

# The Evolving Iconography of the Tristan Legend from the Middle Ages to the Present, with Special Emphasis on the Arthurian Revival in British Art

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In this essay, I explore how the iconography of the legend of Tristan and Iseult evolved through the ages, noting how each epoch favored a specific episode that seemed to emblemize the lovers' plight. Although I consider various cultural influences, I emphasize the particular works (mostly literary) from which artists, musicians, and filmmakers appear to have drawn their primary inspiration. (JTG)

The legend of Tristan and Iseult has had a long and remarkable history.<sup>1</sup> Originating apparently as an oral tale to which the troubadours allude as early as the eleventh century, it is preserved in fragments of narrative poems in Anglo-Norman, Middle High German, Middle English, and Old Norse dating back to the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. It was transformed decisively in the thirteenth century when it merged with the legend of King Arthur in the French prose *Tristan*, a work which then spawned variations in Italian and Spanish. The prose *Tristan* was later preserved in abbreviated form in late fifteenth-century printed editions and—quite differently—in the vast middle section of Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur*. After experiencing a lull in the early modern period, the legend was again revived in the nineteenth century with the appearance of new editions of Malory's work and inaugural editions of the medieval verse romances, which inspired contemporary poets and artists. In the later decades of that century, Richard Wagner's opera, *Tristan und Isolde*, left its powerful imprint on poets, artists, and eventually filmmakers, and, in the early twentieth century, Joseph Bédier's *Roman de Tristan et Iseut* likewise influenced primarily book illustrators and filmmakers. If the legend has never failed to fascinate, the source of its appeal has varied through the ages. Its evolving reception is indicated most strikingly by the images that each epoch has considered iconic, that is, the ones that artists favored as most emblematic to convey the legend's peculiar power to their contemporaries.

The present essay originated as the third lecture in a series honoring Roger Sherman Loomis and his three wives, all medieval scholars.<sup>2</sup> In 1913, Gertrude Schoepperle Loomis published her remarkable study of the sources of the Tristan legend, and in 1938, Roger Sherman Loomis and Laura Hibbard Loomis distinguished themselves as pioneers in the study of Arthurian art with the publication of *Arthurian Legends in Medieval Art*.<sup>3</sup> This remarkable volume, which covers the subject up to 1500 and includes 420 illustrations of artifacts and manuscript illuminations, is the indispensable foundation on which all subsequent studies of Arthurian art have been built.<sup>4</sup>

The title of this essay indicates my initial impulse to offer an overview of the iconography of a legend that clearly struck the Loomises' fancy, as well as my eventual decision to focus on the Arthurian Revival in nineteenth-century England, a period that is intriguing for the complex way it received and passed on the legend. While I do not entirely neglect the Middle Ages and the twentieth century, I discuss the iconic imagery of those periods less extensively.

#### THE HIGH MIDDLE AGES

The Tristan iconography of this period was inspired primarily by the verse romances in Anglo-Norman by Beroul and Thomas of Britain and those in Middle High German by Gottfried von Straßburg and Eilhart von Oberg.<sup>5</sup> In this period, as Stephanie Van d'Elden confirms in her recent book, *Tristan and Isolde: Medieval Illustrations of the Verse Romances*, the tryst in the orchard is by far the episode most represented in medieval secular art and the one that comes to emblemize the Tristan legend and its conflict between the demands of love and those of society.<sup>6</sup> In the representative image depicted on an ivory mirror case [figure 1], Tristan and Iseult, who have arranged to meet secretly in the orchard, stand on either side of a tree in which King Mark is hidden.



FIGURE 1. ORCHARD TRYST  
[IVORY MIRROR CASE, 14TH C.,  
FRANCE OR ITALY, MUSÉE DE  
CLUNY, PARIS]

Tristan holds a falcon and Iseult holds a lapdog, symbolizing, respectively, hunting and fidelity. They see Mark's face reflected in the water below and fashion their dialogue so as to deceive him into thinking they have

been unfairly maligned by their enemies. This episode is most engagingly developed at the beginning of the extant fragment of Beroul's romance.<sup>7</sup> Michael Curschmann, among others, has explained the popularity of the tryst image as, in part, a result of the easy adaptation of the Fall of Man iconography in which Adam and Eve stand under the Tree of Knowledge as they contemplate disobeying God's stern commandment not to partake of that tree's fruit [figure 2].<sup>8</sup>



FIGURE 2. GENESIS: ADAM AND EVE AT A TREE WHERE DANGER LURKS [14TH C. MARBLE BAS-RELIEF, ORVIETO CATHEDRAL, ITALY]



FIGURE 3. LOVERS' TRYST PRESIDED OVER BY GOD OF LOVE [14TH C. IVORY MIRROR CASE, VICTORIA & ALBERT MUSEUM, LONDON]

However, Van d'Elden suspects that 'the tripartite trysting iconography developed simultaneously with courtly lovers iconography that often included a tree, typically with a knight bearing a falcon and a lady with a lapdog, or lovers seated with a chess board between them' [figure 3].<sup>9</sup> Curschmann states that the parallel existence of these religious and secular traditions 'adds a measure of titillating ambiguity to the whole scene.'<sup>10</sup>

This parallelism would also explain why the tryst episode appears on such an astonishing variety of artifacts both profane and religious: ivory caskets and mirror cases, combs, a hair parter, writing tablet cases, wooden chairs, tapestries, embroideries, a tablecloth, an enameled goblet base, corbels, misericords, a Book of Hours, and wall paintings. Over fifty *objets d'art* (not including manuscript illuminations) have been preserved, but many more have undoubtedly been lost.<sup>11</sup>

Naturally, the tryst in the orchard, though indisputably the most *iconic*—or emblematic—image, was not the only scene that attracted medieval artists. Among the most popular episodes were those considered essential for retelling the Tristan legend, and they were thus necessarily included as components in narrative sequences, such as wall paintings, tapestries, and manuscripts.<sup>12</sup> These scenes included: (1) Tristan's combat to defend Cornwall against the

Irish champion, the Morholt [figure 4]; (2) the discovery by Iseult and her mother of the nick in Tristan's sword, identifying him as the Morholt's killer [figure 5]; (3) Tristan's slaying of the dragon ravaging Ireland [figure 6], which wins him the right to take Iseult back to Cornwall to be Mark's bride; (4) the scene on the boat in which Tristan and Iseult mistakenly consume the potion [figure 7]; and (5) the moment when Mark, discovering the exiled lovers asleep in the forest clothed and separated by a naked sword, deems them innocent [figure 8]. Finally, there is (6) the death scene, which was sometimes, but not always, included in these narrative sequences, for they were frequently *celebratory* rather than *tragic* in tone [figure 9].



FIGURE 4. 'TRISTAN COMBATING MORHOLT,' COLOGNE, STADTARCHIV MS W\* KL F. 88



FIGURE 7. 'TRISTAN AND ISEULT DRINK THE LOVE POTION,' COLOGNE, STADTARCHIV MS W\* KL F. 88



FIGURES 5 AND 6. 'TRISTAN IDENTIFIED AS MORHOLT'S KILLER' (LEFT) AND 'TRISTAN SLAYS DRAGON' (RIGHT), BRITISH LIBRARY, MS. ADDITIONAL 11619





FIGURE 8. 'MARK DISCOVERS THE LOVERS ASLEEP,' MUNICH, BAYERISCHE STAATSBIBLIOTHEK MS CGM 51



FIGURE 9. 'THE LOVERS' COFFINS,' COLOGNE, STADARCHIV MS W\* KL F. 88

#### THE LATER MIDDLE AGES

While the imagery of the High Middle Ages reflected the earliest French and German *Tristan* poems, that of the later Middle Ages was dictated by the prose narratives. Beginning in the thirteenth century, the prose *Tristan* served as the main source for this inspiration. Over eighty extant manuscripts contain this voluminous and extraordinarily popular work in which the exiled hero becomes a knight errant and, by virtue of his prowess, is soon welcomed into the fellowship of the Round Table.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, *Tristan's* close friendship with Lancelot inevitably suggests a parallel between the passion these exemplary knights feel for their liege lords' beautiful wives, Yseult and Guenevere, respectively.

Since a large number of the prose *Tristan* manuscripts are illuminated, the Loomises included many images from them in their pioneering volume. Although an analysis of these images is beyond the scope of the present study,<sup>14</sup> there are some important points to consider for understanding how the continuing popularity of the prose *Tristan*—and the availability of one particular version—was to affect the legend's depiction in the nineteenth century. For, naturally, as the textual sources of inspiration changed, the popularity of most of the images discussed previously, including the tryst scene, waned. Only the potion scene remained in vogue, while the lovers' death began to receive a much greater emphasis, as we shall see.<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, the link between love and death, which was introduced in the *Tristan* verse romances but which was not highlighted in medieval

iconography, became much more pronounced in the prose *Tristan*. This is because Tristan and Yseult both become the objects of great passion not just for each other—as is the case in the poems—but also for the tormented souls who nurture an unrequited love for them and are driven to attempt suicide, some successfully.<sup>16</sup> Even Tristan and Yseult themselves consider ending their lives when each believes the other has either died or been unfaithful.<sup>17</sup>

Moreover, in all but one extant manuscript of the prose *Tristan* (BnF. fr.103, discussed below), the traditional ending, which focuses on Tristan's relationship with his jealous and vengeful wife, Iseult of the White Hands, is replaced with one instead underscoring his fraught relationship with his uncle Mark, who, in the prose *Tristan*, becomes a truly villainous figure—acting in stark contrast to King Arthur.<sup>18</sup> In all the *verse* romances, Tristan dies when his wife lies to him about the color of the sail on the boat bringing Queen Isolt to Brittany to heal his mortal wounds. When she tells him the sail is black, not white, Tristan, believing that his beloved has abandoned him, immediately expires, as does the Queen upon her arrival.<sup>19</sup> In the prose *Tristan* (and in Malory), however, the lovers' death occurs not in Brittany but in Cornwall. Tristan has returned there and is harping to Yseult when King Mark treacherously stabs him in the back.

The manuscript known as BnF.fr.103 is the only extant prose *Tristan* manuscript that preserves the traditional ending, although the lovers do end up in Cornwall after their death, since Tristan had prepared letters to be sent to Marc explaining his betrayal.<sup>20</sup> The single illustration that this manuscript contains makes an explicit link between the drinking of the potion and the lovers' death [figure 10]. This large miniature, placed prominently at the



FIGURE 10. ARRIVAL OF THE LOVERS' COFFINS IN CORNWALL (TOP); CONSUMPTION OF LOVE POTION (BOTTOM), PROSE *TRISTAN* [BNF.FR.103, SOLE ILLUSTRATION]

beginning of the manuscript, strikingly juxtaposes two scenes set in boats sharing the same sea: in the bottom right we see Brangain handing Tristan and Yseult the love potion in a ship leaving Ireland sporting a *white* sail. In the top left, the lovers' coffins arrive in Cornwall on a ship displaying a *black* sail.<sup>21</sup>

#### THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD

BnF.fr.103, which dates from the late fifteenth century, contains a much-condensed version of the prose *Tristan*.<sup>22</sup> It proved very useful to those who, following a fifteenth-century trend, sought to retell the legend concisely.<sup>23</sup> In 1489, the Parisian printer Anthoine Vérard apparently used a manuscript that is now lost but was closely related to Ms. 103 for his one-volume *editio princeps* of his *Tristan* and its three subsequent editions.<sup>24</sup> Vérard's *Tristan* was used by other printers, as well as by adapters like Jean Maugin, whose *Nouveau Tristan* first appeared in 1554.<sup>25</sup> It also forms the basis for the *Tristan de Léonais* by the Comte de Tressan, who adapted the old story to the tastes of his eighteenth-century contemporaries.<sup>26</sup> The single illustration included in this text shows the lovers, in elegant eighteenth-century dress, about to consume the love potion [figure 11].



