



Trinity College Dublin
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Dante and the Arthurian Literature:

Contexts, Reception and Critical Perspectives

Ph.D. in Italian

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Gianluca Caccialupi

School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies
Trinity College Dublin

Supervisor: Dr Igor Candido

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SUMMARY

This doctoral dissertation offers the first comprehensive study of Dante's reception of Arthurian literature. In particular, it aims to identify the Arthurian romances that Dante knew, to define the ways in which he read them, and to show how the study of these sources in relation to his wider literary production helps to shed light on some important aspects of the *Commedia*.

To achieve these aims, I begin with an overview of the circulation of the Matter of Britain in thirteenth and early fourteenth-century Italy. Drawing on recent scholarship on the subject, I show how Arthurian literature, and the prose romances in particular, enjoyed great popularity among thirteenth and early fourteenth-century Italian translators and poets. Most of them looked to the stories of Tristan and Lancelot for examples of political and civic virtue, as well as for ideal models of courtly love.

I then show how Dante's reception of Arthurian literature is highly original in comparison with previous Italian authors. In particular, he focuses on moral themes, contrasting Tristan's death in a sinful state, which led to his damnation, with the conversion of Lancelot, who overcomes his adulterous relationship with Guinevere and consecrates himself to God at the end of the *Lancelot en prose*. The similarities between the stories of Lancelot and Dante are evident in the cantos in which the poet reflects on his sinful past, and show how Arthurian literature may have played a role in the depiction of Dante's journey to redemption as presented in the *Commedia*.

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I come from a family of humble origins, consisting of generations of sharecroppers, labourers and factory workers. I was one of the first to graduate from university and probably the first ever to start a PhD. The credit for this is not mine, but that of the previous generations who made it possible through sacrifice and hard work. I would therefore like to thank my grandparents – Assunta, Guido, Anna and Ferruccio, the only one still with us – and the rest of my family. The greatest thanks, however, go to my parents, who, ever since I was a child, have encouraged my interest in history and literature through travels, games and books; it is thanks to their hard work in the factories, their sacrifices and their foresight that I was able to obtain a high level of education and go to university. I therefore dedicate this dissertation to Alessandro, Luisa and my sister Giada.

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INTRODUCTION

The relationship between Dante's works and Old French Arthurian literature has been the subject of numerous studies since the beginning of the twentieth century. The first major study on the subject was published by Paget Toynbee in 1902, and focused on the importance of the *Lancelot* as a source for *Inf.* V. 127-138 and *Par.* XVI. 13-15. The study of this subject was taken up and extended by Nicola Zingarelli in 1920.¹ In the same year, Pio Rajna published two fundamental studies on Dante's reception of Arthurian literature. The first, entitled 'Dante e i romanzi della Tavola Ritonda', reviewed all the references to Arthurian literature in Dante's works, pointing to the thirteenth-century French prose romances, and in particular the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle and the prose *Tristan*, as the poet's main sources. The second, entitled 'Arturi regis ambages pulcerrime', was an interpretative note on *DVE* I. x. 2, a crucial passage for understanding Dante's opinion on the Matter of Britain.² Rajna's studies, characterised by extraordinary methodological rigour and an accurate knowledge of the manuscript sources available at the time, were a landmark for Dante scholars for at least six decades (1920s-1970s). This philological rigour, on the other hand, was lacking in a number of American scholars who, between 1917 and 1955, studied the relationship between Dante and Arthurian literature, with particular reference to the legend of the Holy Grail.³ Although they are often simplistic in pointing to an intertextual relationship between the *Commedia* and the Grail romances, some of these studies, almost completely ignored, can still offer some interesting insights.

The decades between 1920 and 1980 were marked by enormous progress in the study of the circulation of Arthurian literature in Italy. A pioneer in this field was the English scholar Edmund G. Gardner, who wrote the first comprehensive study on the subject: *The Arthurian Legend in Italian Literature*.⁴ Gardner's studies were the first to provide a broad overview of the presence of the Matter of Britain in medieval and Renaissance Italy. Some aspects of this context were further explored in the following decades by the philological and literary studies of other scholars, such as Pierre Breillat, Jole M. Ruggieri, Antonio Viscardi and

¹ Paget Toynbee, 'Dante and the Lancelot Romance', in *Dante Studies and Researches* (London: Methuen, 1902), pp. 1-37; Nicola Zingarelli, 'Le reminiscenze del *Lancelot*', *Studi danteschi*, 1 (1920), 65-90.

² Pio Rajna, 'Dante e i romanzi della Tavola Ritonda', *Nuova Antologia*, 55 (1920), 223-247; Pio Rajna, 'Arturi regis ambages pulcerrime', *Studi danteschi*, 1 (1920), 91-99.

³ Lizette Andrews Fisher, *The Mystic Vision in the Grail Legend and in the Divine Comedy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1917); Barbara Barclay Carter, 'Dante and the Holy Grail', *The Contemporary Review*, 153.1 (1938), 62-71; Justice Neale Carman, 'Purgatorio, I and II, and the *Queste del Saint Graal*', *Romance Philology*, 9.1 (1955), 119-126.

⁴ Edmund G. Gardner, *The Arthurian Legend in Italian Literature* (London: Dent, 1930). See also Edmund G. Gardner, 'The Holy Grail in Italian Literature', *Modern Language Review*, 20 (1925), 443-453.

Daniela Delcorno Branca.⁵ These studies were fundamental in highlighting the widespread circulation of Arthurian prose romances in thirteenth and early fourteenth-century Italy and, together with those of Rajna and Gardner, formed the basis for research on Dante's reception of the Matter of Britain carried out between the 1970s and the early 1990s. The main entries on the subject in the *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, edited by Umberto Bosco and published between 1970 and 1978, were written by Delcorno Branca and Viscardi.⁶ Michelangelo Picone's studies were the first to attempt a comprehensive treatment of Arthurian literature in relation to Dante's works since the times of Rajna and Gardner.⁷ While the latter had mainly sought to identify the Arthurian sources known to Dante, and which played a role in the composition of his works, the former was the first scholar to study in depth the impact of these sources on the overall interpretation of the *Commedia*. In particular, Picone argued that Dante, a profound connoisseur of the Matter of Britain, conceived of the *Commedia* as a strongly anti-French work and as a 'recantation of the Breton *ambages*' that overturned the earthly and sinful system of values they embodied.⁸ Despite some contrary voices,⁹ Picone's view of the relationship between Dante and Arthurian literature – partly supported by the studies of Christopher Kleinhenz¹⁰ – has become the dominant one since the 1980s.

Since the 1990s, scholarship on the circulation and reception of Arthurian literature in Italy has flourished, showing how the Matter of Britain enjoyed widespread success in the years of Dante's life. These studies, the vast majority of which have been carried out by

⁵ Pierre Breillat, 'La Quête du Saint-Graal en Italie', *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire*, 54 (1937), 262-300; Pierre Breillat, 'Une traduction Italienne de la Mort le Roi Artu', *Archivum Romanicum*, 21.4 (1937), 437-469; Jole M. Ruggieri, 'Versioni italiane della «Queste del Saint Graal»', *Archivum Romanicum*, 21.4 (1937), 471-486; Antonio Viscardi, 'La Quête du Saint-Graal dans les romans du Moyen Age italien', in *Lumière du Graal: études et textes*, ed. by René Nelli (Paris: Les Cahiers du Sud, 1951), pp. 263-281; Antonio Viscardi, 'Arthurian influences on Italian literature from 1200 to 1500', in *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages. A Collaborative History*, ed. by Roger Sherman Loomis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), pp. 419-429; Daniela Delcorno Branca, *I romanzi italiani di Tristano e la Tavola Ritonda* (Florence: Olschki, 1968).

⁶ *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, ed. by Umberto Bosco, 6 vols (Rome: Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 1970-1978). For entries in the *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, see, once and for all, the digital edition at: <https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/elenco-opere/Enciclopedia_Dantesca/> [accessed 15/09/2023]. The entries mentioned above are: Daniela Delcorno Branca, 'Romanzi arturiani'; Antonio Viscardi, 'Romanzi cortesi'.

⁷ Michelangelo Picone, 'Dante e la tradizione arturiana', *Romanische Forschungen*, 94.1 (1982), 1-18; Michelangelo Picone, 'Poetic Discourse and Courtly Love: An Intertextual Analysis of *Inferno* 5', in *Lectura Dantis Newberryana*, ed. by Paolo Cherchi and Antonio C. Mastrobuono, 2 vols (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988-1990), II, pp. 173-186; Michelangelo Picone, '«Le donne e' cavalier»: la civiltà cavalleresca nella *Commedia*', *Deutsches Dante-Jahrbuch*, 82 (2007), 17-46.

⁸ Picone, 'Dante e la tradizione arturiana'. The idea of Dante's moral condemnation of Arthurian literature was widely attested before, but always in relation to *Inferno* V rather than the poem as a whole.

⁹ Antonio Pioletti, 'Il romanzo nella *Commedia*', *Lecture classensi*, 17 (1988), 87-111; Arianna Punzi, 'Ancora sul romanzo nella *Commedia*', *Le forme e la storia*, 8.2 (2016), 799-816.

¹⁰ Christopher Kleinhenz 'Dante as Reader and Critic of Courtly Literature', in *Courtly Literature: Culture and Context. Proceedings of the 5th Triennial Congress of the International Courtly Literature Society, Dalfsen, The Netherlands, 9-16 Aug. 1986*, ed. by Keith Busby and Erik Kooper (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1990), pp. 379-393; Christopher Kleinhenz, 'The Arthurian Tradition in the Three Crowns', in *The Arthur of the Italians. The Arthurian Legend in Medieval Italian Literature and Culture*, ed. by Gloria Allaire and F. Regina Psaki (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2014), pp. 158-175.

Italian Romance philologists, shed light on the specific versions of the Arthurian romances that circulated in Italy, their manuscript tradition and readership.¹¹ This new wave of studies reached its peak in the last decade, and has definitively confirmed that the traditional idea of Arthurian literature as an ‘aristocratic genre’, inappropriate to the tastes and social context of the ‘bourgeoisie’ of the Tuscan communes, was completely wrong. It is now clear that the urban classes of medieval Italy and Tuscany were avid readers of Arthurian romances and adapted the moral and civic values they conveyed, as well as the so-called ‘chivalric ethic’, to their specific context. Unfortunately, this large number of recent studies and discoveries on Arthurian literature in Italy has had little impact on Dante studies. The new knowledge on this subject has been brought into dialogue with Dante’s works mainly by Romance philologists, while Dante scholars, with some exceptions,¹² have mostly ignored it. In general, it is still widely believed that Arthurian literature was of little importance to Dante or that it appears in the *Commedia* only to be condemned to hell in *Inferno* V.

In light of the context just outlined, the aim of this dissertation is threefold. First, it aims to provide the first comprehensive study of Dante’s reception of Arthurian literature, taking into account the most recent findings on the circulation and success of the Matter of Britain in the context of thirteenth and early fourteenth-century Italy. Secondly, it aims to call into question the idea of Dante as a harsh critic of Arthurian literature, which he would have condemned for conveying values that are immoral or, at any rate, contradictory to the idea of love and conversion that emerges from the *Commedia*. This implies a radical revision of the views of Michelangelo Picone, the main scholar of the relationship between Dante and Arthurian literature in recent decades. Thirdly, it challenges the idea that Arthurian literature played an almost irrelevant role within Dante’s literary production. In particular, it will show how Arthurian literature, despite its secondary role compared to fundamental sources such as the *Aeneid* or the Holy Scripture, may have contributed to defining some important aspects of Dante’s journey of conversion as depicted in the *Commedia*.

In order to achieve these objectives, this study is divided into two main sections. The first aims to reconstruct the manuscript circulation and literary reception of the Matter of Britain in Italy and Tuscany in Dante’s time, paying particular attention to the two works or cycles that enjoyed the greatest success in this context, and of which he was certainly aware: the prose *Tristan* and the *Lancelot en prose*. In the light of the context thus outlined, the second

¹¹ It is impossible here to review the immense amount of scholarship on Arthurian literature in Italy that has been produced over the last thirty years. For a general idea, see the bibliographical chapters included in: *The Arthur of the Italians*, ed. by Allaire and Psaki, pp. 247-282; *La matière arthurienne tardive en Europe. 1270-1530*, ed. by Christine Ferlampin-Acher (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2020), pp. 165-174.

¹² Federico Rossi, ‘Dante e le *ambages* cavalleresche’, *Critica del testo*, 22.1 (2019), 67-107.

section will consist of a study, as complete as possible, of the Arthurian presences in Dante's works, from the poems of his youth to the *Commedia*. Each of these sections is divided into two chapters.

Chapter I focuses on the circulation of the Matter of Britain in medieval Italy. After an overview of the main Arthurian romances written in France in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, it considers the reception of these romances in thirteenth and early fourteenth-century Italy, with particular attention to manuscript production and readership. The last part of the chapter is devoted to the circulation of the prose *Tristan*, and of the Tristan matter in general, since the story of Tristan and Iseult was undoubtedly the most successful Arthurian tale in Italy.

Chapter II reviews the main theories concerning the composition of the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle and deals with the Italian circulation of the last three romances of the cycle: the *Lancelot*, the *Queste del Saint Graal* and the *Mort Artu*, collectively known as *Lancelot en prose*. The main aspects of the reception of the *Lancelot en prose* in Dante's Italy will be sketched out by means of the manuscript tradition, the literary quotations and the Italian translations or rewritings. In order to provide a solid philological basis for chapter IV, particular attention will also be paid to the circulation of the *Queste del Saint Graal* in Tuscany.

Chapter III examines Dante's reception of Arthurian literature and attempts to identify the romances he read. It will provide an interpretation of the expression 'Arturi regis ambages pulcerrime' ('the beautiful adventures of King Arthur'), with which Dante refers to the Arthurian literature in the *DVE* I. x. 2. It will then consider Dante's knowledge of the Arthurian verse romances and analyse the relationship between Dante's works and the prose *Tristan*, which most likely had an influence on the depiction of the circle of the lustful and the story of Paolo and Francesca.

Chapter IV focuses on Dante's reception of the *Lancelot en prose*. After attempting to understand which version of the *Lancelot* he may have read, it offers an interpretation of *Inferno* V which challenges the traditional view that Francesca's story conveys Dante's moral condemnation of Arthurian literature. It then shows that the story of Lancelot's repentance and redemption, as told in the *Queste del Saint Graal*, may have influenced Dante's spiritual and moral autobiography in the *Commedia*.

A brief conclusion will draw together the threads of the argument and show how the hypotheses put forward in the introduction and developed throughout the study contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between Dante's works and the Arthurian literature.

SECTION 1: CONTEXTS

*Ho letto millanta storie di cavalieri erranti,
di imprese e di vittorie dei giusti sui prepotenti
per starmene ancora chiuso coi miei libri in questa stanza
come un vigliacco ozioso, sordo ad ogni sofferenza.
Nel mondo oggi più di ieri domina l'ingiustizia,
ma di eroici cavalieri non abbiamo più notizia [...]*

Francesco Guccini, 'Don Chisciotte' (2000)

I. The Arthurian Romances: from France to Italy

This chapter will provide an overview of the circulation of Arthurian romances in thirteenth and early fourteenth-century Italy. It does not claim to offer a complete treatment of this topic, which is extremely vast and has been the subject of countless studies. Its purpose is rather to outline a general context for the subsequent chapter and for the second section of the dissertation. The first section of this chapter consists of an overview of the main Arthurian romances composed in twelfth and thirteenth century France, with a particular focus on the texts that had wider international circulation. The second section will dwell on the reception of these romances in thirteenth and early fourteenth-century Italy. After identifying the verse and prose romances that circulated most widely in Italy, through literary references and manuscript circulation respectively, I will show how the Matter of Britain was particularly popular among the urban classes of Tuscany, who often interpreted it as a model of chivalric customs and values. The third section will focus on the circulation of the prose *Tristan*, and of the Tristan matter in general, in thirteenth and early fourteenth-century Italy. I decided to devote particular attention to the story of Tristan and Iseult for two main reasons. First of all, the prose *Tristan* was the most successful Arthurian romance in medieval Italy, where it was the subject of several translations and rewritings in the Italian vernaculars. Secondly, the Tristan matter is quoted extensively in Italian literature of the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. By looking at both Italian Arthurian translations or rewritings and literary quotations, I will outline the main characteristics of the reception and interpretation of the Tristan matter in Dante's Italy.

I. 1 The Arthurian Literature in *langue d'oïl*

The golden age of Arthurian romance in France dates from 1155 to 1270 approximately.¹³ The progenitor of this literary genre is Wace's *Roman de Brut* (1155), a verse translation of

¹³ Wace completed the *Roman de Brut*, the earliest extant Arthurian romance, in 1155. The author himself reveals the completion date of the romance in *Roman de Brut*, vv. 14,863-14,866. The year 1270 is proposed by Christine Ferlampin-Acher as the starting point of the so-called 'Late Arthurian Tradition'. See Christine Ferlampin-Acher, 'La littérature arthurienne tardive en Europe (LATE): approches', in *La matière arthurienne tardive*, ed. by Ferlampin-Acher, pp. 11-34. Reconstructing the evolution of Arthurian romance in France over this long period of time is beyond the scope of this study. For this reason, I will only provide an overview and focus on the works that are most relevant to the argument that will be carried out in the following chapters. For a more complete analyses of the evolution of the Old French Arthurian romance between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, I refer to some general studies that have been taken into account in the writing of this section: James Douglas Bruce, *The Evolution of Arthurian Romance. From the Beginnings Down to the Year 1300*, 2 vols (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1928); *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Loomis; Norris J. Lacy and Geoffrey Ashe, *The Arthurian Handbook: Second Edition* (New York-London:

the pseudo-historical Latin work *Historia Regum Britanniae*, composed around 1135-38 by Geoffrey of Monmouth.¹⁴ Both of these works deal with the history of Britain and include an extensive section on the story and deeds of King Arthur. While retaining the narrative structure of a chronicle, the Arthurian section of the *Roman de Brut* is distinguished from its source by a greater emphasis on themes that would have become characteristic of Arthurian romances, such as love, magic and adventure. These three themes are further developed, to the point of becoming the main focus of the narrative, in two fragmentary verse romances that deal with the story of Tristan and Iseult, composed by the Anglo-Norman poets Thomas of Britain and Béroul.¹⁵ The extant part of Thomas's *Tristan* is 3,298 lines long and witnessed by ten fragments attested in six manuscripts which date back to the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Most scholars date this romance between 1155 and 1176. On the other hand, Béroul's *Tristan* consists of 4,485 lines witnessed by a late thirteenth-century manuscript, and is usually dated to the 1160s. While Thomas would convey the version of the story that scholars have traditionally defined as 'courtly', Béroul would bear witness to a 'vulgar', 'common' or 'primitive' version. Some episodes of the story of Tristan also exist in other Old French verse versions, such as the *Folie Tristan de Bern*, the *Folie Tristan d'Oxford*, Marie de France's *Chevrefoil*, the *Tristan Rossignol*, and the *Tristan Menestrel*. These verse tales date between the second half of the twelfth and the first quarter of the

Garland, 1997), pp. 57-136; Thierry Delcourt, *La littérature arthurienne* (Paris: PUF, 2000); Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, 'The Shape of Romance in Medieval France', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. by Roberta L. Krueger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 13-28; Norris J. Lacy, 'The Evolution and Legacy of French Prose Romance', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. by Krueger, pp. 167-182; *The Arthur of the French. The Arthurian Legend in Medieval French and Occitan Literature*, ed. by Glyn S. Burgess and Karen Pratt (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2006); Alan Lupack, *The Oxford Guide to Arthurian Literature and Legend* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 83-132; Ad Putter, 'The Twelfth-Century Arthur', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Arthurian Legend*, ed. by Elizabeth Archibald and Ad Putter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 36-52; Jane H. M. Taylor, 'The Thirteenth-Century Arthur', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Arthurian Legend*, ed. by Archibald and Putter, pp. 53-68; Maria Luisa Meneghetti, *Il romanzo nel Medioevo* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2010); *Handbook of Arthurian Romance. King Arthur's Court in Medieval European Literature*, ed. by Leah Tether and Johnny McFadyen (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019). For reference to further bibliography, see Keith Busby and Jane H. M. Taylor, 'French Arthurian Literature', in *A History of Arthurian Scholarship*, ed. by Norris J. Lacy (Cambridge: Brewer, 2006), pp. 95-121. For further information and bibliography on the authors and works that I will mention in this section, see also the relevant entries of *The New Arthurian Encyclopaedia*, ed. by Norris J. Lacy (New York-London: Garland, 1996).

¹⁴ On Wace's *Roman de Brut*, and on its relationship with Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, see (among others): Charles Foulon, 'Wace', in *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Loomis, pp. 94-103; Françoise Le Saux, 'Wace's *Roman de Brut*', in *The Arthur of the English: The Arthurian Legend in Medieval English Life and Literature*, ed. by William R. J. Barron (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), pp. 18-22; Gioia Paradisi, *Le passioni della storia. Scrittura e memoria nell'opera di Wace* (Rome: Bagatto Libri, 2002), pp. 185-288; Françoise Le Saux, *A Companion to Wace* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2005), pp. 81-152; Françoise Le Saux and Peter Damian-Grint, 'The Arthur of the chronicles', in *The Arthur of the French*, ed. by Burgess and Pratt, pp. 93-111.

¹⁵ On the various verse versions of the story of Tristan and Iseult, see (among others): Frederick Whitehead, 'The Early Tristan Poems', in *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Loomis, pp. 134-144; Arianna Punzi, *Tristano. Storia di un mito* (Rome: Carocci, 2005), pp. 9-119; Tony Hunt and Geoffrey Bromiley, 'The Tristan Legend in Old French Verse', in *The Arthur of the French*, ed. by Burgess and Pratt, pp. 112-134.

thirteenth century. Although Thomas's and Béroul's *Tristan*, as well as the other verse tales about Tristan, are part of the Matter of Britain, defining them as Arthurian works is inaccurate, as they tell a story which is independent from the adventures of Arthur and his knights and where the Breton king – when present – just plays a small role.

The earliest Arthurian romances 'in the strict sense' are those of Chrétien de Troyes, who can be considered the inventor of this new literary genre, as well as the most influential author of Old French verse romances.¹⁶ Chrétien wrote five Arthurian romances in rhymed octosyllabic couplets, a metre that had been employed, among others, by Wace, Thomas, and Béroul. Scholars do not agree on the precise dating of his romances, all of which were in any case composed between the 1160s and the early 1190s. Chrétien's romances feature knights from Arthur's court as protagonists, with the king always playing a secondary role. In *Erec et Enide*, Chrétien's earliest extant romance, the knight Erec must balance his relationship with his bride Enide and his desire to maintain his knightly reputation. *Cligés* mainly focuses on the love story between the knight Cligés and Fénice, who is married to Alis, Cligés's uncle. Although this romance is clearly inspired by the story of Tristan, Fénice refuses to follow Iseult's example and give herself to two men. To do this, she uses magic potions every night which make Alis sleep and think he has had sex with her. At the end of the romance, Alis dies and Cligés marries Fénice. The third romance, *Lancelot*, introduces the adulterous relationship between Lancelot and Guinevere for the first time in the Arthurian Matter. This narrative theme, which became prominent from Chrétien onwards, was further developed in the prose romances of the thirteenth century. The fourth romance, *Yvain*, focuses on the adventures of the knight Yvain and on his love story with Laudine. Just like Erec, Yvain has to find a balance between love and chivalric adventures. The last romance, *Perceval*, is incomplete. It is widely recognised as the first romance to introduce the theme of Grail quest.¹⁷ The word *grail* is used here as a common noun to refer to a tray or plate which, although represented as a sacred object which contains a Host, is not yet explicitly described as a Christian relic. The Christianisation of the Grail initiated by

¹⁶ On the Arthurian romances of Chrétien de Troyes, see (among others): Jean Frappier, *Chrétien de Troyes: l'homme et l'oeuvre* (Paris: Hatier, 1957); Jean Frappier, 'Chrétien de Troyes', in *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Loomis, pp. 157-191; Leslie T. Topsfield, *Chrétien de Troyes: A Study of the Arthurian Romances* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Joseph J. Duggan, *The Romances of Chrétien de Troyes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001). *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes*, ed. by Norris J. Lacy and Joan T. Grimbert (Cambridge: Brewer, 2005); Douglas Kelly, 'Chrétien de Troyes', in *The Arthur of the French*, ed. by Burgess and Pratt, pp. 135-185; Roberta L. Krueger, 'Chrétien de Troyes and the Invention of Arthurian Courtly Fiction', in *A Companion to Arthurian Literature*, ed. by Helen Fulton (Chichester: Blackwell, 2009), pp. 160-174.

¹⁷ Although most scholars consider Chrétien de Troyes's *Perceval* to be earlier than Robert de Boron's *Joseph d'Arimathie*, the chronological and thematic relationships between these two romances are not entirely clear. For an in-depth discussion of this topic see Francesco Zambon, *Robert de Boron e i segreti del Graal* (Florence: Olschki, 1984), pp. 28-39.

Chrétien will become explicit in the Arthurian prose romances.¹⁸ The romance ends abruptly at a point where Perceval has not yet achieved his quest.

Chrétien's popularity, along with the fact that his last romance remained unfinished, prompted several French authors to write prologues or continuations of his *Perceval*.¹⁹ The anonymous *Bliocadran* and *Elucidation*, which serve as a prequel and extended *exordium* of the *Perceval* respectively, are attested in very few manuscripts. By contrast, the four continuations, composed by 1225 approximately, enjoyed greater success. All continuations, just like the original, are written in verse. While the First and Second Continuation are associated with Wauchier de Denain, whose authorship has only been confirmed for the latter, the last two works are attributed to Manessier and Gerbert de Montreuil. Manessier's Continuation is the only one that reaches a conclusion, and in which Perceval achieves his quest. Although their chronological and thematic relationship with Chrétien's *Perceval* is not entirely clear, Robert de Boron's works mark the transition of the Arthurian romance from verse to prose.²⁰ The verse romances *Joseph d'Arimathie* and *Merlin* are the only works unanimously attributed to Robert de Boron, who probably composed them in the last decade of the twelfth century. Witnessed by a single manuscript, they tell the story of the Grail, finally identified with the chalice of the Last Supper, from the death of Christ to the birth of Merlin. While the *Joseph* is a complete romance, despite some lacunae, the *Merlin* ends after only 502 verses. It is not known whether Robert ever wrote the next part of the *Merlin* and the *Perceval*, which would have completed his verse trilogy. Robert's complete trilogy is known only from the prose version, composed in the first decade of the thirteenth century. Although their attribution to Robert is far from certain, the three prose romances – *Joseph d'Arimathie*, *Merlin*, and *Perceval* – are collectively known as 'Robert de Boron's trilogy' or *Livre dou Graal*. This trilogy, in which Perceval remains the Grailwinner, is, for us at least, the oldest Arthurian prose cycle. The last prose romance in which Perceval is still the main Grail hero is the anonymous *Perlesvaus*, which dates back to the first half of the

¹⁸ On the word *graal* and the progressive Christianisation of this legend, see Francesco Zambon, 'Il ciclo medievale del Graal', in *Metamorfosi del Graal* (Rome: Carocci, 2012), pp. 137-169 (pp. 142-147).

¹⁹ On the prologues and continuations of Chrétien's *Perceval*, see (among others): Albert W. Thompson, 'The Additions to Chrétien's *Perceval*', in *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Loomis, pp. 206-217; Annie Combes, 'The Continuations of the *Conte du Graal*', in *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes*, ed. by Lacy and Grimbart, pp. 191-201; Rupert T. Pickens, Keith Busby and Andrea M.L. Williams, 'Perceval and the Grail: The Continuations, Robert de Boron and *Perlesvaus*', in *The Arthur of the French*, ed. by Burgess and Pratt, pp. 215-273 (pp. 215-247); Leah Tether, *The Continuations of Chrétien's Perceval. Content and Construction, Extension and Ending* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2012).

²⁰ On Robert de Boron's verse romances, and on the prose trilogy which derived from them, see (among others): Pierre Le Gentil, 'The Work of Robert de Boron and the *Didot Perceval*', in *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Loomis, pp. 251-262; Zambon, *Robert de Boron*; Linda Gowans, 'What Did Robert de Boron Really Write?', in *Arthurian Studies in Honour of P.J.C. Field*, ed. by Bonnie Wheeler (Cambridge: Brewer, 2004), pp. 15-28. Pickens, Busby and Williams, 'Perceval and the Grail', pp. 247-259; Francesco Zambon, 'La Trilogia di Robert de Boron', in *Metamorfosi del Graal*, pp. 187-200.

thirteenth century. It is a long and complex work, which strays far from the canon of contemporary Arthurian romances.²¹

The first half of the thirteenth century is marked by the rise of anonymous cycles of Arthurian prose romances. The oldest of these cycles, which decisively influenced all others, is known as the *Lancelot-Graal* or Vulgate Cycle (c. 1215-1230) and consists of five parts: *L'Estoire del Saint Graal*, *Merlin* (with its *Suite*), *Lancelot*, *La Queste del Saint Graal*, and *La Mort le roi Artu*.²² Although partially adapted to the new cyclic structure, and connected to the following romances by a long addition (*Suite Merlin*) that mainly draws from Wace's *Brut*, the first two parts are heavily inspired by Robert de Boron's works and tell the story of the Holy Grail and of Britain from the death of Christ until the early years of Arthur's kingdom. On the other hand, the last three parts, often indicated as *Lancelot en prose*, mainly focus on Lancelot's youth and chivalric adventures, the quest for the Holy Grail and the last years of Arthur's kingdom. Among the romance sources of the *Lancelot en prose*, it is worth mentioning Wace's *Brut*, Chrétien de Troyes's *Lancelot* and Robert de Boron's *Perceval*. One of the main innovations in this cycle is that the main protagonist of the quest for the Grail is no longer Perceval, but Lancelot's son: Galahad. The *Lancelot-Graal* cycle immediately enjoyed great success and was the subject of several rewritings. The so-called Post-Vulgate *Roman du Graal*, an hypothetical prose cycle which dates back to the years 1225-1240, was the earliest and most ambitious among these rewritings.²³ As it does not survive in its entirety in any manuscript, Fanni Bogdanow relied on the extant Old French fragments and the Portuguese and Castilian translations to reconstruct its text.²⁴ However, Bogdanow's reconstruction of this cycle has been challenged by several scholars and some

²¹ For more information on the *Perlesvaus*, see (among others): William Albert Nitze, 'Perlesvaus', in *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Loomis, pp. 263-273; Thomas E. Kelly, *Le Haut Livre du Graal: Perlesvaus. A structural study* (Geneva: Droz, 1974); Pickens, Busby and Williams, 'Perceval and the Grail', pp. 260-264.

²² I will deal with the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle in much more detail in chapter II. 1, to which we refer for further information and bibliography. For general information, see (among others): Jean Frappier, 'The Vulgate Cycle', in *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Loomis, pp. 295-318; Alexandre Micha, 'The Vulgate Merlin', in *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Loomis, pp. 319-324; *A Companion to the Lancelot-Graal Cycle*, ed. by Carol Dover (Cambridge: Brewer, 2003); Elspeth Kennedy and others, 'Lancelot with and without the Grail: *Lancelot do Lac* and the Vulgate Cycle', in *The Arthur of the French*, ed. by Burgess and Pratt, pp. 274-324; Richard Trachsler, 'Dalla Trilogia di Robert de Boron al ciclo di Gautier Map. Un nuovo eroe per un nuovo Graal', in *Il racconto del Graal: Un mito universale fra storia, cultura e simboli*, ed. by Giacomo Maria Prati and Alessandro Coscia (Milan: Jouvence, 2021), pp. 389-403.

²³ On the Post-Vulgate cycle, see (among others): Fanni Bogdanow, 'The *Suite du Merlin* and the Post-Vulgate *Roman du Graal*', in *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Loomis, pp. 325-335; Fanni Bogdanow and Richard Trachsler, 'Rewriting prose romance: the Post-Vulgate *Roman du Graal* and related texts', in *The Arthur of the French*, ed. by Burgess and Pratt, pp. 342-392 (pp. 342-352).

²⁴ See: *La Folie Lancelot: A Hitherto Unidentified Portion of the Suite du Merlin Contained in Mss B.N. fr 112 and 12599*, ed. by Fanni Bogdanow (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1965); Fanni Bogdanow, *The Romance of the Grail: A Study of the Structure and Genesis of a Thirteenth-Century Arthurian Prose Romance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966); *La version Post-Vulgate de la Queste del Saint Graal et de la Mort Artu: troisième partie du Roman du Graal*, ed. by Fanni Bogdanow, 5 vols (Paris: SATF, 1991-2001).

of them even denied that an Old French Post-Vulgate ever existed.²⁵ The Post-Vulgate covers the same events as the *Lancelot-Graal*, with significant plot changes and less emphasis on Lancelot's story.

The most successful prose romance, along with the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle, was the so-called prose *Tristan* (c. 1230-1235), whose manuscript tradition credits two mysterious authors: Luce del Gast and Hélie de Boron.²⁶ It is witnessed by about a hundred manuscripts and fragments, which convey numerous versions of the text. The author drew on the twelfth-century verse versions of the story of Tristan and Iseult, integrating them with the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle and other material. In the prose *Tristan*, the protagonist is to all effects an Arthurian knight. His prowess and chivalry, which allow the author to equate him with Lancelot, are the central focus of the romance, as much as his relationship with Iseult. Hence, the plot combines the typical love themes of the Tristan matter with adventurous episodes drawn or inspired from the *Lancelot-Graal*. In general, the author appears to have wanted to provide the reader with a kind of *summa* of the entire Breton world. Scholars have traditionally divided the various versions of the romance into two main families, known as V.I or 'short version' and V.II or 'vulgate', but this classification has been called into question several times in the last decades. In general, the prose *Tristan* is attested in such a wide variety of forms that a well-defined classification of the versions of the romance is extremely hard to provide.²⁷ The *Guiron le Courtois* or *Palamède* (c. 1235), which combines the worlds of Arthur and Tristan, is the last of the great Arthurian prose cycle of the thirteen century.²⁸ The *Guiron* consists of three romances – *Roman de Meliadus*, *Roman de Guiron*

²⁵ For detailed analyses of Bogdanow's reconstruction, with reference to studies that called it into question, see: Nicola Morato, 'Artù italiano e iberico (sec. XII-XVI). Appunti in margine ai volumi VII e VIII di ALMA', *Revista de Literatura Medieval*, 29 (2017), 263-282 (pp. 275-277); Nicola Morato, 'Histoire d'une diaspora textuelle. Les récits du Pseudo-Robert de Boron dans les travaux de Fanni Bogdanow', in *En Français hors de France. Textes, livres, collections du Moyen Âge*, ed. by Fabio Zinelli and Sylvie Lefèvre (Strasbourg: ELiPhi, 2021), pp. 109-139.

²⁶ On the prose *Tristan*, see (among others): Eugène Vinaver, 'The Prose *Tristan*', in *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Loomis, pp. 339-347; Renée L. Curtis, *Tristan Studies* (Munich: Fink, 1969); Emmanuèle Baumgartner, *Le «Tristan en prose». Essai d'interprétation d'un roman médiéval* (Geneva: Droz, 1975); Emmanuèle Baumgartner, *L'harpe et l'épée. Tradition et renouvellement dans le Tristan en prose* (Paris: SEDES, 1990); *Nouvelles recherches sur le Tristan en prose*, ed. by Jean Dufournet (Paris: Champion, 1990); Punzi, *Tristano*, pp. 121-163; Emmanuèle Baumgartner, 'The Prose *Tristan*', in *The Arthur of the French*, ed. by Burgess and Pratt, pp. 325-341.

²⁷ The most effective attempt to classify the numerous versions of the romance is provided by: Fabrizio Cigni, 'Per un riesame della tradizione del *Tristan* in prosa, con nuove osservazioni sul ms. Paris, BnF, fr. 756-757', in *Culture, livelli di cultura e ambienti nel Medioevo occidentale: atti del IX convegno della Società Italiana di Filologia Romanza*, Bologna, 5-8 ottobre 2009, ed. by Francesco Benozzo and others (Rome: Aracne, 2012), pp. 247-278. See also Huw Grange, 'The Versions of the Prose *Tristan*, with Particular Reference to ms. 164 of the Fondation Martin Bodmer', *Medioevo romanzo*, 39.2 (2015), 321-349. Both Cigni and Grange called into question the traditional distinction between V.1 and V.2.

²⁸ On the *Guiron le Courtois*, see (among others): Cedric E. Pickford, 'Miscellaneous French Prose Romances', in *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Loomis, pp. 348-357 (pp. 348-350); Bogdanow and Trachsler, 'Rewriting prose romance', pp. 364-367; Nicola Morato, *Il ciclo di «Guiron le Courtois». Struttura e testi nella tradizione manoscritta* (Florence: SISMEL, 2010).

and *Suite Guiron* – and survives in around forty manuscripts and fragments. Set between the later years of Uther Pendragon's reign and the early years of Arthur's, the story features knights from the generation preceding those depicted in the *Lancelot en prose* and prose *Tristan*, both works that the anonymous author of the cycle knew and for which he wanted to lay the historical foundations.

I. 2 The Arthurian Romances in Italy

The earliest circulation of the Arthurian stories in Italy dates back to the first half of the twelfth century, possibly before the composition of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* and Wace's *Roman de Brut*.²⁹ The archivolt of the Modena cathedral's Porta della Pescheria and a mosaic of the Otranto cathedral floor – completed by 1140 and 1165 respectively – are the first material evidence of the circulation of Arthurian stories in the Italian peninsula.³⁰ Onomastic attestations of names such as *Artusius* or *Galvanus* also testify to the popularity of these legends in Italy from the first half of the twelfth century.³¹ However, the literary sources of these onomastic and artistic witnesses, if any, cannot be identified, and scholars tend to link them to oral traditions, or, as in the case of the Otranto mosaic, to the influence of Norman culture in southern Italy.³² From the second half of the twelfth century onwards, evidence of the circulation of Arthurian stories in Italy increased considerably. In particular, local legends and traditions, as well as hagiography and Latin literature, attest to the fact that Arthurian imagery was by then widespread.³³ Nonetheless,

²⁹ To write this section, I relied on some general studies on the circulation of the Matter of Britain in Italy, such as: Gardner, *The Arthurian Legend*; Viscardi, 'Arthurian influences on Italian literature'; Donald L. Hoffman, 'The Arthurian Tradition in Italy', in *King Arthur Through the Ages*, ed. by Valerie M. Lagorio and Mildred Leake Day, 2 vols (New York: Garland, 1990), I, pp. 170-188; Christopher Kleinhenz, 'Italian Arthurian Literature', in *The New Arthurian Encyclopedia*, ed. by Lacy, pp. 245-248; Daniela Delcorno Branca, *Tristano e Lancillotto in Italia. Studi di letteratura arturiana* (Ravenna: Longo, 1998); Daniela Delcorno Branca, 'Le storie arturiane in Italia', in *Lo spazio letterario del Medioevo, t. II: Il Medioevo volgare; t. III: La ricezione del testo* (Rome: Salerno, 2003), pp. 385-403; *The Arthur of the Italians*, ed. by Gloria Allaire and F. Regina Psaki (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2014); Ilaria Molteni, *I romanzi arturiani in Italia. Tradizioni narrative, strategie delle immagini, Geografia artistica* (Rome: Viella, 2020). For further bibliography see Christopher Kleinhenz, 'Italian Arthurian Literature', in *A History of Arthurian Scholarship*, ed. by Lacy, pp. 190-197.

³⁰ Gloria Allaire, 'Arthurian Art in Italy', in *The Arthur of the Italians*, ed. by Allaire and Psaki, pp. 205-232 (pp. 206-208).

³¹ Pio Rajna, 'Gli eroi bretoni nell'onomastica italiana del secolo XII', *Romania*, 17 (1888), 161-185; Pio Rajna, 'Ancora gli eroi bretoni nell'onomastica italiana del secolo XII', *Romania*, 17 (1888), 355-365.

³² Keith Busby, 'Arthuriana in the Italian Regions of Medieval Francophonia', in *The Arthur of the Italians*, ed. by Allaire and Psaki, pp. 11-20 (p. 14): 'Neither of these images represents anything from Geoffrey of Monmouth and both predate Chrétien de Troyes. It therefore seems reasonable to conjecture that the sources of both the Modena and Otranto images may have been oral tales, brought over the Alps by itinerant storytellers and/or Norman craftsmen'. On this topic, see also Gardner, *The Arthurian Legend*, pp. 1-6.

³³ On this topic, see: Gardner, *The Arthurian Legend*, pp. 6-20; Helene Wieruszowski, 'King Arthur's Round Table. An "Academic" Club in Thirteenth-Century Tuscany', in *Politics and Culture in medieval Spain and Italy* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1971), pp. 379-386; Delcorno Branca, 'Le storie arturiane', p.

references to King Arthur or the Round Table are rather conventional in this period and do not allow us to deduce anything specific about the circulation of Old French romances. The only evidence of specific Arthurian texts circulating in the late twelfth century can be found in Godfrey of Viterbo's *Pantheon*, a kind of universal history in Latin. In the section of his work on the Angles and Saxons, Godfrey tells some episodes of the stories of Vortigern, Merlin, Uther and Arthur according to the version attested in Geoffrey of Monmouth and Wace. However, there is no certain evidence of the circulation of Old French Arthurian romances in Italy before the thirteenth century.

Given the almost total lack of manuscripts produced or attested in thirteenth-century Italy, the only way to reconstruct the circulation of Arthurian verse romances in this context is to look at quotations in literary texts.³⁴ As Daniela Delcorno Branca points out, dealing with this topic entails the need to reconstruct 'submerged traditions' that are undoubtedly minor compared to those of prose romances, but by no means irrelevant.³⁵ Deducing the circulation of a text in a given context from literary quotations requires particular caution, especially when dealing with Arthurian romances, whose characters and typical situations soon became part of a repertoire of *topoi* and *exempla*. This was particularly the case in lyric poetry, where Arthurian characters became emblems of specific sentiments or moral qualities, just like those from classical myth and literature. The relationship between Tristan and Iseult, for example, had already become an *exemplum* of courtly love in troubadour poetry. Hence, when an author mentions Tristan as an emblematic case of passionate lover, it does not necessarily mean that he knew a specific romance, or at least it is not always possible to establish which version of the story he knew. For this reason, when compiling a list of references to Arthurian characters or situations in thirteenth-century Italian literature, it is necessary to distinguish quotations that allow us to deduce information about the author's literary knowledge from those that are purely conventional. Due to the large number of references to the Matter of Britain in early Italian literature, the list provided is not intended

386; Franco Cardini, 'Arthur in Hagiography: the Legend of San Galgano', in *The Arthur of the Italians*, ed. by Allaire and Psaki, pp. 179-189.

³⁴ This reconstruction mainly relies on the following studies: Gardner, *The Arthurian Legend*, pp. 21-43; Roberta Capelli, 'Presenze arturiane nella lirica italiana delle origini', *Quaderni di lingue e letterature*, 31 (2006), 43-56; Roberta Capelli, 'Presenze arturiane nella lirica italiana delle origini (2a parte)', *Quaderni di lingue e letterature*, 32 (2007), 17-27; Roberta Capelli, 'Caratteri e funzioni dell'elemento cavalleresco-cortese nella lirica italiana del Due e Trecento', in *La letteratura cavalleresca dalle chansons de geste alla Gerusalemme liberata*, ed. by Michelangelo Picone (Pisa: Pacini, 2008), pp. 91-122; Daniela Delcorno Branca, 'Diffusione della materia arturiana in Italia: per un riesame delle "tradizioni sommerse"', in *Culture, livelli di cultura e ambienti*, ed. by Benozzo and others, pp. 321-340; Busby, 'Arthuriana'; Roberta Capelli, 'The Arthurian Presence in Early Italian Lyric', in *The Arthur of the Italians*, ed. by Allaire and Psaki, pp. 133-144; Claudio Lagomarsini, 'Les Trois Couronnes et les autres: le mythe arthurien dans la poésie italienne des XIII^e-XV^e siècles', in *La matière arthurienne tardive*, ed. by Ferlampin-Acher, pp. 555-570.

³⁵ Daniela Delcorno Branca, 'Diffusione della materia arturiana'.

to be exhaustive. However, it will suffice to show how some Arthurian verse romances could have enjoyed a certain degree of success in thirteenth-century Italy.

The poetry of the Sicilian School does not lack references to the Tristan matter.³⁶ Some of these are rather conventional and seem to derive from the influence of Occitan poetry, from which the Sicilian School drew a wide repertoire of metrical forms, themes, and motifs. For example, comparisons between the condition of the poet in love and that of Tristan are a common cliché in troubadour poetry that is also found in several poems of the Sicilian School, such as Filippo da Messina's *Ai, Siri deo, con forte fu lo punto* and Giacomino Pugliese's *La dolcie ciera piagiente*.³⁷ However, some poems of the Sicilian School also contain references to the Tristan matter which, unlike those just mentioned, allow us to guess something about their author's literary knowledge. The most famous one is found in Giacomo da Lentini's *Madonna mia, a voi mando*, where the Sicilian poet could allude to the episode of the 'salle aux images' ('hall of images') in Thomas's *Tristan*. In this episode, Tristan, in exile in Brittany, tries to make up for Iseult's absence by turning to a life-size image of her and pretending that it is really his beloved. Similarly, Giacomo da Lentini recalls the day he recreated the form of his lady in wax and compares her to Iseult:

In gran diletanza era,
madonna, in quello giorno
quando vi formai in cera
le belleze d'intorno.
Più bella mi parete
ca Isolda la bronda,
amorosa, gioconda,
flor de le donne sete.³⁸
(vv. 41-48)

I felt such great delight / my lady, on the day / when I portrayed your face / with all the
beauty you possess: / you seem more beautiful / than faire Isolde was / my sweetheart

³⁶ On the presence of the Tristan matter in the poetry of the Sicilian School, see: Mario Mancini, 'Giacomo da Lentini, Tristano, i trovatori', in *La poesia di Giacomo da Lentini: Scienza e filosofia nel XIII secolo in Sicilia e nel Mediterraneo occidentale*, ed. by Rossend Arqués (Palermo: Centro di Studi filologici e linguistici siciliani, 2000), pp. 214-241. Maria Luisa Meneghetti, 'Cultura cavalleresca', in *Federico II. Enciclopedia fridericiana*, 3 vols (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 2005-2008), I, pp. 438-444; Michelangelo Picone, 'Temi tristaniani nella lirica dei Siciliani', in *Le forme del narrare poetico* (Florence: Cesati, 2007), pp. 21-34; Michelangelo Picone, 'Tracce tristaniane nella lirica dei Siciliani', in *'Accessus ad auctores': Studies in Honor of Christopher Kleinhenz*, ed. by Fabian Alfie and Andrea Dini (Tempe: ACMRS, 2011), pp. 39-50.

³⁷ For more specific references to these texts, see Capelli, 'Caratteri e funzioni', p. 104.

³⁸ *Le rime della Scuola siciliana*, ed. by Bruno Panvini, 2 vols (Florence: Olschki, 1962), I, p. 31.

full of joy, / for you best each and all.³⁹

Similar imagery is also found in Giacomo da Lentini's *Meravigliosa-mente*, which, however, does not refer to Tristan and Iseult:

Avendo gran disio
dipinsi una figura,
bella, a voi simigliante;
e quando voi non vïo
guardo in quella pintura,
e par ch'eo v'agia avante:
sì com'om che si crede
salvare per sua fede
ancor non via davante.⁴⁰
(vv. 19-27)

Possessed of great desire, / I painted, fairest one, / a picture of your likeness, / and when
I don't see you, / I look upon that form / and think I have you here, / like someone who
believes / he'll save his soul through faith, / though it's not there to see.⁴¹

Another possible reference to Thomas's *Tristan* can be found in Giacomo da Lentini's *Dal core mi vene*. The poet, far from his lady, imagines disguising himself as a pilgrim ('romeo', v. 29), secretly visiting her and, once there, enjoying her sweetness without ever leaving her side. Immediately afterwards, Giacomo returns to talk about his current state of being, characterised by distance and pain, and declares that he loves his lady more intensely than Tristan loved Iseult:

Or potess'eo,
o amore meo,
come romeo
venire ascoso
e, disïoso, - con voi mi vedisse!
non mi partisse - dal vostro dolzore!

³⁹ Giacomo da Lentini, *The Complete Poetry*, trans. by Richard Lansing (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), p. 75.

⁴⁰ *Le rime della Scuola siciliana*, ed. by Panvini, I, p. 8.

⁴¹ Giacomo da Lentini, *The Complete Poetry*, trans. by Lansing, p. 25.

Dal vostro lato
 [stando] allungato,
 ben ò provato
 mal che non solda.
 Tristano a Isolda - non amau sì forte;
 ben mi par morte - non vedervi fiore.⁴²
 (vv. 25-36)

If I could now / my dearest love, / come secretly disguised / in pilgrim dress, / full of
 desire, / and find myself with you, / I'd never part / from your sweet company. / By
 being far / ... apart from you / I've borne a wound / that never heals: / Sir Tristan did
 not love / Isolde with such zeal; / it surely seems like death / to see you not at all.⁴³

This comparison may not be coincidental, since in Thomas's romance *Tristan*, after his exile in Brittany, returns to Mark's court as a pilgrim in order not to be recognised. Thanks to this stratagem, he is able to enjoy Iseult's love one last time. Another possible reference to Thomas's *Tristan* can be found in Re Giovanni's *Donna, audite como*, which contains in a few verses a general summary of the story of Tristan and Iseult. The reference to King Mark's trust in Tristan (vv. 56-57) is more compatible with Thomas's version than with the prose *Tristan*, in which Mark begins to show hostility towards his nephew even before his meeting with Iseult:

Fino amor m'à comandato
 ch'io m'allegri tuttavia,
 faccia sì ch'io serva a grato
 a la dolze donna mia,
 quella c'amo più 'n celato
 che Tristano non faccia
 Isotta, como cantato,
 ancor che li fosse zia.
 Lo re Marco era 'nganato
 perché 'n lui si confidia:
 ello n'era smisurato
 e Tristan se ne godia

⁴² *Le rime della Scuola siciliana*, ed. by Panvini, I, p. 37.

⁴³ Giacomo da Lentini, *The Complete Poetry*, trans. by Lansing, pp. 37, 39.

de lo bel viso rosato
ch'Isaotta blond' avia:
ancor che fosse peccato,
altro far non ne potia,
ch'a la nave li fui dato
onde ciò li dovenia.⁴⁴
(vv. 47-64)

Fine love has commanded me that I ever rejoice; may it make me serve acceptably my sweet lady, she whom I love more secretly than Tristan did Iseult, as is told, albeit she was his aunt; King Mark was deceived, for he trusted him. He was excessive therein, and Tristan enjoyed the fair rosy face that gold-haired Iseult had; albeit it was sin, nought else could he do; for on the ship was given them whence this befell them.⁴⁵

In spite of the many coincidences, none of these literary references offers certain proof of the circulation of Thomas's *Tristan* in Frederick II's Sicily. There is even more uncertainty when we look at the poets of the so-called Tuscan school, who, when dealing with the Tristan matter, almost exclusively drew on the lyrical *clichés* already characteristic of Occitan and Sicilian poetry. The references to Tristan and Iseult in Ruggieri Apugliese, Bonagiunta Orbicciani, Inghilfredi, Maestro Torrigiano, and Chiaro Davanzati – among others – are too conventional to identify any source.⁴⁶ On the other hand, Palamidesse di Bellindote's *Amor, grande peccato* clearly refers to the episode of the *Joyeuse Garde* in the prose *Tristan*:

A la Guardia Gioiosa
te· ·n· va' al mio Tristano,
mia chanzone dolorosa,
e di' che Speranvano
a lei tosto verà.⁴⁷
(vv. 61-65)

Wend thee to Joyous Gard, my mournful song, to my Tristan, and say that Hope-in-Vain will soon come to her.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ *Le rime della Scuola siciliana*, ed. by Panvini, I, p. 87.

⁴⁵ Gardner, *The Arthurian Legend*, p. 24.

⁴⁶ For more specific references to these texts see Lagomarsini, 'Les Trois Couronnes', pp. 556-557.

⁴⁷ *Concordanze della Lingua Poetica Italiana delle Origini*, ed. by D'Arco Silvio Avalle (Milan-Naples: Ricciardi, 1992), p. 393.

⁴⁸ Gardner, *The Arthurian Legend*, p. 38.

According to Delcorno Branca, the late thirteenth-century Tuscan poem *Mare Amoro*, although mostly referring to Arthurian prose romances, may have been influenced by Thomas's version of the episode in which Tristan and Iseult drink the love philtre on the ship to Cornwall.⁴⁹ The poet's description of his own grave in the final verses of the poem, where he also mentions the death of Kahedin, a character who dies for his love of Iseult in the prose *Tristan*, bears rhetorical and stylistic similarities to the episode of the love philtre as narrated by Thomas. In particular, both texts are characterised by a series of paronomasias and other rhetorical devices based on the words *mare/mer*, *amare/amer*, *amore/amur*, etc. These are the verses in question from the *Mare Amoro*:

Io farei scrivere nella mia tomba
una scritta che direbbe così:
'Chi vuole amare, li convien tremare,
bramare, chiamare, sì come 'l marinaio in mare amaro;
e chin no·m crede, mi deggia mirare per maraviglia,
ché per amor son morto in amarore,
sì com'è morto Nadriano e Caedino'.⁵⁰
(vv. 327-333)

I would have an inscription on my tombstone saying: "He who wants to love will tremble, yearn, cry out like the sailor in the bitter sea; and he who does not believe me must look at me in amazement, since for love I died in bitterness, as did Nadrian and Caedinus".⁵¹

This is the corresponding passage from Thomas's *Tristan* (Carlisle Fragment):

"Cum bien crëustes vus, amis
Si vus ne fussez, ja ne fusse,
ne de l'amer rien ne sëusse.
Merveille est k'om la mer ne het
qui si amer mal en mer set,
e qui l'anguisse est si amere !
Si je une foiz fors en ere,
ja n'i enteroie, ce quit".

⁴⁹ Delcorno Branca, 'Diffusione della materia arturiana', pp. 326-329.

⁵⁰ *Poeti del Duecento*, ed. by Gianfranco Contini, 2 vols (Milan-Naples: Ricciardi, 1960), I, p. 500.

⁵¹ The translation is mine.

Tristan ad noté chescun dit,
 Mes el l'ad issi forsvëé
 par «l'amer» que ele ad tant changé
 que ne set si cele dolur
 ad de la mer ou de l'amur
 ou s'el dit «amer» de «la mer»
 ou pur «l'amur» diët «amer».
 Pur la dotance quë il sent
 demande li si l'*amur* li prent
 ou si ja grante ou s'el s'*astient*.
 [.....
]
 “Par tant qu'el voir le...te
 car deus mals i put l'en sentir
 l'un d'amer, l'autre de puïr”.
 Ysolt dit : “Ce mal que je sent
 est amer, mes ne put nient :
 mon quer angoisse e pres le tient.
 E tel amer de la mer vient :
 prist puis que *je çaenz* entray”.
 Tristan respont : “Autretel ay:
 ly miens mal est del vostre estrait.
 L'anguisse mon quer amer fait,
 si ne sent pas le mal amer;
 n'il ne revient pas de la mer,
 mes d'amer ay ceste dolur,
 e en la mer m'est pris l'amur”.⁵²
 (vv. 38-71)

“As you believed, my friend, if you weren't (here?), I wouldn't ever have been, and I wouldn't have known anything about bitterness/love. It's odd that people don't hate the sea when they know that at sea there is such bitter ill, and that its anguish is so bitter! If I can ever get out of it, I'll never go back in, I think”. But she has confused him here by «l'amer» on which she has rung such changes that he doesn't know if this pain she has is from the sea or from love, or if she is saying «bitter» about «the sea» or is saying «love» is «bitter». In the doubt he feels / he asks himself if love has taken her, / and if

⁵² Michael Benskin, Tony Hunt and Ian Short, ‘Un nouveau fragment du *Tristan* de Thomas’, *Romania*, 113 (1992), 289-319 (pp. 301-303).

she is yielding to it or refraining. / [...] “Yet... the truth... for one can feel two ills from this, one from loving, the other from putrid illness”. Ysolt says, “The ill that I feel is bitter, but not putrid at all; it torments my heart and holds it tight. This bitterness comes from the sea, it took hold since I embarked on it.” Tristan replies, “I have a similar one; my ill is derived from yours. Torment makes my heart love yet it does not feel the illness as bitter; nor does it come from the sea, from loving I have this pain, and on the sea love seized me”.⁵³

Delcorno Branca also notes the influence of Thomas’s *Tristan* in two Tuscan works from the late thirteenth and mid-fourteenth centuries respectively: the novella 65 of the *Novellino*, which recounts the episode of the nocturnal encounter in the garden between Tristan and Iseult, spied by King Mark, and the Polidori version of the Italian Arthurian romance *Tavola Ritonda*.⁵⁴ In both these texts, the episode of the garden meeting shows a contamination of elements drawn from Thomas with others characteristic of the versions of Béroul and the German poet Eilhart von Oberg.⁵⁵ This leads Delcorno Branca to suggest that the anonymous authors of the *Novellino* and the *Tavola Ritonda* referred to a common source or antecedent for their texts.⁵⁶ In any case, Thomas’s *Tristan* was probably the most successful Arthurian verse romance in thirteenth-century Italy. Despite the complete absence of an Italian manuscript tradition, literary references allow us to hypothesise its presence in the Sicily of Frederick II or the Florence of Dante’s youth, where both the *Novellino* and the *Mare Amoro* were written. On the other hand, other verse versions of the Tristan story are not attested. The presence in *Novellino* 65 of characteristic elements of the so-called ‘vulgar’ version, which is also attested in Eilhart von Oberg’s *Tristrant*, is not sufficient evidence to prove that Béroul’s *Tristan* circulated in the Italian peninsula.

Reconstructing the circulation of Chrétien de Troyes’s romances in thirteenth-century Italy is even more complex.⁵⁷ The poems of the Sicilian School, which often mention Tristan, do not include any references to Chrétien’s characters. The oldest references to Chrétien’s works date back to the second half of the thirteenth century and are mainly found in Tuscany.

⁵³ ‘The Carlisle Fragment of Thomas’s *Tristan*’, trans. by Judy Shoaf, <<https://people.clas.ufl.edu/jshoaf/carlisle-tristan/>> [accessed 26 July 2023].

⁵⁴ Delcorno Branca, ‘I racconti arturiani del «Novellino»’, in *Tristano e Lancillotto*, pp. 117-142 (pp. 119-126); Delcorno Branca, ‘Diffusione della materia arturiana’, pp. 329-330.

⁵⁵ Eilhart von Oberg is the author of the Middle High German romance *Tristrant* (c. 1170-1190), which, just like Béroul, witnesses the ‘primitive’ or ‘common’ version of the story. On the German versions of the Tristan romances, see Lacy and Ashe, *The Arthurian Handbook*, pp. 100-103.

⁵⁶ Delcorno Branca, ‘I racconti arturiani del «Novellino»’, p. 122.

⁵⁷ On the circulation of Chrétien de Troyes’s romances in thirteenth-century Italy, see: Ferdinando Neri, ‘Sulle tracce di Chrétien de Troyes’, *Atti dell’Accademia delle Scienze di Torino*, 86.2 (1940-1941), 220-226; Keith Busby, ‘Chrétien in Italy’, in *Accessus ad auctores*, ed. by Alfie and Dini, pp. 25-38.

In *Amor tanto altamente*, a poem written before 1265, Guittone d'Arezzo refers to the episode of the Grail Castle in the *Perceval*, where the protagonist, after witnessing the procession of the Bleeding Lance and the Grail, does not inquire its meaning:

Però 'n tacer m'asservo,
perché già guiderdone
non dea cheder bon servo;
bisogna i' n'ho, che 'l chere 'l suo servire,
se no atendendo m'allasso;
poi m'avvenisse, lasso!,
che mi trovasse in fallo
sì come Prenzevallo – a non cherere.⁵⁸
(vv. 69-76)

Thus in silence I subject myself, because no good servant must ever ask for a reward;
all I need is to ask to serve her, or else, waiting, I bind myself; then I, alas, would find
myself at fault just like Perceval – for not asking.⁵⁹

Chrétien's *Perceval* is also quoted by the Venetian troubadour Bartolomeo Zorzi in his Occitan sestina *En tal dezirs mos cors intra* (1260s-1270s). Zorzi refers to the episode of Perceval's confession to his hermit uncle:

Don convenra que l'arma l'enfern intra,
qu'el si gaudet, pois amors i mes l'ongla
com Percevaus tro qu'anet a son oncle.⁶⁰
(vv. 16-18)

So it's fitting that the soul will enter hell, / for it rejoices once love has put its fingernail
in, / like Perceval before he went to his uncle.⁶¹

Cligès is another romance that seems to have enjoyed some degree of success in thirteenth-century Italy. One of the oldest references to this work is found in Guittone's *Letter* 21, addressed to Orlando da Chiusi and composed after 1261. The letter explicitly mentions

⁵⁸ *Le Rime di Guittone d'Arezzo*, ed. by Francesco Egidi (Bari: Laterza, 1940), p. 49.

⁵⁹ Busby, 'Arthuriana', p. 15.

⁶⁰ Emil Levy, *Der Troubadour Bertolome Zorzi* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1883), p. 68.

⁶¹ Busby, 'Arthuriana', p. 14.

Chrétien's name and one of his characters, Alexander. It also includes a translation of *Cligès* 157-158, verses that Guittone uses as a sort of moral maxim:

Unde Cristiano là ove Alessandro Novello dice:

“Reposo e loda
non concordano bene insieme”.⁶²

Thus Chrétien, where the new Alexander says, “Rest and fame do not go well together”.⁶³

Another reference to Cligès is found in a text by an anonymous thirteenth-century scribe, written on a blank page of a manuscript of the *Roman d'Eneas*.⁶⁴ In this text, an attempt to write an Occitan *salut d'amor*, the scribe mentions, together with Floire and Blancheflor, the two couples of lovers of Chrétien's *Cliges*.⁶⁵

En am plus vos
de bon cor lialmenz
che Cliges non ama
Fenices verament
ne Floire Blancaflor
ne Alixandre Soredamors⁶⁶.

I love you with a true heart more loyally than Cligès loved Fenice, or Floire
Blanchefleur, or Alexandre Soredamor'.⁶⁷

Other references to Chrétien's romances can be found in the works of two authors who were contemporaries of Guittone. In *Oi, amadori, intendete l'affanno*, Bonagiunta Orbicciani claims to suffer more for love than Tristan and Yvain, the protagonist of Chrétien's homonymous romance:

E messere Ivano
e 'l dolze Tristano

⁶² Guittone d'Arezzo, *Lettere*, ed. by Claude Margueron (Bologna: Commissione per i Testi di Lingua, 1990), p. 229.

⁶³ Busby, 'Arthuriana', p. 15.

⁶⁴ Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. XLIV. 44, f. 60v (s. 12^{ex}).

⁶⁵ Busby, 'Chrétien in Italy', pp. 29-30.

⁶⁶ *Eneas. Texte critique*, ed. by Jacques Salverda de Grave (Halle: Niemeyer, 1891), p. iii.

⁶⁷ Busby, 'Arthuriana', p. 16.

ciaschuno fue sotano
inver'me di languire.⁶⁸
(vv. 30-33)

And Sir Yvain and sweet Tristan were both my inferiors in suffering.⁶⁹

The sonnet *Ragione mosse ed amor lo Fattore*, addressed to Guittone by an anonymous author and preserved in the Laurenziano Rediano 9, ends with a reference to *Erec et Enide*:⁷⁰

Vostro son più non fu d'Enida Erecche.⁷¹

'I am yours more than Erec was Enide's'.⁷²

In light of these references, it could be argued that the period of greatest circulation of Chrétien's romances in Tuscany, and in Italy, was the third quarter of the thirteenth century. However, some references to these romances in *L'Intelligenza*, an anonymous Tuscan poem written between the end of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth century, show that some of them may still have been in circulation in Dante's time. In a long series of stanzas in which the author describes the paintings on the ceiling of his lady's palace, no less than three of Chrétien's romances are mentioned, whose characters appear together with other pairs of lovers from the Biblical, classical, and romance traditions:

74
Èv' Alessandro e Ros[s]enna d'Amore,
Messere Erecco ed Enidia davante,
[...]

75
E non fallio chi·ffu lo 'ntagliadore
la bella Analidà e 'l buonn-Ivano;
èvi intagliato Fiore e Blanzifiore
e la bell' Isaotta Blanzesmano.

⁶⁸ *Concordanze della Lingua Poetica Italiana delle Origini*, ed. by Avallé, p. 354.

⁶⁹ Busby, 'Arthuriana', p. 17.

⁷⁰ Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Redi 9, no. 274, c. 124v. (Tuscany, s. 13^{ex}).

⁷¹ *Il Canzoniere Laurenziano*, ed. by Lino Leonardi (Florence: SISMEL, 2007), p. xxix.

⁷² Gardner, *The Arthurian Legend*, p. 31.

Si com' ella morio per fin amore,
cotanto amò Lanciallotto sovrano,
èvi la nobile Donna del Lago;
quella di Maloalto col cuor vago,
e Palamidès cavalier pagano.⁷³

There are Alexander and Roxana of Love, Sir Erec, and Enide before him, [...]. And he did not err, whoever depicted fair Analidà and good Yvain; depicted there are Floire and Blanchefleur, and beautiful Iseut of the White Hands. Just as she died of noble love for loving the lofty Lancelot so much, the noble Lady of the Lake is there; she of Malehaut, with the loving heart, and Palamedes, the pagan knight.⁷⁴

The anonymous author mentions two pairs of lovers from Chrétien's romances in the first two verses of the stanza 74: Alexander and Soredamor, the parents of Cligès, and Erec and Enide. In the following stanza, Yvain is mentioned together with Analida, a rather problematic name given that Yvain's lady is always referred to in the manuscripts as 'Laudine', 'Laudune' or '*la dame*'.⁷⁵ On the other hand, the fact that Lancelot is associated with the Lady of the Lake and the Lady of Malehaut suggests that the *Lancelot en prose* was the version of the story known to the author. At first sight, the references to the Arthurian matter in *L'Intelligenza*, as well as those in Bonagiunta, the Occitan *salut* and the anonymous sonnet addressed to Guittone, are rather conventional: Chrétien's characters are always mentioned as emblematic examples of lovers. With regard to *L'Intelligenza*, scholars disagree about the author's knowledge of the romances he quotes. While Marco Berisso believes that his familiarity with the Arthurian matter could be superficial, Daniela Delcorno Branca sees in the poem a possible intention to refer to less vulgate or elite readings.⁷⁶ More optimistically, Keith Busby argues that:

We can at the very least conclude from all these references in Zorzi, the Occitan *salut* from the Laurenziana *Eneas* manuscript, Guittone, Bonagiunta, and *L'Intelligenza* that Italian poets knew Chrétien and expected their audiences and readers to as well.⁷⁷

⁷³ For the text of *L'Intelligenza*, see, once for all, *L'Intelligenza: poemetto anonimo del secolo XIII*, ed. by Marco Berisso (Milan-Parma: Guanda, 2000).

