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Joseph Bédier, *The Romance of Tristan and Iseut*, trans. with intro. by Edward J. Gallagher. Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2013. xlix + 159 pp. Short bibliography, glossary, and appendix. \$39.95 U.S. (cl), \$12.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-1-60384-900-5.

Review by Tracy Adams, University of Auckland.

Edward J. Gallagher's *The Romance of Tristan and Iseut* offers a translation into English of medieval scholar Joseph Bédier's wildly popular novelization of the twelfth-century French verse legends of the unfortunate lovers. First published in 1900, the novelization has been reprinted literally hundreds of times. Gallagher's translation is accompanied by a concise (thirty-one page) introduction, glossaries, and English translations of several short articles related to the novelization. The slim paperback introduces non-specialists to the medieval French Tristan and Iseut stories in clear, modern prose and provides specialists with a handy teaching tool.

To clarify Gallagher's contribution, it is important first to explain that the twelfth-century French verse versions of the Tristan and Iseut story exist as several large fragments that have been pieced together, edited and translated numerous times over the past 200 years. Scholars and teachers of the material necessarily confront the problem raised by these differing versions and the many editions in which they are recorded. Of course, this is a problem common in varying degrees to all medieval literature. In this case, the problem is complicated by the fact that the fragments represent two distinct versions of the late twelfth-century story, one composed by a certain Béroul and the other by one Thomas of Brittany. Béroul's version of the story has come down in a single manuscript, the beginning and end of which are missing. Thomas's version consists of nine fragments recounting the story from the time of Tristan's exile until his death, all events from the end of the story.<sup>[1]</sup> The nine fragments are generally believed originally to have formed the latter half of a version whose first part can be reconstructed from the Middle High German adaptation of Gottfried von Strassburg (early thirteenth century), who named his source as Thômas von Britanje. Gottfried's version breaks off near the middle of the story, but the survival of what is commonly agreed to be a translation of Thomas's entire work supplies the missing links. This complete version is the Norse translation by a Brother Robert from 1226.

As for the differences between the Béroul and Thomas versions of the medieval French verse Tristan, the scholar Jean Frappier coined the terms "commune" (Béroul's version) and "courtoise" (Thomas's version) to distinguish between them.<sup>[2]</sup> According to Frappier, the versions differ primarily in the ways in which the two writers imagined Tristan and Iseut's love. Frappier argued that Béroul's text understood love as a primitive passion, reducing "courtly" love to a superficial overlay of rules of conduct.<sup>[3]</sup> Although Béroul's characters mouthed courtly platitudes, they did not seek love as a good in itself. Indeed, for Béroul, love was a bit of bad luck caused by the lovers' accidental consumption of a magic potion. In contrast, according to Frappier, love became an "elected" fate in Thomas's version, where the potion was understood as a symbolic, rather than literal, motivation. Thomas's Tristan engaged in the extended interior monologues dissecting his emotional upheaval characteristic of "courtly" love texts. Frappier described the love explored in this version as a good above any social or religious law.

Bédier's novelization combined some of this Tristan and Iseut material into a unified narrative, beginning with Tristan's childhood and ending with the lovers' death. Gallagher's translation will allow teachers instructing the romance in English, who normally would have to assign either Béroul

or Thomas (not easily available in English translation), or both, to assign the novelization instead. Gallagher's neat, straightforward prose represents an improvement over the stilted, archaizing language of Hilaire Belloc's 1903 translation (which, having omitted several chapters, was redone in 1945 by Paul Rosenfeld).

Certainly teachers will need to alert students that Bédier's novelization was a composite of the fragments, modified according to his own taste, as Gallagher explains in his introduction, where he also underlines Bédier's significant departures from his sources. This information could form the basis for a class discussion on the differences between medieval and early twentieth-century sensibilities and the significance of Bédier's approach in terms of the modern study of medieval manuscripts. Although Bédier did not include in his novelization Tristan's fascinating interior monologues on the overwhelming experience of love, found only in the "courtly" version of Thomas, because he believed Bérout's account to be closer to the archetypal form of the story that he was seeking to recover, the medievalist also translated but did not include another of Thomas's signature episodes, that of the "Hall of Images." In this episode, Tristan converses with a gorgeous statue of Queen Iseut, which he has had constructed to console him in his loneliness. Gallagher usefully includes this episode in the appendix, an addition that would enable a class discussion of the differences between Bérout and Thomas.

In addition to a discussion of the manuscript situation and Bédier's method of novelization, Gallagher also briefly summarizes recent work on the medievalist, the massive intellectual biography by Alain Corbellari and the examination of the connection between the medievalist's childhood on the Reunion Island and his fetishization of the "pure" roots of medieval French literature by Michelle Warren.[4] The introduction also establishes what Bédier hoped to accomplish in this novelization. As Gallagher explains, the medievalist produced the novelization and then quickly followed it in 1902 with a scholarly edition of the Thomas version of the story, along with a theoretical volume laying out his approach to editing the manuscript.

My only hesitation is that the introduction makes no mention of the second of the reasons for Bédier's fame (the first being the novelization itself): the development of the method of editing that today bears his name, the Bédieriste approach. In fact, the introduction will leave students confused on this score. Bédier's novelization and his scholarly works on Tristan and Iseut reveal his early search for the story's archetype, that is, his method of painstakingly comparing the extant versions to determine their genealogy for the purpose of reconstructing the exemplar that gave birth to those versions. But this methodology, associated with Karl Lachmann, produced only a hypothetical original, a work that had never existed in reality. Over the course of his career, Bédier lost faith in this method. Today his fame as an editor rests on his alternative to the method of Lachmann, laid out in an article of 1928 published in the journal *Romania*, in which, recognizing the futility of the attempt to restore the original, he instead promotes the practice of editing the best of the remaining manuscript versions.[5] Gallagher's introduction leaves readers with an impression of Bédier as a Lachmannian editor that is certain to leave them bewildered should they later come across the competing Lachmann-Bédier approaches to editing.

Still, teachers who equip students with an understanding of what they are reading will find a useful resource in this appealing version of the famous love story. The lucid and engaging translation, with its helpful introduction and appended scholarly articles, is an excellent introduction to the beloved romance as well as a welcome tool for teaching it to undergraduates.

## NOTES

[1] The nine fragments are contained in the following manuscripts: Douce, Sneyd (which contains two fragments), Turin (which contains two fragments), Strassburg (no longer extant, but which contained three fragments), and Cambridge.

[2] Jean Frappier, "Structure et sens du Tristan: version commune, version courtoise," *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale* 6 (1963), p. 255.

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[3] Frappier, "Structure et sens du Tristan," p. 260.

[4] Alain Corbellari, *Joseph Bédier, écrivain et philologue* (Genève: Droz, 1997) and Michelle R. Warren, *Creole Medievalism: Colonial France and Joseph Bédier's Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

[5] Joseph Bedier, "La tradition manuscrite du *Lai de l'ombre*," *Romania* 54 (1928): 161-196; 321-356.

Tracy Adams  
University of Auckland  
[t.adams@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:t.adams@auckland.ac.nz)

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