FIGURE 11. POTION SCENE  
[TRISTAN DE LÉONAI, VOL. 7,  
ŒUVRES CHOISIES DU COMTE DE  
TRESSAN, AVEC FIGURES, 1788]

#### THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

The story of Tristan and Iseult experienced an enthusiastic revival in the nineteenth century, but it led artists to represent the legend in very different ways from their medieval counterparts, largely because of the texts that were then circulating.<sup>27</sup> The importance to artists of Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur*, first published by William Caxton in 1485 and re-edited several times in the nineteenth century, can hardly be underestimated. Robert Southey produced a deluxe, unexpurgated edition in 1817, but cheaper editions based

on William Stansby's 1634 bowdlerized and corrupt version had long made Malory accessible to a much larger public and continued to do so.<sup>28</sup>

Malory saw Trystram primarily as an exemplary knight. He placed his long account of Trystram's early life and subsequent adventures at the very center of his work and gave it a triumphant conclusion. At the same time—inevitably—he relegated the love story to secondary status and even kept his readers waiting to learn of Trystram and Isoud's ignominious end. The three references to the lovers' deaths, all recorded later and only indirectly—appear designed essentially to recall Mark's egregious treachery.<sup>29</sup>

Thus, in order to learn and fully appreciate the poignant story of the Cornish lovers, nineteenth-century readers had to depend on texts other than Vérard's printed *Tristans* and the expurgated or complete Malorys. In 1804, Sir Walter Scott published his scholarly edition of *Sir Tristrem*, an anonymous thirteenth-century Middle English poem that he erroneously attributed to Thomas of Erceldoune.<sup>30</sup> The poem is related to Thomas of Britain's *Roman de Tristan*, but it expands the hero's activities as a hunter and combatant—and a killer of giants.<sup>31</sup> Because the sole manuscript was missing some leaves at the end, Scott composed an ending based on a fragment of Thomas's poem preserved in a manuscript in Francis Douce's library (the famous 'Douce fragment' that is the basis for all modern editions of Thomas' poem).<sup>32</sup> Christine Poulson notes that Scott's *Sir Tristrem* inspired the first known artwork of the nineteenth century to acknowledge a medieval Arthurian source. In 1839, Ronald McLan exhibited a painting at the Royal Academy of British Artists titled *Mark, King of Cornwall and his Retinue, Conducted by the Dwarf, Finds Queen Ysoud and Tristram Sleeping in a Cave, Being Fatigued with the Chase: vide Thomas of Ercildoune*. The long, explanatory title shows how little knowledge of the legend McLan could confidently assume on the part of his public.<sup>33</sup> It is certainly a key episode of the story, and one that was frequently depicted in medieval art, as noted above.

Scott's edition of *Sir Tristrem* was not widely read when it first appeared, no doubt because the poem is composed in a difficult, northern English dialect. On the other hand, John Colin Dunlop's *History of Fiction*, first published in 1814, was reprinted several times and eventually retitled *The History of Prose Fiction*.<sup>34</sup> It included a summary of the prose *Tristan*, based on the abbreviated version of that work preserved in Vérard's *Tristan*. Dunlop also drew on Tressan's eighteenth-century adaptation. Thus, Dunlop's summary, like Scott's *Sir Tristrem*—and unlike Malory's *Morte Darthur*—emphasized the love story and featured the ending found in the medieval Tristan poems. Dunlop's synopsis of the prose *Tristan* came to be the most popular alternative to Scott's *Sir Tristrem* until Francisque Michel edited the fragments of the Anglo-Norman poems by Beroul and Thomas in 1835.<sup>35</sup> Those whose knowledge of French did not extend to Anglo-Norman could consult a



brief prose summary of the same poems that the antiquarian Théodore de la Villemarqué published in the *Revue de Paris* in 1841 or Alfred Delvau's 1859 adaptation of Tressan's version in the *Nouvelle bibliothèque bleue*.<sup>36</sup>

Despite the availability of these works, however, Malory's vision of Trystram as an exemplary knight predominated in the first half of the nineteenth century. Malory was not much concerned about the issue of adultery in the case of either Launcelot or Trystram; indeed, he presented Arthur as a sovereign who felt strongly that loyalty to the fellowship of the Round Table was primordial.<sup>37</sup> However, some modern readers, including Southey, were shocked and disgusted by what they themselves perceived as the glorification of adulterous love and excessive violence.

Still, there was a concerted movement in early nineteenth-century England to use King Arthur as a national hero and his knights as models of moral conduct for all men, including boys.<sup>38</sup> In that climate, artists sought images that emphasized courtly behavior. When Prince Albert commissioned William Dyce to paint frescoes based on Malory for the Robing Room of the new Palace of Westminster, Dyce found a way to avoid the unpalatable aspects of the Arthurian legend by proposing to depict those adventures of Arthur and his knights that best exemplified moral qualities.<sup>39</sup> The qualities Dyce chose were hospitality, generosity, mercy, and religion, and, when he considered which of those Trystram's life could safely evoke, he opted for *Hospitality: The Admission of Sir Tristram to the Fellowship of the Round Table* (1864) [figure 12] and *Courtesy: Sir Tristram Harping to La Belle Isoud* (1852) [figure 13]. The latter



FIGURE 12. 'HOSPITALITY: THE ADMISSION OF SIR TRISTRAM TO THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE ROUND TABLE' [FRESCO, WILLIAM DYCE, WESTMINSTER ROBIN ROOM, 1864]

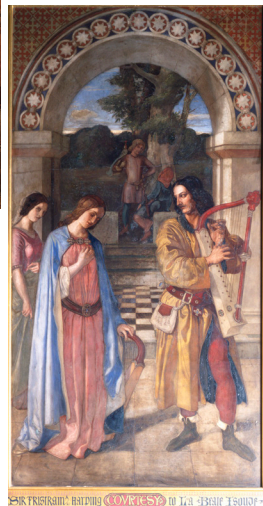


FIGURE 13. 'SIR TRISTRAM HARPING TO LA BELLE ISOUDE' [FRESCO, WILLIAM DYCE, WESTMINSTER ROBIN ROOM, 1852]

episode would become quite popular with artists and book illustrators. James Eckford Lauder, for instance, chose it for the painting he exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1856: *Sir Tristram Teaching La Beale Isoud to Play the Harp*.<sup>40</sup>

This episode resonates in two ways: it underscores Trystram's courtly skill as a musician and it reminds us that Malory emphasizes the fact that the love between Trystram and Isoude was sparked more by shared affinities than by a magic potion. Malory takes great care to trace the steady progress of their love from the time that Isoude heals Trystram and he teaches her to harp, through her support of him when he combats Palomydes, and finally to his return to Ireland after defending her father. Thus, their mutual attraction is firmly established even before they consume the potion.<sup>41</sup> A magic potion was too easily equated with a witch's brew; even Dunlop thought the idea of a potion-induced love was a regrettable aspect of the legend in that it made the lovers' ardent fidelity seem less remarkable.<sup>42</sup> And that fidelity was what Malory appreciated most in the love that bound Trystram and Isoude, as well as in that of Launcelot and Guenevere.

If, by the middle of the nineteenth century, the preeminent *source* regarding Arthur was Malory, the major *interpreter* of the legend soon became Alfred, Lord Tennyson. In his *Idylls of the King*, published in segments between 1859 and 1885, England's Poet Laureate presented Arthur as an ideal figure unsullied by references to his illegitimate birth or the incest that had produced Mordred. In order to make his selective reading of Malory cohere, Tennyson placed the blame for the destruction of the Round Table squarely on Guenevere and Vivien (Nimue). Tennyson's horror of adultery only increased through the years, and when, in 1872, he finally treated the Tristan legend (in *The Last Tournament*), he presented the lovers as utterly selfish and fickle, even omitting the very element that might have excused them—the potion—and thereby 'diminishing the great love story into an episode of sordid adultery, emblematic of the decline of Arthur's ideal kingdom.'<sup>43</sup>

However, as editions and summaries of the medieval French versions of the Tristan legend became more widely read, poets and artists alike stopped tiptoeing around the adulterous core of the story and embraced the Cornish lovers. The first complete, modern retelling of the legend was Matthew Arnold's *Tristram and Iseult*, published in 1852. Arnold's view of the lovers was much more compassionate than Tennyson's, but, since his sympathy extended to Iseult of Brittany, whom he portrayed as an exemplary wife and mother of two, he was forced to modify the traditional ending by eliminating Breton Iseult's deception.<sup>44</sup>

Although artists were inspired by Tennyson's pictorial imagery, his moralizing interpretation of Malory—especially his harsh treatment of the women—offended many, particularly those associated with the Pre-Raphaelites, who soon became disillusioned with the Poet Laureate. William

Morris and Edward Burne-Jones, who met at Oxford and shared a love of all things medieval, discovered Malory's *Morte Darthur* (Southey's edition) in 1855 and were totally smitten. Morris listed Malory's work as one of the best fifty-four works and authors of literature, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti considered its importance second only to the Bible!<sup>45</sup> The appreciation that the Pre-Raphaelite artists conceived for medieval romance soon extended to include medieval art, especially under the tutelage of the influential art critic John Ruskin, who began publishing his work *Modern Painters* in 1843.<sup>46</sup> The Pre-Raphaelites turned their backs on the conventional neo-classical style then in vogue and best exemplified by Dyce's Robing Room frescoes. In place of this academic mode, they adopted a style based on the glowing, jewel-like colors and precise lines that they found in manuscript illuminations and stained glass windows, as well as in the Netherlandish art of Jan van Eyck and Hans Memling.<sup>47</sup> At the same time, as Poulson points out, the Pre-Raphaelites rejected Dyce's idealizing, moralizing treatment of the Arthurian legend and focused instead on emotion. Morris was particularly drawn to the character of Tristan.<sup>48</sup>

The application of this new artistic style to Tristan iconography is most effectively represented by the series of stained glass windows that William Morris' design firm (founded in 1861) executed in 1862 for Harden Grange, the house of textile merchant Walter Dunlop.<sup>49</sup> Morris proposed as theme 'The Romance of Tristram and Isoude,' which he summarized in eleven panels from the hero's sad birth to his tragic death.<sup>50</sup> Joining him in this artistic endeavor were Rossetti, Burne-Jones, and Ford Madox Brown, as well as Arthur Hughes and Val Prinsep. The events he chose as 'milestones' (and the artists who designed the windows) were as follows:

- Tristram's birth (Hughes)
- Sir Tristram defeats Sir Marhaus (Rossetti)
- Tristram and Isoude leave Ireland (Prinsep)
- Tristram and Isoude consume the love potion (Rossetti)
- Tristram weds Isoude Whitehands (Burne-Jones)
- Tristram, mad, harps to shepherds in the woods (Burne-Jones)
- Mark thwarts Isoude's suicide attempt (Burne-Jones)
- Tristram is recognized by the dog he gave Isoude (Morris)
- Tristram and Isoude at Arthur's court (Morris)
- Tristram is slain by Mark as he harps to Isoude (Brown)
- Tomb of Tristram and Isoude (Burne-Jones)

(Two additional panels depict King Arthur and Lancelot, and Guenevere and Isoude les Blanchés Mains.) The event in each panel is identified by a fairly lengthy caption that recalls—no doubt designedly—Malory's prose, but the artists clearly drew inspiration as well from the medieval Tristan poems. Arnold's poem may also have exerted an influence, since Tristram's

marriage to Isoude Les Blanches Mains is depicted and she appears in another window with Guenevere. We should note, though, that Malory records how ‘there grewe grete loue betwixe Isoud [Blanche Maynys] and Trystram’ such that ‘allmoost he hadde forsaken La Beale Isoude.’ Although he does come to his senses on his wedding night and never makes any other ‘chere’ than ‘clyppyng and kyssyng,’ he is accused of treachery by both Launcelot and Guenevere, which drives him mad.<sup>51</sup>

Morris’ choice of key episodes for the Harden Grange series may seem surprising to us, but it reveals how differently the Tristan legend was received in Victorian times. Gone are the iconic tryst scene in the orchard and the allusions to nearly all the episodes that were most popular in the Middle Ages.<sup>52</sup> Despite Morris’ affection for Malory, Trystram’s role as an exemplary knight is recalled in only a single window—representing his fight with Sir Marhaus [figure 14]—while, in the other windows, allusions abound to the deleterious effects (madness, death) of the hero’s relations with La Beale Isoude and Isoude Blanches Mains. The link between love and death is visually underscored, moreover, with both the potion scene and the lovers’ demise represented in very striking designs, which I examine below.

