

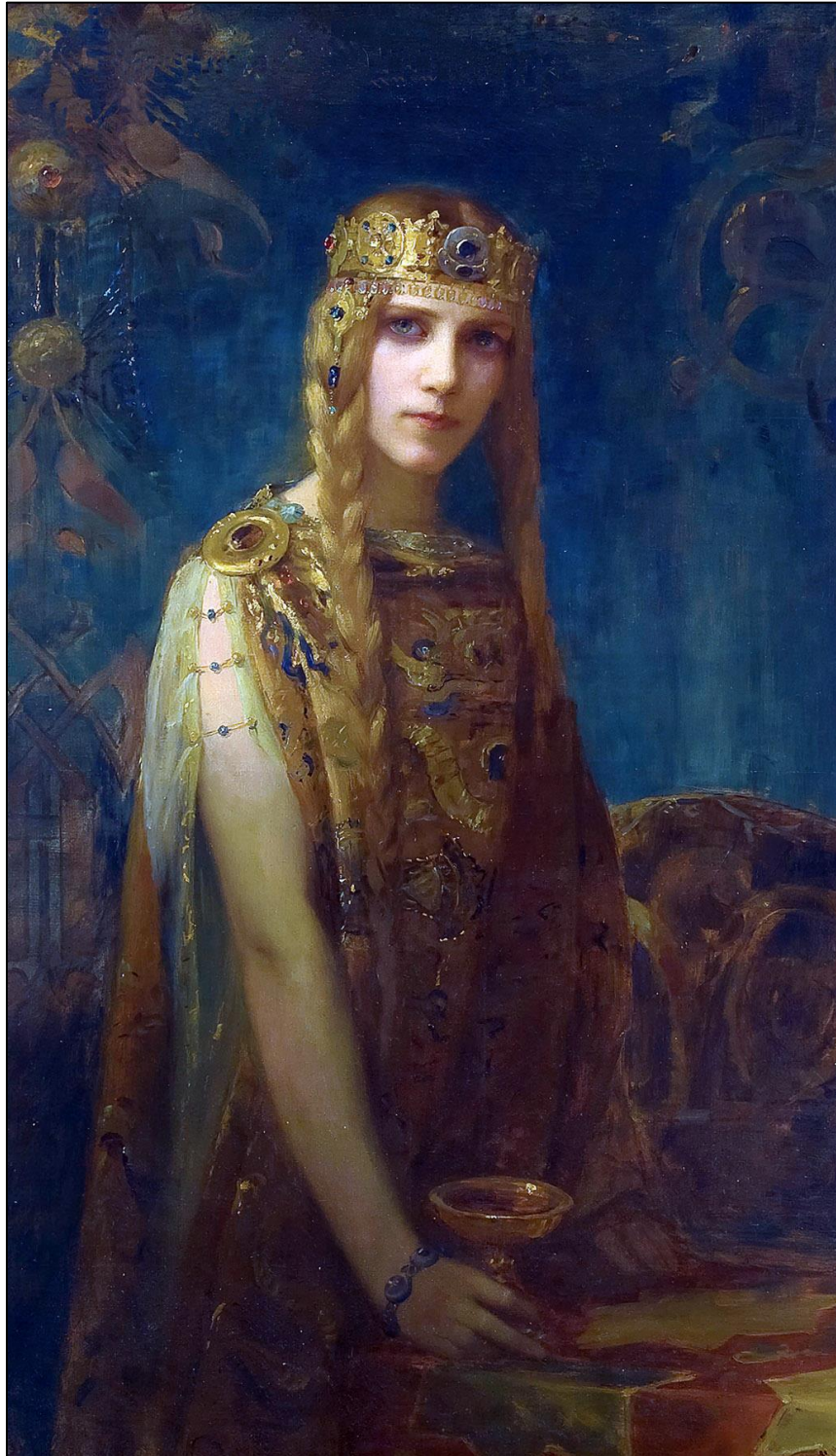
Richard Wagner's
TRISTAN AND ISOLDE

singing translation

by

Abigail Dyer

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'Isolde, The Celt Princess (1911)'
Gaston Bussière (French, 1862-1929)
Artvee

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TRISTAN AND ISOLDE **a drama in three acts**

DRAMATIS PERSONAE



'Tristram and Isolde' by Edmund Blair Leighton (English, 1853 - 1922), Artvee

TRISTAN.....	Tenor
KING MARKE.....	Bass
ISOLDE.....	Soprano
KURWENAL.....	Baritone
MELOT.....	Tenor
BRANGÄNE.....	Soprano
YOUNG SAILOR.....	Tenor
SHEPHERD.....	Tenor
HELMSMAN.....	Baritone

SAILORS, KNIGHTS, and SQUIRES

SETTING

Act I - at sea on the deck of Tristan's ship, during the journey from Ireland to Cornwall.

Act II - in King Marke's royal castle in Cornwall.

Act III - Tristan's castle in Brittany.

Act I

Act I, Scene 1



'Study of scene design for Tristan und Isolde'

Nicholas Roerich (Russian 1874-1947)

[WikiArt](#)

A tent-like room on the foredeck of a seafaring ship, richly curtained with tapestries. At the start of the Act, these close off the Upstage from view. On one side a narrow staircase leads to the ship's interior. Isolde is on a couch, her face pressed into its cushions. Brangäne has pulled one of the curtains back and is looking out to sea.

VOICE OF A YOUNG SAILOR: *(sounding as if from a height, from the top of the mast)*

Westward sweeps her view.

Eastward sails the crew.
 Her homeland's wind blows fresh to say:
 My Irish lass, what keeps you away?
 Is it your tearful sighing
 That sets my sails flying?
 Pour forth, pour forth, you wind!
 Poor you, poor little kid!
 My Irish girl,
 You wild, passionate girl!

ISOLDE: *(suddenly startling)*
 What man dares to mock me?

(looks around, disturbed)

Brangäne, you? Say, where are we?

BRANGÄNE: *(at the opening in the curtains)*
 Bands of blue arise in the eastern sky.
 Smooth and swift sails the ship.
 On such a calm sea, by evening
 We'll safely have set foot on land.

ISOLDE: But which land?

BRANGÄNE: Cornwall's verdant strand.

ISOLDE: Nevermore! Not now, not ever!

BRANGÄNE: *(lets the curtains fall shut and hurries worriedly to Isolde)*
 What is this! Mistress! Ah!

ISOLDE: *(staring wildly in front of her)*
 Degenerate race! Shameful descendent!
 For this, Mother, you gave up the power
 To command the sea and the storm clouds?
 Insipid art of sorcery that just boils healing brews!
 Awaken again, my powerful force!
 Rise up from my heart where from me you hid!
 Hear now my will, you hesitant whirlwinds!
 Send sound and fury, thundering rain!

Send blustering storms, tremendous tornadoes!
Snatch from her dreams this slumbering sea!
Wake from the depths her malevolent greed!
Show her the plunder I shall provide her!
She'll shatter this insolent ship
And suck down what splinters are left!
And all of the souls aiding aboard her,
I will to you winds as your wage!

BRANGÄNE: *(greatly alarmed, attends to Isolde)*

Oh, no, ah, ah, the evil that I foresaw!
Isolde! Mistress! Dear heart mine!
Confide in me your pain!
You shed no tear at leaving your father and mother,
No parting kiss for those whom you left behind
As you left your homeland, stoney cold,
Pale and silent on the boat,
Without eating, without sleep,
Stiff with misery, wild with rage.

How I suffer to adore you
And to see your pain,
Yet to be ignored!
Oh, now tell me of your pain!
Tell me, mistress, why you hurt!
Mistress Isolde,
How to console her?
If you trust me, explain it.
Now tell all to Brangäne!

ISOLDE: Air! Air! How I suffocate!
Open! Open up wide!

(Brangäne hurriedly draws the two center curtains apart.)

Act I, Scene 2

(The entire length of the ship is visible, back to the helm and over the stern to the sea and horizon. Around the main mast, Center, sailors are busy rigging the lines. Beyond them are knights and pages, also busily occupied, and, standing a bit apart from them, Tristan. He stands with his arms folded, looking pensively out to sea. Kurwenal lounges casually at his feet. From high up on the mast we hear once again the voice of the Young Sailor.)

VOICE OF A YOUNG SAILOR: *(Off, up on the mast)*

Westward sweeps her view.

Eastward sails the crew.

Her homeland's wind blows fresh to say:

My Irish lass, what keeps you away?

Is it your tearful sighing

That sets my sails flying?

Pour forth, pour forth, you wind!

Poor you, poor little kid!

My Irish girl,

You wild, passionate girl!

ISOLDE: *(as soon as she spots Tristan, stares fixedly at him. Dully, to herself:)*

He, my chosen.

Him, I lost him.

Hero he.

Cowardly!

Death-devoted head!

Death-devoted heart!

(to Brangäne, laughing eerily)

What think you of that servant?

BRANGÄNE: *(following her gaze)*

Which servant?

ISOLDE: Him, the hero

Who turns his gaze

From mine away,

Ashamed and shy,

With downcast eye.

What's your take on him?

BRANGÄNE: Could you mean Tristan, mistress mine?

The marvelous and fearless,
The subject of each bard?
The hero brave and peerless,
Good reputation's guard?