⁷⁴ Busby, 'Arthuriana', p. 17.

⁷⁵ Busby, 'Chrétien in Italy', p. 31.

⁷⁶ See: *L'Intelligenza*, ed. by Berisso, p. 267; Delcorno Branca, 'Diffusione della materia arturiana', pp. 333-334.

⁷⁷ Busby, 'Chrétien in Italy', p. 32.

On the basis of these data, it is extremely difficult to determine the real extent of the circulation of Chrétien's works in Italy. Nevertheless, some limited and provisional conclusions can be drawn on this issue. Firstly, there is no evidence of the circulation of Chrétien's *Lancelot* in thirteenth and early fourteenth-century Italy. All references to Lancelot in early Italian literature, unless vague or stereotypical, point out to the prose version. Secondly, the *Erec et Enide* and *Yvain* are barely attested. The protagonists of both romances are mentioned in *L'Intelligenza*, while Yvain is named in Bonagiunta and Erec and Enide in the anonymous sonnet to Guittone. However, these references are rather stereotypical and tell us little about the authors' actual knowledge of these works. Thirdly, the *Perceval* seems to have circulated in Italy at least between 1250 and 1280. In both Guittone and Zorzi, the allusions to the *Perceval* refer to key points in the narrative and are used within sophisticated similes, suggesting that both authors had more than a superficial knowledge of the romance.⁷⁸ Moreover, in the *Mare Amoro*, probably composed around 1280, there is a reference to the 'Pucièle Laide' ('Loathly Damsel'), perhaps derived from the Second Continuation of the *Perceval*, a text that is always attested together with Chrétien's original work in the extant manuscripts:

Ed io vorrei bene, s'esser potesse,
che voi pareste a tutta l'altra gente
sì com' paria la Pulzella Laida.⁷⁹
(vv. 209-211)

And I were indeed fain, if it could be, that you might appear to all others even as the loathly damsel appeared.⁸⁰

Lastly, it is not risky to claim that the *Cligès* is the only romance by Chrétien that undoubtedly circulated in Italy between the 1250s and the early 1300s. As mentioned, it is quoted in Guittone's *Letter* 21, the Occitan *salut* and *L'Intelligenza*. While the latter texts mention some of its characters within traditional lists of lovers, Guittone translates some verses of the romance almost verbatim and names its author as 'Cristiano'. Guittone's quotation is not the only solid evidence for the circulation of this romance in medieval Tuscany: some of its verses were copied on a bifolium added at the end of a manuscript now

⁷⁸ Busby, 'Chrétien in Italy', pp. 28-29.

⁷⁹ *Poeti del Duecento*, ed. by Contini, I, p. 495.

⁸⁰ Gardner, *The Arthurian Legend*, p. 102.

preserved in the Biblioteca Riccardiana in Florence.⁸¹ This fragment, which roughly corresponds to verses 339-376 of the *Cligès*, was transcribed around 1300 by a Tuscan copyist. Gabriele Giannini identifies northern Italian linguistic features in the text, leading him to speculate that its antigraph, which presumably witnessed the entire romance, was made in northern Italy by the end of the thirteenth century.⁸² The Tuscan copyist, just like Guittone, seems to have been interested in the exemplary aspects of the romance: the verses he copied, which focus on Alexander's arrival at Arthur's court and his exemplary behaviour before the king, were chosen with a clear didactic purpose. According to Delcorno Branca, it is precisely the didactic and rhetorical interest characteristic of the Italian reception of the Arthurian romances that may have favoured the success of the *Cligès*.⁸³

As for the prose romances, their manuscript tradition is so extensive that there is no need to look at literary references.⁸⁴ The earliest evidence of the circulation of Arthurian prose romances in the Italian peninsula dates back to 1240, when Frederick II, in a letter sent from Foligno, thanks one of his officers for sending him a copy of the 'Liber Palamides', namely the *Roman de Meliadus*.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, the oldest Italian manuscripts of Arthurian prose romances date from around the 1270s and were produced in Genoa and perhaps Pisa.⁸⁶ In the past, a prominent role in the early circulation of French prose romances in Italy had also been attributed to Angevin Naples. However, a large and homogeneous group of manuscripts formerly associated with an unidentified Neapolitan scriptorium, and dated between the

⁸¹ Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, 2756, c. 72r (c. 1300). This text has been studied by Gabriele Giannini, 'Il romanzo francese in versi dei secoli XII e XIII in Italia: il *Cligès* Riccardiano', in *Modi e forme della fruizione della 'materia arturiana' nell'Italia dei secoli XIII-XIV*. Milano: 4-5 febbraio 2005 (Milan: Istituto Lombardo di Scienze e Lettere, 2006), pp. 119-158. See also Busby, 'Chrétien in Italy', pp. 34-38.

⁸² Giannini, 'Il *Cligès* Riccardiano', pp. 150-151.

⁸³ Delcorno Branca, 'Diffusione della materia arturiana', p. 335. On the Italian tendency to focus on the moral and didactic aspects of Arthurian romances, see Delcorno Branca, 'Le storie arturiane', pp. 392-398.

⁸⁴ On the history and geography of the circulation of Arthurian prose romances in thirteenth and early fourteenth-century Italy, see: Delcorno Branca, 'Le storie arturiane', pp. 385-389; Valeria Bertolucci Pizzorusso, 'La réception de la littérature courtoise du XII^e au XIV^e siècle en Italie: nouvelles propositions', in *The Court Reconvenes: Courtly Literature Across the Disciplines* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2003), pp. 3-13; Daniela Delcorno Branca, 'Lecteurs et interprètes des romans arthuriens en Italie: un examen à partir des études récentes', in *Medieval Multilingualism. The Francophone World and Its Neighbours*, ed. by Keith Busby and Christopher Kleinhenz (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), pp. 155-186; Molteni, *I romanzi arturiani*, pp. 47-70.

⁸⁵ *Il registro della cancelleria di Federico II del 1239-1240*, ed. by Cristina Carbonetti Vendittelli, 2 vols (Rome: ISIME, 2002), II, pp. 501-504.

⁸⁶ The manuscripts Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 3325 and London, British Library, Add. 36880 have been recently ascribed to Genoa and dated to 1270-1280. See: Fabrizio Cigni, 'Le manuscrit 3325 de la Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal de Paris (A1)', in *Le Cycle de Guiron le Courtois: Prolégomènes à l'édition intégrale du corpus*, ed. by Luca Cadioli and Sophie Lecomte (Paris: Garnier, 2018), pp. 29-58; Marco Veneziale, 'Le fragment de Mantoue, L4 et la production génoise de manuscrits guironiens', in *Le Cycle de Guiron le Courtois*, ed. by Cadioli and Lecomte, pp. 59-110. The manuscript Paris, BNF, fr. 12599 is dated to the last three decades of the thirteenth century, and could therefore be roughly contemporary with the two Genoese manuscripts. Although the area of production is uncertain, one of the two copyists is undoubtedly Pisan. See Fabrizio Cigni, 'Guiron, Tristan e altri testi arturiani. Nuove osservazioni sui testi e sulla composizione materiale del ms. Parigi, BNF, fr. 12599', *Studi mediolatini e volgari*, 45 (2000), 31-69; Molteni, *I romanzi arturiani*, pp. 48, 95-100.

1290s and the early fourteenth century, is now considered the work of Pisan copyists active in Genoa between 1284 and 1299 approximately.⁸⁷ For this reason, scholars in the last three decades have downgraded the influence once attributed to Naples, focusing instead on the centrality of the geographical area between Genoa and Pisa. Nonetheless, the preponderance of the Pisan-Genoese manuscripts should not lead us to believe that other areas did not play a role in the early circulation of Arthurian prose romances in Italy. A substantial number of manuscripts was also produced in northern Italy and the rest of Tuscany.⁸⁸ A list of Arthurian codices copied in Italy between the second half of the thirteenth century and the first decades of the fourteenth century gives an idea of how extensive and widespread the circulation of prose romances was in Dante's time: except for Robert de Boron's *Perceval* and the anonymous *Perlesvaus*, all the major works and cycles are attested in multiple manuscripts.

Two manuscripts of Robert de Boron's *Joseph d'Armathie* and *Merlin* were produced in northern Italy, one of them maybe in Emilia or Veneto, between the late thirteenth and the early fourteenth century. Another manuscript, also produced in northern Italy, is witnessed by a fragment:⁸⁹

Chantilly, Musée Condé, 644	Northern Italy, s. 13 ^{ex.}	<i>Joseph d'Armathie</i> , <i>Merlin</i>
Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, 2759	Emilia or Veneto, s. 14 ^{1/2}	<i>Joseph d'Armathie</i> , <i>Merlin</i>
Modena, Archivio di Stato, Biblioteca, Frammenti b 11, n. 11	Italy, s. 14 ^{inc.}	<i>Merlin</i> [fragment]
Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, fr. Appendice XXIX	Northern Italy, s. 13 ^{ex.} -14	<i>Merlin</i>

The manuscripts of the *Lancelot-Graal* that date back to the same period are numerous and include all the five romances of the cycle. They were mainly produced in Tuscany, but other

⁸⁷ For a list of these manuscripts see Molteni, *I romanzi arturiani*, pp. 127-129.

⁸⁸ See: Fabrizio Cigni, 'La materia narrativa arturiana fra Francia e Toscana: un riesame per tipologie di manoscritti e altri reperti', in *Studi sulla letteratura cavalleresca in Francia e in Italia (secoli XIII-XVI)*, ed. by Margherita Lecco, 3 vols (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2020), III, pp. 29-48 (pp. 32-38); Fabrizio Cigni, 'Milieux, langues et formes de la circulation arthurienne entre «volgarizzamenti» et «cantari»: le rôle de la Toscane', in *La matière arthurienne tardive*, ed. by Ferlampin-Acher, pp. 459-473 (pp. 460-464).

⁸⁹ On the Italian manuscripts of Robert de Boron's *Joseph* and *Merlin*, see: Daniela Delcorno Branca, 'Appunti su Merlino', in *Tristano e Lancillotto*, pp. 77-97; Marco Infurna, 'I romanzi del Graal in Italia', in *La civiltà cavalleresca e l'Europa: ripensare la storia della cavalleria*, ed. by Franco Cardini and Isabella Gagliardi (Pisa: Pacini, 2007), pp. 229-242 (pp. 229-230).

areas of northern Italy are also well represented in the list:⁹⁰

Berlin, Deutsche Staatsbibliothek, Hamilton 49	Genoa-Pisa, 1284-99	<i>Lancelot</i> [long fragment]
Bologna, Archivio di Stato, Notarile, Brunetti 1615 and 1616-17	Italy, s. 14 ^{1/2}	<i>L'Estoire del Saint Graal</i> [fragment]
Chantilly, Musée Condé, 649	Modena, 1281	<i>La Mort le Roi Artu</i>
Como, Biblioteca dei Musei Civici, Fondo Antico, ms. 404c	North-central Italy, s. 13-14	<i>Lancelot</i> [fragment]
Copenhagen, Kongelige Bibliotek, Thott 1087	Piedmont, s. 13	<i>La Mort le Roi Artu</i>
Cremona, Archivio di Stato, filza 3905 fasc. 2	Northern Italy, s. 13 ^{1/2}	<i>Lancelot</i> [fragment]
El Escorial, Real Biblioteca del Monasterio, P II 22	Genoa-Pisa, 1284-99	<i>Lancelot</i>
Florence, Archivio di Stato, Miscellanea Repubblicana, b. xx, n. 4	Florence, s. 14 ^{inc.}	<i>L'Estoire del Saint Graal</i> [Florentine translation]
Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Pluteo 89 inf. 61	Florence, s. 13 ^{ex.}	<i>Lancelot</i>
Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Panciatichiano 33	Tuscany, s. 14 ^{inc.}	<i>La Queste del Saint Graal, La Mort le Roi Artu</i> [Tuscan translations]

⁹⁰ On the Italian manuscripts of the *Estoire del Saint Graal* and *Merlin*, see: Delcorno Branca, 'Appunti su Merlino'; *La Storia del San Gradale. Volgarizzamento toscano dell'Estoire del Saint Graal*, ed. by Marco Infurna (Padua: Antenore, 1999); Roberto Benedetti, 'Frammenti arturiani. Percorsi e nuove individuazioni: l'*Estoire del Saint Graal*', *Critica del testo*, 7.1 (2004), 257-293; Infurna, 'I romanzi del Graal in Italia', p. 232. On the *Lancelot*: Daniela Delcorno Branca, '«Franceschi romanzi»: copisti, lettori, biblioteche', in *Tristano e Lancillotto*, pp. 13-48; Matteo Cambi, 'Un frammento del *Lancelot en prose* dall'Archivio di Stato di Cremona', *Francigena*, 5 (2019), 141-162; Matteo Cambi, 'Ancora un frammento del *Lancelot en prose* dall'Archivio di Stato di Bologna', *Studi mediolatini e volgari*, 65 (2019), 33-49. On the *Queste del Saint Graal*: Fanni Bogdanow, 'La tradition manuscrite de la *Queste del Saint Graal*, versions *Vulgate* et *Post-Vulgate*, en Italie', in *Die kulturellen Beziehungen zwischen Italien und den anderen Ländern Europas in Mittelalter*, ed. by Danielle Buschinger and Wolfgang Spiewok (Greifswald: Reineke, 1993), pp. 25-45; *La Inchiesta del San Gradale. Volgarizzamento toscano della Queste del Saint Graal*, ed. by Marco Infurna (Florence: Olschki, 1993); Infurna, 'I romanzi del Graal in Italia', pp. 230-232. On the *Mort Artu*: Daniela Delcorno Branca, 'La tradizione della *Mort Artu* in Italia', *Critica del testo*, 7.1 (2004), 317-339; Laura Morreale, 'The Columbia Western 24 and the *Mort Artu* in Italy', *Francigena*, 3 (2017), 111-136.

Oxford, Bodleian Library, Douce 178	Bologna, s. 13 ^{ex.} /14 ^{inc.}	<i>L'Estoire del Saint Graal, Merlin and Suite Merlin</i>
Oxford, Bodleian Library, Douce 189	Genoa?, s. 13 ^{ex.}	<i>La Mort le Roi Artu</i>
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 95	Northern Italy, s. 13	<i>L'Estoire del Saint Graal, Merlin</i>
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 354	Genoa-Pisa, 1284-99	<i>Lancelot</i>
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 767	Arezzo, s. 13 ^{4/4}	<i>Lancelot</i>
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 773	North-eastern Italy, s. 13 ^{ex.}	<i>Lancelot</i>
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 16998	Genoa-Pisa, 1284-99	<i>Lancelot</i>
Puigcerdà, Archivio Deulofeu y Fatjo	Genoa-Pisa, 1284-99	<i>Lancelot</i> [fragment]
Ravenna, Biblioteca Classense, 454	Bologna?, s. 14 ^{inc.}	<i>La Queste del Saint Graal</i>
Rouen, Bibliothèque Municipale, 1055	Florence, s. 13 ^{ex.} -14 ^{inc.}	<i>Lancelot</i>
Udine, Archivio di Stato, frammento 107	Northern Italy, s. 13 ^{ex.}	<i>L'Estoire del Saint Graal</i>
Udine, Biblioteca Arcivescovile, 177	Genoa-Pisa, 1284-99	<i>La Queste del Saint Graal</i>
Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Hebr. Urb. 48	Tuscany, 1278-79	<i>Meleḵ Artuś</i> [Hebrew translation of the <i>Mort Artu</i>]
Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, fr. XI 254	Genoa-Pisa, 1284-99	<i>Lancelot</i>

Like the *Lancelot-Graal*, the prose *Tristan* is attested in Genoa, Tuscany and, to a lesser extent, northern Italy:⁹¹

⁹¹ Daniela Delcorno Branca, 'Il «Roman de Tristan»: storia italiana di un testo francese', in *Tristano e Lancillotto*, pp. 49-76; Marie-José Heijkant, 'From France to Italy: the Tristan Texts', in *The Arthur of the*

Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, 446 E	Genoa-Pisa, 1284-99	<i>Tristan</i>
Bologna, Archivio di Stato, Tribunale di Rota, volume <i>Debitorum anni 1613-1614</i> of the notary Sassi	Italy, s. 13 ^{ex.}	<i>Tristan</i> [fragment]
Bologna, Biblioteca Comunale dell'Archiginnasio, mss. Casini, Cart. XVIII	Italy, s. 13-14	<i>Tristan</i> [fragment]
Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Ashburnham 123	Genoa-Pisa, 1284-99	<i>Tristan</i>
Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Panciatichiano 33	Tuscany, s. 14 ^{inc.}	<i>Tristano</i> <i>Panciatichiano</i> [Tuscan translation]
Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, Riccardiano 2543	Western Tuscany, s. 13 ^{ex.}	<i>Tristano</i> <i>Riccardiano</i> [Tuscan translation]
Innsbruck, Universitätsbibliothek, Fragment B4	Northern Italy, s. 13-14	<i>Tristan</i> [fragment]
London, British Library, Harley 4389	Genoa-Pisa, 1284-99	<i>Tristan</i>
Modena, Biblioteca Estense, Alfa F. 3. 15	Northern Italy?, s. 13-14	<i>Tristan</i>
Modena, Biblioteca Estense, Alfa T. 3. 11	Genoa-Pisa, 1284-99	<i>Tristan</i>
Oxford, Bodleian Library, Douce 189	Genoa?, s. 13 ^{ex.}	<i>Tristan</i>
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 94	North-eastern Italy, c. 1300-1330	<i>Tristan</i>
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 760	Genoa-Pisa, 1284-99	<i>Tristan</i>

Italians, ed. by Allaire and Psaki, pp. 41-68. The lists provided by Delcorno Branca and Heijkant have been updated in light of the following studies: Raffaella Zanni, 'Il *Tristan en prose* tra Francia e Italia: note sui manoscritti Paris, BNF fr. 94 e BNF fr. 1434', in «*Pueden alzarse las gentiles palabras*» per Emma Scoles, ed. by Ines Ravasini and Isabella Tomassetti (Rome: Bagatto Libri, 2013), pp. 453-475; Grange, 'The Versions of the Prose *Tristan*', pp. 321-349.

Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 1434	France, s. 13 ^{4/4} ; Umbria, s. 13 ^{ex.} - 14 ^{1/2}	<i>Tristan</i>
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 1463	Genoa-Pisa, 1284-99	<i>Tristan</i>
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 12599	Pisa?, c. 1270-1300	<i>Tristan</i>
Pistoia, Biblioteca Forteguerriana, Documenti Antichi	Western Tuscany, s. 13 ^{2/2}	<i>Tristan</i> [fragment of a Tuscan translation]
Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, fr. XXIII 234	Genoa-Pisa, 1284-99	<i>Tristan</i>

The geography of the early circulation of the *Guiron le Courtois* coincides perfectly with those of the *Lancelot-Graal* and prose *Tristan*:⁹²

Bologna, Archivio di Stato, Raccolta manoscritti, busta II, nn. 8-11	Genoa-Pisa, 1284-99	<i>Suite Guiron</i> [fragment from Rustichello's <i>Guironian</i> <i>Compilation</i>]
Florence, Biblioteca della Fondazione Ezio Franceschini, 2	North-eastern Italy, s. 14 ^{1/2}	<i>Roman de Meliadus</i>
Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Ashburnham 123	Genoa-Pisa, 1284-99	<i>Roman de Guiron</i> , <i>Suite Guiron</i> [Rustichello's <i>Guironian</i> <i>Compilation</i>]
London, British Library, Add. 36880	Genoa, 1270s	<i>Roman de Guiron</i>

⁹² Fabrizio Cigni, 'Per la storia del *Guiron le Courtois* in Italia', *Critica del testo*, 7.1 (2004), 295-316; Fabrizio Cigni, 'Mappa redazionale del *Guiron le Courtois* diffuso in Italia', in *Modi e forme della fruizione della 'materia arturiana'*, pp. 85-117; an updated list of manuscripts can be found the website of the *Gruppo Guiron*: <<https://guiron.fefonlus.it/testimoni>> [accessed 12 July 2023].

Mantova, Archivio di Stato, Cimeli 143ter	Northern Italy, s. 13 ^{ex} .	<i>Suite Guiron</i> [fragment]
Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal , 3325	Genoa, 1270s	<i>Roman de Meliadus</i> , <i>Suite Guiron</i>
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 12599	Pisa?, c. 1270-1300	<i>Roman de Guiron</i> [French text and Pisan translation]
Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, fr. IX	Genoa-Pisa, 1284-99	<i>Roman de Guiron</i>
Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Reg. Lat. 1501	Genoa-Pisa, 1284-99	<i>Suite Guiron</i> [fragment from Rustichello's <i>Guironian</i> <i>Compilation</i>]

These lists confirm the absolute importance of Liguria and western Tuscany in the early circulation of Arthurian prose romances in Italy and, within this context, the prominent role of the Pisan-Genoese manuscripts.⁹³ Within this group of manuscripts and fragments, there are twenty-eight chivalric texts. They include, among the Arthurian works, seven witnesses of the prose *Tristan*, seven of the *Lancelot-Graal* and four of the *Guiron le Courtois*. Due to the decorations of their initials, which show clear similarities with those of other codices that were undoubtedly illuminated in Genoa, these manuscripts, formerly considered as a work of Lombard copyists or of a scriptorium located in Angevin Naples, have been ascribed to the Genoese area since the 1980s.⁹⁴ However, some linguistic traits that influence the French text and the notes for the illuminators found in several manuscripts suggest instead the

⁹³ Studies that have devoted most attention to this group of manuscripts include: Fabrizio Cigni, 'Manoscritti di prose cortesi compilati in Italia (secc. XIII-XIV): stato della questione e prospettive di ricerca', in *La filologia romanza e i codici*, ed. by Saverio Guida and Fortunata Latella, 2 vols. (Messina: Sicania, 1993), II, pp. 419-441; Fabrizio Cigni, 'I testi della prosa letteraria e i contatti col francese e col latino. Considerazioni sui modelli', in *Pisa crocevia di uomini, lingue e culture. L'età medievale*, ed. by Lucia Battaglia Ricci and Roberta Cella (Rome: Aracne, 2009), pp. 157-181; Fabrizio Cigni, 'Manuscripts en français, italien, et latin entre la Toscane et la Ligurie à la fin du XIII^e siècle: implications codicologiques, linguistiques, et évolution des genres narratifs', in *Medieval Multilingualism*, ed. by Busby and Kleinhenz, pp. 187-217; Fabio Zinelli, 'I codici francesi di Genova e Pisa: elementi per la definizione di una scripta', *Medioevo romanzo*, 1 (2015), 82-127; Fabrizio Cigni, 'Scriptorium o tradizione regionale? Questioni aperte intorno al "gruppo pisano-genovese"', in *Innovazione linguistica e storia della tradizione: casi di studio romanzi medievali*, ed. by Stefano Resconi, Davide Battagliola and Silvia De Santis (Milan: Mimesis, 2020), pp. 271-286; Molteni, *I romanzi arturiani*, pp. 109-173.

⁹⁴ An overview of the different theories on the origin of this group of manuscripts is provided by Cigni, 'Manuscripts en français, italien, et latin', pp. 424-427; for a more complete account of the various hypothesis of attribution, see Molteni, *I romanzi arturiani*, pp. 109-136.

intervention of Pisan copyists. This evidence, together with the underwritings of two codices in which the Pisan copyists mention their condition as prisoners in Genoa, allows Roberto Benedetti to argue that the group of manuscripts in question can be attributed to one or more Genoese scriptoria that employed Pisan prisoners taken to that city after the battle of Meloria and held there for about fifteen years (1284-99).⁹⁵ Recent studies seem to contradict the hypothesis of a single scriptorium, suggesting instead the existence of different phases and places for the production of these codices.⁹⁶ Fabrizio Cigni highlighted a possible link between the copying activity in the Genoese prisons and the Dominican convent of San Domenico, and suggested that there could be a connection between this religious centre and the Dominican *Studium* of Santa Caterina in Pisa.⁹⁷ However, the commissioners and specific centres of production of these manuscripts are not yet known.

The group of Pisan-Genoese chivalric manuscripts is characterised by a strong uniformity in material, decoration, and calligraphy, which suggest a common production context and readership.⁹⁸ The parchments are of low quality and medium format. The illustrations, drawn quickly with pens, are rather simple and homogeneous in the various manuscripts. Their uniformity and interchangeability leads Fulvia Sforza Vattovani to speak of an ‘industrial’ type of book production.⁹⁹ The calligraphy is a common *littera textualis*, the work of non-professional copyists. All these elements suggest that the manuscripts were intended for personal reading and that their target readership was the merchant ‘bourgeoisie’ of the Italian communes. This urban audience seems to have been interested not so much in the adventurous and courtly aspects of Arthurian romances, and chivalric literature in general, as in the civic and moral values they conveyed.¹⁰⁰ As Cigni points out, the chivalric manuscripts, just like the other codices of the Pisan-Genoese group, share the common aim

⁹⁵ Roberto Benedetti, “‘Qua fa’ un santo e un cavaliere...’: aspetti codicologici e note per il miniatore”, in *La grant Queste del Saint Graal: versione inedita della fine del 13. sec. del ms. Udine, Biblioteca arcivescovile, 177* (Udine: Vattori, 1990), ed. by Gian Franco D’Aronco, pp. 31-47 (pp. 41-42). This theory was backed by Fabrizio Cigni, ‘Copisti prigionieri (Genova, fine sec. XIII)’, in *Studi di filologia romanza offerti a Valeria Bertolucci Pizzorusso*, ed. by Piero G. Beltrami and others, 2 vols (Pacini: Pisa, 2006), I, pp. 425-439.

⁹⁶ Cigni, ‘*Scriptorium* o tradizione regionale’.

⁹⁷ On the relationship between the copyists-prisoners and the Dominican centres in Genoa and Pisa, see: Cigni, ‘Manoscritti di prose cortesi’, pp. 437-438; Fabrizio Cigni, ‘La ricezione medievale della letteratura francese nella Toscana nord-occidentale’, in *Fra toscانيتà e italianità. Lingua e letteratura dagli inizi al Novecento*, ed. by Edeltraud Werner and Sabine Schwarze (Tübingen-Basel: Francke, 2000), pp. 71-108 (pp. 84-84); Cigni, ‘Copisti prigionieri’, pp. 426-429; Cigni, ‘I testi della prosa letteraria’, pp. 172-173; Cigni, ‘Manuscripts en français, italien, et latin’, p. 204; Molteni, *I romanzi arturiani*, pp. 125-127.

⁹⁸ On the formal features of these manuscripts, see (among others): Fulvia Sforza Vattovani, ‘Leggere per diletto e guardare le figure. Nascita del libro illustrato per una nuova società di lettori e lettrici’, in *La grant Queste del Saint Graal*, ed. by D’Aronco, pp. 60-87; Cigni, ‘Manoscritti di prose cortesi’, pp. 419-430; Valeria Bertolucci Pizzorusso, ‘Testi e immagini in codici attribuibili all’area pisano-genovese alla fine del Duecento’, in *Pisa e il Mediterraneo. Uomini, merci, idee dagli Etruschi ai Medici*, ed. by Marco Tangheroni (Milan: Skira, 2003), pp. 196-201; Molteni, *I romanzi arturiani*, pp. 48-54, 109-173.

⁹⁹ Sforza Vattovani, ‘Leggere per diletto’, p. 84.

¹⁰⁰ Molteni, *I romanzi arturiani*, p. 124.

of offering their readers a didactic and exemplary repertoire that could be adapted to the public life of the communes. Citizens, especially the younger generation, were to be inspired by the knights of old, whose values included the ability to settle disputes and the observance of religious precepts. This aim is evidenced by the tendency of the authors or copyists to cut the original texts and reassemble some of their episodes in an order that emphasises their didactic purpose.¹⁰¹ A note by a fourteenth-century reader in the manuscript BNF, fr. 16.998 (*Lancelot*) also points in this direction:

‘Guardate chome i buoni Kavalieri sono ricordati per bone fate; per cio ongniomo doverebe questu dire da valere ed ese[re] buono’.¹⁰²

See how good knights are remembered for their good deeds. That is why everyone should consider this valid and be good.¹⁰³

In any case, this attitude towards Arthurian stories was not the prerogative of the Pisan-Genoese manuscripts but rather characteristic of the municipal reception of the Matter of Britain in general.¹⁰⁴ In the Italian communes, King Arthur’s court was seen as an ideal model of society and, for this reason, various kinds of associations had taken the name of *Tavola Rotonda* since the early thirteenth century. In his *Cedrus* (1194-1203), the master of rhetoric Boncompagno da Signa writes that in many Italian cities there were *societates iuvenum* (‘young men’s societies’) governed by statutes, some of which were called *de tabula rotunda* (‘society of the Round Table’). Boncompagno also states that these societies were particularly widespread in Tuscany, so much so that in some towns of the region it was difficult to find young men who were not members of one of them:¹⁰⁵

Fiunt etiam in multis partibus Ytalie quedam iuvenum societates. quarum aliqua falcorum, aliqua leonum, aliqua de tabula rotunda societas nominatur. et sic diversi nomina diversa societatibus super imponunt. et licet ista consuetudo sit per universas partes Ytalie, multo fortius in Tuscia viget, quia vix reperirentur in aliqua civitate iuvenes qui non sint adstricti alicui societati vinculo iuramenti. huiusmodi quippe

¹⁰¹ Cigni, ‘Manuscripts en français, italien, et latin’, pp. 203-204.

¹⁰² Delcorno Branca, ‘«Franceschi romanzi»’, p. 22.

¹⁰³ The translation is mine.

¹⁰⁴ On the exemplary role of Arthurian literature in Italy, see: Franco Cardini, ‘Concetto di cavalleria e mentalità cavalleresca nei romanzi e nei cantari fiorentini’, in *L’acciar de’ cavalieri. Studi sulla cavalleria nel mondo toscano e italico (secc. XII-XV)* (Florence: Le Lettere, 1997), pp. 73-110 (pp. 90-97); Delcorno Branca, ‘Le storie arturiane’, pp. 392-398.

¹⁰⁵ Wieruszowski, ‘King Arthur’s Round Table’, p. 381; Stefano Gasparri, *I milites cittadini. Studi sulla cavalleria in Italia* (Rome: ISIME, 1992), pp. 35-36.

societates quedam faciunt fieri per manum publicam statuta, que vulgo brevia nominantur.¹⁰⁶

(*Cedrus*, III)

In many parts of Italy associations of youths are formed, some of which are named “The society of falcons”, others “The society of lions”, others “The society of the round table”. And thus different names are superimposed on different societies. And although this custom exists in all parts of Italy, it flourishes most strongly in Tuscany, because hardly there may be hardly found in any [Tuscan] city youths who are not committed to some society by the bond of an oath. Indeed some societies of this sort have statutes redacted by a public notary, which they call *brevia* in the vernacular.¹⁰⁷

The exemplary use of Arthurian imagery is also found in a speech by St Francis of Assisi, who, before his conversion, was *rex* (‘king’) of a *societas iuvenum*, the so-called ‘courtly brigade’¹⁰⁸. Both the *Intentio Regulae* and the *Compilatio assisiensis* report that on one occasion Francis compared his first friars to the knights of the Round Table:

Isti sunt mei fratres, milites tabulae rotundae, qui latitant in remotis et in desertis locis, ut diligentius vacent orationi et meditationi.¹⁰⁹

(*Intentio Regulae*, VIII)

These are my brothers, the knights of the Round Table, who hide in remote and deserted places to devote themselves more assiduously to prayer and meditation.¹¹⁰

In Dante’s time, *rotunda tabula* was the name of a professional society or academic club of rhetoricians, probably based in Volterra. This can be deduced from a letter written by Mino da Colle, an important master of rhetoric, to Federico di San Genesio, who had attacked him and the club to which he belonged in another letter that is now lost:

Preterea unum vobis dicere non obmitto quod quecumque a vestre inique intentionis presumptione substineam non substinerem quod aliquid diceretis de rotunda tabula regi

¹⁰⁶ Ludwig von Rockinger, *Briefsteller und Formelbücher des elften bis vierzehnten Jahrhunderts*, 2 vols (Munich: Georg Franz, 1863), I, p. 122.

¹⁰⁷ Boncompagno, ‘Cedrus’, in *Medieval Diplomatic and the ‘ars dictandi’*, ed. by Steven M. Wight, <<http://www.scrineum.it/scrineum/wight/cedrusn.htm>> [accessed 31/07/2023].

¹⁰⁸ Gasparri, *I milites cittadini*, p. 35.

¹⁰⁹ *Documenta Antiqua Franciscana*, ed. by Leonardus Lemmens, 3 vols (Florence: Quaracchi, 1901-02), I, p. 90. The text in *Compilatio assisiensis*, 103, is almost identical.

¹¹⁰ The translation is mine.

subiecta magnifico et probis associata militibus.¹¹¹

Besides there is one thing which I should not fail to tell you: although I tolerate anything from your bad presumption as far as my person is concerned, I would not bear anything said about the Round Table ruled by the magnificent King and consisting of honorable Knights.

One or more *societates iuvenum* named after the Round Table are attested in Pisa for almost a century.¹¹² A company *de tabula ritonda* is mentioned, along with other societies, in an act of peace between the Republic of Pisa and Count Ranieri Della Gherardesca (1238). A Sienese document from 1230 shows that this company was made up entirely or largely of *milites* ('knights') and assigned to military duties. A society of the same name is also attested in the *Breve del Popolo e delle Compagnie di Pisa* (1313-1323), which locates it in the district of Foriporta. We do not know whether these were two different societies or the same one. Certainly, the second document testifies that a *societas iuvenum* named after the Round Table still existed in the years of Dante's adulthood.

The abundance of exemplary references to the Round Table demonstrates the pervasiveness of Arthurian imagery in thirteenth and early fourteenth-century Italian society.¹¹³ In the past, scholars thought that the values of the Matter of Britain, born in feudal France, were hardly compatible with the bourgeois and mercantile society of the central and northern Italian communes. This widespread idea led Michelangelo Picone to argue that Arthurian romances, in their transition from feudal France to urban and mercantile Italy, lost their ethical meaning and became a kind of escapist literature.¹¹⁴ These assumptions were based on a misconception of Italian communal society, which stemmed from a longstanding historiographical tradition dating back at least to Gaetano Salvemini.¹¹⁵ However, medieval historians have shown how chivalric customs and rituals were well rooted in thirteenth-century Italian cities and represented a distinctive feature of the social group of the *milites* ('knights'). This term could refer both to men belonging to families perceived as having a

¹¹¹ Text and translation from: Wieruszowski, 'King Arthur's Round Table', p. 379. The text is witnessed by Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, NA 385, fols 31v-32r.

¹¹² Delcorno Branca, *I romanzi italiani di Tristano*, p. 175; Jean-Claude Maire Vigueur, *Cavalieri e cittadini. Guerra, conflitti e società nell'Italia comunale* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2004), pp. 147-151.

¹¹³ On this topic, see: John Lerner, 'Chivalric Culture in the Age of Dante', *Renaissance Studies* 2.2 (1988), 117-130; F. Regina Psaki, 'Chivalry and Medieval Italian Romance', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. by Krueger, pp. 203-217.

¹¹⁴ Michelangelo Picone, 'La matière de Bretagne nei cantari', in *I Cantari: struttura e tradizione: atti del Convegno internazionale di Montreal, 19-20 marzo 1981*, ed. by Michelangelo Picone and Maria Bendinelli Predelli (Florence: Olschki, 1984), pp. 87-102 (pp. 90-94).

¹¹⁵ Gaetano Salvemini, *La dignità cavalleresca nel comune di Firenze* (Florence: Tipografia Ricci, 1896).

long noble tradition and to members of the emerging classes, those defined by Dante in *Inf.* XVI. 73 as ‘gente nuova’ (‘new croud’). Although enriched by mercantile or financial activities, it was quite normal for the emerging families to equate their lifestyle to that of the older lineages, to the extent that it became increasingly difficult to distinguish between them.¹¹⁶ The *societas iuvenum* were mainly composed of young people belonging to this social context, imbued with chivalric culture. This explains why they adhered to a courtly model of community, for example, they were responsible for the organisation of knightly jousts and tournaments, and were often inspired by the Matter of Britain in their customs, language, names and rituals.¹¹⁷

In light of this, it is not surprising that the mercantile city of Pisa, the centre where the *societates de tabula rotunda* are best documented, played a fundamental role in the early circulation of prose romances. The importance of Pisa is also confirmed by the fact that Rustichello, the main Italian author of Arthurian romances in Old French, lived in the city. His *Arthurian Compilation* or *Meliadus* (c. 1272-74) combines original sections with narrative materials mainly drawn from the *Tristan en prose*, the *Lancelot* and the Post-Vulgate *Queste del Saint Graal*. Rustichello claims to have derived his *Arthurian Compilation* from a book owned by Edward I of England, the dedicatee of the work together with his wife Eleanor of Castile. He would have had access to Edward’s book during the king’s journey through Italy going to, or returning from, Palestine for the eighth and ninth crusade, or directly in the Holy Land, where Pisan merchants had established many emporia.¹¹⁸ Claudio Lagomarsini has recently attributed to him a second work, the *Guironian Compilation* or *Les aventures de Bruns*, mainly based on the *Suite Guiron* and composed in the last decades of the thirteenth century.¹¹⁹ In the prologue to his *Arthurian Compilation*, Rustichello refers to the audience of the work as being kings, various types of nobles, knights, burghers and, in general, all lay people interested in romances. This is further evidence that by the 1270s the ideal audience for the Arthurian romances in communal Italy had already expanded to urban ‘bourgeoisie’ and beyond:¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ On chivalry and nobility in the communes of thirteenth-century Italy, see (among others): Gasparri, *I milites cittadini*; Franco Cardini, ‘Nobiltà e cavalleria nei centri urbani: problemi e interpretazioni’, in *L’acciar de’ cavalieri*, pp. 7-23; Maire Vigueur, *Cavalieri e cittadini*.

¹¹⁷ Gasparri, *I milites cittadini*, pp. 36-38; Maire Vigueur, *Cavalieri e cittadini*, pp. 150-151.

¹¹⁸ On Rustichello’s *Arthurian Compilation*, see: Fabrizio Cigni, ‘French Redactions in Italy: Rustichello da Pisa’, in *The Arthur of the Italians*, ed. by Allaire and Psaki, pp. 21-40; Claudio Lagomarsini, ‘Il mestiere del compilatore: la prosa arturiana di Rustichello da Pisa’, in *La prosa medievale. Produzione e circolazione*, ed. by Massimiliano Gaggero and Filippo Pilati (Rome-Bristol, L’Erma di Bretschneider, 2020), pp. 87-102.

¹¹⁹ On the *Guironian Compilation*, see Claudio Lagomarsini, ‘Le cas du compilateur compilé: une œuvre inconnue de Rusticien de Pisa et la réception de *Guiron le Courtois*’, *Journal of the International Arthurian Society*, 3.1 (2015), 55-71.

¹²⁰ Cigni, ‘French Redactions in Italy’, p. 23; Lagomarsini, ‘Il mestiere del compilatore’, p. 101.

Seingneur enperaor et rois, et princes et dux, et quenz et baronz, civalier et vauvasor et borgiois, et tous le preudome de ce monde que avés talenz de delitier voz en romainz, ci prenés ceste, et le faites lire.¹²¹

(*Arthurian Compilation*, I. 1)

Messrs. emperors and kings, princes and dukes, counts and barons, knights and vavasors and burghers, and all the honest men of this world who take pleasure in romances. take this [book] and let someone read it.¹²²

It is therefore not surprising that the recipients of the Arthurian compilation are almost identical to those mentioned in the prologue of Marco Polo's *Le Devisement dou monde* or *Il Milione*, the most representative work of the Italian mercantile world of the thirteenth century.¹²³

Seingnors, enperaor et rois, dux et marquois, cuens, chevalers et borgiois, et toutes gens qe volés savoir les deverses jenerasions des homes et les deversités des deverses region dou monde, si prennés cestui livre et le faites lire.¹²⁴

(*Le Devisement dou monde*, prologue)

Messrs. emperors and kings, dukes and marquises, counts, knights and burghers, and all those who want to learn about the different lineages of men and the diversity of the different regions of the world, take this book and let someone read it.¹²⁵

As is well known, Marco Polo dictated his story to Rustichello while they were both imprisoned in Genoa (c. 1298). The years of Rustichello's captivity, probably between the Battle of Meloria (1284) and the final truce between Genoa and Pisa (1299), coincide with the period of production of the codices copied in Genoa by Pisan prisoners. It is worth noting that this group of manuscripts includes the oldest and most reliable copy of Rustichello's *Arthurian Compilation* (Paris, BNF, fr. 1463), as well as a fragment of the same work and

¹²¹ *Il romanzo arturiano di Rustichello da Pisa*, ed. by Fabrizio Cigni (Pisa: Pacini, 1994), p. 233.

¹²² The translation is mine.

¹²³ On the two prologues, see Valeria Bertolucci Pizzorusso, 'Pour commencer à raconter le voyage: Le prologue du "Devisement du Monde" de Marco Polo', in *Seuils de l'oeuvre dans le texte médiéval*, ed. by Emmanuèle Baumgartner and Laurence Harf-Lancner, 2 vols (Paris: Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2002), pp. 115-130.

¹²⁴ Marco Polo, *Le Devisement dou monde*, ed. by Mario Eusebi and Eugenio Burgio, 2 vols (Venice: Ca' Foscari, 2018), I, p. 35.

¹²⁵ The translation is mine.

three witnesses of the *Guironian Compilation*.¹²⁶ Moreover, it includes witnesses from almost all the sources Rustichello used for his own compilations.¹²⁷ Since the *Arthurian Compilation* predates the Pisan-Genoese manuscripts, it is likely that some versions of the prose *Tristan* and *Lancelot* – Rustichello’s main sources – were already circulating in Pisa in the 1270s. How Arthurian prose romances may have reached the Tuscan city is still unclear. According to the most suggestive hypothesis, developed by Fabrizio Cigni on the basis of the relationship between BNF fr. 12599 and BNF fr. 750, possibly made at Outremer, this could have happened through the regular contacts between Pisan merchants and French or English people in the Crusader states. This hypothesis, while far from being certain, could be in line with what Rustichello relays to us about the book he received from Edward I during the English king’s crusader expedition (1270-74).¹²⁸

Unfortunately, there is no solid evidence of the existence of Arthurian manuscripts in Old French that were copied in Pisa. Nevertheless, taking into account the Pisan-Genoese manuscripts, the BNF, fr. 12599 and the earliest Italian translations of the *Lancelot-Graal* and prose *Tristan*, all texts that show, in different ways, Western Tuscan linguistic traits, the Pisan copyists or language are absolutely dominant.¹²⁹ This dominance is also reflected in the role played by Pisa in the spread of Arthurian prose romances towards the rest of Tuscany and the Po Valley.¹³⁰ These geographical regions possessed an autonomous tradition of Arthurian manuscripts, roughly contemporary with the Pisan-Genoese group.¹³¹ However, between the end of the thirteenth and the first half of the fourteenth centuries, there was a significant transit of manuscripts with Pisan linguistic features, both in Old French and Italian, towards Florence, Venice and Lombardy. The *Tristano Riccardiano* and the manuscript Panciatichiano 33, which contain some of the earliest Italian translations of Arthurian romances, show, under a predominantly Florentine language, some western

¹²⁶ These manuscripts are:

- Bologna, Archivio di Stato, Raccolta manoscritti, busta II, nn. 8-11: *Guironian Compilation* [fragment].
- Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Ashburnham 123: *Guironian Compilation*.
- Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 1463: *Arthurian Compilation*.
- Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Reg. Lat. 1501: *Guironian Compilation* [fragment].
- Viterbo, Archivio di Stato, Fondo Pergamene, cart. 13, n. 131: *Arthurian Compilation* [fragment].

¹²⁷ Among the identified sources, the *Suite Guiron* is the only one missing. However, the ‘original version’ of this romance is scarcely attested, perhaps also due to the greater fortune of Rustichello’s version. See Lagomarsini, ‘Le cas du compilateur compilé’, p. 58.

¹²⁸ Cigni, ‘Manoscritti di prose cortesi’, pp. 438-441.

¹²⁹ See Cigni, ‘I testi della prosa letteraria’, pp. 174-175. The earliest Italian translations of the *Lancelot-Graal* and prose *Tristan* are:

- Florence, BNC, Panciatichiano 33: *Queste del Saint Graal*, prose *Tristan*, *Mort Artu*.
- Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, 2543: prose *Tristan*.
- Pistoia, Biblioteca Forteguerriana, Documenti antichi 1: prose *Tristan* [fragment].

¹³⁰ Cigni, ‘La ricezione medievale’, pp. 78-80; Delcorno Branca, ‘Lecteurs et interprètes’, pp. 163-164.

¹³¹ Molteni, *I romanzi arturiani*, pp. 88-100; Cigni, ‘Milieux, langues et formes’, p. 460.

Tuscan features, probably the result of a tradition originating in the Pisan area.¹³² The *Tristano Veneto*, an early fourteenth-century Venetian translation of the prose *Tristan*, preserved in a fifteenth-century manuscript, was influenced in both content and language by Old French versions of the prose *Tristan* and Rustichello's *Arthurian Compilation* similar to those copied by Pisan prisoners in Genoa.¹³³ Even Old French manuscripts copied in north-eastern Italy in the fourteenth century, such as those witnessed by the Udine fragment of the prose *Tristan*, seem to have been copied from models originating in the Pisan-Genoese area.¹³⁴ It is also certain that some Pisan-Genoese manuscripts were transferred to Lombardy from the fourteenth century onwards. The most famous of these is the *Roman de Guiron* preserved in the Biblioteca Marciana, whose flyleaf contains a note in fourteenth-century Lombard that acknowledges Pisa as the place of origin of the codex and the 'lies' it contains:

Esti soun stati li malvasi cam Pisani smargarizay ch'ano le boxie qui sono en esto libro.¹³⁵

The miscreant dogs of Pisa are those who possess the lies in this book.

Recent scholarship has shown how the Pisan-Genoese group played a key role in creating a typically Italian style of Arthurian books.¹³⁶ Late thirteenth-century manuscripts from Tuscany, Liguria and the Po Valley are, with a few exceptions, characterised by average or low artistic quality and essential decorations, typical of books designed for the wealthy families of the urban bourgeoisie. The decoration mainly concerns the initials, while illustrations interrupting or flanking the body of the text are almost completely absent.¹³⁷ On

¹³² This is certain for the Panciatichiano 33, whose *Inchiesta del San Gradale* shares an antigraph with the *Queste del Saint Graal* witnessed by the ms. Udine, Biblioteca Arcivescovile, 177, which belongs to the Pisan-Genoese group. The origin of the *Tristano Riccardiano* and its antigraphs is more complex to determine. See: Cigni, 'Milieux, langues et formes', pp. 463-464; *La Inchiesta*, ed. by Infurna, pp. 34-41.

¹³³ Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, 3325 (Veneto, 1487). The Pisan-Genoese manuscripts whose texts are most similar to the *Tristano Veneto* are:

- Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, 446 E: *Tristan*.
- Modena, Biblioteca Estense, Alfa T. 3. 11: *Tristan*.
- Paris, BNF, fr. 1463: Rustichello's *Arthurian Compilation*.

On this topic, see Heijkant, 'From France to Italy', pp. 53-54.

¹³⁴ Udine, Archivio di Stato, fr. 110 (north-eastern Italy, s. 14^{med.}). See Roberto Benedetti, 'Un frammento del *Roman de Tristan en prose* fra tradizione toscana e tradizione veneta (Udine, Archivio di Stato, fr. 110)', *Studi mediolatini e volgari*, 49 (2003), 47-69.

¹³⁵ Delcorno Branca, 'Lecteurs et interprètes', p. 163. The translation is mine. Other Pisan-Genoese manuscripts were included in the library catalogues of the Gonzaga in 1407. See: Benedetti, "'Qua fa' un santo e un cavaliere...'", pp. 42-43; Daniela Delcorno Branca, 'I Tristani dei Gonzaga', in *Miscellanea Mediaevalia: Mélanges offerts à Philippe Menard*, ed. by Jean-Claude Faucon, Alain Labbé and Danielle Quéruel, 2 vols (Paris: Champion, 1998), pp. 385-393 (pp. 385-386).

¹³⁶ Delcorno Branca 'Le storie arturiane', pp. 387-88; Molteni, *I romanzi arturiani*, pp. 110-111.

¹³⁷ On the decoration of late thirteenth-century manuscripts, see Molteni, *I romanzi arturiani*, pp. 73-107. Manuscripts of higher artistic quality are:

the contrary, they appear regularly in the Pisan-Genoese manuscripts, where they are drawn with pens and usually occupy the bottom of the pages. The spread of the Pisan-Genoese manuscripts outside their area of origin, and especially towards the courts of Lombardy, meant that this type of page layout became a characteristic feature of Italian books in the fourteenth century. In particular, illuminations at the bottom of the pages are recurrent in a group of fourteenth-century manuscripts characterised by rich cycles of illustrations, produced in several cases for the ruling houses of the Italian *signorie* ('lordships') or the Angevin nobles of the Kingdom of Naples. However, the new page layout can also be found in simpler manuscripts designed for bourgeois or mercantile social groups, such as the fourteenth century Venetian translation of the prose *Tristan* known as *Tristano Corsiniano*.¹³⁸ These manuscripts show that between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the readership of Arthurian romances was extremely diverse and included both the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie. To conclude, it should be noted that the Pisan-Genoese manuscripts did not only influence the formal evolution of Arthurian manuscripts in Italy, but also their content: according to Delcorno Branca, their wide circulation was decisive in determining the versions of Arthurian prose romances that prevailed in Italy, as is particularly evident in the case of the prose *Tristan*.¹³⁹

I. 3 The *Tristan* matter in thirteenth and early fourteenth-century Italy

The prose *Tristan* is, as we have seen, the only romance based on the story of Tristan and Iseult for which it is possible to reconstruct an Italian manuscript tradition. Although Thomas's *Tristan*, and perhaps a version of the story close to those of Béroul and Eilhart von Oberg, must have circulated in the thirteenth century, they are not attested in any Italian manuscripts. By contrast, the Italian tradition of the prose *Tristan* between the late twelfth and early thirteenth century is particularly vast and includes both Old French manuscripts and translations. The extreme complexity of the manuscript tradition of this romance, attested in around a hundred manuscripts and fragments that convey various versions of the

- London, British Library, Add. 36880.
 - Oxford, Bodleian Library, Douce 178.
 - Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, ms. 3325.
 - Paris, BNF, fr. 12599.

The manuscripts Douce 178 and BNF, fr. 12599 have rich illuminations which interrupt or introduce the body of the text. The manuscript Paris, BNF, fr. 773 also contains two large illuminations, but their artistic quality is rather low. On the other hand, Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Pl. 89 inf. 61, although poorly decorated, is quite refined and was probably intended for an aristocratic readership. See Arianna Punzi, *All'ombra di Lancillotto* (Rome: Carocci, 2022), p. 156.

¹³⁸ Molteni, *I romanzi arturiani*, pp. 175-177.

¹³⁹ Delcorno Branca 'Le storie arturiane', pp. 387-88.

text, has prompted scholars in recent decades to identify the peculiarities of the Italian tradition. This accounts for about a quarter of the total number of Old French witnesses of the work.¹⁴⁰ There are also seven manuscripts or fragments of Italian translations, not to mention original rewrites such as the *Tavola Ritonda* and the *cantari*.¹⁴¹ Most of this material dates back to the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, undoubtedly the most successful period for the prose *Tristan* in Italy. In reconstructing the context that could have influenced Dante's reception of the Tristan matter, the manuscript tradition of the prose *Tristan* in Italy will be taken into account, as well as references to the Tristan story in Sicilian and Tuscan lyric poetry and in Italian short narratives. These literary references will be analysed without regard to the specific sources of the single authors (verse romances, *lais*, prose narratives) and with the sole purpose of demonstrating how the Tristan matter was quoted or interpreted in the literary tradition prior to Dante.

The great popularity of the Tristan matter in Italy is attested above all by the manuscript tradition of the prose *Tristan*. As mentioned above, the various versions of this romance have been traditionally divided into two main families, which Emmanuèle Baumgartner termed V.I ('short' version) and V.2 ('long' or 'vulgate' version).¹⁴² According to Eilert Löseth and Eugène Vinaver, V.1 was a shorter and older version of the text, while V.2 was a longer and heavily interpolated cyclical rewrite.¹⁴³ This long-standing theory was challenged in the 1960s and 1970s by Renée L. Curtis and Emmanuèle Baumgartner, who showed that the first part of the romance is rather homogeneous throughout the manuscript tradition, and the distinction between a short version (V.1) and a long version (V.2) begins with paragraph 183 of Löseth's analysis.¹⁴⁴ It is now generally accepted that – contrary to Löseth's belief – V.1 is not the original version of the romance, nor is it necessarily an older one, since both families contain interpolations from the so-called Post-Vulgate *Queste del Saint Graal*, and therefore date after 1240. Recent scholarship has also called into question the traditional

¹⁴⁰ A complete catalogue of the manuscripts of the prose *Tristan* can be found in *La Tradition manuscrite du Tristan en prose. Bilan et perspectives*, ed. by Damien de Carné and Christine Ferlampin-Acher (Paris: Garnier, 2021), pp. 303-311.

¹⁴¹ On the Italian translations and adaptations of the prose *Tristan*, see Heijkant, 'From France to Italy', pp. 47-61.

¹⁴² Two other families, V.3 and V.4, contain later versions dating from the fourteenth century onwards. For an overview of the main textual problems relating to the tradition of the prose *Tristan*, see: Baumgartner, 'The Prose *Tristan*'; Cigni, 'Per un riesame della tradizione'; Grange, 'The Versions of the Prose *Tristan*', pp. 322-326.

¹⁴³ Eilert Löseth, *Le roman en prose de Tristan, le roman de Palamède et la compilation de Rusticien de Pise. Analyse critique d'après les manuscrits de Paris* (Paris: Bouillon, 1891), pp. XII-XXV; Eugène Vinaver, *Études sur le Tristan en prose. Les sources. Les manuscrits. Bibliographie critique* (Paris: Champion, 1925), pp. 23-24.

¹⁴⁴ Renée L. Curtis, 'Les deux versions du Tristan en prose: examen de la théorie de Löseth', *Romania*, 84 (1963), 390-398; Baumgartner, *Le 'Tristan en prose'*, pp. 17-98. From now on, Löseth's analyses will be referred to as LÖs.

division into families: Fabrizio Cigni proposes the hypothesis that V.1 exists only in the manuscripts BNF, fr. 756-757,¹⁴⁵ while Huw Grange shows that V.2 is less widespread than previously thought.¹⁴⁶ In general, the key features of the tradition of the prose *Tristan* are the impossibility of identifying the original version of the story and the tendency of the vast majority of manuscripts to present a selection of episodes, often reworked or recomposed by copyists, rather than a complete redaction of the romance.¹⁴⁷ These characteristics are also typical of the Italian tradition of the romance in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. The Old French manuscripts copied or assembled in Italy in this period favour a montage of individual episodes, and none of them contain a complete version of the romance:¹⁴⁸

Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, 446 E [W]	Genoa-Pisa, 1284-1299	Lös. 18-60, 71a-74a, 538-549 ['a'] [V.2]
Bologna, Archivio di Stato, Tribunale di Rota [Bo¹]	Italy, s. 13 ^{ex.}	Lös. 505, 510 [fragment]
Bologna, Biblioteca Comunale dell'Archiginnasio [Bo²]	Italy, s. 13-14	Lös. 73a-74a [fragment]
Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Ashburnham 123 [L]	Genoa-Pisa, 1284-1299	Lös. 1-21 ['a']
Innsbruck, Universitätsbibliothek, Fragment B4 [Inn]	Northern Italy, s. 13-14	Lös. 379 [fragment]
London, British Library, Harley 4389 [H]	Genoa-Pisa, 1284-1299	Lös. 18-41['a']

¹⁴⁵ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 756-757 (Naples, s. 14^{ex.}).

¹⁴⁶ Cigni, 'Per un riesame della tradizione', pp. 271-272; Grange, 'The Versions of the Prose *Tristan*', pp. 322-326.

¹⁴⁷ Punzi, *Tristano*, pp. 151-154.

¹⁴⁸ For the section on the manuscript tradition and main textual features of the prose *Tristan* in thirteenth and early fourteenth-century Italy, see: Daniela Delcorno Branca, 'Per la storia del "Roman de Tristan" in Italia', *Cultura neolatina*, 40 (1980), 211-231; Gioia Paradisi and Arianna Punzi, 'La tradizione del *Tristan en prose* in Italia e una nuova traduzione toscana', in *Actes du XXème Congrès International de Linguistique et de Philologie Romanes. Université de Zurich (6-11 Avril 1992)*, ed. by Gerold Hilty, 5 vols (Tübingen-Basel: Francke, 1993), v, pp. 323-337; Delcorno Branca, 'Il «Roman de Tristan»'; Punzi, *Tristano*, pp. 156-163; Heijkant, 'From France to Italy'. Marie-José Heijkant, 'Il *Tristano Riccardiano*: redazione particolare del *Tristan en prose*', in *Tristano multiforme. Studi sulla narrativa arturiana in Italia* (Florence, Olschki, 2018), pp. 3-25.

Modena, Biblioteca Estense, Alfa F. 3. 15 [M]	Northern Italy?, s. 13-14	Lös. 331-384 [V.1]
Modena, Biblioteca Estense, Alfa T. 3. 11 [M¹]	Genoa-Pisa, 1284-1299	Lös. 18-60, 71a-75a, 534-551, 568-570 ['a'] [V.1]
Oxford, Bodleian Library, Douce 189 [Ox]	Genoa?, s. 13 ^{ex.}	Lös. 534-551, 568-570 [V.1]
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 94 [fr. 94]	North-eastern Italy, c. 1300-1330	Lös. 1-75a, 92-280, 338b, 352-379 ['c'] [V.2]
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 760 [fr. 760]	Genoa-Pisa, 1284-1299	Lös. 338b-384, 534-551, 568-570 [V.1]
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 1434 [fr. 1434]	France, s. 13 ^{4/4} ; Umbria, s. 13 ^{ex.} -14 ^{1/2}	Lös. 313-348 [V.1]
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 1463 [fr. 1463]	Genoa-Pisa, 1284-1299	Lös. 534-551, 568-570 [V.1]
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 12599 [fr. 12599]	Pisa?, c. 1270-1300	Lös. 59-71, 74, 418, 57, 85 ['f']; 202-282a [V.2]; 291-299a; 338b-417 [V.1]; 538-551, 568-569 [V.1]
Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, fr. XXIII 234 [Ve]	Genoa-Pisa, 1284-1299	Lös. 26-41, 546-551, 568-570 ['a'] [V.1]

The Italian translations are also incomplete and, with the exception of the Panciatichiano 33, contain only the first part of the romance:

Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Panciatichiano 33 [P]	Tuscany, s. 14 ^{inc.}	Lös. 19-101 [R, 'f'], 338b, 352-381, 539-551, 568-580 [V.1]
Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, Riccardiano 2543 [R]	Western Tuscany, s. 13 ^{ex.}	Lös. 19-57, 71a-74a [R]
Pistoia, Biblioteca Forteguerriana, Documenti Antichi [Pist]	Western Tuscany, s. 13 ^{2/2}	Lös. 28, 56 [R, fragment]

V.1, attested in nine manuscripts (M, M¹, Ox, fr. 760, fr. 1434, fr. 1463, fr. 12599, Ve, P), is absolutely dominant in late thirteenth and early fourteenth-century Italy. V.2 is attested in

three manuscripts (W, fr. 94, fr. 12599). All the other witnesses are fragments or contain only the first part of the romance (Lös. 1-183), for which the distinction between V.1 and V.2 is not valid. All the Old French manuscripts that contain the first part of the romance, with the exception of fr. 94 and fr. 12599, belong to the textual family 'a' (W, L, H, M¹, Ve), which consists almost entirely of manuscripts copied in Italy. Curtis considered this family to be particularly ancient and authoritative, and used it as the basis for her edition of the first part of the romance.¹⁴⁹ It is interesting to note that all the characteristics of the Italian tradition of the prose *Tristan* are already present and dominant in the Pisan-Genoese manuscripts: all the codices containing the first part of the romance belong to 'a' (W, L, H, M¹, Ve), while those containing the following parts, with the exception of W, belong to V.1 (M1, fr. 760, fr. 1463, Ve). This confirms the fundamental role played by this group of manuscripts in determining the most successful redactions in Italy. The Tuscan translations form another group of manuscripts with very uniform aspects: R, Pist and the first part of P (Lös. 19-57) belong to the so-called *redazione Riccardiana*, a special redaction of the first part of the romance that is typical of the Italian translations. These three manuscripts also share a Western Tuscan linguistic substratum, confirming the importance of this area for the early circulation of the romance. However, the most interesting data to be gleaned from the study of the Italian tradition of the prose *Tristan* goes beyond the geographical provenance of individual manuscripts, their language or the specific versions of the romance they convey. As first pointed out by Gioia Paradisi and Arianna Punzi, and later confirmed by Daniela Delcorno Branca, the Italian manuscripts mostly contain three sections of the prose *Tristan*:¹⁵⁰

- A. Tristan's youth: from his birth to his first meeting with King Arthur, whom he rescues from captivity in Darnantes. This section also includes the first part of the love story between Tristan and Iseult (Lös. 19-74a).
- B. Tristan and Iseult in the Kingdom of Logres: from their arrival at the Joyous Gard to the tournament of Loverzep, the highest point of Tristan's chivalric life (Lös. 338b-384).
- C. Tristan's return to Cornwall, the death of the two lovers and the mourning at Arthur's court (Lös. 534-551, 568-570).

¹⁴⁹ *Le Roman de Tristan*, ed. by Renée L. Curtis, 3 vols (Cambridge: Brewer, 1963-1985). From now on, Curtis's edition will be referred to as Curtis.

¹⁵⁰ Paradisi and Punzi, 'La tradizione del *Tristan en prose*', pp. 332-333; Delcorno Branca, 'Il «Roman de Tristan»', pp. 73-75.

As Paradisi and Punzi note, the prevalence of these narrative sections reveals a particular interest in the exemplary episodes of Tristan's life.¹⁵¹ The collateral or cyclical episodes, such as the long prologue or the quest for the Holy Grail, are either poorly attested or completely absent in the Italian tradition. It is difficult to say with certainty whether this selection of episodes, which is consistent in outlining a plot centred on Tristan's love for Iseult and major chivalric deeds, was due to the textual material available in Italy or was the result of a deliberate choice. Certainly, the fact that several manuscripts contain only one of these sections, extrapolated from the overall plot, suggests that they could be used and read in an exemplary way. This is particularly the case of the *Tristano Riccardiano* (s. 13^{ex}), which, just like the other Arthurian translations of this period, was addressed to a mercantile or bourgeois readership.¹⁵² By focusing on the first part of the story (Lös. 19-57, 71a-74a), it sets up a moral opposition between King Mark, who, despite his noble birth, is characterised by anti-chivalrous behaviour, and Tristan, who is portrayed as the ideal knight, imbued from childhood with all the values of chivalry. Palamedes and Lancelot are two other central characters. The former, although lacking the innate virtues of Tristan or the innate villainy of Mark, acquires or loses chivalric virtue according to his actions. The latter represents a model with which Tristan compares himself and which he seems to overcome at the end of the story when he saves King Arthur's life. The *Tristano Riccardiano*, but this is also true for the prose *Tristan* in general, was thus interpreted as a quest for the valiant knight, an identity to be conquered and renewed, rather than a virtue given once and for all. This reading also implied the idea that nobility is determined by merit, rather than by birth. The idea of chivalric identity or nobility as dynamic and to be conquered through one's own strengths made the values conveyed by the romance particularly suitable for a Tuscan bourgeois readership that aspired to its own social advancement.¹⁵³

A similar ideologic approach to the Tristan matter, and to Arthurian literature in general, is also found in the *Panciatichiano* 33 (s. 14^{inc.}), a cyclic anthology which combines translations from the *Queste del Saint Graal*, the *Mort Artu* and the prose *Tristan*. By juxtaposing the Tristan episodes – mainly drawn from the three sections that predominate in the Italian tradition (Lös. 19-101, 338b, 352-381, 539-551, 568-580) – with excerpts from the *Lancelot-Graal*, the compiler once again establishes a relationship between Tristan and Lancelot, and proposes the former as the ideal model of knight.¹⁵⁴ In this text, the

¹⁵¹ Paradisi and Punzi, 'La tradizione del *Tristan en prose*', p. 332.

¹⁵² For the following interpretation of the *Tristano Riccardiano*, see Psaki, 'Chivalry and Medieval Italian Romance', pp. 209-211.

¹⁵³ Psaki, 'Chivalry and Medieval Italian Romance', p. 209; Heijkant, 'Il *Tristano Riccardiano*', p. 25.

¹⁵⁴ For the following interpretation of the *Tristano Panciatichiano*, see Marie-José Heijkant, 'La compilazione del *Tristano Panciatichiano*', in *Tristano multiforme*, pp. 61-67 (pp. 65-67).

relationship between Tristan and Iseult has no negative or sinful connotations, but represents the source of the valour that allows the protagonist to defeat the other Arthurian knights at the tournament of Loverzep. The same attitude towards courtly love is also found in the second of the anonymous letters that the compiler has inserted between the excerpt from the *Queste* and the first section of the *Tristan* (f. 39r), as if to mark a transition from the sacred perspective of the former to the earthly one of the latter. This positive view of the relationship between Tristan and Iseult, which is widely attested in the Italian reception, does not mean that readers were unaware of the problems inherent in the ethics of courtly love, which was extremely dangerous for the social order. Accordingly, the attempt to integrate the quest for identity, social integration or love of individual knights into a collective vision of society is another characteristic feature of the Italian reception of the Tristan matter.¹⁵⁵ In the thirteenth and even more so in the fourteenth century, Tristan became a model of virtue and chivalry for the ruling classes of the cities of central and northern Italy, while Arthur's reign was seen as the perfect example of a well-ordered society that guarantees justice and peace.