One theme that pervades and unifies this series is the lovers’ ardent loyalty to each other, a quality celebrated in all versions of the legend. We are reminded that in many of the medieval depictions of the tryst scene, Iseult is seen holding a lapdog, which in the iconography of the time signified fidelity. This (enduring) symbolism may in part explain why Victorian artists were drawn to one particular episode [figure 15] that had apparently also charmed Malory, since he recounted it at length. It is the moment when the exiled hero returns to Cornwall in an unrecognizable state—either because he has purposely disguised himself as a marginal figure, such as a fool (as in the Old French poems), or because he has gone mad and lived for a time in the wild



FIGURE 14. ‘THE FIGHT BETWEEN TRISTRAM AND SIR MARHAUS’ [STAINED GLASS, DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI, 1862]



FIGURE 15. ‘TRISTRAM RECOGNIZED BY THE BRACHET’ [STAINED GLASS, WILLIAM MORRIS, 1862]

(as in Malory). In both cases, Iseult fails to recognize him until 'the brachet which Tristram had given her' does, a poignant scene depicted in this window designed by Morris.<sup>53</sup>

But which of the dogs featured in the Tristan legend is this? Malory specifies that it is the same 'lytel brachet' that the daughter of the King of France had sent to Trystram along with love letters revealing an unrequited passion from which she would die. This nameless brachet is the only dog Malory mentions in conjunction with Trystram, but she represents a steadfast loyalty because she never leaves Isoude's side. We should note, though, that in the medieval verse romances, two other dogs connote fidelity. When Tristan is exiled from Cornwall, he apparently entrusts his beloved hunting hound Husdent to Iseut; it is a token of love and recognition as significant as the rings they exchange. It is Husdent who recognizes his master when Tristan returns to Cornwall disguised as a fool in the two short Old French poems known as the *Folie Tristan d'Oxford* and the *Folie Tristan de Berne*.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, the anonymous poet who composed *Sir Tristrem* recognized the strength of the bond between the hero and his dog when he added an inventive detail to the potion scene: after Tristrem and Ysonde consume the potion, Hodain eagerly licks the cup, thus ensuring his lifelong devotion!<sup>55</sup> The same poet mentions another dog featured in the medieval French and German poems, a kind of multicolored, sorrow-dispelling *welp* (puppy) named Peticrewe. The King of Wales gives it to Tristrem as a reward for defeating his enemy, the giant Urgan. Tristram, in turn sends it to Ysonde, who cherishes it.<sup>56</sup> When Tristrem and Isonde flee to the woods to escape King Mark's wrath, both Hodain and Peticrewe accompany them. In Eilhart's *Tristrant*, the hero tells his brother-in-law, Kehenis, that if his wife Isalde remains a virgin, it is because he is passionately in love with a woman who, out of affection for him, treats her dog with more tenderness than his wife ever has. To prove this assertion, he takes Kehenis to Cornwall to witness a procession in which the Queen has given her beloved dog a prominent place [figure 16].<sup>57</sup>



FIGURE 16. 'PETITCREIU  
IN PROCESSION' [14TH  
C. WIENHAUSEN III  
EMBROIDERY]

The symbolic weight that these dogs bear may well explain why Morris chose the recognition scene as a key moment to depict in his summary of the legend. His very first oil (commissioned in 1857) had taken as its subject this



same episode: *How Sir Tristram, After his Illness, was Recognized by a Little Dog He Had Given to Iseult*. Although the painting was never completed, five years later, as we have seen, Morris chose the same subject for one of the two stained glass windows he designed for Harden Grange. Mrs. William J. Stillman (née Maria Spartali), another artist associated with the Pre-Raphaelites, also selected the recognition episode for her oil painting of 1873.<sup>58</sup> The fact that she titled it simply *Sir Tristram and la Belle Iseult* may indicate the iconic status that the episode had achieved by then [figure 17].

It is thus not insignificant that two other Harden Grange artists incorporated dogs into their designs as conspicuous symbols of fidelity, possibly at Morris' direction. In Brown's powerfully dramatic depiction [figure 18] of Trystan's death at Mark's hand (Iseult's death will quickly ensue), a dog is seated prominently on a settee as witness to the king's treachery, along with the two people peering in the window, presumably Brangaine and Govenal. In the artist's 1864 oil painting of the same scene [figure 19], the abundant use of crimson makes the white dog stand out even more. If the dog looks like the same one seen in Morris' panel, it bears as well some resemblance to Queen Victoria's beloved spaniel Dash, seen sitting on a red cushion in Edwin Landseer's 1838 painting titled 'Queen Victoria's Favorite Dogs and Parrot' [figure 20].

FIGURE 17. 'TRISTRAM AND LA BELLE ISOUDE' [MRS. WILLIAM J. STILLMAN (NÉE MARIA SPARTALI), 1873]



FIGURE 18. 'TRISTRAM SLAIN BY MARK' [STAINED GLASS, FORD MADOX BROWN, 1862]



FIGURE 19. 'TRISTRAM SLAIN' [OIL PAINTING, FORD MADOX BROWN, 1864]



FIGURE 20. 'QUEEN VICTORIA'S  
FAVORITE DOGS AND PARROT'  
[EDWIN LANDSEER, 1838]

Finally, two hunting hounds appear in the stained glass window designed by Burne-Jones that shows the lovers' common sarcophagus [figure 21]. The dogs' symbolic value is here underscored by their prominent placement in front of the panels that recapitulate the lovers' story. It is a remarkable *mise-en-abyme*. As Debra N. Mancoff notes, above the effigies hang objects that define Trystram by his most salient skills: an eagle (warrior), a harp (musician), and a horn (hunter). Mancoff adds that 'Burne-Jones's design resembles a medieval iconographical schema, providing a discourse on Trystram, his history, and his reputation.'<sup>59</sup> We should note that the presence of the dogs (hunting hounds, specifically) in Burne-Jones' panel reminds us that the hero's hunting skills are highlighted in all of the Tristan romances and expanded on by Malory, who praises Trystram as the fount of all hunting terms and of 'hunting and hawking' as pursuits of the gentry.<sup>60</sup>

One final canine image symbolizing fidelity deserves our attention. Morris included a little dog in his only surviving oil, *La Belle Iseult* (1858), although this portrait apparently corresponds to a different moment in the legend [figure 22]. Iseult, believing the rumor that Tristram is dead, attempts suicide but is rescued by Mark, who then secludes her in a tower. Whereas this painting was once thought to depict Guenevere, it is now believed to represent Iseult because of the dog's presence.<sup>61</sup> Some critics speculate that a few details of the picture, such as the dog and the oranges—both symbolizing fidelity—could derive from Van Eyck's 1434 Arnolfini wedding portrait, acquired by the National Gallery in London in 1842 [figure 23].<sup>62</sup>

#### THE LATER NINETEENTH CENTURY

Of all the images used for the Harden Grange series, Rossetti's depiction of the potion scene stands out as almost prophetic [figure 24]. Indeed, this scene was, starting in the last decades of the nineteenth century, to become the most iconic Tristan image. After inaugurating the trend in 1862, Rossetti used essentially the same design in a watercolor five years later [figure 25]. I say 'essentially,' because, despite the obvious similarities, there are significant differences between the two works. The moment envisioned in both is when



FIGURE 21. 'LOVERS TOMB'  
[STAINED GLASS, EDWARD  
BURNE-JONES, 1862]



FIGURE 24. 'TRISTRAM  
AND ISEULT DRINK  
THE POTION' [STAINED  
GLASS, DANTE GABRIEL  
ROSSETTI, 1862]



FIGURE 23. 'ARNOLFINI  
WEDDING PORTRAIT' [OIL  
PAINTING, JAN VAN EYCK, 1434]



FIGURE 25. 'TRISTRAM  
AND ISEULT DRINK  
THE POTION' [WATERCOLOR,  
DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI, 1862]

FIGURE 26. ISEULT ON THE SHIP [?]  
[PENCIL AND INK ON PAPER, WILLIAM  
MORRIS, 1861]





FIGURE 22. 'LA BELLE ISEULT' [OIL PAINTING,  
WILLIAM MORRIS, 1858]

the couple is alone in the ship's cabin preparing to drink the potion, which, according to Malory, Trystram believes is some fine liqueur that Brangaine and Govenal had been reserving for themselves.<sup>63</sup> In Rossetti's representation of the scene (though not in Malory), as Trystram and Isoude raise and clink their glasses, the potion bursts into flame. Trystram kisses Isoude's hand almost reverentially, while Isoude looks on pensively, although, in the watercolor, as Mancoff notes, she 'betrays a prophetic sense of the consequence of their action as she looks away from the knight, lost in contemplation.'<sup>64</sup> I would add that, in the earlier image, the 'flame' is shaped almost like a dove, which, when paired with Trystram's white robe and stole-like scarf, lends this life-transforming moment a sacramental quality.

No doubt the most remarkable difference between Rossetti's two versions of this scene is that in the earlier rendering a crowned figure perched in the upper right-hand corner—it could only be King Mark—is observing the scene. His inclusion recalls the most iconic Tristan image of the Middle Ages, the tryst beneath the tree. In the watercolor, though, Rossetti has replaced that figure with an image of Cupid cloaked in scarlet with huge red wings hovering over the scene and drawing an arrow from his crimson quiver to ensure that the potion has the effect he desires. Again, we are reminded of the medieval tryst scene because, as noted earlier, when that scene is generic, i.e., depicting an anonymous courtly couple, the god of love appears in place of King Mark [figure 3]. Another innovation in Rossetti's watercolor is the glimpse we have through the cabin window of part of the ship's deck and sail. This detail is significant because, in most of the subsequent iterations of this scene, the potion is consumed not in an enclosed space but out on the deck with the raging sea as a backdrop underscoring the drama of the moment.