ISOLDE: (*mocking her*)

The knight who lost his swagger,
Who flees from everything
Because a living cadaver
He brought to wed his king!

You think my poem's
Rather grim?
Ask him yourself, the rakish man:
Dare he approach me now?
The homage due and reverence for
His lady mistress, these he discards
So her gaze can no more be near his,
This hero brave and peerless!
Oh, he knows well why not!

Greet the splendid man.
Tell him his lady says
At my beck and call speedily to appear.

BRANGÄNE:

So I should see if he'll come greet you?

ISOLDE: You'll order him, the braggart bold, to
Fear his mistress, heed Isolde!

(At Isolde's dismissive wave of the hand, Brangäne departs and walks, ashamed, the length of the deck, passing the sailors as they work. Isolde, watching her with a fixed stare, returns to her couch where she remains throughout the following, her eyes unwaveringly on the helm.)

KURWENAL: (*who sees Brangäne coming, tugs on Tristan's cloak but doesn't get up*)
Look out, Tristan! Message from Isolde.

TRISTAN: *(startling)*

What's that? Isolde? My lady mistress?

(quickly pulls himself together as Brangäne approaches and bows to him)

Here's her ever-faithful servant.

With what courteous missive comes the maid?

BRANGÄNE: My master Tristan,
To attend her bids Isolde, lady mine.

TRISTAN: She must be weary but we're nearly there.
Before the sun has set we'll be on land.
May what my lady commands be faithfully performed.

BRANGÄNE: Then let Sir Tristan pay a call.
That is my lady's wish.

TRISTAN: There, where the verdant pastures
Are flecked with violet shadows,
There my king awaits his bride.
To bring her out to greet him
I'll take the fair and bright one.
I'd cede to none else that grace.

BRANGÄNE: My master Tristan, listen well:
Do your duty as she bids. Attend her now.
Approach her where she awaits your call.

TRISTAN: Where e'er I am, what e'er I do,
I serve most faithfully my lady's good repute.
I'm at the helm and cannot leave.
How else could safely I steer
The ship to King Mark's land?

BRANGÄNE: Tristan, my master! You mock me now?
You may ignore me, a foolish maid,
But mark my mistress well!
She bid me I should tell you:
You'll order him, the braggart bold, to

Fear his mistress, heed Isolde.

KURWENAL: *(jumping up)*

Can I supply the answer?

TRISTAN: *(calmly)*

What answering word would you give?

KURWENAL: This she should tell the maid Isold':

Who Cornwall's crown

And England's land

On Ireland's maid bestows,

No deference owes

The girl he brings

To be his uncle's bride.

A worldly man

Is brave Tristan!

Speak thus, though it emboldens

The wrath of thous'nd Isoldes.

(Tristan tries to cut him off with a gesture. As Brangäne turns to leave, indignant, Kurwenal sings after her at the top of his voice:)

"Sir Morold came to us by sea

For Cornwall's tribute money.

An island in those waters deep

Is where he now lies buried.

His head, though, hangs in Ireland

As tribute paid by England:

Hey! That's our brave Tristan!

How he paid back that man!"

(Kurwenal, admonished by Tristan, goes below. Brangäne returns, dismayed, to Isolde. She closes the curtains after her but the whole crew can still be heard singing outside:)

SAILORS: "His head, though, hangs in Ireland

As tribute paid by England:

Hey! That's our brave Tristan!

How he paid back that man!"

Act I, Scene 3

(Isolde and Brangäne alone, the curtains fully closed. Isolde rises with despairing gestures of rage. Brangäne throws herself at Isolde's feet.)

BRANGÄNE: How? How ever can I bear this?

ISOLDE: *(on the verge of a terrible outburst, quickly pulls herself together)*
What news from Tristan? Tell everything he told you.

BRANGÄNE: I couldn't say!

ISOLDE: Come, speak without fear!

BRANGÄNE: He spoke politely; said not much.

ISOLDE: But then when you insisted?

BRANGÄNE: Well, when I bid him to your side,
Where he is now, he said to me,
He serves most faithfully
His lady's good repute.
He's at the helm and cannot leave.
How else could safely he steer
The ship to King Mark's land?

ISOLDE: *(bitter, painfully)*
"How else could safely he steer
The ship to King Mark's land?"

(strident, fiercely)

To take to him the tribute
He took from Ireland's shore!

BRANGÄNE: But when I gave the message,
Relayed in your own words,
He let his servant Kurwenal--

ISOLDE: Him, I heard loud and clearly.
No word escaped my ear.

You're witness now to my shame
So learn just how it began.

They snicker at me, singing chanties.
I'll give them back an answer!

There came a small and shaky raft
To Ireland's rocky strand.
Inside, an ashen, ailing man,
Pitifully close to death.
Isolde's skill, he heard, would cure.
With rare ointments and balsam pure
The wound that caused his misery
She mercifully healed.

But "Tantris" --a name chosen to disguise him--
Was Tristan! Isolde recognized him!
She saw a notch was missing
From his blade as it just lay there.
That notch precisely matched the splinter
That as message had been sent her
In Ireland's hero's head
When Tristan struck him dead!

A cry of vengeance from the grave!
To obey its call, I took the blade
And drew it on the villain.
For Morold's death, I'd kill him.

Upon his cot he looked my way,
Not at the sword, not at my hand,
He met my gaze and held it.
'Twas his suffering that tore at my heart.
The sword, I just let go of!
The wound that Morold gave him,
I healed it so I could save him,
So homeward he could journey,
Where his gaze could no longer hurt me.

BRANGÄNE: My goodness! I've been such a ninny!
The guest, the one I helped you tend--

ISOLDE: His praise, you hear them singing:
 "Hey! That's our brave Tristan!"
 Yes, he was that miserable man!
 He swore a thousand oaths to me,
 Ever to be faithful.
 Now hear how the brave keep their word!

I let "Tantris" sneak away to his homeland.
 As Tristan, he came back to call.
 Upon his ship, he did demand
 Ireland's heiress to wed as a wife
 For Cornwall's tired monarch,
 Its king, his Uncle Mark.

If Morold lived still,
 What man would have dared
 To do us such grave dishonor?
 For this vassal, this Cornish princeling,
 To sue for Ireland's Kingdom!

But I'm to blame!
 Secretly I brought dishonor,
 Caused this shame.
 The sword of revenge,
 I could have swung it!
 Weak, I let the blade fall!
 So now I serve our vassal.

BRANGÄNE: When words of peace and friendship
 By everyone were spoken,
 It seemed such a happy day.
 How could I have known the grief it caused to you?

ISOLDE: My eyes were blind, my heart was stupid.
 Courage, tame; my silence, hopeless.
 For Tristan broadcast far and wide
 The secret I had kept!
 In silence she restored his life.
 From violent foes, she her silence kept.
 Her silent shield, her healing hand,

All that, he tossed aside!
Victorious and bold, he bragged
Loud and clear all about me:

"That girl's quite a prize, my uncle, Sire.
Would you take her to wed?
The dainty Irish girl I'll bring.
I know my way--I've been before.
One sign, I'll fly to Ireland's shore
To bring you back Isolde!
What fun you'll have to hold her!"

Curse you, betrayer!
Cursed be your head!
Vengeance! Death!
Death, together!

BRANGÄNE: Oh, sweetheart! Darling! Mistress golden!
Fairest beauty! Dear Isolde!

(gradually leads Isolde back to the couch)

Listen! Hear me! Come sit down!
Are you mad? What useless misery!
Why get into a tizzy?
He's not a bad man, is he?
Whatever Tristan may have owed you
He pays back once and for all
With this, the glorious crown of Cornwall.
He faithfully served his uncle king
He gave you his own most valuable thing:
His own inheritance, well-intentioned,
He nobly laid down before you,
So Cornwall's queen he could call you!

(Isolde turns away)

If he chose Marke to be your spouse
Why would you sit and grouse about it?
Mark's kingly worth, you doubt it?
Of noble art and gentle mien,

Who's e'er seen his like
In splendid might?
Whom the noblest knight so faithfully serves,
Who'd not want to have the fortune
As wife to share his portion?

ISOLDE: *(rigidly staring ahead)*
Unadored by him and yet near him every moment!
How could I withstand the torment?

BRANGÄNE: You wicked child! Unadored?

(approaches Isolde, flatters and pets her)

Go find me the man who doesn't love you,
Who Isolde saw and to Isolde
Lost not his heart and soul.
But the man who chose you,
If he be cold or if some magic put him off,
That wicked man, I'd quickly catch him
And bind him with spells of love.

(secretively confiding in Isolde)

Do you not know your mother's arts?
Think you that she, who plans so well,
E'er would let you sail away
With me, without sending aid?

ISOLDE: *(darkly)*
My mother's aid will serve me well.
I gladly welcome what she sends:
Vengeance for a betrayal,
Peace in the face of heartbreak!
That chest there, bring it here!

BRANGÄNE: In there you'll find a cure.

(fetches a small golden chest, opens it and points out the contents)

Like so arranged your mother

The potent magic potions:
For wounds and bruises, here's the balm.
Here's deadly poison's antidote.

(takes out a vial)

The finest brew, I hold right here.

