomas’s lengthy internal explorations of the psyche. One of the most striking cuts occurs in the first part of the remaining fragment of Thomas’s original, where Tristan goes on at length about his motivations for marrying Ysolt of the White Hands. It must also be noted that the only surviving manuscript of Brother Robert’s translation appears in a seventeenth century Icelandic manuscript, but Paul Shach notes a lost fifteenth-century manuscript of the Norse. Some of the emendations may be later and by an Icelandic redactor, but despite this, the translation is considered faithful because of its similarities to Gottfried’s translation; in fact, the Norse version seems to have fewer additions than Gottfried’s.

[And just as quickly she took that same gold ring that had always traveled between them by messengers and threw it to Tristram: ‘Ride off strange knight,’ she said, find yourself lodging and stop holding up our journey.’ But when Tristram saw the ring, he recognized it and understood her words].<sup>399</sup>

While Kalinke understandably translates this last line to say that Tristram “understood her words (orð),” adopting the secondary meaning for “orð” as “message”<sup>400</sup> seems more specific.<sup>401</sup> After all, the message Isond offers Tristram does not rely on lexical ambiguity, but on contextual clues that the king and his men lack. As such, this exchange embodies the relational hermeneutic quality of the lovers’ communication that allows for private meaning to be conveyed secretly in a public forum. In this case, the ring carries the most important content in the communication: that he should take anything she says with the knowledge that she loves him. The public, literal (and referential) meaning of her words is dismissive, ordering him away so that he will no longer delay them. To throw money or other objects on the ground humiliates the one expected to pick

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<sup>398</sup> Robert, 200.

<sup>399</sup> Robert, 201. A longer selection: “Ok þegar jafnskjótt tók hún þat sama gull, sem jafnan hafði þiera ímilli farit með sendiboðum, ok kastaði til Tristrams, svá ti hans talandi: “Rið braut héðan, þú ókunni riddari,” segir hún, “ok fá þér herbergi ok dvel ekki vára ferð.”

“En sem Tristram sá gullit, kendi hann ok undirsoóð orð dróttningar ok veik sér aptr til sinna skalaldsveina ok báðir þeir Kardin” (200).

<sup>400</sup> Gordon, 374.

<sup>401</sup> As a strong neuter noun, orð is both the singular and plural accusative.

them up.<sup>402</sup> In *Tristrams Saga ok Ísöndar*, Isond takes advantage of the tradition that superiors such as the queen often offer alms to those less fortunate, such as this “strange knight.” Earlier in the saga, in fact, at the trial where she convinces the king and his counselors of her innocence, she offers up a wide variety of alms:

gulli ok silfri, klæðum ok kerum, gaf hún mikkinn part fátækun sakir guðs  
ástsemda, einnig sjúkum ok sáru, föðr lausim ok fátækum ekkjum.<sup>403</sup>  
[gold and silver, cups and clothing [...] to the poor as well  
as to the sick and the wounded, to the fatherless and to  
poor widows] .<sup>404</sup>

Here is a model for the alms that she appears to offer the disguised Tristram. These gifts include objects (cups and clothing) and materials (gold and silver) reminiscent of the ring, suggesting an

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<sup>402</sup> The humiliating nature of bending over to pick up valuable items is so strong in the Norse tradition that such a gesture becomes linked to cowardice. In the tale of *Hrolfs saga kraki* King Hrolf and his band of warriors cast gold behind them to slow the pursuit of the Swedish man of King Adils. Adils ignores most of the gold, but is finally overcome with greed when he sees the marvellously-made ring called “Pig of the Swedes.” He leans over to catch it up and exposes his rear. The men of Hrolf also greatly enjoy the fun of pointing out the irony of the ring’s name, calling out, “Now stooped like a swine is the Lord of the Swedes!” Hrolf also specifically refers to the injury as a humiliation. For another instance of this gesture in the Norse sagas, see *Njals saga*, where the Njalssons toss the repayment for Hoskuld Hvitaness-priest’s death on the ground. Because of the implied insult, the repayment is refused, leading to more violence.

<sup>403</sup> Kalinke, 150.

<sup>404</sup> Kalinke, 151.

obvious alternate reading for observers. In addition, the gesture of offering him alms contributes to the demeaning quality of the gesture, clearly establishing his inferiority. Her actions and message, within this public context, are perfectly innocent, if dismissive.

Adding the ring that they had previously exchanged, however, provides Tristram with a more private context within which to consider her words, allowing an almost incredible understanding of her message. Tristram's – correct – interpretation of Isond's message escapes simple decoding. After all, she does want him to “ride off” so that he will not be caught, so the literal definition of these words stands. Following the order to go away (*braut*) and the rude throwing of the “gift,” a reasonable public interpretation of her statement would be for the strange knight to get as far away as possible and stay there. Tristram, however, understands that she does mean for him to find lodging, but to search for a site near hers. Making the interpretive leap even more remarkable is the fact that he understands they should meet at this location, an understanding shown to be correct by their assignation later. This decoding is not a simple reversal – saying I reject you to mean I love you – and so depends not just on his contextual knowledge of the ring but on the preconceptions that Tristram brings into his interpretation. In a way, Tristram and Isond do not merely play a game of misdirection but share a completely distinct language. Tristram chooses to read the ring according to the meaning Isond assigned to it when they parted. When they part, she gives him the ring, saying,

Nú ekki at síðr skaltu þiggja þetta fingurgull, ok varðveit vel fyrir mínar sakir.

Þetta skal vera bréf ok innsigli, handsöl ok huggan áminningar ástar okkarrar ok þessa skilnaðar.<sup>405</sup>

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<sup>405</sup> Kalinke 166.

[Now you shall have nothing less than this ring; take good care of it for my sake. It shall be the written deed and its seal, the promise and the comfort of the remembrance of our love and separation].<sup>406</sup>

The ring is not merely a symbol of their love; it is their love's "written deed and its seal."<sup>407</sup>

Interestingly, she chooses legal, public language to establish a "written" meaning that only she and Tristram can "read" privately. According to those who believed that consent – more than consummation – provided the primary means of defining marriage, the exchange echoes the language of betrothal shared by the lovers from the moment they take the potion.<sup>408</sup> Felicity Riddy discusses a similar incident in *King Horn*, noting that the language in that scene, as in this one, sounds remarkably like "consent which, if followed by intercourse, constituted a legal marriage according to medieval canon law – even if the declaration is private."<sup>409</sup>

Gottfried's Isolde expresses a similar private marital sentiment when she gives Tristan the ring as

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<sup>406</sup> Kalinke 167.

<sup>407</sup> Kalinke 167.

<sup>408</sup> See Irven M. Resnick "Marriage in Medieval Culture: Consent theory and The Case of Joseph and Mary," (*Church History*, June 2000) 350 ff. This tradition continues into the Renaissance under the term "hand-fasting."

<sup>409</sup> Riddy, Felicity. "Middle English Romance: Family, Marriage, Intimacy." *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*. Ed. Roberta L. Kreuger. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), 241. Riddy draws on James Bridgeway's *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*. (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1987) and Neil Cartlidge's *Medieval Marriage: Literary Approaches to 1100-1300*. (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1997).

...ein urkünde sîn

der triuwen unde der mine.<sup>410</sup>

[witness to [their] love and devotion].<sup>411</sup>

Isolde continues to present herself and Tristan as one, telling him

...iewer lip

...daz lît an mîr.

Ein lîp und ein leben<sup>412</sup>

[your life is one with mine. We are one life and one love].<sup>413</sup>

Isolde concludes,

Tristan und Îsôt, ir und ich,

Wir zwwei sîn iemer beide

Ein ding âne underscheide.

Dirre kus sol ein insigil sîn

Daz ich iuwer under ir mîn

Belîben stæte unz an den tôt,

Niwan ein Tristan un ein Îsôt.<sup>414</sup>

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<sup>410</sup> Gottfried, 18313-18314.

<sup>411</sup> Ibid., 282.

<sup>412</sup> Ibid., 18346-18348.

<sup>413</sup> Ibid., 282.

<sup>414</sup> Ibid., 18359-18362.

[You and I, Tristan and Isolde, shall both forever remain one thing without division (or difference)! Let this kiss be a seal upon it that I am yours, that you are mine, steadfast till death, but one Tristan and one Isolde]!<sup>415</sup>

This declaration includes important elements in the wedding ceremony: a commitment until death, the exchange of a ring, the sacramental language of a “seal.” Isolde even attempts to represent the ring as a “witness” to their private exchange. This exchange indicates that Isolde thinks of her relationship with Tristan using marital language. Tristan’s acceptance of the ring shows his acceptance of her definition as much as all of the language centered on how the lovers share one mind. Equally important, Isolde uses the present tense, which matches the church liturgy for marriage.

The sharing of secret codes in the Tristan tales resembles scenes in Ovid’s *Amores*, where one referential meaning has been assigned to a non-linguistic gesture.<sup>416</sup> Ovid’s text provides an

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<sup>415</sup> Ibid., 282.

<sup>416</sup> Beroul, “Tristan.” *Early Tristan Poems, Vol. I.* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1998), 2707-2732.

Beroul shows the lovers more explicitly establishing the ring as an indicator of continued affection. Beroul’s description also echoes the exchange of betrothal gifts seen in other versions of the tale. She defines the ring’s meaning more explicitly, stating “if you do not send me the ring on your finger,/ so that I see it with my own eyes,/ I will not believe what is said to me./ But as soon as I see the ring,/ no tower or wall or castle/ could prevent me from immediately doing/ the bidding of my lover” (2794-2800). As in the Norse, however, other signals in their communications could conceivably alter this meaning. The French is as follows: “Se cel anel de vostre doi/ Ne m’envoiez, si que jel voie,/ Rien qu’il deist ge ne croiroie./ Mais, des que reverrai

example of privileged communication between lovers and may have provided a foundation for medieval authors. In *Amores*, the narrator establishes a code with his lover so that he can “sine voce loquentia dicam” [speak fluid speech without any voice].<sup>417</sup> These messages allow the narrator to understand his beloved’s inner state.

cum tibi succurret Veneris lascivia nostrae,

purpureas tenero pollice tange genas.

siquid erit, de me tacita quod mente queraris,

pendeat extrema mollis ab aure manus.<sup>418</sup>

[When the wantonness of our love comes into your mind,

With tender thumb touch your blushing cheeks;

If you shall complain about me in the silence of your mind,

Your soft hand should hang from the end of your ear.]

When she touches her cheek, she is thinking about the last time they made love while pinching her earlobe indicates she is unhappy with him. As seen in Gottfried’s version, Tristan and Isolde also seem to have established a code with one another, to be discussed soon.<sup>419</sup>

Occasionally, however, the Tristan texts do not show the code being defined. More importantly, the Tristan tales emphasize the importance of how messages are received, by representing the lovers decoding correctly their beloved’s messages. Codes such as these also

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;’anl,/ Net or ne mur ne fort chastel/ Ne me tendra ne face errant/ Le mandement de mon amant”  
(2794-2800).

<sup>417</sup> Ovid. *Amores*. I.4.19.

<sup>418</sup> Ibid., I.4.20-3.

<sup>419</sup> Gottfried, 14427-14450.



depend on contextual clues such as gesture or tone. Returning to the Norse *Tristrams Saga ok Ísöndar*, we see complications that place a greater importance on such contextual clues. Isond provides Tristram (and others) with signals that might indicate an alternate reading of the ring.<sup>420</sup> The medieval tale's emphasis on the potentially different meanings offered in different contexts and receivers represents an awareness of relational semantics not described in Ovid.

Tristram's correct decoding of these messages reflects lovers' unique ability to understand one another. Tristram could easily have interpreted her throwing of the ring as a rejection – a “throwing away” – of his love as well. In addition, they have been apart for some time; in the meantime, Tristram has fought in numerous countries<sup>421</sup> and married another woman, Isodd. Considering the rudeness, their separation, and his marriage, even one with the knowledge of the ring's original meaning might read her gesture as rejection. Despite these public clues, Tristram chooses to read the ring's meaning – and Isond's affection – as constant. His ability to correctly identify which of Isond's signals are to be read privately and which publicly is astonishing and must find its roots outside the original meaning Isond assigned.

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<sup>420</sup> In Gottfried's rendition, Ysolt recognizes Tristan because of a mazer-cup the queen had given him earlier. She tries to pass her ring into the cup but Brengvein interrupts the exchange. Interestingly, she does not expose Tristan. She merely uses relational semantics to criticize the lovers as though Ysolt was too generous to a beggar. Beneath her words lies a critique of the lovers' relationship (332-3). By couching the message this way, the king does not understand Brengvein's hidden message. Brengvein's ability to understand the lovers highlights that the medieval romance tradition is more skeptical of “one mind” communications than the Renaissance tradition.

<sup>421</sup> Robert, 167.

Tristram reads with the assumption that whatever she says is an expression of love and that every message conveys loyalty, affection, and a desire to meet, even when the words or gestures say otherwise.

The Norse version's representation of how Tristram communicates with Isond using wood shavings only makes sense if the two share some preconceived desires. After all, in this version, the lovers are not shown establishing the meaning of such shavings.

En þeim sinnum, sem Trisram vildi ræða við Ísönd,

þá kastaði hann spánum út á ána, er rann hjá turninum

ok fyrir svefnhús dróttningar, ok vissi þegar dróttning

ok fann af þessum velum vilja hans ok vitjan”<sup>422</sup>

[Every time Tristram wanted to talk with Isond, he flung

the shavings out into the river that ran past the tower and

below the queen's bedroom. Immediately the queen

understood and learned by this ruse of his desire to visit].<sup>423</sup>

Without Isond's reception, these shavings carry no linguistic weight and therefore mean nothing. It is entirely possible for her to have seen the shavings and thought that Tristram was merely whittling to pass the time. Despite this, Isond reads his unstated intent “immediately” and correctly while others would see nothing. The use of “immediately” implies that Isond's insight is remarkable, but the phrase “every time” shows habitual meaning and suggests a mutually agreed-upon content. Other things mitigate the unlikely quality of this message. First, Isond recognizes Tristram's shavings from any others because “no man had ever seen their

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<sup>422</sup> Kalinke 140.

<sup>423</sup> Kalinke, 141.

equal” and because he was so skillful that they “didn’t sink [...] and no current could destroy them.”<sup>424</sup> Second – and possibly more useful – Tristram seems to always want to meet with Isond, and therefore any gesture from him to Isond carries this message. Key to this discussion is the fact that the Icelandic tale does not show the lovers coming to a prearranged code so her interpretation seems to indicate a privileged unity with Tristan. Even so, the fact remains that the whittlings carry one meaning for the lovers while meaning nothing to almost everyone else.

Gottfried, in contrast to Brother Robert, includes a scene whereby the meaning of Tristan’s whittlings is established. Brangene defines the means of communication for the lovers, instructing Tristan,

Sô nemet ein oleboumes rîs  
 Und snîdet spæne in lange wîs  
 Und zeichent die mit nihte mê,  
 Wan machete einhalb ein T  
 Und machete anderhalb ein I,<sup>425</sup>  
 ...  
 Als wir in danne ersehen dâ  
 Dâ bekennen wir iesâ  
 Daz ir dâ bî dem brunnen sît<sup>426</sup>  
 ...  
 Diu senede gât iezuo dar.<sup>427</sup>

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<sup>424</sup> Ibid.

<sup>425</sup> Gottfried, 14427-14431.

<sup>426</sup> Ibid., 14445-14447.

[So, take a twig of olive, cut some slivers lengthwise,  
and just engrave them with a “T” on one side and  
“I” on the other [...] When we see the shaving we  
shall at once know you are by the brook [...] and  
come to meet you].<sup>428</sup>

Here, the whittlings are not merely finely crafted, but identifiable by the initials which seem to symbolize how the lovers are two sides of one whole. In addition, because the shavings’ meaning is predetermined, the communication in Gottfried’s version is less arbitrary. The fact that Brangane – not the lovers – establishes the code makes it even more comprehensible.