Rossetti's model for the potion scene was Jane Burden. As the Pre-Raphaelites' ideal model of sensuous, brooding beauty, she was often used to depict Guenevere and Iseult and soon became the model for all Arthurian *femmes fatales*, including Nimué. She was Morris' model in his 1858 oil of *La Belle Iseult* [figure 22], and in a pencil and ink drawing that Whitaker (among others) has labeled 'Iseult on the Ship' [figure 26], although the 1861 watermark on the paper suggests that it may have been, instead, a study for a Helen of Troy mural that was never executed.<sup>65</sup> On the other hand, the Harden Grange project proves that the Tristan legend was much on the artist's mind in 1861–62, and Morris could well have been inclined to portray the anguish Iseult felt on the ship to Cornwall. If so, it would be the closest he came to depicting the potion scene. Jane Burden became Morris' wife in 1859, and, shortly thereafter, Rossetti's mistress, a situation that Morris (like Malory's Arthur) seems to have tacitly accepted, given how much Rossetti's mentorship and friendship meant to him.<sup>66</sup>



The potion scene evolved dramatically in the late nineteenth century, and for this we have two protean figures to thank: the poet Algernon Charles Swinburne and the composer Richard Wagner. Before discussing the later interpretations of the potion scene by visual artists, we will need to consider, at least briefly, the transformative influence that each of these men had on the modern reception of the Tristan legend.

Of all the Arthurian poets, Swinburne forged the most celebratory reworking of the legend in nineteenth-century England in his epic *Tristram of Lyonesse* (1882).<sup>67</sup> Swinburne had met Morris and the other Pre-Raphaelites in 1857 when the group had created a second 'brotherhood' and were painting murals for the Oxford Union Society debating chamber. Swinburne, dismayed by Arnold's transformation of Breton Iseult into a model of Victorian motherhood, structured his poem in a way that made of her vengeful passion a negative counterpoint to the passionate love driving the Cornish lovers.<sup>68</sup> In fact, Swinburne, influenced in part by the Pre-Raphaelites, broke decisively with conventional Victorian morals and redefined adulterous passion *positively*—as a virtue. He exempts the lovers from social blame because they are unaware that fate has determined their drinking of the love potion.<sup>69</sup> As Beverly Taylor and Elisabeth Brewer state, 'Reacting against Arnold's avoidance of direct passion, and Tennyson's endorsement of an Arthurian socio-moral system, Swinburne presented the Victorian reading public with a politically, socially and theologically subversive medievalism.'<sup>70</sup>

Swinburne had read all the available medieval versions of the legend, and they made a deep impression on him. He was determined, he said, to work within established tradition to create a new poem 'acceptable for its orthodoxy and fidelity to the dear old story.'<sup>71</sup> According to Rebecca Cochran, the poet chose as his primary source Scott's edition of *Sir Tristrem* because of the 'greater nobility' of the characters and the 'dignified end for the lovers.' He drew on Malory largely for details that presented his story against an Arthurian backdrop, details often recorded in flashbacks.<sup>72</sup> Swinburne reveals his intention to remain faithful to 'the dear old story' by assigning a prominent role to the sea, reinforcing and replicating the unifying function it played in the medieval poems. Tristan makes several trips across the sea both before and after his relatively short stay in Cornwall, and, as Van d'Elden notes, the importance of these trips is reflected in medieval Tristan iconography, especially in the narrative sequences.<sup>73</sup> The illuminator of BnF.fr.103 understood the sea's importance when, in the opening miniature discussed earlier, he juxtaposed the scene of the lovers' coffins arriving in Cornwall with the potion scene [figure 10].

Swinburne picked up on the ubiquity of the sea and used it to frame many important moments in his retelling. For example, when a squall causes Tristram to help his crew save the ship, Iseult hands him the potion to slake

his thirst, and it is on a stormy night that Iseult meditates on what she perceives as her sin of loving Tristram more than God. Curschmann notes that the lovers' passion is portrayed as deeply sensual and in complete harmony with nature, especially the sea. Their love is fateful in the original sense, and Swinburne achieves closure: 'fate and the vengeful fury of the "other" Iseult eventually lead to oblivion in the ebb and flow of tide and time. There is no apotheosis, and tomb and chapel, the memorial structures erected for the couple by King Mark, sink into the sea.'<sup>74</sup>

The sea plays an important role as well in Wagner's opera *Tristan und Isolde*, which was composed in 1857–1859, first staged in 1865, and premiered in London in 1882. However, the composer's considerable influence on the visual arts went far beyond Swinburne's striking pictorial imagery in that Wagner was to underscore dramatically the link between love and death. He achieved this in two ways. First, he composed music structured on an unresolved chromaticism to express an almost unbearable yearning that he introduces in the prelude and sustains until it is resolved in the final chord of the opera. Second, he transformed the plot radically. Working with Gottfried's classic version, he reduced the tale to what he considered to be its essence and focused exclusively on the lovers' inability to live in society and their consequent yearning to escape to a place—presided over by Night and death—where they could explore their passion freely.

In Act One, which unfolds on the deck of the ship headed for Cornwall, Isolde vents her anger that Tristan has murdered Morolt.<sup>75</sup> But her fury stems even more from the fact that she is in love with Tristan and heartily resents his plan to hand her over to his uncle. In a dramatic confrontation, she virtually compels him to agree to end their lives then and there; however, when she directs Brangäne to give her the flask containing poison, her distressed servant secretly disobeys, handing over instead the love potion. The two young people, utterly unaware of the switch, consume the love elixir and immediately experience its spectacular effects. Wagner's association of the potion with poison, the dominant role he gives to Isolde, and the theatrical unfolding of the scene on the ship's deck would then soon be reflected in several artists' depiction of the potion scene.

One of these artists was Aubrey Beardsley. Deeply drawn to Wagner from early childhood, Beardsley evolved under his sway and in turn exerted a powerful influence on other artists, especially book illustrators. In 1893, he was hired by the British publisher J.M. Dent to illustrate a new edition of Caxton's *Malory*.<sup>76</sup> On the book's cover, the long title delineates a chalice [figure 27]. The shape is no doubt intended to evoke the Holy Grail, but it also brings to mind the goblet containing the love potion. This similarity is significant: whereas Malory saw the love story of Tristram and Isoud as secondary to the story of Arthur and Launcelot and Guenevere, Beardsley, undoubtedly

influenced by Wagner, gave it special prominence by featuring one or both of the lovers in seven of his major drawings for the *Dent Morte Darthur*.



THE BIRTH LIFE AND ACTS OF KING ARTHUR OF HIS  
NOBLE KNIGHTS OF THE ROUND TABLE THEIR  
MARVELLOUS ENQUESTS AND ADVENTURES  
THE ACHIEVING OF THE SAN GREAL  
AND IN THE END LE MORTE DAR:  
THUR WITH THE DOLOUROUS  
DEATH AND DEPARTING  
OUT OF THIS WORLD  
OF THEM ALL.



THE TEXT AS WRITTEN  
BY SIR THOMAS MALORY  
AND IMPRINTED BY WILLIAM CAXTON  
AT WESTMINSTER THE YEAR MCCCXXXV AND  
NOW REPRINTED IN MODERN STYLE WITH AN INTRO-  
DUCTION BY PROFESSOR RIES AND ILLUSTRATED WITH  
MANY ORIGINAL DESIGNS BY AUBREY BEARDSLEY. MDCCCXCIII.

FIGURE 27. (LEFT) CAXTON'S MALORY (TITLE PAGE), ILLUSTRATED BY AUBREY BEARDSLEY [PUB. J.M. DENT, 1893]

FIGURE 28. (RIGHT) 'HOW SIR TRISTRAM DRANK THE LOVE POTION,' ILLUSTRATION BY AUBREY BEARDSLEY [PUB. J.M. DENT, 1893]



How Sir Tristram Drank of the Love Drink.

Not surprisingly, the most famous of these drawings is the potion scene, which Barbara Tapa Lupack cites as the Tristan episode most frequently illustrated by book publishers [figure 28]. A great deal has been written about this suggestive image, which, like others, indicates Beardsley's apparent intention to subvert the tone of the *Morte Darthur* by highlighting aspects of the Cornish lovers' relationship—intentionality, sexuality—that Malory purposely muted.<sup>77</sup> The couple, both robed in white, face each other on board the ship. (A sliver of sea can be seen between the two figures standing on the deck.) Tristram appears initially to dominate as he lifts the goblet in a triumphant gesture. But Isoud raises her head higher, and, although she rears back a bit, she does not resist; on the contrary: in Poulson's words, 'Isoud's dual role as bringer of death as well as love, literally a *femme fatale*, is implied by her writhing, Medusa-like locks.'<sup>78</sup> Indeed, Beardsley's title suggests that it is Isoud who is in charge, as she is in Wagner's opera. Here, as elsewhere in his subversive interpretation of Malory, Beardsley, possibly influenced by the Pre-Raphaelites, depicts strong, almost demonic women, while the men seem weak and somewhat effeminate.

Iseult's dominant role in the potion scene comes through as well in Herbert James Draper's oil painting *Tristram and Iseult*, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1901 [figure 29]. It depicts the moment after the fatal act: the cup has already

been drained, and Iseult appears conscious of having gained unusual power over Tristan, who looks somewhat uncertain and in need of guidance. (The figure in blue to the left is no doubt Brangain, lamenting her ill-advised act.) Poulson cites this painting as one that was influenced by Wagner's opera in that the potion scene appears to be unfolding on a stage.<sup>79</sup> But there is more: the scene is set under the shadow of a black sail, anticipating the death for which the lovers will yearn throughout the opera, although the agent of that death will not be Tristan's wife, whom Wagner simply erased from the story, substituting his own ending. When, in Act II, the lovers are discovered by Mark after a rapturous rendezvous under the cover of Night, Tristan is mortally wounded by Melot, and shipped off to his homeland. He spends all of Act III nursing his wound and waiting for Isolde to come restore him to health. He dies just before she arrives, and when she sees him she expires as well, but not before singing her final glorious aria. Although this famous piece is known popularly as the *Liebestod*, Wagner called it the 'Transfiguration.'<sup>80</sup> Indeed, he considered this to be a triumphal moment, for at last the lovers, who in life had been continually harassed by Day, would be joined in the warm and accepting embrace of Night.