ISOLDE: You're wrong. I know one better.
I marked it specially here on its cap.

(takes a vial and holds it up)

This brew is what I need.

BRANGÄNE: *(pulls back, horrified)*
The deadly brew!

(Isolde has risen from her couch and hears with growing alarm the sailors' call:)

SAILORS: *(Off)*
Ho! He! Ha! Hey!
Take in the sail
And lower mast!
Ho! He! Ha! He!

ISOLDE: That means a journey swift.
Sorrow! Soon we'll arrive!

Act I, Scene 4

(Kurwenal barges in through the curtains)

KURWENAL: Up, up, you ladies!
Look you sharp! Up and at 'em!
Rise and shine and make it quick!

(more formally)

To Dame Isolde, this I convey
From brave Tristan, master mine:
We've raised our joyful banner.
It flutters out toward the coast.
In Marke's royal palace
They see the craft approach.
He bids Isolde to make ready
To land in Cornwall shortly
So that he can escort her.

ISOLDE: *(having first shrunk back in fear at his message, pulls herself together. With dignity:)*

To Tristan carry my regards
And bring him this, my message:
If I'm to stand beside him
Upon the monarch's arrival,
That can't be done properly or right
Unless he seeks me in advance
And offers to atone
For injuries he's done.

(Kurwenal makes a defiant gesture. Isolde continues with increasing intensity:)

You, listen well and tell it true!
Nobody will escort me
To land in Cornwall shortly,
Nor will I go stand beside him
Upon the monarch's arrival
Unless he comes here
To seek my pardon.
Propriety demands it thus

For injuries he's done.
Then I'll let him atone!

KURWENAL: Rest assured I'll tell him so.
Let's see how he reacts!

(He exits quickly. Isolde hurries to Brangäne and hugs her fiercely.)

ISOLDE: Now farewell, Brangäne!
Send my regards! Kisses to Father and Mother!

BRANGÄNE: What's this? What madness?
You wish to flee? But wither should I follow?

ISOLDE: *(quickly gets ahold of herself)*
Did you not hear? I'll stay put.
Tristan I wish to wait for.
Now carry out what I command.
Atonement's drink, go prepare.
You know which one I mean.

(takes the vial from the chest)

BRANGÄNE: What brew is that?

ISOLDE: This one here!
In the golden chalice pour it out.
That cup will hold it all.

BRANGÄNE: *(takes the vial, horrified)*
How can this be?

ISOLDE: Do as I bid!

BRANGÄNE: The brew--for whom?

ISOLDE: All who betrayed.

BRANGÄNE: Tristan?

ISOLDE: Drink to atonement!

BRANGÄNE: *(throwing herself at Isolde's feet)*

The horror! Spare me! Have pity!

ISOLDE: *(very forcefully)*

You should spare me, unfaithful maid!

Do you not know my mother's arts?

Think you that she, who plans so well,

E'er would let me sail away

With you, without sending aid?

For wounds and bruises, she sent balsam.

For deadly poison, antidote.

For deepest pain, for sharpest grief,

Sent she the deadly brew.

Now death gives thanks to her!

BRANGÄNE: *(barely conscious)*

Oh, deepest pain!

ISOLDE: You'll do as I bid?

BRANGÄNE: Oh, sharpest grief!

ISOLDE: Faithfully serve?

BRANGÄNE: The brew?

KURWENAL: *(coming in)*

Sir Tristan!

(Brangäne stands in shock and confusion. With tremendous effort, Isolde tries to pull herself together.)

ISOLDE: Sir Tristan may approach!

Act I, Scene 5

(Kurwenal exits. Brangäne, barely conscious, moves Upstage. Isolde, using all her strength to collect herself, walks slowly and with great dignity toward the couch and leans against it as she watches the entryway. Tristan comes in and remains courteously at the entryway. Isolde, very upset, is lost in his gaze. Long silence.)

TRISTAN: What is madam's heart's desire?

ISOLDE: Surely you know what I desire.
Did not the fear I would fulfill it
Keep you from coming here?

TRISTAN: Honor kept me away.

ISOLDE: Yet little honor showed you to me,
With blatant scorn, refusing all obedience to my command.

TRISTAN: Obedience alone held me back.

ISOLDE: So then does your duty to your lord
Call for the improper behavior you show to his wife?

TRISTAN: Proper men, where I come from,
Who bring brides to their bridegrooms,
Keep away from brides!

ISOLDE: And why is that?

TRISTAN: Ask what's proper!

ISOLDE: Since you're so proper, good Sir Tristan,
Propriety dictates also this:
Your foe's still your foeman
Until he's made atonement.

TRISTAN: And who's this foe?

ISOLDE: Ask what you fear!
Bloodguilt hangs between us.

TRISTAN: That was resolved.

ISOLDE: Not between us!

TRISTAN: Out on a field, before a crowd,
We swore our satisfaction.

ISOLDE: But that's not where I Tristan hid,
Where Tristan to me fell.
He stood in public healed and whole.
But what he swore, I swore it not.
I'd learned my silence to keep.

When he lay in silence, sick in bed,
With the sword I stood before the man.
I stayed my hand, I silenced my voice.
But what with my hand and voice I once vowed,
I swore in silence to keep it.
Now this is my chance. I'll seize it!

TRISTAN: What vow was that?

ISOLDE: Vengeance for Morold!

TRISTAN: Why the fuss?

ISOLDE: Dare you to mock me?
Morold was my betrothed,
An Irish hero great.
Morold's weapons, I sanctified.
For me, he went to fight.
When he was fallen,
Fell my good name.
From my suffering heart,
I swore of his death:
If no man took retribution
Then this maid herself would do it.

Sick and weak and in my power,
Why did I not kill you then?
You know yourself how this will end.

I healed and cured him
So when I restored him,
He'd be killed by the man
Who would win me back from Tristan.
Your fate? Well, you yourself can assess it:
If all men have pledged Tristan their friendship,
Who's left to bring him vengeance?

TRISTAN: (*pale and grim*)
Was Morold such a friend?
Then take the sword again
And this time hold it just so
So you don't happen to let go!

(*offers her the sword*)

ISOLDE: So badly could I treat your master?
Whatever would King Mark think of me
If I should smite his servant good
Who for him won Ireland,
His best, most faithful man?
Care you so little for his reward?
You bring him Ireland's queen to wed!
Would he not scold if I slew the envoy
Who won him a truce
And brings the pledge for his use?

Put back your sword! I took it when
I saw the chance for Morold's revenge.
When you looked in my eyes to calculate
If I Lord Mark might please as his mate,
The sword, I dropped that moment.
Now drink to our atonement!

(*She summons Brangäne. Brangäne shudders and moves hesitantly. Isolde spurs her on with ever more emphatic gestures. Brangäne turns to the preparation of the brew.*)

SAILORS: (*from Off*)
Ho! He! Ha! He!
Take in, take in
The topsail now!

TRISTAN: *(speaks from the depths of his gloom)*

Where are we?

ISOLDE: Near the end!

Tristan, you'll make atonement?

What words have you to tell me?

TRISTAN: *(darkly)*

The queen of silence wants me silent:

I see what she cannot say.

I say not what she can't see.

ISOLDE: I see your silent hedging around.

Will you make atonement now?

(At Isolde's impatient gesture, Brangäne hands her the goblet, which has been filled.)

SAILORS: Ho! He! Ha! He!

Ho! He! Ha! He!

ISOLDE: *(walks to Tristan with the goblet. He stares fixedly into her eyes.)*

You hear the call? We're at the end.

In just a bit we'll stand before King Marke.

(lightly mocking)

When you walk me in won't it be sweet

If you thus address him:

"Uncle and Lord, come check her out.

A nicer girl you'll never find.

Even after I struck her fiancé dead

And sent her home his head,

The wounds her fiancé's weapon made

She healed so helpfully.

My life lay in her power mild.

She gave it me, the gentle child,

Along with Ireland defiled,

A second gift, so she

Your wedded wife could be.

Such bounteous graciousness, I think,

Earned me atonement's sweetest drink.
She mixed it meek and mild,
All guilt to reconcile."

SAILORS: *(Off)*

Man the ropes!
Anchors up!

TRISTAN: *(wildly startling)*

Up the anchor and into the tide!
To wind the sails and mast!

(grabs the goblet from her)

I know the Queen of Ireland well
And well I know her wondrous skill.
The tonic took I that she gave.
The goblet take I now
So fully I'll recover.
Give heed to the atonement oath
I take as well, to thank you:

Tristan's honor's utmost faith!
Tristan's heartache, boldly scorned!
Heart's betrayal!
Dream's presentment!
Boundless sorrow's only balm:
Oblivion's gentle drink,
From you I shall not shrink!

(puts his lips to the goblet and drinks)

ISOLDE: Betrayed here, too?
Half is mine still!

(snatches the goblet away from him)

Betrayer! I drink to you!

(She drinks, then throws the goblet aside. The two, gripped by terror, gaze rigidly but with great agitation into each other's eyes. Their expressions soon turn from deathly

defiance to the glow of love. Trembling, they embrace. They grab, cramped, at their hearts, touch their hands to their brows. Then they look into each other's eyes again. They sink again into confusion and come together again with increasing longing.)