Looking closely at these two descriptions of Tristan’s whittling offers insight into a hotly contested debate over the meaning of Tristan’s carvings in Marie de France’s lai *Chevrefoil*. The only word we know for sure that appears on the wood is Tristan’s name, as he

Quand il ad pare ke bastun,  
De sun cutel escrit sun nun.  
[When he had prepared this staff,  
He wrote his name on it with his knife].<sup>429</sup>

The message that Ysolt receives, however, includes sixteen lines paralleling their love to that of the honeysuckle and hazelwood, ending

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<sup>427</sup> Ibid., 14450.

<sup>428</sup> Ibid., 231.

<sup>429</sup> Marie de France. “Chevrefoil.” *Marie de France’s Lais*. (Gallimard, 2000), 53-4. Citations are from the edition bilingue de Philippe Walter of *Marie de France’s Lais*

Bele amie si et de nus:

Ne vuz sanz mei, ne mei sanz vus.<sup>430</sup>

[Sweet love, so it is with us: You cannot live  
without me, nor I without you].

Referring to the extended message, Marie states,

“Ceo fu la summe de l’escrit

Qu’il li aveit mandeé e dit.<sup>431</sup>

[This was the message [“summe”] of the writing  
that he had sent to her].

“Summe” can mean either “resumé” or “l’essence” but, as Robert Sturges points out, “whether this gist or meaning was written out or meant to be divined [...] is impossible to tell.”<sup>432</sup> What makes this communication so interesting is that none of her companions understand any part of the message. Three possibilities draw the most attention. The first is that he sent a message to her before she arrived in the forest, which Robert Hanning sees as the least likely because “it is not otherwise mentioned” in the lai.<sup>433</sup> The second theory, proposed by M. Cagnon, is that the message is in runic inscriptions that only the lovers know.<sup>434</sup> The third alternative is that his

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<sup>430</sup> Ibid., 77-8.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid., 61-2.

<sup>432</sup> Robert Sturges. *Medieval Interpretation: Models of Reading in the Literary Narrative, 1100-1500* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), 84.

<sup>433</sup> Robert Hanning, *The Lais of Marie de France*. (New York: Baker, 1995), 191.

<sup>434</sup> M. Cagnon. “Chevrefoil and the Ogamic Tradition.” *Romania* 91 [1970], 238-55.

name alone conveys all this because of the “understanding that existed between them.”<sup>435</sup> Sturges builds insightfully on the third alternative, suggesting that the “medium here is clearly the message [...as] Tristan has combined a written text with a physical signifier” to encourage interpretation in his target audience, Isolde.<sup>436</sup> Tristan’s name is linked both physically and symbolically to the tree. Sturges’s reading does a wonderful job of fleshing out how the specifics of the message are arrived at, but he doesn’t account for the message that Tristram sends via shavings in Gottfried’s and Brother Robert’s versions.<sup>437</sup> The one part of the message that Marie implies but does not state openly is their desire to meet, the precise message of the shavings in the other versions and the result of her correctly reading his message.<sup>438</sup> Regardless of one’s speculation about the precise method of transmission, it is clear that understanding is contextual and therefore referential. Equally important is the fact that this message – regardless of its transmission – accurately reflects the preconceived desires of both lovers, once again showing that they share one set of desires. Keeping in mind the idea that these ideal communications reveal a shared mind eliminates the problem of whether Tristan intended to send this message or Isolde supplied a meaning to it. Being as one, they share one intent or one mind.

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<sup>435</sup> Hanning, 191.

<sup>436</sup> Sturges, 85.

<sup>437</sup> In all likelihood, their source, Thomas, would also have included this element, though the remaining fragment of his version does not include these episodes. Unfortunately, the surviving fragments of Beroul’s version begin soon after this episode would have occurred.

<sup>438</sup> *Ibid.*, 91-3.

Donne's "A Valediction: of my Name, in the Window" seems to follow the conventions established by the shavings in the Tristan tales.<sup>439</sup> The entirety of the message is the narrator's "name engrav'd" in a window.<sup>440</sup> Like the Tristan shaving and carving, the only linguistic content is a name. The blurring of the two lovers when she sees her reflection and the name come together; the culmination of this fusion is when the narrator constructs himself and his beloved as one, saying to her "I am you."<sup>441</sup> Donne's visual blurring resembles the shavings as well in that both lovers appear in the one object. Like *Chevrefoil* and other Tristan episodes, a limited message carries substantially greater content than the words might suggest. As in *Chevrefoil*, the medium contributes to the message, as Donne emphasizes the permanence of the engraving.<sup>442</sup> The narrator inscribes in the poem as well not one ideal response to his engraved name, but several, depending on the context. One has her "more loving, as more sad" until the narrator returns.<sup>443</sup> Another, as mentioned before relies upon the medium to contribute to the message; the narrator acknowledges, however, that his may be "too hard and deepe."<sup>444</sup> The narrator even constructs a potential narrative where the beloved reader takes a lover and the engraving potentially "step[s] in"<sup>445</sup> to prevent it. Should she act on her passion, the engraving

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<sup>439</sup> While this poem has suggestive religious readings, these religious interpretations would also seem to be informed by the Tristan conventions.

<sup>440</sup> Donne, "Window," 1.

<sup>441</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>442</sup> *Ibid.*, 15-18.

<sup>443</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>444</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>445</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

will lead her to “remembrest right” the narrator in an act of “fancy.”<sup>446</sup> The poem seems to open with the assumption of a shared mind and move toward a mental separation that parallels the narrator’s absence. The poem expands upon conventions of clandestine communications established in the Tristan tales, but no longer is communication presented as skeptically or with as many clues to the lovers’ interpretation. The skeptical generic conventions associated with lovers – discussed in the chapters on obscure senders, constructing senders, and coerced consent – appear less prominently, if at all, in the Renaissance works. Without these skeptical counterpoints to the “one mind” convention, the lovers’ communications appear more mystical.

Remarkable communication, in fact, can be seen as the central defining characteristic of Tristan and Isolde’s love in all of its versions.<sup>447</sup> In *Tristan Rossignol* (Tristan the Nightingale), Tristan

“Humain lanuage de[g]uisa

Cum cil que l’aprist de peça:

Il cuntrefetle russinol,

La papingai, le oriol...,

E les oiseals de la gaudine.<sup>448</sup>

[disguised his human language

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<sup>446</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>447</sup> Mallory’s version differs in this respect as it does in so many other ways from the broader Tristan tradition.

<sup>448</sup> “Tristan Rossignol” *Arthurian Archives II: Early French Tristan Poems II*. Ed. Norris J. Lacy. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1998). 11-14.



With a skill he had lead long ago  
 ... imitat[ing] the nightingale,  
 the parrot, the oriole.]

Amazingly, Iseult

Mes par cel chant ben entendi  
 Ke pres de luec ot sun ami.<sup>449</sup>  
 [understood clearly from this song  
 that her lover was nearby].<sup>450</sup>

This example provides the most explicit description of the lovers' communication as completely different from "human language" and once again shows Iseult's understanding, even though this tale does not show or mention any previously established code. Later, Tristan, disguised as a

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<sup>449</sup> Ibid., 19-22.

<sup>450</sup> The entire passage reads "Humain lanuage de[g]uisa/ Cum cil que l'aprist de peça:/ Il cunrefetle russinol,/ La papingai, le oriol,/ E les oiseals de la gaudine./ Ysoude escote, la reïne,/ Ou gisout juste le rei Mark,/ Mes el ne sout de quele part./ De cele voiz ne souten fin/ Si fu el parc ou el gardin,/ Mes par cel chant ben entendi/ Ke pres de luec ot sun ami" (11-22). "[He disguised his human language/ with a skill that he had learned long ago/ He imitated the nightingale,/ The parrot, the oriole,/ And the birds in the forest./ Isolde, the queen, was listening/ As she lay next to King Mark,/ But she did not know where the birdsong was coming from./ She could not tell whether this voice/ came from the park or the garden/ but she understood clearly from this song/ that her lover was nearby.]"

one-eyed minstrel, plays on his pipe the Lay of the Honeysuckle<sup>451</sup> in order to let Iseult know it is he. When she hears it, she “thinks” it is her love<sup>452</sup> even though “Tristan has two eyes/ and this man has lost his left one.”<sup>453</sup> Hearing the lay makes her suspicious that Tristan has shared the song that they “composed together.”<sup>454</sup> Even though she acknowledges to herself that “Tristan is not [hers] anymore,”<sup>455</sup> Iseult’s faith and the fact that “he has never lied” to her<sup>456</sup> finally helps her to overcome her suspicions. Later, “thanks to the lay that he played on his pipes,/ She led him to her room.”<sup>457</sup> Just as in *Chevrefoil* – a version of the lai of the honeysuckle, recognition by the lovers of each other calls to mind a much wider range of meaning than appears in the words: here, as in Marie’s version, that the lovers should meet.<sup>458</sup>

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<sup>451</sup> Ibid., 760.

<sup>452</sup> Ibid., 766.

<sup>453</sup> Ibid., 771-2. She “quit c’est Tristrans” (767) and “Tristrans a dous oeus en sa teste/ Et cist a perdu le senestre” (771-2).

<sup>454</sup> Ibid., 777. “Le lai que moi et lui feïsmes.”

<sup>455</sup> Ibid., 774.

<sup>456</sup> Ibid., 779. “Car onques ne menti vers moi”.

<sup>457</sup> Ibid., 895-6. Ysoud “Tristran ravisa/ Par le lai que il fiajola./ En sa chamber l’en a mené” (893-5).

<sup>458</sup> Interestingly, this example plays with the conflict in her fantasy between two senses – her vision – which does not recognize him – and her hearing – which does.

The shared, private quality of the information enhances the sense that the two share their lives in a meaningful way.<sup>459</sup>

While medieval linguistic theories do not explicitly account for relational semantics, Jerome's ideas address the need for contextual interpretation. As noted, Tristan and Isolde's communication does not match well with a simple substitution code. Jerome's ideas on translation focus on "word-for-word" and "sense-for-sense" translations; only in Scripture are both possible at once. As is obvious from the discussion of codes, a word-for-word translation would often present a message completely at odds with the sender's intent. Jerome includes the idea of a far more flexible sense-for-sense translation in order to account for idiomatic expressions and other difficult passages, stating that a good translation "render[s] sense for sense and not word for word."<sup>460</sup> Once again, however, the lovers' words often carry a sense that is outside – not merely the opposite of – the message that they exchange. Their interpretations are not driven by fancy, as the sensory data – words – do not seem to matter in the formation of a correct understanding. On the other hand, the lovers' interpretations are not determined entirely by their imaginations. After all, the lovers are able to interpret correctly one another's misleading messages. Somehow, then, the lovers are able to correctly ascertain the intent of their beloveds, as though the two share one collective intent.<sup>461</sup> Such an understanding can be best

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<sup>459</sup> Beroul's version includes several incidences of the two using previously shared experiences to communicate privately (3296, 3547)

<sup>460</sup> Jerome, 4. "Non verbum e verbo, sed sensum exprimere de sensu." For more on Jerome and translation, see the chapter in this dissertation, "On The Edge of Reception."

<sup>461</sup> See previous section: One's intentions clearly relate to the idea of consent and, as it turns out, the philosophical debate over intent and sin came to the fore at the same time as the marital

understood when considering relational semantics, particularly the extra-linguistic elements that provide different contexts for particular statements.

In the seventeenth century, Donne's "Natures Lay Ideot" builds upon the notion that the most meaningful communication between lovers occurs in a language that is not limited to the words spoken. Donne speaks of understanding the "mystique language of the eye [and] hand."<sup>462</sup> This communication includes the idea of a mystical connection central to the tradition of collective individuals. In addition, the poem provides details of expression to make clearer the importance of contextual details such as "sighs" and "sounds" in determining meaning.<sup>463</sup> Objects that have potential meaning are included as well when the narrator mentions

...the Alphabet  
of flowers, how they devisefully being set  
And bound up, might with speechlesse secrecie  
Deliver arrands mutely, and mutually.<sup>464</sup>

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debate over consent. In particular, Abelard's idea that sin is defined by inward consent places definitive judgments of people's behavior beyond human perception. The connection between Tristan and Isolde, however, allows them to access one another's intent even when the signs are either not clear or contradictory. An ideal love such as theirs offers one response to anxieties regarding the uncertainty of relational semantics. Abelard. "What Sin and Vice Consist in (From *Know Thyself* or *Ethics*)." Trans. D.E. Luscombe. Ed. Richard Bosley and Martin Tweedale. (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview, 1998). (*Scito te ipsum*). 549-559.

<sup>462</sup> Donne, "Natures Lay Ideot," 4.

<sup>463</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>464</sup> Ibid., 9-12.

Here we see one alphabet that makes possible the mystical communication between lovers. Many codes of flowers were employed widely but in this case, a potentially private code has been “devisefully... set” by the lovers. Such a private code resembles what Basil Bernstein calls a *restricted code*, one designed for use within a particular community, in this case a community of two.<sup>465</sup> As noted by Wardaugh, language is used as much to establish identity and exclude outsiders as it is used to communicate.<sup>466</sup> As though sharing one mind, understanding is mutual. Using the word mutual here implies the exclusion of others from comprehending the lovers’ secret message. The message does remain in “secrecie,” after all.

The presence of subtle clues of expression and gesture might explain the lovers’ amazing interpretive leaps. Malcolm Gladwell’s *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*<sup>467</sup> suggests that people are able to make correct snap judgments based on an excellent familiarity with the topic at hand. Applying this to Tristan and Isolde, one could argue that the incredible familiarity the lovers have for one another would allow them to isolate any subtle shift in each other, allowing for a form of non-verbal communication outside of any verbal clues offered.

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<sup>465</sup> Basil Bernstein quoted in Wardaugh, Robert. *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2002), 334.

<sup>466</sup> Basil Bernstein discusses this in more detail in “Social Class, Language and Socialization.” *Language and Social Context: Selected Readings*. Ed. Gigolioni. (Harmondsonsworth, England: Penguin, 1972), 113.

<sup>467</sup> Gladwell discusses the seemingly miraculous interpretive abilities of experts in their fields, noting some experts’ ability to correctly solve problems within their fields of expertise when given only seconds. Malcolm Gladwell. *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking* (New York: Back Bay, 2007).

Such awareness would offer an explanation that allows for the lovers to be in what Gadamer would call an open conversation; rather than being open merely to the words, the participants are open to each others' emotions via these almost unidentifiable clues. Once again, however, it is the lovers' compatibility – their familiarity – that allows such uncanny understanding to occur. Within the context of the romances, the distinction between snap judgments and a shared mind seems negligible, as both suggest mutual consent.

One important component of the *one mind* tradition – from its earliest to its latest versions – sets in contrast the lovers' privileged communication and consent against the others' inability to understand. At the start of the tradition, the lovers' codes are occasionally understood by others, but by the end, the lovers' codes communicate uniquely between the lovers. The consent indicated by their communications, therefore, becomes even more private.