FIGURE 29. 'TRISTAN AND ISOLDE' [OIL PAINTING, HERBERT JAMES DRAPER, EXHIBITED AT THE ROYAL ACADEMY IN 1901]



FIGURE 30. 'TRISTAN AND ISEULT' [CHARCOAL DRAWING, JEAN DELVILLE, MUSÉES ROYAUX DES BEAUX-ARTS, BRUSSELS, 1887]

Wagner's powerful interpretation naturally had an impact on the Symbolist movement, as we can see in Jean Delville's remarkable charcoal drawing, *Tristan et Yseult* (1887), in which the Belgian artist makes the explicit link between the drinking of the potion and the lovers' rapturous transfiguration [figure 30]. As Iseult raises the drained goblet on high, she stretches out over the length of Tristan's body. Multiple rays of light enfold and illuminate them, underscoring the spiritual dimension of their end.<sup>81</sup> The potion scene was also combined with the death scene in an enameled buckle that Alexander Fisher designed in the early 1890s [figure 31].<sup>82</sup>



FIGURE 31. 'WAGNER GIRDLE BUCKLE' [STEEL WITH ENAMELED PLAQUES, ALEXANDER FISHER, 1893-1896]

#### THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

It would be no exaggeration to say that Wagner changed irrevocably the popular perception of the Tristan legend and that his influence extended well into the twentieth century. However, he was soon joined by another towering figure who would likewise have a profound impact on the modern reception of the Tristan legend: the French medievalist Joseph Bédier. Indeed, if the flourishing book trade of the early twentieth century sparked a renewed interest not just in the *Morte Darthur*, but also in the medieval Tristan poems, it was thanks in large part to Bédier's creative genius. In 1900, he interrupted work on his scholarly reconstruction of Thomas' *Tristan* to publish a prose adaptation of the legend for the general public. His *Roman de Tristan et Iseut* (*The Romance of Tristan and Iseut*) was a composite retelling in modern French that drew on all the medieval French and German Tristan poems and BnF. fr.103.<sup>83</sup> (Sadly, he had a certain disdain for the Middle English *Sir Tristrem*.) Bédier's romance, a true labor of love, charmed his contemporaries: an instant bestseller that has never been out of print, it was rapidly translated into dozens of languages and some editions have been beautifully illustrated. As an example, we could do no better than to cite the lavish color illustrations that Maurice Lalau produced for Florence Simmonds' English translation, published in London in 1910 [figure 32].<sup>84</sup> For the potion scene, Lalau chose to depict the immediate aftermath: the empty goblet lies on the ship's deck, and the lovers gaze at each other in silence, 'ravished and amazed,' as the caption says. Lalau also painted another scene that takes place on the ship, but the





FIGURE 32. (LEFT) 'POTION SCENE' [FROM THE ROMANCE OF TRISTRAM AND ISEULT BY JOSEPH BÉDIER, ENGLISH TRANSLATION BY FLORENCE SIMMONS, ILLUSTRATED BY MAURICE LALAU, PUBLISHED LONDON, 1910]



FIGURE 33. (ABOVE) FRONTISPIECE, BÉDIER'S ROMANCE OF TRISTRAM AND ISEULT [ILLUSTRATED BY MAURICE LALAU, 1910]



FIGURE 34. (LEFT) 'MARC SPIES ON LOVERS IN TREE' [SAME WORK, ILLUSTRATED BY MAURICE LALAU, 1910]

lovers, far from looking distressed, are locked in a rapturous embrace [figure 33]. That this particular image was chosen as the frontispiece underscores the iconic status of the potion scene; however, it is interesting as well to see how Lalau depicted those episodes of the legend that had been popular among medieval artists. The tryst scene, for example, is unusual in that it focuses on Mark [figure 34]. He is perched on a tree branch under which Iseult can be seen warning Tristan to keep his distance. The caption reads: 'Above in the branches the King was moved to pity, and he smiled greatly.'

At the beginning of *Illustrating Camelot*, Barbara Lupack cites *The Arthurian Handbook*: 'Of all the visual arts, book illustration has played the greatest role in bringing the Arthurian legend to the widest audience,' going on to add that (as we have seen) 'images play a vital role in capturing the imagination, interpreting the text, and directing attention to key scenes and characters.'<sup>85</sup> These days, though, it has been the cinema that has recreated the Arthurian world of yore, or rather brought to life those earlier images. The timing of Bédier's 1900 romance was such that the French scholar exerted a major influence on the nascent film industry, as did Wagner.<sup>86</sup> It is undoubtedly thanks to both men that the Tristan legend became again the transcultural phenomenon that it had been in the Middle Ages. Indeed, between 1909 and 2006, more than a dozen filmmakers from nine different countries attempted to recreate the poignant story of the Cornish lovers.

Not surprisingly, in the great majority of these films the potion scene plays a starring role, and most filmmakers have found an original way to treat it.<sup>87</sup> In his 1911 silent film, *Tristano e Isotta*, Ugo Falena introduced a slave girl named Rosen, who accompanies her master on the bridequest. Sensing that Tristano, of whom Rosen is enamored, has fallen in love with Isotta, she pours poison into the couple's goblets, but fortunately the 'Fairy Morgan'—Morgan Le Fay—intervenes to change the poison into a love potion! Though overcome with passion, the couple arrives in Cornwall before they can consummate their love, and they flee from Mark's court before Isotta's wedding, thus avoiding the twin sins of fornication and adultery. They soon, however, despair of ever achieving happiness together, and, at the end of the film, they are poised to jump off a cliff into the sea.<sup>88</sup>

The Wagner-inspired link between potion and poison that we see in Falena's film finds another original treatment in *L'Éternel retour* (*The Eternal Return*), a 1943 French film directed by Jean Delannoy in collaboration with Jean Cocteau, who wrote the screenplay. Although the film is set in modern times and the protagonists are renamed Patrice and Nathalie, Cocteau based the scenario on Bédier's romance. Many of his clever adaptations involve popular episodes such as the fight with Morholt (a barroom brawl), the potion scene, and the tryst in the orchard. The final scene, in which the deceased lovers lie side by side on an overturned boat recalls somewhat Burne-Jones'

stained glass representation of the lovers' coffins, right down to the presence of the hero's dog [figure 35].<sup>89</sup>



FIGURE 35. THE ETERNAL RETURN – DEATH SCENE  
[L'ÉTERNEL RETOUR, DIR.  
JEAN DELANNOY, 1943]

The potion scene in *L'Éternel retour* takes place one stormy afternoon when Patrice and Nathalie think they are alone in the castle and Patrice is mixing them cocktails to enjoy before a blazing fire. Nathalie's guardian had given her ward a love potion, labeling it 'poison' as a precaution. But, instead of using it on her wedding night, as instructed, Nathalie left it in her medicine cabinet, where it was discovered by Patrice's envious cousin, the dwarf Achille. While Patrice and Nathalie are distracted by the hero's birdcall imitations, Achille slips the liquid into the couple's drinks. As the potion courses through their veins, their feelings of wondrous rapture are punctuated by the thunder and lightning outside and the flickering flames of the fire reflected on the ceiling.

Whereas Nathalie thought the love elixir was nonsense, the heroines of three other films are convinced of its efficacy and do not scruple to use it to their advantage. In two of these films, Tom Donovan's *Lovespell* (Irish, 1979) and Veith von Fürstenberg's *Feuer und Schwert* (*Fire and Sword* – German, 1981), the protagonists have fallen in love and even consummated their love before even drinking the potion. However, since Tristan is determined to keep his promise to hand his lover over to Mark once they are in Cornwall, the heroine secretly pours the potion into his wine while they are on board the ship. Although, in these films, the potion is not associated with poison, in Donovan's interpretation, when Isolt's guardian gives her the brew, she solemnly warns her that its effects will last her whole life and beyond death. Since this statement is reiterated twice more, it is clearly a nod to Wagner—

and perhaps to Bédier—who underscores the love-death complex in his modern prose romance.<sup>90</sup>

Of all the Tristan films, that of the Icelandic director Hrafn Gunnlaugsson, *Ískugga hrafnsins* (*The Shadow of the Raven* – 1988), features the most elaborate adaptation of this iconic episode, which unfolds in a recently Christianized Iceland where Trausti is a newly ordained priest.<sup>91</sup> Ísold's mother has given her daughter a potion to share with *the man of her choice* to enjoy a love that would last a thousand years. As such, it is Ísold's most prized possession, and, in a series of three separate scenes, she demonstrates her determination to control her fate. After a quarrel between her clan and Trausti's leaves Ísold's father dead and their home in flames, she runs from the house clutching her child and the potion, then promptly faints. Trausti calls for water to revive her but is handed the potion instead. He puts it to Ísold's lips, then takes a healthy swig of it himself, at which point the heroine opens her eyes, and, recognizing the flask, spits the potion out. 'Murderer, murderer!' she screams, for she firmly believes it was Trausti who killed her father.

The second and third potion scenes occur in the chapel of Trausti's mother, where Ísold goes from trying to stab her enemy in the second scene to eventually urging him to share the rest of the precious potion with her in the third. Trausti, who eschews the violence of the old ways, had been forced into single combat with the bishop's son to whom Ísold had been unwillingly betrothed.<sup>92</sup> Having defeated him, Trausti refuses to kill him, impressing Ísold with this display of Christian love. So, wielding the same knife with which she had once threatened to kill him, she slits their palms and joins them together, thus sealing their mutual love with a blood pact inspired by the pre-Christian Odinic religion.

The plot of this film is so unusual that we might not even recognize it as a Tristan film, if not for the protagonists' names and the love potion. Gunnlaugsson's knowledge of the legend was based on a dimly remembered bedtime story that his grandmother had told him as a boy. He thought of adapting it to the plot of his film, which is part of a trilogy shaped mostly by indigenous Icelandic mythology and family sagas. It is likely that his depiction of Ísold owes something to Wagner. But, the fact that Gunnlaugsson dredged up from his memory this single episode of the legend and fashioned such a complex and protracted form of it proves that, at the end of the twentieth century, the potion scene remained iconic.

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We have been tracking the evolving iconography—and reception—of the Tristan legend through the ages by noting how certain episodes seemed to fire the imagination of visual artists, in part because they resonated with the cultural values of their time. It is hardly surprising that the only truly iconic

image of the legend in the High Middle Ages was the tryst in the orchard under the watchful eye of Mark—Tristan's uncle and liege lord and Iseult's husband—for it embodied so effectively the threat that the emerging literature and culture of the courts posed to the authority of Church and State. In the early nineteenth century, under Victoria's reign, artists who appropriated Arthur and his knights to serve the national myth sought images emphasizing Tristan's courtly skills, such as his musicianship, because they deflected attention from the tale's adultery. The Pre-Raphaelites, for their part, created images that underscored the lovers' unimpeachable loyalty to each other, symbolized in part by the fidelity of the dogs that Tristan had entrusted to his beloved to console her in his absence, and they dared to view the lovers' adulterous passion positively. Beginning in the last decades of the nineteenth century, the potion scene achieved iconicity, initially because the consumption of the love elixir seemed to exonerate the lovers, but eventually to underscore the heroine's intention to spend her life with the man of her choice.

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FIGURE 3. *The God of Love and a Couple*, mirror case, Paris, c. 1300–1320, © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

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FIGURE 8. *King Mark Discovers Tristan and Isolde Asleep*, miniature from *Tristan* by Gottfried von Straßburg, 13<sup>th</sup> century, Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek



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FIGURE 11. *Tristan de Léonais*, vol. 7, *Œuvres choisies du Comte de Tressan, avec figures* (Paris: Rue et Hotel Serpente, 1788), <<https://hdl.handle.net/2027/njp.32101075727535?urlappend=%3Bseq=72>>, Public Domain, Google-digitized, Courtesy of HathiTrust.

FIGURE 12. *Hospitality: Admission of Sir Tristram to the Round Table*, Fresco painting by William Dyce & Charles West Cope, © Parliamentary Art Collection, WOA 3153. [www.parliament.uk/art](http://www.parliament.uk/art).

FIGURE 13. *Courtesy: Sir Tristram harping to La Beale Isoud*, Fresco painting by William Dyce, © Parliamentary Art Collection, WOA 3151. [www.parliament.uk/art](http://www.parliament.uk/art).

FIGURE 14. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Fight between Tristram and Sir Marhaus*, stained glass panel, 1862–1863, Bradford Art Gallery, Wikimedia Commons, <[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dante\\_Gabriel\\_Rossetti\\_The\\_Fight\\_between\\_Tristram\\_and\\_Sir\\_Marhaus\\_stained\\_glass.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dante_Gabriel_Rossetti_The_Fight_between_Tristram_and_Sir_Marhaus_stained_glass.png)>, Public Domain.

FIGURE 15. William Morris, *The Recognition of Tristram by La Belle Isoude*, stained glass panel, 1862, Bradford Art Gallery, Wikimedia Commons, <[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:William\\_Morris\\_The\\_recognition\\_of\\_Tristram\\_by\\_La\\_Belle\\_Isoude.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:William_Morris_The_recognition_of_Tristram_by_La_Belle_Isoude.jpg)>, Public Domain.