Other important clues to the reception and interpretation of the Tristan matter in Italy come from literary references or rewritings. Latin texts from the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries provide the earliest references to the story of Tristan and Iseult. In his *Elegia de diversitate fortunae et philosophiae consolatione* (c. 1193), Henry of Settimello refers to Tristan in relation to his own suffering, while Boncompagno da Signa in his *De Amicitia* (c. 1205) mentions Iseult, along with Helen, as an ideal model of beauty.¹⁵⁶ These references are the first evidence in Italy of the tendency, already attested in Occitan lyric poetry, to use Tristan and Iseult as emblematic examples of certain feelings or physical and moral qualities.¹⁵⁷ Due to the strong influence of the Occitan troubadours on the poets of the Sicilian and Tuscan schools, Italian poetry of the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries is rich of exemplary references to the Tristan matter.¹⁵⁸ Most authors use the story of Tristan and Iseult as a repertoire of examples for their own love poetry, albeit in relation to different themes:

¹⁵⁵ On the tension between individualism and collectivity in medieval Italian romance, see: Psaki, 'Chivalry and Medieval Italian Romance', pp. 208-209; Marie-José Heijkant, '«La figura del mondo»: Tristano come modello esemplare della cavalleria arturiana nella *Tavola Ritonda*', in *Tristano multiforme*, pp. 85-102; Roberto Tagliani, 'Tristan et l'idéal chevaleresque en Italie à la fin du Moyen Âge', in *La matière arthurienne tardive*, ed. by Ferlampin-Acher, pp. 485-500.

¹⁵⁶ See Gardner, *The Arthurian Legend*, pp. 8-10.

¹⁵⁷ For an overview of the presence of Arthurian material in troubadour poetry, see Simon Gaunt and Ruth Harvey, 'The Arthurian Tradition in Occitan Literature', in *The Arthur of the French*, ed. by Burgess and Pratt, pp. 528-545 (pp. 528-534).

¹⁵⁸ For the texts and a more detailed analysis of each literary reference, see: Gardner, *The Arthurian Legend*, pp. 21-43; Capelli, 'Caratteri e funzioni'; Picone, 'Tracce tristaniane'; Capelli, 'The Arthurian Presence'; Lagomarsini, 'Les Trois Couronnes'.

1. Celebration of the lady (more beautiful than Iseult).	• Giacomo da Lentini <i>Madonna mia</i>, vv. 41-48. • Anonymous, Vat. Lat. 3793, no. 393, vv. 5-8. • Chiaro Davanzati, <i>Lo disioso core e la speranza</i>, vv. 5-8. • Dante da Maiano, <i>O rosa e giglio e flore aloroso</i>, vv. 13-14.
2. Intensity of love (the poet loves, or suffers for love, more than Tristan).	• Giacomo da Lentini, <i>Dal core mi vene</i>, vv. 35-42. • Giacomino Pugliese, <i>La dolcie ciera piagiente</i>, vv. 25-28. • Filippo da Messina, <i>Ai, Siri deo, con forte fu lo punto</i>, vv. 9-12. • Bonagiunta Orbicciani, <i>Donna, vostre bellezze</i>, vv. 31-34. • Bonagiunta Orbicciani, <i>Oi, amadori, intendete l'affanno</i>, vv. 26-27. • Anonymous, Memoriale Bolognese, 1309, no. 119, vv. 5-8.
3. Loyalty or devotion in love (the poet is a loyal or devoted lover as much as Tristan and Iseult).	• Anonymous, Vat. Lat. 3793, no. 338, vv. 9-14. • Inghilfredi, <i>Del meo voler dir l'ombra</i>, vv. 55-60.
4. Motif of the love philtre.	• Anonymous, <i>Mare Amoro</i>, vv. 217-221.
5. Use of the name 'Tristano' as a <i>senhal</i> .	• Pallamidesse di Bellindote, <i>Amore, grande peccato</i>, vv. 61-65.
6. Combination of different themes (loving in secret, love philtre and moral responsibility).	• Re Giovanni, <i>Donna, audite como</i>, vv. 56-65.

Other authors refer to the Tristan matter in literary works other than love poetry, still in an exemplary way and in relation to different contexts:

1. Tristan as an example of valiant knight.	• Brunetto Latini, <i>Tesoretto</i>, vv. 37-42. • Cecco Angiolieri, <i>In una ch'e' danar mi danno meno</i>, v. 4.
2. Iseult as an example of wise woman.	• Maestro Torrigiano, <i>Esser donzella di trovare dotta</i>, vv. 1-4.
3. Iseult as a model of beauty.	• Stoppa de' Bostichi, <i>Se la fortuna gira o 'l mondo</i>, vv. 77-80.
4. Lists of Arthurian characters / ekphrases.	• Ruggieri Apugliese, <i>Tant'aggio ardire e conoscenza</i>, vv. 222-223. • Anonymous, <i>L'Intelligenza</i>, st. 72, 75, 287, 294.

These lists show how the lyric tradition mostly ignored the civic interpretation of the Tristan matter that characterised the Arthurian translations and focused instead on its amorous aspects. There are only two instances in which Tristan is referred to as a brave warrior, a role that in Italian lyric tradition, as we shall see, belongs primarily to Lancelot. In general, literary quotations by Italian poets tend to be extremely repetitive and seem to be drawn largely from a repertoire of clichés characteristic of troubadour poetry.¹⁵⁹ Nevertheless, some of them deserve to be studied more closely, since they reveal some characteristic patterns of the Italian reception of the Matter of Britain that, as we shall see in the next chapters, will be influential for Dante. In particular, two of the texts in the lists place the names of Tristan and Iseult alongside those of exemplary lovers from the classical tradition. The Sicilian poet Filippo da Messina, in his sonnet *Ai, Siri deo, con forte fu lo punto*, compares the intensity of his love for his lady to that of Paris for Helen or Tristan for Iseult:

Poi non son meo ma vostro, amor meo fino;
preso m'avete como Alena Pari,

¹⁵⁹ Lagomarsini, 'Les Trois Couronnes', pp. 557-558.

e non amò Tristano tanto Isolda
quanto amo voi per cui penar non fino.¹⁶⁰
(vv. 9-12)

Since I am not mine, but yours, my perfect love, you have taken me as Helen took Paris,
and Tristan did not love Iseult as much as I love you, for whom I never cease to suffer.¹⁶¹

In the allegorical poem *L'Intelligenza*, the anonymous author describes the palace where his lady, an allegory of intelligence, lives. Inside the palace is a painting depicting the God of Love and several pairs of lovers from the classical, Biblical and Arthurian traditions. The first four couples to be mentioned are Paris and Helen, Achilles and Polyxena, Aeneas and Dido and Tristan and Iseult:

71
Nel mezzo de la volta è 'l Deo d'Amore
che tiene ne la destra mano un dardo,
ed avisa qualunque ha gentil core
fierelo, che mai nonn-ha riguardo;
ed havi donne di grande valore,
che 'nnamorar' del suo piacente sguardo.
Quiv' è chi per amor portò mai pena,
quiv' è *Parigi* co la bell'*Alena*,
e chi mai 'nnamorò per tempo o tardo.

72
La bella *Pollisena* v'è piagente
quand'*Accillesse* la prese ad amare;
e la regina *Didon* v'è piangente
quand'*Eneas* si partìo per mare,
che d'una spada si fedio nel ventre
quando le vele li vide collare;
e la bell'*Isaotta* e 'l buon *Tristano*,
sì come li sorprese est'Amor vano
che molti regni ha già fatti disfare.

¹⁶⁰ *Le rime della Scuola siciliana*, ed. by Panvini, I, p. 235.

¹⁶¹ The translation is mine.

In the centre of the vault is the God of Love, holding an arrow in his right hand, who chooses and wounds anyone with a noble heart, for he is never cautious; and there are women of great worth, who fell in love because of his pleasant look. Here are those who have ever longed for love, here is Paris with fair Helen, and those who have ever fallen in love when young or old. There is the fair Polyxena, who was weeping when Achilles began to love her; there is Queen Dido, who wept when she saw Aeneas setting sail, to the point of stabbing herself in the belly with a sword when she saw him hoisting the sails of the ship; and there is the fair Iseult and the good Tristan, at the moment when they were surprised by the vain love that has already brought down many kingdoms.¹⁶²

These references confirm that, in thirteenth and early fourteenth-century Italian poetry, Tristan and Iseult, along with other Arthurian heroes, were already part of a repertoire of exemplary characters that included, above all, figures from the classical and Biblical worlds.¹⁶³ It is therefore quite natural for Italian poets to place their love stories alongside those of Greek or Trojan heroes and heroines. In addition, both Tristan and Iseult could be mentioned alongside classical characters in terms of their individual qualities. As mentioned above, Boncompagno da Signa, in his *De Amicitia*, refers to Helen and Iseult as ideal models of beauty:

‘Nec est distinctio inter despectibilem et formosam, quoniam ex quo placet orbato,
gibbosavel nasicurva convertitur in Elenam vel Ysottam’.¹⁶⁴
(*De Amicitia*, 33)

And there is no difference between an ugly woman and a beautiful one, because for someone who loves blindly, a woman with a hump or a crooked nose becomes Helen or Iseult.¹⁶⁵

On the other hand, in Brunetto Latini’s *Tesoretto*, Tristan is mentioned along with Achilles, Hector and Lancelot in a list of valiant warriors:

Sì ch’ Achilles lo prode
ch’ aquistò tante lode,

¹⁶² The translation is mine.

¹⁶³ Among the many lovers drawn from classical and Arthurian literature, *L’Intelligenza* also mentions a couple from the Bible: David and Bathsheba (st. 76).

¹⁶⁴ *Amicitia di maestro Boncompagno da Signa*, ed. by Sarina Nathan (Rome: Società Filologica Romana, 1909), p. 71.

¹⁶⁵ The translation is mine.

e 'l buono Ettor troiano,
Lancelotto e Tristano
non valse me' di vue,
quando bisogno fue.¹⁶⁶
(vv. 37-42)

So that the brave Achilles who won such renown, and the good Trojan Hector, Lancelot and Tristan were not worth more than you when there was need.¹⁶⁷

The almost total absence of references to the Tristan matter in relation to moral issues is rather surprising, given that it could have been well suited to this type of reflection. There are, however, two exceptions. *L'Intelligenza* 72 refers to the fact that Tristan and Iseult were the protagonists of an 'Amor vano, / che molti regni ha già fatti disfare' ('vain love that has already brought down many kingdoms'), thus showing a negative judgement; on the other hand, Re Giovanni in *Donna audite como* focuses on the relationship between Tristan's use of the love philtre and his moral responsibilities towards King Mark:

Lo re Marco era 'nganato,
perché 'n lui si confidia:
ello n'era smisurato,
e Tristan se ne godia
de lo bel viso rosato
ch'Isaotta blond' avia:
ancor che fosse peccato,
altro far non ne potia,
ch'a la nave li fu dato
onde ciò li dovenia.¹⁶⁸
(vv. 56-65)

King Mark was deceived, for he trusted him. He was excessive therein, and Tristan enjoyed the fair rosy face that gold-haired Iseult had; albeit it was sin, nought else could he do; for on the ship was given them whence this befell them.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ *Poeti del Duecento*, ed. by Contini, p. 176.

¹⁶⁷ Gardner, *The Arthurian Legend*, p. 32.

¹⁶⁸ *Le rime della Scuola siciliana*, ed. by Panvini, I, p. 87.

¹⁶⁹ Gardner, *The Arthurian Legend*, p. 24.

Re Giovanni clearly states that Tristan deceived King Mark, who trusted him, and behaved without measure. The Sicilian poet, while acknowledging that Tristan's behaviour was sinful, adds that he could not have done otherwise because of the love potion he was given on the ship. Re Giovanni's attitude towards Tristan is therefore ambivalent. Although he speaks explicitly of sin, it is clear that his judgement is partly mitigated by the reference to the love philtre. It is likely that this is the only Italian literary text before Dante that reflects on Tristan's moral condition and the sinfulness of his relationship with Iseult. In all the other texts, this reflection recedes in favour of the exemplary aspects of the character and his love for Iseult.

The situation is exactly the same in prose literature, where the main characteristics of the Italian reception of the Tristan story prevail: the theme of love, the exemplary role of Tristan as a knight and the beauty of Iseult.¹⁷⁰ *Novellino* 65 recounts an emblematic episode in the love story of Tristan and Iseult: the nocturnal meeting in the garden. This episode, which, as mentioned above, relies on narrative materials that originate from Thomas and Béroul, tells how Iseult, realising that Marco was spying on them, managed to make Tristan aware of it and deceived the king into believing that she was loyal to him. The central point of the story, as the last sentence suggests, is the deep and wise complicity between the two lovers: 'lo savio avvedimento ch'ebbero intra lor due'.¹⁷¹ In another short tale, the *Conto de Brunor et de Galeocto suo fillio*, which belongs to the Tuscan collection of novellas known as *Conti di antichi cavalieri* (c. 1270-1300), Galehaut and Tristan show mercy and great courtesy to each other after a long duel. This story, partly inspired by an episode from the first part of the prose *Tristan* (Lös. 41), shares the portrayal of Tristan as an exemplary knight that characterises the Italian translations of the romance. Lastly, Brunetto Latini includes in his *Trésor* (III. XIII. 11) a whole paragraph in which he engages, with a rhetorical purpose, in an elaborate description of Iseult's beauty.

In conclusion, this analysis of Tuscan translations of the prose *Tristan* and literary references to the Tristan matter between the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries has allowed us to identify some characteristic features of the Italian reception. Firstly, the tendency to present the story of Tristan as a source from which to draw political or civic lessons, found exclusively in Italian Arthurian romances and apparently alien to literary reception. Secondly, the portray of Tristan and Iseult as ideal models of certain virtues, common to translations of the prose *Tristan* and the literary tradition. In particular, Tristan

¹⁷⁰ On this topic, see: Delcorno Branca, 'I racconti arturiani del «Novellino»', p. 119-126; F. Regina Psaki, 'Arthur in Medieval Italian Short Narrative', in *The Arthur of the Italians*, ed. by Allaire and Psaki, pp. 145-157 (pp. 152-155).

¹⁷¹ *Novellino e conti del Duecento*, ed. by Sebastiano Lo Nigro (Turin: Utet, 1963), p. 160.

is a model of chivalrous virtues and valour, while Iseult of feminine beauty. For Italian poets, both are exemplary figures of lovers, as iconic as one of the most famous couples of the classical tradition: Paris and Helen. A tendency common to all sources, with the exception of *Re Giovanni* and to some extent *L'Intelligenza*, is to ignore the moral implications of the adulterous relationship between Tristan and Iseult and to focus mainly on the positive and exemplary aspects of their story.

II. The *Lancelot en prose* in Italy

This chapter examines the circulation of the *Lancelot en prose* in thirteenth and early fourteenth-century Italy. Its purpose, once again, is to provide a general context for the following section of the dissertation, and in particular for chapter four, which will focus on Dante's reception of the last three romances of the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle. The first part of this chapter consists of an overview of the main theories concerning the composition of the *Lancelot-Graal*, with particular emphasis on the relationship between its structure and manuscript circulation. The second section deals with the Italian circulation of the last three romances of the cycle: *Lancelot*, *La Queste del Saint Graal* and *La Mort le roi Artu*, collectively known as *Lancelot en prose*. The decision to focus on the last three romances of the cycle is mainly due to the fact that it has not been possible to identify clear references in Dante's works to the events narrated in the first two romances: *L'Estoire del Saint Graal* and *Merlin* (with its *Suite*).¹⁷² By looking at the manuscript tradition, the literary quotations and the Italian translations or rewritings of the late thirteenth and the early fourteenth centuries, I will outline the main aspects of the reception of the *Lancelot en prose* in Dante's Italy. This reconstruction will be fundamental in order to highlight, in chapter four, the originality of Dante's interpretation of the cycle. In the third part, I will focus on the circulation of the *Queste del Saint Graal* in the same context. As it will be shown, Dante's knowledge of the *Lancelot* and the *Mort Artu* is unquestionable, since both the works are explicitly mentioned in the *Commedia* and the *Convivio*. On the other hand, although scholars have highlighted some striking similarities between the *Queste* and the *Commedia*, they have not identified any undeniable references to this romance in Dante's works. Hence, before studying Dante's reception of the *Lancelot en prose* or assuming a possible relationship between the *Queste* and the *Commedia*, it is necessary to prove that this romance had a wide circulation in the historical and geographical context in which Dante lived.

II. 1 Structure and Composition of the *Lancelot-Graal* Cycle

The history of the composition of the anonymous cycle known as the *Lancelot-Graal* or Vulgata is particularly complex and controversial. The cycle, which dates from between 1215 and 1235, consists, in reading order, of five prose romances: *L'Estoire del Saint Graal*,

¹⁷² The only study dealing with Dante's reception of the *Estoire* is Punzi, 'Ancora sul romanzo nella *Commedia*', which points to a possible relationship between the prologue of the romance and the *Commedia*. On the other hand, no relationship between Dante's works and the *Merlin* has been hypothesised.

Merlin with its continuation (*Suite Merlin*), *Lancelot*, *La Queste del Saint Graal*, and *La Mort le roi Artu*.¹⁷³ Heavily inspired by Robert de Boron's *Joseph d'Arimathie*, the *Estoire del Saint Graal* tells the story of the Holy Grail from the death of Christ to the settlement of Joseph of Arimathea and the other protagonists in Britain. The *Merlin* is composed of two sections: the *Merlin* proper, almost identical to the prose version of Robert de Boron's *Merlin*, and the *Suite Merlin*, composed to link Robert's romance with the following part of the cycle. This romance covers the events between Merlin's birth and the early years of Arthur's reign. The *Lancelot* mainly focuses on the story of the hero: his childhood, his arrival at Arthur's court, his love for Guinevere, his many adventures and deeds. The *Queste del Saint Graal* relates how the knights of the Round Table undertake the search for the Holy Grail, eventually achieved by Galahad. The *Mort Artu* tells of Arthur's discovery of the adulterous relationship between Guinevere and Lancelot, the subsequent war between them and Mordred's usurpation. These events lead to Arthur's death and the collapse of his kingdom. Until the 1980s, the most prominent scholars of the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle agreed on attributing the last three romances to a single author, or at least on considering them to be the coherent project of an 'architect' who supervised a team of writers. More specifically, Ferdinand Lot argued that the entire cycle, with the exception of the *Merlin* and its *Suite*, which he considered to be a later addendum, was written by a single author.¹⁷⁴ On the other hand, according to Jean Frappier, the *Lancelot*, the *Queste del Saint Graal* and the *Mort Artu* were conceived by an 'architect' who coordinated several writers, while the *Estoire del Saint Graal* and the *Merlin* (with its *Suite*) should be considered as a later addition and a sort of prequel to the main and original trilogy.¹⁷⁵

The theory that the *Lancelot-Queste-Mort Artu* trilogy should be seen as a coherent and unitary project was challenged by Elspeth Kennedy, who focused her studies on the differences between the two main versions of the *Lancelot* found in the manuscript tradition. According to Kennedy, the 'short version', attested by seventeen manuscripts, is the oldest and proves that the *Lancelot* was originally conceived as a non-cyclic and independent romance, ending with the episode of Galehaut's death.¹⁷⁶ On the other hand, the 'long

¹⁷³ For more detailed overviews of the different theories on the date and composition of the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle, see: Kennedy and others, 'Lancelot with and without the Grail', pp. 274-277; Claudio Lagomarsini, *Il Graal e i cavalieri della Tavola Rotonda. Guida ai romanzi francesi in prosa del Duecento* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2020), pp. 31-42.

¹⁷⁴ Ferdinand Lot, *Étude sur le Lancelot en prose* (Paris: Champion, 1918).

¹⁷⁵ Jean Frappier, *Étude sur la «Mort le roi Artu», roman du XIII^e siècle, dernière partie du «Lancelot» en prose* (Paris: Droz, 1936).

¹⁷⁶ See Kennedy's edition of the non-cyclic or pre-cyclic version of the *Lancelot*: *Lancelot do Lac. The non-cyclic Old French Prose Romance*, ed. by Elspeth Kennedy, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980). From now on, Kennedy's edition will be referred to as Kenn.

version', which survives in the vast majority of manuscripts, is a later rewrite intended to pave the way for a sequel based on the quest for the Holy Grail and the fall of King Arthur. This cyclic version faithfully follows the pre-cyclic romance up to the episode in which Lancelot and Galehaut become knights of the Round Table and leave King Arthur's court to go to Sorelois. At this point, it includes a rewrite of the final episodes of the pre-cyclic version and many additional adventures leading up to the beginning of the *Queste*.¹⁷⁷ According to Kennedy, it is therefore necessary to distinguish at least three different phases in the composition of the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle. The first phase coincides with the composition of the non-cyclic version of the *Lancelot*; the second one consists of the cyclic rewriting of the *Lancelot*, the *Queste del Saint Graal* and the *Mort le roi Artu*; the third and final phase comprises the prequels, namely the *Estoire del Saint Graal* and the *Merlin* with its *Suite*. Kennedy's theory on the relationship between the two versions of the *Lancelot* was disputed by Alexandre Micha, who argued for the unity of at least the last three romances of the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle.¹⁷⁸ Micha believed that the *Lancelot* was conceived from the beginning of its composition in a close and interdependent relationship with the following branches of the cycle: the *Queste del Saint Graal* and the *Mort Artu*.¹⁷⁹ Hence, according to him, the manuscript BNF fr. 768,¹⁸⁰ on which Kennedy's edition is based, testifies to the work of a copyist who cut and rearranged an incomplete codex of the romance into a coherent text, rather than to the existence of a pre-cyclic *Lancelot*.

As Claudio Lagomarsini points out, both Kennedy's and Micha's theories, which polarised the debate on the relationship between the short and the long versions of the *Lancelot* for many years, have their strengths and weaknesses. However, they are based exclusively on narrative coherence, without any extensive and rigorous examination of the manuscript tradition.¹⁸¹ Moreover, both theories have been challenged by new studies in the last decades. Annie Combes described both the *Lancelot-Graal* as a whole and the trilogy known as *Lancelot en prose* as an imperfect cycle, showing that the structure of the *Lancelot* hardly lends itself to integration into a larger structure. Combes's reconstruction challenges

¹⁷⁷ An overall analyses on the transition between the pre-cyclic and the cyclic version of the *Lancelot*, with all the plot and meaning shifts that this process implied, is provided by Elspeth Kennedy, *Lancelot and the Grail* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986). For a more synthetic treatment of the same topic, see: Elspeth Kennedy, 'The Making of the *Lancelot-Graal Cycle*', in *A Companion to the Lancelot-Graal Cycle*, ed. by Dover, pp. 13-22; Kennedy and others, 'Lancelot with and without the Grail', pp. 295-305.

¹⁷⁸ Alexandre Micha, *Essais sur le cycle du Lancelot-Graal* (Geneva: Droz, 1987).

¹⁷⁹ See Micha's edition of the cyclic version of the *Lancelot*: *Lancelot. Roman en prose du XIII^e siècle*, ed. by Alexandre Micha, 9 vols (Paris-Geneva: Droz, 1979-83). The reading order of the volumes is: VII-VIII, I-II, IV-V-VI. Vol. III includes shorter redactions of some episodes. From now on, Micha's edition will be referred to as Micha.

¹⁸⁰ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 768.

¹⁸¹ Lagomarsini, *Il Graal*, p. 40.

both Kennedy's theory of the non-cyclic *Lancelot* and the definitions of the trilogy as a perfect architecture or symphony in three acts, respectively proposed by Frappier and Micha.¹⁸² On the contrary, Frappier's theory of the 'architect' was taken up and developed by Carol Chase, who hypothesised the existence of two phases in the composition of the cycle. The first part of the *Lancelot*, which Kennedy considered to be pre-cyclic, would have been composed first. A second phase would have consisted of the extension of the *Lancelot* in cyclical form and the writing of the other romances, composed by different authors according to a common plan.¹⁸³ In recent years, Jean-Paul Ponceau argued that the composition of the *Estoire* preceded that of the *Queste*, a theory that undermines the traditional assumption that the prequels were the last to be added to the cycle¹⁸⁴. Finally, Arianna Punzi hypothesised that the *Marche de Gaule* – namely the first section of the *Lancelot* (Micha VII-VIII) – constitutes the original core from which the various rewrites originated. According to Punzi, the author of this original core conceived his work in relation to Robert de Boron's *Joseph* and *Merlin*, and as part of an ideal story that would culminate in Perceval's completion of the Grail quest. After this initial phase, the copyists attempted to make the text of the *Lancelot* compatible with Robert of Boron's *Joseph* and *Merlin*, and then extended and incorporated it into a new cycle with a new Grailwinner: Galahad.¹⁸⁵

The number of authors who worked on the *Lancelot-Graal* is difficult to determine, partly because of uncertainty about the different phases of composition of the work, and partly because several scholars argue that even romances that are generally considered to belong to the same phase, such as the *Queste* and the *Mort Artu*, or the *Estoire* and the *Merlin*, were composed by different authors.¹⁸⁶ Regardless of modern theories about the authors of each romance or the existence of a general architect for the cycle, it should be noted that a medieval reader could have attributed at least the *Lancelot en prose* to a single author: Walter Map, who would have written the trilogy at Henry Plantagenet's request. This attribution is now unanimously rejected, since Walter Map, known as a courtier of Henry II of England

¹⁸² Despite this, Combes does not seem to rule out the possibility that the *Lancelot*, the *Queste* and the *Mort Artu* are the work of the same author. See Annie Combes, *Les voies de l'aventure. Réécriture et composition romanesque dans le Lancelot en prose* (Paris: Champion, 2001).

¹⁸³ Carol J. Chase, 'La fabrication du Cycle du «Lancelot-Graal»', *Bulletin bibliographique de la Société Internationale Arthurienne*, 61 (2009), 261-280.

¹⁸⁴ Jean-Paul Ponceau, 'L'«Estoire del Saint Graal» et la «Queste del Saint Graal»: un problème de chronologie relative', *Medioevo romanzo*, 38 (2014), 251-286.

¹⁸⁵ Punzi, *All'ombra di Lancillotto*, pp. 27-42.

¹⁸⁶ For example, David F. Hult argues that the author of the *Queste* is different from that of the *Lancelot* and the *Mort Artu*, while Fanni Bogdanow believes that the *Estoire* and the *Merlin* were added to the 'original trilogy' by two different authors. See, respectively: *La Mort du roi Arthur*, ed. by David F. Hult (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 2009), p. 21; *La Quête du Saint-Graal*, ed. by Fanni Bogdanow (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 2006), p. 43. From now on, Bogdanow's edition of the *Queste* will be referred to as Bogdanow, while Hult's edition of the *Mort Artu* will be referred to as Hult.

and author of the Latin work *De nugis curialium*, died between 1208 and 1210, before the composition of the cycle had even begun. Map's name is mentioned for the first time in the *explicit* of most of the manuscripts of the cyclic *Lancelot*:

Si fenist ici mestre Gautier Maps son livre et conmanche le Graal.
(Micha VI, p. 244)

And here Master Walter Map concludes his book and begins the *Grail*.¹⁸⁷

This *explicit* was probably added to the *Lancelot*, a work originally without title and attribution, by the author of the *Queste* or by the earliest copyists of the cycle.¹⁸⁸ The second reference to the pseudo-author's name occurs at the end of the *Queste*, where Map is indicated as the translator into French of an original Latin source preserved at the library of Salisbury:

Et quant Boorz ot contees les aventures del Saint Graal teles come il les ot veues, si furent mises en escrit et gardees en l'armaire de Salebieres, dont Mestre Gautier Map les trest a fere son son livre do Seint Graal por amor do roi Henri, son seignor, qui fist l'estoire translater de latin en françois.
(Bogdanow, 654)

When Bors had recounted the adventures of the Holy Grail, as he had seen them, they were recorded and kept in the archive at Salisbury. Master Water Map withdrew them to write his book about the Holy Grail, for the love of his lord King Henry, who had the story translated from Latin into French.

The third reference to the pseudo-author's name, which occurs at the beginning of the *Mort Artu*, establishes a direct connection with the second one, even if Walter Map is represented as a narrator rather than a translator:

Après ce que mestre Gautiers Maps ot translaté des aventures del Saint Graal assez soffisamment, si com il li sembloit, si fu avis au roi Henri son seignor que ce qu'il avoit fet ne devoit pas soffire se il ne recontoit la fin de cels de cui il avoit fet mencion et

¹⁸⁷ For the English translation of the romances of the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle, see, once for all, *Lancelot-Grail. The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation*, ed. by Norris J. Lacy, 10 vols (Cambridge: Brewer, 2010).

¹⁸⁸ See Combes, *Les voies de l'aventure*, pp. 33-51, 74-77.

coment cil morurent de cui il avoit les proeces ramenteües en son livre. Et por ce comença il ceste derraine partie. Et quant il l'ot ensemble mise, si l'apela *La Mort lo roi Artur* [...]. Si comença mestre Gautiers en tel maniere ceste derreeine partie. (Hult, p. 182)

After Walter Map had put into writing the *Adventures of the Holy Grail* as fully as he thought proper, his lord King Henry was of the opinion that his work would be left unfinished if he did not recount the rest of the lives of those about whom he had earlier spoken and the deaths of those whose feats of prowess he had recorded in his book. And for that reason he began this last part, and when he had composed it, he called it *The Death of King Arthur* [...]. And in that way Master Walter Map begins this final part.

A reference to Map is also found in the *explicit* of the *Mort Artu*, where the author, reporting the completion of his work, describes it as 'estoire de Lancelot' ('story of Lancelot'), a definition that refers to the entire trilogy:

Si se test ore atant mestre Gautiers Map de l'estoire de Lancelot, car bien l'a donc menee a fin selonc les choses qui en avindrent, et fenist ici son livre si outreement que après ce n'en porroit nus reconter qui n'en mentist de totes choses. (Hult, p. 908)

And now Master Walter Map has no more to say about the *Story of Lancelot*, for he has brought it to an end and has told everything that happened; his book ends here, and anything else that might be added would be a lie.

Although the attribution of the trilogy to Map is now considered fictitious, this does not necessarily mean that it was perceived as such by medieval copyists and readers. As Combes notes, the fact that this name was extrapolated from the *Queste* and used as the *explicit* of the *Lancelot* suggests that its authenticity was not in doubt.¹⁸⁹ This would have been even more true for a reader who possessed one or more manuscripts containing the entire trilogy, which contains references to Walter Map in four different parts of the text.

The great complexity and variety of the manuscript tradition is another distinctive feature of the *Lancelot-Graal*, which circulated in the most diverse combinations.¹⁹⁰ Of the 162

¹⁸⁹ Combes, *Les voies de l'aventure*, p. 75.

¹⁹⁰ For this part, I mainly relied on: Richard Trachsler, *Clôtures du cycle arthurien. Étude et textes* (Geneva: Droz, 1996), pp. 557-564; Lagomarsini, *Il Graal*, pp. 43-49. An up-to-date list of the manuscripts of the *Lancelot-Graal* can be found in Alison Stones, 'Chronological and Geographical Distribution of *Lancelot-*

witnesses listed by Richard Trachsler, eight contain the entire cycle, fifty-nine various combinations of romances and ninety-five individual romances. *Estoire-Merlin* and *Lancelot-Queste-Mort Artu* are by far the most common combinations. Because of its length, about half of the whole cycle, the *Lancelot* was often split between several manuscripts or only partially transcribed. For example, the combinations *Estoire-Merlin-Lancelot* (first two thirds) and *Lancelot* (last third)-*Queste-Mort Artu* are quite common and, in general, the manuscripts that bear witness to the *Lancelot* tend to preserve just some of its parts. Due to this extremely diverse tradition, the freedom of the copyists and other specific dynamics in the transmission of the texts, it is impossible to identify group of manuscript that are valid for the entire cycle. As a result, scholars using a stemmatic approach to the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle could only reconstruct manuscript families for the individual romances. But while the manuscript tradition of the prequels and sequels has varying degrees of coherence, that of the *Lancelot* is particularly elusive and complex to catalogue. The romance can be divided into four main parts:

<i>Marche de Gaule</i>	Micha VII-VIII / Kenn. 1-572
<i>Galehaut</i>	Micha I (α) / Micha III (β) / Kenn. 572-613 (non cyclic)
<i>Charrette</i>	Micha II (α) / Micha III (β)
<i>Agravain</i>	Micha IV-V-VI

Scholars agree that the *Marche de Gaule*, whether cyclical or not, is the oldest part of the cycle and its text is rather homogeneous throughout the manuscript tradition. It is also generally accepted that the text of the *Lancelot* is attested in different versions from the beginning of the *Galehaut*. Micha distinguishes between a long cyclic version (‘α’ or ‘Paris’), a short cyclic version (‘β’ or ‘London’) and the special version attested exclusively in the BNF manuscript fr 768, which contains only the *Marche de Gaule* and the *Galehaut*.¹⁹¹ According to Kennedy, the latter version, defined as ‘non-cyclic’, is instead attested in thirteen manuscripts.¹⁹² Given the considerable number of manuscripts that switch from one version to another at various points, Micha also outlined some ‘mixed redactions’. Recent

Grail Manuscripts’, in *The Lancelot-Grail Project* <<https://www.lancelot-project.pitt.edu/LG-web/Arthur-LGChronGeog.html>> [accessed 31/07/2023].

¹⁹¹ Alexandre Micha, ‘La tradition manuscrite du *Lancelot* en prose’, *Romania*, 85 (1964), 293-318; Alexandre Micha, ‘La tradition manuscrite du *Lancelot* en prose (Deuxième article)’, *Romania*, 85 (1964), 478-517; Alexandre Micha, ‘La tradition manuscrite du *Lancelot* en prose (Troisième article)’, *Romania*, 86 (1965), 330-359; Alexandre Micha, ‘La tradition manuscrite du *Lancelot* en prose. Les deux versions du *Lancelot en prose* (Quatrième article)’, *Romania*, 87 (1966), 194-233.

¹⁹² *Lancelot do Lac*, ed. by Kennedy, p. 29.

studies, however, have challenged this categorisation, showing how the tradition of the *Lancelot* must be thought of in terms of individual narrative blocks, and proving the existence of an intermediate version that precedes the long one.¹⁹³ All these issues must be taken into account in the reconstruction of the Italian tradition of the *Lancelot-Graal*.

II. 2 The *Lancelot en prose*: Italian Circulation and Readers

After having provided an overview of the various theories concerning the structure and composition of the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle, it is necessary to reconstruct the circulation and reception of the last three romances, the so-called *Lancelot en prose*, in thirteenth and early fourteenth-century Italy. As witnessed by both the manuscript tradition and the references to the cycle found in thirteenth-century literature, Tuscany seems to have been the first Italian region where the *Lancelot en prose* had a wide circulation. The fact that the *Lancelot* is one of the sources of Rustichello's *Arthurian Compilation*, and that an episode from its second part, the *Galehaut*, is quoted in the *Mare Amoroso*, suggests that it was already circulating between Pisa and Florence in the 1270s.¹⁹⁴ In addition, the Pisan-Genoese group contains, together with six manuscripts and fragments of the *Lancelot* (H, Es, P1, P4, APuig, V1), a complete witness of the *Queste del Saint Graal* (Ud).¹⁹⁵ In the same years, two rewrites of episodes from the third part of the *Lancelot*, the *Charrette*, and from the *Mort Artu* were included in the *Novellino* (c. 1280).¹⁹⁶ The presence of the *Mort Artu* in Tuscany in the last decades of the 1200s is confirmed by the *Meleḵ Arṭuś* (Vat), the Hebrew translation of a now lost Italian *Distruzione de la Tavola Ritonda*, made somewhere between Pisa, Florence and Siena in 1278-79.¹⁹⁷ The widespread circulation of the *Lancelot en prose* between Liguria and Tuscany by the first decades of the 1300s is also attested by other manuscripts that bear witness to the *Lancelot* (F, P2, R) and the *Mort Artu* (Ox), as well as by the Italian translations of the *Queste* and the *Mort Artu* contained in the Panciatichiano 33. As mentioned above, the Po Valley was another important region for the early circulation of Arthurian prose romances in Italy. The northern Italian tradition of the *Lancelot en prose* includes, for this period, a manuscript of the *Lancelot* (P3), one of the *Queste* (Rav) and two

¹⁹³ Elena Spadini, 'Studi sul *Lancelot en prose*' (Unpublished doctoral thesis, Sapienza University of Rome, 2016), pp. 43-66 and Punzi, *All'ombra di Lancillotto*, pp. 69-149.

¹⁹⁴ *Mare Amoroso*, vv. 32-36.

¹⁹⁵ The missing parts are due to mechanical lacunae. See Marco Infurna, 'La *Queste del Saint Graal* in Italia e il manoscritto udinese', in *La grant Queste del Saint Graal*, pp. 49-57 (pp. 52-53).

¹⁹⁶ *Novellino* 28; 82.

¹⁹⁷ See Giancarlo Lacerenza, 'Le *Sefer ha-šēmad* ou *Meleḵ Arṭuś*: la version hébraïque d'une *Destruction de la Table ronde* perdue (1278-1279)', in *La matière arthurienne tardive*, ed. by Ferlampin-Acher, pp. 547-553.

of the *Mort Artu* (Cop, Cha), as well as two fragments in Old French of the *Lancelot* (ASBo1, ASCr) and one in Italian of the *Queste* (Ven).¹⁹⁸ This is a complete list of the Old French manuscripts of *Lancelot en prose* produced in Italy between the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries:

*Lancelot*¹⁹⁹

Berlin, Deutsche Staatsbibliothek, Hamilton 49 [H]	Genoa-Pisa, 1284-1299	Micha VII-VIII, xxIIa-LIIa
Bologna, Archivio di Stato, busta X, n. 38 [ASBo1]	Central-northern Italy, s. 14 ^{1/2}	Micha VIII, LXIa, 79-92 [fragment]
Cremona, Archivio di Stato, filza 3905 fasc. 2 [ASCr]	Northern Italy, s. 14 ^{1/2}	Micha III, xvi, 19-xvi, 46; III, xxiv, 17-34 [β]
El Escorial, Real Biblioteca del Monasterio, P II 22 [Es]	Genoa-Pisa, 1284-1299	Micha, VII-VIII, Ia-LXXIa, 49
Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Pluteo 89 inf. 61 [F]	Florence, s. 13 ^{ex}	Micha VII-VIII, Ia-LXXIa; III, I-IV, 24 [fr. 768]
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 354 [P1]	Genoa-Pisa, 1284-1299	Micha II-IV, XLII, 5-LXXI, 36 [α]
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 767 [P2]	Arezzo, s. 13 ^{4/4}	Micha I-IV, VII, 1-LXXVI, 16 [α]
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 773 [P3]	Bologna/Veneto, s. 13 ^{ex}	Micha VII-VIII, Ia-LVIa
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 16998 [P4]	Genoa-Pisa, 1284-1299	Micha I-II, XXVI, 10-LV, 1 [fr. 1430]

¹⁹⁸ Another important proof of the early circulation of the *Lancelot en prose* in the Po Valley is provided by a bequest and an inventory written in 1287 and 1290 respectively, which testify that the *Lancelot* was circulating in Bologna at the time. See Giuseppina Brunetti, 'Un capitolo dell'espansione del francese in Italia: manoscritti e testi a Bologna fra Duecento e Trecento', in *Quaderni di Filologia Romanza*, 17 (2004), 125-164 (pp. 134-137),

¹⁹⁹ Delcorno Branca, '«Franceschi romanzi»'; Cambi, 'Un frammento del *Lancelot en prose*'; Cambi, 'Ancora un frammento del *Lancelot en prose*'.

Puigcerdà, Archivio Deulofeu y Fatjo [APuig]	Genoa-Pisa, 1284-1299	Micha I, xxvii, 6 [fragment]
Rouen, Bibliothèque Municipale, 1055 [R]	Florence, s. 13 ^{ex.} -14 ^{inc.}	Micha VII-VIII, Ia-LXXIa; III, i-iv, 24 [fr. 768]
Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, fr. Z XI 254 [V1]	Genoa-Pisa, 1284-1299	Micha IV-V, LXXXIV, 28- XCIII, 8 [α]

*La Queste del Saint Graal*²⁰⁰

Ravenna, Biblioteca Classense, 454 [Rav]	Bologna?, s. 14 ^{inc.}	Pauph. 1-280
Udine, Biblioteca Arcivescovile, 177 [Ud]	Genoa-Pisa, 1284-1299	Pauph. 1-280

*La Mort le roi Artu*²⁰¹

Copenhagen, Kongelige Bibliotek, Thott 1087 [Cop]	Piedmont/Savoy, s. 13.	Frapp. 1-204
Chantilly, Musée Condé, 649 [Cha]	Modena, 1288	Frapp. 1-204
Oxford, Bodleian Library, Douce 189 [Ox]	Genoa?, s. 13 ^{ex.}	Frapp. 1-204

This is a list of Italian translations dating from the same period, which also includes the Hebrew *Meleḳ Artuś*:²⁰²

²⁰⁰ Bogdanow, 'La tradition manuscrite'; Infurna, 'I romanzi del Graal in Italia'. For the text of the *Queste del Saint Graal* we refer in this table to: *La Queste del Saint Graal, roman du XIII^e siècle*, ed. by Albert Pauphilet (Paris: Champion, 1923) [Pauph.].

²⁰¹ Delcorno Branca, 'La tradizione della *Mort Artu*'; Morreale, 'The Columbia Western 24'. For the text of the *Mort Artu* we refer in this table to: *La Mort le roi Artu, roman du XIII^e siècle*, ed. by Jean Frappier (Paris: Droz, 1936) [Frapp.].

²⁰² Breillat, 'Une traduction Italienne'; Ruggieri, 'Versioni italiane della «Queste del Saint Graal»'; *La Inchiesta*, ed. by Infurna; Delcorno Branca, 'La tradizione della *Mort Artu*'.

Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Panciatichiano 33	Tuscany, s. 14 ^{inc.}	Pauph. 1-71, 27 (<i>Queste</i>) Frapp. 1-85 (<i>Mort Artu</i>)
Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Hebr. Urb. 48. [Vat]	Tuscany, 1278-1279	Frapp. 1-19
Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Gr. Cl. II, XVII [Ven]	Venice, s. 14	Pauph. 66, 10-68, 23; 76, 11-78, 15; 197, 2-200, 4; 204, 21-206, 18

This survey of the Italian manuscript tradition of the *Lancelot en prose* gives the impression that the various romances circulated independently of each other, at least at an early stage. With the exception of the Panciatichiano 33, a compilation of episodes from the *Queste*, the *Mort Artu* and the prose *Tristan*, all thirteenth and early fourteenth-century manuscripts contain only one romance. Manuscripts containing more than one romance date from 1320 onwards and are a minority within the extant Italian tradition.²⁰³ However, the fact that both the *Lancelot* and the cycle as a whole were often divided into several volumes makes it impossible to know whether any surviving Italian manuscript was originally conceived as part of a larger group of volumes containing more than one romance.²⁰⁴ Since most of the manuscripts in circulation at the time are now lost, and the general tradition of the cycle shows that cyclic manuscripts (or groups of manuscripts) have been widely attested since the 1200s,²⁰⁵ we cannot exclude this possibility. Another fact that emerges from the list of Old French manuscripts is that the *Lancelot* is never attested in its entire cyclic form. This was undoubtedly due to the length of the text and its frequent division into several volumes, which could lead to their partial dispersion and, consequently, to the impossibility for the copyists to have access to the entire work. The fact that shorter works such as the *Queste* and

²⁰³ These manuscripts are:

- Oxford, Bodleian Library, Douce 199 (France/Italy: 1320-1330): *Agravain* section of the *Lancelot*, first part of the *Queste*.

- Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson D. 874 (Lombardy: s. 14^{ex.}): Vulgate and Post-Vulgate *Queste*, Post-Vulgate *Mort Artu*.

- Paris, BNF, fr. 343 (Lombardy, s. 14^{ex.}): Vulgate and Post-Vulgate *Queste*, beginning of the *Mort Artu*.

Stones believes that the Douce 199 was copied in Paris, while Bogdanow considers it Italian; see: Stones, 'Chronological and Geographical Distribution'; Fanni Bogdanow, 'La recherche des antécédents littéraires: un remaniement méconnu de la *Queste du Saint Graal Vulgate*, nouvelle source de la *Post-Vulgate*', in *Perceval-Parzival hier et aujourd'hui, recueil d'articles assemblés par D. Buschinger et W. Spiewok pour fêter les 95 ans de J. Fourquet*, ed. by Danielle Buschinger and Wolfgang Spiewok (Greifswald: Reineke, 1994), pp. 25-37. The manuscripts D. 874 and fr. 343 were probably commissioned by the Visconti and are inventoried in their library; see Fanni Bogdanow, 'A Newly Discovered Manuscript of the Post-Vulgate *Queste del Saint Graal* and Its Place in the Manuscript Tradition of the Post-Vulgate', in *Studia in honorem prof. M. de Riquer*, 4 vols (Barcelona: Quadernus Crema, 1986-91) IV, pp. 347-370.

²⁰⁴ See Delcorno Branca, '«Franceschi romanzi»', pp. 39-48.

²⁰⁵ See Trachsler, *Clôtures*, pp. 557-564.

the *Mort Artu* are always attested in their entirety would seem to lend support to this theory. However, this should not lead us to underestimate the typically Italian tendency to transmit Arthurian romances in fragmentary form or by selecting specific episodes, which we have already outlined for the prose *Tristan*. Finally, it is noteworthy that all the main versions of the *Lancelot* are attested in Italy. P1, P2 and V1 convey the part of the romance following the *Marche de Gaule* in the long version (Paris or α). On the other hand, ASCr conveys the short version (London or β) and P4 belongs to the group 1430, a ‘mixed redaction’ that switches from the long to the short version at the end of the episode of the *Val sans retour* (Micha I. xxiv). There are also two manuscripts that contain the so-called non-cyclic or special version (F, R).

Having outlined the versions of the *Lancelot en prose* that circulated in Italy in Dante’s time, it is necessary to see how they were read. As in the case of the prose *Tristan*, the particular success of certain parts of the *Lancelot en prose* could shed light on the interests of its readers. The majority of the Italian manuscripts of the *Lancelot* can be divided into two groups, each privileging a specific reading of the romance.²⁰⁶ H and P show an almost exclusive interest in the amorous, adventurous, and chivalrous aspects of the story. The same can be said of F and R, bearers of the non-cyclical or special version. This version, as Kennedy pointed out, privileges the themes of love and the search for identity, and in no way condemns the adulterous relationship between Lancelot and Guinevere, presenting it instead as the knight’s main impetus for carrying out great deeds.²⁰⁷ On the contrary, several manuscripts bear witness to the *Agravain*, the part of the romance in which the protagonist’s earthly adventures are interspersed with episodes that prepare the ground for the arrival of Galahad, the perfect knight who will complete the quest for the Holy Grail. In this section, the condemnation of the adulterous relationship between Lancelot and Guinevere, which in the *Queste* will prevent the protagonist from gaining access to the vision of the Grail, is already clear. Accordingly, a manuscript containing the *Agravain* alone (V1), or in combination with the *Charrette* (P1, P2), would undoubtedly have favoured an edifying interpretation of the romance. Unlike the *Lancelot*, the *Queste* and *Mort Artu* were transmitted and read in their entirety, as evidenced by all the manuscripts in Old French that preserve them (Rav, Ud, Cop, Cha, Ox).²⁰⁸ While the *Queste* reinforces the moral approach

²⁰⁶ See Punzi, *All’ombra di Lancillotto*, p. 157.

²⁰⁷ See Kennedy, *Lancelot and the Grail*, pp. 5-78.

²⁰⁸ The three translations are an exception, but they do not provide any information about the possibility of the work being transmitted in part. The Panciatichiano 33 is a compilation of carefully selected episodes from the *Lancelot en prose* and the prose *Tristan*. For the *Queste*, it shares the antigraph with Ud, a manuscript that transmits the work in its entirety. Vat is undoubtedly an incomplete project, since it contains anticipations of episodes later than the point at which the translator stopped. These references show that he probably had a

characteristic of the *Agravain*, the *Mort Artu* presents the adulterous relationship between Lancelot and Guinevere as the catalyst for the series of events that lead to the collapse of Arthur's kingdom. For these reasons, both works lent themselves to an edifying rather than a hedonistic reading.

This twofold tendency in the reading of the *Lancelot en prose*, and of Arthurian romances in general, is confirmed by the translations produced in Italy. The compiler of the Panciatichiano 33 downplayed the moral meaning of the *Queste* and the *Mort Artu* by omitting certain sections of the two romances and by interspersing the selected parts with episodes from the prose *Tristan*.²⁰⁹ The *Queste* is interrupted at the end of the episode in which Lancelot, after confessing to a hermit, repents of his sins, particularly his adulterous relationship with Guinevere. Instead of including the rest of the romance, which culminates in Lancelot's failure in the quest, the compiler inserts two anonymous love letters and the first part of the prose *Tristan*, which mark the transition to the earthly morality that dominates the rest of the manuscript. As for the *Mort Artu*, the compiler completely omitted the second half, which deals with the civil wars between Arthur, Lancelot and Mordred. In doing so, he transformed the romance into a courtly text centred on the love between Lancelot and Guinevere, in keeping with the episodes of the prose *Tristan* that precede and follow it in the manuscript. This peculiar editing, in which the uplifting theme that characterises the extract from the *Queste* is completely overwhelmed by the earthly meaning of the following texts, conveys the idea of a compilation based on the celebration of courtly love. By contrast, an edifying reading of the *Lancelot en prose* prevails in the *Meleḳ Arṭuś*.²¹⁰ In the prologue, the Hebrew translator justifies his decision to devote himself to secular reading with the need to distract himself and find solace in moments of sadness and melancholy. But he is not thinking of a hedonistic fruition of the text. In fact, in an attempt to defend himself in advance against possible accusations of neglecting the Torah, he makes it clear that reading that book can be educational and edifying: 'sinners can learn from it the ways of repentance, remember their mortality and return to the Lord'.²¹¹ Thus, although the project was interrupted and only the first part of the work was copied, the prologue immediately highlights an interpretation of the work in an edifying sense.

complete source at his disposal. Finally, Ven contains some fragments of what was probably a complete manuscript. See: *La Inchiesta*, ed. by Infurna, pp. 30-41; Lacerenza, 'Le Sefer ha-šmad', p. 550.

²⁰⁹ On the Panciatichiano 33, see Heijkant, 'La compilazione'.

²¹⁰ For the moral outlook of the *Meleḳ Arṭuś*, I have mostly relied on Lacerenza, 'Le Sefer ha-šmad', p. 548. However, see also Paul R. Rovang, "'Hebraizing Arthurian Romance': The Originality of Melech Artus", *Arthuriana*, 19.2 (2009), 3-9.

²¹¹ Lacerenza, 'Le Sefer ha-šmad', p. 548.

Further information on the Italian reception of the *Lancelot en prose* can be deduced from literary references and rewritings. Just like Tristan and Iseult, the protagonists and the most iconic characters of the *Lancelot en prose* became part of an exemplary repertoire from which thirteenth-century Italian poets drew in abundance. As many of the characters of the *Lancelot en prose*, such as Arthur, Guinevere, Morgan and Lancelot, had appeared in earlier romances, it is sometimes difficult to determine which work the Italian poets were referring to. As we have seen, the name of Arthur had been widely attested in Italy since the 1100s.²¹² In Latin literature of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, the most widespread motif was undoubtedly that of the Bretons' expectation of his providential return, which had fostered the birth of the legend according to which Arthur waited on Mount Etna for the moment of his return.²¹³ Although Arthurian imagery has been attested in Italy since the twelfth century, the almost complete absence of references to Arthur, Guinevere, Lancelot or Morgan in the poetry of the Sicilian School, and their widespread appearance only in the second half of the 1200s, suggests that their literary fortune was mainly linked to the circulation of the *Lancelot in prose*. In any case, I will examine here references to these characters, regardless of the source from which they were taken, and to those who appear for the first time in the *Lancelot en prose*, such as the Lady of the Lake, Galehaut or the Lady of Malehaut.²¹⁴ References to the royal couple Arthur-Guinevere can be found in a variety of contexts:

1. Arthur as a model of virtue.	• Chiaro Davanzati, <i>Palamidesse amico, ogni virtù</i>, vv. 4-5.
2. Arthur in Etna.	• Anonymous, <i>Detto del Gatto Lupesco</i>, vv. 1-36.
3. Galehaut's submission to Arthur thanks to Lancelot.	• Lapuccio Belfradelli, <i>Donna senza pietanza</i>, vv. 54-60.
4. Guinevere as an example of wise woman.	• Maestro Torrigiano, <i>Esser donzella di trovare dotta</i>, vv. 1-4.
5. Guinevere as a model of beauty.	• Stoppa de' Bostichi, <i>Se la fortuna gira o 'l mondo</i>, vv. 77-80.

²¹² See I. 2.

²¹³ See Gardner, *The Arthurian Legend*, pp. 1-20; Antonio Pioletti, 'Artù, Avallon, l'Etna', *Quaderni medievali*, 28 (1989), 6-35.

²¹⁴ For the texts and a more detailed analysis of each literary reference, see: Gardner, *The Arthurian Legend*, pp. 21-43; Alex R. Falzon, *Re Artù in Toscana* (Siena: Nuova immagine, 1996), pp. 15-20; Donald L. Hoffman, 'Lancelot in Italy', in *A Companion to the Lancelot-Graal Cycle*, ed. by Dover, pp. 163-172; Capelli, 'Caratteri e funzioni'; Capelli, 'The Arthurian Presence'; Lagomarsini, 'Les Trois Couronnes'.

6. Lists of Arthurian characters / ekphrases.	• Ruggieri Apugliese, <i>Tant'aggio ardire e conoscenza</i>, v. 219. • Anonymous, <i>L'Intelligenza</i>, st. 73, 287.
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Morgan also enjoyed great success, with a role often comparable to that of Iseult:

1. Morgan as a model of beauty.	• Anonymous, Vat. Lat. 3793, no. 101, vv. 13-18. • Guido delle Colonne, <i>La mia gran pena e lo gravoso affanno</i>, p. 36. • Chiaro Davanzati, <i>Di lontana riviera</i>, vv. 20-22. • Chiaro Davanzati, <i>Madonna, lungiamente aggio portato</i>, vv. 5-8. • Chiaro Davanzati, <i>Ringrazzo amore de l'aventurosa</i>, vv. 3-4. • Anonymous, Vat. Lat. 3793, no. 393, vv. 5-8. • Anonymous, <i>L'Intelligenza</i>, st. 207.
2. Morgan as an example of wise or great woman.	• Chiaro Davanzati, <i>Dacché parlar non possovi celato</i>, v. 12. • Anonymous, Vat. Lat. 3793, no. 909, vv. 1-6.

Lancelot is another character who is particularly present in late thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century Italian poetry:

1. Lancelot as an exemplary or valiant knight (positive, negative or ironic value).	• Guittone d'Arezzo, <i>Ben aggia ormai la fede</i>, vv. 9-11. • Brunetto Latini, <i>Tesoretto</i>, vv. 37-42. • Folgore da San Gimignano, <i>Alla brigata nobile e cortese</i>, vv. 9-14.
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	• Lanfredi, <i>Morte dogliosa, ché non vien' di botto</i>, vv. 5-6.
2. Lancelot as a model of devotion in love (<i>Val sans retour</i> / imprisonment by Morgan).	• Anonymous, Vat. Lat. 3793, no. 290. • Anonymous, <i>Mare Amoro</i>, vv. 31-35.
3. Galehaut's submission to Arthur thanks to Lancelot.	• Lapuccio Belfradelli, <i>Donna senza pietanza</i>, vv. 54-60.
4. Lists of Arthurian characters / ekphrases.	• Anonymous, <i>L'Intelligenza</i>, st. 73, 75, 287.

Among the characters that appear for the first time in the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle, the references to the Lady of the Lake, Galehaut and the Lady of Malehaut are particularly interesting:

1. The Lady of the Lake as an example of wise or great woman.	• Anonymous, Vat. Lat. 3793, no. 909, vv. 1-6.
2. Galehaut's submission to Arthur thanks to Lancelot.	• Lapuccio Belfradelli, <i>Donna senza pietanza</i>, vv. 54-60.
3. Lists of Arthurian characters / ekphrases (Lady of the Lake, Lady of Malehaut).	• Anonymous, <i>L'Intelligenza</i>, st. 75.

The allegorical poem *L'Intelligenza* is undoubtedly the richest in Arthurian references. The anonymous author refers to several characters from the *Lancelot en prose* when describing the palace where his lady lives and, in particular, the aforementioned painting depicting the God of Love and many famous lovers from the classical, Biblical and Arthurian traditions:²¹⁵

71

[...]

Quiv' è chi per amor portò mai pena,
quiv' è *Parigi* co la bell'*Alena*,
e chi mai 'nnamorò per tempo o tardo.

²¹⁵ See I. 3.

72

La bella Pollisena v'è piagente
quand'Accillesse la prese ad amare;
e la regina Didon v'è, piangente
quand'Eneas si partïo per mare,
che d'una spada si fedio nel ventre
quando le vele li vide collare;
e la bell'Isaotta e 'l buon *Tristano*,
sì come li sorprese est'Amor vano
che molti regni ha già fatti disfare.

73

Èvi la bella *Ginevra* regina,
ed evv' appresso messer *Lancialloto*;
èvi Bersenda e Mideia e Lavina,
Pantassaleia regina, del tutto
sì com' Amor la tenne in sua catena:
e come combatteo a.mmotto a motto,
e le pulcelle che venier allore,
che vennero 'nn-aiuto al buon *Ettòre*
quando fu Troia e 'l paese distrutto.

[...]

75

E non fallio chi .ffu lo 'ntagliadore
la bella Analidà e 'l buonn-Ivano;
èvi intagliato Fiore e Blanziflore
e la bell' Isaotta Blanzesmano.
Si com'ella morio per fin amore,
cotanto amò Lancialotto sovrano,
èvi la nobile *Donna de Lago*;
quella di Moloalto col cuor vago,
e Palamidès cavalier pagano.

In the centre of the vault is the God of Love, holding an arrow in his right hand, who chooses and wounds anyone with a noble heart, for he is never cautious; and there are women of great worth, who fell in love because of his pleasant look. Here are those who

have ever longed for love, here is Paris with fair Helen, and those who have ever fallen in love when young or old. There is the fair Polyxena, who was weeping when Achilles began to love her; there is Queen Dido, who wept when she saw Aeneas setting sail, to the point of stabbing herself in the belly with a sword when she saw him hoisting the sails of the ship; and there is the fair Iseult and the good Tristan, at the moment when they were surprised by the vain love that has already brought down many kingdoms. There is the beautiful Queen Guinevere, and there is Sir Lancelot at her side; there are Briseis, Medea, Lavinia and Queen Penthesilea, as love bound them; and it is told word for word how she fought, and how the maidens came to the aid of good Hector when Troy and the land were destroyed. [...] And he did not err, whoever depicted fair Analidà and good Yvain; depicted there are Floire and Blanchefleur, and beautiful Iseut of the White Hands. Just as she died of noble love for loving the lofty Lancelot so much, the noble Lady of the Lake is there; she of Malehaut, with the loving heart, and Palamedes, the pagan knight.²¹⁶

Since the Lady of the Lake is the woman who raises and educates Lancelot, and is not in love with him, the author of the poem could have confused her with the Lady of Escalot, who dies for love of the knight in the *Mort Artu*. This character would fit in perfectly with the other lovers of the painting. The same can be said for the Lady of Malehaut, who is in love with the protagonist in the first part of the *Lancelot*. After being rejected by Lancelot, she witnesses him and Guinevere sharing their first kiss with the help of Galehaut, who later becomes her lover. The Lady of Malehaut eventually dies of grief when she learns of Galehaut's death. Two stanzas earlier, Lancelot himself is included in this list of passionate lovers, along with Guinevere. Their names immediately follow those of Tristan and Iseult, who close stanza 72: 'la bell'Isaotta e 'l buon Tristano, / sì come li sorprese est'Amor vano / che molti regni ha già fatti disfare' ('the fair Iseult and the good Tristan, surprised by that vain love that had already destroyed many kingdoms'). Since the love between Lancelot and Guinevere caused the downfall of Arthur's kingdom in the *Mort Artu*, the author seems to have juxtaposed the two adulterous couples in order to highlight their responsibility for the collapse of their respective political communities. Moreover, the statement that vain love has already destroyed many kingdoms seems to allude to the history of Troy, whose destruction is mentioned at the end of stanza 73. The idea of juxtaposing the story of Troy with those of Tristan and Iseult and Lancelot and Guinevere, and of establishing a link

²¹⁶ The first part of the translation is mine (71-73), the second part (75) is drawn from Busby, 'Arthuriana', p. 17.

between ‘vain love’ and the fall of many kingdoms, may have been suggested to the author of *L’Intelligenza* by a passage in the *Mort Artu*:

Dame, fet soi donques Boorz, qe en diroie je plus? Car certes, ge ne vi onques preudome qui amast longuement par amors qui au derreein n’en fust tenuz por honiz [...]. *Hector* li preuz et *Achilles*, qui d’armes et de chevalerie orent tot le los et tot le pris desor trestoz les chevaliers de l’acien tens, si en morurent et si en furent andui ocis, et plus de cent mil homes avuec els; et tot ice fu fet par l’acheson d’une *feme* que *Paris* prist a force en Grece. Et a nostre tens meïsmes, n’a pas encore v anz que *Tristrans*, li niés au roi Marc de Cornoaille, si en morut, qui si tres loiaument amoit *Yselt la blonde* que il onques en son vivant ne mesprist vers li. Que vos en diroie je plus? Onques nus hom ne s’i prist fermement qui n’en moreüst. *Yselt* ocist *Tristrant*, que l’en doit assez plaindre. Et savez vos que vos feroiz? Vos feroiz pis que totes cez autres dames ne firent [...] vos *domagerez molt plus cest roiaume et maint autre que onques dame* ne fist par le cors d’un seul chevalier. Et cestui est li biens que nos avrons de vostre amor.

(Hult, pp. 358-365)

“Lady”, said Bors, “what can I say? I’ve never seen a noble man who stayed in love for a long while without finally being ruined by it [...]. The valiant Hector and Achilles, who won more praise and esteem for feats of arms and chivalry than any knight of antiquity, were both killed, and more than a hundred thousand men with them, and all of that came about because of one woman whom Paris took by force in Greece. And in our own time, it has not yet been five years since the death of Tristan, the nephew of King Mark, who loved Iseut the Fair so faithfully that never in his life did he wrong to her. What more can I say? No man ever gave his love to a woman without dying as a result. And you would be doing more damage than all those other women [...] you’d be doing greater harm to this kingdom and many another than any other woman ever did through one man. Such is the benefit we can expect from your love!”.

In rebuking Guinevere for her relationship with Lancelot, Boort reminds her of how love for a woman has led many men to shame and death. Firstly, he mentions Paris and Helen’s responsibility for the outbreak of the Trojan War, which led to the deaths of countless men and, in particular, two great knights: Hector and Achilles. Secondly, he draws a parallel between the story of Tristan and Iseult, which happened a few years earlier, and that of Lancelot and Guinevere. He then ends his speech by telling Guinevere that she is going to do far more damage to her kingdom, and to many others, than any woman has ever done before. All these names appear again in the description of the fresco of the God of Love in

L'Intelligenza. As we have seen, the anonymous author mentions Paris and Helen, Tristan and Iseult, Lancelot and Guinevere and the vain love that brought down many kingdoms. Although in different contexts to those mentioned by Boort, he also refers to Achilles (st. 72), Hector and the destruction of Troy (st. 73). The names of the two adulterous couples are also recalled later in the poem, along with those of their respective kings and husbands: Arthur and Mark.

287

Dall'altra parte del ricco palazzo
 intagliat' è la Tavola Ritonda,
 le giostr' e 'l torneare e 'l gran sollazzo;
 ed èv' Artù e Ginevra gioconda
 per cui 'l pro' Lancialotto venne pazzo,
 March' e Tristano ed Isolta la blonda
 [...]

On the other side of the rich palace is carved the Round Table, the jousts and the tournaments and the great disport, and there is Arthur and joyous Guinevere, for whom the valiant Lancelot became mad, Mark and Tristan and golden Iseult [...]²¹⁷

The references to Lancelot in *L'Intelligenza* illustrate one of the various functions attributed to him in early Italian literature: that of the exemplary or foolish lover. Lancelot performs the same function in other contemporary or slightly earlier Florentine works, such as the *Mare Amoro* and *Novellino* 28.²¹⁸ While the *Mare Amoro* refers to Lancelot as an example of a faithful lover in relation to the episode of the *Val sans retour*, the *Novellino* dwells on his amorous madness through a brief reinterpretation of the episode of the cart. Both these episodes are taken from the *Lancelot*.²¹⁹ *Novellino* 82 is drawn instead from the *Mort Artu* and consists of a faithful rewrite of the episode in which King Arthur discovers the dead body of the Lady of Escalot.²²⁰ Rejected by Lancelot, whose loyalty to Guinevere is never in doubt, the Lady fell ill with a love sickness that led to her death.

In other works, however, Lancelot is referred to not as a lover or object of love, but rather as a knight par excellence, or a model of prowess and chivalric virtues. This is done both in

²¹⁷ Gardner, *The Arthurian Legend*, p. 109.

²¹⁸ For this paragraph, see: Gardner, *The Arthurian Legend*, pp. 85-95, 101-106; Delcorno Branca, 'I racconti arturiani del «Novellino»'; Psaki, 'Arthur in Medieval Italian Short Narrative'.

²¹⁹ See, respectively, Micha I. XXI-XXIV and Micha II. XXXVI. 23-28.

²²⁰ Frapp. 70-71.

Tuscan poetry (Guittone, Brunetto, Folgore, Lanfredi) and in *Novellino* 45. In this tale, Lancelot fights with a Saxon knight near a fountain. As soon as the Saxon discovers the name of the opponent he is fighting, he states: ‘Più mi nuoce tuo nome che non mi fa la tua prodezza’ (‘Your name harms me more than your valour does’).²²¹ As Delcorno Branca points out, this episode is taken from the prose *Tristan*, but the author of the *Novellino* replaced Tristan with Lancelot as the protagonist.²²² Finally, there are at least two references in thirteenth-century Italian literature to the episode of Galehaut’s submission to Arthur through the mediation of Lancelot. The first of these can be found in the *Conto de Brunor et de Galetto suo fillio* (*Conti di antichi cavalieri*, 19), which offers a condensed version of the story told in the *Lancelot*.²²³ The second is a summary of the episode in a few verses included in Lapuccio Belfradelli’s *Donna senza pietanza*:

Pemsate a Galeotto,
di ciò c’ a Lancalotto
promise im sua volglienza,
che no volle mentire;
poi ch’ ebe dato il botto
ad Artù re, d’ u· motto
li· si· diede im servenza.²²⁴
(vv. 54-60)

Think of Galehaut, of what he promised Lancelot at his will, which he would not gainsay; after he had overthrown King Arthur, at a word he yielded to him in allegiance.²²⁵

The plot of the episode can be summarised as follows. Galehaut, a wise and brave knight who is endowed with all the virtues of chivalry, invades the kingdom of Arthur. During the war, he witnesses Lancelot’s exploits and, after talking to him, develops an unconditional love for him. The two knights exchange a promise: each will grant the other a single wish. Galehaut asks Lancelot to fight for him, and the knight accepts. However, when he realises that Arthur is about to be overpowered, Lancelot asks Galehaut to honour his promise by submitting to the king. Despite being on the verge of winning the war, Galehaut accepts.