Tristan and Isolde's remarkable communication is a product of anxieties regarding the future spouses' power to choose – their consent – by setting the lovers' compatibility in contrast with the arranged nature of her marriage to King Mark. Contrasting the modes of communication between Isolde and Tristan on the one hand and Mark on this other establishes how much better Tristan embodies Isolde's marital ideal than Mark. In fact, by the standards of consent theory and consummation, Tristram and Isond could be seen as married. Both clearly indicate interest and consent on the ship. The language in both Brother Robert's and Gottfried's translations consciously echo the wedding ceremony, with Brother Robert's stating that "the power of their love was such that they possessed one heart and one mind"<sup>468</sup> and Gottfried stating the lovers understand that they have "one mind, one heart, and but a single will between

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<sup>468</sup> Robert 133. "Svá var mikill kraptr ástar þeirar sem þau hefði bæði einn hug ok hjarta" (132).

them.”<sup>469</sup> The second standard of establishing marriage – consummation – occurs immediately following. Brother Robert’s version only hints at the sexual encounter, suggesting that “there was nothing they could do about it,” followed by Isond’s need for the bed-trick with Bringvet because the servant “was an unspoiled maiden, but [Isond] could not say the same thing of herself”<sup>470</sup> Gottfried states that they “reach the goal of their desire”<sup>471</sup> – consummate their love – and Isond then worries about her “lost virginity.”<sup>472</sup> Isond’s marriage to Mark, then, can be read as preceded by a clandestine, private marriage to Tristram. Only the public ceremonies are missing from Tristram and Isond’s marriage. One could argue that the entire plot establishes Tristan’s prior claim, as their declarations of love – a form of betrothal – and their consummation occur prior to her marriage to Mark.<sup>473</sup> As such, the Tristram tale seems to redefine Tristram and Isond’s relationship as chaste adultery – adultery in a public realm but clearly chaste in a private one – and the debate continues to circle around the question about consent. Even the primary argument against the lovers’ consent – that they were coerced by the potion – is a response to

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<sup>469</sup> Gottfried, 200.

<sup>470</sup> Robert, 121. “Var þegar hugr Tristrams til Ísöndar ok hennar hugr allr á honum með svá ást, at enga bót máttu þau þar í móti gera” and “en dróttning var með Bringvetar búnaði, þvíat hún var óspillt mæ, en sik sjálfa vissi hún ekki slíka.” (120).

<sup>471</sup> Gottfried, 204.

<sup>472</sup> Ibid.

<sup>473</sup> Mark’s loss of Isolde to the harpist further illustrates his incompatibility and negligence as a husband, as Tristram himself comments (Brother Robert 133 and Gottfried 218).

anxieties regarding coerced consent.<sup>474</sup> Far more damning is the description in Gottfried that Isond is “to be given to one whom she did not wish to be given.”<sup>475</sup> As a final note, Mark’s loss of Isond to the harpist further illustrates their incompatibility and his negligence as a husband, an observation made explicitly by Tristram himself.<sup>476</sup>

Romeo and Juliet’s courtship and marriage suffer from their privacy in a manner that resembles Tristan and Isolde’s relationship. There is no doubt as to the lovers’ status as they show consent, marry before a priest, and consummate their marriage. The secrecy propelling the action, however, relies on a debate similar to the one at the heart of the Tristan story: whether lovers have self-determination over themselves or whether marriage is primarily a public relationship to be determined by those with seniority. This debate is enacted linguistically, with the two sides each seeking to control the meaning of the lovers’ statement.

The story of Tristan and Isolde shares another characteristic with Romeo and Juliet; the privileged communication shared by each pair of lovers is broken apart when their messages have to be transmitted by others. Some meaningful, often non-linguistic essence, allows error to creep into the message. Many times, this miscommunication leads to the collapse of the lovers’ relationship. Romeo would never have killed himself had he received the message telling him of

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<sup>474</sup> For more on coerced consent, see Noël James Menuge’s “Female Wards and Marriage in Romance and Law: A Question of Consent.” *Young Medieval Women*. Ed. Katherine J. Lewis, Noël James Menuge, and Kim M. Phillips. (New York: St. Martin’s, 1999). See also Irvn M. Resnick’s “Marriage in Medieval Culture: Consent Theory and the Case of Joseph and Mary.” *Church History*. June 2000. 350ff.

<sup>475</sup> Gottfried, 204.

<sup>476</sup> Robert, 133 and Gottfried 218.



the Friar's plan. In fact, the tragedy of the death scene is magnified when considered in relation to the lovers' perfect communication at the start of the play.

Similarly, Tristran's death – which among the early texts appears only in Thomas – occurs because he receives the incorrect message that his beloved Yseut will not return to heal him and his conclusion that she does not love him any more. Tristran asks Kaherdin to go to Yseut with his ring

Ço sunt enseingnes entre nus<sup>477</sup>

[which are signs between us,]

and ask his lover to come and heal the wounds no one else can heal.<sup>478</sup> If she is to return with him, Kaherdin is to “Del blanc siglez al revenir” [return under a white sail];<sup>479</sup> if not, a “del neir siglë idunc siglez” [travel under a black sail].<sup>480</sup> When Yseut returns with Kaherdin, they do unfurl a white sail. Unfortunately, Yseut aux Blanche Mains has overheard Tristran's instructions to Kaherdin,

Les diz Tristran excute e ot

Ben ad entendu chaüm mot.<sup>481</sup>

[...and listened to Tristran's words, hearing all

And understanding each.]

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<sup>477</sup> Thomas, 2455.

<sup>478</sup> Thomas, “Ço sunt enseingnes entre nus” (2455).

<sup>479</sup> Ibid, 2563.

<sup>480</sup> Ibid., 2565. “Blanc siglez” and “nëis siglë,” repectively.

<sup>481</sup> Ibid, 2606-7.

When Tristan – who cannot rise from his bed – asks her what kind of sail flies above the ship, Yseut aux blanche mains concocts a “grand engin” [cunning scheme],<sup>482</sup> telling him “le sigle est tut near” [the sail is completely black].<sup>483</sup> Yseut’s message of love, therefore, is transmitted to Tristan as a rejection, leading to his death. The impediments to their communication presented by the public sphere finally succeed because the communication is too removed from the lovers. The same concern is raised within the text when Yseut moans, “s’a vus parlé eüsse” [if only I had spoken with you].<sup>484</sup> Here, she seeks the certainty that immediate communication with her lover would offer.<sup>485</sup>

Although seemingly miraculous, the communications of Tristan and Isolde are built around a private code that is decipherable. We don’t see the code defined or explained in every version of the tale; Marie’s *Chevrefoil* and sections of the Norse Tristan come to mind. However, it becomes clear in other episodes and versions of the tale that the lovers have established a code wherein they have a private meaning for particular signals. Even though Gottfried represents the lovers’ communications more mystically than the other versions of Tristan, he includes enough detail for non-lovers to discover the code, as well as the most explicit definitions of some of the lovers’ codes. Gottfried’s version of the tale is the only extant version that includes an explicit definition of the wood shavings, as discussed earlier in the chapter.

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<sup>482</sup> Ibid., 3010.

<sup>483</sup> Ibid., 3023.

<sup>484</sup> Ibid., 2888.

<sup>485</sup> “Tristan, s’a vus parlé eüsse, ne me calsist se puis moruse” (2888-9).

The fact that non-lovers are occasionally able to break the lovers' code suggests that the lovers' messages rely on contextual interpretation – a characteristic of relational semantics. The Norse *Tristan* includes several instances where non-lovers are able to correctly interpret the lovers' seemingly clandestine signals. Perhaps the most obvious case of the lovers' code being potentially understood by others appears when Isolde of the White Hands overhears Tristan explaining that a white sail will indicate Isolde's willingness to heal him while a black one indicates her refusal. Isolde of the White Hands is able to understand the code well enough to substitute an alternate message. In the Norse *Tristram saga*, an "illa dvergs" [evil dwarf]<sup>486</sup> is able to correctly interpret the shavings Tristram sends into the river below Isond's window to set up a meeting. The dwarf tells Markis,

“Ek sá, <at> hann telgði spánuna, er ahnn var vanr at

kasta á ána at lokka ok stefna Ísönd til sín.”<sup>487</sup>

[“I have seen that he whittled wood shavings, which he

was accustomed to cast into the river, in order to entice

Ísönd and summon her to him”.]

The dwarf's understanding in this case is even more unlikely than the lovers' understanding; he did not help to establish code, nor does he share a particular intimacy that would allow him privileged access to the lovers' assumptions.

While communication is still central to the other strand of Tristan tales – called the common tradition – the lovers' codes in these tales are even more easily decoded than those of the courtly – or Thomas-based – tales. In Beroul's version, not generally considered a

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<sup>486</sup> Robert, 142.

<sup>487</sup> Ibid.

descendant of Thomas', the lovers share a communication privileged by information rather than a more metaphysically shared mind.<sup>488</sup> As many – including Norris Lacy – have noted, Beroul's lovers often adopt a private meaning that has sexual undertones. This is particularly noteworthy when Tristan is posing as a beggar in order to carry Iseut across the water and fall between her legs, thereby offering her the chance to offer up a truthful, but misleading assertion that "no man has ever been between my thighs,/ except the leper who made himself a beast of burden/ and carried me over the ford/ and my husband King Mark."<sup>489</sup> When she states she has a "proposition" for him, this can mean a job or a sexual activity.<sup>490</sup> Similarly, when Iseut describes him as "large"<sup>491</sup> and presses against his "crutch,"<sup>492</sup> Beroul emphasizes the sexual quality of these comments, with observers taking only her literal meaning while she, Tristan, and Dinas understand the sexual undertones. The entire plan does not require any feats of interpretation on Tristan's part. First, Dinas hints that Iseult needs someone to carry her over the ford. Iseult then looks at Tristan with a "wink."<sup>493</sup> Beroul presents to readers, then, the

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<sup>488</sup> Interestingly, the Auchinleck *Sir Tristrem* – seemingly in the courtly tradition – follows a model of communication closer to that seen in Beroul.

<sup>489</sup> Beroul, "Tristan." *Early Tristan Poems, Vol. I.* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1998), 4205-8.

""Qu'entre mes coises n'entra home,/ Fors le ladre qui fist soi some/ Qui me porta outre les guez/ Et li rois Marc mes esposez."

<sup>490</sup> Ibid., 3913. "Ge vuel avoir a toi afere"

<sup>491</sup> Ibid., 3928. The leper is "gros."

<sup>492</sup> Ibid., 3935. "Ses cuisse tient sor son puiot."

<sup>493</sup> Ibid., 3874.

subtle clues that allow Tristan to unpack her messages. The fact that the messages are sexual rather than elevated also undermines the remarkable quality of the lovers' communications.

The communications in Beroul, then, highlight relational semantics as much as the courtly versions, but do so in a slightly less elevating and mystical manner. Lovers in the common tradition do not seem to require any special interpretive connection beyond their private knowledge. Making these communications more easily decoded lowers the standard of consent at the heart of the Tristan and Isolde tales. The lovers no longer share "one mind"; instead, they share knowledge. This change accounts for the widely noted difference of opinions regarding how readers should judge the lovers in the different traditions. E. Jane Burns even uses the legal subterfuge in Beroul to condemn Tristan and Iseult, stating "the lover's defense, like the socially deviant act of adultery, rests entirely on linguistically deviant forms of discourse [and that they...] subvert the legality of God's Truth."<sup>494</sup> Burns describes the lovers' use of relational semantics in order to emphasize, even more than Crane, the importance of searching for "unequivocal Truth."<sup>495</sup> While adultery is certainly a socially deviant act, the tale presents enough evidence – in the form of consensual consummation prior with Tristan – to make problematic Isolde's marriage to Mark. A determinate meaning such as Burns proposes suppresses not only this ambiguity, but the central importance in the Tristan tales of relational semantics and therefore multiple meanings. After all, the poem seems at the very least to

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<sup>494</sup> Burns, E. Jane. "How Lovers Lie Together: Infidelity and Fictive Discourse in the Roman de Tristan." *Tristan and Isolde: A Casebook*. Ed. Grimberty, Joan Tasker. (New York: Garland; 1995). 79.

<sup>495</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

question the notion of an unequivocal Truth. The poem may even lionize the lovers by using religious language to describe them.

Though I have been emphasizing the continuities between medieval and Renaissance depictions of lovers united in one consciousness, there are some significant differences. Lovers who choose to adopt a collective individuality are represented more favorably in the Renaissance texts than in the medieval ones. First, the lovers' transgressions are emphasized more in the medieval texts. Second, greater understanding by non-lovers in the Renaissance texts almost always leads to greater approval, while in the medieval texts greater understanding by non-lovers produces either approval or disapproval. Medieval texts tend to represent the lovers as understandably or even nobly transgressive of society's rules, while Renaissance texts tend toward the idea that society's rules should change.

While the medieval texts certainly portray Tristan and Isolde as having a special love, the lovers' societal transgressions are not glossed over. The fact that both Tristan and Isolde choose to ignore their public marriage vows in favor of their private relationship is always presented as a serious transgression. King Mark, even in the prose *Tristan* where Blanchard and Quéreuil describe his portrayal as "irréremédiablement vil,"<sup>496</sup> has a legitimate complaint, as Isolde is cheating on him. Despite being portrayed sympathetically, the lovers – and particularly their privacy – are portrayed in a manner that is "très réaliste, et semble peu influence par the doctrine

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<sup>496</sup> Blanchard, Joël and Michel Quéreuil. *Le Roman de Tristan en Prose*. (Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 1997), 43. Mallory's extremely negative representation of Mark is generally considered an outlier, a variation that extends beyond the range of the wider Tristan tradition, but one can find precedents for it in the prose *Tristan*.

de l'amour courtois" [very realistic, and show little influence from the doctrine of courtly love].<sup>497</sup> As such, the lovers are seen as at least as much of the problem as the societal institution of marriage itself.

*Romeo and Juliet*, however, suggests that the problem lies not in the lovers but in the society that keeps them apart. Unlike Tristan and Isolde, Romeo and Juliet are not committing adultery, because they are legally, if privately, married. Romeo and Juliet's transgression is disobedience in failing to perpetuate their families' feud. Because reason for the feud is never clearly stated, the feud seems less well motivated than the lovers' affection. Romeo and Juliet's disobedience to a seemingly unmotivated feud therefore appears justified within the context of the lovers' seemingly mystical connection with one another. In comparison, the transgression of the lovers' families – here representing society at large – is to obstruct a legally binding marriage, admittedly one that they do not know has occurred. The feud seems particularly artificial in relation to the lovers' natural love for one another. On balance, Romeo and Juliet – and their collective individualism – are presented more favorably than their families.

Donne's poetry extends the trend of presenting the lovers more favorably by describing those who oppose lovers as completely in the wrong. As mentioned in the previous discussion of "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning," non-lovers are described as "dull, sublunary," and referred to as "the laity" in relation to the lovers' divine love.<sup>498</sup> "The Canonization" is directed at one who would "chide" his love, asking to be criticized for his palsy or gout instead. Chiding the narrator's love is compared to "soldiers [who] find wars [and] lawyers [who] find out ...

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<sup>497</sup> Curtis, Renée L. "Introduction." *Le Roman de Tristan en Prose: Tome 1*. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1985), 10.

<sup>498</sup> Donne, "Mourning," 7-8.

litigious men”<sup>499</sup> – those who seek out quarrels where others are hurt – suggesting that the chiding likewise hurts the narrator. In comparison, the narrator asks “who’s injured by [his] love,”<sup>500</sup> setting himself apart from those who truly do hurt others. The narrator suggests the trivial nature of whatever harm his love might cause by considering this minimal harm within the broader context of death, seasons, and war.

Approval of the lovers in these Renaissance works is often linked to understanding as much or as well as the lovers do. Once non-lovers who had previously opposed the lovers understand the “mystical” consent the lovers share, these non-lovers who had previously opposed the lovers now offer their approval. Donne’s poetry presents the clearest example of understanding leading to approval.

In Donne’s “The Canonization,” upon gaining greater understanding, those non-lovers who initially opposed and chided the lovers eventually approve of the love. The one who previously would not “hold [his] tongue, and let [the narrator] love”<sup>501</sup> ends the poem recognizing in the lovers as a “pattern of... love” from above, much like a neo-Platonic form or ideal. Eventually, “all shall approve/ [the lovers] canonized for love” (my emphasis).<sup>502</sup> The kind of the love embodied by the lovers becomes understood to be the Platonic ideal, which leads to universal approval.

Medieval texts show some non-lovers who understand Tristan and Isolde and approve, but this approval is not universal. In the Norse *Tristram Saga*, Kaherdin confronts Tristram

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<sup>499</sup> Donne, “Canonization,” 16-7.

