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PRYVAYLY AND SECRETELY: PERSONAL LETTERS IN MALORY'S "BOOK OF SIR TRISTRAM DE LYONES"

Dans le «Livre de Sir Tristram de Lyones» comme dans sa source, le *Tristan en Prose*, les relations entre les personnages principaux sont soulignées par l'échange de lettres. Cette correspondance à caractère privé ou public est l'objet d'une attention toute particulière de la part de Malory. Les lettres servent ainsi d'embrayeurs narratifs, mais également de révélateurs: les liens ainsi tissés entre les protagonistes des deux triangles amoureux du *Morte Darthur* soulignent le parallélisme entre les deux cours, apparemment si distinctes, de Marc et Arthur, donnant une clé de lecture pour l'ensemble de l'œuvre.

In Malory's work, writing is predominantly the medium of public communication. Letters appear clutched in the hands of corpses, containing the last wishes of the deceased, revealing momentous secrets; charters or official missives are sent by lords or kings issuing orders or preparing military campaigns, while supernatural inscriptions announce and determine the feats of the knights of the Round Table throughout the narrative. The written word thus appears as a carrier of truth and authority which transcends the isolated characters. Private letters, where writing is used to express the subjectivity or the limited concerns of the individual, are not numerous; and they all appear in the "Book of Sir Tristram".¹

1. A possible exception to this statement may be when Modred sends letters to Guinevere to get her to marry him; however, the status of Modred's correspondence with the queen is ambiguous, since it takes place during the siege of London, and may be read as political rather than private. See *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, ed. E. Vinaver, Oxford: Clarendon, 1967, (hereafter *Works*), vol III, p. 1228, l. 24-26. All references to Malory's *Morte Darthur* are to this edition.

Most of these letters are also present in the *Tristan en Prose*; however, their tone and contents, where given, vary considerably from what we find in the French work.² Moreover, Malory not only reworks the private correspondence written by the characters in his source; on a couple of occasions, he also turns oral messages into written ones, thereby demonstrating the importance of this medium of personal communication in his “Book of Sir Tristram”.³

These missives accompany all the major phases of the plot. The actions of the hero are echoed, commented on, and sometimes even initiated by them: Tristram’s marriage in Brittany is thus the occasion for a network of letters, from Isode to Guinevere, then Guinevere to Isode; from Tristram to Lancelot, then Lancelot to Tristram; and finally, putting an end to the episode, from Isode to Tristram. Similarly, Tristram’s madness is caused by an exchange of correspondence between Isode and Kaherdyn, and the end of the crisis is confirmed by the sending of a letter by Isode to Tristram. The Book itself draws to its conclusion with Isode telling her lover that she knows all about Lancelot’s madness,

For quene Gwenyver sente me a lettir all how hyt was done, for
because I sholde requyre you to seke hym.⁴

Letter-writing is therefore a major, if relatively unobtrusive, narrative device.

2. Compare for example Iselt’s correspondence with Genevre (*Le Roman de Tristan en Prose*, ed. R.L. Curtis, vol. II, Leiden: Brill, 1976, p.165 and 172-73) or Tristram’s letter to Lancelot (*Le Roman de Tristan en Prose*, ed. R. L. CURTIS, vol. III, Cambridge: Brewer, 1985, p.12-14) and the corresponding messages in *Le Morte Darthur* (p. 274 and 288). See also E. VINAVER, *Le Roman de Tristan et Iseut dans l’œuvre de Thomas Malory*, Paris: Champion, 1925, p. 155-220, for a systematic survey of all discrepancies between Malory’s text and those of the manuscripts of the *Tristan en Prose* which appear to be closest related to the English work. One may note that the actual text of these letters does not appear in Malory’s “Book of Sir Tristram”; what we have is an abstract of their contents given by the narrator.

3. E. Vinaver counts three such cases, and talks of Malory’s “preference for written messages” (*Works*, vol. III, p. 1496). These three letters are: from Isode to Tristram (p. 513, l. 14-22); from Tristram to Lancelot (p. 627, l. 12-14); and from the people of Lyones to Tristram (p. 785, l. 14-18).

4. *Works*, p. 839, l. 15-17.