ISOLDE: *(with tremulous voice)*

Tristan!

TRISTAN: *(overwhelmed)*

Isolde!

ISOLDE: *(sinking onto his breast)*

Unfaithful lover!

TRISTAN: *(ardently embraces her)*

Lady adored!

(They remain in a silent embrace.)

(Trumpets are heard in the distance, Off.)

CHORUS: Hail to King Marke! Hail!

BRANGÄNE: *(her face turned away in terror and horror, she had been leaning overboard. Now she turns and sees the lovers embracing. She stumbles Downstage, wringing her hands in confusion.)*

No! Oh, no!

They eternal torment get

Instead of death!

Foolish, faithful deed of betrayal

Brought their sorrow about!

(Tristan and Isolde come out of their embrace.)

TRISTAN: *(confused)*

What dream had I of Tristan's honor?

ISOLDE: What dream had I of Isolde's shame?

TRISTAN: Did you renounce me?

ISOLDE: Did you reject me?

TRISTAN: Magic's deceitful, cleverest trick!
Isolde, tenderest maid!

ISOLDE: Umbrage's stupid, empty threat!
Tristan, dearest of men!

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE: See how our two hearts lift up and flutter!
See how our senses ardently shudder:
Passionate longing's budding refulgence,
Ravering love's enraptured indulgence,
Breast's burning cry,
Joyful delight!
Isolde! Tristan!
From all the world freed!
You're won unto me!
Nothing but you exists!
Utmost loving bliss!

(The curtains are pulled wide open. The ship is filled with sailors and knights who wave joyfully over the side of the boat towards the shore, which is visible and crowned with a fortress on its cliff. Tristan and Isolde remain lost in each other's eyes, unaware of all this.)

BRANGÄNE: *(to the ladies who come up from below deck at her command)*
Quick, her mantel! Her royal crown!

(throws herself between Tristan and Isolde)

Sorry souls! Up! Hear where we are!

(dresses Isolde, who remains oblivious, in her royal mantle)

MEN: Hail, hail, hail!
Hail King Marke! Hail!

KURWENAL: *(enters jovially)*
Hail Tristan, fortunate knight!
With his distinguished courtiers,
On his barque, arrives King Marke.
He's getting such a kick

Out of this wedding trip!

TRISTAN: *(looks around confused)*

Who comes?

KURWENAL: The monarch!

TRISTAN: Who? What monarch?

(Kurwenal points overboard)

MEN: *(waving their hats)*

Hail to King Marke!

To King Marke hail!

(Tristan stares blindly toward land.)

ISOLDE: *(confused)*

What's that, Brangäne? What's that cry?

BRANGÄNE: *(despairingly)*

Isolde! Mistress! Gather yourself!

ISOLDE: *(stares horrified at Tristan)*

Where am I? Living? Which was that brew?

BRANGÄNE: *(despairing)*

Eternal love!

ISOLDE: Tristan!

TRISTAN: Isolde!

ISOLDE: Must I live on?

(she faints onto his breast)

BRANGÄNE: *(to the ladies)*

Help our mistress!

TRISTAN: Oh, wonderful and spiteful!

Oh, rapture blessed by guile!

MEN: *(general rejoicing)*

Cornwall! Hail!

(sound of trumpets from the shore)

(People have climbed aboard; others have lowered the gangplank. Their behavior indicates the imminent arrival of the King's retinue as the Act I Curtain quickly falls.)

ACT I CURTAIN

Act II

Act II, Scene 1



'King Marke's castle'
Nicholas Roerich (Russian 1874-1947)
[WikiArt](#)

A garden with high trees in front of Isolde's rooms, which have stairs leading up to them on one side. It is a lovely, bright summer evening. A burning torch has been placed at the open door. Hunting horns. Brangäne, on the chamber steps, watches the hunting party as they recede into the distance. Isolde enters from her rooms in a state of fiery emotion and approaches Brangäne.

ISOLDE: Hear you the horns?
I think they're far away.

BRANGÄNE: *(listening)*

No, they're still near.
Clearly they resound.

ISOLDE: *(listening)*

Worry and angst confuse your ear.
You're fooled by trees in whispering wind
That, laughing, rustles their tops.

BRANGÄNE: You're fooled by desire's recklessness
Into hearing what you want.

(she listens)

I still hear the hunters' horns.

ISOLDE: *(listens again)*

No hunter's horn sounds so good.
The brook's benign ripples, its murmur,
Is the sound soft we hear.
Could I hear that if horns still blasted?
In night's quiet hush, just rushes the brook.
My love, who waits in night's quiet hush
Though the horn calls have long retreated,
Far from me would you keep him?

BRANGÄNE: Your love waits on but heed my warning:

Spies wait to trap him at night!
Do you, love-blinded, think the world's sight
Has darkened just for you two?
Out there aboard the ship,
From Tristan's trembling hand
The pale bride, nearly unconscious,
Was by King Mark received.
They all stared, confused, at the wavering bride.
The gentle king was worried, too.
The long journey here, he said,
Clearly took its toll on you.
One man alone, yes, I marked him well,
Looked in Tristan's eyes and noticed.
With malice and guile, searched Tristan's eyes

To find in his expression
A clue that might condemn him.
Lurking near you both he has been.
He plans you both grave harm.
Of Melot, be forewarned!

ISOLDE: Mean you Sir Melot?
Oh, but you're wrong!
Is he not Tristan's most faithful friend?
When my love must avoid me,
You'll find him with Melot alone.

BRANGÄNE: What makes me suspect him
Makes you adore him.
'Twixt Tristan and Marke
Does Melot plant
His seed of malice dark.
He took King Mark
This night to go hunting.
In haste was Mark invited.
But the beast they hunt
Is a nobler one
Than you could dare to think.

ISOLDE: For friendship's sake
He made up the rouse.
Sir Melot pitied his friend,
So you'd scold the faithful fellow?
Better than you he cares for me.
He opens doors that you'd keep closed.
Oh, spare me, spare me waiting's pain!
The signal! Brangäne! Oh, send the signal!
Put out the final flickering light!
Give nighttime its signal fully to fall!
Already its hush flows through house and grove
And fills up my heart with horrible hope.
Oh, stamp out the torch's glow!
Snuff out the standoffish sun!
Let my beloved come!

BRANGÄNE: Oh, let the warning light flicker!

Let it forewarn you of danger!
Oh, sorrow! Sorrow!
Oh, my poor soul!
Oh, most unhappy potion!
Just that once, unfaithful
To my mistress's request!
Had blindly I obeyed,
I would have caused her death.
But all your shame,
Your dishonoring distress,
I caused, and my guilt I acknowledge.

ISOLDE: You caused? Oh, foolish maid!
The Lady Love know you not?
Know not her magic power?
The queen of clever courage, she?
Who reigns o'er all that comes to be?
Life, also death, submit to her rule.
This she weaves from joy and pain.
To love, she envy does change.
The work of death I took into my own hand.
But Lady Love gave me her own command:
She held the death-bound girl in her sway
And used the work in her own way.
How she may use it,
How she'll conclude it,
What she intends and
How e'er this ends,
To her I'm dedicated.
Now I'll show how I obey her.

BRANGÄNE: Well, if Lady Love's duplicitous drink
Put out the light of your reason;
If you can't see it though I have warned you,
This once, this once, how I implore you,
Leave the danger sign alight!
This once, ah, once! Don't put out the torch out tonight!

ISOLDE: In my breast she sparked a burning bright.
She set my heart aflame, alight.
My day is she, my soul's delight.

Love's Lady says, "Let it be night!"

(hurries to the torch)

So brightly she may shine on
The place she chased your light from.

(takes the torch from the door)

A watch go keep!
Watch faithfully!
The torch, ah, if it were my life's own light,
Blithely I would put it out tonight!

(throws the torch to the ground where its flame slowly goes out)

*(Brangäne turns away, upset, and climbs up another staircase into the watchtower.
She slowly disappears from view.)*

(Isolde listens and watches, at first shyly in a copse of trees. As her longing grows, she steps out from the trees and watches with increasing confidence. She waves a handkerchief, at first sporadically then more often. Finally, with passionate impatience, she waves it ever faster. Her gesture of sudden delight tells us that she has seen her friend in the distance. She cranes higher and higher to see further into the distance. She hurries back to the steps and from the top of the staircase waves to the figure who approaches.)

Act II, Scene 2

TRISTAN: (*rushes in*)

Isolde!

ISOLDE: (*bounding toward him*)

Tristan!

(in a tempestuous embrace they move Downstage)

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE: Beloved!

ISOLDE: Are you mine?

TRISTAN: Will you be with me?

ISOLDE: Dare I embrace you?

TRISTAN: Can I believe it?

ISOLDE: Finally! Finally!

TRISTAN: Come to my arms!

ISOLDE: I really touch you?

TRISTAN: I really see you?

ISOLDE: Do I behold you?

TRISTAN: Is this your mouth?

ISOLDE: Is this your hand?

TRISTAN: Is this your heart?

ISOLDE: Am I? Are you here in my arms?

TRISTAN: Am I? Are you not a mirage?

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE: Not just a dream?

O soul's highest blessing!
O noblest, bravest,
Most audacious,
Sweetest delight!