FIGURE 16. 'Petitcreiu,' detail from *Tristan III Tapestry* (Inv.Nr. Wie Ha 003), Kloster Wienhausen, Permission granted by Kloster Wienhausen.

FIGURE 17. Mrs. William J. Stillman (née Maria Spartali), *Sir Tristram and La Belle Isoude*, painting, 1873, photograph courtesy of Sotheby's.

FIGURE 18. Ford Madox Brown, *Tristram Slain by King Mark*, stained glass panel, 1862, Morris and Co., The Victorian Web, <<http://www.victorianweb.org/art/stainedglass/morris/t10.html>>.

FIGURE 19. Ford Madox Brown, *Death of Sir Tristram*, oil on panel, 1864, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, Wikimedia Commons, <[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ford\\_Madox\\_Brown\\_-\\_Death\\_of\\_Sir\\_Tristram\\_-\\_Google\\_Art\\_Project.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ford_Madox_Brown_-_Death_of_Sir_Tristram_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg)>, Public Domain.

FIGURE 20. Edwin Landseer, *Queen Victoria's Favorite Dogs and Parrot*, c. 1838, Wikimedia Commons, <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Her\\_Majesty%27s\\_Favourite\\_Pets.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Her_Majesty%27s_Favourite_Pets.jpg)>, Public Domain.

FIGURE 21. Edward Burne-Jones, *The Tomb of Tristram and Isoude*, stained glass panel, 1862, Bradford Art Gallery, Wikimedia Commons, <<https://commons.wikimedia>.

org/wiki/File:Edward\_Burne-Jones\_The\_tomb\_of\_Tristram\_and\_Isoude.jpg>, Public Domain.

FIGURE 22. William Morris, *La Belle Iseult*, oil on canvas, 1858, Tate Gallery, Wikimedia Commons, <[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Queen\\_Guinevere.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Queen_Guinevere.jpg)>, Public Domain.

FIGURE 23. Jan van Eyck, *Portrait of Giovanni Arnolfini and his Wife*, oil on panel, 1434, National Gallery, London, Wikimedia Commons, <[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Van\\_Eyck\\_-\\_Arnolfini\\_Portrait.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Van_Eyck_-_Arnolfini_Portrait.jpg)>, Public Domain.

FIGURE 24. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Sir Tristram and La Belle Ysoude Drinking the Love Potion*, stained glass panel, 1862–1863, Bradford Art Gallery, Wikimedia Commons, <[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dante\\_Gabriel\\_Rossetti\\_Sir\\_Tristram\\_and\\_la\\_Belle\\_Ysoude\\_stained\\_glass.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dante_Gabriel_Rossetti_Sir_Tristram_and_la_Belle_Ysoude_stained_glass.png)>, Public Domain.

FIGURE 25. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Sir Tristram and La Belle Yseult Drinking the Love Potion*, watercolor, 1867, Trustees of the Cecil Higgins Art Gallery, Bedford, Wikimedia Commons, <[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dante\\_Gabriel\\_Rossetti\\_-\\_Tristram\\_and\\_Isolde\\_Drinking\\_the\\_Love\\_Potion.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dante_Gabriel_Rossetti_-_Tristram_and_Isolde_Drinking_the_Love_Potion.jpg)>, Public Domain.

FIGURE 26. William Morris, *Jane Morris in Medieval Costume*, pencil and ink sketch, 1861, William Morris Gallery, London Borough of Waltham Forest, © William Morris Gallery.

FIGURE 27. Aubrey Beardsley, illus., *Title Page*, in Thomas Malory, *Le Morte d'Arthur*, imprint William Caxton (London, J.M. Dent, 1893), p. iii, <<https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.31822038199964?urlappend=%3Bseq=9>>, Public Domain, Google-digitized, Courtesy of HathiTrust.

FIGURE 28. Aubrey Beardsley, illus., *How Sir Tristram Drank of the Love Drink*, in Thomas Malory, *Le Morte d'Arthur*, imprint William Caxton (London, J.M. Dent, 1893), Wikimedia Commons, <[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:How\\_Sir\\_Tristram\\_Drank\\_of\\_the\\_Love\\_Drink\\_-\\_by\\_Aubrey\\_Beardsley.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:How_Sir_Tristram_Drank_of_the_Love_Drink_-_by_Aubrey_Beardsley.jpg)>, Public Domain.

FIGURE 29. Herbert James Draper, *Tristan and Isolde*, oil painting, 1901, previously owned by the Walker Art Gallery, Wikimedia Commons, <<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:DrapersTristanIsolde.jpg>>, Public Domain.

FIGURE 30. Jean Delville, *Tristan and Iseult*, charcoal drawing, 1887, © Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels / photo: J. Geleyns – Art Photography.

FIGURE 31. Alexander Fisher, *Pieces of the Wagner Girdle*, steel and gemstones, London, England, 1893–1896, © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

FIGURE 32. Maurice Lalau, illus., *At this moment Bragwine entered . . .*, in Joseph Bédier, *The Romance of Tristram and Iseult*, trans. Florence Simmons (London, 1910), p. 46, <<https://archive.org/details/romanceoftristraoobdie/>>, Public Domain, Courtesy of University of Toronto and Archive.org.

FIGURE 33. Maurice Lalau, illus., *Frontispiece*, in Joseph Bédier, *The Romance of Tristram and Iseult*, trans. Florence Simmons (London, 1910), <<https://archive.org/details/romanceoftristraoobdie/>>, Public Domain, Courtesy of University of Toronto and Archive.org.

org/details/romanceoftristraoobdie/>, Public Domain, Courtesy of University of Toronto and Archive.org.

FIGURE 34. Maurice Lalau, illus., *Above in the branches the King was moved to pity . . .*, in Joseph Bédier, *The Romance of Tristan and Iseult*, trans. Florence Simmons (London, 1910), p. 70, <<https://archive.org/details/romanceoftristraoobdie/>>, Public Domain, Courtesy of University of Toronto and Archive.org.

FIGURE 35. *L'Éternel retour* (*The Eternal Return*), dir. Jean Delannoy, 1943. Still taken by *Arthuriana*, March 7, 2019.

#### NOTES

- 1 The spelling of the heroine's name varies. Here, I use the preferred British spelling, 'Iseult,' except when referring to works where an alternate spelling predominates. The spelling of other characters' names, such as Tristan, Mark, and Brangane, also varies. For an overview of the legend, see *Tristan and Isolde: A Casebook*, ed. Joan Tasker Grimbert (New York and London: Garland, 1995; paperback Routledge, 2002), pp. xiii–ci.
- 2 This third lecture was presented in June 2018 at St. Louis University's *Sixth Annual Medieval and Renaissance Congress* in a session sponsored by the IAS-NAB. I am indebted to Carol J. Chase for her helpful comments to improve my lecture and to K.S. Whetter for his careful reading, especially of the sections on Malory.
- 3 Gertrude Schoepperle Loomis, *Tristan and Isolde: a Study of the Sources of the Romance* (Frankfurt am Main: J. Baer, 1913); Roger Sherman Loomis and Laura Hibbard Loomis, *Arthurian Legends in Medieval Art* (London: Oxford University Press; New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1938). Dorothy Bethurum Loomis is known primarily for her work on Chaucer. See Henry Hall Peyton III, 'The Loomis Ladies: Gertrude Schoepperle Loomis (1882–1921), Laura Hibbard Loomis (1883–1960), Dorothy Bethurum Loomis (1897–1987),' in *On Arthurian Women: Essays in Memory of Maureen Fries*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler and Fiona Tolhurst (Dallas: Scriptorium Press, 2001).
- 4 Alison Stones, 'Arthurian Art Since Loomis,' *Arturus Rex: Acta Conventus Loveniensi 1987*, ed. Willy Van Hoecke, Gilbert Tournoy, and Werner Verbeke, 2 vols. (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1991), II: 21–77.
- 5 A small number of images were inspired by the anonymous Middle English *Sir Tristrem*.
- 6 Stephanie Cain Van d'Elden, *Tristan and Isolde: Medieval Illustrations of the Verse Romances* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), pp. 67–86. Van d'Elden builds here on the pioneering research of Doris Fouquet, 'Die Baumgartenszene des Tristan in der mittelalterlichen Kunst und Literatur,' *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 92 (1973): 360–70, and Michael Curschmann, 'Images of Tristan,' in *Gottfried von Straßburg and the Medieval Tristan Legend: Papers from an Anglo-North American Symposium*, ed. Adrian Stevens and Roy Wisbey (Cambridge, UK: Brewer, 1990), pp. 7–17. Van d'Elden is indebted as well to the remarkably comprehensive panorama offered

- in Muriel Whitaker, *The Legends of King Arthur in Art* (Cambridge, UK: Brewer, 1990).
- 7 See Barbara N. Sargent-Baur, *The Romance of Tristan by Beroul and Beroul II: A Diplomatic Edition and Critical Edition* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015). A student edition and English translation form a companion volume.
  - 8 Michael Curschmann, 'From Myth to Emblem to Panorama,' in *Visuality and Materiality in the Story of Tristan and Isolde*, ed. Jutta Eming, Ann Marie Rasmussen, and Kathryn Starkey (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), pp. 111–16 [107–29].
  - 9 Van d'Elden, *Tristan and Isolde*, p. 69.
  - 10 Curschmann, 'Myth to Emblem,' p. 116.
  - 11 The complete list of artifacts is in Van d'Elden, *Tristan and Isolde*, p. 12.
  - 12 Van d'Elden is careful to distinguish between 'specific scenes' (those specific to the Tristan legend) and 'generic' ones and considers this distinction her main contribution to the field (*Tristan and Isolde*, pp. 18–25).
  - 13 The prose Tristan is the object of two important editions: Renée L. Curtis, *Le Roman de Tristan en prose*, 3 vols.: I (Munich: Max Hueber, 1963), II (Leiden: Brill, 1976), III (Cambridge, UK: Brewer, 1985); and ed. dir. Philippe Ménard, *Le Roman de Tristan en prose*, 9 vols. (Geneva: Droz): I, ed. Philippe Ménard (1987); II, ed. Marie-Luce Chênerie and Thierry Delcourt (1990); III, ed. Gilles Roussineau (1991); IV, ed. Jean-Claude Faucon (1991); V, ed. Denis Lalande (1992); VI, ed. Emmanuèle Baumgartner and Michèle Szkilnik (1993); VII, ed. Danielle Quérueu and Monique Santucci (1994); VIII, ed. Bernard Guidot and Jean Subrenat (1995); IX, ed. Laurence Harf-Lancner (1997).
  - 14 Art historians have emphasized that much research remains to be done on manuscript images. See Julia Walworth, 'Tristan in Medieval Art,' in *Casebook*, ed. Grimberty, pp. 283–95, and Margaret Alison Stones, 'The Artistic Context of Some Northern French Illustrated Tristan Manuscripts,' in *Visuality and Materiality*, ed. Eming, Rasmussen, and Starkey, pp. 299–336.
  - 15 In perusing the Loomises' *Arthurian Legends in the Middle Ages*, one is struck by the number of illuminations from the prose *Tristan* that depict either the lovers' drinking of the potion or their death.
  - 16 Philippe Ménard notes that, in medieval Christian society, suicidal behavior was truly exceptional. In the verses (*lais mortels*) composed by lovers in the prose *Tristan* contemplating suicide, the voice of passion is combined with the old images of *fin'amor*, or courtly love (*Roman de Tristan en prose*, I, ed. Ménard, p. 50). See Emmanuèle Baumgartner, 'La Parole amoureuse: Amorous Discourse in the Prose *Tristan*,' in *Casebook*, ed. Grimberty, pp. 187–206.
  - 17 King Faramon's daughter, Béliide, becomes infatuated with Tristan when he is only twelve years old; she eventually commits suicide (*Roman de Tristan en prose*, ed. Curtis, I). Both Palamedes and Kahedin fall in love with Yseult, but only Kahedin commits suicide (*Roman de Tristan en prose*, ed. Ménard, I, sec. 148–63). When Tristan believes Yseult is in love with Kahedin, he flees Marc's court and takes refuge in the Morois forest where, grief-stricken, he tries to kill himself (III, sec.