<sup>500</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>501</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>502</sup> Ibid., 35-6.



about the fact that Tristram's marriage to Isond of the White Hands has not been consummated. Kaherdin asks to see the beauty that prevents Tristram. Tristram's response is to show Kaherdin the hall of statues and more specifically the statue of Isond. Kaherdin understands and approves once he has seen the statues, withdrawing his complaint and asking to be introduced to Bringvet. Others, however, are not so understanding once they discover the lovers. The evil dwarf who correctly interprets the shavings, for instance, continues to oppose Tristram and Isond whenever possible. Marjadoc, as well, sees the lovers together and plots to ruin their love. Admittedly, those who do not approve upon understanding the lovers are generally presented as selfish and spiteful. The lovers' privileged, private union remains transgressive, only ennobled by the purity of their feelings.

Regardless of the version, communication is central to defining the relationship of Tristan and Isolde. Many medieval literary representations of lovers after Thomas' *Tristan* use communication as the litmus test of relationships, often upholding the ideal even as they critique it. Parallel to the literary constructions of lovers, the same marriage ceremony – with its emphasis on unity and consent – also perpetuates the importance of a shared understanding. Shakespeare responds to anxieties of self-determination in love inherited from the romance tradition and places them in the context of a society where the power was shifting from the traditional aristocracy toward more mercantile interests, where marital self-determination held greater threat to the status quo. The shared sonnet embodies perfectly the lovers' unity even as its interruption highlights the societal intrusions upon their emotional self-determination.

Examined alone, the *one mind* tradition suggests continuity in attitudes toward language from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. Despite this continuity, medieval texts generally balance the lovers' privileged communications with episodes that lead one to question the lovers'

insights. Renaissance texts, on the other hand, often minimize or eliminate these episodes, leading to an impression that, with enough compatibility, the contingency inherent in language can be overcome.

CHAPTER FIVE  
 CRITIQUE OF SELF-ABSORPTION  
 CONSTRUCTING SENDERS, CONSTRUCTING MEANINGS

I don't ever dream about you and me  
 I don't ever make up stuff about us  
 that would be considered insanity

-Kate Nash *We Get On*<sup>503</sup>

Robert:       How can you love someone you don't even know?

Giselle:       I know what's in his heart.

*Enchanted* (2007)<sup>504</sup>

Earlier chapters explore how medieval anxieties about language and marriage come together in the literary convention that lovers had an interpretive connection so close that these lovers shared one mind. As noted before, the early romances such as *Tristan et Yseut* combined – in the same lovers – the ideal with elements that destabilized this ideal. Within this ideal,

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<sup>503</sup> Kate Nash, “We Get On.” *Made of Bricks*. Fiction Records, Cherrytree Records, and Universal Music Group. Release date August 5, 2007. CD.

<sup>504</sup> Bill Kelly. *Enchanted*. Directed by Kevin Lima. Disney. Release Date October 20, 2007. DVD.

lovers have the ability to correctly add content that did not appear in messages they send to one another, thus bypassing the uncertainties of traditional semantics. The chapter on obscure senders discussed the instability at the heart of communications that relied on a hidden or even absent intent. While originally presented as one element in a larger construction – one that included the ideal of one mind – later texts deploy this instability only in communications where the lovers are improper in some way. Because of this limitation, what was initially an element undermining the ideal of one mind ends up expanding the idea of privileged communication between lovers to suggest that any lovers who do not share one mind are not truly in love.

This chapter will discuss the specifics of how literary works within the tradition of lovers sharing one mind represent lovers constructing meaning when faced with messages – as discussed in a previous chapter– that have no clear intent. Since the method of isolating intent from a reader in these romances is to isolate knowledge of the sender, the response to lacking a sender is to mentally construct a substitute sender.

In the absence of clear codes or non-verbal clues, interpretation must stem from an act of imagining the intended message of the beloved. The foundation for this act of imagination is, as noted in the first chapter, that the lovers do indeed share one mind; the mind of the beloved is the mind of the lover; therefore, what the lover imagines the beloved meant must equal the beloved's intention. While this act of imagination may embody an ideal of embracing the beloved, it empties out the role of the sender, replacing it with an imagined sender. Regardless of how closely this cognitive act matches the sender's wishes and/or intentions, the entire communicative act – if it can correctly be called that – occurs solely within the mind of the receiver; the connection between the sender's intent is severed from its eventual meaning.

Particularly important in this shift is the movement of consent described in the pervious chapter. If the beloved has offered consent prior to a particular message, the lover has at least one connection – however tenuous – to the perceived world. Without a previously established consent, obscure messages are understood by imagining a sender to establish intent. Given the self-contained quality of these interpretations, correctly ascertaining consent leaves one with three explanations: a miraculous connection like the one described in chapter one, luck, or destiny. All three, and particularly the last, still play an important role in defining how “successful” relationships.

Marie de France’s *Chevrefoil* presents a clear portrait of how even the most successful of *collective individual* communications erases the sending beloved from the communication. As noted in the first chapter, the only clear evidence of text we have is the name Tristan. From this one word, the queen (presumably Isolde) unpacks a message seventeen lines long. Even if one adopts Hanning’s position that the medium is the message – that hazelwood and chevrefoil symbolize all of these elements – the fact remains that the queen assumes a message, with an intent, directed toward her. She incorporates the one word, its placement in her path, and the medium of the tree into her understanding. Even if one includes the element of whittling – even though it is not shown in the lai but is included in other Tristan tales – she must imagine what he is trying to tell her. The added content in this message has been supplied entirely by her, not grounded in physical signals. While the possibility exists that the message was sent by a Tristan seeking desperately to warn her away, the queen constructs a Tristan desperate to be with her and make love in the forest. Despite having some concrete evidence – in the form of consent – that the beloved approximates the lover’s constructed ideal, most of the this message is imagined by

Isolde. Marie does not offer other signals to destabilize the lovers, so this sequence does not actively undermine their communication. Rather, as noted in the first chapter, the unlikelihood of the imagined message matching the actual intent emphasizes the remarkable unity of the lovers.

The communication, therefore, is between the lover and an image in the lover's head. Even though Marie does not gesture toward this theme, many works within this tradition show a remarkable awareness of the importance imagination plays in these "communications." In fact, these works often incorporate language that shows an awareness of imagination's role in cognition, according to models shared by medieval and Renaissance England. Such explorations, by pointing out how these messages' added contents stem from the mind and not the words, often suggest that the love is also in the mind alone and therefore not reciprocated.

### CONSTRUCTING A SENDER

As in so many other ways, Thomas' Tristan helps to establish the conventions for emphasizing the importance of the imagination when texts' intentions are unclear. When Tristran uses his statue as a substitute for the absent Yseut, Tristran enacts this portion of the "relationship" entirely in his imagination, with the imagined message coming from inside Tristran. In fact, Tristran "became angry with it when he himself was in anger,/ whether brought on by his thoughts or dreams,"<sup>505</sup> dreams formed entirely in his mind. His relationship with the

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<sup>505</sup> Thomas. "Tristran." *Early Tristan Poems, Vol.2*. Trans. Stewart Gregory. Ed. Norris Lacy. (Cambridge: Brewer, 1998), 947-8. "Corrusce soi quant est irez,/ Que par penser [e] que par songes."

statue mirrors the one he has with Yseut; in both cases, he receives her responses largely through imagining a sender that shares one mind with himself.

By providing a physical substitute for Yseut, Thomas raises the possibility that Tristran's interpretation involves him creating an image of the sender – Yseut – to substitute for the real sender in order to establish intent. Given Tristran's uncanny ability to communicate with Yseut, one must assume that others – lacking the lovers' privileged interpretive connection – also use some mental creation to imagine a sender's intent. Thomas shows an awareness that intent may be beyond the reach of a receiver. In addition, the need to create an image of the sender to establish intent indicates an awareness that the same words from a different sender – a different context – may mean something different; such awareness shows a working knowledge of relational semantics. It even raises the more disturbing specter that all human understanding has no firm basis outside our minds.

A second anxiety – epistemological in nature and more deeply seated than concerns about a collective identity – appears in Tristran's relationship to the statue. How is one to know anything when it is difficult to tell if something is imaginary? How is one to distinguish between things that are imaginary and things that have a basis in a commonly accepted reality? Thomas' concerns echo a growing consciousness of an inner reality within the mind and its potentially uncertain relationship to the “outer,” commonly shared world.

Thomas' exploration of this epistemological anxiety incorporates language central to medieval cognitive models. As seen in the Tristran's long exploration of his motives for marrying Yseut aux Blanche Mains at the start of the Bodleian fragment, Thomas is clearly concerned with Tristran's psychological and cognitive state. The fragment opens by stating that

“his mind was ever changing,”<sup>506</sup> suggesting the importance of Tristan’s psychological state. Tristan creates a statue to stand in for his beloved Yseut just as he constructs an image of her in his head. Returning to the statue sequences in the Turin fragment, Thomas keeps repeating various forms of “penser” six times in forty-nine lines.<sup>507</sup> Thomas describes Tristan’s conversations with the statue as “thoughts or dreams,”<sup>508</sup> both things contained within his own mind. Tristran’s “thinking induced false beliefs”<sup>509</sup> that Yseut loved another.<sup>510</sup> Tristran has no evidence to support these beliefs, so he must have imagined it. Tristran’s imaginings are consistently described as false. These imaginings are called “misconceptions”<sup>511</sup> once and “errors”<sup>512</sup> four times in this short section. Pointing out that any other character in the poem would identify these imaginings as false emphasizes that these things exist only in Tristran’s mind.<sup>513</sup> Making the connection even clearer to Tristran’s imagination, Thomas highlights the

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<sup>506</sup> Ibid., 54. “Sis corages mue sovent.”

<sup>507</sup> Turin, 942-991.

<sup>508</sup> Ibid., 948. “Penser...songes

<sup>509</sup> Ibid., 955. “Hicest penser errur le fait.”

<sup>510</sup> Stewart Gregory translates “penser” as “brooding,” but a more precise translation would seem to be thinking.

<sup>511</sup> Turin, 949. “Mençoinges.”

<sup>512</sup> Ibid., 955, 985, 988, 997. It appears as error and irur.

<sup>513</sup> Interestingly, the Norse version does not emphasize Tristran’s error as much. First, the Norse does not refer to error as often. Second, encountering the statues for the first time, Kardin believes the statues are real (197-9).



importance of Tristran's imagination by referring to the statue consistently as an "image,"<sup>514</sup> a word sharing the same linguistic root as the imagination. In the statue section, therefore, Thomas emphasizes the fact that Tristran constructs both mental and physical images of Yseut, constructions that lead to error because they erase or replace the real Yseut.

Both the statue of Yseut and the imagined construction Tristran uses to "animate" her are divorced from the real Yseut. Because of her absence, these "images" clearly come from Tristran's imagination. Like his relationship with the real Yseut, his relationship with the statue is divorced from any outside context. This lack of a context outside Tristran's mind parallels the lack of a social context for the lovers' relationship. How is one to tell whether the lovers' love is merely imagined? By questioning the truth of their communication, Thomas undermines the very foundation that legitimizes the lovers' transgressions.

The fact that these communications are imaginary in Thomas does not necessarily force one to conclude that the text should be read as an attack on the lovers. Given the lack of other judgmental signals and the frequency with which the lovers' imaginations match their beloved's feelings, the poem does not seem to work on an error-based model, one where interpretive error equals inappropriate love. Rather, balancing error and correctness leaves open the uncertain dialogue between fancy and imagination, introducing skepticism into what is presented primarily as a positive ideal for relationships.

Setting the imaginary quality of these communications in balance with the idea of privileged lovers communications becomes an important element in many of these medieval romances. Marie sets the unrealistic but correct imaginary communication in *Chevrefoil* against the fantasy-based uncertainty of Guillardun in *Eliduc*. Guillardun carefully avoids self-delusion,

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<sup>514</sup> Ibid., 945, 967, 974, 986.

staying firmly in the realm of the observable. Eliduc has erased himself fully from the communications, and she refuses to let the intent she imagines for him control the message. Her decision to go with Eliduc is not based on self-delusion but conscious, skeptical choice. As discussed before, however, her relationship is presented less favorably than Isolde's in the companion lai.

Chaucer raises this same question in *Troilus and Criseyde*, having Troilus confront ambiguous messages from Criseyde. Chaucer, however, complicates the issue by placing an even greater emphasis on the imaginary qualities of Troilus' communications with Criseyde than Thomas does on Tristran's communications with Yseut. The emphases on communications between lovers, the societal pressures against the lovers, and Troilus' desire to share a privileged understanding of Criseyde place the poem firmly within the tradition of collective individualism. Troilus faces social pressures against his love that are seemingly addressed by the depth of their love and compatibility. Their compatibility is seemingly established – at least in part – by their communications, though many of these communications are romanticized by Pandarus in transmission. These communications are characterized by relational semantics and the importance of reception in interpretation. Chaucer emphasizes Troilus' delusional qualities, suggesting that their love – and through extension the concept of lovers sharing one mind – is an illusion. Chaucer emphasizes aggressively the imaginary quality of the lovers' relationship by showing Troilus' misinterpretations, thereby critiquing the lover specifically and, by extension, collective individualism generally.

Chaucer presents the potentially delusional quality of collective individualism in the inner workings of Troilus' mind as he interprets an ambiguous letter from Criseyde.

But ofte gan the herte glade and quake

Of Troilus, whil that he gan it rede,  
 So as the wordes yave hym hope or drede.  
  
 But finally, he took al for the beste  
 That she hym wroot, for somewhat he byheld  
 On which hym thoughte he myghte his herte reste,  
 Al covered she tho wordes under sheld.  
 Thus to the more worthi part he held,  
 That what for hope and Pandarus byheste,  
 His grete wo foryede he at the leste.<sup>515</sup>

Troilus eventually takes what Criseyde writes “al for the beste,” deciding to set aside his woe and continue to pursue Criseyde. Despite this, it is easy to see how another reader might take Criseyde’s lukewarm or at least vague response as conflicted feelings or even as a polite rejection. How does Troilus negotiate the meaning of Criseyde’s letter? Chaucer makes it clear that Troilus fills in the gaps where unambiguous signals might be – mentioned above – by emphasizing “somwhat [...] On which hym thoughte he myghte his herte reste – the words [that] yave hym hope”<sup>516</sup> – over those words that caused him to “drede.”<sup>517</sup> Chaucer makes it clear that Troilus emphasizes the positive elements of the letter as “more worthi,” filling the interpretive gaps with hints he has gleaned from the words that gladdened him. Troilus actually forms two

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<sup>515</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer. “Troilus and Criseyde.” *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Ed. Larry Benson. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 2.1321-1330.

<sup>516</sup> Ibid., 2.1325-1329.

<sup>517</sup> Ibid., 2.1323.

patterns of meaning for the letter, one that causes his heart to “glade” and one that causes his heart to “drede.” Faced with two equally compelling interpretations, Troilus must fill in the important detail of emphasis that knowledge of Criseyde’s intent would answer.

Troilus’ search for intent runs the fine line between fancy and imagination. While Chaucer does not use medieval medical terminology to discuss Troilus’ interpretation in this sequence, Chaucer refers to the process of thinking or interpretation – including words such as *thoughte*, *byhelde*, and *took* – three times in this short sequence. Doing so, Chaucer raises the question of just how much of this interpretation has Troilus supplied. The significant portion of the letter – the emphasis on words indicating intent – is imagined by Troilus. In effect, Troilus imagines a substitute Criseyde who writes the letter, pointing the words that indicate love. The communication, therefore, would seem to be between Troilus and an image of Criseyde in Troilus’ head.

Chaucer reintroduces the idea of creating an imaginary Criseyde to supply missing information in the scenes where Troilus fruitlessly awaits Criseyde’s return. Further emphasizing the connection, Chaucer echoes the precise phrase, noting that, after ten days, Troilus’ heart lay between “hope and drede.”<sup>518</sup> Just like the first time, Troilus chooses to emphasize his hope. This time, however, Troilus has more evidence to support his hopes; her promises, the “hestes olde”<sup>519</sup> that she fails eventually to fulfill, as well as their time together. The poem mentions her consent/promise in four consecutive stanzas.<sup>520</sup> This repetition shows how Troilus’ hope has some basis outside his mind.