The first mention of a personal letter in the "Book of Sir Tristram"—the first, indeed, in the whole of Malory's work—occurs with the *lettyrs of love* sent to Tristram by the daughter of King Pharamon of France. These *lettyrs* are accompanied by the gift of a dog, a non-verbal token of love which will be given in turn by Tristram to Isode, and will be the only creature to recognise Tristram during his madness. This first private message announces love as an important feature in the life of the hero; but one may notice that Tristram is the recipient, not the initiator of this love.

This situation is representative of the character as depicted by Malory. Only once does Tristram write to Isode, to tell her to get ready to prepare his escape from prison and elope with him. Tristram's writing is not that of intimacy or of feelings; its concern is with action and appearances. Out of four letters said to have been written by the hero, three are addressed to Lancelot, justifying his marriage to the second Isode, and giving him the latest news about the situation at Mark's court.⁵ At no moment are we shown Tristram writing—or even singing—lays or love songs, as in the *Tristan en Prose*.⁶ That the writing of intimacy is not part of Tristram's creative powers is further demonstrated after he has recovered from his madness, later in the narrative. Brangwain seeks him out carrying a message with *many a pyteous complaynte* from Isode, and is told:

Lady, dame Brangwayne, ye shall ryde with me tylle the turnemente be done at the Castell of Maydyns. And than shall ye beare lettirs and tydynges with you.⁷

These *lettirs* shall never be written; after the tournament, Brangwayn will look for Tristram in vain. The only case where we are shown Tristram being sollicited for a love letter answering Isode's *complaynte* leads only to the absence of writing.⁸

5. *Works*, p. 467, l. 27-37; p. 615, l. 20-24; and p. 627, l. 12-14.

6. Tristram is repeatedly said to be an outstanding harpist, but his skill appears to be purely instrumental. At no point in the English narrative do we see him singing.

7. *Works*, p. 513, l. 20-22.

8. The written expression of feelings would thus appear to be feminine, as opposed to the masculine writing of facts; however, the form in which Malory presents the letters (as summaries) forbids any conclusion along those lines. On Malory's style and his use of language as a means of characterisation, see P. J. C. FIELD, *Romance and Chronicle: A Study of Malory's Prose Style*,

Tristram's creativity lies elsewhere. Malory explicitly presents him as the generator of language, twice stating that he is at the origin of a specific literary genre, that of hunting manuals. The hero's achievement as a hunter—of which the gift of the dog may be an emblem—is the first one the reader is told of in the description of the mature Tristram :

And aftir, as he growed in myght and strength, he laboured in huntynge and in hawkynge ... And as the booke seyth, he began good mesures of blowynge of beestes of venery and beestes of chaace and all maner of vermaynes, and all the tearmys we have yet of hawkynge and huntynge. And therefore the booke of venery, of hawkynge and huntynge is called the booke of sir Trystrams.⁹

The character's proficiency with words is further stressed by the narrator in another passage linking Tristram with hunting:

And every day sir Trystram wolde ryde an-huntynge. For, as bookis reporte, of sir Trystram cam all the good termys of venery and of huntynge, and all the sysses and mesures of all blowyng with an horne; and of hym we had fyrst all the termys of hawkynge, ... that all maner jantylmen hath cause to the worldes ende to prayse sir Trystram and to pray for his soule. Amen, sayde sir Thomas Malleorré.¹⁰

Tristram is a creator of words; but these words are technical terms, belonging to the public realm of authority, since they are encoded in prescriptive manuals. It is noteworthy that this aspect of the hero is hailed by King Arthur when he welcomes Tristram to his court:

[Of] all maner of huntynge thou beryste the prycy, and of all mesures of blowynge thou arte the begynnyng, of all the termys of huntynge and hawkynge ye ar the begynner.¹¹

Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971, and Ann DOBYNS, "The Rhetoric of Character in Malory's *Morte Darthur*", *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 28 (1986), p. 338-352.

9. *Works*, p. 375, l. 15-22. This accomplishment of Tristram's does not appear in the *Tristan en Prose*. See E. VINAVER, *Le Roman de Tristan et Iseut*, p. 157, and François REMIGEREAU, "Tristan Maître de Vénerie dans la tradition anglaise", *Romania*, LVIII (1932), p. 218-37. On the extant "Tristram" hunting manuals, see Rachel HANDS, "Sir Tristram's 'Boke of Huntyng': the case for the Rawlinson Manuscript", *Archiv für das Studium der Neueren Sprachen und Literaturen*, 210 (1973), p. 58-74.

