THE TRISTRAM LEGEND
IN ENGLISH AND AMERICAN POETRY
SINCE 1850

by

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PREFACE

The subject of this paper was first suggested to me by Professor W. S. Johnson. It has proved an interesting one, and, though the work has been interrupted by a variety of hindrances, the pleasure in the material itself has not diminished.

To Professor Johnson I am deeply grateful for his very helpful guidance in plans for the entire paper and for his kindly criticism of the first few chapters. To Professor Josephine Burnham, Professor R. D. O'Leary, and Professor S. L. Whitcomb I wish to express my sincere thanks for their careful, critical reading of all or parts of the paper. I am also indebted to the librarians of the University of Kansas Library for their generous assistance in helping me to secure material.

G. H.

Winfield, Kansas,
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CHAPTER ONE
Introduction

The world has always loved a love story. Whether it is the idealized affection of Dante and Beatrice or the fatal passion of Paolo and Francesca, human nature is prompt to catch the spirit of romance that is ever present. To the English-speaking race no story is better loved, more beautiful, more charged with poignant grief, more poetical in feeling and atmosphere than is that of Tristram and Iseult. (1) This reputation is evident from the frequent use of the legend as source material for modern renderings.

Its passion is as overpowering in its basal features as the cry of the waves on the wild, sea-washed Cornish shores, where most of the action takes place. It is not only a tale of romantic infatuation, but one of transgression in love; one, however, which is lifted above sordid consequences of blind indulgence by the sublime sufferâng of self-renunciation. The constant struggle of the two lovelorn beings, whether fraught with success or defeat of hope, kindles universal interest. Though its surface values have changed with passing generations, the elemental qualities continue as an eternal problem, the solving of which brings the

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(1) These names have various spellings; those peculiar to individual treatments will be used in the discussion of those treatments.
legend into perennial popularity. At no time since the story became crystallized as a definite part of legendary lore has it enjoyed more varied or more comprehensive treatment than it has in the last three quarters of a century. The year 1850 may be taken as a boundary for the purpose of this paper, which will be confined to a discussion of the use of the legend in English and American poetry since that time. The date, though arbitrarily chosen, sets off a period within the memory of many people now living or within that of their immediate forbears. Two years after this date, appeared Matthew Arnold's *Tristram and Iseult* with its distinctly modern note, and only two years ago was presented the latest treatment, Mr. Masefield's play, *Tristan and Isolt*, reaching back to the most primitive sources of the legend.

The major literary handlings of the legend within the period thus described are seven in number and include two short narrative poems by Matthew Arnold and Laurence Binyon, respectively; two long narrative poems by Algernon Charles Swinburne and Edwin Arlington Robinson, respectively; two plays by Thomas Hardy and John Masefield, respectively; and one narrative poem by Alfred Tennyson, which is only a comparatively small part of a re-telling of the Arthurian cycle. In addition, there are several minor poems, chiefly lyrical in form and mood, by poets of more or less note, and two plays, one by J. Comyns Carr, and one by Arthur Symons. These latter are not classed as major handlings because, even though comprehensive in the use of source material, they are so definitely written
for stage presentation that they are dependent for their excellence largely upon the aid of elaborate stage settings and skillful lighting effects. The literary value, in their case, is, therefore, proportionately lessened.

The purpose of this study is to make a brief analysis of the sources of each main production; to note the literary forms used and the style of the author; to show in what way the work expresses the poet's own personality and philosophy, and in what way it is a reflection of the age in which it was written; and finally, to make some effort at literary evaluation and to determine what new and abiding contribution each interpretation has made to the legend.

The History of the Legend

As an introduction to this study of modern renderings a brief sketch of the origin and growth of the legend up to the time of its standardization as source material will be given and the main incidents of the story itself retold.

The historical origin is obscure, and much of that which is submitted by historians and commentators as facts concerning it is controversial. How old the material is no one knows, but possibly it dates back to the ninth century. It seems that the source is partly continental and partly Celtic. Professor Zimmer, a German scholar, associates the name of the hero with the Pictish Drostan and believes that the main incidents of the story may be based on a genuine historical tradition of the ninth or tenth century when
there were dealings between the Celts and Vikings following the invasion of Ireland. (1) This theory would explain the Irish tribute; the golden hair of Iseult, a Norse characteristic; and several of the names, particularly that of Gurmun, which is distinctly Scandinavian, and perhaps that of Iseult, which is at least non-Celtic.

Supplementary to this, are other evidences of Celtic origin. The name of Mark(2) is Celtic and mythical, and is associated with one of the centaur-like powers of darkness of the Celts, probably the Irish. The name Trystan ab Tallwch occurs in the old Welsh triads. (3) Trystan is represented as a purely mythical character in his role of a faithful lover and mighty swineherd. He is protector of the swine of his uncle March ab Meirchion against the attempts of Arthur upon them; and at one time he tends the swine while he sends the ordinary keeper with a love message to Essylt. (4) In another triad he appears in a scene with Arthur to whose court he has returned after an estrangement of three years.

(1) Article "Tristan," Encyclopaedia Britannica.
(2) The name Mark is related to the word for horse in all Celtic tongues. The Beroul version tells of Mark's having horse's ears and of his concealing them under his long hair. The secret was known only to a dwarf. One day the barons asked the dwarf why he and the king talked so much together. The dwarf was drunk and foolishly promised to let them know. At the same time he wanted to be loyal to Mark. Accordingly, he led the barons to a ditch and thrust his head into it and told the hawthorn tree growing near it the secret. The barons learned it them from the tree through musical instruments made of it. The king killed the dwarf for revealing the secret. Schoepperle, Gertrude, Tristan and Iseult, p. 269.
(3) Cf. Mr. Masefield's play.
(4) Welsh form of Iseult.
In the Welsh story of the *Dream of Rhonabury* he is shown as a counsellor of King Arthur. These references in early Welsh literature, now found in the *Mabinogion*, together with certain typically Celtic characteristics of plot and atmosphere, lead many authorities to a belief in a Celtic source for much of the material of the legend. Its growth and its adaptation by various story tellers, however, soon carried it far beyond the bounds of any one country or race.

In the twelfth century the legend had its greatest impetus to growth and popularity. It spread over Europe and Anglo-Norman England, and more certain records of the story appeared in three distinct literary forms—lays, and metrical and prose romances.

The lays, short episodic poems out of which grew the legend proper, flourished mostly in the songs of the troubadours, but also in the songs of the Anglo-Normans residing in England. Parts of the Tristram story doubtless appeared early in many of them; and in many others allusions were made to it to illustrate strong love, great fidelity, or the use of a love potion. The best known lay dealing with a Tristram episode is *Le Chievrefeuille* (The Honeysuckle) by Marie de France, who wrote about 1175-90. (1) It is not known definitely whether she ever lived in England or not, but at least she probably heard from English minstrels Celtic legends and these she made the basis of her own creations. In *Le Chievrefeuille* she

(1) Schofield, W. H., *Chivalry in English Literature* p. 201.
relates an episode of an earlier lay, the composition of which is ascribed to Tristram himself. According to the incident, the hero, after a year's exile from the court of Mark, returns and hides in a forest near Iseult's dwelling. He carves a message on a piece of wood which he places in a spot where he knows she will pass. (1) He tells her he cannot live without her; it is with them as with the honeysuckle and the hazel, for neither can be drawn from the other without destroying both. This lay was previously recorded in English under the English name for honeysuckle, Gotelef, thus indicating Marie's English source. There is also an episodic poem of about a thousand lines, *La Folie Tristan*, in the Berne manuscript, which was composed in England before 1200. (2) Here the hero, dressed as a fool, recalls the experiences of his life; and by this method the poem gives a fairly complete summary of incidents.