TRISTAN: Blissful, endless...

ISOLDE: Overwhelmed with...

TRISTAN: Overjoyed for--

ISOLDE: Ever!

TRISTAN: Ever!

ISOLDE: Unimagined,
Never fathomed!

TRISTAN: Overflowing,
Most ennobling!

ISOLDE: Joyful shouting!

TRISTAN: Sweet enchantment!

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE: Heaven-highest
World-abandon!
Mine! Tristan mine!
Isolde mine!
Yours and mine,
Ever we unite!

ISOLDE: So far apart!
Apart so long!

TRISTAN: How far, so near!
How near, so far!

ISOLDE: O foe of friendship, evil distance!
Drawn-out time's long lingering moments!

TRISTAN: O distance, nearness, never mixing!
Blessed nearness! Empty distance!

ISOLDE: In darkness, you.
In light am I!

TRISTAN: The light! The light!
Damnable light,
How long it cursed the night!
The sun went down.
The day was done.
Yet with its jealous hand it roused
Its sign of danger,
Set it alight before the beloved's enclosure
So I would not approach her.

ISOLDE: But my loving hand
Put out the light
Though the maid's dared not to.
So, without fright,
In Dame Love's protective sway,
Did I defy the day!

TRISTAN: To daytime, to daytime, to treasonous daytime,
That bitterest foe, all scorn and hate mine!
You doused the torch.
May I put out daylight,
On love's behalf wreak it vengeance
And wicked daytime extinguish!
Is there no hurt,
Is there no pain
That day won't wake
With its bright ray?
Even in night's
Darkening sight
Did my love from her house
Hang it, threatening, out!

ISOLDE: Harbored your love
Daylight at her house?
In his own heart, so bright and loud,

Harbored daylight once my dearest Tristan,
Traitor to me!
Did he not gleam
With day's deceit
That day in Ireland when he gained
For Marke my consent,
When truth to death he condemned?

TRISTAN: While day, while day did 'round you shine,
Out there where, like the sun, your light
Glowed full of honor's glory bright,
Isolde from me turned!
She who my eye enchanted so,
She dealt my heart a heavy blow.
In daytime's glaring shine,
How could Isold' be mine?

ISOLDE: Was she not yours who chose you well?
What evil lie did daytime tell?
And how did daytime make you
To your beloved a traitor?

TRISTAN: The glow 'round you of splendor bright,
Of great renown and glory's might--
To love the light 'round you was
My spirit's mad delusion.

Bold daylight's glow of worldly fame
Bored through my head, into my brain,
Where daytime's rays of earthly honor
Deployed their beams of empty rapture.
Through head and brain they wormed their way
Into my heart's most sacred place.

What once the chaste, dark night
Had hidden from my sight,
Unknown of and undreamed,
Did slowly dawn on me:
An image of such luster,
I wondered, could I trust it
As, revealed by daytime's dawning,

It shining lay before me.
What seemed so laudable to me
I pointed out for all to see.
Thus I proclaimed her far and wide
The world's most lovely royal bride.

My jealousy awoke that day.
My envy chased my joy away
And threatened the destruction
Of my good reputation.
I swore to resist
And promised this:
To keep my fame and honor,
To Ireland back I'd wander.

ISOLDE: Conceited slave of day!
I'm fooled by that which fooled you, too.
How much I, loving, for you suffer!
He who in day's deceptive glory
Became a captive to its folly,
There, though the heat of love embraced him,
I, in my heart's bright light, did hate him.

Ah, in my heart's cocoon he
Struck painfully to wound me!
He whom I hid away
Seemed like my foe that day!
There in daylight phony,
My cherished one and only
Before my eyes became
My enemy, my shame!

When your betrayal I did see,
The light of daytime I longed to flee
And into the night take you with me.
There, delusion ends: so my heart guarantees.
There would we escape deceit infernal.
There would we drink to love eternal.
There would we pledge our troth.
There to our death we'd toast.

TRISTAN: Your dear hand proffered death so sweet
 And I knew what you had offered me.
 A premonition clear and inspired
 Showed me what this atonement required.
 Then did night's gentle grace and power descend
 Into my breast, and so my day did reach its end.

ISOLDE: But, ah, it fooled you, the potion false,
 So to you newly the night was lost.
 He begged for him death to take,
 But death returned him to day!

TRISTAN: O hail to the potion! Hail to the bane!
 Hail to its magic power's reign!
 Through the doors of death it flowed to me,
 Wide and rolling, as from the sea.
 It brought what only dreaming I'd spied:
 The wondrous realm of night.
 Thus the image my heart concealed deep inside
 Overcame daytime's shimmering lie.
 My eyes could see right through it,
 So I saw darkness truly.

ISOLDE: It took vengeance on you, rejected day.
 And with your sins a pact it made:
 All you were shown in burgeoning night,
 Did the day-star's shining, royal might
 Order you to relinquish,
 And, lonely, on barren heights,
 Make you keep on living.
 Could I stand it then? Can I stand it now?

TRISTAN: Oh, to night were we consecrated!
 Though treacherous day with jealous hatred
 Still may part us with guile,
 It no more fools us with lies!
 For day's empty pomp and its shimmering lies
 By all will be mocked who treasure night.
 Daytime's shimmering light
 And flickering brightness
 Dazzle us no more.

We who death's dark night look on with love,
 We're to whom death its secret entrusts.
 To us, day's lies, its dazzling might,
 Power and fame so shimmering bright,
 To us they no more matter
 Than dust in sunbeams scattered!
 Amid daytime's vain delusion
 We long for one true union.
 We must return to holy night
 Where one true, eternal love fills us with its delight!

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE: Descend, O night of love, upon me,
 Blot all thought of living from me,
 Clasp me in your waiting arms,
 Free me from these worldly bonds!

TRISTAN: Extinguished are the final embers...

ISOLDE: ...of our thoughts, of our remembrance.

TRISTAN: Over reveries,

ISOLDE: O'er reminders,

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE: Does the thought sublime of twilight
 Break delusion's hold
 And redeem the world.

ISOLDE: In our breast the light of the sun hid
 Sparkling, smiling stars of our love's bliss,

TRISTAN: Which gently mingled with your magic
 And then, before your eyes, they vanished.

ISOLDE: Heart on heart and
 Mouth on mouth,

TRISTAN: Bonded by a single breath,

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE: Eyes grow dim, by wonder blinded,
 The brilliance of the world grows pale.

ISOLDE: Light that the day, lying, unfurls,

TRISTAN: We scorn as deceit, as 'round us it whirls.

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE: I become, then, the world:

Woven with elation,
Life to love consecrated,
Sober, sweet deliberate
Wish to never wake again.

(Tristan and Isolde sink down together, enraptured, head to head on a flowerbed.)

BRANGÄNE: *(from the watchtower)*

All alone the watch at night
Guards the dreaming pair's delight.
Mark it well, her warning cry,
For a wicked wind has come
Warning them to waken soon!
Mark her cry!
Mark her cry!
Soon the night's flown by!

ISOLDE: *(softly)*

Hark, beloved!

TRISTAN: *(also softly)*

Let me die here!

ISOLDE: *(gradually picking herself up a little)*

Envious watchman!

TRISTAN: *(remains lying down)*

Never waken!

ISOLDE: Must the day not waken Tristan?

TRISTAN: *(picks his head up a little)*

Let the day give way to dying!

ISOLDE: Day and death, two equal powers,
Could they harm the love that's ours?

TRISTAN: *(sitting up more)*

Our love harm?
Tristan's love harm?
Yours and mine, Isolde's love harm?
What harm could death wreak it
That would make it weaken?

(ever more to himself as he lays his head against Isolde)

If death stood here and stared me down,
Threatened to claim my life for his own,
My life for love I'd at once relinquish.
What blow could death e'er strike, then,
That love itself e'er could die from?

If I should die, if for love I perish,
How ever could love's life in me vanish?
Immortal love does live on forever.
If death there has no dominion,
How could it kill love, which lives in Tristan?

ISOLDE: But is our love's name
Not known as Tristan and Isolde?
That dearest little "and,"
What it binds fast,
Our bond of love,
If Tristan dies,
Will death not take it, too?

TRISTAN: But what would death kill except the things
That bar Tristan's eternal love for Isolde,
Living ever to love her?

ISOLDE: Ah, but that little "and," if it should die,
How else but joined with Isolde's life, to Tristan
Would death as a gift be given?

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE: *(with a meaningful gesture, Tristan takes Isolde gently to himself; Isolde gazes at him enraptured)*

Then let us die so we'll go on
Bound eternally as one!
Without waking, without fearing
Nameless, yet by love held dearly!
Unto one another given,
To love alone still living!

(Isolde, overwhelmed, lays her head on his breast.)

BRANGÄNE: *(as before)*

Mark her cry!
Mark her cry!
Soon the night's flown by!

TRISTAN: *(smiling, bending toward Isolde)*
Should I hearken?

ISOLDE: *(looks gushingly at Tristan)*
Let me die here!

TRISTAN: Must I waken?

ISOLDE: Never waken!

TRISTAN: Must the day not waken Tristan?

ISOLDE: Let the day give way to dying!

TRISTAN: So shall we hold off the menace of day?