10. *Works*, p. 682-3, l. 25-34 and 1-4.

11. *Works*, p. 571, l. 29-32.

The authoritative function of name-giving is thus ratified by the major authority figure in the world of the *Morte*. Tristram's verbal creativity has led to a new reality for the society surrounding him: he is not only the first person to have done these things—the *begynner*; he is explicitly said to be their origin: their *begynnyng*. Linguistic creation and factual creation become indistinguishable; the ability to manipulate speech extends, it seems, to that of manipulating reality. It is a cause for praise, but it also calls for prayers, thereby implying a sinful dimension to what on a certain level may be read as a tampering with divine creation. Although Tristram's terms are *good*, the suggestion is that his is a world in which facts can be determined, and thus possibly perverted, through language.

It is therefore significant that the letters which appear in the key-passages of the narrative raise the issue of appearances and deception, whether intentional or not. The marriage of Tristram with the second Isode misleads la Beale Isode into thinking that her lover has been unfaithful to her, and prompts her into writing to Guinevere. The queen's answer—one of the few private letters in Malory's work to have its contents reported in any detail—ironically prefigures her own situation later in the narrative, for confronted with Lancelot's unwitting unfaithfulness, she will be incapable of applying this advice to herself:

So quene Gwenyver sente hir another letter and bade her be of goode confort, for she sholde have joy aftir sorow: for sir Trystrames was so noble a knyght called that by craftes of sorsery ladyes wolde make suche noble [men] to wedde them. "But the ende", quene Gwenyver seyde, "shulde be thus, that he shall hate her and love you bettir than ever he dud".¹²

This letter introduces the notion of a double standard in the assessing of reality. In a work where characterisation is effected predominantly by showing the reader what the heroes do, Guinevere is stating the existence of a gap between public actions and inner experience, which in her eyes justifies the ignoring of facts.¹³

12. *Works*, p. 436, l. 2-8.

13. See Terence McCARTHY's analysis of this conflict between public and private in the later books of the *Morte* ("Private Worlds in *Le Morte Darthur*", *Etudes Anglaises*, XXXIX (1986), p. 3-14).

Similarly, Tristram's main concern after his wedding is to spell out the dichotomy between his actions and "reality", so that Lancelot should not condemn him for being unfaithful to la Beale Isode:

So thys meanetyme sir Trystramys sente by a damesell a lettir unto sir Launcelot, excusyng hym of the weddynge of Isod le Blaunche Maynes, and seyde in the lettir, as he was a trew knyght, he had never ado fleyshly with Isode le Blaunche Maynys. And passyng curteysly and jantely sir Trystrames wrote unto sir Launcelot, ever besechynge hym to be hys good frende and unto La Beall Isod of Cornwayle, and that sir Launcelot wolde excuse hym if that ever he saw her. And within shorte tyme, by the grace of God, sir Trystramys seyd that he wolde speke with La Beall Isode and with hym ryght hastyly.¹⁴

In this letter, Lancelot appears as the alter ego of Tristram; and the justification, as well as correcting the mistaken assumption that he had consummated his marriage, also reads as self-deception—after all, we are told that Tristram *had allmoste forsakyn La Beale Isode* (p. 434). It is striking that, rather than Isode, it is Lancelot and Tristram who attach importance to this question of sexual fidelity, the social relevance of which seems to be independent of the love relationship proper. Isode appears in the letter only in the most marginal of ways, and her opinion is not worth Tristram's writing to her directly. Contrary to Lancelot, Isode's reaction is one of pained acceptance of her rival, with a somewhat perverse willingness to condone Tristram's apparent infidelity:

Whan La Beall Isode undirstood that he was wedded she sente to hym by hir maydyn, dame Brangwayn, pyteuous lettirs as coude be thought and made, and hir conclusyon was thus, that if hit pleased sir Trystram, to com to hir courte and brynge with hym Isode le Blaunche Maynys; and they shulde be kepte als well as herselff.¹⁵

This letter marks the end of the Breton episode—Tristram is going to sail back to Cornwall as a result of it; it is in no way connected to the exchange between Tristram and Lancelot, which therefore, on a strictly narrative level, seems somewhat gratu-

14. *Works*, p. 467, l. 27-37.