From the incidents of these lays it was an easy transition to the metrical romances which constitute the second, and almost contemporary, development of the legend. Concerning these earliest poetical versions of the complete story are found many conflicting views. Most writers, however, agree that with the long metrical romances the great body of Tristram literature divides itself according to choice and treatment of incidents into two distinct families, the French and the English versions, based upon

(1) Cf. inclusion of this episode in story proper as summarized on page 19 of this paper.
(2) Schoepperle, Gertrude, *Tristram and Iseult*, p. 66.
the poems in the French language by Béroul and Thomas, respectively.

The French, or Béroul, version consists of three divisions: Béroul's own poem, a metrical romance by Eilhart von Oberge, and the great body of prose romances. Béroul was an Anglo-Norman, or a Norman, who probably composed his poem near the beginning of the second half of the twelfth century. His poem is the earliest extant Tristram narrative. It exists now only in fragments of 4485 lines, dealing with the central portion of the story. The second poem is Tristrant, written by Eilhart von Oberge about 1170 or 1180. Only fragments of it now remain, but since it contains the same details as the Béroul poem, its revision at a later time gives some idea of what the entire Béroul poem might be if all of it were extant. Through Eilhart's poem the legend was translated into the popular Slavonic tongue of Bohemia. The third group of the French family is the large body of prose romances that vary greatly in content and excellence. The earliest is the French prose account which appeared in 1220. It was attributed to Élie de Boron, but whether such a person ever lived is not known. This romance, which was the basis for many retellings and amplifications in the thirteenth century, followed the Béroul version chiefly. (1) Additional

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(1) This romance may have been used as an indirect source of the lost episodic poem of Chrétien de Troies. That poem it is thought may have followed the same version of the poem as Béroul's. Maynadier, Howard, The Arthur of the British Poets, pp. 153-4 and 165.
incidents were added, and in the course of time the legend became more and more associated with the Arthurian cycle. These French prose romances were the source largely of the Tristram story as it occurs in the Morte Darthur, written in English by Sir Thomas Malory and printed in 1485 by Caxton.

The English or Thomas version of the Tristram literature centers about the poem of Thomas of Brittany, which exists now only in fragments discovered in England, Germany, and Italy. These are in Anglo-Norman handwriting and consist of about three thousand lines in all, only approximately one sixth of the work, but enough to give something of the author's style. Thomas was probably an Anglo-Norman who wrote about 1170. He states that he got his material from Brévi, who is identified by various students of the legend as a Welsh poet of the reign of Stephen. (1) It is fortunate that adequate translations of his poem have been preserved. These are three in number and represent the German, Norse, and English thirteenth century interpretations, in the works of Gottfried of Strassburg, Brother Robert of Scandinavia, and Thomas of Scotland, respectively.

The most important version, so far as preserving the details of the story and its literary spirit is concerned, is that of Gottfried, composed about 1210. He

was a minnesinger reared in Strassburg, and was well versed in the classical and romantic literature current in his day. He was a true poet and has given the best poetical version of the story, according to Jessie L. Weston, who has made a charming prose rendering of it in English.

Gottfried did not live to complete his poem, but fortunately his 20,000 lines carry it to a place just beyond the point at which the first long fragment of the Thomas poem begins. The last third of his version was added by two later poets; Ulrich von Türheim about 1240 and Heinrich von Freiberg about 1300, who working independently of each other, followed the Béroul version. In this composite poem of Thomas the original Tristram story is best preserved. (1) The second translation of Thomas was a version in Old Norse by a Brother Robert in 1226. Through this rendering more than any other, the scope of the original is best revealed, though Gottfried best portrays the pastoral atmosphere. It was this version that was afterwards adapted into Icelandic prose, though with a content that varied greatly from the original incidents of the story. (2) The third and last of the notable translations of Thomas's poem is Sir Tristram, a Northern English, sometimes called Scottish, version, by a Thomas, often, though doubtfully,

(1) It was from this Gottfried poem that Wagner got the inspiration for his music drama, Tristan and Isolde, first produced in 1865.
(2) In this, while Tristram leaves his bride as in the original versions, the black Isold, as she is called here, gives birth to a child. Cf. Arnold's Tristram and Iseult.
associated with Thomas of Ercaeldoun, who wrote in the last
decade of the thirteenth century. (1) This poem of about
3500 lines gives a much abbreviated account of the whole
story. (2)

While these two groups of Tristram lore agree in the main, they have certain important differences. The first
is in the home of Tristram; Béroul places it in Lyonesse
and Thomas in Ermonie, or as Gottfried calls it, Pareme,
now identified with some degree of certainty as the Isle of
Man. (3) A second difference is in the time; in the earlier
version it is during the reign of Arthur, and in the later
it is after the death of Arthur, and Mark is king of England
as well as of Cornwall. In the former also, Tristram's
father does not die before his birth but lives to take a
second wife, whom Malory makes the chief character in an
incident revealing Tristram's fairness and generosity; the
latter version, on the other hand, devotes much more space
and interest to the hero's childhood and training. Thomas
gives more prominence to the mother of Isuelt, though in
both versions she prepares a love potion and entrusts it to

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(1) This poem was edited by Sir Walter Scott. He associates
this Thomas with the Thomas of Ercaeldoun. McNeill, Geo. P.,
Sir Tristram, p. xxxix. Schofield, however, believes that the
latter Thomas was connected with the particular version only
because of the identity of his name with the Anglo-Norman
Thomas of the original version and because of the popularity of
the famous "Rhys the, as he was called, "Schofield, Chaucer," pp.
298-10.

(2) One incident peculiar to this version alone is that of
Tristram's dog, Houdain. He comes up just as the lovers have
drained the cup containing the magic potion. They put it down
on the deck and the dog licks it and ever after is bound to his
master with a devotion unusual even in a favorite dog. Cf.
Hardy's play.

The potion is of lasting effect in Thomas, while in the Béroul story its power abates after three or four years. As to characters, he is a simple-hearted, unsuspecting, forgiving kind in contrast to the harsher, less sympathetic one of Béroul. The tendency to introduce additional incidents in the prose romances prepared the way for the new conclusion in Malory in which Mark is a degenerate who treacherously kills Tristram, while the latter sits harping before Iseult. Possibly the greatest difference of all comes in the spirit back of the treatments. Thomas had a greater sense of literary responsibility than his contemporaries and was, therefore, more ready to modify the material in accordance with his own ideals of courtly love. He makes more of the frailty and suffering of the lovers than do the writers of the Béroul group. He feels with his characters and is more sympathetic in portraying their inner feelings; at the same time he shows the inevitability of their fate. He preserves, also, an atmosphere of beauty and rustic simplicity and an enchantment of romance that are lacking in the other version.

Malory's romance, although it is a definite outgrowth of Béroul, presents some distinctive characteristics that make it an important independent source for modern handleings of the legend. About a third of his account (Books VIII, IX, and X) is associated with Tristram, but only the material in the eighth book deals with the story as it comes from the earlier sources; that of the ninth and tenth books is concerned chiefly with Tristram's knightly
adventures in Arthur's kingdom.