ISOLDE: *(with growing excitement)*
It's deceit ever to flee!

TRISTAN: By burgeoning light undaunted we'll be!

ISOLDE: *(rising with a grand gesture)*
May our night go ever on!

(Tristan follows her; they embrace in gushing excitement.)

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE: Eternal night,

Gentle night,

High-exalted

Loving night!

Those you enfolded,

Those whom you prized,

How could they behold the

Light of day without fright?

Now banish all fright, you

Noble death,

Highly exalted, loving death.

By you embraced,

By you set free.

By you we are blessed and

From awaking's threat, redeemed.

How to grasp it,

How to clasp it,

This delighting

Far from sunlight,

From tomorrow's

Parting sorrows!

Free from falseness,

Longing calls us.

Free from terror,

Yearning ever.

No more sighing,

Blissful dying.

No more suffering,

Sweetest nothing.

No contention,

No dissension,

Loved alone,

Ever home

In time and space unmeasured,

Blissful dreams we enter:

TRISTAN: Tristan, you;

I, Isolde!

No more Tristan!

ISOLDE: You, Isolde;
Tristan, I!
No more Isolde!

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE: No more names,
No separations,
New, bright flames,
New revelations,
Ever-endless,
Sensing this:
Ardor's glowing kiss,
Utmost loving bliss!

(they remain as if entranced)

Act II, Scene 3

(Brangäne emits a shrill scream. Kurwenal rushes in, sword drawn.)

KURWENAL: Save yourself, Tristan!

(Kurwenal glances, horrified, Off. Marke, Melot and courtiers in hunting costume enter rapidly from the copse of trees and cross Down. They stop, outraged at the sight of the lovers. Brangäne comes straight down from the watchtower and runs to Isolde. Isolde, seized by involuntary shame, turns her face away and leans against the flowers. Tristan, in a similarly involuntary gesture, stretches his cloak out over his arm and uses it to shield Isolde from the view of those who've just arrived. He stays in this position for a long time, his gaze fixed on the men who, in various poses, have fixed their eyes on him. Dawn.)

TRISTAN: *(after a long silence)*

Vain, empty daylight one last time!

MELOT: *(to Marke)*

Now then, my lord, do tell me,

Did I accuse him well,

After I pledged my head as your security?

I caught the man red-handedly;

Your reputation I preserved from shame most faithfully.

MARKE: *(deeply shaken, with a tremulous voice)*

That's what you've done here? Think you so?

Look at this most faithful man of all men.

Look at this most steadfast friend all friends.

That man's most unfaithful deed

Pierced the heart it heartlessly betrayed!

How, if Tristan has betrayed me,

Can the cost e'er be repaid me?

Can through Melot's word,

Honor be restored?

TRISTAN: *(convulsing violently)*

Daytime's phantom!

Dream of morning!

Dazzling and false!

Get back! Be gone!

MARKE: *(deeply moved)*

Why this? Why, Tristan, me?

Where then has faith gone,

Now Tristan has betrayed?

Where have gone fame, integrity

And honor's highest call,

Now Tristan lost them all?

(Tristan slowly casts his eyes down to the ground. As Marke goes on, Tristan's expression becomes one of increasing sadness.)

If Tristan was its bulwark tall,

To where has virtue now escaped

When from my friend it fled,

When Tristan broke his pledge?

What of your countless services,

The honor, fame and power

That for Marke you achieved?

Must honor, fame, power as well,

And your countless services

With Marke's shame be paid for?

Thought you so little of his thanks

When all that you won for the king and crown

He willed all and only to you?

When Marke's wife died childless,

He loved you so,

That no one new

Would Marke ever marry,

Though all the people in the land

Beseeched and begged him otherwise,

A queen to give the country,

A wife to heal his heartache.

Then you yourself

Pledged king and crown:

The people's wish,

The courtiers' will,

You'd gladly go fulfill it.

In spite of his people's wish

In spite of you yourself,
With gentle kindness did the king refuse,
Till, Tristan, you did threaten
Forever to leave his court and land
If you yourself Mark would not send
To fetch him a royal bride.
So Mark became resigned.

This beauty of a bride
You bravely won for me,
Who could but see her,
Who but know her,
Who could proudly be betrothed her
And not count his many blessings?
Me, I dared not to approach the lady.
All desire for her I quashed chastely.
But this lovely, lofty, lively
Girl who'd cheer me and revive me,
In spite of your foes,
You spirited her here into my arms.

Now with this prize you brought here, you made
My heart more susceptible to pain.
Here, where my heart was newly open,
Here it was broken.
Now it is hopeless.
Now it will never recover.
But why wound deeply, unhappy man,
Why wound one who loves you?
Here with your poisoned, torturous sword
You set my mind and senses aflame.
A friendly hand my open heart maimed
And flooded with mistrust and with spite.
So I came creeping in dark of night
My friend's secret to spy on
And my honor to be deprived of.

Where is heavenly grace?
Why to me comes this torment?
Where is clemency?
Why to me comes this shame?

The undiscovered, deep, dark motive for this blow,
Who in the world can know?

TRISTAN: *(raising his eyes to look at Marke sympathetically)*

O Sire, this I can never tell you.
And what you'd ask about, you'll not discover.

(turns to Isolde, who looks longingly at him)

Wherever Tristan goes now,
Will you, Isolde, follow?
Go to the land I mean,
Where sunlight's never seen?
Go to the dark and shadowed shore
From which my mother brought me forth,
Where on her deathbed
She did birth him
Then died and left him
In daylight earthly?
Me she bore in that place,
Her loving fortress safe,
The kingdom of the night,
Where I first woke to light.
This offer Tristan makes,
That there for you he'll wait.
Whether she'll follow, faithful, bold,
That's what he asks Isold'!

ISOLDE: When from a foreign land

Her lover won her once,
That fiendish foe,
Faithful, bold,
Did Isolde follow.
Now lead me to your own home,
Your heritage to show me.
How could I flee that ground
That spans the world around?
Where Tristan's homeland is,
That's where Isolde lives.
There she will follow,
Faithful, bold.

The way, just show Isold'!

(Tristan slowly bends over her and kisses her softly on the forehead. Melot charges him furiously.)

MELOT: *(draws his sword)*

The traitor! Ha!

Take vengeance, Sire!

Dare you suffer this shame?

(Tristan draws his sword and turns around quickly.)

TRISTAN: Who dares to bet his life against mine?

(looks at Melot)

My friend was he.

His love for me knew no limit.

And my good name, no one would defend like he did.

My heart, he spurred to daring deeds.

The crowd he led that pressed me on,

Greater fame to acquire,

Isolde to bring our sire!

Your gaze, Isolde, blinded him, too,

And, envious, betrayed me my friend

To Marke, whom I betrayed!

(challenges Melot)

Take arms, Melot!

(As Melot raises his sword to strike Tristan, Tristan lets his own sword fall. He sinks wounded into Kurwenal's arms. Isolde falls onto Tristan's chest. Marke holds Melot back. Act II Curtain.)

ACT II CURTAIN

Act III

Act III, Scene 1



'Tristan's castle in Brittany'

Nicholas Roerich (Russian 1874-1947)

[WikiArt](#)

Castle garden. On one side, a tall castle. On the other, a low wall with a lookout post. Upstage, the castle gate. All this is located on a rocky cliff. Through openings, one can see a wide horizon and the sea. The place gives an impression of being deserted, unkempt, in disrepair and overgrown. Downstage, inside the wall, Tristan lies under the shade of a large linden tree, asleep on a couch, laid out as if he were dead. At his head Kurwenal sits, distraught, bent over him listening for the sound of his breath. From outside the wall, when the curtain goes up, is a Shepherd playing a tune of mournful

longing on his pipe. Finally, the Shepherd appears over the wall and looks inside with interest.

SHEPHERD: *(softly)*

Kurwenal! Hey!
Say, Kurwenal!
Listen, friend!

(Kurwenal turns his head a little toward the Shepherd.)

Still not awake?

KURWENAL: *(sadly shakes his head)*

If he wakes up
It will only be
Evermore to leave us.
The far physician's on her way--
Our only hope of help.
Nothing there yet?
No ship yet on the sea?

SHEPHERD: If there were, I'd play a happier tune,
As happy as ever I can.
Now tell me truly, my old friend,
What happened to our lord?

KURWENAL: Drop the subject.
That's something I can't tell you.
Keep your watch.
If you see a ship
Then play your happiest tune!

(Shepherd turns and looks, hand shielding his eyes, out to sea.)

SHEPHERD: Still empty, the sea!

(takes up his pipe and exits as he plays it)

TRISTAN: *(without moving, faintly)*

That tune from childhood...
It wakes me. Why?

(opens his eyes, turns his head a little)

Where am I?

KURWENAL: *(startles, shocked)*

Ha! Ha!

Is he speaking?

He is speaking!

Tristan! Master!

My lord! My Tristan!

TRISTAN: *(with effort)*

Who calls me?

KURWENAL: Finally! Finally! Living! He's living!

Sweet, sweet life once more my Tristan has been given!

TRISTAN: *(flatly, raising himself a little bit off the couch)*

Kurwenal? You?

Where was I?

Where am I?

KURWENAL: Where you are?

In peace and safety, you're free!