15. *Works*, p. 481, l. 3-9.

itous. However, the confidential correspondence which takes place at this stage of the narrative confirms Tristram as essentially a social character. The opinion of his peer carries more weight than that of his lover; his letter deals with facts, not feelings. Tristram's concern is with self-image, his perception of a conflict between his ideal self and outward appearances. Through the act of writing, he is reshaping reality to make it conform to the expectations of Lancelot, and through him, of the chivalric society as a whole. In this light, the letter (an oral message, in the French) to Tristram from the people of Lyones after his final break with Mark becomes particularly significant. It is the ultimate love-letter for the hero, the statement of his social desirability, compounded by a gift of money that one may put in parallel with the more intimate letter and gift sent by the daughter of King Pharamon of France.

Tristram's foreignness to the rhetoric of emotion is strikingly illustrated in the section relating his madness. At the core of the incident we have a misreading by Tristram of Isode's answer to Kaherdyn's love letters and ballads, an incident subtly reshaped by Malory, compared with what we read in the *Tristan en Prose*. In the French work, Isode's letter to Kaherdin is intentionally deceptive, in order to avoid his falling into despair; and Tristan knows nothing of the context to the affair. By contrast, in Malory's account, we have no reason to believe that Isode's letter was meant to mislead Kaherdyn as to her feelings: we are merely told that she wrote *unavised, to conforte hym* (p. 493). Moreover, the letter of Kaherdyn which induced Isode's answer is also found by Tristram in the English work (this is not the case in the French): he therefore has the key to the situation, but is incapable of mastering the language of privacy sufficiently to read it correctly.

This social dimension of Tristram's skill is further demonstrated in the chapters dealing with the revival of his feud with Mark leading to the definitive break between uncle and nephew. The starting point of this downward spiral is a written message sent by Tristram to Arthur's court, saying that all is well following his reconciliation with King Mark. Lancelot, however, refuses to believe in Mark's sincerity:

But sir Launcelot bade ever sir Trystram beware of kynge Marke,
for ever he called hym in hys lettirs Kynge Foxe, as who saythe he

faryth allwey with wylys and treson; and whereof sir Trystram in his herte thanked sir Launcelot.¹⁶

Even though one may argue that such a view is consistent with what the reader already knows of Mark at this point, it must be stressed that, at this stage, there is no longer any enmity between Mark and Tristram. The *wylys and treson* which will follow are generated directly by the expectation of the writer of the letter:

So the damesell departed and brought the lettirs to kynge Marke. And whan he had rad them and undirstonde them, he was wroth wyth sir Trystram, for he demed that he had sente the damesell to kynge Arthure. For kynge Arthure and sir Launcelot in a maner thretned kynge Marke in [t]his letters, and as kynge Marke red this lettyrs he demede treson by sir Tristram.¹⁷

This treason of Tristram's, in fact, is only half imagined. Even though he is officially reconciled with his uncle, Tristram welcomes Lancelot's slanderous words, and is not above trying to spy upon Mark. He and Isode will attempt to intercept Mark's letter to Arthur, thereby making an intentional intrusion into his privacy. Mark's decision to send his missive *pryvayly and secretly* through a different messenger will thwart their plan.

Mark's letter to Arthur touches on all the weaknesses of the world of the *Morte*:

And to begyn, the kyngis lettirs spake wondirly shorte unto kynge Arthur, and bade hym entermete with hymself and wyth hys wyff, and of his knyghtes, for he was able to rule his wyff and his knyghtes. ... And the lattir clause seyde that kynge Marke toke sir Trystram for his mortall enemy, wherefore he put kynge Arthure oute of doute he wolde be revenged of sir Trystram.¹⁸

The themes of adultery, unruliness and revenge that govern "The most piteous tale of the Morte Arthur Saunz Guerdon" are forcibly announced here. As was the case with Guinevere's words to Isode after Tristram's wedding, Mark's advice is better applied to himself than to Arthur; but the irony of this situation does not disguise the essential relevance of Mark's warning for the Round Table. The letters between Mark and Arthur put the two kings in parallel, just like the correspondence between

16. *Works*, p. 615, l. 29-32.

17. *Works*, p. 616, l. 10-16.

18. *Works*, p. 617, l. 6-9 and 17-20.