Malory's romance was subjected to the inevitable process of chivalric decoration. Morolt becomes Sir Morhaus; Princess Iseult, La Beale Isoude; and Brangwaine, Dame Brangwaine. The minor character, Gandin, Irish suitor of Iseult in the Thomas version, is superseded here by the famous Saracen Knight of Arthur's court, Sir Palomides, who figures prominently in the affairs of the lovers—an illustration not only of change of name and character but also of growth of incident as well. The rustic love grotto of the twelfth century is the lordly manor of the fifteenth; and in addition one finds Sir Lancelot's feudal castle, Joyous Gard. The Tristram of the earlier sources is here observant of all knightly regulations, a respecter of knightly blood and honor, and loyal to knightly oaths, though he preserves his old habit of clever lying to extricate himself from difficulties. In general choice and handling of material, also, Malory was influenced by the spirit of his age. His purpose is, in this "mosaic of adaptations," to focus attention upon first one element in chivalry and then another. The Tristram story was introduced as an exponent of mediaeval love--love which was an art as well as a passion. Hence in Malory one finds himself in a maze of incidents, many of them new, that show various phases of courtly love against the background
of Arthur's Round Table. (1)

Reference has already been made to the Celtic character of some of the names and to the influence of certain Welsh triads. Other Celtic traces should be noted. Tristram, besides being a noted hunter and harper, is a lover of the dog rather than the horse; he is ever the temperamental knight, full of emotional impulses and skilled in artistic accomplishments, and much given to bragging of these accomplishments, a common trait of old Celtic heroes. The primitive state of society portrayed suggests also these early sources. Tristram float his carved messages of wood to Iseult on a stream which flows through her apartment. The life of a subordinate is regarded lightly, as is shown in Mark's killing of the dwarf who revealed the fact of Mark's having horse's ears and in Iseult's threatening to have Brangwaine put to death for fear she would divulge a secret. The feeling toward the supernatural is typically characteristic of the Celt. Morgan le Fay's horn, the fairy dog, Petit-criu, the giants and dragons that people the forests, the strange gift of healing, and the fatal love potion—all are beyond the borderland of reality. The portrayal of the charm of outdoor life in the forest and the mystery and gloom of the sea show a

(1) One incident peculiar to Malory and frequently used in later renderings relates how Andred spies upon Tristram in one of his stolen visits to Iseult. The matter is reported to Mark, and Andred with forty barons leads Tristram along the path to a chapel. On the way he escapes and gains the chapel first, where he successfully defends himself against one hundred knights. He then jumps from a window overlooking the sea to a crag beneath. He swims to safety and is found and cared for by Gouvernail.
fanciful attitude toward nature. Finally, the Celtic element is revealed in the treatment of the passion of love, an irresistible force impelling man through joy and pain alike to its inevitable conclusion.

Thus from Celtic beginnings, with ever increasing enrichments from other sources, did the Tristram legendary lore come into the hands of the writers of the poetic and prose romances of the Middle Ages, chief of whom are Béroul, Thomas, and Malory. The versions of these three constitute the standardized material now used as a storehouse from which modern authors select incidents and atmosphere for their interpretations.

The Story Retold

One of the best twentieth century retellings of these old Tristram romances is Jessie Weston's translation of the twelfth century Gottfried poem, which, though differing in minor details, makes use of substantially the same incidents as are used in all the other versions.

According to it, Tristan is the son of Rivalin,[1] a prince of Parmenie, and Blancheflor,(2) a sister of King Mark of Cornwall. His father meets death fighting Mark's enemies and his grief-stricken mother dies shortly after his birth. (3) Rual, a faithful baron in Parmenie, becomes

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(1) This name varies; in the English version it is Roland and in Malory, Meliodas.
(2) Malory names her Elizabeth.
(3) In some forms of the story the mother dies first. In Malory Tristram's father remarries and Tristram changes the jealousy of his step-mother to devotion by his generous pleading in her defense. Cf. Arganthael of Mr. Carr's poem.
the child's foster parent and chief counsellor, and Kurwenal, (1) a learned and wise man, assumes the responsibility for his education and remains throughout life his faithful friend and body servant.

While a young man, Tristran is kidnapped by a band of pirates, who are attracted by his accomplishments at chess. Terrified by a storm, they set him ashore on the Cornish coast. As he wanders about, he meets some hunters. To them he teaches the art of venery, in which he is much skilled. By these men he is led to the court of Mark, though unaware of the latter's relationship to him. His charming manners and skillful harping at once gain the king's favor.

Rual, in the meantime, is filled with grief over his foster son's disappearance and begins a search for him—a search which after four years brings him to Cornwall where, much to the joy of Mark, he reveals the identity of Tristan. Grateful for Rual's care of him, Tristan makes a brief trip home to give up his landed rights to his foster parent and then returns to his uncle's country—a country at that time under subjection to Gurmun, (2) King of Ireland. Contemporaneous with Tristan's arrival is that of the Irish giant, Morolt, (3) brother-in-law of Gurmun, demanding the customary tribute of Cornish youths and maidens. Tristan advises that Mark give battle and himself offers to challenge the Irish champion to a single combat. If Morolt is defeated,
no tribute shall be claimed; if Tristan is defeated, it shall be paid as usual.

In the ensuing fight, Morolt is slain by a blow on the head from his enemy's sword, a piece of which remains in the skull, and Tristan is so severely injured that no leech can cure him. He suspects that his wound is caused by a poisoned sword and can be healed only in the land of the poison. Accordingly, with the fervent hope that even among enemies he may find aid, he has himself placed in a boat with only his harp to keep him company. He drifts to the Irish shores where, disguised as the harper Tantris, he is carried to the court. There among idyllic surroundings and under magic power he receives healing of the Queen of Ireland. Often during his illness he is attended by the charming golden-haired Princess Iseult, whom as he recovers he teaches to play the harp. (1)

After Tristan is restored to health he goes back to Cornwall and reports in such glowing terms to his uncle Mark the surpassing beauty of Iseult that he is sent back to Ireland to seek her as a wife for Mark. (2) The mission is one of great danger because of the Irish law that no one from

(1) Malory speaks thus of the relations of the two young people: "Tramtrist cast great love to La Beale Isoud, for she was at that time the fairest maid and lady of the world. And there Tramtrist learned her to harp, and she began to have a great fancy unto him." Malory, Book viii, chap. 9.

(2) "One story, manifestly of folk-tale source, was that a swallow one day flew to Mark's court with a hair in its bill of most brilliant gold. Mark declared then and there that he would marry the woman from whose head that hair came, and sent Tristram to seek her. She was Iseult." Maynadier, The Arthur of the English Poets, Note 3, p. 157. Swinburne may have been influenced by this incident in his naming of Part I of his poem.
Cornwall may set foot there except on penalty of death.
Again Tristan, clever as always in his own defense, disguises himself and safely lands. Before he reaches the court, however, he kills a dragon that infests the country.
As proof of his deed he cuts the tongue from the monster, but in so doing is overcome by venom exhaled from its tongue.

Meanwhile the king's seneschal, desiring the hand of Iseult, which in desperation the king has offered as a reward for slaying the dragon, comes upon the dead monster. Seeing a chance to win the princess, he cuts off the head as proof that he has done the killing. The steward presents his claim, but both the queen and her daughter so doubt his veracity that they set out to find the real slayer. [1] They discover and recognize the harper Tantris and find the tongue of the dragon hidden in his clothes—a proof that he should receive the reward. They take him to the court and again heal him. (2)

Tristan, as the slayer of the dragon, presents his claim for Iseult, though much to her regret, in behalf of his uncle, King Mark, rather than his own. Tristan urges the suit that there may be peace between the two nations. Because Tristan has freed his kingdom from the dragon, Gurmun grants the request, despite the fact that the suitor is from Corn-

(1) In some stories they are accompanied by the queen's favorite maid, Bragoene, a name variously spelled.
(2) One day during the hero's convalescence Iseult is cleaning Tristan's sword and while drawing it from the sheath discovers that it is the one that has caused the death of her kinsman, Morolt. This arouses bitter hatred in both her and her mother, abated only by their greater hatred for the seneschal, which reconciles them to Tristan.
wall and has killed Morolt. Iseult, whether she will or not, makes ready for her journey to a strange country to marry a strange king. Her mother, fearing complications in the affections of her daughter, prepares a magic love potion to be drunk by her and Mark on their wedding night, a potion of such power that ever after those who drink it will be devoted lovers. This she gives into the keeping of Brangoene, a favorite maid and kinswoman of Iseult who is to accompany her on her journey. (1)

