In many medieval poems the sea plays an important role as a space in the story, a space of contingency, of uncertainty, of curiosity and of trial; in the courtly romance, however, the sea hardly ever achieves such importance. The different mises-en-scène of space mainly follow a logic which, at first glance, is binary: an order represented by the societal design of the 'court' is confronted by the 'uncultured world' (with a particular affinity with the world of âventiure). There are, however, exceptions. For example, in the Lancelot and Tristan material; the semiotics of the sea in the Tristan material is in turn mirrored in a more subtle way in Chrétien de Troyes' Cligès. This paper will look in an exemplary way at the peculiarities which characterize the semiotics of the sea in the courtly romance. Does the sea highlight a frontier which cannot be crossed or, on the contrary, one which should or indeed must be crossed? Is the sea imagined as a place of transformation which has an unlimiting effect? What shifts take place through the semantics of the sea for the societal design of the 'court'?