- 864). When Yseult believes Tristan is dead, she too tries to commit suicide, using Tristan's sword (III, sec. 932).
- 18 For Malory's version of this contrast, see Edward Donald Kennedy, 'Malory's King Mark and King Arthur,' *Medieval Studies* 37 (1975): 190–234, revised in *King Arthur: A Casebook*, ed. Edward Donald Kennedy (New York and London: Garland, 1996; paperback New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 139–71.
  - 19 See Thomas, *Le Roman de Tristan, suivi de La Folie Tristan de Berne et La Folie Tristan d'Oxford*, trans. and ed. Emmanuèle Baumgartner and Ian Short, notes ed. Félix Lecoy (Paris: Champion, 2003), pp. 236–43.
  - 20 Moreover, Tristram's dog Heudent arrives from the forest and grieves with Tristram's loyal friend Perinis. Both return to Leonois (Tristram's homeland) with Brangain and Govenal, who will be the rulers, with Perinis appointed as seneschal.
  - 21 See the description by Mary Beth Winn, 'Vérard's Editions of *Tristan*,' 'Vendanges Tardives': *Late Medieval French Arthurian Romance*, ed. Carol J. Chase and Joan Tasker Grimbert, *Arthuriana* 19.1 (2009): 49 [47–73].
  - 22 The manuscript was partially edited by Joseph Bédier in Thomas, *Le Roman de Tristan*, 2 vols. (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1902–1905), II: 321–95.
  - 23 See Philippe Ménard, 'La Réception des romans de chevalerie à la fin du moyen âge et au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle,' *BBIAS* XLIX (1997): 234–73. Ménard describes how Michel Gonnot put together the compilation preserved in the voluminous Ms. BnF.fr.112, a veritable summa of Arthurian prose romances carefully edited by Cedric Edward Pickford in his *L'Évolution du roman arthurien en prose vers la fin du Moyen Âge* (Paris: Nizet, 1960). Pickford compared Gonnot to Caxton, who, like Gonnot, divided Malory's work into 21 books with chapters and rubrics, not unlike Gonnot does in his book. Both were obliged to condense a huge amount of romance material to fit it into a volume of a reasonable format (p. 237). See Fanni Bogdanow, 'Micheau Gonnot's Arthuriad Preserved in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 112 and Its Place in the Evolution of Arthurian Romance,' *Arthurian Literature* 22 (2005): 20–48. On this general trend, see Miriam Edlich-Muth, *Malory and His European Contemporaries: Adapting Late Arthurian Romance Collections* (Cambridge, UK: Brewer, 2014).
  - 24 The first edition was *Tristan: Les faiz du tresvaillant et renomme chevalier Tristan*, 2 vols. (Rouen: Vérard à Paris, 1489). See Winn, 'Vérard's Editions of *Tristan*': 47–73.
  - 25 Jean Maugin, *Le Premier livre du nouveau Tristan, prince de Léonnais, chevalier de la Table ronde, et d'Yseulte, princesse d'Yrlande, royne de Cornouaille* (Paris: Veuve Maurice de La Porte, 1554). Jane H.M. Taylor compares excerpts from Ms. 103, Vérard's *editio princeps*, and Maugin's adaptation in *Rewriting Arthurian Romance in Renaissance France* (Cambridge, UK: Brewer, 2014).
  - 26 The *Tristan de Léonais* of Count Louis-Élisabeth de la Verne de Tressan appeared in the first volume of the *Bibliothèque universelle des romans* in 1776, then in tome I of the *Corps d'extraits des romans de chevalerie* (1782), which became tome VII of Tressan's *Œuvres choisies* (1787–1789) in the *Bibliothèque universelle des dames* in 1787.



- 27 See Beverly Taylor and Elisabeth Brewer, *The Return of King Arthur: British and American Arthurian Literature since 1800* (Cambridge, UK: Brewer, 1983), pp. 15–33, and David Matthews, ‘Scholarship and Popular Culture in the Nineteenth Century,’ in *A Companion to Arthurian Literature*, ed. Helen Fulton (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), pp. 355–67.
- 28 Caxton’s print survives in two copies: an imperfect copy in the John Rylands Library and a complete copy in the Pierpont Morgan. For a facsimile, see *Le Morte D’arthur Printed by William Caxton*, 1485, ed. Paul Needham (London: Scholar Press, 1976). For Victorian editions, including Southey’s, see *The Morte Darthur: A Collection of Early-Nineteenth-Century Editions*, 7 vols., ed. Yuri Fuwa (Japan: Eureka Press and London: Routledge, 2017); Southey’s edition first appeared as *The Byrth, Lyf, and Actes of Kyng Arthur; of His Noble Knyghtes of the Rounde Table, Theyr Merveyllous Enquestes and Aduentures, Thachyeuyng of the Sanc Greal; and in the End le Morte Darthur, with the Dolourous Deth and Departying out of Thys Worlde of Them Al*, with an introduction and notes by Robert Southey, 2 vols. (London: for Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown by Thomas Davidson, 1817). For a list of the complete editions of the *Morte Darthur* up to 1983, see Marilyn Jackson Parins, ed., *Malory: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 40–44. Among more recent editions, we should mention especially the new critical edition, Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, ed. P.J.C. Field, 2 vols. (Cambridge, UK: Brewer, 2013).
- 29 See *Caxton’s Malory: A New Edition of Sir Thomas Malory’s Le Morte Darthur based on the Pierpont Morgan Copy of William Caxton’s Edition of 1485*, ed. James W. Spisak, based on work by William Matthews, Dictionary by Bert Dillon, 2 vols. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1983): I:336.8–16; I:551.38–552.5; and I:562.8–21. (I cite Caxton’s Malory rather than the version found in the Winchester manuscript, which was unknown until its discovery in 1934, and which was edited by Eugène Vinaver before being published for the first time in 1947.)
- 30 *Sir Tristrem; A Metrical Romance of the Thirteenth Century; by Thomas of Erceldoune Called the Rhymer*, ed. Walter Scott, 3rd edn. (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable, 1811). For a recent edition and translation, see *Lancelot of the Laik and Sir Tristrem*, ed. Alan Lupack (Kalamazoo, MI: TEAMS, 1994).
- 31 According to my calculations, over 40% of the poem is devoted to Tristrem as a hunter and also a combatant against various enemies to defend his own honor or the honor of others.
- 32 Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Douce.
- 33 Christine Poulson, *The Quest for the Grail: Arthurian Legend in British Art 1840–1920* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 16. A slightly different version of her chapter, ‘Tristram and Isoud,’ appears as “That Most Beautiful of Dreams”: Tristram and Isoud in British Art of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries’ in *Casebook*, ed. Grimbert, pp. 325–56.
- 34 John Colin Dunlop, *The History of Fiction* (Edinburgh, 1814) with later editions in 1816, 1845. In 1888, Henry Wilson produced a new edition (entitled *The History*

- of *Prose Fiction*), revising it slightly and adding notes, appendices, and an index (London: George Bell and Sons).
- 35 Francisque Michel, ed., *Tristan; Recueil de ce qui reste des poèmes relatifs à ses aventures composés en français, en anglo-normand et en grec dans les XII et XIII siècles* (Paris: Techener, t. 1 et 2, 1835; t. 3, 1839).
  - 36 Théodore de la Villemarqué, 'Les poèmes gallois et les romans de la Table-Ronde,' *Revue de Paris*, 3rd series, 34 (1841): 266–82. (A brief summary of 'Tristan' is on pp. 274–75.) Alfred Delvau's *Tristan de Léonois* appeared in the Nouvelle bibliothèque bleue in 1859 (Paris: Lécivain et Toubon). See Thierry Delcourt, 'Du *Tristan* de Tressan à la Nouvelle Bibliothèque Bleue d'Alfred Delvau, les avatars du *Tristan* en prose,' pp. 131–50, in *Mémoires des chevaliers: édition, diffusion et réception des romans de chevalerie du XVII<sup>e</sup> au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Actes du colloque international organisé par l'École nationale des chartes, l'Université de Reims Champagne-Ardenne; réunis par Isabelle Diu, Elisabeth Parinet, Françoise Vieillard (Paris: L'École des Chartes, 2007).
  - 37 Dhira B. Mahoney, 'Malory's "Tale of Sir Tristram": Source and Setting Reconsidered,' in *Casebook*, ed. Grimbert, p. 238 [223–53]. This essay originally appeared in *Medievalia et Humanistica*, n.s. 9 (1979): 175–98. See also Curschmann, 'Myth to Emblem,' pp. 116–19.
  - 38 See, most recently, Alan Lupack and Barbara Tapa Lupack, 'The 2016 Loomis Lecture: Moral Chivalry and the Arthurian Revival,' *Arthuriana* 26.4 (2016): 3–32.
  - 39 See Poulson, *Quest for the Grail*, pp. 19–49; Whitaker, *Legends of King Arthur in Art*, pp. 176–83; and Debra N. Mancoff, *The Arthurian Revival in Victorian Art* (New York: Garland, 1990), pp. 117–35, and *The Return of King Arthur: The Legend through Victorian Eyes* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1995), pp. 28–47.
  - 40 Poulson, *Quest for the Grail*, p. 160.
  - 41 See *Caxton's Malory*, ed. Spisak, I:207.30–32; I: 211.31–212.4; I:222.38–39; and I:223.20–30.
  - 42 Dunlop, *History of Prose Fiction* (1888 ed.), p. 206.
  - 43 Poulson, *Quest for the Grail*, p. 160. See also Taylor and Brewer, *Return of King Arthur*, pp. 89–128; and James Noble, 'Women as Agent of Death in Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*,' *The Arthurian Way of Death: The English Tradition*, ed. Karen Cherewatuk and K.S. Whetter (Cambridge, UK: Brewer, 2009), pp. 193–205.
  - 44 Arnold's initial contact with the poem was in Villemarqué's article, but he also consulted notes in Southey's preface (Taylor and Brewer, *The Return of King Arthur*, pp. 79–85). See also the excellent essay by Barbara Fass Leavy, 'Iseult of Brittany: A New Interpretation of Matthew Arnold's *Tristram and Iseult*,' in *Arthurian Women: A Casebook*, ed. Thelma S. Fenster (New York: Garland, 1996), pp. 205–28.
  - 45 *The Collected Works of William Morris*, ed. May Morris, 24 vols. (London: Longmans, 1910–1915), pp. 22, xv.
  - 46 Ruskin began by defending the work of J.M.W. Turner and, by the 1850s, was championing the Pre-Raphaelites. See Christine Poulson, *William Morris* (Hertfordshire: Eagle, 2002), pp. 7–27.