The ship is in the bay and all the people are gathered to speak their farewells. The three women are described with beautiful imagery: the Princess Iseult as the bright sun; her mother, the rosy dawn; and Brangoene, the stately moon. The journey is soon under way. Once while resting at a port, Tristan and Iseult become thirsty and send for a drink. A little maid, (2) in the absence of Brangoene, finds the flask containing the love potion and carries it to her mistress. They drink and each becomes conscious of a love for the other. They struggle against it but in the end confess to each other its power over them. They take into their confidence Brangoene, who blames herself sorely. On their arrival at Cornwall the ship is met by Mark, and the marriage soon takes place. On the wedding night, however, Brangoene is substituted for Iseult, to whom Brangoene now maintains

(1) In Malory the love potion is given into the charge of both Brangoene and Gouvernail. When Tristan and Iseult become thirsty they search and find the flask which they think contains the finest grade of wine, selfishly kept by their two servants for their own use.
(2) Cf. Mr. Symon's play.
unusual devotion because of the grief her neglect has
wrought. (1)

As months pass, the lovers strive to control their
passion, but so strong is it that often they devise stolen
visits. The simple-hearted Mark becomes distrustful only
after the whole court is alive with rumor. At one time his
suspicions barely escape confirmation. It has become Tristan's
custom to arrange meetings with Iseult by carving messages
on twigs and dripping them into a stream that flows through
her apartments. (2) On this evening the dwarf, Melot, and
Marjodo, (3) a false friend of Tristan, have brought Mark
to the trysting place. All three have hidden themselves in
the thick foliage of the trees and are unnoticed by Tristan
when he arrives at the spot to wait for Iseult. Just as she
approaches, he sees shadows upon the ground and suspects
treachery. His ever ready wit aids him, however, and he so
couches his remarks to Iseult that she realizes their danger
and answers in phrases of loyalty to Mark. Hence they again
win the confidence of the king.

But this success in evading suspicion does not last,
and finally Tristan is ordered from the court and Iseult is
requested to submit to the ordeal of red hot irons. She
passes this test safely by a clever ruse on her part, with
the assistance of Tristan, this time disguised as a pilgrim,
and by the kindly dispensation of Providence. The banished

(1) Cf. Mr. Wasefield's play.
(2) Cf. Mr. Binyon's and Mr. Carr's poems.
(3) In Malory Andret is a composite of these two
characters.
Tristan now goes to Wales, where in behalf of Gilan he slays the giant Urgan and in return for his service wins the fairy dog Petit-criu. (1) Petit-criu wears a magic bell, the music of which is so sweet that it immediately soothes the suffering of any one who hears it. Tristan sends it to Iseult that it may bring her comfort in her loneliness, but after the first joy she breaks the bell and destroys the magic power, because she cannot endure relief from pain when Tristan is still suffering.

Tristan's passion again lures him back to Cornwall, and even the slow Mark sees the love between Tristan and Iseult and banishes them both. They go to a love grotto, attended by the faithful Kurwenal and Tristan's favorite hound, Hiudan. Here they lead an idyllic life of rustic simplicity. Once when Mark is riding through the forest he comes to the grotto; and upon looking in, he sees Tristan and Iseult asleep upon a bed of rushes with a drawn sword between them. Much touched by this mark of faithfulness to him, he indicates his feelings by filling in the window with grass and flowers to keep the sun from shining in their faces.

(1) The Celtic source of the legend is indicated by the prominence given to Tristram's dogs throughout the story. Malory introduces dogs twice: once when the daughter of the French king, after being told by Tristram that he cannot love her, sends him a small dog; and, second, when Tristram leaves his "brachet" with Iseult as a consolation to her. It is devoted to her and remains always at her side except when Tristram is near. Once she is made aware of her banished lover by the action of the dog when its master approaches disguised; at another time Mark discovers Tristram's identity through means of the dog. This "brachet" seems to be the Hiudian of other versions, the name of which is variously spelled.
and leaves them unharmed. (1)

The lovers are soon recalled from the forest and forgiven. But rumor in the castle is never still, and Mark struggles to believe in the loyalty to him of both his nephew and his wife, and at the same time feels impelled to investigate all suspicions. At last he can believe in Tristan and Iseult no longer, and he turns the lovers over to his counsellors. After a last farewell in which Iseult bestows upon Tristan a troth plighted ring, Tristan escapes, and Mark, unable to make his charge, holds his peace and is unavenged.

Tristan sails to Normandy, where he engages in many knightly encounters to lessen his grief. Among the petty rulers aided by his prowess is Jovelin, Duke of Arundel. The Grateful duke invites Tristan into his home and to the friendship of his son, Kahedin, and his daughter, Iseult of the White Hands. (2) The latter reminds Tristan, faintly by her manners but chiefly by her name, of the Iseult of Ireland. Lost in a contemplation of his amorous past, he sings a song of love to Iseult. Naturally both father and daughter inter-

(1) In some of the versions Mark places his glove upon the sword as evidence of his having been there and of his forgiveness. Cf. the Swinburne and Masefield treatments.

(2) According to Malory, after Tristram has been seriously wounded in a forest fight during one of his periods of banishment, Iseult of Ireland sends word to him to go to Brittany for healing from "Isoud la Blanche Mains," the daughter of King Howel(Duke Jovelin of Gottfried). He does so and is restored to health by her, and then out of gratitude he marries her. Many of the adventures in Malory occur after this incident, including those at Joyous Gard.
pret it as an expression of affection for the only Iseult they know. As a result Tristan, scarcely knowing what he is doing and yearning all of the time for the Irish Iseult who he thinks has forgotten him, asks and gets the hand of the Breton princess in marriage. (1) But happiness is not to be his, and soon he seeks relief from pain in a romantic adventure in behalf of his brother-in-law, Kahedin. In this he receives his fatal wound and is carried to his castle where his patient young wife dresses his wounds and vainly strives to win him back to health. Realizing that death is near, Tristan places the troth plight ring in Kahedin's hands and asks him to go in search of the Irish Iseult. If successful in bringing her to the dying knight, Kahedin promises to hoist over his ship a white sail; a black, if unsuccessful. The young wife overhears the commission and when the returning ship puts ashore she jealously reports the sail black. (2) Tristan dies and his people set up a wail of grief which confirms the fears of the Cornish queen as she hurries to the bier of her lover. (3) There sits the childlike Breton Iseult whom the older woman addresses thus: "Why sittest thou beside the dead, thou who hast slain him? Arise, and get thee hence!" The Irish Iseult lies down beside her dead lover and finds in

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(1) Gottfried's poem stops here and the Weston account follows the story as continued by Ulrich von Türheim and Heimrich von Fräiberg.

(2) In some versions Iseult of Brittany reports the sail black through mistake, not jealousy.

(3) Iseult is sometimes represented as having arrived just before Tristram's death.
death consolation and peace. Mark, hearing of his queen's flight, pursues her and lands soon after the tragic deaths. From Kurwenal he learns of the secret love potion and its dire effects. (1) The mourning Mark says had he but known he would have given Iseult to Tristan as wife. He takes the bodies to Tintagel where in marble tombs in a small chapel he buries them. A rose sapling is planted beside one tomb and a vine beside the other; as time passes, their tendrils reach out until they intertwine over the two graves -- a symbol of the consummation of passion that the lovers find in death.