²²¹ *Novellino e conti del Duecento*, ed. by Lo Nigro, p. 128. Translation from Psaki, ‘Arthur in Medieval Short Narrative’, p. 152.

²²² Delcorno Branca, ‘I racconti arturiani del «Novellino»’, pp. 131-134.

²²³ Micha VIII. XLIX-LIIa. 73

²²⁴ *Concordanze della Lingua Poetica Italiana delle Origini*, ed. by Avals, pp. 452.

²²⁵ Gardner, *The Arthurian Legend*, p. 33.

This story, one of the most popular in Italy among those told in the *Lancelot*, was mostly read in a moral and civil key.²²⁶ Lapuccio Belfradelli portrays Galehaut as a man who does not lie and keeps his word, even in a situation where it would be more advantageous for him to contradict himself. On the other hand, the *Conto de Brunor* refers to him as a perfect example of courtesy, generosity, and chivalric virtues in general. Since the *Conti di antichi cavalieri* are presented in their prologue as a *speculum* for the rulers, the ruling classes of the Tuscan communes who, as we have seen, were deeply imbued with chivalric values, it is clear that Galehaut, along with Arthur, is proposed to them as a model to follow. Accordingly, after presenting Galehaut as the embodiment of all knightly virtues, the anonymous author sets up a contrast between King Arthur and the rulers of his time:

Non era el re Arture simele a li altri re che erano allora né che ora sonno, ma era un re e signore solamente in operare ordenato e in fare e inviare; in operare onne bontà d'amore de cavalleria de cortesia de larghezza de lealtà de fermezza e de ciascun valore. E li cavalieri ch'erano so' lui erano solo ordenati in dire e in seguire ciò.²²⁷
(*Conti di antichi cavalieri*, 19)

King Arthur was not like the other kings who were then and are now, but he was a king and a lord who was uniquely disposed to act, to do and to give; to act according to every goodness of love, chivalry, courtesy, liberality, loyalty, steadfastness and every value. And the knights who were with him were uniquely disposed to say and pursue this.²²⁸

The *Lancelot* pits Galehaut, a prince loved by his subjects for his chivalric virtues and liberality, against Arthur, a weak, unloved and sinful king. This moral opposition is alien both to the *Conto de Brunor* and to the Italian tradition in general, which often presents King Arthur as an exemplary ruler. Galehaut is also presented as an example of a virtuous and courteous knight in the prose *Tristan* and its Tuscan versions, which refer to the duel between him and Tristan.²²⁹ On the other hand, Rustichello da Pisa, while recounting the episode of the *Lancelot* and presenting it as the greatest of all adventures, downplays the positive and courtly aspects of Galehaut, emphasising above all Lancelot's merits.²³⁰ What unites

²²⁶ For the final section of this subchapter, see: Daniela Delcorno Branca, 'L'alto principe Galeotto', in *Tristano e Lancillotto*, pp. 225-238; Samuel N. Rosenberg, 'Galeotto Before the Fall', in *Accessus ad auctores*, ed. by Alfie and Dini, pp. 51-59; Arianna Punzi, 'Quando il personaggio esce dal libro: il caso di Galeotto signore delle isole lontane', in *Dai pochi ai molti. Studi in onore di Roberto Antonelli*, ed. by Paolo Canettieri and Arianna Punzi, 2 vols (Rome: Viella, 2014), II, pp. 1395-1421.

²²⁷ *Novellino e conti del Duecento*, ed. by Lo Nigro, p. 311.

²²⁸ The translation is mine.

²²⁹ See I. 3.

²³⁰ Delcorno Branca, 'L'alto principe Galeotto', pp. 230-231.

Rustichello and the anonymous author of the *Conto di Brunor*, as well as the Italian versions of the prose *Tristan*, is the desire to present the episode of the war between Galehaut and Arthur, or the duel between Galehaut and Tristan, as exemplary episodes in a political and civil key. A war or a duel with potentially destructive effects is interrupted thanks to the knights' ability to dialogue and achieve peace, made possible by their total adherence to, and mutual recognition of, chivalric values. On the other hand, the absence in all the Italian texts of references to the episode of the first kiss between Lancelot and Guinevere, and to Galehaut's mediating role on that occasion, is quite surprising to modern readers, who know the character mainly from the point of view adopted by Dante in *Inferno* V. However, Galehaut's role as panderer is completely alien to thirteenth-century Italian literature and Arthurian rewritings and will become iconic thanks to the Dantean episode and its quotation by Boccaccio in the subtitle of his *Decameron*. In conclusion, the *Lancelot en prose* and Arthurian literature in general provided a vast corpus of exemplary characters and events, both for those who practised love poetry and for those who wished to provide the ruling classes with political and civil models to imitate.

II. 3 The *Queste del Saint Graal* in Dante's Italy

The earliest reference to the myth of the Holy Grail in medieval Italy dates back to the early decades of the thirteenth century.²³¹ The Friulan poet Tommasino de' Cerchiari da Cividale mentions the Grail in connection with Perceval in his German poem *Der Wälsche Gast* (vv. 1075-1078), written around 1215. As Edmund G. Gardner pointed out, the poem alludes to Arthurian characters who, with the exception of Tristan, belong to the romances of Chrétien de Troyes.²³² Since the dating of *Der Wälsche Gast* likely precedes the composition of the *Queste del Saint Graal*, the reference to Perceval may have been taken from Chrétien de Troyes's homonymous work or, given the author's German culture, from Wolfram Von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, which was completed around 1210.²³³ As we have seen, the earliest references to the Holy Grail in Italian literary texts date from the second half of the thirteenth

²³¹ On the *Queste del Saint Graal* and the Grail myth in Italy, see: Gardner, 'The Holy Graal'; Gardner, *The Arthurian Legend*, pp. 17-20; Breillat, 'La Quête du Saint-Graal en Italie'; Viscardi, 'La Quête du Saint-Graal dans les romans du Moyen Age italien'; *La Inchiesta del San Gradale*, ed. by Infurna, pp. 23-68.

²³² Gardner, *the Arthurian Legend*, p. 19.

²³³ The Arthurian names mentioned in Tommasino de' Cerchiari, *Der Wälsche Gast*, vv. 1033-1078, are those of Enide, Soredamor, Gawain, Cligés, Erec, Ywain, Sagremor, Kalogriande, Tristan, and Perceval. If Kalogriande (v. 1052) were to be identified with Galogandres, and not, as Gardner does, with Calogrenant, then all the characters mentioned, except Tristan, would also appear in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, which was inspired by Chrétien's romances. On the other hand, the reference to Tristan could come from Old French romances in verse (Thomas's or Béroul's *Tristan*), from Eilhart von Oberg's *Tristrant* or from Gottfried von Straßburg's *Tristan*, all written before 1210.

century. Guittone d'Arezzo, in his canzone *Amor tant'altamente*, mentions Perceval's failure to ask for information about the Holy Grail, showing that he was familiar with Chrétien de Troyes's romance. In the same period, the Venetian troubadour Bartolomeo Zorzi, in his Occitan sestina *En tal dezirs mos cors intra*, alludes to the episode in Chrétien de Troyes's romance in which Perceval meets his hermit uncle.²³⁴ The source of a reference contained in a poem known as *Serventese del Maestro di tutte l'Arti*, attributed to Ruggieri Apugliese, a Senese poet probably active in the third quarter of the thirteenth century, is more difficult to define. It is included in a sequence of verses in which the author lists all his literary knowledge:

Al mio amico so far mancia;
 per ragione aggiusto bilancia
 e so ben dove andò la lancia
 e lo gradale.
 Di Merlin sapria trattare,
 quando fece bene e male;
 com' nacque Artuso al temporale:
 la mia materia è cutale
 ke senno abonda.
 So della Taula Ritonda,
 Tristano ed Isotta la Bionda;
 e come l'uom tutto si monda:
 e ke 'l peccato no'l confonda,
 si dé mondare.²³⁵
 (vv. 213-226)

I can give a gift to a friend; I can adjust the balance correctly and I know well where the Lance and Grail went. Of Merlin I could treat, when he did good and evil, and how Arthur was born under the storm: my matter is such that it abounds in meaning. I know about the Round Table, Tristan and Iseult the Blonde; and how man cleanses himself: and so that sin does not bring him to ruin he must cleans himself.²³⁶

According to Gardner, the reference to 'the spear and the grail' ('la lancia e lo gradale', vv. 215-216) would come from the 'Galahad version' of the story as told in the *Queste del Saint*

²³⁴ For the texts of Guittone's and Zorzi's poems, see I. 2.

²³⁵ *Poeti del Duecento*, ed. by Contini, I, pp. 899-900.

²³⁶ The translation is mine.

Graal, while according to Breillat it would recall Chrétien de Troyes's *Perceval*.²³⁷ It is worth noting that in the version of the text used by these scholars, vv. 215-216 are reported as follows: 'Et so ben la lancia / e lo gradale'. This version of v. 215, according to which the poet would say that 'he well knows [the story of] the spear and the grail', is clearly incomplete, since in this position, for metrical reasons, there should be a nine syllable verse. On the other hand, the solution proposed by Gianfranco Contini, according to which the poet states to 'know well where the spear and the grail went' ('e so ben dove andò la lancia / e lo gradale'), is metrically correct and definitely accurate. In Chrétien de Troyes's unfinished romance there is no indication that the spear and the Grail have been taken anywhere. On the contrary, in the only episode in which they appear, that of the banquet at the court of the Fisher King, they are simply moved between two different rooms, without leaving the castle. When Perceval wakes up the next morning, the narrator simply says that the protagonist finds the castle empty, without making any reference to the two objects.²³⁸ From this moment on, the mystery of the spear and the Grail is entirely linked to their meaning, which Perceval would have understood if he had asked the Fisher King. There is therefore no logical reason why Ruggieri Apugliese, in order to allude to Perceval, should have focused on the problem of 'where the spear and the Grail went', since Chrétien himself does not seem to pay any attention to this issue. On the other hand, at the end of the *Queste del Saint Graal*, after all the mysteries of the Grail have been revealed, the disappearance of the two sacred objects is clearly described. After having accessed a total and definitive vision of the Grail, Galahad dies and his soul is taken up into Heaven. Immediately after this event, Perceval and Boort, who are witnessing the scene, see a disembodied hand which descends from the sky, takes the two objects, and carries them away towards the sky:

Et si tost com il fu deviez, si avint iluec une grant merveille. Car li dui compaignon virent tot apertement que une main vint devers le ciel; mes il ne veoient pas le cors dont la main estoit. Et elle vint droit au seint Vessel, si le prist, et la Lance ausi, si enporta tot vers lo ciel, a tal eur qu'il ne fu puis home tant hardiz qu'il osast dire qu'il eust veu le Saint Graal.

(Bogdanow, 652)

At the moment of Galahad's death, an extraordinary thing took place. The two companions saw a hand reach down from heaven, though they could not see the body to which the hand belonged. The hand moved straight toward the Holy Vessel, seized it

²³⁷ Gardner, *The Arthurian Legend*, p. 32; Breillat, 'La «Quête du Saint-Graal»', p. 289.

²³⁸ For this episode, see Chrétien de Troyes, *Perceval*, vv. 3128-3363.

along with the lance, and carried them both up to heaven. Since that time, no man has been bold enough to claim that he has seen the Holy Grail.

From that moment on, as the narrator says, ‘there was no longer a man so bold as to say that he had seen the Holy Grail’. A few lines later, the romance ends, so that Galahad’s ascension to heaven and the disappearance of the spear and the Grail form the climax of the adventures recounted. This episode is therefore much more likely to be the source of the expression ‘and I know well where the spear and the Grail went’, which would thus allude to a fundamental episode among the adventures recounted in the romance, namely the disappearance of the spear and the Grail from the earthly world. Moreover, the following verses of the Italian poem, which refer to the story of Merlin, the birth of Arthur and the Round Table, all themes dealt with in the romances of the *Lancelot-Graal*, are another possible indication that this cycle may have been the source of Ruggieri Apugliese’s reference to the spear and the Grail. Another possible evidence of this is the decision to include, after the list of Arthurian romances, a reference to the need for men to cleanse themselves of sin, a theme which, among the most widespread romances or cycles of the Matter of Britain, belongs exclusively to the *Lancelot-Graal*. Since scholars generally date Ruggieri Apugliese’s poetic activity to the 1260s, his reference to ‘the spear and the Grail’ may be the earliest allusion to the *Queste del Saint Graal* in Italian literature, and the earliest evidence of its circulation in Italy.²³⁹ Since the episodes of the quest for the Grail included by Rustichello in his *Arthurian Compilation* may have been drawn from the version of the story contained in the prose *Tristan*, there are no clear references to the *Queste* before the early decades of the fourteenth century.²⁴⁰ The *Tavola Ritonda*, written in the first half of the fourteenth century, contains an abridged version of the story, which is based on the Vulgate *Queste*. Other references to the *Queste* can be found in the Franco-Venetian poem *Entrée d’Espagne* (c. 1320), in Boccaccio’s *Amorosa visione* (1342-1343), in Fazio degli Uberti’s *Dittamondo* (1345-1367) and in the anonymous Tuscan poem *Cantare dei Cantari*, (c. 1380).

The fact that there are no specific literary references to the *Queste* until the early fourteenth century does not mean that it did not have a substantial circulation in the last decades of the 1200s. There is some evidence to suggest that this romance was known in Italy as early as the 1270s, the same decade in which the earliest references to the *Lancelot*

²³⁹ Four poems are attributed with some degree of certainty to Ruggieri Apugliese, including a tenso with the Senese and Ghibelline statesman Provenzano Salvani, dated to 1261-1262. See *Poeti del Duecento*, ed. by Contini, I, pp. 883-884.

²⁴⁰ On the inclusion of the *Queste* in Rustichello’s *Arthurian Compilation*, see Lagomarsini, ‘Il mestiere del compilatore’, p. 92.

and the *Mort Artu* are found. For example, the fourth chapter of the *Meleḳ Arṭuś*, the Hebrew translation of the *Mort Artu* made in Tuscany in 1278-79, includes a reference to an Italian *Libro de la kesta del Sangraal* ('book of the quest for the Holy Grail').²⁴¹ Further evidence of knowledge of the *Queste* in this period is provided by onomastics, and in particular the use of Italian versions of Galahad as proper names. The name of Galeazzo Visconti, Lord of Milan between 1322 and 1338, suggests that the romance was already known in Lombardy in the year of his birth (1277). Moreover, the fact that Galasso da Montefeltro, an important political and military figure of Dante's time, was already an adult in 1277, allows us to trace back the presence of the *Queste* in Italy to at least the late 1250s or early 1260s.²⁴² However, the strongest evidence for the circulation of the *Queste* in this contest comes from the manuscript tradition, which includes at least three witnesses copied in Italy by the early decades of the thirteenth century:

Udine, Biblioteca Arcivescovile, 177 ²⁴³ [Ud]	Genoa-Pisa, 1284-1299	<i>La Queste del Saint Graal</i> [Pauph. 1-280]
Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Panciatichiano 33 ²⁴⁴	Tuscany, s. 14 ^{inc.}	<i>La Inchiesta del San Gradale</i> [Pauph. 1-71, 27]
Ravenna, Biblioteca Classense, 454 ²⁴⁵ [Rav]	Bologna?, s. 14 ^{inc.}	<i>La Queste del Saint Graal</i> [Pauph. 1-280]

In his edition of the *Queste del Saint Graal*, Albert Pauphilet divided all the manuscripts of the work into two large families, called α and β . The French scholar attributed only seven of the thirty-nine manuscripts known to him to the β group. Of these manuscripts, five were copied in France and two in Italy.²⁴⁶ Pauphilet did not know the Udine and Ravenna manuscripts. In the last century the total number of extant manuscripts has risen to over fifty, and the β family has expanded considerably and now includes seven other witnesses, including one copied in Provence, one in northern France and five in Italy (among which Ud and Rav).²⁴⁷ According to Bogdanow's classification, all manuscripts and fragments of the *Queste* produced in thirteenth or fourteenth-century Italy belong to group β , which probably

²⁴¹ Lacerenza, 'Le Sefer ha-šemad', p. 550.

²⁴² On this onomastic evidence, see Breillat, 'La «Quête du Saint-Graal»', p. 293.

²⁴³ See *La grant Queste del Saint Graal*.

²⁴⁴ See *La Inchiesta del San Gradale*, ed. by Infurna.

²⁴⁵ Breillat, 'La «Quête du Saint-Graal»', pp. 277-279.

²⁴⁶ See *La Queste del Saint Graal*, ed. by Pauphilet, pp. III-VIII.

²⁴⁷ For an updated overview on the manuscript tradition of the *Queste*, with particular attention to the group β , see Bogdanow, pp. 44-59. Unlike Bogdanow, Marco Infurna believes that Rav belongs to the family α ; see Infurna, 'La Queste del Saint Graal in Italia', p. 54.

conveys the versions of the text that circulated most widely in that context.²⁴⁸ Of these witnesses, Ud and Rav are the oldest, and they are probably the ones that give us the best idea of which version of the text was in circulation in Dante's Italy.

The earliest Italian translation of the *Queste del Saint Graal*, probably copied in Florence at the beginning of the fourteenth century and preserved in the Panciatichiano 33, provides important information on the circulation of the romance in Tuscany between the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. In his edition of this text, Marco Infurna shows, by comparing the Tuscan translation and Ud, that they belong to the same family and are closely related.²⁴⁹ The Udine manuscript undoubtedly belongs to the group of codices copied in Genoa by Pisan prisoners (1284-1299), as evidenced both by the language of the instructions given to the illuminator and by some western Tuscan linguistic features that infiltrate the French text. Infurna, on the other hand, attributes the origin of the text witnessed by the Panciatichiano 33 to the copying of a Pisan-Lucchese antigraph by a copyist who tended to 'Florentinise' the original language, preserving only the traits of Western Tuscan that had already spread to Florence in the thirteenth century. In his collation of these two codices, Infurna notes a number of errors and *lectiones adiaphorae* that are unique to the manuscripts in question and completely absent from the other witnesses of the β family. However, he also finds errors in Ud that are not present in the Panciatichiano. From this, he deduces that the Tuscan translator, perhaps the Pisan-Lucchese copyist who produced the antigraph of the Panciatichiano, possessed an Old French version of the text that was slightly more accurate than that attested in Ud. On this basis, Infurna proposes that between the end of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth century another Old French manuscript of the *Queste*, more accurate than Ud, circulated in western Tuscany, and was used as a source for the Italian translation that was successively copied in the Panciatichiano 33. This Old French manuscript, which no longer exists, could also have been the antigraph of Ud, whose specific errors should therefore be attributed to its own copyist.

As Infurna points out, the translation of the *Queste*, together with the other Italian versions of Old French romances that the Panciatichiano 33 transmits, marks 'the emergence of a Tuscan *koinè* heavily influenced by the Florentine vernacular'.²⁵⁰ After the dominant role originally played by the Pisan-Genoese area, Florence became an important area of fruition and translation of the Matter of Britain, as demonstrated by the *Tristano Riccardiano*, the Panciatichiano 33, the *Storia del San Gradale* and the *Storia di Merlino* attributed to Paolino

²⁴⁸ See Bogdanow, 'La tradition manuscrite de la *Queste*'.

²⁴⁹ For this paragraph, see *La Inchiesta del San Gradale*, ed. by Infurna, pp. 34-61, 69-83.

²⁵⁰ *La Inchiesta del San Gradale*, ed. by Infurna, p. 80.

Pieri.²⁵¹ All these texts were produced in an urban context and for a bourgeois-mercantile readership in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. The great success of the Matter of Britain in this context is also evidenced, as we have seen, by the *Mare Amoro*so and the *Novellino*, works that testify to the circulation of the *Lancelot* and the *Mort Artu* in Florence in the last decades of the 1200s. By contrast, there are no literary references to the *Queste del Saint Graal* in Florentine texts before the 1300s. This may seem surprising, given that the number of extant manuscripts suggests that the *Queste* had a circulation comparable to that of the *Mort Artu* in late thirteenth-century Tuscany. The absence of literary references to the *Queste* may be due to the fact that its spiritual, mystical and allegorical focus made it less suitable for quotation in love poetry or courtly rewrites than more traditional Arthurian works such as the *Lancelot* and the *Mort Artu*. In light of this, it is no coincidence that the only thirteenth-century Florentine work that could have been influenced by the *Queste* is the anonymous *Detto del Gatto Lupesco* (1274-1275). Although the *Detto* may have inherited from the *Queste* the tendency to combine Christian allegorism, whether authentic or ironic, with the narrative structure of the chivalric quest and some typical *clichés* of Arthurian literature, the analogies are too vague to hypothesise an intertextual relationship.²⁵²

Despite the impossibility of identifying literary references to the *Queste* in Florentine literature before the fourteenth century, the manuscript tradition shows that the work certainly circulated between Tuscany and north-eastern Italy in Dante's time. First, Marco Infurna's comparative study of the Udine manuscript and the Panciatichiano 33 provided solid evidence of the success of the *Queste* among the bourgeois and mercantile social groups of the Tuscan cities, a context for which the existence of at least two French and two Italian manuscripts can be assumed.²⁵³ Second, the Ravenna manuscript, copied in Bologna or north-eastern Italy for a bourgeois readership, proves that the *Queste* circulated in the early 1300s in another geographical area that was particularly relevant to Dante's biography. Thirdly, Breillat's onomastic study and the reference to the *Queste* in the *Melek Artu*s lead us to believe that the work circulated in Italy as early as the 1260s or 1270s, just like the other romances of the *Lancelot en prose*. In his pioneering study on the legend of the Grail

²⁵¹ On this topic, see Cigni, 'La ricezione medievale', pp. 71-80.

²⁵² On the presence of the narrative structure of the chivalric quest in the *Detto*, see Christopher Kleinhenz, 'The Quest Motif in Medieval Italian Literature', in *Conjunctures: Medieval Studies in Honor of Douglas Kelly*, ed. by Keith Busby and Norris J. Lacy (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994), pp. 235-251. On the analogies between the *Detto* and the *Queste del Saint Graal*, see Franco Suitner, 'Le tre fiere di Dante, la *Queste* e il *Gatto lupo*esco', in *Dante e il mondo animale*, ed. by Giuseppe Crimi and Luca Marcozzi (Rome: Carocci, 2013), pp. 34-48 (pp. 36-37).

²⁵³ In particular, Ud, Panciatichiano 33, the Pisan antigraph of Panciatichiano 33 and the Old French manuscript from which Ud and the Pisan antigraph of the Panciatichiano 33 were copied or translated. See, again, *La Inchiesta del San Gradale*, ed. by Infurna, pp. 34-61.

in Italian literature, Gardner wrote that ‘the story of the Holy Graal took no root in Italian soil; its mysticism was of a kind alien to the Italian genius’.²⁵⁴ On the contrary, Breillat, despite the availability of fewer Italian manuscripts than those nowadays known, argued that the *Queste* ‘had a great success, whose golden age seems to have been the early fourteenth century, in all the regions where the influence of French language is well attested for that period, such as Tuscany, Lombardy, Emilia, and Veneto’.²⁵⁵ In light of recent studies and the reconstruction presented, it is plausible to say that Breillat was right and to hypothesise that, in Florence or in the early years of his exile, Dante could have come across a manuscript of the *Queste del Saint Graal*, a work whose knowledge would undoubtedly have conditioned his perspective on Arthurian literature.

²⁵⁴ Gardner, ‘The Holy Grail’, p. 453.

²⁵⁵ Breillat, ‘La «Quête du Saint-Graal»’, p. 296.

SECTION 2: RECEPTION AND CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES

*Dante alla porta di Paolo e Francesca
spia chi fa meglio di lui.
Lì dietro si racconta un amore normale,
ma lui saprà poi renderlo tanto geniale.
E il viaggio all'inferno ora fallo da solo
con l'ultima invidia lasciata là sotto un lenzuolo.
Sorpresa sulla porta d'una felicità
la bomba ha risparmiato la normalità
al ballo mascherato della celebrità*

Fabrizio De André, 'Al ballo mascherato' (1973)

III. Dante and the Arthurian Romances

This chapter looks at Dante's reception of Arthurian literature and attempts to identify the types of romances he read. First, it will provide an interpretation of the expression 'Arturi regis ambages pulcerrime' ('the beautiful *ambages* of King Arthur'; *DVE* I. x. 2), with which Dante refers to the Arthurian literature in the *De vulgari eloquentia*. In particular, it will attempt to refute the hypothesis that the word *ambages* means *fabulae* or 'fictional narratives', and instead show how the Arthurian stories were considered by Dante and his contemporaries to be real events, on a par with those narrated in Latin literature or the Bible. The second part of this chapter examines Dante's possible knowledge of the Arthurian verse romances, apparently incompatible with Dante's association between the genre of romance and prose in *Purg.* XXVI. 118-119. After reviewing the main studies that argue in favour of Dante's reception of the works of Chrétien de Troyes and Thomas, it will be shown that this cannot be categorically excluded, but at the same time is extremely difficult to prove. In light of this, the choice of studying Dante's reception of Arthurian literature in relation to prose romances is justified. The last part is devoted to the relationship between Dante's works and the Tristan matter. I will show that the work most likely known to Dante was the prose *Tristan*, which enjoyed enormous success in its time and most likely had an influence on Dante's depiction of the circle of the lustful and the story of Paolo and Francesca. Finally, I will show how Dante considered Tristan to be an emblematic figure of lustful desire and how he abandoned all the exemplary, civil and political interpretations of the character that were widespread in Italy at the time.

III. 1 'Arturi regis ambages pulcerrime': Dante and the Matter of Britain

Allegat ergo pro se lingua oïl quod propter sui faciliorem ac delectabiliorem vulgaritatem quicquid redactum sive inventum est ad vulgare prosaicum, suum est: videlicet Biblia cum Troyanorum Romanorumque gestibus compilata et Arturi regis ambages pulcerrime et quamplures alie ystorie ac doctrine.²⁵⁶

(*DVE* I. x. 2)

Thus the language of *oïl* adduces on its own behalf the fact that, because of the greater facility and pleasing quality of its vernacular style, everything that is recounted or

²⁵⁶ For the text of the *De vulgari eloquentia*, see, once for all, Dante Alighieri, *De vulgari eloquentia*, ed. by Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo (Padua: Antenore, 1968).

invented in vernacular prose belongs to it: such as compilations from the Bible and the histories of Troy and Rome, and the beautiful tales of King Arthur, and many other works of history and doctrine.²⁵⁷

This passage from the *De vulgari eloquentia* is undoubtedly the starting point for any reflection on the relationship between Dante's works and the Matter of Britain. After having introduced the concept of *ydioma tripharium* ('tripartite language'; DVE, I. VIII. 5 – I. IX), the common language once spoken by all the peoples of the Iberian Peninsula, France and Italy, now divided into three varieties, Dante discusses the literary prerogatives of each specific vernacular: French, Occitan and Italian. In discussing the *langue d'oïl*, Dante states that it is the most suitable language for prose works because of its 'greater facility and pleasing quality', to the point that 'everything that is told or invented in vernacular prose belongs to it'. For Dante, then, French is the language of prose par excellence. This statement is based on a conviction that was widespread among the Italian writers of the thirteenth century. Brunetto Latini explains that he decided to write his *Tresor* (1260-1267) in French for two reasons: 'l'une que nos sommes en France, l'autre por ce que la parleur est plus delitable et plus comune a touz langaiges' ('Firstly, because we are in France, and secondly, because this way of speaking is the most pleasant and most common to all languages'; I. I. 7).²⁵⁸ Martin da Canal's *Les Estoires de Venise* (1267-75) cites as its source an ancient history of the Venetians written in Latin, which the author decided to translate into French 'por ce que langue franceise cort parmi le monde et est la plus delitable a lire et a oïr que nule autre' ('Because French is widespread throughout the world and is the most pleasant language to read and listen to'; I. 5).²⁵⁹ Both Brunetto and Martin da Canal, authors of a doctrinal work and a historiographical work respectively, say, like Dante, that French is the most pleasing language. It is no coincidence, then, that among the prose genres typical of the French vernacular, Dante mentions precisely 'ystorie ac doctrine' ('works of history and doctrine'). In any case, the most debated part of this passage is where he identifies two specific prose genres of French literature: the 'compilations from the Bible and the histories of Troy and Rome' and the 'beautiful *ambages* of King Arthur'.

Scholars have long debated the meaning of *ambages* in the *De vulgari eloquentia*. This word has both literal and metaphorical meanings in Latin. In its proper sense, *ambages* can

²⁵⁷ For the English translation of the *De vulgari eloquentia*, see, once for all, Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia*, trans. by Steven Botterill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

²⁵⁸ Brunetto Latini, *Tresor*, ed. by Pietro G. Beltrami and others (Turin: Einaudi, 2007), p. 6. The translation is mine.

²⁵⁹ Martin da Canal, *Les Estoires de Venise. Cronaca veneziana in lingua francese dalle origini al 1275*, ed. by Alberto Limentani (Florence: Olschki, 1972). The translation is mine.

mean ‘tortuous place’ or ‘wanderings’.²⁶⁰ On the other hand, in its figurative sense, it can mean ‘undirect, enigmatic or false speech’.²⁶¹ This plurality of meanings has produced a plurality of interpretations of Dante’s expression. The first systematic paper on the subject was published by Pio Rajna in 1920.²⁶² Rajna begins his article by referring to the Italian translations of *De vulgari eloquentia* by Gian Giorgio Trissino and Celso Cittadini, which render *ambages* as ‘favole’ (‘fables’, in line with the metaphorical sense of ‘false speech’) and ‘errori’ (in the literal sense of ‘wanderings’) respectively. He then argues that Dante must have been more familiar with the metaphorical use of the term. To assert this, he cites as evidence the meaning of ‘*dubia locutio*’ (‘enigmatic speech’) given to the term in Uguccione da Pisa’s *Derivationes*, referred to as the lexicon Dante used, and the fact that this meaning also appears in the only passage in which Dante uses the term in Italian:

Né per ambage, in che la gente folle
già s’inviscava pria che fosse anciso
l’Agnel di Dio che le peccata tolle,

ma per chiare parole e con preciso
latin rispuose quello amor paterno,
chiuso e parvente del suo proprio riso.²⁶³

(*Par.* XVII. 31-36)

Not with cloudy sayings, by which the foolish folk / were once ensnared, before the
Lamb of God, / who takes away our sins, was slain, / but in plain words and with clear
speech / that paternal love replied, / hidden and yet revealed in his own smile.²⁶⁴

Dante contrasts the *ambages* of the false prophets of antiquity, an allusion to the Cumaean Sibyl in *Aeneid* VI. 98-100, with the clear words with which Cacciaguida is about to prophesy his exile. Thus, in *Paradiso* XVII, Dante undoubtedly uses the word in the

²⁶⁰ For the meaning of ‘tortuous place’, see: Virgil, *Aeneid* VI. 29-30; Ovid, *Metamorphoses* VIII. 160-161; Statius, *Thebaid* XII. 668. For the meaning of ‘wandering’, see: Virgil, *Aeneid* I. 341-342; Ovid, *Heroides* VII. 149.

²⁶¹ For the meaning of ‘undirect speech’, see: Virgil, *Georgics* II. 45-46; Persius, *Satires* II. 19-20. For the meaning of ‘enigmatic speech’, see: Virgil, *Aeneid* VI. 98-100; Statius, *Thebaid* I. 66-67. For the meaning of ‘false speech’, see Ovid, *Ars amatoria* III. 651-652.

²⁶² Rajna, ‘Arturi regis ambages pulcerrime’.

²⁶³ For the text of the *Commedia*, see, once for all, Dante Alighieri, *La Commedia secondo l’antica vulgata*, ed. by Giorgio Petrocchi, 4 vols (Florence: Le Lettere, 1994).

²⁶⁴ For the English translation of the *Commedia*, see, once for all, Dante, *Inferno. Purgatorio. Paradiso*, trans. by Robert Hollander and Jean Hollander, 3 vols (New York: Doubleday, 2000-07).

figurative sense of ‘enigmatic speech’, an ambiguous way of speaking that could be used to hide a ‘false speech’. Rajna also notes that the term is used in this sense, with reference to Arthurian romances, in the prologue to the *Liber regius* by Raymond de Béziers (1313), a French writer contemporary with Dante:

Vos igitur regalem curiam frequentantes, qui tempus vestrum *in narrationibus ambagis*, verbi gracia Lanceloti, Galvani consimilibusque consumitis libris, quibus nulla consistit scientia vel modica viget utilitas, crebrius instudentes, abiecta vanitatis palea, librum istum regium, virtutum graniferum, non solum semel, immo pluries attentissime perlegatis [...].²⁶⁵
(*Liber Regius*, prologue)

You who frequent the royal court, who waste your time in ‘ambagic’ narratives - e.g. of Lancelot, of Gawain - and similar books, in which no knowledge or little use is to be found, when you have thrown away the chaff of vanity, read carefully, not once but several times, this royal book [...].²⁶⁶

Raymond contrasts the usefulness of his book, which conveys virtues and moral teachings, with that of the Arthurian romances that were popular at the French court. According to him, these ‘ambagic’ narratives of Lancelot or Gawain convey no knowledge and are of little use. Rajna translates *narraciones ambagice* as ‘narrazioni fantastiche’ (‘fantastic narratives’) and uses this text, which he considers to be clearer, to shed light on Dante’s expression, rendered as ‘the beautiful fantasies of King Arthur’. But even in Raymond’s work, the meaning of the adjective *ambagis* is far from clear: the author seems to be criticising the low educational and pragmatic value of the romances rather than the fictional nature of their plot, which is in fact also characteristic of his own work.²⁶⁷ Although he seems to lean towards the meaning of ‘fantasies’, close to that of ‘fables’ proposed by Trissino, Rajna does not exclude an alternative solution. Referring to *Aen.* I. 341-342 and *Heroides* VII. 149 – both texts in which *ambages* means ‘wanderings’ – he suggests the translation ‘adventures’, in line with Cittadini’s ‘errori’. Rajna’s article had a strong influence throughout the twentieth century, a period characterised by several attempts to combine the different meanings of *ambages* traditionally associated with Dante’s expression. In his edition of the *De vulgari eloquentia*, Aristide Marigo translated *ambages* as ‘errabonde avventure’ (‘wandering adventures’),

²⁶⁵ Léopold Hervieux, *Les fabulistes latins depuis le siècle d’Auguste jusqu’à la fin du Moyen Age*, 5 vols (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1893-1899), v, pp. 387-388.

²⁶⁶ The translation is mine.

²⁶⁷ See Rossi, ‘Dante e le *ambages*’, p. 75.

which favours the literal meaning of ‘wanderings’, but through the word ‘adventures’ recalls their character as ‘fabulous tales’.²⁶⁸ Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo also accepted both solutions. He therefore chose to translate *ambages* as ‘avventure’ (‘adventures’), a term which, thanks to its polysemy, has become the dominant solution in most of the subsequent editions, up to the most recent ones.²⁶⁹

Michelangelo Picone, while not rejecting the literal meaning of ‘wanderings’, undoubtedly favoured the metaphorical sense of ‘fables’ or ‘fantastic narratives’ and provided new arguments to support this interpretation.²⁷⁰ According to Picone, the meaning of *ambages* is ‘non-ystorie’ (‘not-histories’) and Dante may have derived it from Bernardus Silvestris’s commentary on *Aeneid* VI. In this canto, after reporting the prophecy that the Cumaean Sibyl made to Aeneas, Virgil writes:

Talibus ex adyto dictis Cymaea Sibylla
horrendas canit ambages antroque remugit
obscuris vera involvens [...].²⁷¹
(*Aen.* VI. 98-100)

Fearsome, ambiguous words such as these are the Sibyl of Cumae’s song from her sanctum. She rolls up the truth in obscurity’s riddles, rumbling the cavern with echoes.

In Bernardus Silvestris’s interpretation:

ambages quasi ambiguitates i.e. responsa integumentis involuta [...] *Obscuris* integumentis. *Vera* veritatem enim per integumenta occultat. Intelligentia namque divina praecipue docet, divinis vero integumenta praecipue congruunt, quia ut ait Martianus cuniculis verborum divina sunt tegenda. Unde Plato et alii philosophi cum anima vel alio theologico aliquid dicunt ad integumentum se convertunt: ut Maro in hoc opere.²⁷²

²⁶⁸ Dante Alighieri, *De vulgari eloquentia*, ed. by Aristide Marigo (Florence: Le Monnier, 1938).

²⁶⁹ Dante Alighieri, *De vulgari eloquentia*, ed. by Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo, in Dante Alighieri, *Opere minori*, ed. by Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo and others, 2 vols (Milan-Naples: Ricciardi, 1979), II, p. 84. The same translation is also found in: Dante Alighieri, *De vulgari eloquentia*, ed. by Mirko Tavoni, in Dante Alighieri, *Opere*, ed. by Marco Santagata, 2 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 2011-2014), I, p. 1236; Dante Alighieri, *De vulgari eloquentia*, ed. by Enrico Fenzi (Rome: Salerno, 2012), p. 69.

²⁷⁰ Picone, ‘Dante e la tradizione arturiana’, pp. 1-6.

²⁷¹ For the text of the *Aeneid*, see, once for all, Virgilio, *Eneide*, ed. by Ettore Paratore, 6 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1978-1983). For the English translation of the *Aeneid*, see, once for all, Virgil, *Aeneid*, trans. by Frederick Ahl (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 131.

²⁷² *Commentum Bernardi di Silvestris super sex libros Eneidos Virgilio*, ed. by Wilhelm Riedel (Greifswald: Abel, 1924), pp. 50-51.

ambages: as ambiguities, i.e. answers covered with integuments [...] *Obscuris*: integuments. *Vera*: he [Virgil] hides the truth with integuments. For the knowledge of divine things mainly teaches, but the integuments are suited above all to divine things, for, as Martianus says, divine things must be hidden in the caves of words. That is why Plato and other philosophers, when they say something about the soul or something else theological, turn to the integument, as Maro does in this work.²⁷³

The meaning of *ambages* as ‘enigmatic speeches’ is already clear in Virgil’s text, where he states that the Sibyl chants ‘fearsome ambiguous words’ (*‘horrendas canit ambages’*) and ‘rolls up the truth in obscurity’s riddles’ (*‘obscuris vera involvens’*). There is no doubt that Dante knew this meaning of the word *ambages* and that he took it from the *Aeneid*, as *Par. XVII. 31-36* confirms. The commentary of Bernardus Silvestris, however, introduces an important novelty by establishing a relationship between the word *ambages* and the medieval Latin rhetorical practice of the *integumenta*. An *integumentum* was a demonstrative process aimed at deriving moral truths from fantastic narratives through a rational interpretation that manages to penetrate the shell of the *littera* in order to grasp the hidden meaning of a text. In Bernardus Silvestris’s words:

Integumentum est genus demonstrationis sub fabulosa narratione veritatis, involvens intellectum: unde et involucrum dicitur.²⁷⁴

The *integumentum* is a genre of demonstration of the truth underlying a fabulous narrative and involving the intellect: hence it is also called *involucrum*.²⁷⁵

By establishing a link between the *ambages* of the Sibyl and those of King Arthur through the commentary of Bernardus Silvestris, Picone proposes to equate this term with *fabulae* (‘fables’), i.e. tales that conceal moral truths within a fabulous *littera*. Hence, in Dante’s view, the *fabulae* of King Arthur would not have been mere fantasies, fictions or falsehoods: by virtue of the meanings hidden in their shell, they would have contributed as much as the *historiae* to the knowledge of reality. Accordingly, a reader who wished to have an accurate knowledge of King Arthur’s *ambages* should have applied to them the demonstrative process known as *integumentum*. This would not have been necessary for the *historiae*, whose *littera* is real and whose meaning is immediately perceivable. This definition of the genre of *fabula*,

²⁷³ The translation is mine.

²⁷⁴ *Commentum Bernardi di Silvestris*, ed. by Riedel, p. 18.

²⁷⁵ The translation is mine.

and of its relationship with the *historia*, was widespread in medieval culture. Isidore of Seville, for example, defines the *fabula* in this way:

De fabula. Fabulas poetae a fando nominaverunt, quia non sunt res factae, sed tantum loquendo fictae. Quae ideo sunt inductae, ut fictorum mutorum animalium inter se conloquio imago quaedam vitae hominum nosceretur. Has primus invenisse traditur Alcmeon Crotoniensis, appellanturque Aesopiae, quia is apud Phrygas in hac re polluit. Sunt autem fabulae aut Aesopicae, aut Libysticae. Aesopicae sunt, cum animalia muta inter se sermocinasse finguntur, vel quae animam non habent, ut urbes, arbores, montes, petrae, flumina. Libysticae autem, dum hominum cum bestiis, aut bestiarum cum hominibus fingitur vocis esse commercium. Fabulas poetae quasdam delectandi causa finxerunt, quasdam ad naturam rerum, nonnullas ad mores hominum interpretati sunt. Delectandi causa fictas, ut eas, quas vulgo dicunt, vel quales Plautus et Terentius composuerunt. Ad naturam rerum fabulas fingunt, ut “Vulcanus claudus”, quia per naturam numquam rectus est ignis, ut illa triformis bestia (Lucret. 5, 903): “Prima leo, postrema draco, media ipsa Chimaera”: id est caprea, aetates hominum per eam volentes distinguere; quarum ferox et horrens prima adolescentia, ut leo; dimidium vitae tempus lucidissimum, ut caprea, eo quod acutissime videat; tunc fit senectus casibus inflexis, draco. Sic et Hippocentauri fabulam esse confictam, id est hominem equo mixtum, ad exprimendam humanae vitae velocitatem, quia equum constat esse velocissimum. Ad mores, ut apud Horatium mus loquitur muri et mustela vulpeculae, ut per narrationem fictam ad id quod agitur verax significatio referatur. Unde et Aesopi tales sunt fabulae ad morum finem relatae, vel sicut in libro Iudicum (9, 8) ligna sibi regem requirunt et loquuntur ad oleam et ad ficum et ad vitem et ad rubum; quod totum utique ad mores fingitur ut ad rem, quae intenditur, ficta quidem narratione, sed veraci significatione veniatur.²⁷⁶

(*Etymologiae*, I. XL. 1-6)

The fable. Poets named “fables” (*fabula*) from “speaking” (*fari*), because they are not actual events that took place, but were only invented in words. These are presented with the intention that the conversation of imaginary dumb animals among themselves may be recognized as a certain image of the life of humans. Alcmeon of Croton is said to have been the first to invent these, and they are called Aesopian, because among the Phrygians, Aesop was accomplished in this area. And there are both Aesopian fables and Libystican fables. They are Aesopian fables when dumb animals, or inanimate things such as cities, trees, mountains, rocks, and rivers, are imagined to converse

²⁷⁶ For the text of Isidore of Seville’s *Etymologiae*, see, once for all, Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi, *Etymologiarum sive originum libri XX*, ed. by Wallace M. Lindsay, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911).

among themselves. But they are Libystican fables when humans are imagined as conversing with animals, or animals with humans. Poets have made up some fables for the sake of entertainment, and expounded others as having to do with the nature of things, and still others as about human morals. Those made up for the sake of entertainment are such as are commonly told, or that kind that Plautus and Terence composed. People make up fables about the nature of things, like “crooked-limbed Vulcan”, because by nature fire is never straight, and like the animal with three shapes (Lucretius *On the Nature of Things* 5.905): “A lion in front, a dragon in the rear, and in the middle, the Chimaera itself”, that is, a she-goat. With this, people intend to distinguish the ages of man: the first, adolescence, is ferocious and bristling, like a lion; the midpart of life is the most lucid, like a she-goat, because she sees most acutely; then comes old age with its crooked happenstances – the dragon. Thus also the fable of the Hippocentaur, that is, a human being mixed with a horse, was invented to express the speedy course of human life, because it is known that a horse is very fast. Then there are fables with a moral, as in Horace a mouse speaks to a mouse, and a weasel to a little fox, so that through an imaginary story a true meaning may be applied to the story’s action. Whence also Aesop’s fables are the kind told for the purpose of a moral, just as in the book of Judges (9:8) the trees seek a king for themselves and speak to the olive tree, the fig tree, the grape vine, and the bramble-bush. The whole story is made up especially for the moral, so that we arrive at the matter that is intended with the true meaning, though, to be sure, by means of a made-up narrative.²⁷⁷

For Isidore, the *fabulae* feature animals or inanimate beings that speak and can be written either to amuse or to teach lessons about human nature or morality through fictional plots. Having provided this definition, Isidore turns to the *historia* and ends the first book of the *Etymologiae* by focusing on the difference between this genre, the *argumentum* and the *fabula*. While the *historiae* recount facts that really happened, the *argumenta* deal with plausible events that never happened but could happen. The *fabulae*, on the other hand, deal with events that never happened and could not happen because they are impossible or unnatural:

Item inter historiam et argumentum et fabulam interesse. Nam historiae sunt res verae quae factae sunt; argumenta sunt quae etsi facta non sunt, fieri tamen possunt; fabulae vero sunt quae nec factae sunt nec fieri possunt, quia contra naturam sunt.

(*Etymologiae*, I. XLIV. 5)

²⁷⁷ For the English translation of Isidore’s *Etymologiae*, see, once for all, *The Etymologies of Isidor of Seville*, trans. by Stephen A. Barney and others (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

And history, “plausible narration” (*argumentum*), and fable differ from one other. Histories are true deeds that have happened, plausible narrations are things that, even if they have not happened, nevertheless could happen, and fables are things that have not happened and cannot happen, because they are contrary to nature.

Whether or not Dante knew this passage from the *Etymologiae*, Isidore clearly articulates what would become the medieval distinction between narrative genres. As Zygmunt Barański notes, in the Middle Ages this tripartite division was often reduced to a simple binary distinction between true tales (*historiae*) and fictional tales (*fabulae*).²⁷⁸ Dante’s use of the term *favola* is perfectly compatible with Isidore’s definition and with the medieval distinction between narratives that relate real or fictitious facts:

E a ciò dare a intendere, si vuol sapere che le scritture si possono intendere e deonsi esponere massimamente per quattro sensi. L’uno si chiama litterale [...] L’altro si chiama allegorico, e questo è quello che si nasconde sotto ’l manto di queste *favole*, ed è una veritade ascosa sotto bella menzogna: sì come quando dice Ovidio che Orfeo facea colla cetera mansuete le fiere, e li arbori e le pietre a sé muovere.²⁷⁹
(Cv. II. I. 2-4)

To indicate what this means, it should be explained that texts can be interpreted, and must therefore be elucidated, principally in four senses. The first is called literal [...] The second is called allegorical: this is the sense concealed under the cloak of these fables, and consists of a truth hidden under a beautiful lie. An example of this is Ovid’s saying that Orpheus with his lyre made the wild beasts tame, and moved stones and trees to follow him.²⁸⁰

A few lines after this passage, Dante states that the allegorical sense he has just described is typical of poetry. The main characteristic of the so-called ‘allegory of the poets’ is that it is ‘una veritade ascosa sotto bella menzogna’ (‘a truth hidden under a beautiful lie’), a definition that is perfectly in line with the concept of *integumentum* described above, and with Picone’s interpretation of *ambages* as *fabulae*. In the *Convivio*, however, Dante uses

²⁷⁸ Zygmunt G. Barański, ‘I segni della Bibbia: la lezione esegetica di *Inferno* I’, in *Dante e i segni* (Naples: Liguori, 2000), pp. 103-126 (p. 112).

²⁷⁹ For the text of the *Convivio*, see, once for all, Dante Alighieri, *Convivio*, ed. by Franca Brambilla Ageno, 3 vols (Florence: Le Lettere, 1995).

²⁸⁰ For the English translation of the *Convivio*, see, once for all, Dante, *The Banquet*, trans. by Christopher Ryan (Saratoga: Anma Libri, 1989).

the term *favole*, which corresponds to the traditional designation for narratives that convey a moral truth through a fictional plot. Moreover, both here and in other passages of the *Convivio* and the *Commedia*, Dante uses this word to refer to poetic works, in particular Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and two fables then attributed to Aesop.²⁸¹

On the basis of similar considerations concerning *DVE* I. x. 2 and *Cv.* II. i. 2-4, Federico Rossi challenges Picone's idea that *ambages* are synonymous with *fabulae*. In particular, he shows that the use of the word *ambages* to refer to a fictional narrative containing a moral truth is far from common in the medieval tradition, which regularly uses the term *fabulae* instead. He also pointed out that Dante's references to French romances never draw on their fantastic elements, and that in the *Convivio* it is rather poetry that conveys 'a truth hidden under a beautiful lie'.²⁸² We have seen how, in both the *Convivio* and the *Commedia*, Dante regularly uses the term *favole* to refer to literary works characterised by fictional plots, such as Ovid's *Metamorphoses* or Aesop's fables. If in the *De vulgari eloquentia*, a work more or less contemporary with the *Convivio*, he wanted to ascribe the same characteristics to Arthurian literature, why should he have used *ambages* instead of the much more common *fabulae*?²⁸³ In light of these considerations, it is appropriate to examine whether, from Dante's point of view, the term *fabula* would have been appropriate to designate the genre of Arthurian romance. For this purpose, it is necessary to return to the text of the *De vulgari*:

Allegat ergo pro se lingua oïl quod propter sui faciliorem ac delectabiliorem
vulgaritatem quicquid redactum sive inventum est ad vulgare prosaicum, suum est:
videlicet Biblia cum Troyanorum Romanorumque gestibus compilata et Arturi regis
ambages pulcerrime et quamplures alie ystorie ac doctrine.

(*DVE* I. x. 2)

Thus the language of *oïl* adduces on its own behalf the fact that, because of the greater facility and pleasing quality of its vernacular style, everything that is recounted or invented in vernacular prose belongs to it: such as compilations from the Bible and the histories of Troy and Rome, and the beautiful tales of King Arthur, and many other works of history and doctrine.

²⁸¹ On three occasions, Dante uses the term *favola* to refer to stories from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: *Cv.* II. i. 3; *Cv.* II. xiv. 5; *Cv.* IV. xxvii. 17. On the other hand, he mentions the fables of 'Esopo poeta' ('the poet Aesop') in *Cv.* IV. xxx. 4 and *Inf.* XXIII. 4. He probably knew these texts, which are not by Aesop, from their versions in elegiac couplets in the *Liber Aesopi*, attributed to Gualterus Anglicus. See: Fernando Salsano, 'Favola', in *Enciclopedia Dantesca*; Clara Kraus, 'Esopo', in *Enciclopedia Dantesca*.

²⁸² Rossi, 'Dante e le *ambages*', pp. 75-77.

²⁸³ Rossi, 'Dante e le *ambages*', p. 76.

To justify his interpretation of the word *ambages*, Picone argues that this passage sets up an opposition between two of the main prose genres of the *langue d'oïl*: the Biblical and classical compilations (*historiae*) and the Arthurian stories (*fabulae* or *non-historiae*). While the truthfulness of the former is supported by the *auctoritas* of God and classical tradition, the latter are the expression of a natural or folkloric heritage and hide the truth behind fabulous tales.²⁸⁴ Although subtle and fascinating, this interpretation does not seem to be supported by the text, which offers no linguistic evidence that Dante is setting up an opposition here. In pointing out the characteristic genres of French prose, Dante refers to the compilations of classical and Biblical history, the ambages of King Arthur and 'many others' ('quamplures alie') works of history and doctrine. The use of 'aliae' makes it clear that King Arthur's *ambages*, just like the classical and Biblical compilations, are two examples of the many 'ystorie' and 'doctrine' characteristic of French prose. The syntax of the text does not allow the former to be excluded and the latter to be included at the same time. What has led some scholars to exclude the Arthurian *ambages* from the group of the *historiae* is obviously not a lack of understanding of the Latin text, but rather a sense of surprise at seeing the so-called 'Arthurian fantasies' side by side with stories from the Bible and classical history.

Two questions need to be asked at this point. What literary works did Dante refer to with the expression 'compilations from the Bible and the histories of Troy and Rome'? Could he have recognised Arthurian romances as having historical value comparable to these compilations? It is generally accepted that the expression 'Biblia cum Troyanorum Romanorumque gestibus compilata' refers to historiographical compilations in Old French that combined the Biblical and classical traditions. Mengaldo and Rossi have convincingly shown that Dante probably had in mind the *Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César*, an early thirteenth-century compilation that begins with the stories of Genesis and ends with Julius Caesar's Gallic war. In particular, Mengaldo's commentary refers to the opening rubrics of three French manuscripts of this work, which recall Dante's definition. On the other hand, Rossi shows how the work is defined as 'Bible' or 'Bible en françois' in the rubrics of three Pisan-Genoese manuscripts.²⁸⁵ These three codices form part of the group of twenty-eight chivalric manuscripts described above, which also includes witnesses of the *Lancelot-Graal*, the prose *Tristan*, the cycle of *Guiron le Courtois* and other Arthurian texts, including

²⁸⁴ Picone, 'Dante e la tradizione arturiana', pp. 1-6.

²⁸⁵ These manuscripts are:

- Carpentras, Bibliothèque Inguimbertaine, 1260.

- Paris, BNF, fr. 9685

- Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Lat. 5895.

See: Dante Alighieri, *De vulgari eloquentia*, ed. by Mengaldo, in Dante Alighieri, *Opere minori*, ed. by Mengaldo and others, II, p. 84; Rossi, 'Dante e le *ambages*', pp. 71-72, which also includes the rubrics of the three manuscripts produced in France, as well as additional bibliography.

Rustichello's compilations.²⁸⁶ Apart from the Arthurian romances, the chivalric group of Pisan-Genoese manuscripts includes five witnesses of the *Histoire ancienne*, two of the *Roman de Troie*, one of the *Faits des Romains* and one of the Giordano Ruffo's *Libro de le marescalcie*. Looking at all the works that make up this group of manuscripts, it is surprising to note the almost complete correspondence with the genres that Dante identifies as characteristic of French prose: compilations of ancient history and Arthurian romances. Among the manuscripts produced in the same context, there is also a group of seven codices defined as 'didactic-moralising', which include, among other works, three witnesses of Brunetto Latini's *Tresor*, one of Richard de Fournival's *Bestiaire d'amour* and one of Aldobrandino da Siena's *Régime du corps*. The combination of these two groups, made up almost entirely of French texts, sheds further light on Dante's decision to identify French prose literature with 'ystorie ac doctrine'.²⁸⁷

Of course, by noting an analogy between the works transmitted by the Pisan-Genoese manuscripts and those that Dante mentions as characteristic of French prose literature, we do not mean to imply that he had come across a similar group of manuscripts. What we want to emphasise is the consistency of Dante's definition of *vulgare prosaicum* with the manuscript circulation of French prose works in Italy in the late 1200s, and the fact that the association of the 'Arthurian *ambages*' with 'other works of history and doctrine' was also quite normal for Italian copyists of the time. This association could occur both within a group of texts copied in the same context, such as the Pisan-Genoese codices, and within a single manuscript.²⁸⁸ I am referring, in particular, to the Ashburnham 123, which contains a combination of texts that is, at first sight, rather peculiar: Richard de Fournival's *Bestiaire d'Amour*, the anonymous allegorical poem *Jugement d'Amour*, Adam de Suel's *Distiques de Caton*, the *Roman d'Apollon de Tyr*, the prose *Tristan*, the *Roman de Guiron* and Rustichello's *Guironian Compilation*.²⁸⁹ The Arthurian texts, which occupy the second half of the manuscript, are therefore copied alongside a *historia* (*Apollon de Tyr*) and a *doctrina* (*Bestiaire d'Amour*), as well as a moral and a courtly text in verse. As Fabrizio Cigni pointed out, the manuscript is 'a homogeneous book of courtly stories of exemplary value, intended

²⁸⁶ See I. 2.

²⁸⁷ It is worth noting the striking coincidence between the works attested in the Pisan-Genoese manuscripts and many of those mentioned by Enrico Fenzi in his commentary on *DVE* I. x. 2. See Dante Alighieri, *De vulgari eloquentia*, ed. by Fenzi, pp. 68-70.

²⁸⁸ By referring to texts produced in the same context, we do not mean that they represent the coherent work of a single *scriptorium*. In fact, recent studies have shown that it is perhaps more appropriate to speak of a regional tradition and to imagine different centres of production. See Cigni, 'Scriptorium o tradizione regionale'. For a list of the Pisa-Genoese manuscripts, see Molteni, *I romanzi arturiani*, pp. 127-129.

²⁸⁹ Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Ashburnham 123 (Genoa-Pisa, 1284-1299).

for an audience remarkably different from the one for which they were written'.²⁹⁰ The audience is, of course, the one already described as characteristic of the Pisano-Genoese manuscripts: the ruling classes and the merchant bourgeoisie of the Italian communes, interested above all in the exemplary, didactic, and moral aspects of these texts.²⁹¹

Another important manuscript for understanding how medieval copyists understood the relationship between Biblical or classical history and Arthurian romances is BNF, fr. 17177, an early fourteenth-century French manuscript containing, among other works, the *Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César*.²⁹² As Richard Trachsler notes, the absence of an Arthurian section in this work led the editor or patron of the manuscript to consider it incomplete and therefore to include a French translation of the story of Brutus from Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*. In addition, Trachsler also shows that in the manuscript tradition, both Geoffrey's *Historia* and Wace's *Brut* are often preceded or followed by historical texts such as Gaimar's *Estoire des Engleis* or other chronicles, annals or genealogies. This is evidence of how the Matter of Britain could be perfectly integrated into historical compilations and therefore its plots were not perceived as pure fiction.²⁹³ Trachsler also emphasised that the desire to present the plots as 'true' was one of the factors that led to the transition of romance from verse to prose. Since poetry was often accused of padding the narrative with inauthentic material, the authors of both chronicles and romances began to resort to prose from the beginning of the thirteenth century. In the case of the Arthurian romances, this choice was also dictated by the tendency to go beyond the structure of Chrétien de Troyes's works, which dealt only with circumscribed periods in the lives of the protagonists, and to offer broad narratives ranging from Christ's Passion to the end of Arthur's reign. In other words, the introduction of a Christian Grail, a spiritual dimension for chivalry and a historical-eschatological perspective for the romance necessitated the development of a new narrative form that would, among other things, give credibility to the story.²⁹⁴ This tendency is particularly evident in both the trilogy of Robert de Boron and the *Lancelot-Graal*, prose cycles that use various narrative strategies and literary devices to present the facts they recount as historical.²⁹⁵

²⁹⁰ Cigni, 'Manuscripts en français, italien, et latin', p. 203.

²⁹¹ See I. 2.

²⁹² Paris, BNF, fr. 17177.

²⁹³ See Richard Trachsler, 'A Question of Time: Romance and History', in *A Companion to the Lancelot-Graal Cycle*, ed. by Dover, pp. 23-32 (pp. 23-24), which is the main source for this paragraph.

²⁹⁴ Richard Trachsler, 'Prosa e versi. Sguardi su edizioni e codici romanzi arturiani', in *La letteratura cavalleresca*, ed. by Picone, pp. 77-89 (pp. 81-82).

²⁹⁵ On Robert de Boron's trilogy see Zambon, *Robert de Boron*, pp. 99-120. On the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle, see: Combes, *Les voies de l'aventure*, pp. 73-178; Trachsler, 'A Question of Time'. See also Fabrizio Cigni, 'Storia e Scrittura nel romanzo arturiano: i chierici e l'origine merliniana del "libro di corte"', in *Mito e storia nella*

Having shown that the authors of the Arthurian romances presented their works as *historiae*, and that copyists, at least until the early fourteenth century, understood them as such, we must ask whether Italian readers were also convinced of this. Looking at the literary tradition of the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, one has the impression that Arthurian characters are placed without hesitation alongside those from classical and sometimes Biblical history. Leaving aside the more concise or conventional references, there are at least three texts, all from the Florentine or Tuscan area, which seem to treat the Arthurian stories on a par with those of the Bible or the classical tradition.²⁹⁶ In his *Tesoretto* (vv. 1-73), Brunetto Latini celebrates the dedicatee of the poem by associating each of his qualities with one or more exemplary characters from the Biblical, classical and Arthurian traditions. The dedicatee is compared for his wisdom to Solomon, for his goodness to Alexander, for his valour to Achilles, Hector, Lancelot and Tristan, for his eloquence to Cicero and for his manners to Seneca and Cato. In his sirventes *Tant'aggio ardire e conoscenza* (vv. 192-226), Ruggieri Apugliese enumerates his vast literary knowledge. The list includes characters and events from the most diverse traditions: Biblical, Trojan, Roman and medieval history. Ruggieri's list, which is clearly a list of *historiae*, also includes characters and stories from the Matter of Britain: the Holy Grail, Merlin, Arthur, the Round Table, Tristan and Iseult. Finally, the ekphrasis of *L'Intelligenza* (st. 71-76), contains a long list of exemplary lovers. The author mentions two characters from the Biblical tradition: David and Bathsheba. On the other hand, there are numerous characters and stories from the classical and Arthurian traditions. Most of the classical characters belong to the Trojan history, the *Aeneid* or the story of Apollonius of Tyre. Arthurian characters include Tristan and Iseult, Lancelot and Guinevere, as well as minor characters from the prose romances or some of the protagonists of Chrétien de Troyes's works.

The same tendency can be seen in Dante's *Inferno*, where the only two Arthurian characters that the author includes among the damned souls of hell are flanked by exemplary figures from the classical, medieval or strictly contemporary world. In *Inferno* V, in the circle of the lustful, Virgil points out and names to Dante the souls of more than a thousand ancient women and knights who died for love. Among them, the poet mentions Semiramis, Dido, Cleopatra, Helen, Achilles, Paris and Tristan.²⁹⁷ Paolo Malatesta and Francesca da Polenta,

tradizione cavalleresca. Atti del XLII Convegno storico internazionale, Todi, 9-12 ottobre 2005 (Spoleto: CISAM, 2006), pp. 363-383.

²⁹⁶ See: Boncompagno da Signa, *De amicitia* XXXIII; Filippo da Messina, *Ai Siri deo, con forte fu lo punto*, vv. 9-12; Folgore da San Gimignano, *Sonetti dei mesi*, vv. 9-14 I. For some of these references, see I. 3 and II. 2.

²⁹⁷ *Inf.* V. 52-72.

who will be the protagonists of the second part of the canto, also belong to this group.²⁹⁸ Dante thus includes Tristan in a list that includes figures from both ancient and contemporary history. Similarly, in *Inferno* XXXII, he refers to a number of traitors who are condemned to the ninth circle of hell. Among these characters, most of whom belong to his own time, Dante mentions Ganellone ('Ganelon'), traitor to the Franks in the Carolingian cycle, and Mordred, usurper of Arthur's kingdom in several Arthurian romances.²⁹⁹ The long list of traitors is completed, in *Inferno* XXXIV, with references to Judas, Brutus and Cassius, characters from the Biblical or classical tradition.³⁰⁰ With reference to these cantos, Rossi emphasises how Dante seems to recognise classical and Arthurian characters as having a similar status. The reference to the lustful mentioned in *Inferno* V as 'le donne antiche e ' cavalieri' ('the ladies and the knights of old') suggests that they are treated 'in a romance perspective', a widespread practice in the medieval tradition.³⁰¹ On the other hand, *Inferno* XXXII, with its references to Mordred-Arthur and Tydeus-Melanippus, two pairs of characters who killed each other, suggests that Dante recognised to the Matter of Britain a status of truth comparable to that of Statius's *Thebaid*.³⁰² As an example of the continuity between the classical epic and the Arthurian romances, Rossi also mentions *Inferno* XXVI, where the last wanderings of Ulysses show some affinities with the adventures of the Arthurian knights.³⁰³ It is also worth noting that if we consider Dante's journey to be an experience that he presents as real, as most scholars do, it would make little sense to think that he included among the souls of the hell, and alongside historical figures from the classical tradition or from the contemporary world, characters that he considered to be completely fictional.

²⁹⁸ *Inf.* V. 85: 'cotali uscir de la schiera ov' è Dido' ('so did these [Paolo and Francesca] leave the troop where Dido is').

²⁹⁹ See, respectively, *Inf.* XXXII. 122 and *Inf.* XXXII. 61-62.

³⁰⁰ *Inf.* XXXIV. 61-67

³⁰¹ For example, in the anonymous *Roman de Thèbe* and *Roman d'Eneas*, as well as in Benoît de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie*, the ancient heroes and heroines are depicted to all intents and purposes as medieval knights and ladies.

³⁰² As Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi (among others) has noted: 'Thebes was the city of savagery par excellence, where the most terrible and inhuman events took place'. The invocation of the Muses in *Inferno* XXXII. 10-11, together with other references in this and the following canto, imbue the entire circle of traitors with a Theban atmosphere, which also pervades all the events narrated or alluded to. In this particular case, it is clear that both the story of Tyldus and that of Mordred are perfect examples of the destructive consequences of internal discord within cities or kingdoms. On the pervasiveness of the Theban myth in the circle of traitors, see the introduction and commentary to *Inferno* XXXII by Chiavacci Leonardi. For all but the commentaries on the *Commedia*, see the Dartmouth Dante Project: <<https://dante.dartmouth.edu/>> [accessed 17/08/2023]. The only commentary on the *Commedia* not available on the website of the Dartmouth Dante Projects (among those consulted) is Dante Alighieri, *Commedia*, ed. by Giorgio Inglese, 3 vols (Rome: Carocci, 2007-2016). From now on, Inglese's commentary will be referred to as Inglese (2007-2016).

³⁰³ Rossi, 'Dante e le *ambages*', pp. 77-82. On the affinities between Ulysses's wanderings and the adventures of the Arthurian knights, see: Rajna, 'Dante e i romanzi della Tavola Rotonda', pp. 223-227; D'Arco Silvio Avalle, 'L'ultimo viaggio di Ulisse', in *Modelli semiologici nella Commedia di Dante* (Milan: Bompiani, 1975), pp. 34-63 (pp. 35-46).