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<sup>518</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.1207.

<sup>519</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.1208.

<sup>520</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.1190, 5.1191, 5.1204, 5.1208.

In the scene that indicates Troilus has finally accepted that Criseyde will not return, Troilus addresses an absent Criseyde. Rather than substitute an imagined receiver or even construct an “image” or statue as did Tristan, Troilus does not imagine her responses. In fact, six of the seven sentences he calls out are questions that are never answered while the seventh is his declaration – perhaps more of a self-accusation – that he took her word as “gospel.”<sup>521</sup> At this point, Troilus most clearly admits the disparity between the real Criseyde and his idealized image of her – the one he constructed/imagined in his mind. Not surprisingly, the image of her he has created centers around what may be thought of as Troilus’ own central trait – steadfastness. Note that he still acts as though watched by this idealized image, what might be called his *ego ideal*.

Like Thomas, Chaucer emphasizes the workings of the lovers’ minds, particularly how forming an image in one’s mind of a person informs one’s interpretation. Chaucer presents a prolonged description of how the lovers form images of one another during their initial seduction. Criseyde wishes for her image to be made “faste” in Troilus’ “mynde” and cautions Troilus that “non other fantasie” creeps into his “brayn.”<sup>522</sup> Given Criseyde’s later choice of Diomedes, Chaucer may be presenting Criseyde’s concern about memory as ironic. Using cognitive terminology – even imprecisely – allows Chaucer to express a concern whether a fantasy can intrude upon the “real” image of another in one’s mind. The emphasis on the mind is continued thirty lines later when Troilus

in his thought gan up and down to wynde

Hires wordes all, and every countenance,

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<sup>521</sup> Ibid., 5.1265.

<sup>522</sup> Ibid., 3.1504-7.

And fermely impressen in his mynde

The leeste point that to him was plesaunce.<sup>523</sup>

This longer sequence makes explicit the connection between “wordes” and the image (or, perhaps more accurately, the fantasy) impressed within his “mynde.” In addition to establishing the importance of the mind in interpretation, this example highlights the selective nature of how this image is formed. Similar to when Troilus reads Criseyde’s first letter, Troilus here chooses to remember only the points that are pleasant to him. More specifically, Troilus links her words to this image of her – an image formed when she is freshly in love with him.

Chaucer then introduces the role of memory into Troilus’ interpretations. When Criseyde goes to the Greeks, Troilus keeps this image of her in his mind.

The lettres ek that she of olde tyme

Hadde hym ysent, he wolde allone rede

An hondred sithe atwixen noon and prime,

Refiguring hire shap, hire wommanhede,

Withinne his herte.<sup>524</sup>

Here, Troilus uses the letters to reinforce this image within his heart – an image that resembles the one that he created himself while reading her first letter. The act is solitary, rather than social, and has a circular quality: Troilus reads the letters with an image of Criseyde in his mind – in order to reinforce or even remake – “refigur[e]” – that image. This is the image that Troilus uses as a stand-in for the absent Criseyde when she sends him ambivalent letters later in the

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<sup>523</sup> Ibid., 3.1541-70.

<sup>524</sup> Ibid., 5.470-474.

poem.<sup>525</sup> Troilus' image of Criseyde stays the same even as Criseyde changes. When Troilus uses the same model of imaginative interpretation after Criseyde has been sent to the Greeks, Criseyde's actions highlight the disparity between herself and the image of her that Troilus has created. Troilus' "hope alwey hym blente,"<sup>526</sup> making him blind to the possibility that she will never come back. Troilus' hope stems from his image of Criseyde as pining in love as deeply as he himself pines. While Troilus' idea makes sense within the tradition of sharing one mind, Chaucer emphasizes the absence of Criseyde and how Troilus seems to narcissistically substitute himself for her.

Even the moment where Troilus finally acknowledges that Criseyde may no longer love him is presented as erasing or expelling an image from Criseyde's mind. Troilus concludes – to an absent Criseyde – that "clene out of youre mynde / ye han me cast."<sup>527</sup> While Troilus considers that, in a meaningful way, he previously resided in Criseyde's mind, this phrase also acknowledges that the connection – if it wasn't entirely imaginary – has been severed when Criseyde's image of him is deleted from her memory.

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<sup>525</sup> Criseyde similarly seeks to secure the image of Troilus in her memory (3.1548-54). Chaucer may be making another ironic comment about Criseyde's changeability because this image clearly fades. Troilus' image of Criseyde stays the same as Criseyde changes; Criseyde's image of Troilus would seem to have faded as Troilus stays the same.

<sup>526</sup> Ibid., 5.1195..

<sup>527</sup> Ibid., 5.1695-6.

Evidence that the reception of Chaucer's poem included an awareness of cognitive models can be found in Henryson's fifteenth century *Testament of Cresseid*.<sup>528</sup> Henryson's *Testament* was conceived as an episode that Chaucer chose not to include in his romance, where the lovers see but do not recognize each other. By pointing out the difference between the lovers' idealized images of one another and the reality upon which these lovers are based, Henryson suggests that Troilus' love, even when involved with Criseyde, may have been equally faulty. Henryson's language, even more explicitly than Chaucer's, emphasizes the importance and error of the fancy in the lovers' memories.

Henryson's poem presents an episode between Troilus' discovery of Criseyde's possible change of affections and Troilus' death, where neither lover recognizes the other. When Troilus saw Cresseid among the lepers, he "knew [Cresseid] nocht."<sup>529</sup> Henryson does not represent disfiguring leprosy as the cause of Troilus' lack of recognition; in fact, Henryson makes no mention of the disease afflicting her. Rather, Henryson identifies the cause as Troilus' fancy.

Na wonder was, suppois in mynd that he  
 Tuik hir figure sa sone, an lo! Now quhy;  
 The idole of ane thing in cace may be  
 Sa deip imprentit in the fantasy,  
 That it deludes the wittis outwardly  
 And sa appeiris in forme and lyke estait

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<sup>528</sup> Robert Henryson. "Testament of Cresseid." *The Story of Troilus*. Trans. Ruth K Gordon. (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1998).

<sup>529</sup> *Ibid.*, 365.



Within the mynd as it was figurait.<sup>530</sup>

This short section, contained within an envelope pattern marked by “mynd” on both ends, shows how the image or “idole” formed in the “fantasy” can overwhelm the “wittes.” The “idole” of Cresseid as he perceived her when they were in love is so deeply imprinted in Troilus’ fancy (“fantasy”) and so entirely different than her current state that Troilus’ mind cannot make a connection between the fancy’s image (from his sight) and the memory’s. Another possible and potentially overlapping cognitive construction would set the fancy’s image – now in memory – against the imagination’s image of what Cresseid might now be like, an image built from the memory and kept the same because Troilus wishes for her to remain beautiful. Both of these possible cognitive progressions show the role of a “reader’s” desire in making meaning; Troilus’ desire in this case – a prejudgment on his part – is that Cresseid remains the ideal of love and beauty that he remembers.<sup>531</sup> The “idole” itself, due to being “figurait” by the mind, is potentially unreliable in the first place; this image is formed or figured by the receiver, in this case, Troilus. The passage of time increases the likelihood that the image is inaccurate, as changes to the person increase differences enough to make any connection to the original person unlikely. In fact, the original Cresseid is erased entirely in favor of Troilus’ image; the entire process is contained in Troilus’ mind and isolated from the world around him.

Returning to Chaucer’s version, it is difficult to see clearly the target of his critique, but more evidence suggests that it destabilizes the idea of sharing one mind more than it suggests

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<sup>530</sup> Ibid., 365.

<sup>531</sup> In modern connectionist cognitive terms, the elements of Cresseid are not enough to overcome the “threshold of activation” necessary for Troilus to connect the image of her when they were in love with that of her as a leper.

Troilus is unworthy as a suitor. Even though Troilus is often a figure of ridicule, lolling about in bed, climbing in privies, and swooning, he is attentive to Criseyde's wishes and more steadfast in his affection than wise. Chaucer, then, directs the *critique of self-absorption* at the idea of *collective individualism*.

## CONSTRUCTING CONSENT

As noted in the previous chapter, one of the key shifts in these lines of communication during the period in question is that sharing one mind is assumed not to be brought about by consent, but the indication of compatibility and consent. Put more simply, consent "moves" from input to output.

This linguistic shift mirrors literary lovers' increasing – but certainly not complete – self-determination in marriage and the need to establish compatibility and consent rather than concealing these very things from people who could separate the lovers. The goal of the communications is no longer to communicate two levels of information, one of which is hidden. The goal of these communications is to test whether the lovers are compatible. The Renaissance texts, having inherited the generic convention that lovers share privileged communications, use this as the litmus test for compatibility and consent. As seen in the previous chapter, however, these same conventions erase the sender from the interpretation, leaving only an imagined (rather than fantasized) sender. If the imagined sender matches the real sender, then the lovers must share one mind.

The shift of consent means that the lover has even less evidence to activate private lovers' secondary meanings. In medieval cognitive terms, the fantasy has even less of a role to play and the imagination takes an even more prominent role. Later in the period, the *self-*

*involved critique* becomes increasingly directed at individuals rather than at the generic expectations of sharing one mind. In order to be worthy, one must correctly construct an imaginary sender that matches with the real beloved even though the beloved has not yet indicated interest. Those who imagine incorrectly are shown to be unworthy, too reliant on their own perspective of the world. In contrast, those who imagine correctly despite the greater difficulty are shown to be even more remarkable. By romanticizing even more this interpretive connection, the *critique of self-absorption*, much like the *unintentional critique*, comes to reinforce the ideal of sharing one mind.

*King Horn*, like Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, provides a medieval example of exploring the idea of constructing a sender within the context of courtship. *King Horn's* Rymenhild provides one of the earliest examples of an error-based *critique of self-absorption*. Looking closely at the cognitive elements in the wider tradition suggests that she places too much emphasis on her senses and forms improper patterns from the information taken in by her common senses. Lacan's terminology clarifies the issue. In both scenes where she misrecognizes Horn, her idealized self-image – Horn – is tied to his superiority. In the bedroom scene where she mistakes Athulf for Horn, Rymenhild is blinded both by her desire (senses) and by the idea that the most beautiful man in her world desires her (an imaginary figure – her ego ideal). In the recognition scene, it is in part Rymenhild's inability to consider Horn outside her preconceptions – particularly class boundaries – that prevents her from imagining that he is the beggar.<sup>532</sup> In both cases, the romance shows Rymenhild to be wrong, or at least to miss an entire

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<sup>532</sup> This class commentary matches well with the reading of the poem by Ronald B. Herzman, Graham Drake, and Eve Salisbury in *Four Romances of England* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1999).

layer of meaning to which she should have access. She also, as noted in the previous chapter, falls into the very traps she hopes the ring will prevent in Horn. Despite this, Rymenhild's overabundant appetite and imagination seem to be balanced by her steadfast devotion during Horn's long absence. Her character, then, seems to be a mix of positive and negative traits, both linked to her preconceptions, but she does not come across as unworthy. She does come across as unrealistically idealistic, but this characteristic can best be explained by the expectations drawn from other romances. As such, the critique of self-absorption in *King Horn* follows medieval tradition by having the critique directed at the lead lovers, thereby critiquing the ideal rather than the character. However, *King Horn* anticipates the Renaissance tradition by presenting the inability to ascertain a hidden message as an error.

Sidney's *Old Arcadia*<sup>533</sup> presents a range of entertaining but baffling interpretive situations between prospective lovers that become clearer within the framework of the *critique of self-absorption*. Sidney brings together the key elements of this tradition: absent senders whose absence makes interpretation problematic, the construction of imaginary senders to determine intent, and cognitive terminology to describe this construction. The key cognitive capacity in these musings is the frequently mentioned "fancy." *OA* may be seen as one of the earliest texts to incorporate an error-based model of the *critique of self-absorption*, whereby, despite being prior to consent, lovers are able to make interpretive leaps that suggest they share privileged connections with their beloveds. In contrast, other lovers are shown to be inappropriate because their imagined senders do not match the people they are trying to imagine. While Sidney's

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<sup>533</sup> Sir Philip Sidney. *Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia (Old Arcadia)*. Ed. Katharine Duncan-Jones. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994).

princesses are too skeptical of their insights to seem as though they share one mind with the princes, the princesses do share a connection with the princes that sees through gender and class.

Much like Thomas' *Tristan*, Sidney's *Old Arcadia* shows a clear concern with characters' psychological states, suggesting that these states play an important role in constructing the meaning of statements they have heard; more specifically, the construction of meaning involves constructing a potential sender. Long sections of the poem are devoted to describing the characters' internal monologues and musings. Presenting the lovers thinking in isolation about their beloveds suggests the self-involved quality of such musings. Sidney's *Old Arcadia* transmits the medieval convention of using cognitive terminology to represent lovers' self-involved interpretations, particularly when meaning is difficult to determine due to an uncertain sender. Sidney's *OA*, like Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, does not deploy cognitive terminology as precisely as Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid*. Sidney uses the term "fancy" indiscriminately to describe all things needing the fancy or imagination, perhaps because fancy also carries the secondary meaning of affection. One of the earliest references to fancy occurs when Sidney's narrator addresses his readers, describing a shepherd "in order that you may take [this shepherd] the better into your fancies" (27). A more precise cognitive description would be for the readers to use their imaginations, as the shepherd is not physically present. While Sidney's confusion of fancy and imagination is almost certainly due to an incomplete knowledge of the medical terms, this linguistic blurring supports – perhaps unintentionally – his blurring of whether one's understanding is accurate.

Musidorus, dressed as Dorus, also emphasizes cognition when he creates a poem describing how he creates an image of his beloved Pamela.<sup>534</sup> Musidorus describes his musings as the “books of a fancy,”<sup>535</sup> though clearly the imagination plays the greater role. Similar to the statue scene in Thomas’ *Tristan*, Musidorus takes inanimate objects and imagines them as his beloved.

But to the cedar, queen of the woods, when I lift my beteaed eyes,  
Then do I shape to myself that form which reigns so within me,  
And think there she do dwell and hear what plaints I do utter:  
When that noble top doth nod, I believe she salutes me;  
When by the wind it maketh noise, I do think she doth answer.<sup>536</sup>

Musidorus externalizes the image of Pamela and superimposes them on the trees. Even though the sounds have no meaning on their own, Musidorus creates meaning where there is none. Sidney’s language emphasizes the interiority of this experience, pointing out that the form exists “within [him].” As with *Tristan*, an entire conversation is carried on with an imagined lover. This scene differs from *Tristan* in that Musidorus, by including it in a poem and being so self-aware of his process, seems to be able to ascertain the difference between this imagined conversation and a real one. The poem takes the idea of “form” and converts it into a Neo-Platonic conceit common to many similar love poems. Furthermore, Musidorus recites this

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<sup>534</sup> For clarity, I will use the princes’ names rather than the names they adopt. As such, Pryocles will keep a masculine pronoun even though Sidney uses the feminine to describe Pyrocles as the Amazon Cleophila.

<sup>535</sup> Sidney, *OA*, 77.