(1) Other accounts have Mark learn of the love potion through Brangwaine.
CHAPTER TWO

Tristram and Iseult

by

Matthew Arnold

The first treatment of the Tristram legend in the period represented in this paper was by Matthew Arnold in "Tristram and Iseult." It was published in 1852 in a volume entitled Empedocles on Etna and Other Poems, above the unassuming signature "A." The poem was Arnold's initial experiment in narrative poetry, although he was already well established as a lyricist. He was then thirty years old and much influenced by the turbulent, questioning spirit of his age in its search for peace and a happy solution of the problems of life. The constant agitation of youth and age disturbed him; the spirit of unrest that he met everywhere, combined with his naturally reflective mind, led him to seek calm, though Arnold was too sympathetic to accept it at the expense of indifference to suffering humanity. These conditions, doubtless, account for his finding in the modernization of the passionate tale of Tristram and Iseult congenial material for his pen. Here was a tale of intensity of emotion, an all-absorbing love between a man and a woman and the rational reaction of a second woman caught in the tangled loops of that love. Because of Arnold's conception of the problem—for such it seems to have appeared to him—he follows the old sources only fragmentarily. His greater sympathy for
Iseult of Brittany led him to omit much of the earlier part of the story. In the treatment of her he is greatly influenced by the more kindly attitude of Thomas. He follows the Thomas version also in making the love potion of lasting effect. For the time of the story, however, he turns to Béroul's rendering, which connects it with the Arthurian cycle. He varies from both the older versions in having Tristram's death occur just after the arrival of Iseult of Ireland rather than just before. Moreover, he follows Béroul in locating Tristram's home in Lyonesse and in recounting the burial of the lovers in Mark's chapel in Tintagel. He departs from the early sources again, in regard to the color of Queen Iseult's hair. Instead of the golden-haired princess, she appears here as a "raven-haired beauty." The poet differs from the main sources also, when he makes the marriage of Tristram and Iseult of Brittany fruitful and pictures the mother with her two children. Only one development of the old tale has any reference to children, an Icelandic rendering, in which Iseult of Brittany is spoken of as having given birth to a child. Whether Arnold was familiar with this version is not known.

While the sources would suggest a narrative treatment, Arnold makes his that only in part. The story is interspersed with lyric and dramatic passages, and what narrative there is contains little action. The setting is in the castle in Brittany where Tristram lies dying, with his wife and page attending him. He is restless and
impatient for the arrival of his old love, Iseult of Ireland, for whom he has sent his faithful servant, possibly Gouvernail, though Arnold does not name him. In his wild and fevered ravings Tristram recalls successive scenes from his past—the drinking of the love potion with its tragic effect; Mark's discovery of him and the queen in her garden, their last farewell, and his hurried flight; his fruitless efforts to quell his passion in chivalrous battles in Rome in company with Arthus's knights; and finally, his stolen visits with his queen in the forest glades of Cornwall.

On regaining consciousness he bids an affectionate good night to his wife and makes fatherly inquiries concerning his children. A moment later lights flash, steps echo on the stair, and Iseult of Ireland enters. Then follows the most dramatic scene of the poem, in which the thwarted lovers meet and find a modified peace and happiness in death. A year intervenes, and a second picture is presented of Iseult of Brittany and her children walking along the heath, with Iseult's telling them the tale of Merlin which they love and the repetition of which brings comfort and the restoring power of fortitude to her own heart. The few additional fragments of the story are given in the author's running comments and explanations on the action as it takes place.

Arnold divides his poem into three parts, the emotional interest of which centers, respectively, in the three leading characters: Tristram, Iseult of Ireland, and
Iseult of Brittany. The first part opens with a brief dialogue between the hero and his page and continues with alternating monologue of the dying knight and the poet's commentary in narrative and lyrical forms. The second part is a dramatic dialogue between the lovers, culminating in the climax, their death, and followed by a soliloquy in lyrical verse by the author. The last part is made up of vivid, idyllic description of mother and children, of landscape details, of the author's reflections, concluding with Iseult's tale of Merlin, apparently an entire departure from the thread of the story.

The meter of the poem is as diverse as its plan; it includes iambic and trochaic tetrameter and pentameter lines, alternating according to the simple recital of events or to the merging of melancholy feeling into tragedy. At least one anapestic couplet, vibrating with spirit, occurs:

What voices are these on the clear night air?  
What lights in the court--what steps on the stair?  
(1)

Quatrains and rhyming couplets are adapted to the emotional levels of the poem. These variations in types, meters, and rhymes secure vividness and save the poem from a monotony which the single strain of emotion might otherwise produce.

Much of Arnold himself is to be seen in his treatment of the old legend. He recognized the claims of passion, the constant turmoil of man's mind and his ever

(1) Poetical Works of Matthew Arnold, p. 150.
pressing pursuit after happiness; but he realized, too, that the goal of peace could not come in a blind indulgence of these passions. Arnold's brooding, contemplative spirit saw a solution only in serenity and repose, attained in the presence of the tumults of life by moderation and self-control, by resignation and submission. It is no wonder, then, that he found in the impelling love of Tristram and Iseult of Ireland an illustration of unrest and wild yearning for satisfaction, and in the fate of the younger Iseult an opportunity to reveal a spirit of serene endurance and triumphant loyalty to duty. Arnold, however, was not an ardent romanticist. He lacked emotional abandonment; he never lost himself in the wildness of his own passion or of that of his literary characters. Hence, it is not strange that though he chose mediaeval material, he should give it a distinctly subjective treatment.

It is this subjectivity that led Arnold to use directly only such incidents from the sources as seemed important for the development of his main theme, merely alluding to such other parts as he felt necessary to the complete interpretation of the legend. Of the four persons whose names are recorded Mark, the Cornish king, is referred to only as a "deep-wronged husband." But to the other three he gives clean cut, vivid characterization. Tristram of Lyonesse is "the peerless hunter, harper, knight," as he was known of old. But he is more than that; he is, as Maynadier says, also a nineteenth century
gentleman, who in his youth loved deeply though not wisely. Later, he married and became a conscientious husband and father; yet he still retained the old love for the earlier Iseult. (1) Arnold's recognition of the claims of passion led him to give a sympathetic, though as compared with Swinburne a restrained, treatment of this part of the hero's nature. Here clear, lucid details enhance the emotional quality, as in the following vivid picture:

Ah, sweet angels, let him dream!  
Keep his eyelids! let him seem  
Not this fever-wasted wight  
Thinn'd and paled before his time,  
But the brilliant youthful knight  
In the glory of his prime,  
Sitting in the gilded barge,  
At thy side, thou lovely charge,  
Bending gaily o'er thy hand,  
Iseult of Ireland!  

(2)

Again the poet's subjective treatment is seen in the warmth of his comment when he vicariously experiences the tyranny of love which cannot be drowned by the din of battle or the vain jest of fellow knights. The reader becomes a part of the scene through these typically suggestive lines:

Ah, what boots it, that the jest  
Lightens every other brow,  
What, that every other breast  
Dances as the trumpets blow,  
If one's own heart beats not light  
On the waves of the toss'd fight,

(2) Poetical Works of Matthew Arnold, p. 142.
If oneself cannot get free
From the clog of misery?

Only in an experience of conflict so nearly in accord with his own feelings could Arnold have thus projected his own personality. To him, relief from the storms of overwrought emotion could come only in an inner peace and quiet. Here, too, he is beating against the constant unrest which he saw all about him. Plainly, the interpretation of Tristram's character is a self-revelation of Arnold, in that it shows he could understand the power of passion. He has, therefore, a tendency to idealize Tristram, to arouse and maintain interest in him, to make the reader feel the tragedy of thwarted love; but, having done that, he delays no longer in his characterization, for the problem as he sees it is that of the Princess Iseult. Stopford Brooke ascribes the less intense treatment of Tristram's love to the long time intervening since the lovers last met and to the severity of Tristram's wounds.