Guinevere and Isode or between Tristram and Lancelot had done in previous chapters. Though their honour *be not lyke*, to quote the knight who took Morgan's enchanted horn to Mark's court rather than Arthur's,¹⁹ the network of private letters around Mark and Arthur shows that they are living a similar experience, and are confronted with similar problems.

The status of Mark's letter is ambiguous; its contents are very private, it is sent and read *prevayly*, but it is apparently addressed to three people, Arthur, Guinevere and Lancelot. It thus exceeds the usual limits of confidential correspondence, and becomes an informal exposure of the love triangle similar to that devised by Morgan with her painted shield. This shield, one will recall, was carried by Tristram to a tournament called by Arthur; it had:

a kynge and a quene therein paynted, and a knyght stondyng aboven them with hys one foot standyng upon the kynges hede and the othir upon the quenys hede.²⁰

At the tournament, the relevance of Morgan's image is further emphasised by Tristram's literal overthrowing of Arthur, who was *wounded on the lyfe syde a grete wounde and a perelous* (p. 559, l. 33-34). Shield and letter appear as doublets in many respects; indeed, Mark's letter explicitly recalls to Arthur's mind Morgan's accusations, to the extent that *in this thought he studyed a grete whyle* (p. 617, l. 13-14). It is also recognised as a major threat by the queen and her lover:

And whan quene Gwenyver rad hir lettir and undirstode hyt, she was wrothe oute of mesure, for the letter spake shame by her and by sir Launcelot. And so prevayly she sente the lettir unto sir Launcelot. And whan he wiste the entente of the letter he was so wrothe that he layde hym downe on his bed to slepe.²¹

Lancelot's reaction is one of powerlessness before a letter which Arthur has dismissed as unauthoritative, but which remains truth-bearing. The authority of the letter is further suggested in the way Dynadan gets to read it:

19. The knight in question is Lamorak, who thus spared Guinevere the humiliation of the chastity test. See *Works*, p. 443, l. 31-34.

20. *Works*, p. 554, l. 24-26.

21. *Works*, p. 617, l. 2-27.

As sir Launcelot slepte, he stale the lettir oute of his honde and rad hit worde by worde.²²

Dynadan's "stealing" of the letter is not absolutely necessary for the plot to unfold as it does, since he will pretend not to know the reason for Lancelot's renewed anger when he wakes up. As it stands, the incident evokes other scenes in Malory's work, where letters are taken out of the hands of corpses.²³ This visual parallel aligns Mark's private letter with the truthful message transmitted by the deceased, while Dynadan's reading of it has as consequence the breaking out in public of a private quarrel.

It is certainly significant that Dynadan's (and therefore, indirectly, Lancelot's) response to Mark's private letter should be both public and oral: *the worste lay that ever harper songe with harpe or with any other instrument* (p. 618, ll.18-19). The satirical lay, which reveals Mark's shortcomings to all its listeners, is an attempt to make appearances coincide with reality as perceived by Dynadan and Lancelot, and thus destroy Mark's social image. When Tristram first hears the lay, he exclaims:

O Lord Jesu! That sir Dynadan can make wondirly well and yll.
There he sholde make evyll.²⁴

The slanderous and damaging nature of this lay is recognized openly by Tristram, who praises its evil contents in the same breath as the skill with which it was composed: his urging the minstrel to sing the lay to Mark therefore betrays a wilful desire to *make evyll*, compounded by the blasphemous oath which opens his exclamation. Private and public have now met, and it comes as no surprise when, after having witnessed a public medium being used for private revenge, we see Mark usurp the medium of authority to further his desire for vengeance.

22. *Works*, p. 617, l. 29-30.

23. See for example *Works*, p. 710: the dead King of the Red City clutches a letter in his hand, which Tristram takes and reads; p. 713, Sir Ebull describes how he wrote the letter for his dying lord and put it in his hand *or ever he were colde* (l. 24-5). A similar scene is described in connection with the Maid of Astolat, whose dead body floats down the river with a letter in the right hand (p. 1094 and 1096). In both cases the letter reveals a secret, and determines the behaviour of the person who reads it.

24. *Works*, p. 626, l. 25-26.