<sup>536</sup> *Ibid.*

poem in the presence of his beloved Pamela, making it an indirect declaration of his love to her. Sidney does not offer her response to the poem immediately, but soon after, describes her as “having had no small stirring of her mind toward him” but, due to his class, “sought to overcome it.”<sup>537</sup> Pamela’s response indicates her interior feelings, feelings that will prove more accurate than a construction of him based primarily on his class. Musidorus then composes a poem with Mopsa as its ostensible object but containing a “second meaning” directed at Pamela.<sup>538</sup> Once again, he returns to the idea of his beloved within his mind, her “image lives in [him].”<sup>539</sup>

In addition to emphasizing the imaginary, this sequence includes erroneous interpretation by the unworthy Mopsa. Mopsa continues to see herself as the object of the Musidorus’ poetry, even though Pamela notes that only “great ignorance” could allow anyone to miss Musidorus’ second, and true, meaning. Then, when Pamela questions his worth, Musidorus asks Pamela to deliver a fine jewel to Mopsa. Once again, Pamela shows her sensitivity to this secret message, noting his worth before passing the jewel on to the shepherdess. Unlike the communications between Tristan and Isolde, where his messages are equally true on both levels, both as a servant and as a lover, in each of these examples, one interpretation is clearly wrong. Mopsa’s inability to interpret this correctly indicates that she is not right for him, even as Pamela’s ability to do so indicates her compatibility.

Philoclea’s response to the Amazon-disguised Pyrocles also indicates that her inner, perhaps subconscious, emotional response is more accurate than one based on solely on her senses. Her *communis sensus*, through her fancy, tells her Pyrocles is a woman, but some insight

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<sup>537</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>538</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>539</sup> Ibid.

allows her to secretly form an image of Pyrocles as a man. As noted in the previous chapter, Philoclea actually imagines him a man or, at the very least, being changed from a woman into a man.<sup>540</sup> First, she has come up with an entire scenario entirely in her mind. Second, she does not know his feelings (consent). Third, the lack of any real connection to her reality is clear because of the impossibility of a sex change. Because of these two things, it is clear Philoclea has constructed a version of Pyrocles in her imagination (as opposed to her fancy). Despite the fact that the scenario is completely unrealistic in a literal sense, her imaginary construct of Pyrocles is more accurate than one based primarily on the senses. Philoclea's wishes reflect in her an inner consent she has not yet admitted to herself, a subconscious consent that matches well with Abelard's definition of sin, as discussed in the previous chapter.<sup>541</sup> Sidney's presentation of the recognition motif both satirizes and romanticizes the idea an imaginative connection between lovers.

Sidney's version of the error-based model makes a clear distinction between imaginative compatibility and consent, particularly when highlighting inappropriate suitors. While the female leads show their worth by accurately constructing images of their suitors, inappropriate suitors such as Mopsa, King Basilius, or Gynecia refuse to let the fact that their beloveds withhold consent change the image in their head. Because they will not change the image in their head to account for the feelings of their beloveds, these characters are shown to be unworthy. In cognitive terms, the improper lovers place greater value on their imagined

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<sup>540</sup> Ibid., 97-98.

<sup>541</sup> Abelard. "What Sin and Vice Consist in (From *Know Thyself* or *Ethics*)." Trans. D.E. Luscombe. Ed. Richard Bosley and Martin Tweedale. (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview, 1998). (*Scito te ipsum*). 549-559.



beloveds than on reality and can safely be labeled self-involved. Gynecia, in fact, works to force Pyrocles to fit her image of him.

The issues of compatibility, consent, and imagination come together in the scene where Pyrocles overhears Gynecia in the cave. As discussed in the previous chapter, Pyrocles has no way to determine Gynecia is the poet/sender, which makes the poem lack a specific intent other than a general declaration of love. When he hears the poem, Pyrocles asks “who can it be that can make so lively a portraiture of my miseries?”<sup>542</sup> This kind of language echoes the “one mind” mentality seen in Philoclea’s lament that Pyrocles has spoken “words which she thought might with more cause have been spoken by her own mouth”.<sup>543</sup> Both situations indicate compatibility of sentiment, but Philoclea’s connection with Pyrocles indicates something more than Pyrocles’ temporary connection with Gynecia. Philoclea does, after all, know the source of her poem. Contrasting this, Sidney emphasizes the need for Pyrocles to bring his mental image into contact with the actual poet before offering consent. Pyrocles mentions to himself the qualified quality of this connection, stating that he and the poet are “at the least hand fellow prentices to one master.”<sup>544</sup> The shared emotion inspired in Pyrocles is merely one step in the process. The next is to bring the image formed in his head by the poem into contact with the actual poet because, Sidney makes clear, general compatibility does not equal person-specific consent. The other key difference is that consent is not mutual in the latter case; Pyrocles does not agree to love Gynecia. The primary indicator of this – and reason for it – is that the image in Pyrocles’ does not match with the actual Gynecia.

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<sup>542</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>543</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>544</sup> Ibid., 159.

Sidney's response in *OA* to the absence of a sender has two steps: first, one constructs a sender largely in the imagination and second, one must compare that imaginary construct with observable evidence, the best of which would be a clear declaration of approval or rejection. Such a model places the burden on the lover to make this comparison correctly and only then to continue holding on to it. The *critique of self-absorption*, in this case, is primarily directed not at the expectations of sharing one mind, but at the individual who has judged erroneously.

Sidney uses a similar model to undermine the narrator of *Astrophil and Stella*.

Astrophil's declarations of Stella's love appear reliable even though she expresses reservations about kissing him, because such reservations fit with social and generic expectations. However, through much of the sonnet cycle, Stella is silent. Even when her words are present, Stella has been erased entirely from the message, as her words are merely a catalyst for a message from an image of her in his head to himself. When Astrophil reports her speech in the *Eighth Song*, he adopts the position of a privileged interpreter of her words.

...her speech was such,  
 As not ears but heart did touch:  
 While such wise she love denied,  
 As yet love she signified.<sup>545</sup>

Astrophil asserts that her public, literal meaning denying that she loves him is merely a cover for her true signified, that she loves him. As the two meanings are mutually exclusive, one is in error, placing Astrophil's construction firmly within the Renaissance conventions of sharing one mind. In doing so, he follows the Renaissance convention of error-based communications,

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<sup>545</sup> Sir Philip Sidney. "Eighth Song." *Astrophil and Stella*. *Sir Philip Sidney: The Major Works*. Ed. Katharine Duncan-Jones. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004), 71-2.

where one meaning is right and the other wrong.<sup>546</sup> Even the language approximates the cognitive ideas in *OA*, denying the sensory, phantasy-driven in favor of an image in his “heart.” If only there were evidence that Sidney followed the lesser-known Aristotelian cognitive model where the seat of cognition was the heart rather than the brain, the connection would be indisputable, but it seems more likely that Sidney is merely linking the interpretation to emotion. Lacking such definitive evidence, we have only the elements laid out before: parallel meanings only one of which is correct with that same one available only to a true lover, described with an awareness of interiority. Rather than following this model precisely, however, Sidney introduces the idea of error by emphasizing the disparity between the imagined intent linked to an image in Astrophil’s mind and the actual words.

While Astrophil works with the generic conventions of *collective individualism*, Sidney, by setting Astrophil’s imagined loving Stella as the sender against her words denying love, introduces the idea that this imaginary content may only be accepted conditionally. The *Eleventh Song* serves to bring this point into clear focus when Stella repeatedly and almost rudely tells him to forget her and Astrophil stubbornly holds on to his image of a loving Stella.<sup>547</sup> Clearly, Astrophil’s self-definition is so deeply vested in the idea of Stella’s loving gaze as the perspective from which he wants to be observed. Sidney seems to split his satire equally between the unrealistic expectations of *collective individualism* and Astrophil himself. Given *OA*, however, one suspects that the primary issue is that Astrophil refuses to see any disparities. Sidney, then, maintains the notion of a privileged connection between lovers, but introduces the notion that this connection needs to be set in dialogue with the fantasy.

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<sup>546</sup> As opposed to the medieval model where both meanings coexist simultaneously.

<sup>547</sup> Sidney, *AS*, *Eleventh Song*.

These Renaissance texts seem to address the issue of the potential unreliability of the imagination through a process of comparing images constructed with the imagination and phantasy. Essentially, given an absent sender and therefore absent intent, one must start the process with by imagining a sender. As most of the literary examples from later in the periods at hand focus on courtship, consent cannot be assumed and therefore factored into the construct. The first the step is to take the text and imagine a sender. This sender may take a form similar to the receiver's idealized self, and therefore likely includes an element of wishful thinking. The key step, however, is when the character is shown to make an open-minded comparison between this imaginary construct and the next encounter with the beloved. If the image and the fantasy match, then the character is shown to be correct, moving the lovers into the tradition of the *collective individual*, as discussed in the first chapter. If, however, there is a disparity between the image and the phantasy, the character is shown to be inappropriate and therefore subject to the *critique of self-absorption*.

After indicating to the reader or audience a disparity between the imagined construct and the sensory ones, writers using this comparative method indicate the *critique of self-absorption* in two ways. First, the character can fail to notice the disparity. The character's ability to form patterns is clearly isolated from reality, the character's judgments are shown to be unreliable. The second method is to have the character notice the disparity and refuse to allow the beloved to refuse consent. This second method incorporates a different set of conventions than the *critique of self-absorption* and will therefore be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. The first method, following conventions established in Sidney, provides the means to highlight inappropriate suitors for the rest of the period.

Shakespeare incorporates the conventions of the *critique of self-absorption* to highlight Malvolio's transgressions as a lover in *Twelfth Night*. As discussed in the previous chapter, the modern response to Malvolio is conflicted due to shifts since the Renaissance in values regarding class and self-determination. Because of this, modern productions often take care to perform Malvolio as self-involved as soon as he receives the letter he thinks comes from Olivia. The previous chapter discussed the letter in detail, but the scene that more clearly indicates Malvolio's self-involvement is when he approaches Olivia with his encoded acceptance of her love – the wearing of stockings and smiling.<sup>548</sup>

For these communications, Malvolio has substituted a constructed Olivia whose message consistently indicates the same preconceived meaning; whatever she says signifies her love for Malvolio. Having made this substitution, Malvolio has erased the real Olivia from the communications entirely. Even though Olivia responds to his encoded declaration with nine questions and three exclamations of confused alarm, Malvolio never perceives any confusion in her. He interprets her suggestion that he go to bed as a sexual innuendo. In so doing, he substitutes his image of her, ignoring any confusion indicated in her voice or in the rest of her responses. As such, he never sets his image in a meaningful relation to the real Olivia, to the commonly agreed upon perception of her responses.

Several other moments in the play suggest that interpretation, rather than class, should be the primary lens through which we judge Malvolio. Language and interpretation are at the heart of the troubling scene in the coal cellar. When confronted with Feste's assertion that the room is light, Malvolio doesn't even consider the possibility that his own perceptions might not be

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<sup>548</sup> William Shakespeare. "Twelfth Night." *The Complete Pelican Shakespeare*. Ed. Stephen Orgel and A.R. Braunmuller. (New York: Penguin, 2002), 3.4.

correct. The problem is not that he is wrong, but that he is unwilling to consider things from another perspective. The same can be said of his attitudes toward morality, as pointed out by Toby, who points out that Malvolio's personal condemnation of cakes and ale will not necessarily prevent others from partaking.

CHAPTER SIX  
COERCED CONSENT  
WILLFUL MISREADING

Loving in trueth, and fayne in verse my loue to show,  
That she, deare Shee, might take som pleasure of my paine,  
Pleasure might cause her reade, reading might make her know,  
Knowledge might pittie winne, and pity grace obtaine,...

Sir Philip Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella* #1 (1591)<sup>549</sup>

I would you were as I would have you be!

Olivia in *Twelfth Night* 3.1.123<sup>550</sup>

These quotes from *Twelfth Night* and *Astrophil and Stella* may not seem to have much in common, but both show characters acting on a desired response, rather than respectfully accepting rejections from those they love. Erasing a clear intent from the beloved and substituting instead one's own desires seems to go contrary to the tradition of sharing one mind as identified in the previous chapters, but it does build on the *critique of self-absorption*, moving from self-delusion to conscious coercion. Deploy these generic conventions in isolation and

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<sup>549</sup> Sir Philip Sidney. *Sir Philip Sidney: The Major Works*. Ed. Katharine Duncan-Jones. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004).

<sup>550</sup> William Shakespeare. "Twelfth Night." *The Complete Pelican Shakespeare*. Ed. Stephen Orgel and A.R. Braunmuller. (New York: Penguin, 2002), 3.1.123.

such coercion makes no sense; deployed together, however, these conventions can lead to a consent more coerced than earned. This chapter will trace the development of a form of controlling a young person's consent that stems not from self-deception or paternal authority but from a more insidious place, the assumption that one knows better than the beloved what he or she "really" wants.

These quotations suggest that the beloved should surrender control to the person who knows them better than they know themselves, thus placing the beloved's consent in the hands of the suitors who love/desire them. Within the medieval context, the control over *consent has merely been transferred from the family to the suitor*. The key, however, is that the beloved must be made to understand that the lover has this greater knowledge; often the lover uses persuasion that blurs the lines into coercion, ignoring a clearly stated rejection and adopting a position in relation to the beloved much like that of a litigant in a legal case.

The logic behind the first sonnet in Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* includes a logical progression based upon similar assumptions. Astrophil describes the emotional response that he hopes Stella will follow as she reads his poetry, with her greater knowledge of his suffering leading to "grace."<sup>551</sup> For the purposes of my argument, the key element in this progression is knowledge. Astrophil's implied assertion to Stella is "I know you would love me if you really knew me." This implication is founded upon the idea that Astrophil believes he knows her feelings better than she knows her own and that his love provides him with this insight.<sup>552</sup> Stella

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<sup>551</sup> Sidney AS #1, 4.

<sup>552</sup> For more on Stella's voice, see Fienberg, Nora. "The Emergence of Stella in *Astrophil And Stella*." *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* (Winter 1985), 5-19. See also Roberts, Katherine. "Realism in Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*: The Creation of Stella." *Sidney*



is erased from the process, with Astrophil's imagined – and desired – responses substituted for any of her own.<sup>553</sup>

Stella's absence from the poem might not seem remarkable, given the monologic quality of most lyric poetry; we only hear the poet's voice. Sidney, however, emphasizes throughout this sonnet cycle the frequent disconnect between Astrophil's ideas of Stella and the "actual" Stella.<sup>554</sup> The *Eleventh Song*, for instance, uses dialogue between Stella and Astrophil to make clear the disparity between Astrophil's representation of Stella's feelings and what she says for herself. When Astrophil appears at her window in the night, the best greeting she can offer is "Why, alas, and are you he?/ Be not yet those fancies changed?"<sup>555</sup> In a series of exchanges, Stella indicates her growing impatience with Astrophil's use of the language of courtly love

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*Newsletter and Journal* (Jan. 1993), 30-34. Laura Kolb asserts that, for Astrophil, Stella's presence is unmediated. Such an assertion echoes the *one mind* tradition discussed earlier in the dissertation. Kolb, Laura. "Stella's Voice: Echo and Collaboration in *Astrophil and Stella* 57 and 58." *Sidney Journal* (2012), 79-100.

<sup>553</sup> Erasing women's voices appears in many poems, not the least of which are written by the Cavalier poets like Andrew Marvell. Lady Mary Wroth's sonnets often explore the silencing of women, and her poetry often responds to such themes in poetry written by men, including her uncle, Sir Philip Sidney.

<sup>554</sup> The "actual" Stella to whom I refer is the fictional character in the sonnet cycle rather than the historical figure of Penelope Devereaux, upon whom Sidney modeled the character of Stella. Penelope married Lord Rich in 1581.