In light of all this, the idea that Dante considered the Arthurian romances to be fictional tales, and that he meant *fabulae* by the term *ambages*, must be ruled out, and the most plausible meaning of the word seems to be ‘wanderings’ or ‘adventures’. This interpretation seems to be confirmed by both the Latin and the Romance traditions. The two main Latin sources using the word *ambages* with the meaning of ‘wanderings’ had Aeneas and Dido as protagonists and were known to Dante. In *Aeneid* I, the goddess Venus tells Aeneas, who is about to arrive in Carthage, that Dido rules that land:

imperium Dido Tyria regit urbe profecta,
 germanum fugiens. Longa est iniuria, longae
ambages; sed summa sequar fastigia rerum.
 (*Aen.* I. 340-342)

Dido’s the ruler in charge. She came here to escape from her brother, sailing from Tyre. It’s a long tale of wrong and injustice, a long tale: twists, turns, full of deceit [or “a long tale of wanderings”]. But I’ll summarize most of the main point.

In this passage, *ambages* has sometimes been translated literally as ‘wanderings’, and sometimes metaphorically as ‘long digression or speech necessary to tell them’. Taken literally, the word *ambages* would have referred to Dido’s wanderings in the period between her departure from Tyre and the founding of Carthage. A use of the word *ambages* in this sense is also found in Ovid’s *Heroides*, and in particular in the letter that Dido writes to Aeneas after her abandonment:

Hos potius populos in dotem, *ambage* remissa,
 accipe et advectas Pygmalionis opes.³⁰⁴
 (*Heroides* VII, 149-150)

Stop this wandering! Choose me and my dowry – the riches of Pygmalion and the people
 I brought to this place.³⁰⁵

In these verses, the meaning of the word *ambages* is quite clear: Dido invites Aeneas to stop his wanderings and stay with her and her people in Carthage. She is obviously referring to the long journey of Aeneas, which began with his departure from Troy and will end on the

³⁰⁴ Ovidio, *Heroides*, in Ovidio, *Dalla poesia d’amore alla poesia dell’esilio*, ed. by Paolo Fedeli, 2 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 2007), I, p. 416.

³⁰⁵ Ovid, *Heroides*, trans. by Harold Isbell (London: Penguin, 1990).

shores of Latium. The wanderings of the classical heroes, guided by chance and characterised by sudden and unexpected events, were perceived in the Middle Ages as closely related to the adventures of the knights-errant of chivalric romances.³⁰⁶ As Rossi points out, this is confirmed by several translations of Latin or Old French works into Tuscan, mainly dating from the first half of the fourteenth century. For example, Andrea Lancia, in his translation of *Aen.* I. 372-374, describes the wanderings of Aeneas and his companions as ‘trojane aventure’ (‘Trojan adventures’), while Binduccio dello Scelto in his *Storia di Troia*, a translation into Italian of a prose version of Benoît de Sainte-Maure’s *Roman de Troie*, twice refers to the travels of Ulysses as ‘aventure’ (‘adventures’).³⁰⁷ The Tuscan noun *avventura* or *avventura* is a loanword from Old French (*aventure*) and has no Latin equivalent with the same meaning. What word could an author who was writing in Latin have used to refer to the adventures of the Arthurian knights? Given the analogies between the adventures of the knights-errant and the wanderings of classical heroes, sometimes called *aventure* or *aventures* in Romance texts, the Latin word *ambages* would undoubtedly have been a perfect solution.

One last question remains. Why should Dante have chosen to designate the genre of the Arthurian romance as a whole with the expression ‘the beautiful adventures of King Arthur’? This question may seem pointless: adventures are the defining aspect of the Arthurian romances, and although Arthur rarely takes part in them, his name was perfectly functional to refer to the Matter of Britain as a whole. However, Rossi emphasises how the definition used by Dante, and in particular the expression *ambages pulcerrime* (‘beautiful adventures’), can be derived from formulae found in the prologues of some Old French prose romances.³⁰⁸ He refers first of all to the prologue of the prose *Tristan*, which defines the content of the romance as ‘beautiful and pleasant adventures that took place in Britain in the time of King Arthur’:

Aprés ce que je ai leü et releü par maintes foiz le grant livre del latin, celui meïsmes qui devise apertement l’estoire del Saint Graal, mout me merveil que aucun preudome ne vien avant qui enpreigne a translater del latin en françois; car ce seroit une chose que volentiers orroient povre et riche, puisqu’il eüssent volenté d’escouter et d’entendre *beles aventures et plesanz*, qui avindrent sanz doutance en la Grant Bretaigne au tens le roi Artus et devant, ensi come l’estoire vraie del Saint Graal nos raconte et tesmoigne.
(Curtis, I, p. 39)

³⁰⁶ This analogy was already noted by Rajna, ‘Arturi regis ambages’, pp. 94-95.

³⁰⁷ For more specific references to these texts, see Rossi, ‘Dante e le *ambages*’, pp. 93-94.

³⁰⁸ For the last part of this subchapter, I follow Rossi, ‘Dante e le *ambages*’, pp. 94-105.

I have read and re-read the great Latin Book many a time, the very one which early tells the story of the Holy Grail, and I am amazed that no worthy man has undertaken to translate it from Latin into French, for it would be something that rich and poor alike would enjoy to hear; provided of course they wished to listen and harken to the pleasant story of the memorable adventures which actually took place in Great Britain during the reign of King Arthur and before, as the story of the Holy Grail relates and testifies.³⁰⁹

The prologue to the prose *Tristan*, although not one of the parts of the romance that seem to have enjoyed the greatest success in Italy, is attested in two manuscripts dating from around Dante's time: BNF, fr. 94 and Ashburnham 123, which, as we have seen, belongs to the Pisan-Genoese group and witnesses a peculiar combination of 'works of history and doctrine'.³¹⁰ After noting this analogy, Rossi shows that Dante may have been familiar with the prose *Tristan*, a work that was widely read in Italy and to which Dante probably referred to at several points in his works. In any case, he leaves open both an intertextual and interdiscursive perspective, showing how similar formulations were also present in other romances, such as Rustichello da Pisa's *Arthurian Compilation* or the anonymous *Tavola Ritonda*. Regardless of the existence of a specific source for the Dante's expression, Rossi's study and the new arguments presented here seem to confirm that the most appropriate translation for 'Arturi regis ambages pulcerrime' is 'the beautiful adventures of King Arthur'. Such a definition suggests that Dante's attitude towards Arthurian literature, at least at this stage of his life and career, was still positive.

III. 2 '*Prose di romanzi*' and Arthurian verse romances

What were the specific works to which Dante was referring when he used the expression 'Arturi regis ambages pulcerrime'? We have seen how Dante includes 'the beautiful adventures of King Arthur' among the characteristic genres of Old French literature, identified in all respects with prose texts on historical and doctrinal subjects. Although in the second book of the same treatise he shows some knowledge of Old French poetry, in particular two *canso* which he attributes to Thibaut de Champagne, mentioned as 'Rex Navarre',³¹¹ in *DVE* I. x. 2 the *langue d'oïl* is to all intents and purposes the language of

³⁰⁹ For the English translation of the prose *Tristan*, see, once for all, *The Romance of Tristan. The Thirteenth-Century Old French 'Prose Tristan'*, trans. by Renée L. Curtis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

³¹⁰ On these issues, see above in this sub-chapter and I. 3.

³¹¹ The *canso* *Ire d'amor que en mon cor repaire*, which Dante mentions in *DVE* II. vi. 6, was actually composed by Gace Brulé. In contrast, Dante's attribution of the *canso* *De fin amor si vient sen et bonté* to

prose. Thus, if we were to consider only this passage from the *De vulgari eloquentia*, we would get the impression that Dante, when referring to King Arthur, had in mind the great prose romances of the thirteenth century, such as the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle, the prose *Tristan* or the cycle of *Guiron le Courtois*. This impression seems to be confirmed by a text written between five and ten years after the interruption of the Latin treatise: *Purgatorio* XXVI. In this canto, Guido Guinizzelli, while pointing out to Dante the soul of the Occitan poet Arnaut Daniel, says that he surpassed all those who wrote ‘versi d’amore e prose di romanzi’ (‘verses of love and tales of romance’):

‘O frate’, disse, ‘questi ch’io ti cerno
col dito’, e additò un spirto innanzi,
‘fu miglior fabbro del parlar materno.

Versi d’amore e prose di romanzi
soverchiò tutti; e lascia dir li stolti
che quel di Lemosì credon ch’avanzi.

(*Purg.* XXVI. 115-120)

‘O brother’, he said, ‘that one whom I point out – / and he pointed to a spirit just ahead
– ‘was a better craftsman of the mother tongue. / In verses of love and tales of romance
/ he surpassed them all, and let the fools go on / who think that fellow from Limoges
was better’.

The interpretation of this passage is uncertain. According to Chiavacci Leonardi, Guinizzelli uses the expressions ‘versi d’amore’ and ‘prose di romanzi’ to refer to the two genres characteristic of the literary languages of France: Occitan poetry and the Old French prose romances. On the other hand, according to Umberto Bosco and Giovanni Reggio, it is not clear whether he means by ‘versi d’amore’ only Occitan poetry or also Old French and Italian poetry.³¹² This uncertainty is already evident in the early commentators of the *Commedia*. The author of the *Ottimo commento* summarises *Purg.* XXVI. 115-120 as follows: ‘Qui introduce uno famoso dicitore Provenzale; e dice, ch’egli avanzòe in rima ed in prosa tutti gli altri di quella lingua [...]’ (‘Here he introduces a famous Provençal author; and says that

Thibaut de Champagne, found in *DVE* I. ix. 3 and II. v. 4, is correct. See ‘Le rime provenzali e francesi’, ed. by Luciano Formisano, in Dante Alighieri, *De vulgari eloquentia*, ed. by Fenzi, pp. 265-338 (pp. 331-338).

³¹² See the commentaries on *Purg.* XXVI. 118 by Umberto Bosco and Giovanni Reggio (1979) and Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi (1991-1997).

he surpassed in rhyme and prose all others of that language [...]'). According to this interpretation, Guinizzelli would state that Arnaut was the best author of both poems and prose works in Occitan. The Anonimo Fiorentino, who was ill-informed about the Occitan poet, believed that Arnaut Daniel also wrote prose romances in French: '[...] Arnaut Daniel provenzale, il quale in fare prose di romanzi in lingua francesca, o vuo' dire in rima, avanzò gli altri' ('[...] the Provençal Arnaut Daniel, who surpassed the others in composing prose romances in French or poems'). Benvenuto da Imola interpreted the expression 'prose di romanzi' as follows: 'prose di romanzi, id est, vulgarium; unde gallici omnia vulgaria appellant romantia' ('proses of romance, namely of vernaculars; according to which the French call all the vernacular languages "romances"'). According to Benvenuto, therefore, the expression 'prose di romanzi' does not refer to the specific genre of the romance, but to vernacular prose in general. On the other hand, Francesco da Buti interprets the word *romanzi* as 'istorie, ditte forse così de le romane istorie che si trovano in lingua francesca' ('histories, perhaps so called for the Roman histories found in the French language').³¹³ He thus seems to think that Dante uses the word *romanzi* to refer to 'historical narratives', a category that for a medieval man, as we have seen above, could also include Arthurian romances.³¹⁴

The difficulties in interpreting *Purg.* XXVI. 118 thus derive, among other things, from the ambiguity of the word *romanzo*, which Italian inherited from Old French. In Old French, *roman* originally meant 'romance vernacular' or, more specifically, 'French vernacular'. From the middle of the twelfth century, however, it began to denote a new literary genre consisting of the translation into the French vernacular (*mise en roman*) of pre-existing Latin works. As early as the 1160s, this new genre, still in verse, was emancipated from the translation process, thanks mainly to the Arthurian works of Thomas, Béroul and Chrétien de Troyes. Due to the popularity of these authors and the prose cycles that followed, the word *roman*, while retaining all its meanings, came to refer mainly to Arthurian romances. The same polysemy and the same prevalence of the Arthurian meaning of the term can be found in thirteenth and fourteenth-century Italian. According to the *TLIO*,³¹⁵ the only occurrence of the word *romanzo* in the sense of 'vernacular' is found in *La Storia del San Graale*, the Tuscan translation of the *Estoire del Saint Graal* written in Florence at the beginning of the fourteenth century. To this we must add the Latin commentary on *Purgatorio* XXVI by Benvenuto da Imola (1375-1380). The use of the word *romanzo* in the

³¹³ The translations of the four commentaries are mine.

³¹⁴ See III. 1.

³¹⁵ 'romanzo', in *Tesoro della Lingua Italiana delle Origini*, <<http://tlio.ovi.cnr.it/TLIO/>> [accessed 23/08/2023].

sense of a historical narrative or chronicle is only attested in Antonio Pucci's *Centiloquio*, dating from the second half of the fourteenth century, and in Francesco da Buti's commentary on *Purgatorio* XXVI (1385-1395). All other references in the *TLIO*, twelve in all, refer instead to the literary genre of romance, and in the vast majority to Arthurian literature. It seems clear, therefore, that in thirteenth and fourteenth-century Italy the term *romanzo* was used mainly to refer to a specific literary genre: the romance.

In light of this, it is probable that by 'prose di romanzi' Dante meant the literary genre of prose romance and, by synecdoche, Old French literature in general. But even if Dante used this expression to refer to vernacular prose in general, as Benvenuto da Imola believed, its referent would probably not change much. We have seen that French is the language par excellence of the vernacular prose in the *De vulgari eloquentia*, and that the Arthurian romance is listed among the characteristic genres of the *vulgare prosaicum*, along with the 'compilations from the Bible and the histories of Troy and Rome' and 'other works of history and doctrine'.³¹⁶ Accordingly, in *Purg.* XXVI. 118, Guinizelli probably means to say that Arnaut, by virtue of the refinement of his language, surpassed all the authors of Old French prose romances, an expression that probably includes the Arthurian romances as well as the *romans d'antiquité* ('romances of antiquity'), and love poems, whether in Occitan or, more generally, in any vernacular belonging to the *ydioma tripharium*. The parallel reading of these two passages could lead us to believe that, for Dante, the Matter of Britain coincided in every respect with the prose romances of the thirteenth century: in *DVE* I. x. 2 'the beautiful adventures of King Arthur' are referred to as a prose genre, and in *Purg.* XXVI. 188 Guinizelli speaks explicitly of 'prose romances'. This idea could be confirmed by the few certain references to the Arthurian romances that can be found in Dante's works, all of which point to the *Lancelot en prose*, and by the absolute preponderance of the Italian tradition of prose romances over that of verse romances. However, the fact that Dante considered the Arthurian romance to be primarily a prose genre is not sufficient proof that he completely ignored the verse romances of Chrétien de Troyes, Thomas or Béroul. We have seen that, with the exception of the *Cligès Riccardiano*, there are no extant manuscripts of Arthurian verse romances copied in Italy.³¹⁷ In order to find evidence of Dante's knowledge of these romances, therefore, we can only rely on possible references in his works. Accordingly, all the scholars who have studied Dante's reception of the Arthurian verse romances have tried to find, in the *Commedia* or in other works, references to the romances of Thomas, Béroul or Chrétien de Troyes.

³¹⁶ See III. 1.

³¹⁷ See I. 2.

Among the studies on this subject, the one that has produced the most interesting results is Furio Brugnolo's research on the presence of the Tristan matter in Dante's canzone *La dispietata mente che pur mira*.³¹⁸ This canzone is almost certainly one of the first that Dante wrote and shows a close relationship with the literary genre of the love epistle in verse, widespread in the Occitan tradition and known as *salut d'amor*. In this canzone, the poet finds himself far away from his lady and his country and, remembering the past time, feels great pain. Because of this, he has no vital energy left and is close to death. His only hope of salvation is the help of the woman, whom he addresses directly in the poem, asking her to send him the only thing that can save him: her healing greeting ('*salute*'). The poet, who does not have much time left before he dies, sends his poem to the woman in the hope that she will in turn send messengers of love to bring him her greeting and save him. Brugnolo notes how the structure of this poem recalls a famous passage from Thomas's *Tristan*. In this episode, Tristan, mortally wounded, sends a message to Iseult through his friend Kahedin, asking her to come to his aid as she is the only one who can heal his wound and save his life. Although the reason why he is dying is different, Tristan, like Dante, can only be cured by his lady, the only one who can bring him health (*saluz*):

Dites li saluz de ma part,
 que nule en moi senz li n'a part.
 De cuer tanz saluz li emvei
 que nule ne remaint od moi.
 Mis cuers de salu la salue,
 senz li ne m'ert santé rendue,
 emvei li tute ma salu.
 Cumfort ne m'ert ja mais rendu,
 salu de vie ne santé,
 se par li ne sunt aporté.
 S'ele ma salu ne m'aporte
 e par buche ne me conforte,
 ma santé od li dunc remaine,
 e jo murray od ma grant peine.³¹⁹
 (vv. 2467-2480)

³¹⁸ Furio Brugnolo, 'Un ipotesto tristaniano in Dante. Nota sulla canzone *La dispietata mente*', *Medioevo letterario d'Italia*, 13 (2016), 31-41.

³¹⁹ For the text of Thomas's *Tristan*, with the exception of the Carlisle fragment, see, once for all, *Le Roman de Tristan par Thomas*, ed. by Felix Lecoy (Paris: Champion, 1991), p. 97. For the English translation of Thomas's *Tristan*, see, once for all, Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan with the 'Tristan' of Thomas*, trans. by Arthur Thomas Hatto (London: Penguin, 1974).

Greet her and wish her health from me, for without her there is none in me. I send her so many wishes for her well-being that none remains with me. My heart salutes her in hopes of healing, since, without her, health will not return to me. I sent her all my health. I shall never have succour in my life, or health or healing, unless she bring them. If she does not bring me health or succour me with her own lips, then my health will remain with her and I shall die of my great pain.

In this passage, which is part of Tristan's speech to Kahedin when he sends him to Iseult, Thomas plays with the word *saluz*, which can mean either 'health' or 'greeting'. This is the same wordplay that Dante uses in verse 12 of *La dispietata mente*, where the word *salute* refers both to the lady's greeting and to the salvation it would bring to the poet:

né dentro sento tanto di valore
che possa lungamente far difesa,
gentil madonna, se da voi non vene:
però, s'a voi convene
ad iscampo di lui mai fare impresa,
piacciavi a lui mandar vostra *salute*
che sia conforto della sua vertute.³²⁰
(vv. 7-13)

Nor, gentle lady, / do I feel that I have the power / in me to resist for long, unless / such power come from you; / hence if it is fitting that you / sometimes take action to rescue / my heart send your greeting, / I beg you, to restore its strength.³²¹

Verse 53 also contains an identical wordplay:

Dunque vostra *salute* omai si mova
e vegna dentro al cor, che lei aspetta,
gentil madonna, come avete inteso;
(vv. 53-55)

'Therefore let your greeting now come forth, / and come into my heart that awaits it, / my gentle lady, as you have heard'.

³²⁰ For the text of the *Rime*, see, once for all, Dante Alighieri, *Rime*, ed. by Domenico De Robertis, 5 vols (Florence: Le Lettere, 2002).

³²¹ For the English translation of the *Rime*, see, once for all, *Dante's Lyric Poetry*, trans. by Kenelm Foster and Patrick Boyd, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967).

The similarities between these two texts relate not only to the way they play with the words *salute* and *saluz*, but also to the narrative structure. As already mentioned, the protagonists are on the verge of death, and both Tristan's *saluz* and Dante's *salute* depend on the help of their ladies, who are the only possible source of health and salvation. Both Thomas and Dante explicitly state that the health of the protagonist is in the hands of his beloved. This is part of Kahedin's speech to Iseult on behalf of Tristan:

Tristan vus mande cume druz
amisté, servise e saluz
cume a dame, cum a s'amie,
en qui maint sa mort e sa vie.
(vv. 2709-2712)

Tristan sends you his love, service, and greetings, as a lover to his beloved lady, in whose hand lie his life and his death.

On the other hand, these are the verses in which Dante states that love has placed his life and death in the hands of his lady:

Darmi potete ciò ch'altri non osa,
ché 'l sì e 'l no di me in vostra mano
ha posto Amore, ond'io grande mi tegno;
(vv. 46-49)

You can / give me what no one else can, / for Love has put / into your hands the power of life and death / over me, and in this I glory.

Costanzo De Girolamo emphasises how these episodes from Thomas's *Tristan* played a fundamental role in the origin of the literary genre of the *salut d'amor*, which spread first to Occitan poetry and then to Italian poetry, up to Dante's *La dispietata mente*.³²² However, Brugnolo points out that in the Occitan *salutz*, the poets ask their ladies for *merce* (reciprocity in love), while Tristan and Dante address the women they love to get *saluz* or *salute* (health).³²³ This is the main argument that led him to hypothesise that Dante's canzone, although related to the genre of the *salut d'amor*, could have Thomas's *Tristan* as a source.

³²² Costanzo di Girolamo, "“Madonna mia”. Una riflessione sui salutz e una nota per Giacomo da Lentini", *Cultura neolatina*, 66 (2006), 411-422.

³²³ Brugnolo, 'Un ipotesto tristaniano in Dante', pp. 37-38.

Kurt Ringger also hypothesises possible relationships between Dante's works and Thomas's *Tristan*.³²⁴ According to him, the expression 'mal perverso' ('grievous plight'; *Inf.* V. 93), which Francesca uses to refer to her own infernal punishment, or the sin that led to her damnation, may echo the final dedication of Thomas's *Tristan*:

Tumas fine ci sun escrit;
a tuz amanz saluz i dit,
as pensis e as amerus,
as emvius, as desirus,
as enveisiez, as *purvers*,
a tuz ces ki orunt ces vers.
(vv. 3125-3130)

Here Thomas ends his book. Now he takes leave of all lovers, the sad and the amorous, the jealous and the desirous, the gay and the distraught, and all who will hear these lines.

The meaning of the words used by Thomas to describe the different categories of lovers has been studied by Emmanuèle Baumgartner and Robert-Léon Wagner.³²⁵ They point out that the Old French *pervers* or *purvers* retained the meaning of the Latin word *perversus*, which refers to someone or something that undermines the order of accepted norms. In the Middle Ages, the word was also used to refer to heretics as subverters of Christian doctrine, and more generally to those who, despite having had the opportunity to know the truth, persisted in their errors or sins and were doomed to damnation.³²⁶ In Thomas, however, the term *purvers* has no theological connotation and refers to those who do not follow the norms of courtly love or *fin'amor* ('fine love'), which are instead embodied in Tristan and Iseult. Accordingly, the *enveisiez* and the *purvers* are the carnal lovers who reduce love to the physical gratification of their instincts. By addressing them in the dedication, Thomas alludes to the fact that they can learn from his romance that it is necessary to renounce an exclusively carnal love and convert to the doctrine of the *fin'amor*.

In medieval Italian, the word *perverso* has a similar meaning to Latin *perversus* and Old French *pervers*: it refers both to heretics and sinners who break the laws ordained by God,

³²⁴ Kurt Ringger, 'Il dantesco "mal perverso" (*Inferno*, V. 93)', in *Vom Mittelalter zur Moderne. Beiträge zur französischen und italienischen Literatur* (Tübingen: Narr, 1991), pp. 126-130.

³²⁵ Emmanuèle Baumgartner and Robert-Léon Wagner, '«As enveisiez e as purvers». Commentaire sur les vers 3125-3129 du *Roman de Tristan* de Thomas', *Romania*, 88 (1967), 527-537.

³²⁶ Dante uses the word in a similar sense in *Par.* XX. 126 (see below).

and to those who transgress social norms.³²⁷ In most instances, Dante uses the word *perverso* in precisely this sense.³²⁸ A definition of this word is given in a passage from the *Convivio*:

E soggiungo che, mirando costei – dico la sapienza – in questa parte, ogni viziato tornerà diritto e buono; e però dico: ‘Questa è colei ch’umilia ogni perverso’, cioè volge dolcemente chi fuori di debito ordine è piegato.

(Cv. III. XIV. 15)

And I add that by gazing upon that part of her (I mean wisdom), every vicious person will become upright and good. Therefore I say: This is she who humbles every haughty person – that is, who gently turns back whoever inclines away from the proper course.

In another passage of the same work, Dante establishes an opposition between lawful order and perverse order:

Ciascuna cosa che da perverso ordine procede è laboriosa, e per conseguente è amara, e non dolce, sì come dormire il die e veggiare la notte, e andare indietro e non inanzi. Comandare lo subietto allo sovrano procede da ordine perverso – ché ordine diritto è lo sovrano allo subietto comandare –, e così è amaro, e non dolce.

(Cv. I. VII. 4)

Everything that proceeds by inverse order is disagreeable, and consequently is bitter and not sweet, as, for example, sleeping during the day and lying awake at night, or going backwards and not forwards. For the subject to command the sovereign is to proceed by inverse order (for the right order is for the sovereign to command the servant); so it is bitter and not sweet.

In *Paradiso* XX, Dante uses the word *perverso* in its theological sense, referring to pagans:

ond’ ei credette in quella, e non sofferse
da indi il puzzo più del paganesmo;
e riprendiene le genti perverse.

(Par. XX. 124-126)

³²⁷ ‘perverso’, in *Tesoro della Lingua Italiana delle Origini*, <<http://tlio.oiv.cnr.it/TLIO/>> [accessed 26/08/2023].

³²⁸ See Antonio Lanci, ‘Perverso’, in *Enciclopedia Dantesca*.

So that he [Ripheus] believed and, from that time on, / endured no longer paganism's
stench / but rebuked the wayward peoples for it.

In medieval Italian, and in Dante's works, perverse can also mean 'cruel', as a kind of extension of its primary meaning of 'out of the right order'.³²⁹ The term is used with this meaning, with reference to Love, in the canzone *Così nel mio parlar voglio esser aspro*:

Egli alza ad ora ad ora la mano, e sfida
la debole mia vita, esto perverso,
che disteso a riverso
mi tiene in terra d'ogni guizzo stanco.
(vv. 40-43)

Again and again he raises his hand / threatening my weakened life, this evil one / who
pins me to the ground, flat on my back, / and too exhausted to move.

On the other hand, the meaning of Francesca's expression 'mal perverso' is far from certain:

se fosse amico il re de l'universo,
noi pregheremmo lui de la tua pace,
poi c'hai pietà del nostro mal perverso.
(*Inf.* V. 91-93)

If the King of the universe were our friend / we would pray that He might give you
peace, / since you show pity for our grievous plight.

The indecision in the interpretation of Francesca's words is already evident in the early commentaries. Giovanni Boccaccio interprets the expression 'mal perverso' as 'tormento' ('torment'). On the contrary, Benvenuto da Imola believes that Francesca is referring to the sin that caused her damnation, her adulterous relationship with Paolo, rather than to her infernal punishment: 'de quo compateris nostro amori perverso, cuius causa ita jactamur. Isti enim nimis perverterunt ordinem amoris, quia cognati erant' ('For you have pity on our perverse love, because of which we are so tormented. For they subverted the order of love in an extraordinary way, being siblings-in-law').³³⁰ The same indecision is also evident in

³²⁹ See, again, 'perverso', in *Tesoro della Lingua Italiana delle Origini*.

³³⁰ The translation is mine.

modern commentaries: Mattalia, Padoan or Chiavacci Leonardi are either uncertain or take no clear position.³³¹

As Rossi notes, the adjective *perverso*, if understood as ‘alien to the right order’, is ill-suited to refer to the punishment of the lustful, which is in fact part of the divine order, as is any infernal torment.³³² Moreover, Francesca refers to Dante’s pity for ‘our perverse love’. However, Dante shows pity not so much when he witnesses the punishment of the lustful (*Inf.* V. 25-50), but rather after hearing Virgil list the ancient women and knights condemned to hell for their lust: ‘Poscia ch’io ebbi ’l mio dottore udito / nomar le donne antiche e ’ cavalieri, / pietà mi giunse e fui quasi smarrito’ (‘When I heard my teacher name the ladies / and the knights of old, pity overcame me / and I almost lost my senses’; *Inf.* V. 70-72). In other words, Dante’s compassion seems to depend on the identity of the damned and the consequence of their sin rather than on the specific characteristics of the divine torment that afflicts them. Accordingly, Francesca is probably referring to Dante’s compassion for the fate of the lustful, which he expresses immediately before speaking to her, rather than to the punishment to which they are condemned. In any case, the main merit of Ringger’s article is to point out the possible courtly origin of the adjective *perverso*, used by Francesca as a synonym for *fol’amor* (‘mad love’), in a discourse and in a canto characterised by the constant use of courtly imagery.³³³ This does not mean, however, that Dante’s source must necessarily have been Thomas. As Rossi notes, the adjective *pervers*, with the same meaning, also occurs in the *Lai mortel de Kahedin* and in some manuscripts that bear witness to the *Lai de victoire de Tristan*. These two poems are part of the prose *Tristan*, a work that had a much wider circulation in Dante’s Tuscany than Thomas’s romance.³³⁴

Edmund G. Gardner and William Sayers have also pointed out possible references to Thomas’s *Tristan* in Dante’s works. According to Gardner, the first dream of the *Vita Nuova*, the one in which Love makes Beatrice eat Dante’s heart, may recall the episode in Thomas’s *Tristan* where Iseult sings the *Lai Guirun*.³³⁵ This lai tells the story of Guirun, the lover of a lady who was married to a count. When the count found out about Guirun’s love for his wife, he killed him and made the lady eat his heart. Apart from the motif of the woman eating her lover’s heart, the *Lai Guirun* has nothing in common with the highly allegorical episode of Dante’s *Vita Nuova*. Moreover, this motif was widespread in medieval literature: before the

³³¹ See the commentaries on *Inf.* V. 93 by Daniele Mattalia (1960), Giorgio Padona (1967) and Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi (1991-1997).

³³² Rossi, ‘Dante e le *ambages*’, pp. 100-101.

³³³ Ringger, ‘Il dantesco “mal perverso”’. Ringger hypothesises that Dante’s expression ‘dubbiosi disiri’ (‘hesitant desires’; *Inf.* V. 120) may also be an echo of the same passage of the *Tristan*, where Thomas, among the various categories of lovers, addresses the *desirus* (‘desirous’, v. 3128).

³³⁴ Rossi, ‘Dante e le *ambages*’, pp. 99-101.

³³⁵ Gardner, *The Arthurian Legend*, p. 131.

end of the thirteenth century, it appears in Thomas's *Tristan*, Renaut's *Lai d'Ignaur  *, Jakem  s's *Roman du ch  telain de Coucy et de la dame de Fayel* and in the anonymous *vida* of the troubadour Guilhem de Cabestaing.³³⁶ In view of this, even if Dante had a precise source for the first dream of the *Vita Nuova*, it would be difficult to identify it. On the other hand, Sayers suggests some episodes of Thomas's *Tristan* as the source of the contrapasso of *Inferno* V.³³⁷ In particular, he hypothesised that in developing the idea of the infernal storm tormenting the lustful, Dante drew on the episodes in which Thomas recounts the two lovers' crossing from Ireland to Cornwall and Iseult's sea voyage to Brittany to save Tristan's life. Both voyages are marked by changes in the sea conditions, which, according to Sayers, are 'intimately tied to the course of the love affair, contributing to its realization but also thwarting its final expression'.³³⁸ On the basis of this assumption and the presence of Tristan among the damned of the second circle, Sayers suggests that Dante drew from these literal and emotional sea changes in Thomas's *Tristan* the idea of the hellish storm, both physical and metaphorical, that torments the lustful. The main weakness of Sayers's hypothesis is that it does not offer a precise intertextual argument, and thus leads to arbitrary conclusions.

It is even more difficult to establish a relationship between the romances of Chr  tien de Troyes and the works of Dante. The most convincing study of Dante's reception of Chr  tien's works concerns the canso *D'Amors, qui m'a tolu a moi*, which, although it deals with the problem of courtly love and contains a reference to Tristan, has little to do with the Arthurian matter.³³⁹ On the other hand, studies of the relationship between Chr  tien's Arthurian romances and Dante's works have not yielded satisfactory results. Gardner highlighted a generic and unconvincing relationship between two sonnets of the *Vita Nuova*, *Piangete, amanti, poi che piange Amore* and *Morte villana di piet   nemica*, and the episode of the *Clig  s* in which people weep over the supposed death of F  nice.³⁴⁰ More recently, Franco Ferrucci carried out an interesting study on the presence in the *Commedia* of literary motifs characteristic of the Arthurian romances.³⁴¹ However, the relationships between the *Commedia* and Chr  tien's romances that Ferrucci highlights are, once again, extremely

³³⁶ On this literary motif, see Luciano Rossi, *Il cuore, mistico pasto d'amore: dal "Lai Guirun" al Decameron* (L'Aquila: Japadre, 1983).

³³⁷ William Sayers, 'Sea Changes in Thomas's *Roman de Tristan* and Dante's *Inferno*, Canto 5', *Romance Quarterly*, 51.1 (2004), 67-71.

³³⁸ Sayers, 'Sea Changes', p. 68.

³³⁹ See Giuliano Rossi, '«Merci» e «bone volentez»: un'ipotesi su Chr  tien e Dante', *Critica del testo*, 12. 2-3 (2009), 79-111.

³⁴⁰ Gardner, *The Arthurian Legend*, pp. 131-132.

³⁴¹ Franco Ferrucci, 'Dante e Chr  tien de Troyes: sublimazione classico-cristiana del romanzo cortese', *Lectura Dantis*, 13 (Fall 1993), 3-21.

vague and not supported by a precise intertextual analysis. In particular, the theme of the ‘hidden name’ of the protagonist or other characters, which Ferrucci associates with several passages from the *Commedia* and examines in relation to Chrétien’s *Lancelot*, *Yvain* and *Perceval*, is also present in romances that enjoyed greater success in Italy, such as the prose *Lancelot*. Even the expression ‘droite voie’ (‘straight path’), used in Chrétien’s *Lancelot* and *Yvain* and associated by Ferrucci with the ‘diritta via’ (‘straight path’) of *Inf.* I. 3, is extremely common in the Arthurian romances.³⁴² More detailed studies on this subject have been offered by Corrado Bologna and Karlheinz Stierle, who examine the possible reception of Chrétien’s *Lancelot* and *Perceval* by Dante.

Corrado Bologna hypothesises that in composing *Inferno* V, Dante contaminated and reworked several sources belonging to the genre of the Arthurian romance, including Chrétien de Troyes’s *Lancelot*.³⁴³ First, Bologna notes a lexical affinity between *Inferno* V and the episode in which Lancelot crosses a bridge in the shape of a sharp sword.³⁴⁴ In this episode, the pain that Lancelot feels as he crosses the bridge is alleviated by his goal, the liberation of Guinevere, who had previously been kidnapped by Meleagant. Chrétien makes it clear that it is Love that guides Lancelot on his adventure:

A la grant dolor con li sist
s’an passe outre et a gran destrece;
mains et genolz et piez se blece,
mes tot le rasoage et sainne
Amors qui le conduist et mainne;
si li estoit a sofrir dolz.³⁴⁵
(vv. 3116-3120)

In the way that suited him he crosses over very painfully and in great distress, wounding himself on hands, knees and feet. But Love, who guides and leads him on, gives him complete comfort and relief, so that all his suffering is pleasant to him.

According to Bologna, the verse ‘*Amors qui le conduist et mainne*’ (...) could be echoed in *Inferno* V, where Dante uses the verb ‘menare’ three times to refer to the hellish storm or

³⁴² See IV.3.

³⁴³ Corrado Bologna, ‘Galeotto fu il *Lancelot*. Dante lesse Chrétien de Troyes?’, in *Metafora medievale. Il «libro degli amici» di Mario Mancini*, ed. by Carlo Donà, Marco Infurna and Francesco Zambon (Rome: Carocci, 2011), pp. 49-80.

³⁴⁴ Chrétien de Troyes, *Lancelot ou le Chevalier de la charrette*, vv. 3097-3120.

³⁴⁵ For the text of Chrétien’s romances, see, once for all, Chrétien de Troyes, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. by Daniel Poirion (Paris: Gallimard, 1994). For the English translations of Chrétien’s romances, see, once for all, Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, trans. by D. D. Roy Owen (London: Dent, 1987), p. 226.

love that leads the lustful.³⁴⁶ However, he recognises that this verb also occurs with the same meaning in other Arthurian romances, such as Béroul's *Tristan* and the prose *Tristan*, which Paola Marconi and Michelangelo Picone, respectively, have suggested as possible sources.³⁴⁷ Secondly, Bologna hypothesises that some of the rhymes used by Dante in *Inferno* V may have been drawn from the episode in which Lancelot, believing Guinevere to be dead, expresses his desire to commit suicide:

Si ferai, mes que il me lest
cest laz antor ma gole *estraindre*,
ensi cuit bien la mort *destraindre*
tant que mal gré suen m'ocirra.
Morz qui onques ne desirra
se cez non qui de li n'ont cure
ne vialt venir, mes ma ceinture
la m'amanra trestote *prise*,
et des qu'ele iert an ma *justise*.
Donc fera ele mon talant.
(vv. 4280-4289)

Yes I shall, if only He will let me pull this noose tight round my throat: in that way I'm confident I can compel Death to slay me despite himself. Death, who has never coveted any but those who don't care for him, doesn't want to come, but my belt will bring him here as my prisoner; and one he's in my power, he 'll do as I wish.

According to Bologna, the two rhymes *estraindre* : *destraindre* (vv. 4281-4282) and *prise* : *justise* (vv. 4287-4288) are recalled by Dante through the series *strinse* : *vinse* (vv. 128; 132) and the anadiplosis *s'apprende* : *prese* (vv. 101; 104). This would happen in a passage where, as in Chrétien's *Lancelot*, the themes of love and death are closely linked.³⁴⁸ However, the stylistic comparison suggested by Bologna is far from precise, and the specific verses of *Inferno* V to which he refers to deal more with the theme of the origin of passion than with that of death. More interesting is the comparison between these verses and the episode of Guinevere and Lancelot's night of love.³⁴⁹ Later in the romance, Lancelot manages to reunite

³⁴⁶ *Inf.* V. 31-33; 42-43; 77-78. See Bologna, 'Galeotto fu il *Lancelot*', p. 66.

³⁴⁷ Picone, 'Dante e la tradizione arturiana', p. 15; Paola Marconi, '«Per quello amor che i mena»: *Inferno* V, 78 e il *Roman de Tristan* di Béroul', *L'Alighieri*, 20 (2002), 77-93. See also III. 3.

³⁴⁸ Bologna, 'Galeotto fu il *Lancelot*', pp. 71-72.

³⁴⁹ Bologna, 'Galeotto fu il *Lancelot*', pp. 74-78.

with Guinevere and spend a night with her. The love scene has a number of things in common with the words of Francesca in *Inferno* V:

Et la reïne li estant
ses bras ancontre, si l'anbrace,
estroit pres de son piz le lace,
si l'a lez li an son lit tret,
et le plus bel sanblant li fet
que ele onques feire li puet,
que d'*Amors* et del *cuer* li muet,
d'*Amors* vient qu'ele le conjot;
et s'ele a lui grant *amor* ot
et il cent mile tanz a li,
car a toz autres cuers failli
Amors avers qu'au suen ne fist;
mes an son cuer tote reprist
Amors, et fu si anterine
qu'an toz autres cers fu frarine.
(vv. 4662-4676)

The queen holds out her arms to him and embraces him, hugging him to her breast, then draws him into her bed beside her, showing him all the endearments of which she is capable, prompted by the love in her heart. The warmth of her welcome is motivated by love; and if he was very dear to her, his love for her was a hundred thousand times as great, for love in all other hearts was non-existent compared with that in his own: in his heart love was wholly rooted and so totally present that there was but a meagre supply for all other hearts.

Bologna stresses the numerous occurrences of the word *amor* in these verses and the driving role that love plays in the episode. This repetition would be recalled by the famous anaphora of *Inf.* V. 100-106 ('Amor [...] Amor [...] Amor'), in which Love is described as an absolute force that guides the lovers' decisions. He also notes that this episode, just like *Inferno* V, contains a kiss between Lancelot and Guinevere:³⁵⁰

Tant li est ses jeux dolz et buens,
et del *beisier*, et del sentir,

³⁵⁰ Bologna, 'Galeotto fu il *Lancelot*', pp. 75-77.

que il lor avint sanz mantir
une joie et une mervoille
tel c'onques ancor sa paroille
ne fu oïe ne seüe.
(vv. 4682-4687)

He finds her love-making so sweet and splendid as they kiss and fondle that they truly come to experience such joy and wonderment that its equal was never heard or known.

The similarities do not end there. Bologna also points out that Dante's phrase 'Francesca, i tuoi martiri / a lagrimar mi fanno tristo e pio' ('Francesca, your torments / make me weep for grief and pity'; *Inf.* V. 116-117) could be an echo of the words used by Chrétien to describe Lancelot's grief when he has to leave Guinevere in the morning:³⁵¹

Mez li jorz vient qui molt li grieve,
quant de lez s'amie se lieve.
Au lever fu il droiz *martirs*,
tant li fu griés li departirs,
car il i suefre grant *martire*.
(vv. 4695-4699)

But, to his deep regret, day comes and he rises from his beloved's side. When he did so he was a true martyr: so distressed was he at the parting that when it came he endured terrible martyrdom.

Bologna's essay has the merit of bringing to the attention of Dante scholars a text that further illustrates how the lexicon of *Inferno* V is completely imbued with words characteristic of Arthurian literature. However, it is difficult to agree with him when he states that this episode of Chrétien's *Lancelot* is the page that Paolo and Francesca were reading at the moment of their first kiss. To refute this assumption, it is not necessary to dwell on the complete lack of evidence for the circulation of Chrétien's *Lancelot* in thirteenth-century Italy, nor on Dante's references to the Arthurian romance as a prose genre: the texts themselves make it clear that the prose *Lancelot* is a much more appropriate source. The episode traditionally cited as the source of *Inferno* V is the one from the prose *Lancelot* in which Lancelot and Guinevere, just like Paolo and Francesca, exchange their first kiss, thus

³⁵¹ Bologna, 'Galeotto fu il *Lancelot*', pp. 78-79.

initiating their adulterous relationship.³⁵² By contrast, the kiss from Chrétien's romance has no particular relevance, but is merely part of a larger scene of love or sex. In addition, Francesca refers to the character of Galehaut and, by associating him with the book she read with Paolo, alludes to the role he played in facilitating the first kiss between the knight and the queen. This character, who is fundamental to the prose *Lancelot*, is completely absent from Chrétien's romance. Although the associations suggested by Bologna are often appropriate, Francesca's description of her first kiss with Paolo seems to follow closely the pages that precede the kiss between Lancelot and Guinevere in the prose *Lancelot*, where the author describes the physical effects of amorous passion on Lancelot.³⁵³ The fact that these pages particularly impressed Dante is confirmed by *Par.* XVI. 13-15, where Dante refers to the same episode from another perspective, that of the Lady of Malehaut, who is also present at the moment of the first kiss between Lancelot and Guinevere. All this is not to say that it is impossible that Dante could have read Chrétien's *Lancelot*, or that he necessarily used a single source: the prose *Lancelot*. But it is clear that this source, even if it were not unique, would in any case coincide with the book that Paolo and Francesca read.

The possible influence of Chrétien de Troyes's romances on the *Commedia* has also been explored by Karlheinz Stierle, who focuses on a possible relationship between *Inferno* I and the *Perceval*.³⁵⁴ In Chrétien's romance, Perceval sees the Grail procession during a banquet at the Fisher King's castle but does not ask who the Grail service is for. Later in the romance, he discovers that had he asked, the Fisher King would have been healed of his wound, which was also the cause of a curse that brought famine to his kingdom. After attending the banquet, Perceval falls asleep. When he wakes, it is dawn and he finds the castle completely empty, so he decides to leave. Shortly after he leaves, Perceval meets a young woman who he discovers is his cousin, and who reveals to him that his decision to leave home had caused his mother to die of grief. Perceval, who had stumbled upon Grail castle on his way back to visit his mother, now finds himself without a purpose and says:

Et des que ele est mise en terre,
que iroie jou avant querre?
Kar por rien nule n'i aloie
fors por li que veoir voloie;

³⁵² Micha VII, pp. 104-117.

³⁵³ See Daniela Delcorno Branca, 'Il «Roman de Lancelot» fra Dante e Petrarca', in *Tristano e Lancillotto*, pp. 143-154 (pp. 147-150).

³⁵⁴ Karlheinz Stierle, 'A te convien tenere altro viaggio. La *Commedia* e *Li contes del Graal* di Chrétien', in *Il grande mare del senso. Esplorazioni "ermenautiche" nella Commedia di Dante* (Rome: Aracne, 2014), pp. 371-407.

autre voie m'estuet tenir.

(vv. 3621-3625)

But since she's been buried, why should I go seeking any further? Because I was going that way for no other reason that I wanted to see her. I must take another road.

The 'autre voie' ('other road') is the one that will lead Perceval, after new revelatory encounters, to the realisation that he must find the Grail and unravel its mystery. According to Stierle, the expression 'Autre voie m'estuet tenir' ('I must take another road') may be echoed in *Inf.* I. 91, where Virgil says to the lost pilgrim: 'A te convien tenere altro viaggio' ('It is another path that you must follow').³⁵⁵ The comparison is relevant: the pilgrim has just failed to climb the hill, the she-wolf is chasing him back into the dark forest, he is therefore lost and does not know what to do, just like Perceval after leaving the Grail castle. His encounter with Virgil, like Perceval's with his cousin, is the one that makes him to realise that he must begin a different journey, which will turn out to be a journey through the otherworld. However, the source of Dante's verse is far from certain. As Lino Pertile points out, similar sentences can be found in several ancient and medieval texts, and the context in which Virgil pronounces it is analogous, for example, to the situation in which Circe tells Ulysses that he must undertake an otherworldly journey in the *Odyssey*.³⁵⁶

Stierle also draws an analogy between the episode in which Perceval leaves his mother's house by venturing into the 'forest obscure' ('dark forest', v. 75) and Dante's bewilderment in the 'selva oscura' ('dark wood') in *Inf.* I. 2. He offers an interpretation of the 'forest obscure' as a metaphor for individual disorientation, an allegorical meaning it would share with Dante's forest. Accordingly, both protagonists would have a moment of bewilderment in a dark forest at the beginning of their respective stories, which would be an allegory of ontological abandonment. However, this allegorical interpretation, which works perfectly for Dante's *selva*, does not apply to Perceval's *forest*:

Et cil ceingle de la reorte
son chaceor par mi la crope,
et cil s'an va qui pas ne çope,
einz l'an porte grant aleüre

³⁵⁵ See Stierle, 'A te convien tenere altro viaggio', pp. 377-380.

³⁵⁶ Lino Pertile, 'L'altro viaggio di Dante e Ulisse', *Dante*, 4 (2007), 25-30. Dante's source for this phrase from the *Odyssey* would obviously not be the Greek text, but a Latin translation which Pertile, by his own admission, was unable to identify. See also Lino Pertile, 'Inferno XXVI: morte di Ulisse e rovina dell'*Odissea*?', *Letteratura italiana antica*, 20 (2019), 171-189.

par mi la grant forest obscure;
et chevalcha des le matin
tant que li jorz vint a declin.
(vv. 626-632)

Then he lashes his hunter on the rump with his switch; and it sets off, by no means
stumbling but bearing him at a great pace through the great, dark forest. From that
morning he rode on until the day drew to its close.

There are no elements in Chrétien's romance that would allow an allegorical interpretation of the episode: Perceval is not lost in the wilderness, nor is he worried or frightened; his attitude is typical of a young man leaving his mother's house for the first time. Later in the romance he discovers that his departure caused his mother's death, but at the moment he ventures into the forest he is still unaware of this. Although 'obscure', the forest here is the traditional site of the *entrée en aventure* ('entry into adventure'), as it often is in the Arthurian romances, rather than an allegory of individual bewilderment.³⁵⁷ The other analogies identified by Stierle, while thematically appropriate, are rather vague. The most interesting is the one, already noted by Pio Rajna, between the Grail cortege in *Perceval* and the allegorical procession in *Purgatorio* XXIX, which indeed show some common elements.³⁵⁸ None of them, however, is sufficiently clear to allow us to conclude that Dante read Chrétien's romance.

In conclusion, the problem of Dante's reception of the Arthurian verse romances is destined to remain open. The possible references to such romances that have been identified in Dante's works are often vague, and the almost total absence of an Italian manuscript tradition makes it difficult to establish whether a particular text circulated in the contexts in which he lived. The verse romance he is most likely to have known is Thomas's *Tristan*, some episodes of which were quoted or rewritten in late thirteenth-century Tuscan literature, such as the *Mare Amoro* and the *Novellino*.³⁵⁹ Moreover, Brugnolo's study of the relationship between Thomas's *Tristan* and the canzone *La dispietata mente* is undoubtedly the one that provides the most solid arguments in favour of the influence of Arthurian verse romances in Dante's works. On the other hand, the references to the romances of Chrétien de Troyes in Dante's works are extremely uncertain: the studies by Bologna and Stierle,

³⁵⁷ See IV. 3.

³⁵⁸ Rajna, 'Dante e i romanzi della Tavola Rotonda', p. 246; Stierle, 'A te convien tenere altro viaggio', pp. 388-402.

³⁵⁹ See I. 2.

while offering interesting comparisons from a thematic point of view, are less convincing when it comes to arguing for Dante's use of specific episodes from the *Lancelot* and the *Perceval*. These romances do not seem to have been particularly successful in Italy. Although we know that the *Perceval* had some circulation (it is quoted by Guittone d'Arezzo and Bartolomeo Zorzi between the 1260s and 1270s) traces of the *Lancelot* are completely absent from the Italian peninsula.³⁶⁰ The limited success in Italy of the works of Chrétien or Thomas, at least in comparison with prose romances, is confirmed both by Dante's statements on romance as a prose genre in *De vulgari eloquentia* I. x and *Purgatorio* XXVI and by quotations from Arthurian romances in his works, which, as we shall see, always refer to prose texts. These arguments do not allow us to exclude the possibility that Dante read some of the Arthurian romances in verse, but they do require scholars to focus on the texts that he was most likely to have known: the anonymous prose romances of the thirteenth century.

III. 3 The Tristan matter in Dante's works

The earliest reference to the Matter of Britain in Dante's literary production can be found in the sonnet *Guido, i' vorrei che tu e Lapo ed io*, a poem that precedes the *Vita Nuova* and dates back to the 1280s. The sonnet, which resembles an Occitan *plazer*, is addressed to Guido Cavalcanti. Dante hopes that a good wizard will put him, Guido, their friend Lapo and their respective ladies on a magical ship that will sail out to sea without a pilot, following only the will of the sailors. On this ship, the three friends and their ladies will be able to spend time together and talk about love:

Guido, i' vorrei che tu e Lapo ed io
fossimo presi per *incantamento*,
e messi in *un vassel ch'ad ogni vento*
per mare andasse al voler vostro e mio,

sì che fortuna od altro tempo rio
non ci potesse dare impedimento,
anzi, vivendo sempre in talento,
di stare insieme crescesse 'l disio.

³⁶⁰ See, again, I. 2.

E monna Vanna e monna Lagia poi
con quella ch'è sul numer de le trenta
con noi ponesse il *buono incantatore*:

e quivi ragionar sempre d'amore,
e ciascuna di lor fosse contenta,
sì come i' credo che saremmo noi.

(vv. 1-14)

Guido, I wish that you and Lapo and I / could be taken by magic and placed / in a boat
that, whatever the wind, / was carried over the sea wherever you and I / chose to go,
unhindered by tempest / or any foul weather -our desire to be / together in fact always
increasing, / living as we would in unceasing harmony. / And with this, that the good
wizard / should give us for company lady Vanna / and lady Lagia and her who stands
on / number thirty, there to talk always of love; / and that each of them should be happy,
/ as I'm sure we would be.

Since the time of Rajna's studies, scholars have generally agreed that Dante's description of the magical ship, as well as his reference to the 'buono incantatore' ('good wizard'), suggest that the poet may have had in mind a specific episode of the prose *Tristan*: that of the 'nef de joie' (Lös 323-335). The 'nef de joie' ('ship of joy') is a magical ship originally created by Merlin for the daughter of the king of Northumberland. The ship moves under sail and without a pilot, just like the *vasello* ('ship') in which Dante would like to sail with Guido, Lapo and their respective ladies. Tristan and Iseult use the ship to travel from Cornwall to the Kingdom of Logres, experiencing adventures and moments of joy along the way.³⁶¹ This episode of the prose *Tristan* does not belong to the sections of the romance that were most successful in Italy. Among the manuscripts copied or assembled in Italy in Dante's time, it is found in partial form in M (Lös 331-335) and in complete but fragmentary form in fr. 1434, a codex copied in France and assembled in Italy, perhaps in Umbria, between the late thirteenth and the early fourteenth centuries.³⁶² Although it is plausible that Dante read this episode of the prose *Tristan*, we are not sure that it was the source of his sonnet, since the

³⁶¹ See Rajna 'Dante e i romanzi della Tavola Rotonda', pp. 241-243. See also Dante Alighieri, *Rime*, ed. by Gianfranco Contini (Turin: Einaudi, 1995), p. 35.

³⁶² On the manuscripts of the prose *Tristan* and the episodes of this romance that were most successful in Italy, see I. 3. On the manuscript fr. 1434, see also Zanni, 'Il *Tristan en prose* tra Francia e Italia', pp. 466-475.

‘nef de joie’ is not the only magic ship in Old French Arthurian literature, nor in Tuscan poetry.³⁶³

A similar vessel is found in the Tuscan poem *Mare amoroso*, probably written before Dante’s sonnet. In this poem, the anonymous author expresses his wish to make his lady drink a love potion that would make her fall in love with him, and then to embark with her on a magical ship that would sail over land and sea without oars or sails, similar to the one that Merlin gave to the lady of Avalon:

E se potesse avere una barchetta,
tal com’ fu quella che donò Merlino
a la valente donna d’Avalona,
ch’andassi senza remi e senza vela
altressì ben per terra com’ per aqua;
e io sapessi fare una bevanda
tal chente fu quella che bevve Tristaino e Isotta,
a bere ve’n daria celatamente una fiata
per far lo vostro cuor d’una sentenza
e d’un volere col mio intendimento;
[...]
poi intrerei con voi in quella barchetta
e mai non finirei d’andar per mare,
infin ch’i’ mi vedrei oltre quel braccio
che fie chiamato il braccio di Saufi per tutta gente,
c’ha scritto in su la man: «Nimo ci passi»,
per ciò che di qua mai non torna chi di là passa;
poi mi starei sicur senza rancura
in gioco ed in sollazzo disiato.³⁶⁴
(vv. 212-221; 226-233)

And if I could have a small boat, such as was that which Merlin gave to the noble lady of Avalon, that should go without oars and without sail as well over land as over water; and if I could make a potion such as was that which Tristan and Iseult drank, I would give it to you secretly to drink just once, to have your heart of one feeling and one wish with my desire [...] Then I would enter that boat with you, and never end travelling the see until I saw myself beyond that strait which shall be called the Strait of Saufi by all

³⁶³ On the literary theme of the magic ship, see Michelangelo Picone, ‘La nave magica’, in *Percorsi della lirica duecentesca* (Fiesole: Cadmo, 2003), pp. 145-165.

³⁶⁴ *Poeti del Duecento*, ed. by Contini, I, p. 495.

people, for it has written thereon: “Let none pass here”, for he who passes never thence returns. Then should I stay safe without wrath in sport and desired joy.³⁶⁵

The source of this ship has been identified in the *Prophecies de Merlin*, a text written in Venice between 1272 and 1279 by an unknown author referring to himself by the pseudonym Maistre Richart d’Irlande.³⁶⁶ The ‘donna d’Avalona’ (‘lady of Avalon’) would be Aglentine, who arrives at Arthur’s court in a magical boat made by Merlin that can sail both land and sea.³⁶⁷ However, the author of the poem also seems to have been familiar with the prose *Tristan*, from which he may have taken both the reference to the love philtre and the idea of two lovers travelling by sea in a magical ship, which is absent from the *Prophecies*. In any case, the source of Dante’s sonnet remains uncertain. The motif of the amorous voyage in a magical ship, associated with Merlin, could in fact be derived from both the prose *Tristan* and the *Mare Amoro*so.

More solid evidence of Dante’s knowledge of the prose *Tristan* can be found in *Inferno* V. In the first half of the canto, the description of the contrapasso of the lustful, a violent storm that overwhelms the souls and drags them incessantly, immediately reveals Dante’s will to enter into dialogue with the literary tradition of the Arthurian romance:

La bufera infernal, che mai non resta,
mena li spirti con la sua rapina;
voltando e percotendo li molesta.

Quando giungon davanti a la ruina,
quivi le strida, il compianto, il lamento;
bestemmian quivi la virtù divina.

Intesi ch’a così fatto tormento
enno dannati i peccator carnali,
che la ragion sommettono al talento.

E come li stornei ne portan l’ali
nel freddo tempo, a schiera larga e piena,
così quel fiato li spiriti mali

³⁶⁵ Gardner, *The Arthurian Legend*, p. 104.

³⁶⁶ On the *Prophecies de Merlin*, see: Bogdanow and Trachsler, ‘Rewriting prose romance’, pp. 352-357.

³⁶⁷ Gardner, *The Arthurian Legend*, pp. 104-106.

di qua, di là, di giù, di sù li mena;
nulla speranza li conforta mai,
non che di posa, ma di minor pena.

(*Inf.* V. 28-45)

I reached a place mute of all light, / which bellows as the sea in tempest / tossed by conflicting winds. / The hellish squall, which never rests, / sweeps spirits in its headlong rush, / tormenting, whirls and strikes them. / Caught in that path of violence, / they shriek, weep, and lament. / Then how they curse the power of God! / I understood that to such torment / the carnal sinners are condemned, / they who make reason subject to desire. / As, in cold weather, the wings of starlings / bear them up in wide, dense flocks, / so does that blast propel the wicked spirits. / Here and there, down and up, it drives them. / Never are they comforted by hope / of rest or even lesser punishment.

Dante states that the hellish storm ‘mena li spirti con la sua rapina’ (‘sweeps spirits in its headlong rush’). In attempting to explain the motive of the contrapasso that Dante associates with the lustful, scholars have rightly emphasised that the infernal storm represents in a concrete way the metaphorical whirlwind of passions that dominated these sinners during their lives. Picone, however, have pointed out that Dante’s use of the verb *menare* may suggest a deeper meaning for this infernal punishment and provide a key to a full understanding of the whole canto.³⁶⁸ The verb *menare*, which occurs on several occasions within the canto,³⁶⁹ is a word that Arthurian romances mainly use in relation to chivalric adventures. Picone mentions an example from the *Tristan en prose*, in which its author writes that knights-errant ‘ne quierent oncques droit chemin, ains vont tout ades ainsi comme adventure les *maine*’ (‘never seek a straight path, but go on as adventure drags them’).³⁷⁰ This phrase bears witness to the traditional notion according to which Arthurian knights abandon themselves to adventure and are thus guided by chance or irrational passions.

³⁶⁸ The whole reflection on the verb *menare* is mainly drawn from Picone, ‘Dante e la tradizione arturiana’, pp. 14-16. The same topic is also treated in: Picone, ‘Poetic Discourse and Courtly Love’; Picone, ‘«Le donne e cavalier»’. All of these studies have been taken into consideration.

³⁶⁹ *Inf.* V. 31-33: ‘La bufera infernal, che mai non resta / mena li spirti con la sua rapina; / voltando e percotendo li molesta’ (‘The hellish squall, which never rests, / sweeps spirits in its headlong rush, / tormenting, whirls and strikes them’); *Inf.* V. 42-43: ‘così quel fiato li spiriti mali / di qua, di là, di giù, di su, li mena’ (‘so does that blast propel the wicked spirits. / Here and there, down and up, it drives them’); *Inf.* V. 77-78: ‘[...] e tu allor li priega / per quello amor che i mena, ed ei verranno’ (‘if you entreat them by the love / that leads them, they will come’); *Inf.* V. 113-114: ‘quanti dolci pensier, quanto disio / menò costoro al doloroso passo’ (‘how many sweet thoughts, what great desire, / have brought them to this woeful pass!’). Moreover, in *Inf.* XI, 70-71, Dante mentions the lustful through the periphrasis ‘quei [...] / che mena il vento’ (‘those the wind drives’). For these references, see Picone, ‘Dante e la tradizione arturiana’, pp. 14-15.

³⁷⁰ The translation is mine. See Picone, ‘Dante e la tradizione arturiana’, p. 15.

Furthermore, Picone adds that the verb *mener* was also associated with the passion of love, and discusses another episode from the prose *Tristan*, in which Guinevere writes about love in a letter to Iseult (Lös. 60):

[...] d'amors, m'est il avis, ne puet l'en mie toz jorz joie avoir, enz devons savoir certainement que puis qu'amors est chose humene, et des choses humenes est ausi com de la roe de Fortune qui l'ome *moine* a sa volenté, ore desus, ores dejus, or en joie, or en corroz; et por ce dient li plusor que amors est humene chose, qu'ele est muable ausi come li venz.

(Curtis, II, p. 173)

[...] from love, it appears to me, we cannot always expect to have joy, but we should know for certain that since love is a human condition, human conditions are as unstable as the Wheel of Fortune which leads men where it wishes, now to the top, now to the bottom, now to joy, now to misery. That is why many people say that love is a human condition as changeable as the wind.

This text, which describes love as a human feeling controlled entirely by Fortune, and thus 'as changeable as the wind', would be a perfect source for the contrapasso depicted in *Inferno* V. Dante's verses, which mention that the wind 'di qua, di là, di giù, di su li mena' ('Here and there, down and up, it drives them'; *Inf.* V. 43), seem to directly recall the idea of Fortune 'qui l'ome *moine* a sa volenté, or desus, or dejus' ('which leads men where it wishes, now to the top, now to the bottom'). Even the phrase where Guinevere says that love is 'muable ausi come li venz' ('as changeable as the wind') seems to anticipate the infernal storm that torments the lustful. In general, the idea of love that emerges in Guinevere's words is entirely in line with the turbulent passion that Dante condemns in *Inferno* V, in which the lustful are depicted as being led by a whirlwind of passions, as having subordinated reason to desire, and therefore as having allowed feelings to dominate them completely. As I will go on to explain, this idea of love as a tyrannical and uncontrollable passion also emerges in the words of Francesca, a character accurately described as a reader of Arthurian romances³⁷¹. Guinevere's letter is part of one of the most popular sections of the romance in Italy, which deals with Tristan's youth and the first part of his love story with Iseult (Lös. 19-74a). The text of the letter is found in three Tuscan manuscripts dating from before 1300: W and M¹, which belong to the Pisan-Genoese group, and fr. 12599, often associated with the Pisan

³⁷¹ On the characterisation of Francesca as a reader of romances, see Elena Lombardi, 'Francesca lettrice di romanzi e il "punto" di *Inferno* V', *L'Alighieri*, 43 (2014), 19-39.

area. It is also found in a north-eastern manuscript dating from the early decades of the 1300s: BNF fr. 94.³⁷² Guinevere's letter to Iseult is thus a text that enjoyed some success in the Italian tradition of the prose *Tristan* and that Dante could have read. In light of this, the textual comparison proposed by Picone is particularly interesting, as it provides further evidence of Dante's knowledge of the prose *Tristan* and suggests that this text may have played an important role in the composition of the canto.

This impression is confirmed by the verses that immediately follow the ones we have just analysed. Some damned souls are dragged by the infernal storm and compared by Dante to a group of cranes which sings its *lai* as it forms a long line in the sky:

E come i gru van cantando lor lai,
faccendo in aere di sé lunga riga,
così vid'io venir, traendo guai,

ombre portate da la detta briga;
per ch'ì' dissi: "Maestro, chi son quelle
genti che l'aura nera sì gastiga?".

(*Inf.* V. 46-51).

Just as cranes chant their mournful songs, / making a long line in the air, / thus I saw
approach, heaving plaintive sighs, / shades lifted on that turbulence, / so that I said:
"Master, who are these / whom the black air lashes?".

The word *lai*, which can be interpreted as 'lament' or 'mournful song', inevitably recalls, as Giovanni Boccaccio pointed out, the homonymous narrative poems typical of medieval French literature. Boccaccio comments on the term *lai* as follows: 'Cioè lor versi. Ed è questo vocabolo preso, cioè *lai*, dal parlar francesco, nel quale si chiamano "lai" certi versi in forma di lamentazione nel lor volgare composti' ('That is, their verses. And this word *lai* comes from the French language, in which certain verses in the form of lamentations, written in their vernacular, are called "lai"').³⁷³ As Francesco Ciabattini notes, 'the word *lai* in old Italian indicated first and foremost the lyric genre for music, as it does in the French language of the Arthurian Romances. It was only after Dante's time that it came to be employed

³⁷² For these manuscripts and the sections of the *Tristan* prose that were most successful in Italy, see I. 3.

³⁷³ Giovanni Boccaccio (1373-75). On the word *lai* in *Inferno* V, see: Bruno Basile, 'Lai', in *Enciclopedia Dantesca*; Picone, '«Le donne e' cavalier»', p. 26.

primarily as “wailing” or “lament””.³⁷⁴ Hence, Dante compares the laments of the lustful to the Old French *lais*, which often recounted dramatic love stories or adventure tales whose protagonists, such as Tristan and Iseult, generally originated in the Matter of Britain. During Dante’s lifetime, the most widespread *lais* in Italy were probably those contained in the prose *Tristan*.³⁷⁵ In this work, Tristan and Iseult are represented as singers of *lais* and the narrative prose is frequently interrupted by poetic texts sung by them or by other minor characters.³⁷⁶ The fact that in Dante’s Italy the *lais* were closely linked to the Tristan matter is confirmed by the Tuscan poem *L’Intelligenza*, written around 1300:

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Quiv’ era una donzella ch’organava
ismisurat’ e dolzi melodie
co’ le squillanti boci che ssonava,
angelicali, dilettose e pie.
Audi’ sonar d’un’arpa e smisurava
cantand’ u’llai onde Tristan morie.

There was a damsel who was forming endless sweet melodies with the ringing words
that she sang, angelical, delightful, tender; I heard a harp sound with free measure, as
she sang a lay of how Tristan died.³⁷⁷

It is not surprising, then, that Tristan himself is one of the many characters in the crowd of souls that Dante compares to cranes singing their *lai*:

“La prima di color di cui novelle
tu vuo’ saper”, mi disse quelli allotta,
“fu imperadrice di molte favelle.

A vizio di lussuria fu sì rotta,

³⁷⁴ Francesco Ciabattini, *Dante’s Journey to Polyphony* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), p. 87.

³⁷⁵ Marie de France’s *Chevrefoil*, whose protagonists are Tristan and Iseult, is the most famous of the *lais*. However, there is no evidence of its circulation in medieval Italy. By contrast, the prose *Tristan* had an extensive circulation (see I. 3) and many Italian manuscripts of this work include some *lais*. See Rosanna Brusegan, ‘Les insertions lyriques dans les Tristans italiens. Le lai en Italie au Moyen Age’, in *Des Tristan en vers au Tristan en prose. Hommage à Emmanuèle Baumgartner*, ed. by Laurence Harf-Lancner and others (Paris: Champion, 2009), pp. 63-83.