Intermingled with the portrayal of Tristram is that of Iseult of Ireland. In her, too, there is a curious blending of the ancient and modern. The reader sees through brief sketches here and there the charming Irish maiden develop into the haughty Queen of Cornwall, stifling the clamorous yearnings of her soul in the cold atmosphere of an uncongenial court. This is far more suggestive of the modern attitude of a responsive poet than of the less introspective mediaeval period. The

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(1) Poetical Works of Matthew Arnold, pl 147.
(2) Brooke, Stopford A., Four Poets, p. 108.
fact remains, however, that the more subjective treatment accorded Iseult of Brittany demanded greater detachment in characterizing her rival.

The second Iseult Arnold makes the heroine of the tale, and it is in her portrayal that more of the poet's own invention of incident and character is found. In the older stories she is represented as little and jealous, though in the Thomas version instantly penitent, when she sees the result of her rash words. The modern age, however, and Arnold in particular with his deep feeling for suffering humanity, recognized her as an innocent victim entangled in a love fated to lash and tear all who were caught in its web. Arnold's problem here was not that of wrongdoing itself but of the reaction it brought forth in one under its influence. Perhaps the closeness of the theme to the poet's own thinking led him to give Iseult of Brittany a finer and more artistic treatment than he gives the other characters. One of the loveliest, though saddest passages of the poem is the clear, finely drawn picture of her leaving Tristram's bedside:

She raised her eyes upon his face—
Not with a look of wounded pride,
A look as if the heart complained—
Her look was like a sad embrace;
The gaze of one who can divine
A grief, and sympathize.

(1)

Here is an exalted compassion and a generosity of spirit altogether in keeping with the author's ideals. Part III is devoted entirely to her and reveals the Princess Iseult

(1) Poetical Works of Matthew Arnold, p. 149.
trying to find comfort and strength to endure her fate in the care and training of her children and in quiet communion with nature—the hollies, her native heaths, and the birds that flutter in and out of their coverts. If she feels resentment, she does not express it; rather, self-control sweetened by resignation rules her spirit. Arnold realizes the solitude of her soul and the calm fortitude with which she faces life; and then he raises the question, Is she happy? For answer he speaks of her as one "dying in a mask of youth," and pictures her with Tristram's aged hound at her feet, sitting solitary beside her lamp, which the fishermen have learned to know as a guiding star; working on her embroidery far into the night, her quiet meditations interrupted only by the wind or by her ministrations to her children; and later on, work laid aside, sitting with clasped hands and musing over what life has given her; then kneeling in prayer and quietly slipping to bed—each day an exact repetition of the one before. As if to prove the perfection of her self-mastery, he has her tell to her children in the final scene the tale of Merlin and Vivian which shows the results of self-indulgence of passion. This, too, is characteristic of Arnold. It is in keeping with his praise of moderation to turn at the end of a story of intense emotion to a quiet recital of an ancient tale.

Thus the poet sees in the spirit of Iseult of Brittany the triumph of will power, and he contrasts her, who can enjoy even in a modified degree the life she lives
and the old stories she tells her children, with those whose spirits crumble in the "gradual furnace of the world." He shows his lack of sympathy with the too frequent yielding to passion and unrest, and even irritation at it. The love of Tristram and Iseult of Ireland, which ever vainly sought peace and happiness, and which inevitably injured those who came under its sway, he sets beside the patient submission, if not happiness, and the calm self-control of Iseult of Brittany with its healing, comforting influence. Clearly, the author's sympathy is with the latter. In it he sees an ideal, a solution for the world's spirit of disquietude.

Modern as the treatment is, Arnold's sense of balance and unity impelled him to retain the mediaeval atmosphere of his source. The ancient castle, the dying knight with the "dark green forest-dress" spread across his feet and the gold harp leaning against his bed, the "blown rushes on the floor," and the rich furs brought to shore by Venetian ships, together with occasional use of words of mediaeval charm, such as "wight," "fellfare," and "surge-beat," are all richly suggestive of legendary times. Except for these, the poet's own interests precluded a greater embodiment of the past.

Part III contains two passages directly expressive of Arnold's thinking. In the stanza beginning

Dear saints, it is not sorrow, as I hear,
Not suffering, which shuts up eye and ear
To all that had delighted them before,
And lets us be what we were once no more.
No, we may suffer deeply, yet retain
Power to be moved and soothed, for all our pain,
(1)
he voices his doctrine of self-mastery, the supremacy of
the mind over the things that would distract and wreck it.
In terms of strong disapproval he pictures how

".....some tyrannous single thought--
Call it ambition, or remorse, or love"

(2)
can utterly subdue one's soul unless the power of will is
exercised against it. Then follows the often quoted
passage, expressive of Arnold's wrath against the glamour
of romance which was so habitually glorified, yet in which
he saw so much of superficiality and hypocrisy:

And yet, I swear, it angers me to see
How this fool passion gulls men potently;
Being, in truth, but a diseased unrest,
And an unnatural overheat at best.
How they are full of languor and distress
Not having it; which when they do possess,
They straightway are burnt up with fume and care,
And spend their lives in posting here and there
Where this plague drives them; and have little ease,
Are furious with themselves, and hard to please.
(3)

As a narrative poem, Tristram and Iseult is not a
marked success. The poet's tendency to reflect, to criticize,
and to picture hinders the onward sweep of events. His
dramatic art is scarcely better illustrated, although Part II
with its final meeting of the lovers shows some intensity
of feeling and has many breathless lines in which the reader
forgets all but the dying knight and the love-stricken

(2) Poetical Works of Matthew Arnold, pl 162.
(3) Ibid., p. 162.
queen kneeling at his side. But it is in the lyrical passages that the poetic quality of the poem reaches its height; and these are scattered richly throughout the whole. Perhaps, however, it is this very combination of types that gives to the lyrics much of their effectiveness and charm.

In description, particularly, Arnold's discriminating sense of poetic values is evident. The lovely picture of the children asleep "in sheltered rest" is one of the most frequently quoted in the poem.

Full on their window the moon's ray
Makes their chamber as bright as day.
It shines upon the blank white walls,
And on the snowy pillow falls,
And on two angel-heads doth play
Turn'd to each other—the eyes closed,
The lashes on the cheeks reposed.
Round each sweet brow the cap close-set
Hardly lets peep the golden hair;
Through the soft-open'd lips the air
Scarce makes the curtain move.
One little wandering arm is thrown
At random on the counterpane,
And often the fingers close in haste
As if their baby-form chased.
The butterflies again.
This stir they have, and this alone;
But else they are so still!

With simple words, a wise selection of details, and a delicacy of touch the scene is sketched in. The lines following, which describe the children's playground at night caught in the moon's light and shadows, are marked by the same definiteness of outline, to which is added the magic of fairyland. The entire third part abounds in vivid word pictures of the quiet indoor scenes, the equally quiet

(1) Poetical Works of Matthew Arnold, pp. 149-50
winter scenes on Iseult's native Breton heaths, and the fairy-haunted glades of Merlin's land. Whatever the place, Arnold chooses his words with masterly skill. It is this precision in finding and handling words that gives the lyrics of the poem their peculiar power. At times only a phrase is used, but it is highly suggestive of emotion, as when the dying Tristram looks up at Queen Iseult just arrived from her hurried sea voyage with

Yes, the spray is on thy cloak and hair.

It is scarcely the words here, but the rare combination in a particular setting that indicates outline, movement, and even tone of voice.

Moreover, Arnold gains the desired poetical effects through the use of compactness in expression, rhetorical imagery, and contrasts. In the lines (already quoted) announcing the arrival of the first Iseult, there are only four details—voices, night air, lights, and footsteps; yet what a wealth of suggestion—breathless waiting, rapidity of movement, color effects, and echoing sounds! The rhetorical imagery is unobtrusive, and not over-abundant but effective, as is also Arnold's temperate use of contrasts. The latter is illustrated in the wildness of the night on which Tristram dies as it is set over against the peace and quiet of the one he recalls in his fevered ravings.