<sup>555</sup> Sidney, Sir Philip. "Astrophil and Stella." *Sir Philip Sidney: The Major Works*. Ed. Katharine Duncan-Jones. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004).

while refusing to accept her rejections. She proceeds to state that “in absence will [his love] die,”<sup>556</sup> that “time will these thoughts remove,”<sup>557</sup> and finishes with a frustrated “Come no more, lest I get anger.”<sup>558</sup> Astrophil responds “Absence sure will help, if I/ Can learn how myself to sunder,/ From what in my heart doth lie,”<sup>559</sup> followed by “Time doth as the subject prove;/ With time still th’ affection growth/ In the faithful turtledove,”<sup>560</sup> and concluding “Bliss, I will my bliss forbear,/ Fearing, sweet, you to endanger,/ But my soul shall harbor there.”<sup>561</sup> Astrophil works in the first example on the assumption that he shares one mind with Stella; in the second, on the assumption that he knows better than she does; and in the third, once again, on the assumption that the two are soul-mates. Astrophil’s self-absorption is more narcissistically willful than the ignorance of Malvolio; after all, Olivia does not reject her steward directly.<sup>562</sup>

Scenes like this one between Astrophil and Stella build on the notion that the lover knows his beloved better than she knows herself, taking the idea of one mind into dangerously coercive realms. Refusal to hear a rejection can enforce a silent “consent.” Taken outside the context of consensual lovers, the quotations listed at the beginning of the chapter on lovers sharing one mind take on a more disturbing air.

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<sup>556</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>557</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>558</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>559</sup> Ibid., 13-15.

<sup>560</sup> Ibid., 18-20.

<sup>561</sup> Ibid., 38-40.

<sup>562</sup> It is likely that Olivia does not reject Malvolio directly because she does not entirely understand that he is declaring his love for her.

Previous chapters have explored the role of relational semantics in lovers who seem to share one mind, the importance of recognition in interpretation, and difficulties in establishing intent. At the heart of all of these chapters would seem to be attempts to truly understand the other speaker; desires that intrude upon the process are quickly resolved when that intention is made clear. Occasionally, however, a rejected potential lover is unwilling to accept the meaning of a message that has a clear intention to reject. In these cases, the reader willfully misreads a message to match with his or her desires, adopting a legalistic discourse in a romantic setting. In some cases, this type of reading is literal, following the specific words rather than the intention behind the words. The combative nature of this discourse runs contrary to the ideal of one mind seen in romances where mutual consent is central, as one lover attempts to impose his or her will – desires and/or definitions – on the other. These attempts at coercion are described as for the beloved's own good and revealing the beloved's hidden, unknown love. The beloved is talked into loving another person in a manner best described as coerced consent.

This chapter will explore how the tradition of *one mind* – identified in chapter four, combines with the tradition of *self-absorption* – identified in chapter five, leading to a new trend. This new trend shows unworthy lovers assuming they know those they love better than the beloved characters know themselves. This late development, of *coerced consent*, differs from earlier texts, which consistently condemns the practice. In contrast, the idea of *coerced consent* becomes presented in a positive light, leading eventually to the tradition of the “reformed rake.” As seen in previous chapters, early texts in the romance tradition contrast coercion and consent. This chapter will briefly discuss earlier condemnations of coerced consent before exploring positive representations of it. Fikenhild's attempts in *King Horn* to force Rymenhild to marry

him are described in terms that modern readers would identify as rape.<sup>563</sup> Later versions of Tristan import this discourse of dominance into King Mark's behavior toward Isolde but do not include the idea that he is trying to convince her to love him. Poems such as Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* introduce ambiguity into these coercions but do not abandon the idea that such force is troubling. It is in Sidney's *Old Arcadia* that the princes' attempts to woo the princesses are finally presented as indicating the women's true feelings, therefore justifying the deception and coercion in courtship.<sup>564</sup> The bulk of this chapter will focus on how Shakespeare then picks up on this theme in *All's Well That Ends Well*.

The idea of coerced consent is a late development even though the components at its heart – discussed in the previous chapters – appear in the earliest romances. These components, when taken together, work as a syllogism justifying how one lover may convince another to love him or her. By the time of Sidney, the romantic ideal of one mind has wide circulation in canonical texts. Consent is the key to determining marriage/love, but, building on Abelard's notion of intent, it is possible that one may not know one's own feelings or one's own

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<sup>563</sup> I hesitate to use the medieval "raptus" because of the widespread debate over the term, particularly in relation to cases directed toward Chaucer (and, later, Malory). In fourteenth-century English law, the term *raptus* ambiguously indicated either abduction or forced coitus. For an overview of both the scholarly tradition and the fourteenth-century legal tradition, see Cannon, Christopher. "Raptus in the Chaumpaigne Release and a Newly Discovered Document Concerning the Life of Geoffrey Chaucer." (*Speculum*, Jan., 1993), 74-94.

<sup>564</sup> Sir Philip Sidney. *Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia (Old Arcadia)*. Ed. Katharine Duncan-Jones. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994).

willingness to consent. Putting these ideas together, it is possible that a lover knows his beloved's mind better than she knows herself. In this case, convincing her to love is merely revealing her own "true" feelings to her. As we will see, coercion is not limited to male lovers forcing themselves on women.

Returning to earlier works, the use of literal, legalistic interpretations contrary to the spirit of the law and consent were criticized in the romances of the twelfth century. The clearest example of this appears in a scene discussed in previous chapters, when Tristan disguises himself as a beggar and carries Isolde across a stream. Tripping, his head lands in her lap. When accused of infidelity, Isolde can then honestly say that no men other than her husband – and this beggar – have been between her thighs. All those present including King Mark interpret this statement within the limited sense of the "beggar's" apparent identity rather than his hidden identity as Tristan.<sup>565</sup>

The legal situation in twelfth-century England was particularly unstable in relation to cases regarding secular marriage. Early romances figuring Tristan and Horn were almost certainly composed before the large quantity of marital legislation of the thirteenth century but after "Venien ad nos," which declared the church's position in favor of consent.

Coercion also plays an important role in many of these romances. Isolde faces implied but unstated political and societal pressures to marry Mark despite her love for Tristan. As mentioned before, the marriages of Tristan and of Isolde put pressure upon the idea of subconscious consent, suggesting that adulterous love destabilizes the consent they offer

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<sup>565</sup> Beroul, "Tristan." *Early Tristan Poems, Vol. I.* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1998), starting at 3900.

consciously to their respective spouses.<sup>566</sup> *King Horn* even more explicitly explores the issue of coercion. Rymenhild faces two unwanted marriages arranged by the upstart Fikenhild, the latter to himself. In these cases, however, Rymehild would be an unwilling participant.

Fourteenth-century romances like *Troilus and Criseyde* blur the line between earning one's love – essentially convincing one to consent – and coercion. The romance convention of being ennobled by one's love and performing heroic deeds in order to be worthy gradually take on the notion of earning that love. Petrarch's sonnets usually present this as gaining the beloved's pity, as in *Astrophil and Stella* #1, which retains the beloved's agency.<sup>567</sup> These fourteenth-century romances, in contrast, capitalize on the notion of obligation.

The tradition of legalistic discourse and coercion within lovers' communications is also considered in other fourteenth-century texts, perhaps the most famous of which is in Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale* when Aurelius takes Dorigen's rejection as the condition upon which she will take him as lover. When Dorigen states "in pleye"<sup>568</sup> that she will grant to be his love when he removes all the rocks along the coast,<sup>569</sup> it is clear that she means never, even if it is made "in

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<sup>566</sup> For more on this, see earlier sections on Abelard. Abelard. "What Sin and Vice Consist in (From *Know Thyself* or *Ethics*)." Trans. D.E. Luscombe. Ed. Richard Bosley and Martin Tweedale. (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview, 1998). (*Scito te ipsum*). 549-559.

<sup>567</sup> The idea of convincing one to pity becomes explicit in the first sonnet of Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*.

<sup>568</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer. "The Franklin's Tale." *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Ed. Larry Benson. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 280.

<sup>569</sup> *Ibid.*, 281-290.

pleye.”<sup>570</sup> Her rejection is made clear because she only sets this condition after stating clearly that “ne shal I neuere been vntrewe wyf.”<sup>571</sup> Furthermore, Aurelius seems to understand her when he replies, “Is ther noon oother grace in yow?”<sup>572</sup> His decision to take her words as a contractual obligation on her part only makes sense in a mercantile, legal discourse and runs contrary to the romantic discourse of a shared mind.<sup>573</sup> Aurelius takes advantage of relational semantics to impose his meaning upon Dorigen’s words in order to establish a consent for her that is clearly false. Chaucer ends the tale with Aurelius’ introduction into lovers’ discourse of submission by Arveragas’ submission to his wife’s words and Dorigen’s submission to her husband’s will.<sup>574</sup> Following the previous tradition, Chaucer presents coercion as a transgressive act.

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<sup>570</sup> Ibid., 280.

<sup>571</sup> Ibid., 276.

<sup>572</sup> Ibid., 291.

<sup>573</sup> For more on mercantile misreading in Chaucer, see Ladd, Roger A. “The Mercantile (Mis) Reader in “The Canterbury Tales.” (*Studies in Philology*, Winter, 2002), 17-32.

<sup>574</sup> This reading matches well with Jill Mann’s observation in an informal, unpublished presentation at the Harvard Colloquium, in which she argued that Arveragas’ generosity inspires the others to other acts of generosity. In my terms, what she describes as generosity can be described as acts of submission, submitting one’s own desires in favor of another’s. For a published article that follows a similar argument to Mann’s, see Timothy H. Flake’s “Love, Trouthe, and the Happy Ending of *The Franklin’s Tale*.” (*English Studies*, 1996, 3), 209-226. Flake also discusses, on page 223, the difference between Dorigen becoming an adulteress in word versus spirit, implying the importance of inner consent.

In contrast to medieval representations of coerced consent, Renaissance texts such as Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* introduce the idea that the privileged knowledge of a lover allows one to ignore clear rejections. One of the clearest examples of a lover ignoring clear rejections appears in Shakespeare's *All's Well That Ends Well*.<sup>575</sup> In the play, the low-born Helena lives as the ward of the Countess of Rousillon and loves Bertram,<sup>576</sup> the countess' son, who does not return her affection. As the daughter of a deceased doctor, Helena has knowledge of medicines, a knowledge she uses to save the king. In recompense for her healing, the king allows her to choose her husband. Her choice, Bertram, flees immediately after the ceremony, saying he will never marry her until after they have consummated and she has worn his family ring. Helena follows the rakish Bertram and concocts a scheme whereby, without his knowledge, she sleeps with him and gains his ring. Helena does this by substituting herself for a woman Bertram seeks to seduce, Diana. Once the Countess hears of Bertram's behavior, she claims Helena as her daughter. Once Helena fakes her own death and returns home, Bertram returns home as well. Helena announces before the court that she has met the conditions established by Bertram, and then Bertram agrees to the marriage.

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<sup>575</sup> While not part of this dissertation, *The Taming of the Shrew*, with its coerced consent and submission to a husband's will, might offer opportunities for future scholarship in this vein.

<sup>576</sup> For a discussion of class conflict in *All's Well That Ends Well*, see Erikson, Peter. "The Political Effects of Gender and Class in *All's Well That Ends Well*." *Shakespeare's Problem Plays*. (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 54-73.



The conclusion of *All's Well That Ends Well* builds on the same convention of offering consent as submission to the other's will, but portrays this coercion in more positive light.<sup>577</sup> Helena's willful misreading of Bertram's message and the eventual imposition of her meaning upon his words involve intent, consent, misrecognition, submission, and the role of power in imposing meaning.

When thou canst get the ring upon my  
finger, which never shall come off, and show me a  
child begotten of thy body that I am father to, then call  
me husband; but in such a 'then' I write a 'never.'<sup>578</sup>

Little ambiguity as to intent creeps into Bertram's rejection of Helena in *All's Well That Ends Well*; clearly, the 'conditions' he places upon their marriage are *impossibilia* designed to

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<sup>577</sup> Shakespeare inverts and subverts many of the generic expectations of characters that parallel Helena, such as Griselde in Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale* and Gilette in Boccaccio. Shakespeare's inversion of the bed-trick brings to light the gendered nature of the scenario, with greater importance placed on a woman's chastity. Leah Scragg discusses many of these generic expectations, asserting a generational difference between a decaying, but noble culture and one, symbolized in Helena, that will reinvigorate it. For more, see Scragg, Leah. "All's Well That Ends Well and the Chivalric Quest." *Shakespeare's Problem Plays*. (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 29-53.

<sup>578</sup> William Shakespeare, "All's Well That Ends Well." *The Complete Pelican Shakespeare*. Ed. Stephen Orgel and A.R. Braunmuller. (New York: Penguin, 2002), 3.2.57-60.

show the certainty of his position.<sup>579</sup> Should his intent be unclear, however, Bertram specifically redefines “then” to mean “never.” The terms of Bertram’s rejection, however, do more than show the depth of his feelings; these terms reject specifically Helena’s two primary legal claims to marriage.<sup>580</sup> “Never” signals his lack of consent, leaving him room to contest the marriage on the grounds that it is coerced. The ring symbolizes several things: his status and family, the traditional symbol of betrothal, and, of course, sexual consummation as seen in the added comment about siring a child. Even his gesture of hand-fasting is incomplete and shows his resistance. When told by the king that he must “take her by the hand, and tell her she is thine,”<sup>581</sup> Bertram seemingly withholds his consent, answering only “I take her hand.”<sup>582</sup> Bertram’s rejection is categorical, punctuated by his flight to the wars, but offers one possible

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<sup>579</sup> Likewise, Helena is “driven by an overriding knowledge of what she truly desires. She will get what she wants, whatever the cost, and whatever the effect on her reputation” (275).

Edmondson, Paul. “Comical and Tragical.” *Shakespeare: An Oxford Guide*. Eds. Stanley Wells and Lena Cowen Orlin. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003), 267-278.

<sup>580</sup> For more on the broken marriage vows, see Neely, Carol Thomas. *Broken Nuptials in Shakespeare’s Plays*. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1985).

<sup>581</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.3.173-4.

<sup>582</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.3.176. See earlier on consent in marriage. Also, in Renaissance cognitive terms, Bertram says earlier to the king that he “must submit my fancy to your eyes” (2.3.167-8), suggesting the potential difference of opinion / interpretation due to perceptions and/or preconceptions, an idea confirmed by his sarcastic commentary upon Helena’s newfound status.

legal loophole to escape the match.<sup>583</sup> Rather than submit to marrying Helena, Bertram flees to the wars in Florence, telling his mother in a letter that he “has wedded her, not bedded her, and sworn to make the ‘not’ eternal.”<sup>584</sup> His refusal to consummate their marriage provides him with another argument nullifying the validity of the marriage, making clear his intention never to be a true husband to Helena. Bertram makes his intention clear both in the letter to Helena and in the letter to his mother: “never.” These are impossible conditions meant to make the depth of his rejection clear. Helena consciously chooses a favorable reading though it is at odds with the original intent.<sup>585</sup>

Despite knowing his intent, Helena willfully – and consciously – misreads his message as a series of conditions to be met.<sup>586</sup> By the end of the play, Helena successfully contests and redefines the meaning of the letter to suit her purposes, using the king and others as witnesses to

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<sup>583</sup> See earlier on consent in marriage. Also, in Renaissance cognitive terms, Bertram says earlier to the king that he “must submit my fancy to your eyes” (2.3.167-8), suggesting the potential difference of opinion / interpretation due to perceptions and/or preconceptions, an idea confirmed by his sarcastic commentary upon Helena’s newfound status.

<sup>584</sup> Ibid., 3.2.20-2.

<sup>585</sup> For more on how the play explores the difference between words and deeds, see, Barton, Ann. *The Riverside Shakespeare*. Ed. G. Blakemore Evans and J.J.M. Tobin . (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 533-37.

<sup>586</sup> Helena’s rereading of the letter could be seen in a more sinister light if one reads her interpretation as a contract that Bertram must fulfill should she meet its conditions.

confirm her position. Since “Helena sees only in her fantasy” the worth of Bertram,<sup>587</sup> she fits in the tradition of lovers identified as unworthy in the *self-absorbed* tradition. A key difference is, of course, that she will force her fantastical desires onto Bertram.<sup>588</sup>

Helena’s control of the rings’ meanings in *All’s Well That Ends Well* hinges on her ability to control their transmission. By controlling perceptions of who sends an item, Helena leads Bertram in particular to assume incorrectly the intent behind the gesture; likewise, by substituting herself for Diana, she ‘steals’ Bertram’s intended message – a contested one – from Diana and applies it to herself. In this way, Helena meets Bertram’s ‘conditions.’