³⁷⁶ Among the *lais* that Tristan and Iseult sing as characters of romances, it is worth mentioning both those included in the *Tristan en prose* and the *Lai Guirun*, namely, the story of the heart being eaten included in Thomas’s *Tristan*. On the *Lai Guirun*, see III. 2.

³⁷⁷ Gardner, *The Arthurian Legend*, p. 110.

che libito fé licito in sua legge,
per tòrre il biasmo in che era condotta.

Ell'è Semiramìs, di cui si legge
che succedette a Nino e fu sua sposa:
tenne la terra che 'l Soldan corregge.

L'altra è colei che s'ancise amorosa,
e ruppe fede al cener di Sicheo;
poi è Cleopatràs lussuriosa.

Elena vedi, per cui tanto reo
tempo si volse, e vedi 'l grande Achille,
che con amore al fine combatteo.

Vedi Parìs, *Tristano*"; e più di mille
ombre mostrommi e nominommi a dito,
ch'amor di nostra vita dipartille.

Poscia ch'io ebbi 'l mio dottore udito
nomar le donne antiche e ' cavalieri,
pietà mi giunse, e fui quasi smarrito.

(*Inf.* V. 52-72)

“The first of them about whom / you would hear”, he then replied, / “was empress over many tongues. / “She was so given to the vice of lechery / she made lust licit in her law / to take away the blame she had incurred. / She is Semiramis, of whom we read / that she, once Ninus’ wife, succeeded him. / She held way in the land the Sultan rules. / Here is she who broke faith with the ashes / of Sichaeus and slew herself for love. / The next is wanton Cleopatra. / See Helen, for whose sake so many years / of ill rolled past. And see the great Achilles, / who battled, at the last, with love. / See Paris, Tristan”, and he showed me more / than a thousand shades, naming as he pointed, / whom love had parted from our life. / When I heard my teacher name the ladies / and the knights of old, pity overcame me / and I almost lost my senses.

Even the list of ancient ladies and knights damned for their lust, which closes the first half of the canto and preludes the conversation with Francesca, seems to have been

influenced by Old French literature. Renato Poggioli and Michelangelo Picone suggest that this list, although made up of characters from the classical tradition, with the exception of Tristan, should be interpreted in relation to the romance tradition, at least as far as the male characters are concerned. According to Poggioli, while the characterization of the ‘*donne antiche*’ (‘ancient ladies’, v. 71) is primarily derived from the classical tradition, and, above all, from Virgil’s *Aeneid* and Orosius’s *Historiae adversus paganos*, the ‘*cavalieri*’ (‘knights’, v. 71), including Paris and Achilles, are depicted ‘in the light of the medieval interpretation of their legends’.³⁷⁸ On the other hand, Picone states that the order in which Dante mentions these characters recalls the order used in the *De vulgari eloquentia* to classify prose literature in *langue d’oïl*.³⁷⁹ More specifically, Dante begins with a character that could be considered biblical (Semiramis), continues with some protagonists of Roman (Dido, Cleopatra) and Trojan (Helen, Achilles, Paris) history, and concludes with an Arthurian knight (Tristan)³⁸⁰. Since the link between Semiramis and the biblical tradition is tenuous, it would be more logical to associate all the characters, except Tristan, with the entire phrase that Dante uses in the *De vulgari eloquentia*: ‘*Biblia cum Troianorum Romanorumque gestibus compilata*’ (‘the Bible compiled with the deeds of the Trojans and the Romans’; *DVE* I. x. 2), which alludes to Old French compilations of ancient history, such as the *Histoire ancienne jusqu’à César* and, perhaps, *Li Fet des Romains*.³⁸¹ In light of this tradition, the *donne antiche* that Dante mentions could also be interpreted in relation to courtly romance. By contrast, Tristan would represent the other Old French narrative genre mentioned by Dante in *DVE* I. x. 2: the ‘*Arturi regis ambages pulcerrime*’ (‘the beautiful adventures of King Arthur’).

We have already seen how lists of exemplary characters, in which ladies and knights from the Arthurian world are flanked by those from classical antiquity or the Bible, are common in early Italian literature. This happens both when classical or Arthurian characters are cited as models of particular virtues or qualities: Helen and Iseult for beauty, Achilles, Lancelot and Tristan for valour, and when they appear in lists of exemplary lovers.³⁸² We have also pointed out that in these lists the heroes and heroines of the Matter of Brittany are perceived as historical figures on a par with those of classical literature or the Biblical tradition.³⁸³ Dante’s list of the ‘ancient ladies’ and ‘knights’ in *Inferno* V is perfectly in line with this

³⁷⁸ Renato Poggioli ‘Tragedy or Romance? A Reading of the Paolo and Francesca Episode in Dante’s *Inferno*’, *PMLA*, 72.3 (1957), 313-358 (pp. 341-344).

³⁷⁹ See III. 1.

³⁸⁰ Picone, ‘«Le donne e’ cavalieri»’, pp. 26-28.

³⁸¹ See: III. 1; Rossi, ‘Dante e le *ambages*’, pp. 71-72.

³⁸² See I. 3 and II. 2.

³⁸³ See III. 1.

tendency. It is interesting to note that it includes at least one lover from each of the couples mentioned in stanzas 71-72 of the Tuscan poem *L'Intelligenza*:

71

[...]

Quiv' è *chi per amor portò mai pena*,
quiv' è *Parigi* co la bell'*Alena*,
e chi mai 'nnamorò per tempo o tardo.

72

La bella *Pollisena* v'è piagente
quand'*Accillesse* la prese ad amare;
e la regina *Didon* v'è piangente
quand'*Eneas* si partìo per mare,
che d'una spada si fedio nel ventre
quando le vele li vide collare;
e la bell'*Isaotta* e 'l buon *Tristano*,
sì come li sorprese est'*Amor vano*
che molti regni ha già fatti disfare.

Here are those who have ever longed for love, here is Paris with fair Helen, and those who have ever fallen in love when young or old. There is the fair Polyxena, who was weeping when Achilles began to love her; there is Queen Dido, who wept when she saw Aeneas setting sail, to the point of stabbing herself in the belly with a sword when she saw him hoisting the sails of the ship; and there is the fair Iseult and the good Tristan, at the moment when they were surprised by the vain love that has already brought down many kingdoms.³⁸⁴

Dante lists a number of ladies and knights from the classical and Biblical tradition 'ch' amor di nostra vita dipartille' ('whom love had parted from our life'; *Inf.* V. 69). Similarly, the author of *L'Intelligenza* provides a list of 'chi per amor portò mai pena' ('those who suffered for love'). Among the characters cited in *L'Intelligenza* 71-72, Dante mentions Dido, Helen, Achilles, Paris and Tristan. The absence of Aeneas and Polyxena is clearly due to the fact that they were not guilty of the sin of lust and did not die because of love. On the other hand, the exclusion of Iseult is surprising, especially when we consider that Tristan is included in

³⁸⁴ The translation is mine.

the list and that their love story seems to have shaped Dante's depiction of the circle of the lustful.³⁸⁵ Another aspect common to both texts is the tendency to establish a relationship between the figures of ancient history and those of the Matter of Britain in relation to a particular theme: 'the interdependency of unlawful love and political destruction'.³⁸⁶ Since there is no evidence that Dante was familiar with *L'Intelligenza*, it is possible that the two texts drew inspiration for these lists from a common source: Bohort's rebuke of Guinevere in the *Mort Artu*, a romance known to both authors.³⁸⁷ In this episode, Bohort warns Guinevere of the possible nefarious consequences of her adulterous relationship with Lancelot, citing some historical examples: the love between Helen and Paris and that between Tristan and Iseult. The author of *L'Intelligenza* explicitly speaks of 'Amor vano / che molti regni ha già fatti disfare' ('vain love that has caused many kingdoms to be destroyed'; st. 72) and, in the last verse of stanza 73, mentions the destruction of Troy: 'quando fu Troia e 'l paese distrutto' ('When Troy and its land were destroyed'). According to Franziska Meier, Dante's interest in this theme is confirmed both by the reference to Helen's guilt – i.e. the Trojan War³⁸⁸ – and by the decision to associate Paris and Tristan, two characters who damaged their kingdoms because of their *fol'amor*.³⁸⁹

The list of ancient ladies and knights who died for love, ending with Tristan's name, is a prelude to the most 'Tristanian' part of the canto: Dante's encounter with Francesca. Many scholars, starting with Francesco Torraca, have pointed out that, despite the reference to the *Lancelot*, the story of Paolo and Francesca is actually modelled on that of Tristan and Iseult.³⁹⁰ Both stories deal with the theme of adulterous love, betrayal, and revenge within the same family unit. As Tristan is the nephew of Iseult's husband, Paolo is the brother of Francesca's husband, and both adulterous couples suffer the revenge of the betrayed husbands: Marco and Gianciotto respectively. While the similarities between these events may be pure coincidence, the way in which the author of the prose *Tristan* and Dante recount them does not seem to be. Francesca's account of the day she and Paolo first kissed is likely

³⁸⁵ On the exclusion of Iseult from this list, see Eduard Vilella, 'Not even in hell. Dante and Isolt', in *Women in Hell. Francesca da Rimini & Friends Between Sin, Virtue, and Heroism* (Rimini: Romagna Arte e Storia, 2013), pp. 43-57.

³⁸⁶ Franziska Meier, 'The Matter of Britain and Rome in early fourteenth-century Tuscany. Reflections on Dante's *Inferno* V and the anonymous poem *L'Intelligenza*', in *Réécriture und Rezeption. Wandlungen des Artusromans*, ed. by Cora Dietl, Christoph Schanze and Friedrich Wolfzettel (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), pp. 71-87 (p. 78).

³⁸⁷ See II. 2 and IV. 2.

³⁸⁸ See *Inf.* V. 64-65: 'Elena vedi, per cui tanto reo / tempo si volse [...]' ('See Helen, for whose sake so many years / of ill rolled past').

³⁸⁹ Meier, 'The Matter of Britain and Rome', pp. 77-78.

³⁹⁰ See: Francesco Torraca, 'La Divina Commedia di Dante Alighieri con commento del prof. Giacomo Poletto', *Bullettino della Società Dantesca Italiana, Nuova Serie*, 2.9 (1895), 129-157 (pp. 137-139); Rajna, 'Dante e i romanzi della Tavola Rotonda', pp. 237-240; D'Arco Silvio Avalle, "... de fole amor", in *Modelli semiologici*, pp. 97-121; Vilella, 'Not even in hell', pp. 47-57; Rossi, 'Dante e le *ambages*', pp. 94-102.

reminiscent of the episode in which Tristan and Iseult fall in love in the prose *Tristan*.³⁹¹ Tristan accompanies Iseult from Ireland to Cornwall, where she will meet her future husband: King Mark, Tristan's uncle. Before leaving Ireland, Iseult's mother had given Governal and Brangain, Tristan's guardian and Iseult's handmaid respectively, a love potion to be drunk by the two future grooms on their wedding night. However, during the sea voyage, Governal and Brangain accidentally make Tristan and Iseult drink the philtre and they fall in love. Tristan and Iseult drink it on the third day of the voyage, while they are playing chess in the ship's cabin:

Trois jorz demoreient en mer, lié et joiant del bon tens que Diex lor avoit envoié. *Au tierz jor avint bien entor hore de midi que Tristanz jooit aus eschés avec Yselt [...].* Tristanz, qui auques avoit chaut, demande a boire Governal et Brangain. Et il lor avint qu'il troverent le boire amorox dont il ne se prenoient garde, car leanz avoit plusors vesselemez d'argent, par quoi il furent deceü a cele foiz. Governal prent le vessel ne nel regarde mie, et Brangain prent la cope d'or et s'en vet devant Tristan. Governal verse et Brangain li done [...]. Quant il a beü, il comande que l'en doint le vin a Yselt, et l'en li done, et ele boit.

(Curtis, II, p. 65)

They remained at sea for three days, happy and joyous at the fine weather which God had sent them. On the third day round about noon Tristan was playing chess with Iseult [...]. Tristan, who was feeling the heat, asked Governal and Brangain for a drink, and it so happened that they chanced upon the love potion, without however noticing what it was; there were so many other silver vessels standing around that they were deceived at that point. Governal picked up the vessel without looking at it, and Brangain took the gold goblet and brought it to Tristan. Governal poured it out and Brangain handed it to him [...]. When he had finished it, he asked them to give some to Iseult, which they did, and she drank it.

After drinking the philtre, Tristan and Iseult immediately fall in love. Both are consumed by thoughts of love for each other and cannot think of anything else, until each becomes aware of the other's love. After a long series of glances, Tristan and Iseult reveal their mutual feelings. Knowing that they are alone in the room and that no one will disturb them, they have sex for the first time:

³⁹¹ See: Rajna, 'Dante e i romanzi della Tavola Rotonda', pp. 238-240; Giorgio Inglese, 'Inferno V. «Nessun maggior dolore...»', in *Scritti su Dante* (Rome: Carocci, 2021), pp. 113-127 (pp. 123-127).

Maintenant qu'il ont beü li uns regarde l'autre, et sont ausi com tuit esbahi. Or pensent a autre chose qu'il ne pensoient devant. Tristanz pense a Yselt, et Yselt a Tristanz. [...] Et ele regarde Tristan, et Tristanz li; et tant se regardent en tele maniere que li uns conoist de l'autre la volenté et la pensee. Tristanz conoist que Yselt l'aime de tot son cuer; Ysolte conoist que Tristanz l'aime. [...] Tristanz regarde la hautesce d'Yselt, si en esprent et alume tant qu'il ne desire nule chose fors Yselt, et Yselt desire riens fors Tristan. Ensi s'acordent a ceste chose. Tot est passé; celer n'i vaut riens. Tristanz descoevre a Yselt tot son pensé et com il l'aime de tot son cuer [...]. Puis que Tristanz conoist que Yselt s'acorde a sa volenté, il n'i a nul destorbement, car il sont en chambre sol a seul, qu'il n'ont garde de sorvenue ne paor d'un ne d'autre. Il fait de li ce que il veust et li tost le non de pucele.

(Curtis, II, pp. 65-67)

As soon as they had drunk it, the one looked at the other and both of them were quite taken aback. Now their thoughts were very different from before. Tristan was thinking of Iseut, and Iseut of Tristan. [...] She looked at Tristan and Tristan looked at her; and they gazed at each other in this way for so long that the one realized what was in the other's heart and mind. Tristan knew that Iseut loved him with all her might; Iseut knew that Tristan loved her. [...] Tristan looked at Iseut's noble bearing and it so roused and inflamed him that he desired nothing other than Iseut, and Iseut desired only Tristan. They were of one mind on this matter. It was all decided; there was no point in concealing it. Tristan revealed his thoughts to Iseut and said that he loved her with all his heart. [...] As soon as Tristan realized that Iseut shared his desires, there was nothing to hinder them, since they were all alone in the cabin, and did not have to worry about chance-comers nor to be afraid of anyone. He did with her what he wanted so that she lost her virginity.

The situation in which Paolo and Francesca fall in love, discover their mutual feelings and share their first kiss is quite similar:

Noi leggiavamo un giorno per diletto
di Lancialotto come amor lo strinse;
soli eravamo e senza alcun sospetto.

Per più fiate li occhi ci sospinse
quella lettura, e scolorocci il viso;
ma solo un punto fu quel che ci vinse.

Quando leggemmo il disiato riso
esser baciato da cotanto amante,
questi, che mai da me non fia diviso,

la bocca mi basciò tutto tremante.
Galeotto fu 'l libro e chi lo scrisse:
quel giorno più non vi leggemmo avante.

(*Inf.* V. 127-138)

One day, to pass the time in pleasure, / we read of Lancelot, how love enthralled him. /
We were alone, without the least misgiving. / More than once that reading made our
eyes meet / and drained the color from our faces. / Still, it was a single instant overcame
us: / when we read how the longed-for smile / was kissed by so renowned a lover, this
man, / who never shall be parted from me, / all trembling, kissed me on my mouth. / A
Galeotto was the book and he that wrote it. / That day we read in it no further.

The beginning of the narrative bears many similarities. According to the prose *Tristan*, 'Au tierz jor avint bien entor hore de midi que Tristanz jooit aus eschés avec Yselt' ('On the third day round about noon Tristan was playing chess with Iseut'). Similarly, Francesca states that: 'Noi leggiavamo un giorno per diletto / di Lancialotto come amor lo strinse' ('One day, to pass the time in pleasure, / we read of Lancelot, how love enthralled him'). Both couples are engaged in an activity for fun, without the slightest suspicion of what is about to happen: Tristan and Iseult are playing chess, while Paolo and Francesca are reading the *Lancelot*. In both cases, the couple fall in love because of an external factor that they cannot control: in the case of Tristan and Iseult, the philtre; in the case of Paolo and Francesca, *Amore*, which acts through the book they are reading.³⁹² After falling in love, Tristan and Iseult begin to look at each other and become aware of their feelings: 'Maintenant qu'il ont beü li uns regarde l'autre, et sont ausi com tuit esbahi. Or pensent a autre chose qu'il ne pensoient devant. Tristanz pense a Yselt, et Yselt a Tristanz. [...] Et ele regarde Tristan, et Tristanz li; et tant se regardent en tele maniere que li uns conoist de l'autre la volenté et la pensee' ('As soon as they had drunk it, the one looked at the other and both of them were quite taken

³⁹² See Francesca's explanation of the origin of their mutual love in *Inf.* V. 100-105: 'Amor, ch'al cor gentil ratto s'apprende, / prese costui de la bella persona / che mi fu tolta; e 'l modo ancor m'offende. / Amor, ch'a nullo amato amar perdona, / mi prese del costui piacer sì forte, / che, come vedi, ancor non m'abbandona' ('Love, quick to kindle in the gentle heart, / seized this man with the fair form taken from me. / The way of it afflicts me still. / Love, which absolves no one beloved from loving, / seized me so strongly with his charm that, / as you see, it has not left me yet'). See also Inglese, 'Inferno V', p. 124.

aback. [...] She looked at Tristan and Tristan looked at her; and they gazed at each other in this way for so long that the one realized what was in the other's heart and mind'). In a similar vein, Francesca states that 'Per più fiato li occhi ci sospinse / quella lettura, e scolorocci il viso' ('More than once that reading made our eyes meet / and drained the color from our faces'). Then there is the moment of the mutual revelation of the feelings. Driven by the power of the philtre, Tristan and Iseult confess that they love each other. On the other hand, Paolo and Francesca come to a mutual revelation through reading: at the moment when Lancelot and Guinevere kiss, so do they. The end of both scenes is the moment of love or sex. The author of the prose *Tristan* explicitly says that Iseult loses her virginity: 'Il fait de li ce que il veust et li tost le non de pucele' ('He did with her what he wanted so that she lost her virginity'). Dante, by means of the aposiopesis, simply says that they did not read any more that day, and leaves the reader to guess what has happened: 'quel giorno più non vi leggemmo avante' ('That day we read in it no further'). It is also important to note that in both cases the revelation of mutual feelings occurs when couples are alone. Govenal and Brangaine are absent when Tristan and Iseult declare their love for each other: 'il n'i a nul destorbement, car il sont en chambre sol a seul' ('there was nothing to hinder them, since they were all alone in the cabin'). Likewise, Francesca states that 'soli eravamo e senza alcun sospetto' ('We were alone, without the least misgiving').³⁹³

Hence, although Paolo and Francesca are reading the *Lancelot*, and the story of Lancelot and Guinevere has a clear influence on the description of the scene,³⁹⁴ the situation unfolds as in the episode of the prose *Tristan*, which was widely circulated in Italy and was probably known to Dante. This episode is testified to by five Old French manuscripts produced in Italy, four of which are attributed to the Pisan-Genoese group.³⁹⁵ It is also witnessed by two Tuscan translations: the *Tristano Panciatichiano* (P) and the *Tristano Riccardiano* (R). A close relationship between the prose *Tristan* and *Inferno* V was also recognised by early readers or commentators of the *Commedia*. Firstly, the anonymous author of the *Tavola Ritonda*, an Italian Arthurian romance written by the mid-fourteenth century, uses expressions from *Inferno* V to refer to the story of Tristan and Iseult.³⁹⁶ For example, he writes that their love led Tristan and Iseult to 'a death' ('gli condusse ad una morte'), an expression clearly derived from *Inf.* V. 106 ('Amor condusse noi ad una morte'). In another

³⁹³ Although the two expressions are similar, 'senza alcun sospetto' in *Inf.* V. 129 seems to allude more to the fact that the two lovers could not imagine what was about to happen.

³⁹⁴ See IV. 2.

³⁹⁵ The Pisan-Genoese manuscripts are: W, H, M¹ and Ve. The fifth manuscript is BNF fr. 94. For these manuscripts, see I. 3.

³⁹⁶ See Donald L. Hoffman, 'Radix Amoris: The *Tavola Ritonda* and its response to Dante's Paolo and Francesca', in *Tristan and Isolde. A casebook*, ed. by Joan T. Grimbert (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 207-222; Vilella, 'Not even in hell', pp. 55-56.

part of the story, the author writes that Tristan ‘fell down as a dead body’ (‘cadde come corpo morto’), which is instead a quotation from *Inf.* V. 142 (‘E caddi come corpo morto cade’). Moreover, the way in which Giovanni Boccaccio tells the story of Paolo and Francesca in his *Esposizioni sopra la Commedia di Dante* is clearly influenced by that of Tristan and Iseult in the prose *Tristan*.³⁹⁷ The co-presence of two models behind the story of Paolo and Francesca was perhaps also noted by Petrarch, who places ‘la coppia d’Arimino’ (‘the couple from Rimini’) alongside Lancelot, Tristan, Guinevere and Iseult in his *Triumphus Cupidinis*:

Ecco quei che le carte empion di sogni,
Lancilotto, Tristano e gli altri erranti,
ove conven che ’l vulgo errante agogni.

Vedi Ginevra, Isolda e l’altre amanti,
e la coppia d’Arimino che ’nseme
vanno facendo dolorosi pianti.³⁹⁸

(*Trionfi* I. II. 79-84)

Here are those who fill the pages with dreams, / Lancelot, Tristan and the other knights-errant, / to whom the vulgar crowd is naturally attracted. / Look at Guinevere, Iseult and the other lovers, / and the Rimini couple who / walk together with sad cries.³⁹⁹

In conclusion, Dante probably read the prose *Tristan*, a work that was enormously successful in Italy at the time. It cannot be ruled out that he may have read a verse version of the story of Tristan and Iseult, such as Thomas’s *Tristan*, but this hypothesis is not supported by sufficient evidence.⁴⁰⁰ Certainly, Dante interpreted the story of Tristan and Iseult, whichever version he read, differently from other Italian writers or readers of the thirteenth or early fourteenth century. The idea of Tristan as a model of chivalry or of political and civil virtues, which was particularly widespread in the Italian translations of the prose *Tristan*, is completely absent from Dante’s works.⁴⁰¹ His condemnation in the circle of the lustful clearly shows that Tristan is for Dante one of the representative figures of the *fol’ amor*, an idea of love that strays from the right order and leads to sin. This condemnatory attitude

³⁹⁷ See Daniela Delcorno Branca, *Boccaccio e le storie di re Artù* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1991).

³⁹⁸ Francesco Petrarca, *Trionfi*, ed. by Ferdinando Neri, in Francesco Petrarca, *Rime, Trionfi e poesie latine* (Milan-Naples: Ricciardi, 1951), pp. 497-498.

³⁹⁹ The translation is mine.

⁴⁰⁰ See III. 2.

⁴⁰¹ See I. 3.

towards Tristan is almost entirely absent from the Italian reception of the Tristan matter. The author of *L'Intelligenza* states that 'vain love' has led to the destruction of many kingdoms but does not in any way reflect on the moral implications of the adulterous relationship between Tristan and Iseult. On the other hand, Re Giovanni in his poem *Donna, audite como*, while raising the problem of the amorality of Tristan's behaviour, ends up recognising a kind of mitigating factor in the love philtre.⁴⁰² A clearer condemnation of Tristan's love can be found instead in Chrétien de Troyes's *Cligès* and in his canso *D'amors qui, m'a tolu a moi*, a poem that Dante may have known.⁴⁰³ In any case, Dante's decision to condemn Tristan to hell, and to draw inspiration from his relationship with Iseult in order to develop the story of Paolo and Francesca, is completely original in the Italian context, and clearly shows that the idea of love represented by Tristan is incompatible with that which Dante professes and promotes in the *Commedia*.

⁴⁰² See, again, I. 3.

⁴⁰³ Rossi, '«Merci» e «bone volentez»'.

IV. Dante and the *Lancelot en prose*

This chapter focuses on Dante's reception of the *Lancelot en prose*. The first section, after analysing Dante's explicit references to the cycle, will consider which version of the *Lancelot* he may have read. The text of the *Lancelot* is attested in at least two main versions and seems to have circulated in Italy in a partial form. The fact that Dante refers only to the episode of Lancelot and Guinevere's kiss in the first part of the romance, which is the most textually stable, makes it impossible to say whether he read a manuscript belonging to the cyclic or non-cyclic version. The second section deals with the most Arthurian canto of the *Commedia*: *Inferno* V. Francesca's statement on the *Libro Galeotto* has often been interpreted as conveying Dante's moral condemnation of Arthurian literature. This section aims to challenge this critical view by arguing that *Inferno* V provides an example of how Arthurian romances should not be read. Paolo and Francesca fell in love while reading the first part of the *Lancelot*. Lancelot and Guinevere's adulterous relationship, although apparently celebrated at the beginning of the *Lancelot*, is harshly condemned in the subsequent romances of the cycle: *La Queste del Saint Graal* and *La Mort le Roi Artu*, which ends with Lancelot's conversion and death in bliss. Dante, who quotes the epilogue of the *Mort Artu* in the *Convivio*, was certainly aware that the tale that Paolo and Francesca read and imitated, if considered in its entirety, would instead have offered a positive model of redemption. The last section of the chapter deals with Dante's reception of the *Queste del Saint Graal*, the only romance of the *Lancelot en prose* that Dante does not quote explicitly. In particular, I will show that the story of Lancelot's repentance and temporary redemption, one of the central points of the romance, may have influenced Dante's spiritual and moral autobiography, as it emerges from a parallel reading of *Inferno* I and *Purgatorio* XXX-XXXI. If Dante had used the story of Lancelot as a model for his own journey to salvation, it would be clear that the *Lancelot en prose* was an exemplary text for him, rather than a potential source of negative models.

IV. 1 The *Lancelot en prose* in Dante's works

Many thirteenth-century Italian authors had drawn from Arthurian romances a repertoire of political virtues or exemplary characters that were traditionally associated with certain qualities or sentiments. Dante, on the other hand, mainly drew moral paradigms from the Matter of Britain and treated the exemplary references to some characters of the *Lancelot en*

prose in an original way. Twice in the *Commedia*, and in completely different contexts, Dante refers to the episode of the *Lancelot* in which the protagonist and Guinevere share their first kiss, thanks to Galehaut's mediation.⁴⁰⁴ The first of these references, by far the best known, can be found in *Inf.* V. 127-138. Francesca da Polenta, punished in the circle of the lustful, tells Dante that her adulterous relationship with her brother-in-law Paolo Malatesta began while they were reading together the episode of the *Lancelot* in which the knight kisses the queen for the first time, a scene that Paolo and Francesca immediately emulated. As Daniela Delcorno Branca points out, Dante sets aside in this occasion the political interpretation of the character of Galehaut, which had been dominant in late thirteenth-century Italian literature, and identifies him both with the mediator of Lancelot and Guinevere's kiss and the book that Paolo and Francesca were reading when they fell in love.⁴⁰⁵ The second reference to this episode is in *Paradiso* XVI, where Dante refers to Lancelot and Guinevere's meeting through a different perspective, that of the Lady of Malehaut:

onde Beatrice, ch'era un poco scevra,
ridendo, parve quella che tossio
al primo fallo scritto di Ginevra.
(*Par.* XVI. 13-15)

and Beatrice, who stood somewhat apart, / smiled, like the lady who discreetly coughed
/ at the first fault inscribed of Guinevere.

After his ancestor Cacciaguida has revealed that he had been knighted by emperor Conrad, and therefore that the Alighieri family has noble origins, Dante does not address him with the pronoun *tu*, as he did in the previous canto, but with the more formal *voi*. Beatrice, who is on the sidelines during this conversation, probably because she is extraneous to the earthly topics they are discussing, smiles after hearing the formal pronoun that Dante uses to address Cacciaguida. Beatrice's smile is compared to the Lady of Malehaut's reaction when she discovered that Lancelot, whom she loved, was in love with Guinevere. More specifically, the Lady of Malehaut, together with Galehaut, was present at the meeting between the knight and the queen that culminated in their first kiss. Despite being initially on the sidelines to avoid being noticed, when Guinevere let Lancelot understand that she was aware of his

⁴⁰⁴ Micha VIII, pp. 103-117.

⁴⁰⁵ Delcorno Branca, 'Il «Roman de Lancelot»', p. 150. On the civic and political interpretation of Galehaut, see II.2.

feeling, the Lady of Malehaut pretended to cough, both to warn the knight of her presence and to show him that she was conscious of his secret passion. Hence, the Lady of Malehaut, who is mentioned in *Intelligenza* 75 as a traditional example of the passionate lover, is rather associated by Dante with a specific narrative detail, through which he establishes a relationship with *Inferno* V.⁴⁰⁶

On other occasions, Dante explicitly mentions two episodes drawn from the ending of the *Mort Artu*. A first reference is found in *Cv.* IV. XXVIII. 8, where, speaking of noble men who, in their old age, abandon worldly affairs and cares to devote themselves to God, Dante mentions ‘lo cavaliere Lanzalotto’ (‘the knight Lancelot’) and Guido di Montefeltro, both great and noble warriors who spent the last years of their lives in a convent or hermitage. Lancelot, a character that in thirteenth-century lyric poetry was traditionally associated with the chivalrous qualities of valour and courtesy, in Dante’s interpretation becomes a model of conversion, or at least of *contemptus mundi* (‘contempt of the world’) and spiritual care of the soul, in the last phase of life. A second reference to the final romance of the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle is found in *Inferno* XXXII, where Dante, in listing the traitors punished in the Caina, identifies Mordred through a periphrasis which recalls an episode from the *Mort Artu*, the one in which the chest of the knight, having been pierced from front to back by Arthur’s spear, is penetrated by a sunbeam: ‘quelli a cui fu rotto il petto e l’ombra / con esso un colpo per la man d’Artù’ (‘him whose breast and shadow were pierced / by a single blow from Arthur’s hand’; *Inf.* XXXII. 61-62). Mordred is included in the *Commedia* as an exemplary traitor of relatives. However, Dante seems to have been impressed above all by the description of his death, which he recalls with great precision. On the other hand, there is no reference in the poem to the death of King Arthur, killed in turn by Mordred, an event that the early commentators of the *Commedia* often mention while analysing these verses.⁴⁰⁷

We have seen how the *Mort Artu* circulated in a rather uniform way, while the *Lancelot* is attested in Italy in partial and often different versions. Dante’s reference to the *Lancelot* in *Inferno* V is the only one that allows to guess some characteristics of the text that he could have read. More specifically, Francesca’s assertion that Paolo, after reading that Guinevere’s ‘disiato riso’ (‘longed-for smile’; *Inf.* V. 133) was kissed by ‘cotanto amante’ (‘so renowned a lover’; *Inf.* V. 134), kissed her in turn, has prompted some scholars to reflect on Dante’s alteration of the original text, in which, by contrast, Guinevere kisses Lancelot. This difference between the episode of the *Lancelot* and its reinterpretation by Dante has been the

⁴⁰⁶ See Paolo Valesio, ‘Canto V. The Fierce Dove’, in *Lectura Dantis: Inferno*, ed. by Allen Mandelbaum, Anthony Oldcorn and Charles Ross (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 63-83 (pp. 74-78).

⁴⁰⁷ See Daniela Delcorno Branca, ‘Prospettive per lo studio della *Mort Artu* in Italia’, in *Modi e forme della fruizione della ‘materia arturiana’*, pp. 67-84 (pp. 74-80).

subject of a great number of studies and the most disparate hypotheses.⁴⁰⁸ In opposition to scholars who argued for Dante's confused memory of the episode or deliberate alteration of the text, Delcorno Branca points out that the Italian manuscripts that include the passage in which the kiss is described share a quite original textual variant, which is extraneous to most of the manuscripts produced in France.⁴⁰⁹ This is the main version of the episode of the kiss:

Et la roine voit que li chevaliers n'en ose plus faire, si le prent par le menton et le baise
devant Galahot assés longuement si que la dame de Malohaut seit qu'*ele le baise*.
(Micha VIII, pp. 115-116)

And when the queen saw that the knight dared no more, she took him by the chin and
kissed him in front of Galehaut, so long that the Lady of Malehaut realised *she was
kissing him*.⁴¹⁰

The queen realises that Lancelot is unable to take the initiative. Hence, she takes him by the chin and kisses him in front of Galehaut for so long that that the Lady of Malehaut, who is on the sidelines, notices that '*ele le baise*' ('she was kissing him'). However, there is a significant change in meaning within the three Italian manuscripts that witness the episode:

Et la reine voit que li chevaliers n'en ose plus faire, si le prant par le menton et le baise
devant Galahot assés longuement si que la dame de Malohaut seit qu'*il la basoit*.⁴¹¹

And when the queen saw that the knight dared no more, she took him by the chin and
kissed him in front of Galehaut, so long that the Lady of Malehaut realised *he was
kissing her*.⁴¹²

The Italian manuscripts report that the Lady of Malehaut realised that 'he kissed her', and not that 'she kissed him'. With this in mind, Delcorno Branca argues that Francesca's

⁴⁰⁸ The debate on this question was particularly intense in the first decades of the twentieth century, and many scholars took part in it. For a summary of the different positions, see: Anna Hatcher and Mark Musa, 'The Kiss: *Inferno* V and the Old French Prose *Lancelot*', *Comparative literature*, 20.2 (1968), 97-109; Lorenzo Renzi, 'Da Ginevra a Francesca: per una storia del bacio', in *«L'ornato parlare»*. *Studi di filologia e letterature romanze per Furio Brugnolo*, ed. by Gianfelice Peron (Padua: Esedra, 2007), pp. 431-454.

⁴⁰⁹ Delcorno Branca, 'Il «Roman de Lancelot»', p. 146.

⁴¹⁰ The translation is mine.

⁴¹¹ This text reproduces Micha's edition, and just replaces the section which is relevant to understand the change in meaning that characterises the Italian manuscripts. The proper *lectiones* of the three manuscripts are:

- Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana, Pl. 89 inf. 61: 'si que la dame de Malehot soit de voir quil [...]'.
- Paris, BNF, fr. 773: 'si que la dame de Malohaut sot bien que il le beisoit'.
- Modena, Archivio di Stato, Biblioteca, Fr. b. 11, n. 5: 'si que la dame de Malohaut set de voir quil la baissot'.

- Modena, Archivio di Stato, Biblioteca, Fr. b. 11, n. 5: 'si que la dame de Malohaut set de voir quil la baissot'.

⁴¹² The translation is mine.

reference to Lancelot's kiss is due to the fact that Dante quotes the *Lancelot* according to the text that circulated in Italy.⁴¹³ However, as Lagomarsini notes, the fact that the Italian manuscripts say that the Lady of Malehaut noticed that Lancelot was kissing Guinevere is not enough to make the reader understand that Lancelot took the initiative, since the previous sentence clearly states that Guinevere took the knight by the chin and kissed him.⁴¹⁴ Giuseppina Brunetti, noting that Guinevere clearly takes the initiative in all branches of the manuscript tradition, identifies a possible semantic implication of the above textual variant: 'they kissed each other for so long that the Lady of Malehaut realised that Guinevere was not the only one who did it, but that Lancelot, whom she loved, returned Guinevere's kiss; in short, that he was kissing her [*il la basoit*]'.⁴¹⁵ This interpretation is confirmed by a rubric of the Laurenziano Pl. 89 inf. 61, one of the Italian manuscripts witnessing the episode and the textual variant:

Qant la reine Genievre baisa por la boche Lancelot, et Lancelot baisa la reine el primer aucointement de lor.⁴¹⁶

When the queen kissed Lancelot on the mouth and Lancelot kissed the queen at their first meeting.⁴¹⁷

All of this suggests that in none of the extant versions the initiative of the kiss is attributed to the knight, and that in the Italian manuscripts Lancelot's kiss is nothing more than an immediate reaction to Guinevere's. It is undoubtedly true, as both Delcorno Branca and Brunetti points out, that the BNF fr. 118, just like some other manuscripts, includes a miniature of the kiss commented by a rubric that might have induced readers to believe that Lancelot took the initiative.⁴¹⁸ However, Lagomarsini correctly notes that the text of BNF

⁴¹³ Delcorno Branca, 'Il «Roman de Lancelot»', p. 147.

⁴¹⁴ Claudio Lagomarsini, 'Il bacio di Ginevra', in *Briciole di discorsi amorosi. Scritti per Sara Natale e Simone Albonico offerti dagli amici fiorentini* (Pisa: Campano Edizioni, 2018), pp. 143-146 (p. 145): 'per far davvero prendere l'iniziativa a Lancillotto, sarebbero state necessarie due innovazioni simultanee: 1) Lancillotto tocca il mento di Ginevra e poi la bacia (non il contrario); 2) la dama di Malohaut vede Lancillotto baciare Ginevra. Mentre la variante 2 è attestata, la prima resta, al momento, virtuale'.

⁴¹⁵ Giuseppina Brunetti, 'Franceschi e Provenzali per le mani di Boccaccio. Con una nota sui manoscritti della *Commedia*', *Studi sul Boccaccio*, 39 (2011), 23-59 (pp. 39-40): 'il bacio era così lungo che la dama si accorse che non era solo Ginevra a donargli il suo, ma che Lancillotto, il cavaliere che la dama amava, ricambiava quel bacio, insomma che *lui* la baciava'.

⁴¹⁶ See: Rajna, 'Dante e i romanzi della Tavola Rotonda', p. 232; Lagomarsini, 'Il bacio di Ginevra', p. 144. Both scholars mention this rubric to argue for the idea that Lancelot only returned the kiss.

⁴¹⁷ The translation is mine.

⁴¹⁸ Delcorno Branca, 'Il «Roman de Lancelot»', p. 146n; Brunetti, 'Franceschi e Provenzali', pp. 40-41. Brunetti provides several examples of illustrations of Lancelot and Guinevere's kiss. The rubric which comments the miniature of the kiss in the manuscript fr. 118 states: 'Comment M. Lancelot baisa la royne

fr. 118 confirms that Guinevere took the initiative, and it is therefore difficult to believe that the rubrics of a similar manuscript could have misled Dante, who shows an accurate knowledge of the cycle in *Inferno* XXXII and *Paradiso* XVI.⁴¹⁹ It is undoubtedly interesting that the Italian manuscript tradition of the episode shows a textual variant which emphasises the reciprocity of the kiss, thus offering a possible textual basis for Francesca's statement. However, the fact that in the romance Lancelot's kiss is placed in the same sentence which specifies that Guinevere took the initiative proves that Dante certainly knew who kissed first. Nonetheless, Paolo is the one who takes the initiative in Dante's poem, and it therefore seems natural that the poet decided to focus on Lancelot's kiss rather than on Guinevere's. As Rajna rightly pointed out more than a century ago, Dante only emphasised the kiss which would have allowed a closer comparison between the two stories, without altering the original text.⁴²⁰

Even if we admitted the presence of the textual variant in the manuscript that Dante read, Kennedy's statement according to which the *Libro Galeotto* would correspond with the non-cyclic *Lancelot* would seem to be groundless, given that the variant in question is not a prerogative of the non-cyclic version of the romance.⁴²¹ Among the two Italian manuscripts of a certain length that include the episode of the kiss, and particularly the textual variant, only the Laurenziano bears witness to the non-cyclic version of the romance, while fr. 773, just like nearly all the other Italian manuscripts of the *Lancelot*, seems to witness the cyclic version.⁴²² Regardless of this, Dante demonstrates a knowledge of the cycle that goes far beyond what Kennedy identified as the original core of the *Lancelot*, and which undoubtedly embraces at least the final romance of the cycle: the *Mort Artu*.

IV. 2 *Inferno* V: Dante, Francesca and the *Lancelot*

In *Inferno* V Dante accesses the second circle of Hell, where he meets the lustful, namely, in his words, 'i peccator carnali / che la ragion sommettono al talento' ('the carnal sinners

Genievre la première fois' ('How Sir Lancelot kissed queen Guinevere for the first time'; the translation is mine).

⁴¹⁹ See Lagomarsini, 'Il bacio di Ginevra', pp. 144-145, where the text of fr. 118 is provided: 'Et la royne voit bien que le chevalier n'en ose plus faire, si le prent elle mesmes par le menton et le baise devant Galaot assez longuement, si que la dame de Maloot s'en apparçut bien' ('And when the queen saw that the knight dared no more, she took him by the chin and kissed him in front of Galehaut, so long that the Lady of Malehaut realised it well'; the translation is mine).

⁴²⁰ Rajna, 'Dante e i romanzi della Tavola Rotonda', pp. 231-232. There would have been an alteration if Dante had written that Lancelot kissed first. However, Francesca's phrase does not specify who took the initiative in the romance.

⁴²¹ Kenn. I, p. vi.

⁴²² The Modena manuscript witnesses a fragmentary text.

[...] who make reason subject to desire'; *Inf.* V. 38-39). This expression, as the early commentators remarked, alludes to people that in life made reason subject to appetite or, in other words, made the rational part of the soul, a human prerogative, subjected to the concupiscible part, which is typical of all the animals.⁴²³ In the first half of the canto (*Inf.* V. 1-72) Dante describes his meeting with the infernal judge Minos and the general context of the second circle, and particularly focuses on the typology of the sin and the contrapasso. In this context, Virgil shows Dante the souls of innumerable ancient ladies and knights whose death was the consequence of an unbridled love passion ('ch'amor di nostra vita dipartille'; *Inf.* V. 69), among which he mentions Semiramis, Dido, Cleopatra, Helen of Troy, Achilles, Paris and Tristan.⁴²⁴ Among the sinners of 'la schiera ov'è Dido' ('the troop where Dido is'; *Inf.* V. 85), Dante is mainly interested in two souls who move together and with greater lightness and speed than the others and decides to speak to them:

I' cominciai: 'Poeta, volontieri
 parlerei a quei due che 'nsieme vanno,
 e paion sì al vento esser leggeri'.
 (*Inf.* V. 73-75)

I began: "Poet, gladly would I speak / with these two that move together / and seem to
 be so light upon the wind".

The 'two that move together' are Paolo and Francesca, the protagonists of an adulterous relationship that Dante dwells on in the second half of the canto (*Inf.* V. 73-142). Francesca Da Polenta, daughter of the lord of Ravenna, was wedded to Gianciotto Malatesta, son of the lord of Rimini, in order to secure the peace that had been negotiated between the two families. However, Francesca and Paolo Malatesta, Gianciotto's brother, fell in love with each other and began a clandestine relationship. When Gianciotto discovered the adulterous relationship between his brother and his wife, he killed them. These events are taken for

⁴²³ See (among others): Jacopo Alighieri (1322): 'Dimostrata la qualità del primo grado infernale, in quella del secondo qui si procede, la quale di coloro in cui la ragione umana all'abituato talento della lussuria è sottomessa, si considera'; Jacopo della Lana (1324-28): '[...] li spiriti, li quali peccanno nel mondo in lussuria, e che sottomiseno la ragione, cioè lo regere virtudioso, che è ragion nell'uomo, al talento, cioè alla concupiscenza carnale'; Ottimo (1333): 'che la ragione sottomettono al talento: dove tocca due potenzie de l'anima nostra, cioè la potenza concupiscibile, e la potenza razionale: per la concupiscibile, comunichiamo noi con le bestie; per la razionale, passiamo e avanziamo quelle; e però è questa nobilissima potenza, e quella è vilissima; onde dice che l'ancella, cioè la potenza concupiscibile, signoreggiò in costoro la donna, cioè la razionale potenza: la terza potenza de l'anima è la potenza irascibile'; Pietro Alighieri (1344-55): 'Post hoc auctor fingit in hoc secundo circulo Inferni puniri animas decedentium in peccato luxurie, summittendo rationem talento, idest appetitui'.

⁴²⁴ See III. 3.

granted by Dante the Author, who mentions them in an allusive way in Francesca's first direct speech. Regardless of this, they must have been quite well known at the time, although the earliest extant evidence of Paolo and Francesca's story is that provided by the *Commedia* and its early commentators, who describe these events in much more detail.⁴²⁵ In *Inferno* V, while Francesca answers Dante's questions, Paolo, except for crying, remains silent throughout the conversation. In her first direct speech, Francesca introduces herself by referring to her city of origin, Ravenna (*Inf.* V. 97-99) and to the fact that, together with Paolo, she was the protagonist of a bloody love story, interrupted by a relative who killed them: 'Amor condusse noi ad una morte. / Caina attende chi a vita ci spense' ('Love brought us to one death. / Caina waits for him who quenched our lives'; *Inf.* V. 106-107). This concise information is enough for Dante to recognise her and call her by her name. After expressing all his sadness and pity for the torment of the two lovers, Dante asks Francesca to tell him the origin of their love story. In Francesca's second speech, which aims to answer this question, the poet inserts a fictional episode:

E quella a me: "Nessun maggior dolore
che ricordarsi del tempo felice
nella miseria; e ciò sa 'l tuo dottore.

Ma s'a conoscer la prima radice
del nostro amor tu hai cotanto affetto,
dirò come colui che piange e dice.

Noi leggiavamo un giorno per diletto
di Lancialotto come amor lo strinse:
soli eravamo e senza alcun sospetto.

Per più fiate li occhi ci sospinse
quella lettura, e scolorocci il viso;
ma solo un punto fu quel che ci vinse.

Quando leggemmo il disiato riso
esser baciato da cotanto amante,
questi, che mai da me non fia diviso,

⁴²⁵ See Teodolinda Barolini, 'Dante and Francesca da Rimini: Realpolitik, Romance, Gender', *Speculum*, 75. 1 (2000), 1-28.

la bocca mi baciò tutto tremante.
Galeotto fu il libro e chi lo scrisse:
quel giorno più non vi leggemmo avante”.

(*Inf.* V. 121-138)

And she to me: “There is no greater sorrow / than to recall our time of joy / in wretchedness / and this your teacher knows. / But if you feel such longing / to know the first root of our love, / I shall tell as one who weeps in telling. / One day, to pass the time in pleasure, / we read of Lancelot, how love enthralled him. / We were alone, without the least misgiving. / More than once that reading made our eyes meet / and drained the color from our faces. / Still, it was a single instant overcame us: / When we read how the longed-for smile / was kissed by so renowned a lover, this man, / who never shall be parted from me, / all trembling, kissed me on my mouth. / A Galeotto was the book and he that wrote it. / That day we read in it no further.

In her answer, Francesca states that they were reading together the Old French *Lancelot* ‘without any bad intention’ (‘*sanza alcun sospetto*’), at least when they began.⁴²⁶ However, while they were going on with the reading, the initial signs of love started to appear in their eyes and faces. Still, they abandoned themselves to their own sinful feelings only at a specific point: when they read the episode in which Lancelot and Guinevere exchanged their first kiss. After that, as Francesca says, ‘*quel giorno più non vi leggemmo avante*’ (‘we read in it no further’). This phrase is a typical example of *aposiopesis* or *reticentia*: Francesca deliberately interrupts the sentence in order to let Dante the Pilgrim imagine the ending, easily deducible from what she said at the end of her first direct speech: ‘*Amor condusse noi ad una morte*’ (‘Love brought us to one death’; *Inf.* V. 106).⁴²⁷ The previous verse, ‘*Galeotto fu il libro e chi lo scrisse*’ (‘A Galeotto was the book and he that wrote it’), is a key point for understanding Francesca’s speech, and more generally the reason why Dante decided to establish a relationship between the story of Paolo and Francesca and the tale of Lancelot

⁴²⁶ According to the most recent commentaries on the *Commedia*, this is the meaning of the expression ‘*sanza alcun sospetto*’ (‘without the least misgiving’; *Inf.* V. 129). Poggioli, ‘Tragedy or Romance?’, p. 336, provides a clear interpretation of the first part of Francesca’s tale: ‘We imagine the two sitting beside each other: one listening, the other, probably Francesca, reading aloud. But the only thing we are told by Francesca is that they were alone, without the company of even the fear of their weakness, or the suspicion of their own selves. It would be impossible to state more concisely the perfidy of temptation, lying in wait to assail two unprepared and defenceless human hearts’.

⁴²⁷ In the same way, Dante the author uses this figure of speech to let the reader guess the ending. See John Freccero, *In Dante’s Wake. Reading from Medieval to Modern in the Augustinian Tradition* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), p. 49: ‘Francesca’s last words [...] use what rhetoricians call “*reticentia*”, a figure to express by pointed suppression a meaning that is obscene, horrible, or otherwise unspeakable’.

and Guinevere. Galehaut (it. 'Galeotto') is the knight who acted as a mediator between Lancelot and Guinevere, and thanks to whom the future lovers discovered their mutual feelings and kissed each other for the first time. By saying that the book and its author were a Galehaut, Francesca alludes to the intermediary role that they played in the origin of her adulterous relationship with Paolo. Accordingly, Francesca attributes to the *Lancelot* and its author the same role played by Galehaut in the book, and recognises the reading of the romance as the 'prima radice' ('first root'; *Inf.* V. 124) of her sinful love story. Francesca's answer to Dante's question, which seems to imagine a progressive manifestation of the love passion – 'Ma dimmi: al tempo d'i dolci sospiri, / a che e come concedette amore / che conosceste i dubbiosi disiri?' ('but tell me, in that season of sweet sighs, / how and by what signs did Love / acquaint you with your hesitant desires?'; *Inf.* V. 118-120) – shows in fact that both the falling in love and the revelation of reciprocal feelings took place on the day of the reading.⁴²⁸ Paolo and Francesca started the reading 'sanza alcun sospetto', without even suspecting what would have happened, and after a progressive rise and manifestation of their feelings, hand in hand with the events described in the romance, they concluded it with a kiss, which marked the beginning of their adulterous relationship.

According to the traditional interpretation, which dates back to Jacopo della Lana, one of the earliest commentators of the *Commedia*, the verse 'Galeotto fu il libro e chi lo scrisse' ('A Galeotto was the book and he that wrote it') and the episode as a whole would convey Dante's moral condemnation of Arthurian literature.⁴²⁹ In order to reconcile this apparently negative judgment on the Matter of Britain with Dante's statement in the *De vulgari eloquentia* ('the beautiful adventures of King Arthur'; *DVE* I. x. 2), several scholars have hypothesised a change in his perspective in the years between the interruption of the *De vulgari eloquentia* (1304-05) and the composition of the *Inferno* (1307-08).⁴³⁰ According to this interpretation, Dante, while acknowledging that the responsibility of their sin falls on the two lovers, would identify the *Lancelot*, and more generally courtly or Arthurian literature, as a potential source of negative models due to its celebration of an earthly and

⁴²⁸ On this topic, see Lucia Battaglia Ricci, 'I «dubbiosi disiri» di Francesca', *Nuova Rivista di Letteratura Italiana*, 13.1-2 (2010), 151-164 (pp. 163-164).

⁴²⁹ Jacopo della Lana (1324-1328): 'Infine quando furono in quello passo dove Lancillotto gittò lo braccio al collo a Ginevra e baciolla, costoro fenno lo simile insieme: e qui feceno punto a sua lezione. Poi e lie e altrove si favelonno per altro modo. Circa la qual cosa è da notare che si dee schifare quelle lezioni, le quali disordinano li animi delle persone e perducenli a vizio: ancora si deve schifare li luoghi li quali possano generare sospizione overo segurtade di mala operazione, che forse se non fosseno stati soli non sarebbe avvenuto quello principio che li condusse poi a violenta morte'.

⁴³⁰ See (among others): Poggioli, 'Tragedy or Romance?', p. 352; Daniela Delcorno Branca, 'Romanzi arturiani'; John A. Scott, 'Dante's Francesca and the Poet's Attitude towards Courtly Literature', *Reading Medieval Studies*, 5 (1979), 4-20 (p. 4); Kleinhenz 'Dante as Reader and Critic of Courtly Literature', pp. 382-386; Picone, 'Poetic Discourse and Courtly Love', pp. 173-174.

sinful idea of love.⁴³¹ However, it is necessary to point out that the *Lancelot* is mentioned in Francesca's direct speech and, accordingly, that the point of view of a character does not necessarily coincide with the author's. Hence, Francesca's statement on the *Libro Galeotto* should be read and understood as the interpretation of the origin of a sin provided by the sinner that is responsible for it. By following this line of interpretation, it is possible to formulate two alternative hypotheses.

As some scholars pointed out, Francesca could mention the reading of the *Lancelot* to provide a justification for her own sin.⁴³² Nevertheless, this self-justification would have not been convincing for Dante the Author, who condemns her to hell. Even if Francesca had described the *Lancelot* as a magic object that completely subjugated her will, just like the love philtre that provoked Tristan and Iseult's infatuation, Dante would have not recognised it as a valid excuse.⁴³³ As proof of this, Tristan is included among the lustful of *Inferno* V, just like Paolo and Francesca. In the first half of the canto, Dante explicitly states that the lustful are 'i peccator carnali / che la ragion sommettono al talento' ('the carnal sinners [...] who make reason subject to desire'; *Inf.* V, 38-39). This expression, as stated above, alludes to people that in life made reason subject to appetite or made the rational part of the soul subject to the concupiscible part. According to the poet, reason is the source of free will, a divine gift which distinguishes men from animals.⁴³⁴ Hence, they who make reason subject to desire misuse God's main gift and deserve hell, regardless of whether their sin was induced by an external factor, such as a love philtre or a courtly romance. In Dante's view, Paolo and Francesca had the power to make moral judgment prevail over appetite, but they did not.⁴³⁵

⁴³¹ As an example of this theory, see Poggioli, 'Tragedy or Romance?', pp. 345-346: 'Dante wrote the episode of Paolo and Francesca in order to condemn the evil, suggestive power that the reading of romances did once exercise on the souls of the two protagonists of this canto, and may still exercise on the souls of too many living women and men'.

⁴³² Donald Maddox, 'The Arthurian Intertexts of *Inferno* V', *Dante Studies*, 114 (1996), 113-127; Claudia Fernandez, 'El beso de Francesca. Una lectura del canto V del "*Infierno*"', *Tenzone*, 16 (2015), 119-134.

⁴³³ The analogy between the function of the love philtre in the tale of Tristan and the role played by the book in the episode of Paolo and Francesca has been remarked by: Rajna, 'Dante e i romanzi della Tavola Rotonda', p. 240; Gardner, *The Arthurian Legend*, p. 141; Avalor, "'... de fole amor'", p. 107; Stephen Popolizio, 'Literary Reminiscences and the Act of Reading in *Inferno* V', *Dante Studies*, 98 (1980), 19-33 (p. 25). However, as Inglese, '*Inferno* V', p. 124, pointed out, the '*Libro Galeotto*' cannot be considered equivalent to the love philtre, since it played the role of a mediator ('*internuntium*') rather than being the cause of Paolo and Francesca's falling in love.

⁴³⁴ Dante addresses the issue of free will within different works: *Purg.* XVI, 67-84; *Purg.* XVIII, 55-75; *Mon.* I. XII. 1-7. See, among others, Enrico Malato 'Dottrina e poesia nel canto di Francesca. Lettura del canto V dell'*Inferno*', in *Studi su Dante: lecturae Dantis, chiose e altre note dantesche* (Cittadella: Bertoncello Arti Grafiche, 2005), pp. 50-102 (pp. 58-59), who includes some passages from the *Convivio* in which Dante recognises the rational or intellectual soul as the guiding principle of human actions.

⁴³⁵ On this topic, see Donato Pirovano, 'All'inferno per amore. Lettura del canto V dell'*Inferno*', *Rivista di Studi Danteschi*, 15 (2015), 3-27 (pp. 20-25).

On the other hand, Francesca could simply be reporting the events as they truly happened, without providing any self-justification for her sin. According to this interpretation, Francesca, although not showing any kind of repentance, and indeed longing for the happy times of her relationship with Paolo – ‘Nessun maggior dolore / che ricordarsi del tempo felice / ne la miseria’ (‘There is no greater sorrow / than to recall our time of joy / in wretchedness – and this your teacher knows’; *Inf.* V. 121-123) –, would be perfectly aware of the gravity of her sin: ‘se fosse amico il re dell’universo, / noi pregheremmo lui della tua pace, / poi c’hai pietà del nostro mal perverso’ (‘if the King of the universe were our friend / we would pray that He might give you peace, / since you show pity for our grievous plight’; *Inf.* V, 91-93).⁴³⁶ In this case, even the character does not blame the *Lancelot*: she merely refers to the reading of the romance as the ‘first root’ of her sinful love. If this is the correct interpretation, it becomes necessary to provide some textual or contextual evidence indicating that Dante does indeed blame the *Lancelot*, and to verify that, from his perspective, the book celebrates an adulterous love and encourages readers to commit sin.

However, there is no textual condemnation of the work, nor any evidence that Francesca’s point of view, assuming that she is identifying the *Lancelot* as the trigger for her sin, and not as a mere catalyst, can coincide with Dante’s.⁴³⁷ Since there is no textual evidence that confirms their hypothesis, scholars who promote the traditional interpretation of the episode tend to argue that Dante’s condemnation is implicit in Francesca’s words or, more generally, that the idea of love attested in the *Lancelot* is totally incompatible with the moral outlook of the *Commedia*, where love is elevated from an earthly to a heavenly perspective.⁴³⁸ This assertion is undoubtedly true in itself. However, some fundamental questions have to be addressed in order to argue that Dante is a harsh critic of the *Lancelot*. What is the anonymous French author’s attitude towards his characters?⁴³⁹ Does he celebrate or

⁴³⁶ See Malato, ‘Dottrina e poesia’, p. 95: ‘Francesca non offre giustificazioni della sua colpa: la giustificazione è in realtà implicita nella prima parte del suo discorso, ma è offerta piuttosto come spiegazione degli eventi – sia pure, ovviamente, nella sua personale visione delle cose – che come discolpa. Chiama «felice» il tempo della vita, che è il tempo del peccato, ma per lei è soprattutto il tempo dell’amore pienamente goduto: sottintende la consapevolezza della colpa e del meritato castigo, ma non lascia filtrare alcun barlume di pentimento [...]’.

⁴³⁷ On this topic, I agree with Pirovano, ‘All’inferno per amore’, p. 25 and Inglese, ‘*Inferno* V’, p. 124, who consider the *Libro Galeotto*, respectively, ‘una miccia’ and ‘*internuntium*’.

⁴³⁸ Poggioli, ‘Tragedy or romance?’, pp. 357-358, who promotes the traditional interpretation of the episode, acknowledges that there are no clear words of condemnation in the text, and that Dante entrusts Francesca with the moral of his story. For an argument based on the incompatibility between the idea of love attested in courtly romances and the *Commedia* see Scott, ‘Dante’s Francesca’, p. 14.

⁴³⁹ Many scholars believe that the last three romances of the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle are not the work of a single author, and it can neither be excluded that each romance should be attributed to a different writer. According to Elspeth Kennedy, even the non-cyclic and cyclic version of the *Lancelot* would have been composed by different authors. Regardless of this, the medieval manuscripts of the cyclic *Lancelot*, the *Queste del Saint Graal* and the *Mort Artu* mention Gautier Maps as the author, and there is no reason to believe that this attribution was considered fictitious even by medieval readers, who could therefore have ascribed the entire

condemn Lancelot and Guinevere's adulterous relationship? If the author of the *Lancelot* celebrated this sinful love, the traditional interpretation of *Inferno* V would be acceptable. Conversely, if the French author condemned it, this theory would be completely groundless. Why should Dante criticise a book which condemns an idea of love that he himself condemns?

In order to address these questions, it will first be necessary to consider which version of the *Lancelot* Dante is likely to have read.⁴⁴⁰ If, as Alexandre Micha suggests, a pre-cyclic version of the *Lancelot* never existed, and thus the romance had to be exclusively identified with what Elspeth Kennedy believes to be its cyclic rewriting, the author's perspective on Lancelot and Guinevere's relationship would undoubtedly be negative, given that the last section of the work, known as 'the preparation to the *Queste del Saint Graal*', expresses an unequivocal condemnation. By contrast, if the right theory were the one formulated by Kennedy, according to whom the short form of the *Lancelot* corresponds to a pre-cyclic version, the answer would be more complex. In what Kennedy identifies as the original and pre-cyclic version of the *Lancelot*, the relationship between Lancelot and Guinevere is far from being condemned, and the internal conflict between the knight's passion for the queen and his loyalty to the king is completely absent. By contrast, love is described throughout the story as the stimulus that allowed Lancelot to become the greatest among the knights of the Round Table.⁴⁴¹ Furthermore, in this version of the romance, the few references to the search for the Holy Grail, an adventure that in the *Queste del Saint Graal* will constitute Lancelot's only great failure, mainly due to his sinful love affair with Guinevere, suggest that it has already been concluded by Perceval as narrated, for example, by Robert de Boron.⁴⁴² However, in Kennedy's opinion, the extension of the *Lancelot* and its inclusion within a broader cycle entailed major modifications to the original text and a relevant change of meaning. More specifically, the final part of the *Lancelot* was the subject of a rewriting that opened the path to its sequels, and suggested a critical attitude towards the adulterous relationship by prefiguring both Lancelot's failure and Galahad's success in the quest for the Holy Grail.⁴⁴³ Hence, while the non-cyclic *Lancelot* seems to avoid any reflection on the

cycle to a single author. For an overview of the different theories on the composition and authorship of the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle, see II. 1.

⁴⁴⁰ See II. 1 and IV. 1.

⁴⁴¹ Kennedy, *Lancelot and the Grail*, pp. 77-78.

⁴⁴² Kennedy, *Lancelot and the Grail*, pp. 143-155.

⁴⁴³ For a detailed study on the rewriting of the last part of the *Lancelot* in view of its inclusion within a broader cycle, see Kennedy, *Lancelot and the Grail*, pp. 253-309. For the narrator's change of perspective on the relationship between Lancelot and Guinevere within the cyclical *Lancelot*, see Elspeth Kennedy, 'The Rewriting and Re-reading of a Text: the Evolution of the Prose Lancelot', in *The Changing Face of the Arthurian Romance*, ed. by Alison Adams, Armel H. Diverres and Karen Stern (Cambridge: Brewer, 1986), pp. 1-9.

moral and social implications of the adulterous love between Lancelot and Guinevere, the cyclic version of the same romance, with equal clarity, morally judges and condemns that relationship, thus inaugurating the trend that will characterise both the *Queste del Saint Graal*, where the adultery is condemned in light of Christian morality, and the *Mort Artu*, where a social condemnation is prevalent.

The reference to Lancelot and Guinevere's kiss, which is the only episode from the *Lancelot* that Dante explicitly quotes within his works, does not allow us to determine which version of the text he would have read, since the kiss is included in both the cyclic and non-cyclic *Lancelot*. The absolute prevalence of the cyclic version of the romance both in the Italian and in the overall manuscript tradition may suggest that the chances that Dante had access to it are higher. However, regardless of the version of the *Lancelot* that Dante read, the references to other parts the cycle included in his works, such as the detailed quotation of the episode of Mordred's death in *Inf.* XXXII. 61-62 and the allusion to Lancelot's conversion in *Cv.* IV. XXVIII. 8, show that he had a solid knowledge of the final part of the *Mort Artu*.⁴⁴⁴ Hence, even if Dante read the non-cyclic *Lancelot*, a version devoid of the moral and critical approach characteristic of the cyclic one, he would still have found a clear condemnation of the adulterous relationship in the *Mort Artu*, where Lancelot and Guinevere's love story is clearly compared to Tristan and Iseult's, an association that the non-cyclic *Lancelot* tries to avoid throughout the story:⁴⁴⁵

Dame, fet soi donques Boorz, qe en diroie je plus? Car certes, ge ne vi onques preudome qui amast longuement par amors qui au derreein n'en fust tenuz por honiz [...] Hector li preuz et Achilles, qui d'armes et de chevalerie orent tot le los et tot le pris desor trestoz les chevaliers de l'ancien tens, si en morurent et si en furent andui ocis, et plus de cent mil homes avuec els; et tot ice fu fet par l'acheson d'une feme que Paris prist a force en Grece. Et a nostre tens meïsmes, n'a pas encore v anz que Tristrans, li niés au roi Marc de Cornoaille, si en morut, qui si tres loiaument amoit Yselt la blonde que il onques en son vivant ne mesprist vers li. Que vos en diroie je plus? Onques nus hom ne s'i prist

⁴⁴⁴ Sergio Cristaldi, *Dante di fronte al gioachimismo. I. Dalla «Vita Nova» alla «Monarchia»* (Caltanissetta: Salvatore Sciascia, 2000), p. 193, pointed out that the reference to Lancelot and Guido da Montefeltro in the *Convivio* seems to underline, more than the importance of conversion as renunciation of sin, the need to abandon worldly preoccupations and turn to God in the last phase of life. However, the fact that Dante refers to this episode of the *Mort Artu* implies that he read its final chapter, where Lancelot, after having spent the last years of his life in a hermitage, dies in bliss. See Hult, p. 904: 'Il vienent maintenant la ou Lanceloz estoit et trouverent que l'ame s'en estoit alee. «Ha, Diex! Fet li arcevesques, Beneoiz soiez vos! Or sei ge veraïement que de l'ame de cestui fesoient ore li angre feste si grant com ge vi. Or sei ge bien que penitance vaut seur toutes choses»'. 'They came to the place where Lancelot was and found that his soul had departed. "Oh, God!" said the archbishop. "Blessed are You. Now I know truly that the angels whom I saw rejoice so were celebrating for the soul of this man. Now I know well that penitence is more important than anything else"'.
⁴⁴⁵ Kennedy, *Lancelot and the Grail*, pp. 73-74.

fermement qui n'en moreüst. Yselt ocist Tristrant, que l'en doit assez plaindre. Et savez vos que vos feroiz? Vos feroiz pis que totes cez autres dames ne firent [...] vos domagerez molt plus cest roiaume et maint autre que onques dame ne fist par le cors d'un seul chevalier. Et cestui est li biens que nos avrons de vostre amor.
(Hult, pp. 358-365)

“Lady”, said Bors, “what can I say? I’ve never seen a noble man who stayed in love for a long while without finally being ruined by it [...]. The valiant Hector and Achilles, who won more praise and esteem for feats of arms and chivalry than any knight of antiquity, were both killed, and more than a hundred thousand men with them, and all of that came about because of one woman whom Paris took by force in Greece. And in our own time, it has not yet been five years since the death of Tristan, the nephew of King Mark, who loved Iseut the Fair so faithfully that never in his life did he wrong to her. What more can I say? No man ever gave his love to a woman without dying as a result. And you would be doing more damage than all those other women [...] you’d be doing greater harm to this kingdom and many another than any other woman ever did through one man. Such is the benefit we can expect from your love!”.