Taking advantage of the fact that Tristram is wounded after a tournament, Mark smuggles him away into a prison. Prompted by Isode, two of Mark's barons rise against him: Mark then resorts to a ruse to get Tristram out of the way:

He reme[mb]ird of treson and wyeles, and so thus he ded lete make and counturfete lettirs from the Pope, and dede make a straunge clarke to brynge tho lettys unto kynge Marke, the whyche lettyrs specifyed that kynge Marke sholde make hym redy, uppon Payne of cursyng, wyth his oste to com to the Pope to helpe hym to go to Jerusalem for to make warre upon the Saresyns.²⁵

Letters from the Pope are not unheard of in Malory's work; in the "Morte" section, papal letters prompt Arthur to make peace with Lancelot.²⁶ Moreover, in the *Tristan en Prose*, this call to the crusades by the Pope is genuine. Tristram's negative response to Mark's offer to let him go free if he leads this crusade is therefore potentially an act of double insubordination: against his king, and against the welfare of Christendom. Even though the reader may feel that the hero's refusal of Mark's offer is vindicated by what has happened, we witness here a breakdown of social structures, both from above and from below.

Mark's forging a second set of papal letters, summoning Tristram nominally this time, further emphasises the profanation of writing, which is no longer authoritative and truth-bearing. His efforts are useless, for Tristram recognises the forgery, even though—unlike in the *Tristan en Prose*, where he had a point of comparison—the hero does not appear to have any objective reason to doubt the authenticity of the document. Mark's forgery symbolically invalidates the basis of all authority, including his own, and the only token of his kingship—the fact he holds Isode—will disappear as a consequence. Tristram seizes Mark's queen; the debased king is put in prison by his barons, while Tristram openly flouts the laws of marriage and of vassalic duty by openly living with Isode at Joyous Garde.

Instead of reproving such subversive behaviour, Arthur condones it by holding a joust in his honour. This paves the way for his own destruction: Arthur will experience a breakdown of authority similar to that suffered by Mark, and for much the same

25. *Works*, p. 677, l. 26-33.

26. See the section "The Vengeance of Sir Gawain", *Works*, p. 1194-95.

reasons. This parallel is underscored at the conclusion of the Book by Guinevere's letter to Isode, where the two sets of lovers appear as virtually interchangeable.²⁷ Lancelot like Tristram has gone mad for love, Guinevere like Isode laments her separation from her beloved, while the social structures destroyed by Tristram in Cornwall will be shown in later books to be equally crumbling in Arthur's realm.

Letter-writing in the "Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones" may therefore be said to be important on three levels:

— first, it is a convenient device used by Malory to initiate plots and further the narrative;

— second, it is an indirect form of characterisation, drawing attention to the two major love-triangles of the world of the *Morte*, dissimilar in honour but similar in nature;

— third, and most significantly, it illustrates the gradual bankruptcy of authority which leads to the fall of the Round Table.

As Thomas C. Rumble justly observes, the "Book of Sir Tristram" takes on its full meaning when seen against its larger Arthurian background.²⁸ Lancelot's letters blackening Mark are not only justifications for Tristram's contempt for the authority and honour of his king; they also mitigate the guilt of his own parallel situation with Arthur. The moral comfort of the two adulterous couples depends on their ability to disguise facts with words. In both cases, as depicted on Morgan's shield, social order is disturbed, the king's authority is negated, and social peace can only be maintained by divorcing appearances from truth.

The manipulative power of words, used to good ends by Tristram in the field of hunting, is shown in all its ambivalence as different characters attempt to shape a new image of themselves, their situation or their actions through their pens. Personal desire, read as fact, undermines authority at its roots. The written expression of truth is depicted as unstable, the reading of it often inadequate; the boundaries between objective fact and the personal fiction of the characters are dissolved as forgery

27. This observation is also true of the *Tristan en Prose*, but to a much more limited extent. See E. BAUMGARTNER, *Le Tristan en Prose. Essai d'interprétation d'un roman médiéval*, Genève: Droz, 1975.

28. T.C. RUMBLE, "The Tale of Tristram: Development by Analogy", p. 118-83 in *Malory's Originality. A Critical Study of Le Morte Darthur*, ed. R. M. Lumiansky, Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1964.

mingles private and public, truth and lies. At the end of the "Book of Sir Tristram", we are in a world without absolutes, where all forms of writing are potentially truth-bearing. When Modred, in the "Morte" section, forges a letter announcing Arthur's death, his lie is a mere anticipation of the truth. The very act of writing will ultimately have led to its realisation.

Françoise LE SAUX

