

# The literature of developed feudalism

Lecture 2

# The literature tendencies of the period

- The interests and views of privileged classes of society are widely expressed in the chivalrous and clerical literature of the period of the development of feudalism. From the XII century, the importance of cities as centers of craft and trade, which grew mainly from the settlements of serfs who left the feudal estates, is increasing. They create a special, "burgher" (urban), literature, oppositional and democratic in their tendencies, but at the same time considerably separated from the people's world perception. Creativity of the broad masses, without access to writing, almost to the very end of the Middle Ages, continues to exist and develop only in oral form, causing a scornful and even hostile attitude towards themselves from the feudal aristocracy and the church.
- Nevertheless, these main directions of medieval literature, different in their social origin, do not develop in isolation, but in interaction. Democratic poetry in some cases uses the motives and forms of knightly poetry, with their more or less processing and rethinking. On the other hand, throughout this period, folk poetry nourishes written literary creativity, with its plots, images and forms delivering to him a wealth of material, which, being appropriately revised, is used by knightly lyrics and chivalry novel, and later satirical and didactic narrative, and even the "scholarly" literature of the era. It is this connection with folk art that gives the best works of medieval written literature a deeper universal human content, rising above the narrow class limitations of specifically feudal literature.
- Despite this, folk poetry itself, although represented by an independent and rich, but exclusively oral tradition, did not reach us in earlier written records than those made in the XIV-XV centuries. Therefore, we can only get an approximate idea of its character on the basis of indirect data - partly according to the testimonies about it in the documents of the era, partly by direct reflections of it in those recorded poetic works where it has undergone a not too radical reworking.

# Clerical and Urban literature

- Created for the needs of the church (instructive and didactic component) mainly by the ministers of the church. Written in Latin. The church defines all the aesthetics and worldview of the Middle Ages, and clerical literature guides people on the right path.
- The clerical literature of the High Middle Ages is devoted to religious subjects of preaching, moralizing in the Christian spirit, but is not limited to them. Since the clerics received education in monastic and episcopal schools, they also created all the “popular science” literature of the epoch (books about animals — the bestiary; “treatises on the stones — lapidary; a kind of encyclopedia — the mirror.” In the framework of clerical literature, a medieval drama emerged, which grew out of worship, liturgy (see in the dictionary: mystery, miracle, morality; the development of secular, comic theater originated from the comic elements of mysteries and juggling performances - farces, sati, fastnutshpi). in terms of urban growth. At this time, the decline of the classical Latin language is celebrated; it is being replaced by the language of the unlearned monks, who are called “kitchen Latin”.
- Here it is worth remembering who the “fathers of the church” are, Tertullian, Augustine, and what patristics are all about (dogma, the doctrine of what Christianity is, these same fathers of the church namutili) and apologetics.

# Tristan and Iseult

- There are two main traditions of the Tristan legend. The early tradition comprised the French romances of two poets from the second half of the 12th century, Thomas of Britain and Béroul. Later traditions come from the Prose Tristan (c. 1240), which was markedly different from the earlier tales written by Thomas and Béroul. The Prose Tristan became the common medieval tale of Tristan and Iseult that would provide the background for the writings of Sir Thomas Malory, the English author who wrote *Le Morte d'Arthur* (c. 1469).

The story and character of Tristan vary from poet to poet. Even the spelling of his name varies a great deal, although "Tristan" is the most popular spelling. Most versions of the Tristan story follow the same general outline.

## Tristan & Isolde by John Duncan

After defeating the Irish knight Morholt, Tristan travels to Ireland to bring back the fair Iseult for his uncle, King Mark of Cornwall, to marry. Along the way, they ingest a love potion which causes the pair to fall madly in love. In the courtly version, the potion's effects last a lifetime, but, in the common versions, the potion's effects wane after three years. In some versions, they ingest the potion accidentally; in others, the potion's maker instructs Iseult to share it with Mark, but she deliberately gives it to Tristan instead. Although Iseult marries Mark, she and Tristan are forced by the potion to seek one another, as lovers. While the typical noble Arthurian character would be shamed by such an act, the love potion that controls them frees Tristan and Iseult from responsibility. The king's advisors repeatedly endeavour to have the pair tried for adultery, but the couple continually use trickery to preserve their façade of innocence. In Béroul's version, the love potion eventually wears off, and the two lovers are free to make their own choice as to whether to cease their adulterous relationship or to continue.