Kareol, Lord.

Know you your family's castle not?

TRISTAN: Family's castle?

KURWENAL: Just look around!

TRISTAN: What's that piping?

KURWENAL: The shepherd's pipe is what you hear playing.

That hill is where he tends to your flocks at pasture.

TRISTAN: Mine? At pasture?

KURWENAL: Yes, exactly!

Yours the house; yours the land.

Its men all true to you, their lord.
As best they could they kept the castle grounds
That you, my lord, once did bequeath
To the people for their own
Back when you left your home,
In foreign lands to roam.

TRISTAN: Which foreign lands?

KURWENAL: Well! In Cornwall!
Bold and brightly, what reputation, honor and glory
Tristan, my hero, there won!

TRISTAN: Am I in Cornwall?

KURWENAL: No, no! In Kareol!

TRISTAN: I came here...how?

KURWENAL: Oh, boy! How you came?
On horseback rode you not.
A dinghy carried you in.
But from that dinghy here
On my back I carried you--
It is broad.
It carried you to the shore.
But now you're at home.
You're on your land,
Your one, true home,
Your father's land.
You're on your fields, your birthright,
Warmed by ancestral sunlight.
Here, from your wounds so deadly
You'll blessedly get better.

(presses himself to Tristan's breast)

TRISTAN: *(after a short silence)*
Think you so? Well, I know different
But I cannot explain it.
Where I awoke, I stayed not.

But where I went to,
That I can never tell you.
The sun, I never saw.
I saw no lands or people.
But what I saw,
That's what I cannot tell you.
I was where I have always come from
And where I'll come to rest:
In the expansive world of night.
In there we knew nothing else but
Timeless and divine oblivion!
But then the knowledge faded.

Longing remembrance,
Was it you
Who drove me newly
Back to light and daytime,
Where just one thing was still mine:
A love lasting for all time?
From death-delight, so frightening,
Into the light it drives me,
Deceitful, bright and golden,
That 'round Isolde shines!

(Kurwenal, seized with horror, hides his head. Tristan gradually sits up.)

Isolde's still in sunlight's kingdom!
In daylight's shimmer, still Isolde!
Ah, such longing!
Ah, so frightening!
Ah, to see her, such desire!
Crashing closed I heard already
The door of death behind me.
Yet the door again has opened.
The rays of sunlight burst it wide.
So with my eyes wide open
I flee from nighttime's homeland
Now to seek her, now to catch her.
In her only let me die and let me vanish.
Grudge it not Tristan.

No! I feel faint, afraid!
In me daytime's wild craze
And the falseness of its shine
Wake the mad deceit of my mind!
Accursed shine! Accursed day!
Will you always wake my pain?
Will this light burn, timeless, faithless,
E'en at night to separate us?

Ah, Isolde,
Sweet and noble,
When will you, when, ah, when,
Will you douse the torches
So I may know my fortune?
When will the light go out?

(exhausted, sinks back down)

When still will be the house?

KURWENAL: *(greatly shaken, pulling himself out of his defeated mood)*

I spurned her once, from faithfulness
But faithfulness now demands I call her.
Trust in my word:
You soon shall see her here, today.
That comfort I can give you,
Assuming she herself lives, too.

TRISTAN: *(very faintly)*

The light has not gone out,
Not night yet in the house.
Isolde lives, keeps watch.
From night, she called me forth.

KURWENAL: If she lives then keep up hope you'll see her!

Thought Kurwenal may seem stupid,
For this you won't rebuke him:
Near death you've been since the day
That Melot, fie and curse him,
His sword against you raised.
The wounds he dealt you--

How to heal them?
This foolish man here
Thought of her
Who healed you once
From Morold's wounds.
She'd heal you from the sickness
That Melot's blade inflicted.
To fetch the doctor, I thought then,
To Cornwall I a boat will send!
The faithful man who sailed there
Brings you Isolde here.

TRISTAN: *(beside himself)*

Isolde comes!
Isolde nears!

(struggles, searching for words)

How faithful!
How sublimely faithful!

(pulls Kurwenal to himself and hugs him)

My Kurwenal, beloved friend!
For faithfulness unflagging
Oh, how can Tristan thank you?
My shield, my helm in battle's strife,
Through thick and thin you're at my side.
All those I hate, you hate them, too,
All those I love, you love them, too.

When I served Marke truly and well,
You gave him your most faithful help.
When I betrayed him, the noble king,
You betrayed him and gladly did!
Not your own man, only mine.
You suffer, too, when I suffer.
But what I suffer, that, you cannot suffer!

This horrible longing sears me deep.
This tortuous burning makes me weak.

How to speak plainer,
 So you won't stay here?
 So here you will not tarry,
 And watch to keep you will hurry?
 Each sense afire,
 Straining to sight her,
 Eyes roaming over the water
 To see her ship's sail flutter?

Through wind and brine she
 Comes to find me!
 By the flames of love is driven
 Isold' to guide her ship in!

It comes! It comes courageous and fast!
 It waves, it waves, the flag on the mast!
 It's she! It's she! She passes the reef!
 Do you not see?

(forcefully)

Kurwenal, do you not see?

(As Kurwenal, who doesn't want to leave Tristan's side, hesitates and watches him in tense silence, the sound of the Shepherd's pipe is heard as at the start of the act, closer, then further away, playing a melancholy tune.)

KURWENAL: *(defeated)*
 There's not a ship in sight!

TRISTAN: *(had been listening with diminishing excitement; now begins to speak with increasing melancholy)*
 Can that be what you mean,
 You old and solemn music,
 By your grief-stricken tune?
 On the evening breezes you came, too,
 When first the boy his father's death did hear of.
 And on that morning, fearful, gloomy,
 When the son his mother's fate did learn.
 He sired me, then he died.
 She, dying, gave me life.

That childhood tune of longing full,
Perhaps it played for them as well.
It asked me then, it asks me now:
What is your fate, your fortune?
What purpose were you born to?
What is your fate?
The childhood music tells me once more:
To long for and die for!

No, oh, no--
That is not it!
Longing! Longing!
I long as I lie dying
But I die not from longing!
That never dies.
It only begs for peaceful death
On the far physician's breast.

Dying, mute, upon the barque,
The poisoned wound was near my heart.
Longing, plaintive played the music
As, blown by breezes so mild,
I neared Ireland's child.

The poisoned wound she healed and closed.
Then with the sword tore newly op'n.
She swung not but she let it sink down;
Then poison gave to me to drink down.

I hoped the poison wholly would heal me.
Instead the magical potion did sear me:
It cursed me ne'er to perish,
And deathless pain inherit.

The drink! The drink! The terrible drink!
How from heart to head its fury set in!
No healing now, no death so sweet
From longing's anguish can me free.
Nowhere, ah, nowhere I find rest.
Night casts me into day's distress
Where sunlight finds so delightful

My pain, eternal and frightful.

Oh, day! Oh, sun! Oh, searing white light!
It scorches my brain with its torture so bright!
From heat, from longing's sweltering ardor,
Ah, there's no shade, no sheltering arbor!
From this, the pain of agony deep,
What elixir ever could give me relief?

This terrible drink that caused my torment cruel,
Myself, myself, I myself did brew!
From father's anguish, mother's pain,
From lovelorn tears from age to age,
From laughter and woe, from wonders and wounds,
I mixed up the poison potion and brewed it!
That which I brewed,
Which flooded through me,
With never-ending bliss I consumed it.

Be cursed, you terrible drink.
Be cursed, who made the brew!

(faints back onto the couch)

KURWENAL: *(tries in vain to calm Tristan; cries out in horror)*

My master! Tristan!
Terrible magic!
O love's deceit,
Compulsion's craze,
The world's loveliest ruse,
What have you brought about?
He lies here still, this wonderful man,
Who like no other loved and adored.
Now see what kind of a thanks love has planned!
Ask what love has been good for!

(with a sob in his voice)

Hey, are you dead? Still alive?
Or kidnapped by the curse?

(listens for Tristan's breathing)

Oh, marvel! No! He's moving! He lives!
How gently he moves his lips!

TRISTAN: *(slowly reviving)*
The ship? Not yet in sight?

KURWENAL: The ship?
For sure, she'll come today.
She can't delay much longer.

TRISTAN: On board, Isolde waving proud,
Toasting our atonement now!
Don't you see?
Don't you see her yet?
How she, mildly, blissfully and softly
Glides through ocean's waters?
On beautiful waves of flowers blooming
She wafts gently here, out to me.
Her smile consoles and brings me peace.
She brings my last refreshment sweet.
Ah, Isolde! Isolde! You're heavenly!

And Kurwenal, what?
You saw her not?
Go keep a lookout,
You stupid lout!
What my inner eye has witnessed,
Keep watch and do not miss it!
Do you not hear?
Go look out! Go!
Run! Keep a lookout!
Get to your post!
The ship? The ship?
Isolde's ship?
You must have seen it!
Must have seen it!
The ship?
Not seen it yet?

(As Kurwenal hesitantly struggles with Tristan, the Shepherd's pipe is heard Off. Kurwenal jumps up joyfully.)

KURWENAL: Oh, wonder joyful!

(leaps up to the lookout post, looks out)

Ha! The ship! I clearly see her coming.