Boort, the only survivor among the knights who had access to the vision of the Holy Grail in the *Queste del Saint Graal*, addresses these words to Guinevere in the *Mort Artu*, thus showing a critical attitude towards her adulterous relationship with Lancelot, which is explicitly described throughout the romance as the trigger of all the events that lead to the collapse of the kingdom of Logres. Boort’s speech, which resembles a clerical reprimand located in a secular discourse,⁴⁴⁶ is characterised by misogyny and the awareness that the relationship between Lancelot and Guinevere will greatly damage the realm, rather than by the moral attitude typical of the *Queste*. According to Picone, Dante’s list of the ancient ladies and knights in *Inferno* V could have been inspired by Boort’s cautionary enumeration of love stories that led valorous men to death.⁴⁴⁷ More specifically, four characters among those mentioned or alluded to by Boort also appear among the lustful of *Inferno* V: Achilles, Paris, Helen, and Tristan, who closes both the lists.⁴⁴⁸ Dante, an attentive reader of the *Lancelot* and the *Mort Artu* at least, must have been aware that the *Lancelot en prose*

⁴⁴⁶ Hult, p. 359.

⁴⁴⁷ Picone, ‘«Le donne e’ cavalieri»’, p. 28: ‘L’elenco dantesco è infatti modellato su quello attestato nel romanzo che chiude il grande ciclo *Lancelot-Graal*, cioè nella *Mort le roi Artu*. Significativamente Dante, che costruisce l’episodio dell’incontro con Francesca avendo in mente il *Lancelot*, quando deve descrivere la pena alla quale Francesca è condannata, lo fa ricorrendo alla palinodia moralistica del *Lancelot*, riecheggiando cioè un passo tratto da quella vera e propria *Götterdämmerung* che è *La mort le roi Artu*’.

⁴⁴⁸ See also III. 3.

condemned Lancelot and Guinevere's adulterous relationship.⁴⁴⁹ This awareness would have been all the more pronounced if he read the *Queste del Saint Graal*, in which Lancelot's sinful condition is one of the central points of the romance. In particular, the adulterous relationship with Guinevere, which constituted in the *Lancelot* the knight's main stimulus to carry out great deeds, is represented in the *Queste* as the principal reason why an open vision of the Grail is precluded to him. In light of this, it is clear that Dante was aware of the French cycle's critical attitude towards Lancelot and Guinevere's relationship and, consequently, that the traditional interpretation of the episode has no logical foundation.⁴⁵⁰

In order to provide further evidence for this assumption, it is also necessary to confute the idea that the values asserted or celebrated in Arthurian literature are not compatible with Dante's perspective in the *Commedia*. This view is based on a controversial association between the theme of carnal or adulterous love and the Matter of Britain as a whole. Modern readers can easily realise that the model of love represented in most of the Arthurian romances has little in common with the sinful infatuation which characterises Tristan and Iseult or Lancelot and Guinevere.⁴⁵¹ However, what was Dante's opinion on this topic? Some romances from the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle and some version of the tale of Tristan are the only Arthurian texts that Dante undoubtedly read. Hence, if the only cycle that Dante appears to have known with a certain degree of accuracy expresses an unequivocal condemnation towards Lancelot and Guinevere's affair, it seems at the least imprudent to affirm that he associated Arthurian literature as a whole with a sinful idea of love. It is certainly true that the tale of Tristan and Iseult, namely the only other Arthurian story that Dante undoubtedly read, offers a sinful idea of love, plainly antithetical to the values asserted both in the *Lancelot-Graal* and the *Commedia*, as the condemnation of Tristan in *Inferno* V and Boort's speech in the *Mort Artu* clearly show. However, Dante certainly realised that the *Lancelot-Graal* disagreed with the idea of love typical of the Tristan matter and, accordingly, that sinful or adulterous love cannot be associated with Arthurian literature as a whole. Unsurprisingly, Lancelot is not among the damned souls of *Inferno* V, whereas Tristan, whose tale has undoubtedly played a role in the construction of Paolo and Francesca's story, is included in the list. This is probably due to the fact that while Tristan, just like Paolo and Francesca, never interrupted his love affair with Iseult and died in sin, Lancelot, as the

⁴⁴⁹ The same idea is promoted with similar arguments by Pioletti, 'Il romanzo nella *Commedia*', pp. 99-100.

⁴⁵⁰ As stated above, 'why should Dante criticise a book which condemns an idea of love that Dante himself condemns?'

⁴⁵¹ See, as an example, the majority of Chretien de Troyes's romances (*Erec and Enide*, *Yvain the Knight of Lyon*, *Perceval*), Robert de Boron's cycle, and the anonymous prose romance *Perlesvaus*. On these romances, see I. 1.

Convivio recalls, spent the last years of his life in a hermitage, thus preventing that unbridled love from leading him to physical and spiritual death:⁴⁵²

Rendesi dunque a Dio la nobile anima in questa etade, e attende lo fine di questa vita con molto desiderio e uscir le pare de l'albergo e ritornare ne la propria mansione, uscir le pare di cammino e tornare in cittade, uscir le pare di mare e tornare a porto. O miseri e vili che con le vele alte correte a questo porto, e là ove dovereste riposare, per lo impeto del vento rompete, e perdetate voi medesimi là dove tanto camminato avete! Certo lo cavaliere Lancelotto non volse entrar con le vele alte, né lo nobilissimo Guido montefeltrano. Bene questi nobili calaro le vele de le mondane operazioni, che ne la loro lunga etade a religione si rendero, ogni mondano diletto e opera disponendo.
(Cv. IV. XXVIII. 7-8)

The noble soul, then, surrenders itself to God in this age of life and awaits the end of this life with great desire, and seems to be leaving an inn and returning to its proper dwelling, seems to be coming back from a journey and returning to the city, seems to be coming in from the sea and returning to port. O you miserable and debased beings who speed into this port with sails raised high! Where you should take your rest, you shipwreck yourselves against the force of the wind and perish at the very place to which you have so long been journeying! Certainly the knight Lancelot did not wish to enter with his sails raised high, nor the most noble of our Italians, Guido of Montefeltro. These noble men did indeed lower the sails of their worldly preoccupations and late in life gave themselves to religious orders, forsaking all worldly delights and affairs.

Some scholars have tried to understand the motivation that induced Dante to choose Lancelot and Guinevere, and not Tristan and Iseult, as a model for Paolo and Francesca's love. It is evident that the story of passion and betrayal within the same family, the dynamics of the falling in love and the tragic death of the two lovers, all facts narrated or alluded to in *Inferno* 5, have a similar antecedent in the tale of Tristan and Iseult, rather than in that of Lancelot and Guinevere.⁴⁵³ Moreover, the cyclical version of the story of Lancelot and Guinevere seems to have been influenced in turn, especially within the *Mort Artu*, by the tale of Tristan and Iseult, and more specifically by some twelfth-century verse romance.⁴⁵⁴ Some

⁴⁵² See Maddox, 'The Arthurian Intertexts', p. 123.

⁴⁵³ On this topic, see: Rajna, 'Dante e i romanzi della Tavola Rotonda', pp. 237-241; Inglese, 'Inferno V', pp. 123-127. See also III. 3.

⁴⁵⁴ See Avalor, "... de fole amor", pp. 102-104, who identifies a unitary compositional scheme underlying both *Inferno* V and the main *contes d'adultère* ('tales of adultery') of Medieval French Literature and Celtic tradition.

interesting answers to this question are offered by Delcorno Branca, who, dwelling on the episode from the *Lancelot* that Dante quotes in *Inferno* V, shows that the Italian poet derived Paolo and Francesca's symptomatology of love from the pages they were reading, in which the same signs of love are attributed to Lancelot and Guinevere.⁴⁵⁵ However, Dante's decision mainly depended on the fact that the story of Lancelot shows 'a tension between sacred and profane love, sin and redemption' that is completely extraneous to the Tristan matter, but which represents a distinctive feature of the *Commedia*.⁴⁵⁶

While accepting this interpretation, it is necessary to remark that the life of Paolo and Francesca, unlike those of other Dantean characters or Lancelot and Guinevere, is also completely extraneous to this dynamic of conversion. This assertion can be clearly deduced from a parallel reading of *Inferno* V and *Paradiso* IX. In this canto, Dante meets the souls of the heaven of Venus, notably Cunizza da Romano, a noblewoman from Treviso described by contemporary sources as the protagonist of an adulterous or courtly relationship with the Mantuan troubadour Sordello da Goito, and Folquet de Marseille, an Occitan love poet that in the latter part of his life converted to Christian life and became bishop of Toulouse. At the beginning of her dialogue with Dante, Cunizza introduces herself and illustrates the influence that the heaven of Venus had on her life:

Cunizza fui chiamata, e qui refulgo
perché mi vinse il lume d'esta stella;

ma lietamente a me medesma indulgo
la cagion di mia sorte, e non mi noia;
che parria forse forte al vostro vulgo.

(*Par.* IX, 32-36)

Cunizza was my name and, overcome / by this star's splendor, I shine here. / I gladly
pardon in myself the reason for my lot, / nor does it grieve me – a fact that may / seem
strange, perhaps, to those unschooled among you.

⁴⁵⁵ Delcorno Branca, 'Il "Roman de Lancelot"', pp. 147-149.

⁴⁵⁶ Delcorno Branca, 'Il "Roman del Lancelot"', p. 152: 'Nel *Tristan* in prosa il mito tristaniano originario dell'amore impossibile in rotta con la società veniva in qualche modo addormentato per comporsi in un'etica esemplare socialmente integrata, alla portata di una borghesia con nostalgie cavalleresche. Nel *Lancelot* (e ancor più nel *Lancelot-Graal*) sussisteva invece un piano di vasto respiro, e con modalità strutturali di grande finezza, quella tensione fra amor profano e amor sacro, peccato e conversione che costituisce la molla segreta di opere come la *Commedia* o il *Canzoniere* [...]'.
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Cunizza states that she belongs to that heaven because during her earthly life she has been overcome by the influence of Venus – ‘il lume d'esta stella’ (‘this star’s splendor’) – which, according to medieval astrology, causes a particular sensitivity of human soul towards love. Cunizza is not ashamed of this natural propensity, which on the one hand pushed her towards sin in her youth, and on the other triggered her conversion in maturity, thanks to which she accessed Paradise. As Chiavacci Leonardi clearly states, ‘this verse establishes a relationship between the presence of the Blessed in the various heavens and the influence exerted by the planets on their disposition, namely an ‘astrological’ criterion in the ordering of the Blessed in the spheres’.⁴⁵⁷ In other words, Dante believes that every human soul is dominated by the influence of a planet, which in itself is neither positive nor negative, but can lead to both damnation or salvation. In this sense, the souls of *Paradiso* IX are the heavenly equivalent of the lustful of *Inferno* V. Both these categories of souls were dominated in life by the same astral or sentimental influence, that of Venus or love. However, this led the lustful to damnation and the blessed souls of the heaven of Venus, after a youth dominated by earthly passion, to conversion and salvation. This interpretation is buttressed a few lines later by the words that Folquet addresses to Dante:

Folco mi disse quella gente a cui
fu noto il nome mio; e questo cielo
di me s’imprenta, com’io fe’ di lui;

ché più non arse la figlia di Belo,
noiando e a Sicheo ed a Creusa,
di me, infin che si convenne al pelo;

[...]

Non però qui si pente, ma si ride,
non della colpa, ch’a mente non torna,
ma del valor ch’ordinò e provide.

Qui si rimira nell’arte ch’adorna
cotanto effetto, e discernesì ‘l bene

⁴⁵⁷ Chiavacci Leonardi (1991-97): ‘Questo verso stabilisce un rapporto fra la presenza dei beati nei vari cieli e l’influenza esercitata dai pianeti sulla loro indole, cioè un criterio «astrologico» nell’ordinamento dei beati nelle sfere’.

per che 'l mondo di su quel di giù torna.

(*Par.* IX. 94-99, 103-108)

Folco the people called me, if they knew / my name, and now this heaven / is marked by me, as I was marked by it, / for the daughter of Belus was no more aflame, / bringing grief to Sychaeus and to Creusa, / than I, until the color of my hair began to fade [...] Yet, here we don't repent, but smile instead, / not at our fault, which comes not back to mind, / but for that Power which ordered and foresaw. / Here we contemplate the craft that beautifies / such love, and here discern the good / with which the world above informs the one below.

Folquet states that, just like the heaven of Venus is now marked by the light of his presence, when he was alive the influence of that planet marked in turn his own soul ('questo cielo di me s'imprenta, com'io fe' di lui'). To motivate this assertion, Folquet states that, as long as he was young ('infin che si convenne al pelo'), the strength of his own passion was no lower than Dido's ('la figlia di Belo'), a character that Dante includes among the lustful of *Inferno* V. However, Folquet's following words, according to which the blessed do not repent of guilt but enjoy bliss, also allude to his subsequent conversion and the overcoming of his juvenile sin. Why is there a radical difference between Folquet's and Dido's destinies, or between Cunizza's and Francesca's? What allowed the souls of *Paradiso* IX to access eternal bliss? Dante's answer is clearly deducible from their stories: while in Folquet's and Cunizza's lives the phase of sin has been erased by the phase of conversion, Dido and Francesca died without repenting. Hence, it is likely that, in Dante's view, the life of Lancelot, whose conversion and death in bliss are described in the *Mort Artu*, could be associated to Folquet's or Cunizza's, rather than to Dido's or Francesca's. Perhaps for this reason the Arthurian knight is not listed among the lustful of *Inferno* V: if Dante had included him in his poem, it is possible that he would have placed him in the heaven of Venus rather than in the second circle of Hell.

This dynamic of conversion was undoubtedly clear to Dante, as the *Convivio* confirms. However, Paolo and Francesca, who committed sin while reading a romance that, if read in its entirety and considered in the broader context of the cycle, would have offered a positive model of redemption, do not seem to have understood it. In light of this, it is reasonable to wonder whether the 'literary fault' at the centre of the episode could be associated with the readers rather than with the book. In order to understand what this literary fault could consist of, it is necessary first of all to investigate the nature of Paolo and Francesca's sin. It has

already been evidenced that the sin of lust, at least for the characters mentioned in *Inferno* V, consists in the inability to exercise a rational and moral control of the passions, namely to temper the appetites produced by the sensitive part of the soul through the lucidity which characterises its rational part. For a broader understanding of this typology of sin, it is necessary to turn to Virgil's discourse on love in *Purgatorio* XVII:

“Né creator né creatura mai”

cominciò el, “figliuol, fu senza amore,
o naturale o d'animo; e tu l' sai.

Lo naturale è sempre senza errore,
ma l'altro puote errar per mal obietto
o per troppo o per poco di vigore.

Mentre ch'elli è nel primo ben diretto,
e ne' secondi sé stesso misura,
esser non può cagion di mal diletto;

ma quando al mal si torce, o con più cura
o con men che non dee corre nel bene,
contra 'l fattore adovra sua fattura.

Quinci comprender puoi ch'esser convene
amor sementa in voi d'ogni virtute
e d'ogne operazion che merta pene”.

(*Purg.* XVII. 91-105)

“Neither Creator nor His creature, my dear son, / was ever without love, whether natural / or of the mind”, he began, “and this you know. / The natural is always without error, / but the other may err in its chosen goal / or through excessive or deficient vigor. / While it is directed to the primal good, / knowing moderation in its lesser goals, / it cannot be the cause of wrongful pleasure. / But when it bends to evil, or pursues the good / with more or less concern than needed, / then the creature works against his Maker. / From this you surely understand that love / must be the seed in you of every virtue / and of every deed that merits punishment”.

From a comparative reading of *Inferno* V and *Paradiso* IX it is possible to deduce that the natural disposition to love, or the influence of Venus, is not negative in itself but can lead to both salvation and damnation. In *Purgatorio* XVII, Virgil emphasizes that love can be divided in two categories: ‘natural love’, referable to the sensitive part of the soul and characteristic of all the animals, and ‘love of the mind’, a prerogative of humans, the only species that possesses a rational soul.⁴⁵⁸ Natural love is never wrong, since it consists in the instinctive force that pushes every being towards its end and is a direct emanation of the divine will.⁴⁵⁹ By contrast, the love of the mind, which originates from the intellect, and therefore from the human will, can err in different ways. On the one hand, it can err in its chosen objective (‘mal obietto’), and turn in a negative direction. On the other, it can turn to the good but its strength, depending on the chosen aim, can be excessive or insufficient (‘o per troppo o per poco di vigore’). If love is directed towards the ‘primo bene’, namely God, or if in turning to the ‘secondi beni’, the earthly ones, it keeps the right measure, ‘esser non può cagion di mal diletto’ (‘it cannot be the cause of wrongful pleasure’). By contrast, if love turns to evil, or turns to good in an excessive or insufficient way, respectively by loving immoderately earthly goods or deficiently the primal good, the creature acts against the creator and commits sin. For this reason, love can be as much a source for every virtue as it is the cause of every vice or sin. Among the categories of sin indicated, lust, just like gluttony and greed, undoubtedly falls within the second one, namely ‘excessive love towards lesser or earthly goods’.⁴⁶⁰ Hence, this is the nature of the sin of Paolo, Francesca, and all the other lustful of *Inferno* V. This sin, as already mentioned, was not ineluctable, since the two lovers would have had the possibility of controlling their appetite:

Però, là onde vegna lo intelletto
delle prime notizie, omo non sape,
e de’ primi appetibili l’affetto,

ch’è solo in voi, sì come studio in ape
di far lo mele; e questa prima voglia
merto di lode o di biasmo non cape.

⁴⁵⁸ Virgil’s speech is mostly inspired by Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa Theologica*. On this topic, see Inglese (2007-2016), II, pp. 217-219.

⁴⁵⁹ See *Mon.* III. XIV. 2: ‘Quod a natura recipitur, a deo recipitur’ (‘what comes from nature comes from God’). For the text of the *Monarchia*, see Dante Alighieri, *Monarchia*, ed. by Prue Shaw (Florence: Le Lettere, 2009). For the English translation of the *Monarchia*, see Dante, *Monarchy*, trans. by Prue Shaw (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁴⁶⁰ This is clearly deducible from *Purg.* XVII, 127-139.

Or perché a questa ogn'altra si raccoglie,
innata v'è la virtù che consiglia,
e dell'assenso de' tener la soglia.

Quest'è il principio là onde si piglia
ragion di meritare in voi, secondo
che buoni e rei amori accoglie e viglia.

Color che ragionando andaro al fondo,
s'accorser d'esta innata libertate;
però moralità lasciaro al mondo.

Onde, poniam che di necessitate
surga ogni amor che dentro a voi s'ascende,
di ritenerlo è in voi la podestate.

La nobile virtù Beatrice intende
per lo libero arbitrio, e però guarda
che l'abbi a mente, s' a parlar ten prende.

(Purg. XVIII, 55-75)

In consequence, where we derive our knowledge / of first principles and the inclination
/ to universal object of desire, no one knows. / These are innate in you just like the zeal
in bees / for making honey, and this primal inclination / admits no positing of praise or
blame. / That to this will all others may conform / there is innate in you the faculty that
counsels / and ought to guard the threshold of assent. / This is the principle in which is
found / the measure of your merit, as it welcomes / and then winnows good from guilty
loves. / Those who in their reasoning reached the root / recognized this innate freedom
/ and thus bequeathed their ethics to the world. / Let us posit a given: every love / that's
kindled in you arises of necessity. / Still, the power to restrain it lies with you. / That
noble power is called free will by Beatrice, / and so make sure that you remember this /
if she should ever speak of it with you.

In responding to Dante's doubts about the relationship between love and human will, Virgil offers a rational answer. The Roman poet claims that he can only tell him what is accessible to reason; for the truths of faith, which transcend his abilities, Dante must wait for

Beatrice.⁴⁶¹ Virgil states that humans do not know the origin of the peculiar and innate traits of their species, namely the knowledge of the first principles on which reason is based ('lo intelletto delle prime notizie') and the natural attraction towards the universal objects of desire ('de' primi appetibili l'affetto'), such as truth, good, beauty, and happiness. It is clear that Virgil, as a pagan, can only offer a philosophical and rational solution to Dante's question. Consequently, he states that humans do not know the origin of reason and appetites, which Christian faith and theology would obviously attribute to God's will. Although Virgil is unaware of the divine origin of the universal appetites, he recognizes that this primitive inclination, as natural and common to all humans, 'merto di lode o di biasmo non cape' ('admits no positing of praise or blame'). In order to reconcile the individual and non-innate appetites, namely, the specific desires that arise in a human soul throughout life, with the innate appetites, and thus, to elude sin, humans possess the 'virtù che consiglia', or, in other words, free will. Thanks to the innate presence of this faculty, men have the opportunity to choose between good and guilty appetites, and their merits and demerits are based on the choices they make. Hence, even assuming that a human love or appetite arises out of necessity, such as astral influences or any other external conditioning, men, thanks to free will, have the power and freedom to accept or reject it.

By integrating this argument with the theological concepts that emerge from *Purgatorio* XVII, it is possible to state that love is always and in any case subject to free will, even if it arises in the human soul out of necessity. Hence, Paolo and Francesca's sin consists in having misused free will, in having accepted, rather than rejected, a 'guilty love'.⁴⁶² Even after her death, Francesca seems to completely ignore free will, whose correct use would have led her to both physical and spiritual salvation:

Amor, ch'al cor gentil ratto s'apprende,
prese costui della bella persona
che mi fu tolta; e 'l modo ancor m'offende.

Amor, ch'a nullo amato amar perdona,
mi prese del costui piacer sì forte,

⁴⁶¹ See *Purg* XVIII. 46-48: 'Ed elli a me: "Quanto ragion qui vede, / dir ti poss'io; da indi in là t'aspetta / pur a Beatrice, ch'è opra di fede"' ('And he to me: "As far as reason may see in this, / I can tell you. To go farther you must look / to Beatrice, for it depends on faith alone"').

⁴⁶² See Inglese, '*Inferno* V', p. 118: 'Francesca e gli altri sono condannati perché hanno sottoposto lo *iudicium* all'*appetitus*: non il talento ha "legato" la ragione, ma la ragione – come sdoppiandosi – ha conosciuto nell'oggetto appreso sia il male morale (*iudicium conscientiae*), sia il bene terreno appetibile (*iudicium de hoc particulari operabili*), e ha voluto che l'appetito del bene terreno prevalesse sulla rinuncia al male'.

che, come vedi, ancor non m'abbandona.

(*Inf.* V. 100-105)

Love, quick to kindle in the gentle heart, / seized this man with the fair form taken from
me. / The way of it afflicts me still. / Love, which absolves no one beloved from loving,
/ seized me so strongly with his charm that, / as you see, it has not left me yet.

Francesca, while describing the origin of her love passion towards Paolo, unequivocally reveals a deterministic approach.⁴⁶³ Since love 'al cor gentil ratto s'apprende' ('is quick to kindle in the gentle heart'), Paolo, who was fatally struck by her beauty, could not avoid indulgence in the passion that governed him. On the other hand, since love 'a nullo amato amar perdona' ('absolves no one beloved from loving'), Francesca could not avoid reciprocating Paolo's passion or falling in love with him due to his beauty. As many scholars have pointed out, the two tercets just analysed represent a *pastiche* of quotations drawn from thirteenth-century lyric poetry or courtly literature, through which Francesca constructs a coherent discourse on love that she applies to her biographical events. More specifically, the verse 'Amor, ch'al cor gentil ratto s'apprende' recalls Guido Guinizzelli's canzone *Al cor gentil rempaira sempre Amor* and, in the second instance, Dante's sonnet *Amor e 'l cor gentil sono una cosa*. On the other hand, the verse 'Amor ch'a nullo amato amar perdona' may be a rewriting of some maxims on the reciprocity of love drawn from Andreas Cappellanus's *De amore*.⁴⁶⁴ However, the 'love' Francesca is talking about represents, rather than Guinizzelli's or Dante's ennobling feeling, a personification of the tyrannical god Love typical of the poetic tradition, a figure whose power is comparable to that of Venus and Cupid, who triggered Dido's passion for Aeneas, or to that of Tristan and Iseult's love philtre. Hence, it is clear that what Francesca describes here is a feeling that arose out of necessity, and that free will does not find any space in her sophisticated discourse on the origin of love passion.⁴⁶⁵ Francesca, just like the ancient ladies and knights mentioned in *Inferno* V, let herself be dominated by a sinful appetite, thus misusing her free will and falling into sin.

⁴⁶³ See Pirovano, 'All'Inferno per amore', p. 20.

⁴⁶⁴ On the intertextuality of these verses, see: Gianfranco Contini, 'Dante come personaggio-poeta della Commedia', in *Varianti e altra linguistica. Una raccolta di saggi (1938-1968)* (Turin: Einaudi, 1970), pp. 335-361 (pp. 343-347); Malato, 'Dottrina e poesia', pp. 75-90; Carlos Lopez Cortezo, 'Le Roman de Francesca', *Tenzione*, 12 (2011), 83-103; Inglese, 'Inferno V', pp. 118-123.

⁴⁶⁵ See Inglese, 'Inferno V', p. 118: '[...] quando Francesca ha peccato, il suo arbitrio non era *ligatum* ma *liberum*. Questa è la verità obiettiva del caso, che la sventurata né riconosce né può formalmente negare'.

Given this understanding of the nature of Francesca's sin and the deterministic dynamics to which she attributes the origin of her passion, it can be showed that this anti-rational attitude also guided her during her reading of the *Lancelot*. The first evidence for this theory is provided by Francesca herself at the beginning of her second speech, when she says that she was reading the story of Lancelot, together with Paolo, 'per diletto' ('to pass the time in pleasure'; *Inf.* V. 127).⁴⁶⁶ Paolo and Francesca are thus responsible for a hedonistic act of reading, based on the aesthetic fruition of the story rather than on the desire to understand its moral implications.⁴⁶⁷ This approach is confirmed by the following lines, when Francesca tells Dante how the book involved them on an emotional level: 'Per più fiate li occhi ci sospinse / quella lettura, e scolorocci il viso' ('More than once that reading made our eyes meet / and drained the color from our faces'; *Inf.* V. 130-131). By having read the book in a sentimentally involved manner, Paolo and Francesca represent a paradigmatic example of the lustful. This reading attitude led them to make reason subject to desire and, consequently, to override the pursuit of truth with the satisfaction of their own sinful passion.⁴⁶⁸ If Paolo and Francesca had made reason prevail over appetite, they would not have interrupted the reading, thus discovering the moral and social consequences of Lancelot and Guinevere's adulterous relationship.

This reading of *Inferno* V bears witness to a continuity between Paolo and Francesca's episode and the opinion on the Arthurian romances that Dante expressed a few years earlier in the *De vulgari eloquentia*. According to this interpretation, there is no need to surmise a sudden and total change of Dante's perspective on the Matter of Britain in the short period between the interruption of the Latin treatise and the composition of *Inferno* V, where Dante's condemnation involves, rather than the *Lancelot* or the Arthurian literature in general, a hedonistic attitude towards courtly romances.⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁶ To promote this theory, Maddox, 'The Arthurian Intertexts', p. 123, recalls *Cv.* IV. XXVIII. 7-8, where Dante, while writing about Lancelot's conversion, uses the word *diletto* in a positive sense: 'ogni mondano *diletto* e opera disponendo' ('forsaking all worldly delights and affairs').

⁴⁶⁷ See Popolizio, 'Literary Reminiscences', p. 26: 'Dante deliberately portrays his heroine as one who, stimulated by its aesthetic allurements and not its didactic import, seeks in literature only what is consoling and exalting. For Francesca, reading is essentially an emotional experience, hardly a learning process'.

⁴⁶⁸ See Marco Veglia, 'Messer Decameron Galeotto. Un titolo e una chiave di lettura', *Heliotropia*, 8-9 (2011-2012), 99-112 (p. 103): 'Il nodo drammatico del canto, la "prima radice" (*Inf.* V.124) dell'amore fatale in esso rappresentato, sta appunto nel rischio di una bellezza, di un "piacere" (*Inf.* V.104), letto e adorato non come viatico alla verità, ma come compimento e legittimazione di una ragione sottomessa al "talento"'.

⁴⁶⁹ See, again, Veglia, 'Messer Decameron Galeotto', p. 103: 'L'uso edonistico della letteratura in lato senso cortese, non della letteratura cortese in sé, è oggetto di condanna e censura: "Oh lasso! / quanti dolci pensier, quanto disio / menò costoro al doloroso passo" (*Inf.* V.112-114). Come accadrà più tardi nella chiusa del *Decameron*, è in gioco per Dante l'onestà del lettore. Il "piacere" delle "presenti cose", giudicato "falso" in *Purg.* XXXI.34-35, rappresentato in "natura o arte" (*Purg.* XXXI.50), deve indurre l'uomo a "levar suso" il proprio cammino, a indirizzarlo non a sé, al compiacimento delle proprie passioni, ma al "sommo Ben"'.

IV. 3 Dante, the dark wood and the *Queste del Saint Graal*

In a 1987 essay later included in his book *Dante e i segni*, Zygmunt Barański discusses the proemial function of *Inferno* I in relation to the rest of the poem.⁴⁷⁰ By positing the point of view of a medieval reader, who would ordinarily identify a work's main themes and links with a pre-existing tradition in its *exordium*, Barański reflects on the ways in which the first canto of the *Inferno* clarifies the *Commedia*'s genre and subject matter. While he acknowledges that the Middle Ages lacked a consistent rhetoric terminology, he observes how the most frequent distinction with regard to narrative works was that between *fabula* and *historia*, namely texts whose literal sense was fictional or real respectively. These 'narrative genres' were interpreted in different ways. As we have seen in the previous chapter,⁴⁷¹ the *fabulae* were not just intended as fantastic narratives. On the contrary, their fictional shell (*integumentum*) was believed to conceal moral truths to be uncovered through exegesis. Accordingly, the *fabulae* were meant to be read according to the principles of the *allegoria in verbis* or, as Dante defines it in the *Convivio*, the 'allegory of the poets', consisting in a 'veritade ascosa sotto bella menzogna' ('truth hidden beneath a beautiful fiction'; *Cv.* II. I. 3). On the other hand, the *historiae* were seen as narratives whose literal sense conveyed real events, and therefore whose content was wholly truthful. In order to understand the meaning of a *historia*, it is necessary to investigate the significance of real events through the principles of the *allegoria in factis* or, according to *Cv.* II. I. 4-7, the 'allegory of the theologians', characterised by the coexistence of a historical meaning, which is found in the literal sense, and three hidden senses: allegorical, moral and anagogical. As Barański notes, within this classification allegorical texts with a didactic or moral purpose were regarded as *fabulae*. On the other hand, the Holy Scripture or the visions of the afterlife were categorised as *historiae*. According to Barański, a medieval reader familiar with this distinction would have encountered contradictory signals in reading *Inferno* I.

Inf. I. 1-63 might have led a medieval reader to believe that he was dealing with a traditional allegorical text, and therefore a *fabula*, much like the *Roman de la Rose* or Brunetto Latini's *Tesoretto*, whose prologue is often identified as a possible source for the opening canto of the *Commedia*. However, Dante's meeting with Virgil (*Inf.* I. 64-66) marks a significant shift in the narrative. The historical accuracy of Virgil's first speech (*Inf.* I. 67-75), as well as the Pilgrim's address to the Latin poet (*Inf.* I. 79-90) hint at the transition

⁴⁷⁰ Zygmunt G. Barański, 'La lezione esegetica di *Inferno* I: allegoria, storia e letteratura nella *Commedia*', in *Dante e le forme dell'allegoresi*, ed. by Michelangelo Picone (Ravenna: Longo, 1987), pp. 79-97. Republished as Barański, 'I segni della Bibbia', pp. 103-126.

⁴⁷¹ See III. 1.

from *fabula* to *historia*. Moreover, the two characters' discussion of the events befalling the Pilgrim in *Inf.* I. 1-63 – presented as part of the same historical reality encompassing their conversation – shows that, in Dante's intention, 'the wood, the mountain and the three beasts are not poetic inventions [...] but physically real entities'.⁴⁷² In addition, Barański notes that a medieval reader would have been aware of another narrative shift, which occurs at verses 112-129. Here, 'the *Commedia* [...] announces that it tells a story in which things, people and events, starting with the wilderness, the pilgrim and his adventures, have the same truth as the facts told in the Bible'.⁴⁷³ In other words, Dante uses allegory to establish a direct link between the events narrated at verses 1-63, their role within the divine design and their place in universal history. Hence, the narrative transcends the dimension of secular history to rise to the level of a *sacra historia* ('sacred history'). This is evidenced by Virgil's interpretation of the events narrated in *Inferno* I through the lens of the *allegoria in factis* or 'allegory of the theologians', which is characteristic of the Holy Scripture.⁴⁷⁴ In light of this reading, it becomes necessary to look at the events narrated in *Inf.* I. 1-63 as belonging to the same historical reality that encompasses Dante's encounter with Virgil and the beginning of his otherworldly journey, regardless of whether they also possess a clear allegorical significance.⁴⁷⁵ A similar view is also promoted by Lucia Battaglia Ricci, who, in

⁴⁷² Barański, 'I segni della Bibbia', p. 117. The above is based on Virgil's words in *Inf.* I. 76-78 ('Ma tu perché ritorni a tanta noia? / perché non sali il diletto monte / ch'è principio e cagion di tutta gioia?'). 'But you, why are you turning back to misery? / Why do you not climb the peak that gives delight, / origin and cause of every joy?') and *Inf.* I. 91-96 ('"A te convien tenere altro viaggio", / rispuose, poi che lagrimar mi vide, / "se vuo' campar d'esto loco selvaggio; ché questa bestia, per la qual tu gride, / non lascia altrui passar per la sua via, / ma tanto lo 'mpedisce che l'uccide"''). "It is another path that you must follow", / he answered, when he saw me weeping, / "if you would flee this wild and savage place. / For the beast that moves you to cry out / lets no man pass her way, / but so besets him that she slays him"', as well as on Dante's in *Inf.* I. 88-90 ('Vedi la bestia per cu' io mi volsi; / aiutami da lei, famoso saggio, / ch'ella mi fa tremar le vene e i polsi'). 'See the beast that forced me to turn back. / Save me from her, famous sage – / she makes my veins and pulses tremble').

⁴⁷³ Barański, 'I segni della Bibbia', p. 119.

⁴⁷⁴ Barański, 'I segni della Bibbia', pp. 117-121. In order to shed light on the relationship between the secular history and the *sacra historia*, Baranski quotes a passage from Alexander of Hales's *Summa Theologica* (Tractatus introductivus, q. I, c. I): 'aliter est historia in sacra Scriptura, aliter in aliis. In aliis enim historia significatione sermonum exprimit "singularia gesta" hominum; nec est intentio significationis interioris, et ideo, quia singularium actuum et temporalium est, omnis talis historia est eorum quae "nunquam intelliguntur". In sacra vero Scriptura ponitur historia non ea intentione seu fine ut significantur singulares actus hominum significatione sermonum sed ut significantur universales actus et conditiones pertinentes ad informationem hominum et contemplationem divinorum mysteriorum significatione rerum'; text from: Alexandri de Hales, *Summa Theologica*, 4 vols (Rome: Quaracchi, 1924-48). 'History in Holy Scripture is one thing, in other texts it is another. In the other texts, history expresses the individual deeds of men through the meaning of discourses. And there is no intention of an inner meaning, for the reason that, since it concerns individual and temporal acts, every such history is the history of those who understand nothing. On the contrary, history is not placed in the Holy Scripture with the intention or purpose of signifying the individual acts of men by the meaning of discourses, but to signify the universal acts and conditions relevant to the information of men and the contemplation of the divine mysteries by the meaning of things'; the translation is mine.

⁴⁷⁵ This is further reinforced by *Inf.* XV. 49-54, where Dante, in conversation with Brunetto Latini, speaks of the events occurred in *Inferno* I as real facts: '"Là sù di sopra, in la vita serena", / rispuos' io lui, "mi smarri' in una valle, / avanti che l'età mia fosse piena. / Pur ier mattina volsi le spalle: / questi m'apparve, tornand' io in quella, / e reducemmi a ca per questo calle"' ('"In the sunlit life above", I answered, / "in a valley there, I lost

investigating the polysemic nature of the *Commedia*, argues that Dante's scripturally inflected language in *Inferno* I and other cantos indicates a desire to base his narrative on facts rather than on poetic invention.⁴⁷⁶

It is important to note that the romance sources and precedents identified so far do not fully explain the peculiar status of the dark wood in *Inferno* I, a real, historical place imbued with strong allegorical echoes, particularly in relation to the protagonist's sinful state. The vast majority of commentators of *Inferno* I have paid a great deal of attention to the forest's allegorical resonances, while ignoring the fact that the protagonist's straying and bewilderment should be interpreted as a real event (*historia*) rather than a poetic invention (*fabula*). As we shall see, some scholars have recognised the importance of interpreting the dark wood as a real place. However, the sources and literary precedents they put forward, while perfectly consistent with a literal reading, are hardly aligned with the allegorical significance of Dante's dark wood. While acknowledging that the only certain source for Dante's dark wood is *Aeneid* VI, which is effective in explaining both its literal and allegorical meanings, I will argue for the existence of a literary precedent drawn from the romance tradition: Lancelot's wanderings in the *Forest Gaste* ('Waste Forest') in the *Queste del Saint Graal*. Firstly, this episode is presented as real within the narrative engine of the romance, and is interpreted through the lens of the *allegoria in factis* by the hermits who, in guiding Lancelot in his journey to conversion, are comparable to Virgil and Beatrice, who are tasked with the explanation of Dante's own straying in *Inferno* I-II and *Purgatorio* XXX-XXXI respectively. Secondly, Lancelot's bewilderment in the forest, like Dante's, allegorises his sinful state and marks the beginning of a journey of conversion culminating in a mystical vision. However, before proceeding to a comparative analysis of the *Queste* and the *Commedia*, it will be necessary to provide a brief overview of the main sources that scholars have traditionally associated with the dark wood of *Inferno* I.

my way / before I reached the zenith of my days. / Only yesterday morning did I leave it, / but had turned back when he appeared, / and now along this road he leads me home").

⁴⁷⁶ Lucia Battaglia Ricci, *Dante e la tradizione letteraria medievale. Una proposta per la «Commedia»* (Pisa: Giardini, 1983), pp. 65-105 (pp. 90-91): 'In effetti se le tre fiere fanno parte del *sensus parabolicus* e sono dunque una pura metafora espressiva [...], non una realtà fisica con cui Dante si scontra, come possiamo poi definire "realtà storica Virgilio" e il resto del *poema*? Dichiarare metaforico il I canto (fino all'incontro con Virgilio, perché per Virgilio tutti accettano ormai l'auerbachiano concetto di figura) implica evidentemente una definizione metaforica di tutto il *poema*, dato che Dante non cambia il suo linguaggio tra il II e il III canto dell'*Inferno* né tra la descrizione delle tre fiere e quella di Virgilio: il ché è chiaramente inaccettabile proprio per le esplicite dichiarazioni dantesche di "verità storica" del suo viaggio e della sua visione. Dante, insomma, dice che Virgilio lo salva da tre fiere fisicamente e corporalmente minacciose che impediscono l'ascesa al colle luminoso, e questa è la verità istoriale del *poema*. Ma dice anche che quella salvazione è di tipo morale e costruisce quella "storia" con un tessuto di chiara provenienza biblica. Questa presenza che, abbiamo visto, è continua, fitta, incalzante, risolve il problema centrale della struttura del *poema* dantesco: vedere cioè come sia possibile, una volta chiarita la verità letterale della esperienza compiuta dal Dante personaggio, caricarla di un sovrasenso e renderla leggibile su due piani diversi, quello della storia (lettera) e quello del significato spirituale (allegoria, tropologia, anagogia)'.

The tendency to provide an exclusively allegorical reading of the dark wood has been prevalent since the decades following Dante's death. The vast majority of fourteenth-century commentators explain the first few lines of the poem by interpreting the forest as an allegory of sin, vice and ignorance, or as an allusion to the earthly life or the troubled political situation of Dante's time.⁴⁷⁷ This allegorising trend was taken to its extreme by Benedetto Croce, who claims that in *Inferno* I 'we find ourselves in a forest that is not forest and we see a hill that is not a hill',⁴⁷⁸ and continued to dominate twentieth-century commentaries,⁴⁷⁹ often in conjunction with references to the most illustrious literary precedents of the canto: Virgil's *Aeneid* (VI. 179) and Brunetto Latini's *Tesoretto* (vv. 187-190). While entirely acceptable, exclusively allegorical interpretations of the dark wood are incomplete, as they often ignore the literal sense, which, according to Dante's own *Convivio*, should represent the starting point of any reading of a text:

E in dimostrare questo, sempre lo litterale dee andare innanzi, sì come quello nella cui sentenza li altri sono inchiusi, e senza lo quale sarebbe impossibile ed inrazionale intendere alli altri, e massimamente allo allegorico.⁴⁸⁰

(Cv. II. I. 8)

In this kind of explication, the literal should always come first, as being the sense in whose meaning the others are enclosed, and without which it would be impossible and illogical to attend to the other senses, and especially the allegorical.

In a 1972 essay, Ann H. Hallock explores the limitation of an exclusively allegorical understanding of the first few lines of *Inferno* before attempting a literal interpretation of the dark wood. However, her exegetical efforts inadvertently replicate her predecessors' allegorical focus. For instance, she argues that by the word 'selva' ('wood') Dante is literally referring to 'vegetative life' or 'unformed matter'.⁴⁸¹ This reading, while grounded in Iacopo

⁴⁷⁷ As an example of this exegetical trend, see Guglielmo Maramauro (1369-1373): 'Questo primo capitolo è tuto alegorico, cioè che sona ne l'intelecto altro che ne la littera'.

⁴⁷⁸ Benedetto Croce, *La poesia di Dante* (Bari: Laterza, 1921), p. 73: 'ci si ritrova in una selva che non è selva, e si vede un colle che non è un colle'.

⁴⁷⁹ On this exegetical trend in relation to *Inferno* I, see Juan Varela-Portas de Orduña, 'L'eresia dell'io', in «*Il mondo errante*». *Dante fra letteratura, eresia e storia. Atti del Convegno internazionale di studio Bertinoro, 13-16 settembre 2010*, ed. by Marco Veglia, Lorenzo Paolini and Riccardo Parmeggiani (Spoleto: CISAM, 2013), pp. 523-535 (pp. 523-525).

⁴⁸⁰ In the following paragraphs (9-15), Dante further emphasises that the *littera* must be the foundation for all other exegetical efforts, particularly the identification of an allegorical meaning. A similar observation is also found in Albertus Magnus (*Summa Theologica sive de mirabili scientia Dei*, I. tr. I. q. 5. cap. 4) and Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologiae*, I. q. 1. a. 10. ad 1m). On this topic, see Dante Alighieri, *Convivio*, ed. by Gianfranco Fioravanti, in Dante Alighieri, *Opere*, ed. by Santagata, II, pp. 218-221.

⁴⁸¹ Ann H. Hallock, 'Dante's *selva oscura* and Other Obscure Selvas', *Forum Italicum*, 6.1 (1972), 57-78.

Alighieri's and Cristoforo Landino's commentaries, as well as in two passages from the *Monarchia* and the *De vulgari eloquentia*, has little or nothing to do with the literal sense of the first few lines of *Inferno*, where Dante explicitly states that he lost his way in a forest. In order to provide a reading consistent with Dante's own ideas as expressed in the *Convivio*, it is therefore necessary to start from the awareness that Dante's journey into the afterlife originates in a real and physical place, in a *selva* 'selvaggia e aspra e forte' ('savage, dense and harsh'; *Inf.* I. 5) which is not just an allegory. This is not, of course, to deny the fundamental importance of allegorical interpretation, but to accompany it with a reflection on the literal sense which, at least in the first stage, is not influenced by the level of allegory. This would hardly be possible without a brief discussion of how forests were imagined and understood in the Middle Ages and an overview of some of the sources that may have inspired Dante's dark wood.

Medieval Europe was an extensively wooded continent whose forests carried ambivalent connotations in the popular imagination. On the one hand, forests represented an important resource regularly exploited for a wide range of economic activities, from hunting to the foraging of raw materials. In this sense, some forests could be regarded as fully anthropised environment. On the other hand, forests would also be seen as wild and intimidating places, diametrically opposed to the civilised world of cities, manors and farmed land. As a result, they came to be regarded as the chosen shelter of outcasts, outlaws and hermits.⁴⁸² This second aspect was of particular interest to theologians and hagiographers, who played a fundamental role in shaping the popular conception of the forest as a place antithetical to the spaces of civilisation and devoted to religious experience. Hence, in many medieval works the forest came to replace the desert, traditionally represented in the New Testament or in the lives of Eastern hermits of early Christianity as the conventional space of contemplation, mystical experience and the struggle against temptations.⁴⁸³ This imagery also permeated medieval vernacular literature, where the forest became the characteristic environment of both the hermit experience and the chivalric quest.⁴⁸⁴ How might this heritage have shaped Dante's representation of the dark wood? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to

⁴⁸² For more on this, see: Roger Grand and Raymond Delatouche, *Storia agraria del medioevo* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1981), pp. 380-381; Jacques Le Goff, 'Il deserto-foresta nell'Occidente medievale', in *Il meraviglioso e il quotidiano nell'Occidente medievale* (Bari: Laterza, 1983), pp. 25-44 (pp. 34-36).

⁴⁸³ Le Goff, 'Il deserto-foresta', pp. 27-38; Reginald Grégoire, 'La foresta come esperienza religiosa', in *L'ambiente vegetale nell'Alto Medioevo. Atti della Settimana di Studio sull'Alto Medioevo* (Spoleto: CISAM, 1990), pp. 663-703 (pp. 692-701).

⁴⁸⁴ For an overview of the influence of this imagery in romance literature – particularly on the cycle of William of Orange, Béroul's *Tristan* and Chrétien de Troyes's *Yvain* and *Perceval* – see Le Goff, 'Il deserto-foresta', pp. 38-42.

provide an outline of the theological and literary texts that may have inspired him.⁴⁸⁵

The majority of possible sources advanced by scholars exclusively illuminate the allegorical aspects of Dante's forest, which, as John Freccero has pointed out, appear to be indebted to St Augustine's *Confessions*.⁴⁸⁶ However, this study will only consider sources that may further a literal understanding of the dark wood. The sixth book of the *Aeneid*, in which the protagonist descends into the underworld to shed light on his mission and the future of his lineage, is undoubtedly the source most often cited in relation to *Inferno* I. In *Aen.* VI. 126-132, the Cumaean Sibyl speaks to Aeneas about the entrance to the Avernus and states that 'Tenent media omnia silvae' ('The whole centre is forest'; *Aen.* VI. 131). Shortly after, Aeneas and his companions enter 'in antiquam silvam, stabula alta ferarum' ('an ancient forest [...] tall lairs for the wild beasts'; *Aen.* VI. 179) while gathering wood for Misenus's funeral pyre. Moreover, the first part of the book is punctuated with references to 'Triviae lucos' ('The grove [...] of the Goddess at Crossroads'; *Aen.* VI. 13), 'lucis [...] Avernis' ('the woodland groves of Avernus'; *Aen.* VI. 118), 'lucos Stygis' ('the groves of the Styx'; *Aen.* VI. 154), 'silvam immensam' ('huge forest'; *Aen.* VI. 186). These expressions always refer to the Sibyl's lair or the doors into the Avernus, 'tuta lacu nigro nemorumque tenebris' ('guarded well by a black lake and woodland's tenacious'; *Aen.* VI. 238). It is from the *Aeneid* that Dante draws the idea of a forest located near the entrance to the afterlife. A further relationship between the two texts can be identified in the allegorical significance that some commentators on the *Aeneid*, whose glosses often appeared beside Virgil's text in the mediaeval manuscripts, associated with the woods of the Avernus. In his commentary *Super sex libros Eneidos Virgilii*, Bernardus Silvestris interprets *Aen.* VI. 118 and VI. 179 by equating the forest to material goods.⁴⁸⁷ It is also important to note that while during Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages many interpreted the *Aeneid* as a *fabula*, highlighting its ethical and philosophical meanings through allegory, Dante regarded it as a *historia*.⁴⁸⁸ For all these reasons, Virgil's poem is unquestionably the primary source for

⁴⁸⁵ On the sources of Dante's dark wood, see (among others): Francesco Mazzoni, *Saggio di un commento alla Divina Commedia, Inferno, canti I-III* (Florence: Sansoni, 1967), pp. 14-45; Mirella Sabbatini and Eugenio Ragni, 'Selva', in *Enciclopedia Dantesca*; Guglielmo Gorni, *Dante nella selva. Il primo canto della Commedia* (Parma: Nuove Pratiche, 1995), pp. 57-84; Anna Pegoretti, *Dal «lito deserto» al giardino. La costruzione del paesaggio nel Purgatorio di Dante* (Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2007), pp. 45-51. See also the commentaries on *Inf.* I. 2 by Chiavacci Leonardi (1991-97) and Inglese (2007-2016).

⁴⁸⁶ John Freccero, *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 1-15. See also Mazzoni, *Saggio di un commento*, p. 28, who argues for the presence of another source: Augustin, *In Ioannem*, V. tr. XVI. 6.

⁴⁸⁷ See how in *Purgatorio* XXX Beatrice states that Dante's excessive attachment to material goods was one of the causes of his confusion, represented by his disorientation in the forest: 'e volse i passi suoi per via non vera, / immagini di ben seguendo false, / che nulla promession rendono intera' ('He set his steps upon an untrue way, / pursuing those false images of good / that bring no promise to fulfillment'; *Purg.* XXX. 130-132).

⁴⁸⁸ See Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Dante, Poet of the Desert. History and Allegory in the Divine Comedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), pp. 151-159, 173-184; Barański, 'I segni della Bibbia', pp. 122-123.

Dante's portrayal of the forest in *Inferno* I. However, this is the only point of contact between *Aeneid* VI and the first few lines of the *Commedia* as far as narrative matter is concerned. Aeneas has to cross a forest to reach the Avernus, but Virgil makes no mention of him getting lost in it. It could therefore be argued that a precedent for Dante's bewilderment in the dark wood must be found in different texts and literary traditions.

Scholars often refer to a passage from Brunetto Latini's *Tesoretto* when commenting on the first verses of *Inferno* I.⁴⁸⁹ In *Tesoretto* 113-190, Brunetto recounts how he learned of the expulsion of the Guelphs from Florence when he was in Castile as an ambassador for the city. When the news reached him in Navarre, near Roncesvalles, he was overcome with grief, left the main road and entered a strange forest:

e io, in tal corrotto
pensando a capo chino,
perdei il gran cammino,
e tenni a la traversa
d'una selva diversa'
(vv. 186-190).⁴⁹⁰

And I in such mourning, thinking with bowed head, lost the great path and went through
a strange forest.⁴⁹¹

The following encounter between the protagonist and a personification of Nature has little in common with the beginning of the *Commedia*. However, it is evident how both narratives – or, in the *Tesoretto*, the proper plot of the tale – begin when the protagonist abandons a 'main road' or a 'straight path' and makes his way across a wood. Brunetto's forest would appear to be unrelated to the sinful state of the protagonist, whose confusion is embedded in his grief for the expulsion of the Guelphs from Florence. As Barański has observed, the two poets also differ in their approach to their chosen subject matter: 'Brunetto uses contemporary history as a starting point to immediately hide in the symbolic forest, while Dante follows the opposite route'.⁴⁹² For this reason, it would be difficult to single out any more points of contact between the forest in the *Tesoretto* and the dark wood of *Inferno* I.⁴⁹³

⁴⁸⁹ See, again, the commentaries on *Inf.* I. 2 by Chiavacci Leonardi (1991-97) and Inglese (2007-2016).

⁴⁹⁰ *Poeti del Duecento*, ed. by Contini, p. 182.

⁴⁹¹ The translation is mine.

⁴⁹² Barański, 'I segni della Bibbia', p. 123: 'Brunetto usa la storia contemporanea come punto di partenza per nascondersi subito nella foresta simbolica, mentre Dante segue la via opposta'.

⁴⁹³ This is not to discount the *Tesoretto*'s influence on other aspects of *Inferno* I, or on the *Commedia* more in general. On this topic, see: Bianca Ceva, *Brunetto Latini: l'uomo e l'opera* (Milan-Naples: Ricciardi, 1965),

Unlike Dante, Brunetto creates a forest, and a story, that is entirely allegorical, and without any reference to the protagonist's sinful condition. By focusing on the protagonist's wanderings before the beginning of the story, Brunetto seems rather to evoke a conventional *tópos* of medieval narrative texts, particularly common in chivalric romances.⁴⁹⁴

Another allegorical text written in Florence and sometimes associated with the incipit of the *Commedia* is the *Detto del Gatto lupesco*, indicatively dated to the 1270s.⁴⁹⁵ Like the *Commedia*, the *Detto*, too, opens with its main character accidentally swerving from the beaten track onto a secondary path. However, significant differences exist between the two opening passages. The *Detto*'s protagonist does not get lost in a wood; rather, he simply leaves the main path out of distraction. Moreover, while Dante abandons 'la verace via' ('the one true way'; *Inf.* I. 12) as he is 'pieno di sonno' ('full of sleep'; *Inf.* I. 11), a real drowsiness allegorising the soul's sleep in its state of sin, the Gatto Lupesco is side-tracked by sensual thoughts:

Sì com'altr' uomini vanno,
ki per prode e chi per danno,
per lo mondo tuttavia,
così m'andava l'altra dia
per un cammino trastullando,
e d'un mio amor già pensando:
e andava a capo chino.
Allora uscìo fuor del cammino,
ed intrai in uno sentieri
ed incontrai duo cavalieri
de la corte de lo re Artù⁴⁹⁶
(vv. 5-11)

pp. 93-97; Deana Basile, 'Il peccato di Brunetto Latini. Il guardare fisso nel *Tesoretto* e nella *Commedia*', *Romance Review*, 4.1 (1994), 7-18; Selene Sarteschi, 'Dal *Tesoretto* alla *Commedia*: considerazioni su alcune riprese dantesche dal testo di Brunetto Latini', *Rassegna europea di letteratura italiana*, 19 (2002), 19-44; Francesco Mazzoni, 'Brunetto in Dante', in *Con Dante per Dante. Saggi di filologia ed ermeneutica dantesca. I. Approcci a Dante*, ed. by Gian Carlo Garfagnini and others (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2014), pp. 41-62; Stefano Carrai, 'L'intertestualità nel commento alla *Commedia* dantesca. Il caso di Brunetto', in *La pratica del commento*, ed. by Daniele Brogi, Tiziana De Rogatis and Giuseppe Marrani (Pisa: Pacini, 2015), pp. 37-43 (p. 41), who argues for a fundamental resemblance between Dante's otherworldly journey and Brunetto's poem, 'in cui un protagonista che ha lo stesso nome dell'autore e che ne è la proiezione poetica immagina di smarrirsi in una foresta durante il proprio cammino e di incontrare una guida che lo accompagna lungo un percorso paligenetico, non conclusosi a causa del fatto che il *Tesoretto* rimase interrotto'.

⁴⁹⁴ On the conventionality of this imagery, see Ernst Robert Curtius, *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter* (Bern: Francke, 1948).

⁴⁹⁵ See Antonio Lanza, 'Il *Detto del gatto lupesco*: alle radici dell'"allegoria fondamentale" della *Divina Commedia*', in *Primi secoli. Saggi di letteratura italiana antica* (Rome: Archivio Guido Izzi, 1991), pp. 41-59.

⁴⁹⁶ *Poeti del Duecento*, ed. by Contini, p. 288.

As all men go through the world all the time, some with gain and some with loss, so the other day I was wandering along a path, walking with my head bowed, thinking of a love of mine. Then I turned off the main road and into a path and met two knights from King Arthur's court.⁴⁹⁷

The main challenge to a comparative reading of the two poems lies in the *Detto*'s fairly problematic interpretation. While some readers regard it as a purely allegorical text, others have highlighted its parodic and burlesque elements.⁴⁹⁸ Significant analogies with *Inferno* I would emerge if we were to consider the *Detto* as an allegorical and edifying poem: the protagonist leaves or loses the right path while immersed in worldly thoughts; after a period of confusion, he finds the right path again thanks to the intervention of a hermit, whose role is comparable to that of Virgil. Furthermore, the Gatto lupo often faces challenges similar to those of Dante in *Inferno* I: while crossing a 'gran diserto' ('great desert'; v. 45), he runs into a set of allegorical wild animals, including a 'leone' ('lion'; v. 124) and a 'lonça' ('*pardus*'; v. 128).⁴⁹⁹ However, as the wood motif is completely absent, the *Detto* is more suitable as a source for the events that take place in the 'piaggia diserta' ('desert slope'; *Inf.* I. 29) than for the 'selva oscura' ('dark wood'; *Inf.* I. 2).

The *Detto*'s author certainly echoes numerous distinguishing features of the Arthurian romance: the protagonist gets lost while distracted by sensual thoughts, he meets 'duo cavalieri de la corte de lo re Artù' ('two knights of King Arthur's court'; vv. 10-11) and he is hosted by a hermit who instructs him on the journey he has to undertake. In fact, the Arthurian romance might represent an interesting precedent for both the *Detto* and the

⁴⁹⁷ The translation is mine.

⁴⁹⁸ The most influential proponent of the allegorical reading was Camillo Guerrieri Crocetti. See: Camillo Guerrieri Crocetti, 'Il detto del gatto lupo', *Rassegna bibliografica della letteratura italiana*, 22 (1914), 202-210; Camillo Guerrieri Crocetti, 'Su un antichissimo *Detto* italiano', *Giornale italiano di filologia*, 4 (1951), 19-32; Camillo Guerrieri Crocetti, 'Ancora su un antichissimo *Detto* italiano', *Filologia romanza*, 3 (1956), 113-121. The parodic interpretation, on the other hand, was first advanced by Leo Spitzer. See: Leo Spitzer, 'Il *Detto* del Gatto lupo', *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, 133 (1956), 1-24; Leo Spitzer, 'Ancora sul *Detto* del Gatto lupo', *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, 134 (1957), 450-469. Others who privilege, more or less decidedly, the parodic key include: Anna Granville Hatcher, 'The *Detto* del gatto lupo again', *MLN*, 77.1 (1962), 66-89; Bianca Barattelli, 'Considerazioni sul *Detto* del gatto lupo', *Medioevo romanzo*, 12 (1987), 363-380; Annamaria Carrega, 'Il *Detto* del gatto lupo come parodia del "racconto di viaggio"', *Reinardus*, 1 (1988), 30-40; Michelangelo Picone, 'Giullari d'Italia: una lettura del "Detto del gatto lupo"', *Versants: revue suisse des littératures romanes*, 28 (1995), 73-97; Christopher Kleinhenz, 'Comic strategies in early Italian poetry: the "Contrasto" of Cielo d'Alcamo and the anonymous "Detto del gatto lupo"', *Italian quarterly*, 37 (2000), 25-31. The allegorical reading is supported, among others, by: Lanza, 'Il *Detto* del gatto lupo'; Antonio Lanza, 'Nuove riflessioni sul *Detto* del gatto lupo', in *Freschi e minii del Due, Tre e Quattrocento. Saggi di letteratura italiana antica* (Fiesole: Cadmo, 2002), pp. 13-22.

⁴⁹⁹ Lanza, 'Nuove riflessioni', pp. 17-18. See also Suitner, 'Le tre fiere di Dante', pp. 40-48. For the identification of the *lonza* as a *pardus*, see Giuseppe Ledda, 'An Ethical and Political Bestiary in the First Canto of Dante's Comedy', in *Ethics, Politics and Justice in Dante*, ed. by Giulia Gaimari and Catherine Keen (London: UCL Press, 2019), pp. 46-62.

Commedia's incipit. As Franco Suitner observed, the first few lines of *Inferno* I share little with the classical epic tradition. The beginning *in medias res*, not preceded by an invocation to the Muses, is rather reminiscent of the tradition of medieval romance.⁵⁰⁰ As we have seen, Karlheinz Stierle has pointed to Chrétien de Troyes's *Perceval* as a possible source for *Inferno* I.⁵⁰¹ Although the *Perceval* had at least a partial circulation in thirteenth-century Tuscany and Italy, there is little evidence of it today.⁵⁰² Moreover, Stierle's analysis of the relationship between *Inferno* I. 91 and *Perceval*, v. 3563, and between Dante's journey into the underworld and *Perceval*'s quest more generally, fails to identify a fully convincing precedent for the dark forest in Chrétien's poem. Although the opening scene of the *Perceval* takes place in a forest, the protagonist is not lost, nor does the narrative show any affinities, literal or allegorical, with the incipit of the *Commedia*.⁵⁰³ We must then proceed to consider other possible Arthurian sources for the first few lines of Dante's poem.

Picone has shown how Dante's bewilderment in the dark wood displays marked similarities with the *Lancelot* episode where the protagonist enters a forest and wanders off the main path.⁵⁰⁴ After noting that scholarship has focused mainly on its moral and allegorical meanings, Picone argues that the dark wood, in its literal sense, presents aspects characteristic of the forests of Arthurian literature, wild places that contrast with the ordered and civilised world of Arthur's court and represent for the knights the place of the *entrée en aventure* ('entry into adventure'). He also says that the forest is a privileged space for the quest of the Arthurian knights as well as for Dante, and that a medieval reader would have spontaneously grasped the Arthurian echoes in the first lines of *Inferno* I. Picone supports his argument by reading *Inf.* I. 1-12 side by side with a relevant passage from the *Lancelot*. In this episode, a young Lancelot is about to embark on his first adventure. In particular, Lancelot responds to the Lady of Nohaut's call for help to Arthur's court after she has been challenged by some knights. Before leaving, Lancelot meets at the edges of a forest two squires and the knight who has been sent by the Lady of Nohaut as an envoy. After they ride together for a while in the forest, Lancelot distractedly follows the knight off the main road:

Or s'en vait li vallés [Lancelot] après le chevalier qui vint querre le secors et après son

⁵⁰⁰ Franco Suitner, 'Dante narratore, a confronto con l'Europa', in *Leggere Dante oggi. Interpretare, commentare, tradurre alle soglie del settecentesimo anniversario*, ed. by Éva Víggh (Rome: Aracne, 2011), pp. 17-26 (pp. 24-26); Suitner, 'Le tre fiere di Dante', pp. 34-35.

⁵⁰¹ See III. 2; Karlheinz Stierle, 'Il mondo cavalleresco nella *Commedia*', in *La letteratura cavalleresca*, ed. by Picone, pp. 123-138 (pp. 126-132); Stierle, 'A te convien tenere altro viaggio'.

⁵⁰² See I. 2.

⁵⁰³ See III. 2.

⁵⁰⁴ Picone, 'Dante e la tradizione arturiana', pp. 7-12; Picone, '«Le donne e' cavalier»', pp. 20-24.

harnois qui avant vait, si rataint le chevalier et le hernois a l'entree de la forest. Il chevauchent ensamble par mi la forest tant qu'il est noune, si fait mout grant caut. Li vallés oste son hiaume, si le baille a .I. sien escuier et il commenche a penser moult durement. Et li chevaliers qui devant vait issi *hors del chemin* et entre en un petit sentier. Et quant il ont un poi alé par le sentier, .I. rains aconsieut le vallet el vis, si l'a blechié et il laisse son penser, si regarde et voit qu'il est hors del *grant chemin*.

(Micha VII, pp. 287)

Now the young man [Lancelot] was riding after the knight who had come to seek help and after his own equipment, which he had sent out with him. He caught up with the knight and his equipment at the edge of the forest. They rode together through the woods until the hours of nones, when it was very hot. The young man took off his helmet and gave it to one of his squires, and he became very quiet and thoughtful. The knight, who was riding ahead of him, *turned off the road* onto a narrow path, and he followed. When they had gone a bit along the path, a branch hit the young man in the face, hurting him. He was jolted out of his brooding and, looking up, realized that he was no longer on the *main road*.

Picone compares this passage to the first twelve verses of the *Commedia*:

Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
mi ritrovai per una selva oscura
ché la diritta via era smarrita.

Ahi quanto a dir qual era è cosa dura
esta selva selvaggia e aspra e forte
che nel pensier rinova la paura.

Tant' è amara che poco è più morte;
ma per trattar del ben ch'i' vi trovai,
dirò de l'altre cose ch'i' v'ho scorte.

Io non so ben ridir com' i' v'intrai,
tant' era pien di sonno a quel punto
che la verace via abbandonai.

(*Inf.* I. 1-12)

Midway in the journey of our life / I came to myself in a dark wood, / for the straight way was lost. / Ah, how hard it is to tell / the nature of that wood, savage, dense and harsh – / the very thought of it renews my fear! / It is so bitter death is hardly more so. / But to set forth the good I found / I will recount the other things I saw. / How I came there I cannot really tell, / I was so full of sleep / when I forsook the one true way.

As Picone has pointed out, in both texts the adventure begins with the protagonists entering a forest and leaving the main path, be it Lancelot's 'grant chemin' ('main road') or Dante's 'diritta via' ('straight way'). They also share a common cause for their disorientation, as both characters find themselves, for different reasons, in a state of obliviousness. Lancelot is wholly lost in his own thoughts, which are probably of a sensual nature, and follows the knight without noticing that they are leaving the main path. On the other hand, Dante is so sleepy that he leaves the 'verace via' ('one true way') without realising. After the abandonment of the main path, the conscience of both characters is awakened. In Lancelot's case, this happens when his face hits a low-hanging twig. The cause of Dante's awakening remains unspecified and the narrator simply states that he suddenly realised he was lost in a forest. Picone also highlights similarities in the meaning and temporal dimension of the two episodes. Dante's journey begins at a highly symbolic moment, halfway through the journey of his life, that is, at the age of thirty-five, as the *Convivio* suggests.⁵⁰⁵ Lancelot's adventure, on the other hand, begins on the none, the conventional hour for the *entrée en aventure*. Moreover, in both cases, the protagonist's loss of direction appears to be symbolically interlinked with the motif of love passion. Lancelot abandons the main path because he is completely absorbed in his thoughts for Guinevere, whom he met in the previous chapter. Similarly, one of the causes of Dante's going astray is an unbridled passion that has led him away from Beatrice and the idea of love that she represents.⁵⁰⁶

Although the two texts have some similarities, at least if we consider the literal sense, Picone's reading is not entirely convincing. While Dante's dark wood may evoke the forests of Arthurian romances, the relationship established between chronological dimension of the two episodes seems rather contrived, and the analogies in terms of meaning and narrative context are limited. Firstly, the *Lancelot*'s emphasis on the protagonist's sensual passion is almost non-existent. Lancelot is led astray by the knight while immersed in his own thoughts, and it is of course plausible that these thoughts are of Guinevere. However, the text does not

⁵⁰⁵ Cv. IV. XXIV. 3: 'E la ragione che ciò mi dà sì è che, se 'l colmo del nostro arco è nelli trentacinque, tanto quanto questa etade ha di salita tanto dee avere di scesa' ('he reasoning which leads me to this conclusion is that if the highest point of our arc is in the thirty-fifth year, this age of life must have a descent and an ascent of equal duration').