Helena uses Bertram’s infatuation with Diana in order to gain possession of his ring and to bed him. Bertram offer the family ring to Diana, first as an attempt to buy affections and then, when she insists, as a form of implied proposal,<sup>589</sup> one on which he will eventually renege.

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<sup>587</sup> Asp, Carolyn. “Subjectivity, Desire, and Femal Friendship in *All’s Well That Ends Well*.” *Shakespeare’s Problem Plays*. Ed. Simon Barker. (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 83.

<sup>588</sup> Another key difference is that Helena is a woman. Erikson discusses the parallels between the power dynamics in *All’s Well That Ends Well* and Queen Elizabeth’s relationship with Essex. Many scholars have discussed Bertram in contrast with Shakespear’s Henry V. For more on this historical conflict, see Dollimore, Jonathan and Alan Sinfield. “History and Ideology: The Instance of *Henry V*.” *Alternative Shakespeares*. Ed. John Drakakis. (London: Routledge, 1985). 206-27.

<sup>589</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.2.51-3.

When Diana asserts, “A wife you have won of me,”<sup>590</sup> she confirms the idea of marriage, all the while keeping secret that Helena is the wife Bertram has won through substitution. In a parallel act of substitution, Helena takes Diana’s place in the dark bed-room, fulfilling Bertram’s other condition.

Helena is even able to anticipate that Bertram will “repent” giving the ring to Diana (3.7.26-8). Helena’s intimate – almost miraculous – knowledge of Bertram’s heart – not only his innermost desires but how to manipulate them from a distance – places her in the long-standing tradition of lovers who have a miraculous understanding of their beloveds, such as Tristan and Isolde. Diana transmits Helena’s words to Bertram – though pretending they are her own – and then transmits the ring to Helena once Bertram offers it. As such, she is merely the vessel of delivery for the messages, even as Bertram perceives her as their recipient. Bertram’s ignorance of Helena’s machinations allows her to ‘steal’ his message of proposal to another woman and claim it as her own. Diana’s consent – her willingness to be merely an intermediary – allows Helena to hijack the ring and, in a way, claim the message for herself.

Diana, on Helena’s coaching, offers Bertram a ring in return that Helena received as a reward for healing the king. When the ring resurfaces in Bertram’s possession, the king grows suspicious. The meaning he assumes is that which he defined for the ring when he offered it to her. When he sees it, the king recalls his gift to Helena, stating,

The ring was mine, and when I gave it Helen

I bade her, if her fortunes ever stood

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<sup>590</sup> Ibid., 4.2.64-5. Bertram seems to tacitly agree to marry Diana, by not correcting her. Parolles confirms that he did “go between them” and that he “knew of their going to bed, and of other motions, as promising her marriage” (5.3.259-66).

Necessitied to help, that by this token

I would relieve her.<sup>591</sup>

The king, then, sees the ring as a call to action but he is unclear as to what actions he should take.

Unlike Bertram, the king is eager to act upon his obligation.<sup>592</sup> Adding to his sense of foreboding is that Helena

called the saints to surety

that she would never put it from her finger

Unless she gave it to yourself in bed,

Where you have never come, or sent it us

Upon her great disaster.<sup>593</sup>

As the king sees it, only two conditions can determine the ring's meaning: Helena's gift of the ring to Bertram in bed, which he sees as impossible, and disaster to her. The king's uncertainty stems from his ignorance as to how Bertram gained the ring and he even considers the possibility that Bertram attained it by "rough enforcement."<sup>594</sup> At this point, it is conceivable that the play would have ended with Bertram's execution; for this and other reasons, *All's Well That Ends*

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<sup>591</sup> Ibid., 5.3.84-7.

<sup>592</sup> In so doing, the King begins to reassert his patriarchal power. For a psychological reading informed by Lacan of the play, particularly the exploration of how women adopt a subject position in the society of the play, see Asp, Carolyn. "Subjectivity, Desire, and Female Friendship in *All's Well That Ends Well*." *Shakespeare's Problem Plays*. Ed. Simon Barker. (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 74-94.

<sup>593</sup> Ibid., 5.3.109-12

<sup>594</sup> Ibid., 5.3.108.

*Well* is often grouped with the problem plays. The king refuses to accept Bertram's knowingly false explanation of gaining the ring from the casement window and his unknowingly false one of receiving it from Diana. The king's knowledge of Helena's virtue eliminates – for him – the possibility Helena's other definition of the ring as proof she slept with Bertram.

Just as with the first ring, however, Helena manages to control the eventual, contested meaning of the second ring. By substituting herself for Diana in bed, Helena manages to meet the other 'condition' set forth in Bertram's letter – to be got with his child – without his knowledge.<sup>595</sup> Helena even orchestrates events such that her revelations save Bertram from the king's potential wrath. In addition to meeting his impossible – and unintended – 'conditions,' Helena creates one more reason – or obligation – for Bertram's gratitude. In the end, Helena asks the incredulous Bertram, "Will you be mine, now you are doubly won?"<sup>596</sup> In a way, Helena 'wins' Bertram in ways reminiscent of medieval romances where the knight goes into the world and performs acts that earn him the hand and love of the maiden. Helena wins Bertram once by gaining the patronage of the king and a second time by meeting his 'conditions,' but no reconciliation would be possible without Helena's question.

For the first time, Helena asks Bertram for his consent, allowing him to choose.<sup>597</sup> Throughout the play, Helena has forced Bertram into the uncomfortable position – usually

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<sup>595</sup> For more on the bed-trick, see Adelman, Janet. "Bed Tricks: On Marriage as the End of Comedy in *All's Well That Ends Well*." *Shakespeare's Personality*. Ed. Norman H. Holland, Sidney Homan, and Bernard J. Paris (Berkeley: U of California P, 1990).151-74.

<sup>596</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.3.315.

<sup>597</sup> At this moment, Bertram is given the chance to act on his newfound self-knoweldge, as noted by McEachern, Claire. *The Complete Pelican Shakespeare*. Ed. Stephen Orgel and A.R.

occupied by women – of being unable to withhold his consent; doing so allows Shakespeare to comment upon women's position as he does in other plays. Bertram's response is important for two reasons.<sup>598</sup> First, he is willing – if only conditionally – to accept her redefinition of his letter, allowing her to imprint her meaning upon him.<sup>599</sup> Second, he does not merely accept her assertions; he wants her to explain it to him. Such a dialogue parallels the newfound 'companionate' ideal of marriage in conduct books of the time.<sup>600</sup>

Considering the roots of the interpretive model seen in *All's Well That Ends Well* directs the emphasis away from homosocial relations or explorations of how to address our fallen nature and onto the language of negotiation. While some see the major issues of the play as unresolved, linguistically, the play has resolved both the issues of interpretation and consent with that one

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Braunmuller. (London: Pelican, 2002), 568. Bertram's self-knowledge and genuine consent can be questioned, making the resolution of the play problematic.

<sup>598</sup> Robert D. Freidman in "Male Bonds and Marriage in 'All's Well' and 'Much Ado' (*Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, Spring 1995, 231-50) argues that Bertram's acceptance is merely to secure a homosocial relationship with the king. If this were the entire case, however, the same opportunity presents itself at the start of the play.

<sup>599</sup> Such 'writing' upon one another parallels the knots in Marie de France's *Guigemar*.

<sup>600</sup> Two tracts on marriage describing elements of the newfound ideal of 'companionate' marriage include Edmund Tilney's *A Brief and Pleasant Discourse of Duties in Marriage, called The Flower of Friendship* and William Perkins' *Christian Economy; or A Short Survey of the Right Manner of Erecting and Ordering a Family, According to the Scriptures*.



question and response.<sup>601</sup> Focusing on interpretation within the play offers the chance not merely to understand more clearly the relational semantics in the play's seemingly oxymoronic statements,<sup>602</sup> but the relational hermeneutics used to interpret these words.<sup>603</sup> Characters consistently consult their desires when interpreting tokens and texts, sometimes consciously and at others from ignorance. Most importantly, these understandings are always provisional, facing challenges from the preconceived notions of others. Finally, the resolution of the play becomes clearer when one sees the conflict as interpretive; only when both Helena and Bertram are willing to truly listen – or enter into what Gadamer calls an 'open' conversation – is reconciliation possible.<sup>604</sup>

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<sup>601</sup> Barton suggests that the resolution belongs to the "same world of fairy-tale and romance as the first. In terms of psychological truth, there is no more reason of Bertram to accept Helena because of the bed-trick than because of the miraculous healing of the king. This second clash between realism and fable, the old world and the new, is suggested but comes to no issue" (502). Her reading, however, ignores the importance of the fact that Helena asks Bertram and he questions her in return. No longer is language a tool of power but a means of truly listening.

<sup>602</sup> Shakespeare *All's Well That Ends Well*, 3.7.45.

<sup>603</sup> Barton argues that the play seems to be driving for the truth beneath words when she states that "language has become an empty and often a lying substitute for deeds" (501) and then describing how the virtuous characters perceive correctly.

<sup>604</sup> This contrasts with the widely accepted notion that the last speech "lack weight: three lines in all to accomplish recompense, reconciliation, and assurance of love" (Gerard J. Gross "The Conclusion to *All's Well That Ends Well*" *SEL 1500-1900* 23 (Spring 1983). 270.

Bertram's position would seem to be one more familiar to Renaissance English women than men; he attempts to reserve for himself the right to say no. Helena's manipulation of his response redefines his "no" to mean "yes" by ignoring his clear intent and adopting the *impossibilia* as true conditions to be met. Pushing the idea that Bertram defines the letter as a kind of legal defense, Helena can be seen as adopting a legal standpoint as well, treating the text as a contract. Bertram's linguistic position in the letter is a traditionally patriarchal one: he adopts the subject position and expects Helena to passively accept his statement. As we have seen in previous romances, however, clandestine communications between lovers offer the potential for a woman to adopt an interpretive position equal to a man.<sup>605</sup>

Perhaps the most subversive outcome of a wider trend of the relational semantics in lovers' communications is that both sender and receiver adopt a subject position in the message, rather than the receiver serving merely as object. At a linguistic level, then, the woman can assume a position of equality with her suitor, defining rather than merely accepting the meaning of their messages. While this is also true of her suitor, the subject position is certainly more familiar to men in Renaissance England. This expanded linguistic control for women can be traced to ideas central to the medieval romance tradition: consent, one mind, first generation nominalism, and mistaken identities.

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<sup>605</sup> David Bevington asserts that Helena's goal, perhaps accomplished, is to have Bertram understand "that sexuality and deep friendship can and should exist in a single relationship." Bevington, David. *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*. (New York: Longman, 1997), 364.

## CONCLUSION

I wish that you knew that when I said two sugars

I actually meant three.

– Kate Nash “Nicest Thing” (2007)<sup>606</sup>

Rið braut héðan, þú ókunni riddari,” segir hún, “ok fá þér herbergi

ok dvel ekki vára ferð.” En sem Tristram sá gullit,

kendi hann ok undirstóð.

– Brother Robert *Tristan* (13c.)<sup>607</sup>

[‘Ride off strange knight,’ she said, find yourself lodging  
and stop holding up our journey.’ But when Tristram saw the ring,  
he recognized it and understood her meaning.]

Earlier, I used these quotations to illustrate how a lover could understand his beloved so well that he knew what she wanted even when she asked for something else.<sup>608</sup> The previous discussion emphasized the concept that lovers shared a connection beyond language – or one mind – and relied upon his or her lover supplying an intent that was absent in words but did match what he or she really “meant.” An alternate reading of this line suggests that Nash herself might not even know she wants three sugars, indicating that her lover knows her better than she

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<sup>606</sup> Kate Nash, “Nicest Thing.” *Made of Bricks*. Fiction record, Cherrytree Recods, and Universal Music Group. Release date August 5, 2007.

<sup>607</sup> Brother Robert. *Norse Romance I: The Tristan Legend*. Ed. and Trans Marianne Kalinke. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2012), 200. Ok þegar jafnskjótt tók hún þat sama gull, sem jafnan hafði þiera ímilli farit með sendiboðum, ok kastaði til Tristrams, svá ti hans talandi: “Rið braut héðan, þú ókunni riddari,” segir hún, “ok fá þér herbergi ok dvel ekki vára ferð.”

“En sem Tristram sá gullit, kendi hann ok undirsoð orð dróttningar ok veik sér aptr til sinna skalaldsveina ok báðir þeir Kardin.”

<sup>608</sup> Please excuse the gender specific pronouns. Nothing about this process is limited by gender.

knows herself. Such a situation encourages her lover to ignore what she says in favor of what he thinks she wants.

Two can mean three... No can mean yes.

Isolde's response to Tristan, above, offers more clues that her meaning does not match her words. Since Tristan knows that the context is public and that she needs to keep her relationship with him secret, he has one clue suggesting that he not take her words at face value. The second potential indicator that her words should not be taken literally appears when she draws attention to the ring that the two exchange to remind each other of their love. However, as mentioned earlier, the gesture of throwing the ring to the ground could indicate a similar rejection of their relationship. He is expected to know that this "no" means "yes."

This dissertation has explored how anxieties toward language, particularly relational semantics, lead to a range of generic literary conventions about lovers that continue to circulate in twentieth and twenty-first century literary lovers. Even the romanticized notion of lovers sharing privileged communications can create unrealistic expectations for modern flesh-and-blood readers, while the notion of coerced consent discussed in this chapter suggests unhealthy power dynamics hidden in beautiful language.

The continuity between these medieval romances and modern literary lovers challenges scholarly assumptions about the radical differences between the Middle Ages and modern society and constructions of the self. Most surprising might be the realization that medieval literary texts often worked with a far more radical sense of linguistic contingency than their Renaissance counterparts; as such, in this way at least, the Middle Ages might be considered more modern than the early modern period.

When I started this topic, it seemed like a relatively contained one, exploring the transmission of messages between lovers. In the end, the works dictated a larger claim than I anticipated. The increased importance of consent in medieval marriage law led to the creation of widely circulating literary works that offered ways of thinking about language that anticipated – and perhaps helped to formulate – modern attitudes about communication as well as relationships. The kind of secrecy in these communications mimics a kind of interiority, a characteristic associated with modern constructions of the self.

Once the terms of this argument became clear, examples from these generic conventions leapt out at me from a range of modern media, including movies, television shows, and music. I even noticed once day, in myself, the unreasonable expectation that my wife would somehow know, without my mentioning it, that I needed her to take out the trash.

One area of future exploration might be to trace these generic conventions from the Renaissance to today. The conditions of lovers in medieval and Renaissance England encountered relatively similar challenges, hiding their love from those in power who could prevent it. What keeps lovers communicating secretly in Restoration comedies like *The Man of Mode*? Self-determination in marriage has become the norm in twenty-first-century Anglo-American society, so the question arises as to why these same conventions still circulate so widely. What are the conditions that keep them circulating?

Another area of future exploration might be to look for precursors to the eleventh century examples in this dissertation. This project began in part from my skepticism about the idea that interiority did not exist before the Renaissance. I am generally cautious about identifying with any certainty a radical change to any particular period. Despite this, few examples leap out from either the early medieval insular tradition or the Classical one. The

example of secret codes in Ovid's *Amores*, for example, shows a code that this clearly defined beforehand, and therefore does not show a mystical sharing of one mind. If few examples appear, then this dissertation may be far more radical than I ever anticipated.

APPENDIX:  
TRISTAN AND ISOLDE

<u>Title</u>	<u>Author</u>	<u>Date</u>
<i>Tristan</i>	Thomas d'Angleterre	ca. 1170
<i>Tristan</i>	Bérout	ca. 1150 – 1190
<i>Chevrefoil</i>	Marie de France	ca. 1190
<i>Tristan</i>	Gottfried von Strassburg	ca. 1211
<i>Tristrams Saga ok Ísöndar</i>	Brother Robert	ca. 1226

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