As with the Arthur-Lancelot-Guinevere love triangle, Tristan, King Mark, and Iseult of Ireland all love each other. Tristan honours, respects, and loves King Mark as his mentor and adopted father; Iseult is grateful that Mark is kind to her; and Mark loves Tristan as his son and Iseult as a wife. But every night, each has horrible dreams about the future. Tristan's uncle eventually learns of the affair and seeks to entrap his nephew and his bride. Also present is the endangerment of a fragile kingdom, the cessation of war between Ireland and Cornwall (Dumnonia). Mark acquires what seems proof of their guilt and resolves to punish them: Tristan by hanging and Iseult by burning at the stake, later lodging her in a leper colony. Tristan escapes on his way to the gallows. He makes a miraculous leap from a chapel and rescues Iseult. The lovers escape into the forest of Morrois and take shelter there until discovered by Mark. They make peace with Mark after Tristan's agreement to return Iseult of Ireland to Mark and leave the country. Tristan then travels to Brittany, where he marries (for her name and her beauty) Iseult of the White Hands, daughter of Hoel of Brittany and sister of Kahedin.

# Tristan and Iseult

- Tristan, Iseult and Mark in *The End of the Song* by Edmund Leighton (1902)  
In the Prose Tristan and works derived from it, Tristan is mortally wounded by Mark, who treacherously strikes Tristan with a poisoned lance while the latter is playing a harp for Iseult. The poetic versions of the Tristan legend offer a very different account of the hero's death. According to Thomas' version, Tristan was wounded by a poison lance while attempting to rescue a young woman from six knights. Tristan sends his friend Kahedin to find Iseult of Ireland, the only person who can heal him. Tristan tells Kahedin to sail back with white sails if he is bringing Iseult, and black sails if he is not. Iseult agrees to return to Tristan with Kahedin, but Tristan's jealous wife, Iseult of the White Hands, lies to Tristan about the colour of the sails. Tristan dies of grief, thinking that Iseult has betrayed him, and Iseult dies swooning over his corpse. Several versions of the Prose Tristan include the traditional account of Tristan's death found in the poetic versions.

## Geneviève and Lancelot at the Tombs of Isolde and Tristan by Eugénie Servières

In French sources, such as those carefully picked over and then given in English by the well-sourced and best-selling Belloc translation of 1903, it is stated that a thick bramble briar grows out of Tristan's grave, growing so much that it forms a bower and roots itself into Iseult's grave. It goes on that King Mark tries to have the branches cut three separate times, and each time the branches grow back and intertwine. This behaviour of briars would have been very familiar to medieval people who worked on the land. Later tellings sweeten this aspect of the story, by having Tristan's grave grow a briar, but Iseult's grave grow a rose tree, which then intertwine with each other. Further tellings refine this aspect even more, with the two plants being said to have been hazel and honeysuckle.

A few later stories even record that the lovers had a number of children. In some stories they produced a son and a daughter they named after themselves; these children survived their parents and had adventures of their own. In the romance *Ysaie the Sad*, the eponymous hero is the son of Tristan and Iseult; he becomes involved with the fairy king Oberon and marries a girl named Martha, who bears him a son named Mark.

# The Canterbury Tales

- *The Canterbury Tales* is a collection of 24 stories that runs to over 17,000 lines written in Middle English by Geoffrey Chaucer between 1387 and 1400. In 1386, Chaucer became Controller of Customs and Justice of Peace and, in 1389, Clerk of the King's work. It was during these years that Chaucer began working on his most famous text, *The Canterbury Tales*. The tales (mostly written in verse, although some are in prose) are presented as part of a story-telling contest by a group of pilgrims as they travel together from London to [Canterbury](#) to visit the shrine of Saint Thomas Becket at Canterbury Cathedral. The prize for this contest is a free meal at the Tabard Inn at Southwark on their return.
- After a long list of works written earlier in his career, including *Troilus and Criseyde*, *House of Fame*, and *Parliament of Fowls*, *The Canterbury Tales* is near-unanimously seen as Chaucer's *magnum opus*. He uses the tales and descriptions of its characters to paint an ironic and critical portrait of English society at the time, and particularly of the Church. Chaucer's use of such a wide range of classes and types of people was without precedent in English. Although the characters are fictional, they still offer a variety of insights into customs and practices of the time. Often, such insight leads to a variety of discussions and disagreements among people in the 14th century. For example, although various social classes are represented in these stories and all of the pilgrims are on a spiritual quest, it is apparent that they are more concerned with worldly things than spiritual. Structurally, the collection resembles Giovanni Boccaccio's *The Decameron*, which Chaucer may have read during his first diplomatic mission to Italy in 1372.