⁵⁰⁶ See Picone, 'Dante e la tradizione arturiana', p. 9; Picone, '«Le donne e' cavalier»', pp. 22-23.

emphasise this motif. Secondly, Lancelot is not lost, since the knight who accompanies him has deliberately chosen to leave the main path and knows exactly where he is:

Biaus sire, fait li chevaliers au vallet [Lancelot], or vous dirai jou, se vous volés, por coi jou laissoie le grant chemin. – Dites, fait il. – En chel paveillon la, fait li chevaliers, a une puchele, si le garde uns chevaliers qui est plus grans d’autres chevaliers bien demi pié et plus fors et plus corsus ; si est moult fel et moult cruels de tous cheus dont il vient au desus, et ch’est de tous chex qui a lui se mellent, car il est de si grant forche que nus ne le puet souffrir et por che vos destornoie del chemin fors.

(Micha VII, pp. 288-289)

“My good lord”, said the knight to the youth, “now I’ll tell you, if you wish, why I left the main road”. “Go ahead”, he answered. “In that pavilion over there”, said the knight, “is a girl guarded by a knight who is a good half-foot taller than other knights and stronger and better built. He is very harsh and cruel toward all men he overcomes – and that means all those who start a fight with him – for he is so strong that no one can withstand him. That’s why I led you off the road”.

While Picone has the merit of having identified Arthurian literature as a possible source for Dante’s bewilderment in the dark wood, he failed to note that another episode of the *Lancelot en prose* bears more resemblance to the opening scene of the *Commedia* than the passage he identified: the beginning of Lancelot’s quest in the *Queste del Saint Graal*.⁵⁰⁷ In a 1938 essay largely ignored by scholars, Barbara Barclay Carter had already noted some similarities between Lancelot’s *quest* and Dante’s otherworldly journey.⁵⁰⁸ As we have seen, the references to Lancelot in *Inf.* V. 127-138 and *Cv.* IV. xxviii. 8 allow for the possibility that Dante may have identified a common path of sin, repentance and redemption. This path of conversion ends for Dante with the vision of God, for Lancelot with the ecstasy described in the last part of the *Queste del Saint Grail* and with the death in bliss mentioned in the *Mort Artu*. With this in mind, it is necessary to reflect on the possible relationship between *Inferno* I and the beginning of Lancelot’s quest in the *Queste del Saint Graal*, an episode in which the knight, just like the Pilgrim in the *Commedia*, realises that he is in a state of sin, repents and begins his journey towards redemption. However, it is first necessary to provide an overview of the first few chapters of the *Queste del Saint Graal* in order to place the episode in the larger context of the romance.

⁵⁰⁷ Bogdanow, V.

⁵⁰⁸ Carter, ‘Dante and the Holy Grail’.

The story of the *Queste del Saint Graal* begins on Pentecost eve, when Lancelot meets for the first time Galahad, his only son. Lancelot knights him and makes his way back to Arthur's court. A few hours later, Galahad, immediately presented as the knight who will achieve the quest for the Holy Grail, also arrives at Camelot. On the same day, during dinner, the Grail appears at Arthur's court, fills all the plates with food and then disappears again. The following day, the knights of the Round Table set off on their quest, while Arthur goes back to Camelot after travelling with them part of the way. The knights part ways after spending the night in a castle.⁵⁰⁹ While Galahad undertakes his first adventures, Gawain becomes aware of his own sinful state but refuses to repent. Despite the fact that an old cleric had warned the knights that those who set out in a sinful state would not be able to complete the quest, Gawain decides to proceed.⁵¹⁰ The narrative then returns to Galahad, who meets Lancelot and Perceval in a place known as the *Forest Gaste* ('Waste Forest'). Fully clad in their armours, the knights do not recognise each other, and Lancelot and Perceval attack Galahad. Galahad unhorses them and flees into the forest. As night falls, Perceval decides to retrace his steps and leave the forest. Lancelot, however, decides to pursue the mysterious knight through the forest in the hope of discovering his identity.⁵¹¹ Thus begins Lancelot's quest, the first adventure of which bears a strong resemblance to the opening verses of *Inferno* I:

Einsi est Lanceloz remés en la Forest Gaste dolenz et corrocié del chevalier qu'il a perdu. Si demande a Perceval qu'il feront. Et il dit qu'il ne set nul conseil metre sor ceste chose: "Car li chevaliers en va si grant oirre que s'il estoit jorz nel porrions nos ateindre, et vos veés que la nuit nos a surpris en tel leu dont ja mes ne saurons oissir se Dex ne nos en jete hors. Et por ce m'est il avis qu'il nos vendroit melz retourner vers le *grant chemin*, que se nos començon ci a *desvoier*, je ne cuit mie que nos reveignons a piece a *droit chemin*. Or en ferez ce que vos plera, que je voi plus nostre preu el remaindre qu'en aler avant". Et Lanceloz dit que au remanoir ne s'acordera il pas volentiers, ainz ira après celui qui l'escu blanc en porte, car il ne sera ja mes a ese tant qu'il savra qui il est. [...] Et Lanceloz s'en va après le chevalier tout le travers de la forest, en tel maniere que *il ne tient ne voie ne sentier*, ainz s'en va si com aventure le moine. Et ce li fet mout mal que *il ne voit ne loing ne pres ou il puist prendre sa voie, que trop estoit la nuiz obscure*.

(Bogdanow, pp. 196-199)

⁵⁰⁹ Bogdanow, I.

⁵¹⁰ Bogdanow, II-IV.

⁵¹¹ Bogdanow, V. 66-68.

Lancelot's dismay and anger at having lost the knight's trail lingered as he crossed the Waste Forest. "What can we do?" he asked Perceval, who had no advice to give. The knight had fled so rapidly that they would never be able to find him. "You see yourself how nightfall has overtaken us", explained Perceval, "making it impossible for us to advance further without some luck. I think we're better off retracing our steps. For if we lose our way in here, it will be difficult to find the right road again. You can do as you wish, but I think we should turn back rather than push ahead". Lancelot said that he could not readily agree to turn back. He would rather pursue the knight who carried the white shield, for he could never rest until he knew who he was. [...] Allowing chance to guide his way, Lancelot abandoned the established trail and tried to follow a course of his own. But to his dismay, he could see no way to proceed, whether close by or in the distance, because of darkness.

Perceval advises Lancelot to make his way back to the 'grant chemin' ('the main road'). He argues that 'desvoier' ('to deviate', and thus 'to move away from the main road') will make it harder to find the 'droit chemin' ('straight way') again. Perceval's words recall the situation described by Dante at the beginning of *Inferno* I. The 'droit chemin' that the knights would struggle to regain sounds similar to the 'diritta via' that Dante lost in the dark wood. As a hermit explains to Lancelot a few pages later, here too the expression 'droit chemin' has allegorical connotations: it is the path to God that the knight has abandoned. As a result, the verb 'desvoier' can be interpreted in its allegorical sense of 'going astray' from the 'droit chemin' that leads to God, as in Dante's case. Unsurprisingly, Perceval, one of the three pure knights who will achieve the quest for the Holy Grail, immediately reverts to the 'grant chemin'. On the other hand, Lancelot, who is a sinner, decides to continue his journey, even though it is getting dark. When darkness falls, Lancelot fails to discover a path and gets lost in the forest. As the narrator points out, 'il ne tient ne voie ne sentier, ainz s'en va si com aventure le moine' ('Allowing chance to guide his way, Lancelot abandoned the established trail and tried to follow a course of his own'), a conventional turn of phrase in Arthurian romance, referring to the knights-errant's habit to be guided by chance in their earthly wanderings. The *Quest del Saint Graal*, however, promotes a radically different kind of adventure, where the power that guides the three chosen knights – Galahad, Perceval and Boort – is no longer chance, but divine providence.

After wandering through the forest, Lancelot finally reaches an abandoned chapel and falls asleep near it. It is here that the Holy Grail reappears and heals a wounded knight who happens to be passing by. Lancelot watches in a state of half-sleep. However, due to his sinful state, he neither moves nor shows interest in the Grail. Once awake, he wonders in his

confusion whether the vision was a dream or a real event.⁵¹² When he tries to look into the abandoned chapel where the Grail came from, Lancelot finds the relic gone and is rebuked by a disembodied voice:

Lancelot, plus dur que pierre, plus amer que fust, plus nuz et plus despris que fueille de fier, coment fus tu si hardiz que tu en leu ou li Sainz Graax reperast osas entrer? Va t'en d'ici, que li lex est toz enpullentez de ton repere.

(Bogdanow, pp. 206-207)

Lancelot, harder than stone, more bitter than wood, more naked and exposed than a fig tree, how dare you enter a place where the Holy Grail has been? Go away from here; this place is already too contaminated by your presence.

Profoundly affected by these words, Lancelot tries to retrieve his horse and weapons but realises that they were stolen by the knight who had been healed by the Holy Grail. He then realises that what he saw was not a dream and realises that he is in a sinful state:

Ha! Dex, ore i pert *mon pechié* et *ma mauvaise vie*. Or voi je bien que ma chetivité m'a confondu plus que nule autre chose, que quant ge plus me deusse amender, lors me destruit plus li enemis, qui si m'a tolu la veue que je ne puis vooir chose qui de par Deu soit. Ne ce n'est mie merveille se je ne puis vooir cler, car puis que je fui primes chevaliers ne fu il hore que je ne fusse coverz de tenebres de pechié mortel, car tot adés ai esté en *luxure* et en la *vilté del monde* plus que nus autres hom.

(Bogdanow, pp. 206-207)

My God! My sins and wicked life have become apparent. Now I see how my wretchedness, more than anything else, led me astray. When I had the opportunity to make amends, the devil destroyed me, taking away my sight. He blinded me to anything that came from God. It should come as no surprise that I cannot see clearly. From the moment I was knighted, I was covered with the darkness of mortal sin, for I, more than any other, immediately succumbed to debauchery and worldly abjection.

He then spends the rest of the night repenting of his sins, especially his inclination to 'luxure' ('debauchery' or 'lust') and 'vilté del monde' ('worldly abjection'). The next morning, he continues his journey through the forest and reaches a hermitage on a hill. He attends mass

⁵¹² Bogdanow, V. 68-73.

and asks a hermit to hear his confession; the hermit then reveals to him the allegorical meaning of what happened the night before. At the beginning of the confession, the hermit enumerates the great gifts that the Lord has bestowed on Lancelot, recalling the parable of the gold coins to encourage him to make the most of them in the service of the Lord. He then urges him to seek God's forgiveness for his sins.⁵¹³ Lancelot, now fully aware of his faults, acknowledges his sins:

[...] j'ai servi tote ma vie son enemy et l'ai lessié par mon pechié. Et me sui mis en la voie que l'en trove au comencement larje et en mi estroite, c'est comencement de pechié. Li deable m'a mostré la doçor et le miel, mes il ne me mostra *la pardurable poine ou cil sera mis qui en cele voie demore*.

(Bogdanow, pp. 212-213)

All my life I have served God's enemy and fought against God by my sin. I caused my own death by taking the path that appears at first wide and delicious: that's the entry into sin. The devil showed me sweetness and honey without revealing the eternal suffering that awaits those who stay on this path.

The last sentence of Lancelot's speech, as well as the reference to the erroneous and diabolical path he has followed up to that point, brings to mind once again the beginning of the *Commedia*:

Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
mi ritrovai per una selva oscura
ché la diritta via era smarrita.

Ahi quanto a dir qual era è cosa dura
esta selva selvaggia e aspra e forte
che nel pensier rinova la paura.

Tant' è amara che poco è più morte;
ma per trattar del ben ch'i' vi trovai,
dirò de l'altre cose ch'i' v'ho scorte.

Io non so ben ridir com' i' v'intrai,

⁵¹³ Bogdanow, V. 74-77.

tant' era pien di sonno a quel punto
che la verace via abbandonai.

(*Inf.* I. 1-12)

'Midway in the journey of our life / I came to myself in a dark wood, / for the straight way was lost. / Ah, how hard it is to tell / the nature of that wood, savage, dense and harsh – / the very thought of it renews my fear! / It is so bitter death is hardly more so. / But to set forth the good I found / I will recount the other things I saw. / How I came there I cannot really tell, / I was so full of sleep / when I forsook the one true way'.

In her article, Carter simply compares Dante's verses with the words with which the hermit responds to Lancelot's admission of guilt:⁵¹⁴

Sire, de ceste voi eque vos me contez sai ge bien que nus n'i remaint qui ne soit mort pardurablement. Mes si com vos veez que .i. hom forvoie aucune foiz en son chemin et il s'endort et revient arrieres si tost qu'il est esveilliez, tot ausi est del pecheor qui dort el pechié mortel et torne hors de droite voie, puis retorne a son criator et se radrece d'aler au Haut Seigneur qui toz jorz crie: "Je suis voie et veritez et vie".
(Bogdanow, pp. 212-213)

Sir, I know that no one remains on the path you describe without risking eternal damnation. But you know that a man can occasionally stray from the path by falling asleep and regain it as soon as he wakes up. It's the same with the sinner who falls into the sleep of sin, departing from the straight path, and then returns to the path of his Creator, directing himself toward the Almighty who shouts out, "I am the way and the truth and the life".

According to Carter, the words that the hermit addresses to Lancelot may be deployed as a gloss on *Inferno* I. 1-12. The language and imagery of the two authors, although similar, may be traced back to a number of common sources, such as Holy Scripture and Christian literature and theology. Nonetheless, a further elaboration of Carter's intertextual reading within the larger contexts of *Inferno* I and the *Queste del Saint Graal* would appear to be entirely justified. Both Lancelot's quest and Dante's journey begin at night in a dark

⁵¹⁴ Carter, 'Dante and the Holy Grail', p. 67.

forest.⁵¹⁵ Lancelot finds himself in the *Forest Gaste* ('Waste Forest'). Similarly, Dante's forest is 'selvaggia e aspra e forte' ('savage, dense and harsh'). Both characters abandon the 'straight path', the 'droit chemin' and the 'diritta via' respectively, while in the dark woods. In Dante's case, the way is lost inadvertently: 'Mi ritrovai per una selva oscura' ('I came to myself in a dark wood'; *Inf.* I. 2) and 'Io non so ben ridir com' i' v'intrai, / tant' era pien di sonno a quel punto / che la verace via abbandonai' ('How I came there I cannot really tell, / I was so full of sleep / when I forsook the one true way'; *Inf.* I. 10-12). Lancelot, on the other hand, gets lost as a result of a conscious decision: although night falls, he does not return to the 'grant chemin' with Perceval and continues to pursue Galahad through the forest.

Despite this slight difference, in both cases turning away from the straight path has the allegorical meaning of going astray, i.e. turning away from the path that leads to God because of sin. This reading of the incipit of the *Commedia* is unanimously accepted by both early and modern commentators. In the case of the *Queste*, the allegorical interpretation is supported by the words that the hermit addresses to Lancelot: 'tot ausi est del pecheor qui dort el pechié mortel et torne hors de droite voie, puis retourne a son criator' ('It's the same with the sinner who falls into the sleep of sin, departing from the straight path, and then returns to the path of his Creator'). As for Dante, the deviation from the 'diritta via' or 'droite voie' is for Lancelot the allegory of his distance from God. The speech previously addressed to Lancelot by the hermit ('Sire, de ceste voi eque vos me contez sai ge bien que nus n'i remaint qui ne soit mort pardurablement'; 'Sir, I know that no one remains on the path you describe without risking eternal damnation') is particularly interesting when read in parallel with Beatrice's rebuke to Dante in *Purg.* XXX. 130 ('e volse i passi suoi per via non vera'; 'He set his steps upon an untrue way') and with *Inf.* I. 25-27 ('così l'animo mio, ch'ancor fuggiva, / si volse a retro a rimirar lo passo / che non lasciò già mai persona viva'; 'so my mind, still in flight / turned back to look once more upon the pass / no mortal being ever left alive'). Like Dante, Lancelot walked 'upon an untrue way', on a 'pass no mortal being ever left alive', namely a deceptive path that leads all travellers to damnation. This reading is also confirmed by Lancelot's earlier acknowledgement of his faults in front of the hermit: 'Et me sui mis en la voie que l'en trove au comencement larje et en mi estroite, c'est comencemenz de pechié. Li deable m'a mostré la doçor et le miel, mes il ne me mostra la pardurable poine

⁵¹⁵ The *Queste del Saint Graal* does not contain the expression 'dark wood'. However, the poet stresses the fact that Lancelot is unable to follow any clear path due to the darkness, and is forced to be led by chance across the forest. See Bogdanow, p. 198: 'il ne tient ne voie ne sentier, ainz s'en va si com aventure le moine. Et ce li fet mout mal que il ne voit ne loing ne pres ou il puist prendre sa voie, que trop estoit la nuiz obscure' ('Allowing chance to guide his way, Lancelot abandoned the established trail and tried to follow a course of his own. But to his dismay, he could see no way to proceed, whether close by or in the distance, because of darkness').

ou cil sera mis qui en cele voie demore' ('I caused my own death by taking the path that appears at first wide and delicious: that's the entry into sin. The devil showed me sweetness and honey without revealing the eternal suffering that awaits those who stay on this path'). Hence, the path described by Lancelot has similar characteristics to that of Dante, who 'volsse i passi suoi per via non vera / imagini di ben seguendo false / che nulla promission rendono intera' ('He set his steps upon an untrue way / pursuing those false images of good / that bring no promise to fulfilment'; *Purg.* XXX. 130-132). As we shall see, there are also profound similarities in the nature of the two characters' sinful condition.

However, it is first necessary to show further similarities between the two episodes. Firstly, both characters become aware of their own sinful state not only after wandering in a forest, but also after awakening from a slumber that symbolises their sinful condition. In particular, Lancelot realises he is a sinner when, after ignoring the appearance of the Grail and recovering from the torpor of sleep, he is rebuked by a mysterious voice: 'Lancelot [...] coment fus tu si hardiz que tu en leu ou li Sainz Graax reperast osas entrer? Va t'en d'ici, que li lex est toz enpullentez de ton repere' ('Lancelot [...] how dare you enter a place where the Holy Grail has been? Go away from here; this place is already too contaminated by your presence'). On the other hand, Dante, who has lost his way in the dark wood because of his drowsiness (*Inf.* I. 10-12), at a certain point awakens from his torpor and returns to consciousness. As Picone argues, the phrase 'mi ritrovai per una selva oscura' ('I came to myself in a dark wood'; *Inf.* I. 2) suggests to the reader the idea of an awakening.⁵¹⁶ From this moment on, Dante realises that he has lost his way and tries to get out of the forest. Moreover, Lancelot spends a restless night after realising he is in a state of mortal sin. The feelings that dominate him are self-loathing or self-blame and grief: 'se despit et blasme molt forment Lanceloz et fet son duel tote la nuit' ('Lancelot reproached and blamed himself in this way throughout the night').⁵¹⁷ Dante's predominant emotion when he realises that he is lost is fear: 'quella valle / che m'avea di paura il cor compunto' ('the valley [...] that had pierced my heart with fear'; *Inf.* I. 14-15). However, he later characterises his night in the dark wood as one of misery or anguish, a feeling not unlike Lancelot's nocturnal despair: 'la notte ch'i passai con tanta pieta' ('the night I spent in such distress'; *Inf.* I. 21).

Following a night of fear or despair, both characters leave the forest. In both works, this happens in the morning. Lancelot walks on and sees the hermitage on top of a hill where the

⁵¹⁶ Picone, 'Dante e la tradizione arturiana', p. 9. It is important to highlight that here, too, differences remain between the two characters' predicaments. While the author of the *Queste* explicitly mentions Lancelot's sinful state, which is also openly referenced in the knight's words, in *Inferno* I Dante completely relies on allegory to express the moral significance of the episode.

⁵¹⁷ Bogdanow, pp. 206-207.

hermit will hear his confession and inspire him to convert. Dante, on the other hand, comes across a hill touched by the early rays of the sun and decides to try to reach its summit.⁵¹⁸ While he begins his ascent, he comes across three wild beasts – the *pardus*, the lion and the wolf – that cause him to lose the ‘speranza dell’altezza’ (‘hope of making the ascent’; *Inf.* I. 54). The most dangerous of the three animals is the wolf, advancing towards him and forcing him to retreat in the direction of the forest. However, when all seems lost, Dante meets Virgil, who rescues him and convinces him to embark on an ‘altro viaggio’ (‘another path’; *Inf.* I. 91), namely a journey of redemption and a pilgrimage.⁵¹⁹ It follows that Virgil’s role in *Inferno* I partially overlaps with that of the first hermit that Lancelot meets in the *Queste del Saint Graal*: both are mentors who aid the protagonists, shed light on the allegorical significance of their experience and direct them to a path that will eventually lead them to conversion.⁵²⁰ In light of this, it could be argued that the *Queste* is an interesting precedent for *Inferno* I, both in its literal sense and in its allegorical implications. In both works, the protagonists’ wanderings through a forest stand as both an allegory of their sinful state and the moment they become aware of their own straying. It is the awareness of their sinfulness that allows both characters to embark on a journey of redemption. This journey begins with the help of two mentors, who are also called upon to clarify the allegorical implications of the two protagonists’ adventures.

It may be helpful to clarify what Dante’s and Lancelot’s sins might be. The three beasts that hinder Dante’s ascent are an allegorical representation of the tendency to sin that hinders man on the path to salvation, represented by the hill. According to the traditional interpretation, the *pardus*, the lion and the wolf allegorise lust, pride and greed, sins that Dante may have considered to be characteristic of his own sinful state.⁵²¹ More generally, they represent the excessive attachment to earthly goods that prevents man from ascending to God. This is confirmed by Dante in *Purgatorio* XXXI, where the Pilgrim confesses his sins to Beatrice, claiming that ‘Le presenti cose / col falso lor piacer volser miei passi’ (‘Things set in front of me, / with their false delights, turned back my steps’; *Purg.* XXXI. 34-35). In other words, the deceptive charms of worldly pleasures led him to abandon the path of righteousness in favour of a ‘via non vera’ (‘untrue way’; *Purg.* XXX. 130), as

⁵¹⁸ Bogdanow, V. 74-75; *Inf.* I. 13-30.

⁵¹⁹ On the differences between Dante’s ‘first journey’ as outlined in *Inferno* I and his penitential journey through the otherworld, see: Freccero, *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*, pp. 1-15; Michelangelo Picone, ‘«Inferno» I e II: l’uno e l’altro viaggio’, in *Scritti danteschi* (Ravenna: Longo, 2017), pp. 461-472.

⁵²⁰ The analogy between Virgil’s role and that of the hermits in *Detto del gatto lupesco* and in the Graal romances has been partially discussed by Suitner, ‘Le tre fiere di Dante’, p. 47.

⁵²¹ See the commentaries by Chiavacci Leonardi (1991-97) and Inglese (2007-2016), who convincingly argue for the traditional interpretation of the three beasts. For a wider discussion, see Ledda, ‘An Ethical and Political Bestiary’.

Beatrice states in the preceding canto. Dante's confession in *Purgatorio* XXXI shows some similarities, once again, with Lancelot's remorseful words after he becomes aware of being in mortal sin: 'tot adés ai esté en *luxure* et en la *vilté del monde* plus que nus autres hom' ('I, more than any other, immediately succumbed to debauchery and worldly abjection').⁵²² Lancelot admits that the reason for his straying lies in his inclination to lust and the base pleasures of the world, i.e. earthly goods. It seems that Dante's characteristic sins also overlap with Lancelot's, especially if we read the wolf not so much as an allegory of greed for wealth, but rather as a more general allusion to the concept of *cupiditas*, intended as 'disordered appetite for earthly goods'.⁵²³ This can also be seen in the passage where Lancelot confesses his specific sins to the hermit, soon after the one quoted above:

Sire, fet il, il est einsî que je sui morz de pechié d'une moie dame que j'ai amee tote ma vie, c'est la roine Guinevre, la feme mon seignor lo roi Artur. C'est cele qui a grant planté m'a doné or et argent et riches dras que j'ai aucune foiz doné as povres chevaliers. C'est cele qui m'a mis el grant bobant et en la grant hautece ou je sui. C'est cele por cui amor j'ai fetes les granz proeces dont toz li mond parole. C'est cele qui m'a fet venir de povreté a richece et de mesese a tote beneurté terriene. Mes je sai or bien que par cest pechié de lui est Nostre Sires si durement corrociez a moi, si le m'a bien mostré puis ersoir.

(Bogdanow, pp. 214-217)

"Sir", he said, "I have fallen into mortal sin because of a lady whom I have loved all my life. She's Queen Guenevere, King Arthur's wife. She's the one who generously gave me the gold, silver and rich gifts that I once distributed to poor knights. She's the one who elevated me to the luxury and high position I now enjoy. It's because of her love that I undertook the great feats of prowess everyone recounts about me. Because of her I went from rags to riches and from misfortune to enjoying all the good things in life. But I realize that Our Lord is fiercely angry with me because of this sin, as he demonstrated clearly last night.

Lancelot identifies his adulterous relationship with Guinevere as his main sin. This relationship was the mainspring of his most famous achievements, which brought him wealth and earthly glory. However, his love for Guinevere also led him to abandon the path to God

⁵²² Bogdanow, pp. 206-207.

⁵²³ For this definition, and for the distinction between a broader and a narrower sense of the concept of *cupiditas*, see Cristaldi, *Dante di fronte al gioachimismo*, pp. 75-76. As we are about to see, the two protagonists would also seem to share the sin of pride.

for a deceptive path leading to damnation.⁵²⁴ Beatrice, on the other hand, attributes Dante's straying to his desire for other women after her death, which kept him anchored to the earthly dimension:

Sì tosto come in su la soglia fui
di mia seconda etade e mutai vita,
questi si tolse a me, e diessi altrui.

Quando di carne a spirto era salita,
e bellezza e virtù cresciuta m'era,
fu' io a lui men cara e men gradita;

e volse i passi suoi per via non vera,
imagini di ben seguendo false,
che nulla promession rendono intera.

(*Purg.* XXX. 124-132)

Once I had reached the threshold of my second age, / when I changed lives, he took
himself from me / and gave himself to others. / When I had risen to spirit from my flesh,
/ as beauty and virtue in me became more rich, / to him I was less dear and less than
pleasing. / He set his steps upon an untrue way, / pursuing those false images of good /
that bring no promise to fulfilment.

Beatrice further clarifies the causes of Dante's sinful state in *Purgatorio* XXXI:

Mai non t'appresentò natura o arte
piacer, quanto le belle membra in ch'io
rinchiusa fui, e che so' 'n terra sparte;

e se 'l sommo piacer sì ti fallio
per la mia morte, qual cosa mortale

⁵²⁴ This passage is the palinode of an episode of the *Lancelot* in which the protagonist tells Guinevere for the first time that he loves her. This declaration of love immediately follows the cough of the Lady of Malehaut, quoted by Dante in *Paradiso* XVI. 13-15. On this topic, see: Elspeth Kennedy, 'Intertextuality between Genres in the *Lancelot-Graal*', in *Text and Intertext in Medieval Arthurian Literature*, ed. by Norris J. Lacy (New York-London: Garland, 1996), pp. 71-90 (pp. 73-75); Delcorno Branca, 'Il «Roman de Lancelot»', p. 153; *La ricerca del Santo Graal*, ed. by Marco Infurna, in *Il Graal. I testi che hanno fondato la leggenda*, ed. by Mariantonia Liborio (Milan: Mondadori: 2005), p. 1100.

dovea poi trarre te nel suo disio?

Ben ti dovevi, per lo primo strale
de le cose fallaci, levar suso
di retro a me che non era più tale.

Non ti dovea gravar le penne in giuso,
ad aspettar più colpo, o pargoletta
o altra novità con sì breve uso.
(*Purg.* XXXI. 49-60)

Never did art or nature set before you beauty / as great as in the lovely members that
enclosed me, / now scattered and reduced to dust. / And if the highest beauty failed you
/ in my death, what mortal thing / should then have drawn you to desire it? / Indeed, at
the very first arrow / or deceitful things, you should have risen up / and followed me
who was no longer of them. / You should not have allowed your wings to droop, /
leaving you to other darts from some young girl / or other novelty of such brief use.

Dante's sin differs, at least in some respects, from Lancelot's: while the latter committed adultery with Guinevere, the former betrayed the memory of Beatrice after her death by giving himself to other women. In both cases, however, their sinful passions led them away from the path of salvation and onto a false path leading to damnation. Lancelot's love for Guinevere drove him to seek riches and earthly glory, on a path that at first seems wide and full of pleasure, but ultimately leads to eternal death.⁵²⁵ Similarly, Dante's love for other women led the poet to pursue 'false images of good' and to allow his 'wings to droop', namely to direct his attention towards 'mortal' and 'deceitful things'. Dante's straying, then, also consists in having been inspired by an earthly and misleading love, as opposed to the *caritas* associated with Beatrice, which is divine and radically opposed to the idea of *cupiditas*. It could be argued that while Lancelot's love for Guinevere motivated him in his knightly deeds, Dante's earthly passions inspired him in some of his poetic accomplishments, as demonstrated by the reference to the 'pargoletta' ('young girl'; *Purg.* XXXI. 59).⁵²⁶ Similarly, while the search for the Holy Grail, and thus for God, marks the

⁵²⁵ Bogdanow, V. 77.

⁵²⁶ Scholars widely agree that, beginning with the discovery of the 'stilo della loda' ('style of praise') in the *Vita Nuova*, Dante's love for Beatrice is not an end in itself, but rather a means to direct his love towards God. The praise of the creature is therefore a means to praise the Creator. This notion of love as a *medium* can be defined as *caritas*. It is opposed by *cupiditas*, a form of fruition of earthly goods, including love, which is an end in itself rather than a way of reaching God. This leads to succumbing to the carnal appetite, and therefore to sin. While the former conception of love (*caritas*) belongs to the *Vita Nuova* and the *Commedia*, the latter

end of Lancelot's earthly adventures, inspired by his sinful passion for Guinevere, Dante, with the *Commedia*, leaves behind some of the love poetry that he had written in the years of his straying and returns to a conception of love as *caritas*, embodied by Beatrice.

Bruno Porcelli has pointed out some analogies between *Purgatorio* XXX-XXXI and the section of the *Queste* that begins with Lancelot's slumber during the apparition of the Grail and ends with his encounter with the first hermit. However, he mostly emphasises the structural similarities between these passages rather than the relationship between the two characters. In particular, he identifies in *Purg.* XXX. 55-145 and XXXI. 1-90 two of the three characteristic moments of confession: the *contritio cordis* ('contrition of the heart'), namely Dante's troubled conscience during Beatrice's rebuke, and the *confessio oris* ('confession of the mouth'), the penitent's confession of his own sins, which allows him to approach salvation by declaring his repentance.⁵²⁷ The structure of the *Queste* in the corresponding episode is analogous, but incorporates the third stage of the confession: the *satisfactio operis* ('satisfaction of deeds'). In particular, the *contritio cordis* coincides with the section located between the voice's rebuke of Lancelot in the chapel and the first part of Lancelot's conversation with the hermit who reminds him of the great natural gifts he has wasted; the *confessio oris* is present when the knight acknowledges his own sins with the hermit who is confessing him; the *satisfactio operis* consists in the subsequent promise not to fall into temptation again.⁵²⁸ After pointing out some differences between *Purgatorio* XXVIII-XXXIII and the episode of the *Queste*, in particular the ritual function of Dante's confession as opposed to the operative nature of Lancelot's, Porcelli focuses on the most striking similarity: both characters are severely rebuked for their sins. Lancelot is rebuked by the mysterious voice in the chapel before his confession to the hermit:

Lancelot, plus dur que pierre, plus amer que fust, plus nuz et plus despris que fueille de fier, coment fus tu si hardiz que tu en leu ou li Sainz Graax reperast osas entrer? Va t'en d'ici, que li lex est toz enpullentez de ton repere.

(Bogdanow, pp. 206-207)

(*amore ereos*) is typical of Guido Cavalcanti's poetics as well as of some of Dante's poems, such as those dedicated to the *donna Petra* and the *Pargoletta*. On these conflicting notions of love see (among others): Michelangelo Picone, *"Vita Nuova" e tradizione romanza* (Padua: Liviana, 1979), pp. 64-72; Donato Pirovano, *Amore e colpa. Dante e Francesca* (Rome: Donzelli, 2021), pp. 52-60. On the relationship between the poems for the *Pargoletta* and the *Commedia*, see Tristan Kay, 'Dante's Cavalcantian Relapse: The "Pargoletta" Sequence and the "Commedia"', *Dante Studies*, 131 (2013), 73-97.

⁵²⁷ Bruno Porcelli, 'Progressione e simmetria nella sequenza di *Purg.* XXVIII-XXXIII', in *Dante maggiore e Boccaccio minore. Strutture e modelli* (Pisa: Giardini, 1987), pp. 92-108 (pp. 99-101).

⁵²⁸ Porcelli, 'Progressione e simmetria', pp. 101-103.

Lancelot, harder than stone, more bitter than wood, more naked and exposed than a fig tree, how dare you enter a place where the Holy Grail has been? Go away from here; this place is already too contaminated by your presence.

On the other hand, Dante is rebuked by Beatrice at the beginning of their conversation:

Guardaci ben! Ben son, ben son Beatrice.
Come degnasti d'accedere al monte?
non sapei tu che qui è l'uom felice?
(*Purg.* XXX. 73-75)

Look over here! I am, I truly am Beatrice. / How did you dare approach the mountain?
/ Do you not know that here man lives in joy?.

Several scholars have identified this as the only instance in which Dante could have quoted directly from the *Queste del Saint Graal*.⁵²⁹ However, this assumption is far from certain, since these lines seem to refer to *Psalms* 23,3: 'Quis ascendet in montem Domini? aut quis stabit in loco sancto eius?' ('Who may ascend the mountain of the lord? Who may stand in his holy place?'). It is also possible that Dante mixed the two sources. In any case, Porcelli does not address the possible intertextual links between the two works, preferring to focus on the narrative structure. In particular, he points out that the author of *Queste* resorts to an anti-climax, starting with the harsh rebuke at the beginning of the episode and ending with the final exhortation, whereas Dante creates a symmetry by placing Beatrice's two harshest sentences at the beginning and end of the sequence.⁵³⁰ In any case, Porcelli's article, while not dealing with specific intertextual echoes, provides further evidence of the possible influence of the *Queste del Saint Graal* on the two middle cantos of the Eden sequence.

Further analogies between Dante's and Lancelot's experiences can be found by returning to the *Queste*. At the end of the episode centred on his confession to the hermit, Lancelot seems genuinely repentant and determined to avoid future temptations. The narrative then moves on to Perceval's adventures, before returning to the protagonist of the cycle.⁵³¹

⁵²⁹ This comparison was advanced, although skeptically, by Gardner, 'The Holy Graal', p. 453. Other scholars who referred to a possible quotation are: Carter, 'Dante and the Holy Grail', p. 68; Delcorno Branca, 'Il «Roman de Lancelot»', p. 153.

⁵³⁰ Porcelli, 'Progressione e simmetria', pp. 103-104. Here, Porcelli refers not only to Beatrice's rebuke to Dante in *Purg.* XXX. 73-75, but also to *Purg.* XXXI. 37-69, at the end of the confessional sequence.

⁵³¹ Bogdanow, VI. Possible similarities between the episodes concerning Perceval's quest and Dante's *Commedia* have been pointed out by: Carman, 'Purgatorio, I and II, and the *Queste del Saint Graal*'; Paolo De Ventura, 'Il Saint Vessel e il vasello del galeotto celestiale: dall'amoroso regno a Sarraz', *Tenzzone*, 13 (2012), 121-154.

Lancelot spends a few days with the hermit, who comforts him and offers him weapons and a horse to continue his quest. After leaving the hermitage, Lancelot soon encounters a squire who severely rebukes him for his sinful state. The allegorical significance of this encounter is later explained to him by a second hermit, who also rebukes him for his past life.⁵³² Among the other similarities noted by Carter, who, again, did not comment on them, the similarity between Lancelot's encounter with the second hermit and *Purg.* XXX. 115-118 is certainly the most interesting.⁵³³ Whereas the first hermit had used the parable of the gold coins to remind Lancelot of the natural gifts God had given him, the second hermit points out how those same qualities, fully developed and honoured in Lancelot's youth, had been squandered from the day he became a knight, and especially when he fell in love with Guinevere, an event that marked the beginning of his straying. He refers in particular to two virtues, virginity and humility, as opposed to lust and pride, which are depicted as Lancelot's characteristic sins:

Or Lancelot, fet li preudons, cest essample t'ai je mostré por la vie que tua s si longuement menee puis que tu chaïs en pechié, ce est, puis que tu receus le haut ordre de chevalerie. Car devant ce que tu fusses chevalier avoies tu herbergiés en toi totes bones vertuz si naturelment que je ne sai nul juene home qui poïst estre tes parelz. Car tu avoies tot premierement virginité herbergié en toi si veraïement que onques ne l'avoies enfreinte en volenté ne en ovre. Seulement en volenté ne l'avoies tu pas enfreinte; car mainte foiz avint que quant tu pensoies a la viltance de la coupe charnel en quoi virginitez est corumpue, tu en escopissoies en despit et disoies que ja en ceste maleurté n'encharroies. Lors affermoies tu qu'il n'estoit nule chevalerie si haute com d'estre virges et eschiver luxure et garder son cors toz jorz netement. Après ceste vertu, qui tant est merveilleuse, avoies tu en toi humilité. [...] Einsi fesoit tu quant tu estoies damoisiax, que tu dotoies et amoies ton criator sor totes choses et disoies que l'en ne devoit nule terriene chose doter, mes l'en devoit douter celui qui poiit destruire cors et ame et geter en enfer.

(Bogdanow, pp. 330-333)

⁵³² In the *Queste del Saint Graal*, the narration of the knights' adventures is always accompanied by an explanation of their allegorical meaning, usually by hermits or recluses. The romance frames the knights' various adventures as manifestations of the Holy Graal (*semblances* or *demonstrances*) that conceal an allegorical meaning (*senefiance*). Although explained by members of the clergy, the allegorical meaning, which is always mystical or religious in nature, is always addressed to the protagonists of the quest: the knights. On this topic, see: Emmanuèle Baumgartner, *L'arbre et le pain. Essai sur La Queste del Saint Graal* (Paris: SEDES, 1981); Zambon, 'Il ciclo medievale del Graal', pp. 160-163. On possible analogies between this narrative strategy and Dante's authorial self-exegesis in the *Vita Nuova*, see Monica Farnetti, 'Dante e il libro della memoria', *Critica letteraria*, 25.3 (1997), 419-434.

⁵³³ Carter, 'Dante and the Holy Grail', p. 68.

Lancelot, I have told you this tale because you have led a life of sin for so long, ever since you received the order of chivalry. Before becoming a knight, you were endowed by nature with all virtues; I know of no young man who could have compared with you. First, you had a natural virginity, so pure that you never violated it in thought or in deed. You even had no desire to violate it. And many times when you thought about the carnal sin through which virginity is corrupted, you would spit in disgust, declaring that you would never fall into that misfortune. Then you would affirm that there could be no more chivalrous than being a virgin, avoiding lust, and keeping one's body pure. Along with this lofty virtue, you possessed humility. [...] You were like this when you were a young man,. You loved and feared your Creator above all else, saying that although we should fear nothing on earth, we should indeed fear Him who could destroy body and soul and cast us into hell.

This passage can be read in parallel with Beatrice's reproach to Dante in *Purgatorio* XXX:

Non pur per ovra de le rote magne,
che drizzan ciascun seme ad alcun fine
secondo che le stelle son compagne,

ma per larghezza di grazie divine,
che sì alti vapori hanno a lor piova,
che nostre viste là non van vicine,

questi fu tal ne la sua vita nova
virtüalmente, ch'ogne abito destro
fatto averebbe in lui mirabil prova.

Ma tanto più maligno e più silvestro
si fa 'l terren col mal seme e non cólto,
quant'elli ha più di buon vigor terrestre.

Alcun tempo il sostenni col mio volto:
mostrando li occhi giovanetti a lui,
meco il menava in dritta parte vòlto.

Sì tosto come in su la soglia fui
di mia seconda etade e mutai vita,
questi si tolse a me, e diessi altrui.

Quando di carne a spirto era salita,
e bellezza e virtù cresciuta m'era,
fu' io a lui men cara e men gradita;

e volse i passi suoi per via non vera,
imagini di ben seguendo false,
che nulla promession rendono intera.

(*Purg.* XXX. 109-132)

‘Not only by the working of the wheels above / that urge each seed to a certain end / according to the stars that cluster with them, / but by grace, abundant and divine, / which rains from clouds so high above / our sight cannot come near them, / this man in his new life potentially was such / that each good disposition in him / would have come to marvelous conclusion, / but the richer and more vigorous the soil, / when planted ill and left to go to seed, / the wilder and more noxious it becomes. / For a time I let my countenance sustain him. / Guiding him with my youthful eyes, / I drew him with me in the right direction. / Once I had reached the threshold of my second age, / when I changed lives, he took himself from me / and gave himself to others. / When I had risen to spirit from my flesh, / as beauty and virtue in me became more rich, / to him I was less dear and less than pleasing. / He set his steps upon an untrue way, / pursuing those false images of good / that bring no promise to fulfilment’.

Both Dante and Lancelot were granted significant gifts by God or nature at birth. Dante acquired these qualities ‘per larghezza di grazie divine’ (‘by grace, abundant and divine’) and ‘fu tal ne la sua vita nova / virtualmente, ch’ogne abito destro / fatto averebbe in lui mirabil prova’ (‘in his new life potentially was such / that each good disposition in him / would have come to marvelous conclusion’). On the other hand, the hermit tells Lancelot: ‘avoies tu herbergiés en toi totes bones vertuz si naturelment que je ne sai nul juene home qui poïst estre tes parelz’ (‘you were endowed by nature with all virtues; I know of no young man who could have compared with you’). The celebration of their natural virtues has the effect of intensifying the guilt of the two characters for having squandered them. Furthermore, both episodes isolate a specific event as the onset of their moral decline: for Lancelot, this is his admission to knighthood, overlapping with the onset of his love for the queen; for Dante, this is Beatrice’s death, when he ‘diessi altrui’ (‘gave himself to others’) e ‘volse i passi suoi per via non vera’ (‘set his steps upon an untrue way’). In both cases, a

youth full of promise is followed by a period of sin, partly due, as we have seen, to an earthly conception of love.

At the beginning of *Purgatorio* XXXI, Beatrice goes over the phases of Dante's moral deterioration before addressing the pilgrim directly to urge him to acknowledge his sins: 'a tanta accusa / tua confession conviene esser congiunta' ('To such an accusation / your confession must be joined'; *Purg.* XXXI. 5-6). Dante, now fully aware of his errors, confesses them: 'le presenti cose / col falso lor piacer volser miei passi, / tosto che 'l vostro viso si nascose' ('Things set in front of me, / with their false delights, turned back my steps / the moment that Your countenance was hidden'; *Purg.* XXXI. 35-36). After this confession, Beatrice reminds Dante that he should not have been distracted by earthly goods after her death, but should have risen up and followed her. She then encourages him to raise his gaze. Dante can now see her in all her beauty, which is far superior to her earthly charms in life, and his regret becomes so intense that he loses consciousness. There is a kind of mirroring in meaning and emotional tension between this passage and *Inferno* V, the main difference being that, whereas in *Inferno* V Dante is overwhelmed by a conception of love that almost ruined him, here regret and shame prevail.⁵³⁴ Once he comes back to his senses, Dante enters the waters of the river Lethe, a purifying immersion that cleanses the sinner's memory from the remembrance of his faults and represents the threshold between sinfulness and grace. Dante, finally cleansed of his sins, is now ready to be entrusted by Beatrice with his providential mission. The lost protagonist of the first two canticas is replaced by the prophet, who is now ready to enter heaven and, when he returns to earth, to tell all that he has seen, as Beatrice herself urges him to do in *Purg.* XXXII. 103-105 and *Purg.* XXXIII. 52-55.

The moral teachings given to Lancelot by the two hermits also resemble a new kind of investiture. While Lancelot's confession to the first hermit marks the beginning of his journey to redemption, the second hermit relaunches it with new teachings and a harsh rebuke. First, he reminds Lancelot of the virtues he possessed before becoming a knight; then he lists his sins, with particular emphasis on lust and pride.⁵³⁵ Neither sin is alien to Dante, as shown not only by the allegorical significance of the three beasts in *Inferno* I, but also by the emotional involvement of the Pilgrim in *Inferno* V and the strong autobiographical bent of *Purgatorio* XI, followed shortly thereafter by Dante's own sense

⁵³⁴ See the commentary on *Purg.* XXXI. 89 by Chiavacci Leonardi (1991-97). See also Pirovano, *Amore e colpa*, p. 123, who argues that Dante and Francesca share a common irresistible attraction to earthly goods, namely 'le presenti cose' ('Things set in front of me'; *Purg.* XXXI. 35). However, while Dante successfully overcomes this fascination, Francesca holds into it even in Hell: 'mi prese del costui piacer sì forte, / che, come vedi, ancor non m'abbandona' ('[Love] seized me so strongly with his charm that, / as you see, it has not left me yet').

⁵³⁵ Bogdanow, VII. 154.

of being destined to the terrace of the proud: ‘Troppa è più la paura ond’è sospesa / l’anima mia del tormento di sotto, / che già lo ’ncarco di là giù mi pesa’ (‘Greater is the fear, which fills my soul with dread, / of torments lower down, those heavy loads – / I can almost feel their weight upon me now’; *Purg.* XIII. 136-138).⁵³⁶

At the end of his meeting with the second hermit, Lancelot promises to abstain from wine and sex for the rest of his quest and to wear a rough and prickly sackcloth that will prevent him from falling into mortal sin again.⁵³⁷ He then resumes his journey and takes part in a joust between black knights and white knights. Lancelot sides with the black knights, but he is defeated and taken prisoner.⁵³⁸ The allegorical significance of this event is later explained by a recluse: the tournament allegorises the quest for the Holy Grail, and Lancelot’s decision to side with the black knights represents his sinful state, also evidenced by his unconscious choice to fight with Galahad at the beginning of his quest. The confrontation with the white knights, which drained him of all his strength, recalls the moment after the apparition of the Holy Grail in the chapel, when he felt so burdened with sin that he could no longer carry his own weapons and continue his journey. Similarly, his capture by the white knights recalls his encounters with the hermits, who set him on the path of the Lord.⁵³⁹ As he has not fallen into mortal sin since then, the recluse reveals that he has now entered the celestial knighthood.⁵⁴⁰ Having been recognised as a *miles spiritualis* (‘spiritual knight’) Lancelot’s quest come to an end. After leaving the recluse and meeting Galahad one last time, he finally experiences a partial revelation of the Grail’s secrets at Corbenic castle. This is followed by twenty-four days of infirmity, reflecting his twenty-four years of sin. After recovering and gaining insight into the meaning of the punishment and the divine vision, which is described as ineffable, Lancelot discovers that his quest is over and that other knights will achieve a total vision of the Grail. He then decides to return to Arthur’s court.⁵⁴¹

Dante conceived of *Purgatorio* XXX-XXXI as closely linked to *Inferno* I-II, and included there the most comprehensive account of his moral decline through the words of Beatrice.⁵⁴²

⁵³⁶ For more on this topic, see Umberto Carpi, *La nobiltà di Dante*, 2 vols (Florence: Polistampa, 2004), I, pp. 130-132.

⁵³⁷ Bogdanow, VII. 157.

⁵³⁸ Bogdanow, VII. 170-172.

⁵³⁹ Bogdanow, VII. 173-176.

⁵⁴⁰ Bogdanow, pp. 372-373: ‘Lancelot, Lancelot, tant com vos fustes chevaliers des chevaleries terrienes, si fustes vos li plus merueilleus hom del monde et li plus aventureus. Or premierement come vos estes devenu .i. des chevaliers celestieux, se adventures merveilleuses vos avienent, ce n’est pas merveille’ (‘Lancelot, Lancelot, when you were the knight of all earthly knights, you were the world’s most amazing and most daring man. So it should not surprise you that extraordinary adventures might come to you as you first take up celestial chivalry’).

⁵⁴¹ Bogdanow, XIV.

⁵⁴² On the relationship between the first two cantos of the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* XXX-XXXI see, among others, Marco Veglia, *Dante leggero. Dal priorato alla Commedia* (Rome: Carocci, 2017), pp. 85-88.

The nature of Dante's straying is undoubtedly much more nuanced than that of Lancelot. It is interesting, however, that the cantos that are most concerned with the story of Dante's straying and subsequent redemption contain so many analogies to the episodes of the *Queste* that shed light on Lancelot's sinful state. The Arthurian hero's journey of conversion begins after he is lost in a forest, and is fully interpreted by a recluse who reveals that his adventures in the quest for the Holy Grail allegorise his gradual transition from earthly to heavenly knighthood. Similarly, the encounter with Beatrice in the final cantos of the *Purgatorio* ends when Dante becomes fully aware that he has reached the end of his own redemptive journey and that he is ready for both for the ascent to heaven and for the prophetic mission he will have on his return to earth. The links between Dante's and Lancelot's stories appear significant when one considers their passage not only from sin to redemption, but also from the earthly to the heavenly *militia*, as confirmed by the prophetic investiture granted to Dante by Cacciaguida in *Paradiso* XVII. Hence, the adventures of the Arthurian hero and the story of his passage from sin to redemption, and from earthly to heavenly knighthood, would have been a perfect model for the literary biography that Dante provided in the *Commedia*.

Unfortunately, there is no certain proof that Dante read the *Queste* and that it inspired him in the depiction of his journey towards salvation. Nevertheless, the fact that the romance was circulating in Tuscany and northern Italy at the time of Dante,⁵⁴³ and the many similarities that have been pointed out, allow us to at least hypothesise a relationship between the two works. Dante's knowledge of the *Queste* would enrich our understanding of *Inferno* V and of his choice to relate the vicissitudes of Paolo and Francesca, as well as his own, to those of Lancelot and Guinevere's. Unlike Paolo and Francesca, he would have read on and discovered that the adulterous relationship and worldly exploits that the first part of the *Lancelot* seems to glorify would come to be identified in the *Queste* as the fundamental cause of Lancelot's sinful condition. The sinful passion that Dante associated in the *Commedia* with the poems for the *Pargoletta* or the *petrose* has some features in common with that of Tristan and Iseult's, Lancelot and Guinevere's, or Paolo and Francesca's. The type of love depicted in these works is strongly characterised in terms of *fole amor* or *amor hereos*, an erotic obsession that gives the lover no respite and ultimately becomes a source of suffering.⁵⁴⁴ In the *Vita Nuova*, Dante had indicated the 'fedele consiglio della ragione' ('faithful counsel of reason'; VN II. 9)⁵⁴⁵ as the predominant character of his love for

⁵⁴³ See II. 3.

⁵⁴⁴ See Pirovano, *Amore e colpa*, p. 56. On the idea of *amore hereos*, see Natascia Tonelli, *Fisiologia della passione. Poesia d'amore e medicina da Cavalcanti a Boccaccio* (Florence: SISMEL, 2015), pp. 3-111.

⁵⁴⁵ For the text of the *Vita Nuova*, see Dante Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, ed. by Michele Barbi (Florence: Bemporad, 1932). For the English translation of the *Vita Nuova*, see Dante, *Vita Nuova*, trans. by Mark Musa (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

Beatrice. This love becomes a medium to approach the divine dimension through the ‘stilo de la loda’ (‘style of praise’). Conversely, in Dante’s *petrose*, as well as in the adulterous stories of Tristan and Lancelot, reason is completely subordinated to desire, and love is an end in itself, to the point that the protagonists end up straying from the path of righteousness that leads to God. This explains Dante’s loss of consciousness in both *Inferno* V and *Purgatorio* XXXI: just like Paolo and Francesca, Tristan and Iseult, or Lancelot and Guinevere, Dante had experienced the kind of love that could have led him to damnation.⁵⁴⁶ But while Tristan and Iseult or Paolo and Francesca were unable to emancipate themselves from their *fole amor*, both Dante and Lancelot repented and embarked on a journey of conversion.

Lancelot’s redemptive journey, which ends with a partial vision of the Holy Grail, is effectively nullified by a rapid relapse into sin soon after his return to court. At the beginning of the *Mort Artu*, the narrator emphasises how Lancelot ‘si tost com il fu revenuz a cort, il ne demora pas .i. mois après que il fu autressi espris et alumez de la roïne com il avoit onques plus esté a nul jor, si qu’il enchaï en pechié de la roïne ausi com il avoit fet autre foiz’. (‘when he returned to court, not a month passed before he was as enamored and inflamed as he had ever been before, so that he again lapsed into sin with the queen just as he had done formerly’).⁵⁴⁷ Despite this temporary relapse, at the end of the romance the author recounts how Lancelot spent the last years of his life in the service of God in a hermitage before a blissful death. Dante’s *Convivio* describes Lancelot’s final conversion at the end of the *Mort Artu* as an exemplary event, in a passage that emphasises his *mutatio vitae* (‘mutation of life’). Dante’s choice of this episode stems from his ongoing reflection on the *senio*, the last age of human life, ideally characterised by the renunciation of all ‘mondane operazioni’ (‘worldly preoccupations’; *Cv.* IV. XXVIII. 8) and by a return to God. On the other hand, *Inferno* I and *Purgatorio* XXX-XXXI deal with Dante’s straying, repentance and final overcoming of his sinful condition. For this reason, the conversion of Lancelot in the *Queste del Saint Graal*, with its emphasis on the hero’s straying and subsequent repentance, could arguably be considered as an important literary precedent for the author of the *Commedia*.

⁵⁴⁶ See Pirovano, *Amore e colpa*, pp. 117-118.

⁵⁴⁷ Hult, pp. 188-191.

CONCLUSIONS

In the first section of this study, we saw that the thirteenth-century prose romances were the most successful Old French Arthurian works in Italy, while the twelfth-century verse romances probably had a more limited circulation. We also saw that the prose *Tristan* and the *Lancelot en prose* were the most copied, read and translated Arthurian romances in Italy between the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. While the *Queste del Saint Graal* and the *Mort Artu* circulated in an integral and almost unified form, the *Lancelot* and the prose *Tristan*, due to their considerable length, circulated in a piecemeal and more fragmented manner. This makes it particularly complex to study their reception by medieval Italian authors, who were unlikely to have had access to manuscripts containing a complete version of the plot. Nevertheless, I pointed out how some parts of these romances were more successful than others, as evidenced both by the manuscript tradition and by literary references or adaptations. In addition, we saw how Arthurian literature, as it moved from the aristocratic courts of France to the Italian communes, was adapted to the context and sensibilities of the urban classes, who drew from it above all political and civic models.

The context outlined in the first part of this study is perfectly in line with Dante's reception of the Arthurian romances, on which I focused in the second section. The analysis of *DVE* I. x. 2 in relation to the literary and manuscript context of late thirteenth and early fourteenth-century Italy showed that the interpretation of the word *ambages* as a synonym for *fabulae* is unfounded, since the Arthurian romances were conceived in every respect as historical narratives. This explains, at least in part, the paradigmatic value often attributed to the Arthurian tales, which were entirely comparable to the historical compilations recounting the deeds of the Trojans and Romans. The study of *DVE* I. x. 2 also confirms that Dante's judgement of the 'beautiful adventures of King Arthur' was entirely positive in the years when he wrote this treatise. This passage from the *De vulgari eloquentia*, read in conjunction with *Purg.* XXVI. 118, where he speaks of 'prose di romanzi' ('prose of romance'), shows that Dante, just like his contemporaries, associated the Arthurian stories primarily with their prose versions. This is confirmed by the great difficulty of establishing certain intertextual relationships between Dante's works and the verse romances of Béroul, Thomas and Chrétien de Troyes, which, as evidenced in the first section, seem to have had only limited success in his time.

Among the Arthurian stories, the ones that Dante knew best and that he used in his own works are those of Tristan and Lancelot. He most probably knew the prose *Tristan* in one of

the French versions circulating in Italy at the time, which privileged the parts of Tristan's biography relating to his love story with Iseult and his most famous chivalric exploits. We saw that Dante referred to the prose *Tristan* to represent both the circle of the lustful and the story of Paolo and Francesca. Dante's use of this story confirms a greater interest in the moral aspects of the Arthurian literature than in the political-civic or courtly elements, which were instead dominant in the Italian translations and literary quotations respectively. This is further confirmed by Dante's references to the *Lancelot en prose*, where moral themes are central. The only romances he definitely knew were the *Mort Artu* and some version of the *Lancelot* that is hard to determine because he always quotes the first part of the romance, which is the most textually stable and common in the various versions. Nevertheless, his references to the *Mort Artu* suggest that he had a sufficiently broad knowledge of the cycle to be able to grasp the religious and moral plot at its heart. He undoubtedly knew the episode of Lancelot's conversion and death in bliss, cited in *Cv. IV. XXVIII. 8*, and therefore was aware that overcoming his adulterous relationship with Guinevere allowed the knight to avoid damnation. In light of this, and of the characterisation of Francesca in *Inferno V*, I presented new arguments in support of the thesis that Dante's reference to the *Lancelot* (*Inf. V. 127-138*) was intended to condemn a hedonistic approach to reading, rather than Arthurian literature as a whole.

At this point, in light of the interpretation of *Inferno V* that I offered, it is necessary to discuss the ideas of Michelangelo Picone, probably the scholar who, more than any other, has studied the relationship between Dante and Arthurian literature in recent decades. In his article 'Dante e la tradizione arturiana' (1982), he states that, in the *De vulgari eloquentia*, Dante reflects on the Matter of Britain with a classificatory and taxonomic intention, and that his judgement of the 'beautiful *ambages* of King Arthur' in this work is still positive.⁵⁴⁸ In the following pages, however, Picone argues that Dante's judgement on the Matter of Britain in the *Commedia* is not objective and classificatory, but subjective and literary, and therefore functional to the message the poem intends to convey. In saying this, and in defining Dante's sacred poem as a 'recantation of the Breton *ambages*',⁵⁴⁹ he comes to the implicit conclusion that the poet's judgement on the Matter of Britain in the *Commedia* is completely negative. Picone developed this claim in a later study: 'Poetic Discourse and Courtly Love: An Intertextual Analysis of *Inferno V*' (1990). On this occasion, he explicitly states that Dante's positive judgement on the Matter of Britain, expressed in the *De vulgari eloquentia*, was completely overturned in the *Commedia*: 'The few allusions to the Arthurian

⁵⁴⁸ Picone, 'Dante e la tradizione arturiana', pp. 5-6.

⁵⁴⁹ Picone, 'Dante e la tradizione arturiana', pp. 6-7.

tradition are completely negative, a clear sign of Dante's rejection of the culture to which this tradition belongs'.⁵⁵⁰

However, it is difficult to detect a critical attitude towards Arthurian literature in the few direct references to the *Lancelot-Graal* contained in the *Commedia*. Apart from the allusion to Mordred in *Inf.* XXXII. 61-62, the only episode from the cycle that Dante explicitly quotes is the meeting and the kiss between Lancelot and Guinevere (*Inf.* V. 127-138 and *Par.* XVI. 13-15). As mentioned above, the relationship between the queen and the knight is criticised both in the long version of the *Lancelot* and in the subsequent romances of the cycle, of which Dante knew at least the *Mort Artu*. For this reason, Picone himself, in his most recent study on the relationship between Dante and the Arthurian romances – entitled '«Le donne e cavalieri»: La civiltà cavalleresca nella *Commedia*' (2007) – seems to moderate certain views he had previously expressed. In particular, he seems to recognise that the palinodic rewriting of the Arthurian stories that he had previously attributed to the *Commedia* is actually already present in the *Mort Artu*:

Significativamente Dante, che costruisce l'episodio dell'incontro con Francesca avendo in mente il *Lancelot*, quando deve descrivere la pena alla quale Francesca è condannata, lo fa ricorrendo alla palinodia moralistica del *Lancelot*, riecheggiando cioè un passo tratto da quella vera e propria *Götterdämmerung* che è *La mort le roi Artu*.⁵⁵¹

While commenting the reference to the *Lancelot* in *Inferno* V, Picone recalls once again the subsequent romances of the cycle:

Il «libro e chi lo scrisse», il *Lancelot* e il suo anonimo autore, diventano così il modello esistenziale e culturale seguendo il quale gli amanti riminesi riescono a far rivivere in terra di Romagna l'ideale cavalleresco emblemizzato dalle donne e dai cavalieri arturiani. Si tratta però di un ideale solo terreno e mondano, privo di ogni prospettiva ultraterrena e religiosa; prospettiva che trova la sua espressione nei romanzi che continuano il *Lancelot propre*: nella *Queste del Saint Graal* e nella *Mort le roi Artu*. Se Paolo e Francesca avessero letto l'intero ciclo romanzesco e non avessero interrotto la loro lettura del *Lancelot* al «punto» al quale erano arrivati, se fossero cioè giunti fino alla conversione di Lancillotto e alla monacazione di Ginevra (eventi affabulati nella *Mort Artu*), forse avrebbero evitato sia la morte fisica che quella spirituale. È questo il

⁵⁵⁰ Picone, 'Poetic Discourse and Courtly Love', p. 174. Picone, according to whom the *Commedia* would be 'a profoundly anti-French work', alludes in particular to Dante's refusal of the literary culture in *langue d'oïl*.

⁵⁵¹ Picone, '«Le donne e cavalieri»', p. 28.

senso che si potrebbe attribuire all'enigmatico verso 138: «quel giorno più non vi leggemmo avante».⁵⁵²

Despite this, Picone does not offer a substantial revision of the ideas previously expressed, and in the first pages of the same article he again refers to Dante's alleged criticism of Arthurian literature. While he argues that the models for the 'sacred poem' should include, in addition to the *Aeneid* and the Holy Scripture, the French prose romances, he also notes that Dante does not attribute *auctoritas* to the Matter of Britain as he does to Virgil or the Bible, since in *Inferno* V the *Lancelot* is seen as the cause of the moral ruin of Paolo and Francesca.⁵⁵³ It is not the intention of this study to affirm that, in Dante's view, Walter Map's *auctoritas* could have been analogous to Virgil, nor to argue that the Arthurian romances may have played a role in the conception of the poem that is minimally comparable to that of two central sources such as the *Aeneid* and the Bible. However, I firmly believe that, in light of the study carried out, Picone's views on the relationship between Dante and Arthurian literature should be radically revised.

Some of Picone's exegetical proposals, if developed further, help to refute his own views. For example, he states that Dante's frequent use of the verb *menare* in *Inferno* V aims to establish a relationship between the lustful and Arthurian characters, who tend to be guided in their actions or decisions by irrational forces such as chance and the passions. This same tendency to be dominated by chance or passion is evident in the words of Francesca, who, when talking about her sin, suggests that everything happened in an inevitable way, completely ignoring the role of reason and free will. This characterisation suggests that the cause of her moral ruin lies in her attitude rather than in the book she read with Paolo. As Picone himself admits, if Paolo and Francesca had not interrupted their reading, 'they might have avoided both physical and spiritual death'.⁵⁵⁴ However, Paolo and Francesca did not go beyond the episode of Lancelot and Guinevere's first kiss, after which they kissed each other in turn and 'did not read further on'. The main cause of the sinful kiss and the interruption of the reading, therefore, was Paolo and Francesca's inability to exercise rational control over the feelings or appetites that gradually arose as they became absorbed in the romance.

Picone's views of Dante as a severe critic of Arthurian literature, and of the *Commedia* as a recantation of Arthurian *ambages*, are based solely on a reading of *Inferno* V that recognises the central role of the *Lancelot* in the damnation of Paolo and Francesca. The rejection of this interpretation therefore implies the need to reconsider the role that Arthurian

⁵⁵² Picone, '«Le donne e' cavalier»', p. 35.

⁵⁵³ Picone, '«Le donne e' cavalier»', p. 19.

⁵⁵⁴ Picone, '«Le donne e' cavalier»', p. 35.

literature plays in the *Commedia*. To do so, we have shown that the *Queste*, the romance of the cycle that most clearly expresses the condemnation of the adulterous love between Lancelot and Guinevere, may have played a role in Dante's depiction of his own journey from sin to redemption. Lancelot becomes aware of his own sinful state when he leaves the main road and gets lost in a forest. The allegorical sense of his bewilderment is then explained in the course of various encounters with hermits and recluses, who clarify the causes of his sinful condition and guide him on his path to redemption. Similarly, the allegorical sense of Dante's bewilderment in the dark wood is explained by Virgil in *Inferno* I-II and especially by Beatrice in *Purgatorio* XXX-XXXI. Beatrice shows Dante the causes of his straying, linking them mainly to a sinful and earthly concept of love, a sin that is also characteristic of Lancelot, though in a different way. Dante's confession to Beatrice, like Lancelot's to the hermits and the recluse, marks the beginning of a path of conversion that leads the knight to a partial vision of the secrets of the Grail and Dante to the contemplation of the divine mysteries. The combination of these correspondences allows me to hypothesise that the *Lancelot en prose* may have represented for Dante a model of conversion rather than a literary work promoting a sinful morality and leading to sin and damnation.

It is to be hoped that this study may serve as a basis for further research. The context reconstructed in Section 1 will undoubtedly be useful to anyone wishing to study the relationship between the Arthurian romances and other authors of medieval Italian literature. Section 2, on the other hand, raises the question of the extent to which the Matter of Britain, and Old French literature in general, may have influenced other central themes in Dante's literary production. This work is also the first attempt to offer a comprehensive analysis of Dante's reception of the Matter of Britain, taking into account the most recent studies of Arthurian literature in Italy. It has provided a completely different point of view from that of Picone's studies, on the one hand acknowledging their fundamental role in recognising Arthurian literature as an important source for Dante, but on the other hand coming to opposite conclusions. In fact, unlike Picone, I believe that Dante's judgement on the Matter of Britain in the *De vulgari eloquentia* in no way contradicts the Arthurian references in the *Commedia*, and that, far from being condemned, Old French literature was a source of inspiration in the conception of various parts of the poem and in the overall representation of the protagonist's journey from sin to redemption.

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