TRISTAN: *(with growing excitement)*

Did I not tell you so?

Tell you she lives

And life to me gives?

You see, Isolde is my whole world.

So if Isold' lives, I'm still on earth!

KURWENAL: *(calling joyfully down from the lookout post)*

Heiha! Heiha!

How the ship sails bravely!

Her sails fill with the wind!

How she runs! How she flies!

TRISTAN: The banner? The banner?

KURWENAL: The joyful banner is flying merry and bright!

TRISTAN: *(sitting up on his couch)*

The banner joyful!

Light of day brings to me Isolde!

Isolde to me!

See you her face?

KURWENAL: The ship has gone behind the rocks.

TRISTAN: Behind the cliff? Is danger near?

There menacing currants threaten a shipwreck!

Who's steering the boat?

KURWENAL: The best of the sailors.

TRISTAN: A traitor he?

Under Melot's command?

KURWENAL: Trust him as me!

TRISTAN: A traitor you, too! Wretched man!
Is she back in sight?

KURWENAL: Not yet.

TRISTAN: I've lost her!

KURWENAL: (*joyfully*)
Heiha! Hei ha ha ha!
She's past! She's past!
Safely she's past!

TRISTAN: (*joyfully*)
Hei ha ha ha!
Kurwenal, most faithful friend!
All my worldly goods, to you I commend them.

KURWENAL: They're full speed ahead.

TRISTAN: So can you see her? See you Isolde?

KURWENAL: That's her! She waves!

TRISTAN: Oh, woman most blessed!

KURWENAL: In harbor they're safe!
Isolde, ha, with one great leap,
Leapt from the ship to shore.

TRISTAN: Come down from your lookout,
You lazy gawker!
Go out, go out to the shore!
Help her! Go help my wife!

KURWENAL: I'll bring her right here.
Trust me to bring her!
But you, Tristan,

Stay obediently in bed!

(exit Kurwenal, quickly)

Act III, Scene 2

TRISTAN: *(straining from the couch with great excitement)*

Oh, see the sunlight!

Ah, see the day!

Ah, look! It's wonder's sunniest day!

Blood courses fierce!

Bravery cheers!

Bliss without ending!

Jubilant frenzy!

But confined to bed

I can't endure it!

Get up, go outside

Where my heartbeat drives me!

Tristan the Brave, with jubilant strength,

Snatched himself from the jaws of death.

(he raises himself high up)

Both bloody and wounded,

I battled once Morolde.

Both bloody and wounded,

Today I win back Isolde!

(tears the bandage off his wound)

Heiha, my blood, flow and be merry

(springs up from his couch, sways forward)

So that my wound may heal forever!

Heroic she flies to heal me and save.

Let all the world die of jubilant haste!

(stumbles toward Center)

ISOLDE: *(Off)*

Tristan, beloved!

TRISTAN: *(in a state of most terrible excitement)*

Could light be that sound?
The torch has-- Ha! The torch has gone out!
To her! To her!

(Isolde hurries in breathlessly. Tristan, barely conscious, stumbles, swaying, toward her. They meet Center; she takes him in her arms. Tristan sinks to the floor slowly in her arms.)

ISOLDE: Tristan! Ah!

TRISTAN: *(looks at her, dying)*
Isolde!

(he dies)

ISOLDE: Ah! Tristan! Tristan! Sweetest beloved!
Ah, once more give ear to my call:
Isolde calls, Isolde comes
To Tristan's side to perish!
Can you not speak?
For one brief hour, one hour, wake and
Stay by my side!

The anxious days spent waking and longing
For one last hour to spend waking with you!
Betrayed Isolde! Betrayed by Tristan!
Denied this single, eternal, final worldly joy?

You're wounded! Where? I'll make you better
So we'll have one blissful night together!
Not from your wounds, ah, from your wounds you must not die!
But let us, united, blow out our lives' last light!

Gone cloudy, his eye! Still, his heart!
Silent, the flutter of his breath!
Must she now sorrow at your death,
She who joyful came here to wed you,
Bravely sailing the sea?

Too late! Obstinate man!
Punishing me as hard as you can?

Can't you forgive me my debt of grief?
Or even listen
To my petition?
Just one more time,
Once more be mine!
Tristan! Ha!
Hark! He wakes!
Beloved!

(sinks down unconscious over his body)

Act III, Scene 3

(Kurwenal had come in just behind Isolde. He witnessed the scene, mute and terribly shaken. Motionless, he stares at Tristan. From below can be heard a dull murmur and the clank of weapons. The Shepherd climbs over the wall.)

SHEPHERD: *(quickly and quietly turning to Kurwenal)*
Kurwenal! Look! A second ship!

(Kurwenal startles violently and looks over the wall as the Shepherd, from a distance, is shaken by the sight of Tristan and Isolde.)

KURWENAL: *(flying into a rage)*
Fire and brimstone! On deck all hands!
Marke and Melot I see advance!
Take up your weapons! Help me! The gate!

(hurries to the gate with the Shepherd and they hastily try to barricade it)

HELMSMAN: *(rushes in)*
Mark's in pursuit with men at arms.
Resist no more. We've been overrun!

KURWENAL: Stay put and help!
While I'm still living I'll let no one break in!

BRANGÄNE'S VOICE: *(Off, from below)*
Isolde! Mistress!

KURWENAL: Brangäne's call?

(calling down to her)

Why came you here?

BRANGÄNE: Open, Kurwenal! Where is Isolde?

KURWENAL: A traitor you, too? Curse you, you villain!

MELOT: *(Off)*
You idiot! Do not resist!

KURWENAL: *(anger flaring up)*
Heihahaha! Today I deal you a death blow!

(Melot appears with armed men below the gate. Kurwenal rushes him and cuts him down.)

Die, devious wretch!

MELOT: Alas! Tristan!

(he dies)

BRANGÄNE: *(still Off)*
Kurwenal! Lunatic! Look, you're mistaken!

KURWENAL: Unfaithful maid!

(to his men)

Come! With me!
Make them retreat!

(they fight)

MARKE: *(Off)*
Stop there, lunatic! Have you gone crazy?

KURWENAL: Death rages right here!
Nothing but death waits here for you, Sire,
So if you want it, come on!

(goes after Marke and his retinue)

MARKE: *(appears below the gate with his retinue)*
Get back, mad maniac!

BRANGÄNE: *(has climbed over the side wall and hurried Downstage)*
Isolde! Mistress! All is well!
What is this? Ah! Mistress? Isolde?

(She ministers to Isolde. Marke and his retinue have battled Kurwenal and his men back from the gate and press their way inside.)

MARKE: Oh mad deceit! Tristan, where are you?

KURWENAL: *(badly wounded, staggers Downstage to Marke)*

He lies right here

And I with him.

(collapses at Tristan's feet)

MARKE: Tristan! Tristan! Isolde! No!

KURWENAL: *(takes Tristan's hand)*

Tristan! Dearest!

Don't be mad that your faithful friend comes, too!

(he dies)

MARKE: Dead! They're all gone! All are dead!

My hero, Tristan, dearest of friends,

Today as well must you betray our friendship

E'en when I come to prove

How faithful I am to you?

Awaken! Awaken

And hear my lamentation,

Most faithless, faithful friend!

(bends, sobbing, over the bodies)

BRANGÄNE: *(as Isolde regains consciousness in her arms)*

She stirs! She lives!

Isolde, mistress, accept my atonement!

The potion's deception I've told to the monarch!

In worry and haste he set to sea

So he could find you

And could renounce you

And pledge your troth to his friend.

MARKE: But why, Isolde, do this to me?

How happily I heard

What before had been kept from me.
How glad was I to learn
That guiltless was my friend!
To join you both in wedlock holy,
With sails full I followed you here.
But misfortune's fury wreaks
Havoc on those who come in peace.
Death's harvest I but increased.
Delusion caused more grief!

BRANGÄNE: Do you not hear, Isolde, dearest,
Your maidservant faithful call?

(Isolde, unaware of everything around her, looks at Tristan's body with growing rapture.)

ISOLDE: Softly, gently,
How he smiles.
How his eyes he
Nobly opens.
Look and see, friends!
See you not?
How his light burns ever brighter
Soaring to the stars above?
See you not?
How his heart beats bravely on,
So sublime, a gushing font?
How his lips, so fair and soft,
Flutter as he gently breathes?
Look and see!
See you not, my friends?

Could it be that I alone might
Hear the wondrous song so quiet,
Plaintive pealing,
All revealing,
Sweet resolving,
From him coming,
Through me sounding,
Higher bounding,
Blessed echoes

All around me?
Ever brightening,
'Round me chiming...
Are they gentle breezes surging?
Are they waves of wonderful perfume?
As they trembling 'round me glisten,
Should I breathe them? Should I listen?
Should I sip them? Dive beneath them?
Should I drown within their sweetness?
In the burgeoning swirl,
In the echoing whirl,
In the infinite breath of the world,
To drown in,
Sink down in
Senselessness,
Utmost bliss!

*(Isolde sinks gently, as if transfigured, into Brangäne's arms and onto Tristan's body.
Deep emotion and awe from the assembled. Marke blesses the bodies. Slow Curtain.)*

FINAL CURTAIN