Perhaps the least successful element in the poem is its melody. It is not that one finds jarring or discordant passages, but that the music of the verse lacks
distinction. The best part, metrically, seems to be the third, for here is found a regularity of rhythm and rhyme, not monotonous, but quiet and self-controlled, singularly in keeping with the mood of the section.

On the poetic values of Tristram and Iseult critics disagree. Bickley says it is the best thing in the 1852 collection of Arnold's poems, (1) and Parrott calls it a failure. (2) Whatever the verdict may be, in purpose it is in harmony with the author's own standard for poetical excellence. Sherman quotes him as saying that the true end of all poetry is to strengthen and uphold the heart with high inspirations and consolations. (3) Under Arnold's treatment the poem meets that requirement. Some have said that there is too much analysis of life, that it is too self-centered. It is true that it has these qualities and that they detract from the high emotional level of the poem; but they add an element of strength also in the appeal thereby made to the intellect. Arnold stimulates thought. One either actively accepts what he gives or challenges its truth or wisdom. As in the case of Iseult of Brittany, one may resent the fate that is hers, but there is always the question whether it is reasonable or probable that one should react as she did and whether she met her fate in the most satisfactory way.

Thus Arnold's Tristram and Iseult is primarily a "criticism of life." The interpretation and handling are typically his own. The conception of the poem is of

(1) Bickley, Frances, Matthew Arnold and His Poetry, p. 80.
(2) Parrott, Thomas, Studies of a Booklover, p. 18.
(3) Sherman, Stuart P., Matthew Arnold: How to Know Him, p. 92.
his own soul, its development in harmony with the high moral sense with which he observed heroic minds meeting life's situations. His intense subjectivity prevented him from giving the story the impassioned treatment of its origin; but the poise and balance with which he presented it carries his message of courage to the reader.
The next poet to deal with the Tristram legend was Tennyson, who like Arnold had in mind his readers to whom he wished to convey a message of hope or solace. Both were direct voices of their age; the one of that group of people who were strongly moved by the period of unrest and transition in which they lived and who sought earnestly, though sometimes vainly, for a solution of the consequent problems of the age; the other of that larger group who so longed for quiet and surcease from the turmoil of conflict in thought and emotion that they gladly accepted the comfort that came from compromise -- unconscious though that compromise often doubtless was -- and from broad statement of ideals to which they honestly, but perhaps with some vagueness, desired to attain. To the first group Arnold spoke; to the second, Tennyson. To understand why Tennyson's audience was larger, one has only to realize the conditions of the time and the natural desire of man for a peaceful, orderly existence uninterrupted by that which astounds and forces him into strife from which he can see no satisfactory outcome.

Both men saw in the Tristram tale valuable material for presenting one of the social problems of human existence. But whereas Arnold made the legend the main basis for his Tristram and Iseult, Tennyson used it only as subordinate and
illustrative material in the Arthurian romance upon which he built his *Idylls of the King*. He saw fit, also, to change the essential spirit of the tale. These facts account for the dazed feeling the reader has when he lays down the *Idylls* and tries to reconcile the Tristram found there with the Tristram of the old legend or the one of Arnold or Swinburne. It is evident, however, in the light of Tennyson's general theme and plan that if he was to use the tale at all he had to make the changes that he did make.

In order to make clear Tennyson's treatment it is necessary to suggest briefly the poet's temper of mind and his outlook upon his age and how he desired to give expression to a principle of living in a poem of epic proportions. Moreover, an understanding will involve a limited discussion of the theme and structure of the entire *Idylls* of which the Tristram tale is only a very small part.

Although Tennyson was actively aware of the great social unrest prevalent during his age, he was comparatively untouched by it. To a marked degree his life was that of a serene, composed observer of the problems of humanity. True, he saw much which puzzled him, much of which he disapproved, and much which he thought should be changed; but what protest he made, what solutions he offered, what lessons of life he taught were through the quiet, persuasive power of his poetry. He had a high conception of his calling as poet, and it was this that led him to formulate principles of living which he expressed in his poetry. While Tennyson, by nature, lacked the ability to grapple with moral problems, he did have an in-
stinctive moral sense, and this he projected into his poetical themes. He felt the conflict between the flesh and the spirit in man, the age-long struggle of the lowest in his nature against the highest; and as definitely as Tennyson feared the one he wanted to cleave to the other. Instead, however, of conquering the former, he thought best to ignore it. This evasion produced a certain unreality and vagueness in his works. The Idylls of the King, in particular, falls short of the vigor and truth which would have made the poet's teaching far more effective for succeeding generations than it has proved to be.

So conscious was Tennyson of his public's sentiment and so fearful of that public's criticism that in the poem under discussion he tried to deal with a social problem and make it true to his own ideals and at the same time sufficiently in accord with prevalent opinion to render the poem and its message acceptable without protest. Tennyson saw in the King Arthur stories, with which he had been familiar from his youth, an illustration of the idea he had in mind of sin and its deteriorating effect upon civilization. It is an interesting fact to note, however, that this theme, which is the basis of the Idylls as a whole, was not fully manifest to the poet till he had been experimenting with the material for almost a quarter of a century; and even then it came to him with growing clearness, and in its full power only in the final number of the series in 1885.

For source material Tennyson holds more strictly to one version, Malory's Morte d'Arthur, than do many of the
poets under consideration. He may have been influenced slightly by some other accounts, chiefly those of the chron- iclers, who make of Arthur a great English hero. Though his sources are more limited, he is freer in the use of incidents, character, and even the spirit of the legend than are the other poets -- unless it be Masefield, who, nevertheless, is truer to the essential spirit of the old tale than Tennyson. It is in the treatment of the Tristram story in the Arthurian cycle that the changes are most evident. Here he replaces the passionate power of a great and consuming love with the light, almost flippant, emotion of a transitory affection. He uses only the shell of the story; the kernel is lost. How and why Tennyson does this will be suggested later. He also does not hesitate to invent incidents and traits of character according to his purpose, or to transfer those connected with one person to another.

The Idylls of the King in its final form consists of two background narratives, "The Coming of Arthur" and "The Passing of Arthur," and ten episodic idylls, with an introductory dedication to the memory of Prince Albert and a closing address to the reigning queen. In the last Tennyson suggests the allegorical theme when he says,

"... accept this old imperfect tale, New-old, and shadowing Sense at war with Soul, Ideal manhood closed in real man," (1)

real man, that is to say, rather than the Arthur of mythical or legendary lore. Although Tennyson had been experimenting with Arthurian material since 1832, he did not publish any of the idylls as a series until 1859, when four appeared. From

(1) Tennyson's Poetical Works, p.575.
then on till 1885 the others were added at irregular intervals. "The Last Tournament," which contains the Tristram legend, was published in 1872. In "The Coming of Arthur" the background for the entire group is sketched in and the general purport made clear. To what extent the poet intended the allegory to be carried need not be discussed here; it is evident he wished both to tell an epical story and to present a lesson. The high ideals of Arthur, representing man, are thwarted in regard to their effect upon society by the guilty love of Lancelot and Queen Guinevere. The ten idylls, relating separate episodes, reveal how the influence of the sin of the two highest in the realm next to the king, wrought degradation and the final disruption of the Round Table and caused the failure of Arthur's ideals in his effort to lift his knights to the plane he aspired to for them. From the time when the first rumor of sin with its blighting power is felt in the two idylls, telling of Geraint and Enid to the last of the ten, "Guinevere," when the fatal consequences of wrong-doing are most grievously effected, the poem moves with more or less regularity. The symbolical use of the seasons strengthens the unity of the idylls. "The Coming of Arthur" is at the New Year, and "The Passing of Arthur," which centers about the "last weird battle of the West," takes place on the shortest day of the year; between these dates, as the season advances, the destructive force of sin gathers momentum.

