

Tristan And Isolde – A Contemporary Perspective

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Brîndușa Grigoriu, *Amor sans desonor : une pragmatique pour Tristan et Iseut*, Universitaria Publishing House, Craiova, 2013, 306 pages.



Being marked by originality and succeeding in bringing a fresh perspective on the medieval topic of *Tristan and Isolde*, the book “*Amor sans desonor: une pragmatique pour Tristan et Yseut*”, by Brîndușa Grigoriu, published in Craiova, at “Editura Universitaria” in 2013, is a remarkable reflection on love seen during the Middle Ages, based on a PhD defended in June 2010 at the University of Poitiers, France.

The work is based on the long narrative texts of Béroul and Thomas who insisted on the mythical history of these two lovers, seen from a pragmatic perspective. The introduction of the work of sociologist Erving Goffman, followed by the linguistic point of view of Penelope Brown, Stephen Levinson, Catherine Kerbrat-Orecchioni is simply outstanding.

There is a specific delicacy of writing which reveals the author’s very good knowledge of historical, linguistic and literary criticism. Even the titles of the chapters indicate a perfectly geometrical construction, underlining specific qualities of each of these parts: “*Faire grant chiere selon Béroul*”, “*L’amer selon Thomas*”, “*Amour et passe-amour selon le Tristan en prose*”. If we focus on the author’s writing style, we can definitely say that there is a special sensitivity, a very carefully chosen vocabulary which transmits the emotion of medieval times. On the one hand, there is a specific preoccupation with rendering the “air de l’époque”, by using words which are now considered obsolete, such as “démariage”, “déconfort”, “compréhensibilité”, “réciproquer”. On the other hand, neologisms like “l’intermythualité”(page 14) and “l’outré-monde” (page 167) counterbalance the linguistic field of archaisms.

Moreover, the style is marked by exquisite metaphors, we are delighted to notice that the entire book offers a delicate, fragile balance of words which completes the medieval, chivalric frame. To be more specific, the following examples illustrate the precision, the accuracy in rendering some of the finest feelings and ideas: “Un évitement total, des autres et du moi, flèche leur inconscience” (page 79), “L’image des amants en sort indemne, voir nimbée” (page 37), “Aimer conduit à s’exposer: aux spectateurs de passage, aux rivaux, aux feux de la rampe. À poser.” (page 24), “Dans un sens, le philtre est un aveu de pessimisme: le couple Marc-Yseut ne saurait durer sans renfort. Et un catalyseur du *pessimus*: le renfort renforce les faiblesses” (page 55), “Le dénouement amène une écorchure de face positive. Si le philtre peut anesthésier, maquiller en âpre beauté cette lèpre, ce n’est guère pour longtemps: Tristan se sent, normalement, en droit d’image. Le Morrois n’est pas son milieu naturel. Aussi rêve-t-il de sa bonne vieille normalité, si apaisante socialement: <Gel serviroie a grant honor./ Comme mon oncle et mon seignor >¹. Exceller en matière de chevalerie lui est aussi naturel que de respirer”(page 44).

The story of Tristan and Isolde was made popular during the 12th century through French medieval poetry, has travelled in different versions, and was retold in numerous sources with many variations. The adulterous love between the Cornish knight Tristan and the Irish princess Isolde was most likely influenced by the Arthurian romance of Lancelot and Guinevere. The details of the story are different from one author to another, but the overall plot remains, broadly speaking, the same. There is a specific episode which is well encapsulated in the following fragment which is also representative of the writing style: “Il y a, justement, un âpre accord entre Tristan et Yseut, qui fait que chacun veut d’abord mourir sans l’autre, selon un parallélisme pesamment facial. Si Tristan songe surtout à mettre en sauveté son corps, en lui épargnant la profanation et en lui ménageant un avenir de relique, Yseut veut un suicide par main interposée, afin de sauver son image chrétienne. Tout s’arrange, pour leur face, si Marc veut bien déranger le rayonnement de la sienne” (page 244).

In a nutshell, if we analyze the style of the book, it is a rigorous, focused work with a rich bibliography and an extremely well-argued approach to the topic. The vivid literary connections betray a peculiar attention to details, to the ‘weight’ of each word which is extremely well placed in context. To conclude, the entire literary approach is a delicate embroidery of words, an almost exhaustive endeavor which also contains a sociological perspective on the Middle Ages, elements of medieval and theoretical pragmatics, everything united in a convincing, intriguing and

¹ Béroul, *Le Roman de Tristan*, dans *Tristan et Iseut. Les poèmes français. La saga norroise*, éd. Daniel Lacroix et Philippe Walter, Paris, Librairie Générale Française, 1989, v.2239-2240, p.124.

captivating book which sheds a new light on the medieval topic of Tristan and Isolde.