

Jane Tozer is a poet/translator living in Cornwall. Her version of *The Lais of Marie de France* (c1180) was published in 2007. Having worked with professional storytellers, she loves to read the *Lais* in performance. Jane's new long-term project is to translate one of the oldest surviving romances, Bérout's *Tristran* (c1150-70). We know nothing of Bérout, except that he knew Cornwall well. With a map, one can identify the location of crucial scenes in his *Tristran*.

This is a Celtic story from the oral tradition. It's certainly not about a pretty princess and a bold knight in shining armour. After a narrow escape from death by fire, the lovers escape to the forest. For a year or more, they live like hunted beasts in woods, high moors, marshes. To survive, Tristan hunts with his bow, Iseult forages for roots and berries. The Cornish winter brings violent Atlantic storms with crashing trees, swollen rivers, steep banks of slippery clay. Modern city-dwellers can't imagine the fearful darkness of moonless night in the wilderness. Add to this, the terror of pursuit. Yet despite hardship, the two are at their happiest. To Jane Tozer, the lovers are primal beings; Tristan a trickster hero, Iseult a healer and wisewoman.

A collage from French and German sources

A man, a woman : woman, man
Tristan, Iseult : Iseult, Tristan.
Dear love, it's like that with us two -
No you sans me, no me sans you!
You are the reason I draw breath
You are my life. You are my death. JT