- 47 See Melissa E. Buron, *Truth & Beauty: The Pre-Raphaelites and the Old Masters* (Munich: Prestel, 2018). This book accompanies the 2018 exhibition of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco-Legion of Honor.
- 48 Poulson, *Quest for the Grail*, pp. 160–68.
- 49 The Bradford Art Galleries and Museum acquired the panels in 1917. See Whitaker's discussion in *Legends of Arthur*, pp. 194–98. Color plates of most of the panels are on the insert between pp. 210 and 211. On Morris' firm, see Poulson, *William Morris*, pp. 29–53.
- 50 I am exceedingly grateful to Christine Poulson for sending me a copy of the summary of the legend that Morris apparently dictated, with suggestions for particular subjects for the panels, all of which Dunlop accepted.
- 51 For a description of Trystram's relations with Isoude Blanches Mains, see *Caxton's Malory*, ed. Spisak, I:235.25–36, and for the reaction of La Beale Isoude, Launcelot, and Guenevere to the news of Trystram's marriage, see I:235.37–236.20.
- 52 Note that Malory eliminated nearly all the stratagems the lovers used to meet or escape discovery, including the tryst in the garden. Nevertheless, I find Morris' choice of episodes somewhat perplexing, unlike Mancoff, who states: 'Through thoughtful subject selection Morris narrated Tristram's saga with clarity and economy' (*Arthurian Revival*, p. 180).
- 53 The entire caption reads: 'How Sir Tristram slew a giant who would have slain King Mark, how King Mark not knowing him brought him to Tintagel, and how he got his wit again and how Isoulde knew him again by cause of the brachet which Tristram had given her which leaped upon him and licked him.' The caption's unusual length seems to reflect the careful attention that Malory gave to this incident, recorded in *Caxton's Malory*, ed. Spisak, I:264.39–265:7.
- 54 In Baumgartner's edition of Thomas, *Le Roman de Tristan* and the *Folies*, the scene describing the lovers' parting in the *Roman de Tristan* breaks off just as Yseut is offering Tristan her ring (pp. 54–55), but we can safely assume that she asked him to leave her Husdent as well, for both the ring and the dog are tokens of recognition as recorded in the two *Folies*, pp. 334–35, 406–11.
- 55 Lupack, ed., *Sir Tristrem*, vv. 1673–83.
- 56 Lupack, ed., *Sir Tristrem*, vv. 2399–2420. In Gottfried's version, Petitcreiu has a bell attached to his collar that banishes care and pain. When Isolde receives the puppy, she removes the bell so that she can share in Tristan's sorrow; Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan, With the Surviving Fragments of the 'Tristram' of Thomas*, trans. A.T. Hatto (London: Penguin Books, 1960), pp. 249–56.
- 57 Van d'Elden, *Tristan and Isolde*, p. 452. One of the manuscripts containing Gottfried's poem (Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek MS cgm 51, f. 86v), shows the Duke of Wales giving the dog to Tristan, who entrusts it to a minstrel, who takes it to Isolde (Van d'Elden, *Tristan and Isolde*, p. 368).
- 58 Poulson, *Quest for the Grail*, pp. 161–65.
- 59 Mancoff, *Arthurian Revival*, p. 181.
- 60 *Caxton's Malory*, ed. Spisak, I:201.39–202.11.

- 61 Christine Poulson's dissertation research led to the decision to see this painting as a portrait of Iseult rather than of Guenevere. See Joanna Banham and Jennifer Harris, eds., *William Morris and the Middle Ages: A collection of essays, together with a catalogue of works exhibited at the Whitworth Art Gallery, 28 September–8 December 1984* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 114–16.
- 62 Indeed, an exhibition held at the National Gallery in Spring 2018 emphasized the influence that the Netherlandish painter had had on the Pre-Raphaelites. (See also note 42, *supra*, about the 2018 exhibition in San Francisco.)
- 63 *Caxton's Malory*, ed. Spisak, I:223.20–30.
- 64 Mancoff, *Arthurian Revival*, p. 183.
- 65 On the William Morris Gallery website, the caption reads simply: 'Jane Morris in medieval costume (1861).'
- 66 Whitaker, *Legends of King Arthur in Art*, p. 195. In Malory, when Mordred and Gawain tell Arthur of Launcelot's affair with Guenevere, the king is loath to give credence to the rumor of his beloved first knight's betrayal (*Caxton's Malory*, ed. Spisak, I:556, 36–39). Similarly, after Launcelot kills many knights when rescuing the queen from the fire (including Gareth, accidentally), Arthur sees how Gawain's war against Launcelot means the destruction of his fellowship and states that he is sorrier for that loss than for the loss of his fair queen (*Caxton's Malory*, ed. Spisak, I:565, 25–29). For a comprehensive account of Rossetti's life and work, see Alicia Craig Faxon's *Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1989), which includes excellent reproductions of his work.
- 67 Curschmann lauds Swinburne's interpretation of the legend as the fourth and last major stage in the evolution of the Tristan legend that he traces in 'Myth to Emblem,' pp. 119–22.
- 68 Rebecca Cochran, 'An Assessment of Swinburne's Arthuriana,' in *King Arthur Through the Ages*, 2 vols., ed. Valerie Lagorio and Mildred Leake Day (New York: Garland, 1990), II: 62–82.
- 69 Chris Brooks and Inga Bryden, 'The Arthurian Legacy,' in *The Arthur of the English: The Arthurian Legend in Medieval English Life and Literature*, ed. W.R.J. Barron (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1999), p. 262 [247–64].
- 70 Taylor and Brewer, *Return of King Arthur*, p. 262.
- 71 Taylor and Brewer, *Return of King Arthur*, p. 31.
- 72 Cochran, 'Assessment,' p. 68. This flashback technique recalls the one used by Wagner in *Tristan und Isolde*.
- 73 Van d'Elden, *Tristan and Isolde*, pp. 103–11.
- 74 Curschmann, 'Myth to Emblem,' p. 121.
- 75 Thinking no doubt that a modern audience would not understand the importance of one's maternal uncle (second only to the father) in the Middle Ages, Wagner transforms Morholt into Isolde's fiancée. Some filmmakers will follow suit.
- 76 The title used by Southey is retained: *The Birth, Life and Acts of King Arthur, of His Noble Knights of the Round Table, Their Marevllous Enquests and Adventures, the Achieving of the San Greal and in the End Le Morte Darthur with the Dolourous Death and Departing out of This World of Them Al*.



- 77 See Barbara Tapa Lupack with Alan Lupack, *Illustrating Camelot* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2008), pp. 85–87, for a description of the potion scene and pp. 75–94 for Beardsley's subversion of Malory, which is more fully discussed by Linda Gertner Zatin in *Aubrey Beardsley and Victorian Sexual Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990) and *Beardsley, Japonisme, and the Perversion of the Victorian Ideal* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
- 78 Poulson, *Quest for the Grail*, p. 170.
- 79 Poulson, *Quest for the Grail*, pp. 172–75. Previously owned by the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool, the painting was destroyed during World War II.
- 80 In 'Wagner Weekend' in *The New Yorker*, Oct. 17, 2016: 104, Alex Ross states: '[Wagner] applied the word "Liebestod" to the music of groping longing that appears in the Prelude and recurs in Act I, as the lovers partake of the potion they mistakenly believe to be poison. It was Franz Liszt who, in an 1867 piano paraphrase, dubbed the ending "Isolden's Liebes-Tod." In its original context, *Liebestod* indicates a death that turns into love. The later usage implies the opposite, a love that turns into death.'
- 81 Whitaker, *Legends of Arthur*, adds that 'the butterflies on Yseult's gown symbolise their transcendent souls' (p. 253).
- 82 The buckle is part of the 'Wagner girdle' in the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum. Poulson notes that the enamel plaques on the girdle feature scenes from a variety of Wagnerian operas, but that *Tristan und Isolde* is given pride of place, since the buckle is comprised of two plaques, each twice the size of the others, illustrating the potion scene and Tristram's death (*Quest for the Grail*, p. 71).
- 83 The original edition was published in Paris by L'Édition d'Art H. Piazza. Edward J. Gallagher provides an excellent introduction and new English translation in his Joseph Bédier, *The Romance of Tristan and Iseut* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2013).
- 84 Florence Simmonds and Maurice Lalau, *The Romance of Tristram and Iseult* by Joseph Bédier, 1864–1938, first published by William Heinemann (London, 1910) and by J. B. Lippencott Company (Philadelphia, PA). It can be accessed on Archive.org.
- 85 Norris J. Lacy and Geoffrey Ashe, with Debra N. Mancoff, *The Arthurian Handbook*, 2nd edn. (New York and London: Garland, 1997), p. 237. Lupack, *Illustrating Camelot*, p. 1.
- 86 Jeongwon Joe and Sander L. Gilman, eds., *Wagner & Cinema* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010).
- 87 See Joan Tasker Grimbert, 'Variations on a Transcultural Phenomenon: The Potion Scene in Four Film Versions of the Legend of Tristan and Iseult,' in *The Legacy of Courtly Literature: From Medieval to Contemporary Culture*, ed. Deborah Nelson-Campbell and Rouben Cholakian (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 131–47.
- 88 See Kevin J. Harty, 'A Note on Maureen Fries, Morgan le Fay, and Ugo Falena's 1911 Film *Tristano e Isotta*,' in *On Arthurian Women*, ed. Wheeler and Tolhurst, pp. 313–18; and Joan Tasker Grimbert, 'Isolde on the Silver Screen: Enraptured,

Resolute, and Shrewd,' in *Medieval Women on Film: Queens, Warriors, Saints, Sinners*, ed. Kevin J. Harty (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, forthcoming in 2020). A copy of this film (Parts I and II) is owned by the Library of Congress, which provides online access to Part II.

- 89 See Joan Tasker Grimbert and Robert Smarz, 'Fable and Poésie in Cocteau's *L'Éternel Retour* (1943),' in *Cinema Arthuriana: Twenty Essays*, rev. edn., ed. Kevin J. Harty, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2001), pp. 220–34. The dog, Moulouk ('guardian angel' in Arabic), who appears prominently in the film, belonged to actor Jean Marais ('Patrice'), who had found him at the German front after being demobilized.
- 90 Although Bédier sought to counteract Wagner's influence by 'reclaiming' the legend for France, he was helpless to resist the German composer's sway. On Bédier's insistence on the love-death complex, see Alain Corbellari, *Joseph Bédier, écrivain et philologue* (Genève: Droz, 1997), p. 210; and Joan Tasker Grimbert, 'Bédier et la légende tristanienne,' *Sur les traces de Joseph Bédier* (special issue), *Romanische Studien* 7 (2017): 73 [67–78].
- 91 Joan Tasker Grimbert and Claudia Bornholdt, "The Love of All Mankind but Also the Love of One Woman Alone": Hrafn Gunnlaugsson's *Shadow of the Raven* (1988),' in *The Vikings on Film: Essays on Depictions of the Nordic Middle Ages*, ed. Kevin J. Harty (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2011), pp. 96–105. See also Jane Chance and Jessica Weinstein, 'National Identity and Conversion Through Medieval Romance: The Case of Hrafn Gunnlaugsson's Film *Í skugga hrafnsins*,' *Scandinavian Studies* 75 (2013): 417–38.
- 92 Ísold is a single mother—a touch designed, according to Gunnlaugsson, 'to get away from the frustrating virginity and make her a woman with her own will' (communicated in an e-mail to Weinstein cited in Chance and Weinstein, 'National Identity and Conversion,' p. 429). Her father no doubt considered her 'damaged goods.'