"The Last Tournament," with which this paper is primarily concerned, continues the account of the decline of the spirit of chivalry among the knights. The action takes place
in the autumn of the year, which Tennyson uses as suggestive of the moral decadence everywhere apparent. The "yellowing woods," the"faded fields," the"wet wind," and the "autumn thunder, thunder," and the "death-dumb autumn-dripping gloom" create and maintain an atmosphere in keeping both with the allegorical meaning of this idyll and with incidents of its narrative. As is often characteristic of Tennyson's storytelling method, he begins with a conversation, in this case one between Tristram and Dagonet, the fool of Arthur's court, on the morning after a tournament at which the former was victor; he then goes back to recount incidents leading up to the scene. He tells of Arthur's finding a ruby necklace that becomes the prize in a Tournament of the Dead Innocence -- so named as a memorial for the foundling babe who had been cared for by the queen.

"Perchance - who knows? - the purest of thy knights May win them for the purest of my maids," (1) says Guinevere to Arthur. The jousts are announced and Lancelot is left to act as arbiter while Arthur rides into the north country to subdue a rebel knight. In the course of the tournament its name assumes an ironical importance unintended by the queen who suggested it, for the knights disobey rules and lose their sense of knightly honor; innocence, indeed, is dead and love has acquired a coarseness diametrically opposed to the vows to which the Round Table was pledged.

Tristram wins the prize, and as Lancelot gives the gems to him Lancelot merely says with bitter cynicism,

(1) Tennyson's Poetical Works, p. 541.
"Hast thou won? Art thou the purest, brother? See the hand Wherewith thou takest this is red!" (1)

This in a measure prepares the reader for the new character of the Tristram of the _Idylls_. Outwardly he is the same, but the light, tossing manner of speech, the shallow words, the flippant regard for love, the lack of courtesy, a quality innate in the hero of the older legends, reveal the great change that is here made in him. An illustration of the superficiality of his thought and manner is seen in his suggestion to Lancelot that he cease his suffering struggle between loyalty to his king and to his love, for, he says,

"Be happy in thy fair queen as I in mine."

Then with complete disregard of courtesy he caracoles around the gallery, announcing that his Queen of Beauty is not here. The gay crowd disperses in a "thick rain" and some one cries out shrilly with ironical intent,

"Praise the patient saints, Our one white day of Innocence has past, Tho' somewhat draggled at the skirt." (2)

At this point the Tristram story is brought back to the introductory scene, and the conversation of Tristram and Dagonet is continued. In it the little jester rebukes the hero of the tournament for the "broken music" which he is making with his bride in Brittany when he "harps the air" he does with Queen Isolt. Tristram remonstrates by voicing his doctrine of free love, the theme of which is

Free love - free field - we love but while we may.

(1) _Tennyson's Poetical Works_, p. 543.
(2) _Ibid._, p. 544.
Thus far the Tristram tale seems to have a definite part, though a very subordinate one, in the poet's development of King Arthur material. He does not, however, stop here but continues with a love episode between Tristram and Isolt, which adds almost nothing to the force or artistic effect of the main theme -- does no more, indeed, than to offer another instance of illicit love, and a more degenerate one than that of Lancelot and Guinevere. In the preparation for this scene mention is made of the lodge at which Tristram and Isolt had spent a month together; her return to her husband, Mark; Tristram's musing as to how to allay his queen's anger over his marriage to Isolt of Brittany, if indeed she has heard of it; the incidents which led to the marriage -- all a part of the older stories.

This final section is introduced by the lovely picture of Isolt of Ireland with the low sea-sunset casting its radiance upon her hair. The firm step of her lover thrills her as the stealthy, catlike footfalls of her husband cannot. In this and other hints by her is suggested the degraded Mark of Malory's version. The whole scene, consisting almost entirely of conversation, indicates the trifling value placed on love. There is nothing of the sublime passion of the Arnold or Swinburne versions. It is only a cheap and transitory imitation of the more chivalrous affection of Lancelot and his queen, and all the more degraded because of its transitoriness. When Isolt complains to Tristram of his faithlessness to her, he defends his theory of free love by illustrations of the wild birds as observed in his life as a hunter.
The closing incident, which ends with the death of Tristram, is realized through a few well chosen narrative details. Events follow each other swiftly — the banquet, the mocking references to Mark, the singing of the song with its scorning of the high ideals of the king, the answering of questions concerning the rubies. A shadow then rises behind Tristram, a taunting remark is shrieked out, and Mark's sword strikes Tristram dead. The scene ends here; what follows between Mark and Isolt is left to the imagination. Thus does Tennyson use the story of Tristram and Isolt in the last part of the idyll only as a further example of the moral deterioration of the court.

In his treatment of the legend it is easily seen, therefore, that Tennyson makes wide departures from his source material. He does not use the love potion. The reason is clear; for if he had introduced it Tristram and Isolt would have been blameless and hence useless for his plan. Its introduction would have brought up the question of fate and created pity for these two who, according to his interpretation, deliberately chose evil, influenced, of course, by the general downward trend of court ideals. The poet has, moreover, transferred some of the incidents of Tristram's experience in the older stories to Lancelot; for example, Lancelot, instead of Merlin, as in Malory, carries Arthur's offer of marriage to Guinevere and on the acceptance of the offer by her father brings her back to the court at Camelot. This in itself enlists one's sympathy for the two chief persons involved. But with Tristram and Isolt there is no subtle working of fate or magic, no
natural or spontaneous development of a deep seated and sincere passion which one can ascribe as a reason for their affection. Tennyson makes their love ignoble while he sublimes that of Lancelot and Guinevere. He shows each of the latter battling to maintain a loyalty -- the one to his king, the other to her husband -- that would do violence to their own love for each other. Both loyalties are ennobling; yet each strikes at the sacredness of the other. This ethically tragic situation arouses in the reader the same generous sympathy for these lovers that in older versions of the tale has been aroused for Tristram and Isolt. Such a situation belongs inately to both the Lancelot and Tristram stories; but sincere love is the very essence of the latter, and to destroy this is to do violence to one of the world's great stories, a violence made all the more objectionable by virtue of contrast in the combination of the two legends. Tennyson doubtless used the material in the only way that he could, but the question remains whether in the light of his theme and plan he should have included it at all.

Tennyson makes for his purpose as free adaptations of people as he does of events. He has a tendency, due perhaps to his allegorical purpose, to make characters illustrate certain traits or make them the embodiment of certain experiences only. Thus it is that Tristram appears as the personification of free love. But even in this role there is still much of the element of reality thrown about him, and in part his first appearance at the tournament is reminiscent of his old personality. The story relates how Lancelot as umpire
The voice that billow'd round the barriers roar
An ocean-sounding welcome to one knight,
But newly-enter'd, taller than the rest,
And armor'd all in forest green, whereon
There tript a hundred tiny silver deer,
And wearing but a holly-spray for crest,
With ever-scattering berries, and on shield
A spear, a harp, a bugle -- Tristra, -- late
From over-seas in Brittany return'd,
And marriage with a princess of that realm,
Isolt the White -- Sir Tristram of the Woods -- (1)

Here is the popular hero of old. The armorial decorations reveal the playful, exuberant temperament which one invariably associates with Tristram; the spear, harp, and bugle engraved on his shield are suggestive of him in his three-fold character of knight, harper, hunter.

In other respects the Tristram here is of the poet's invention. His lack of courtesy, his jesting, superficial talk of the sacredness of his vows, his light songs, his scorn of Mark associated with no pity or understanding, and even his sensual love have all been referred to in the discussion of the general treatment as revealing a new and strange person. The greatest change, of course, is in his love. Tennyson gives it no nobleness, no faithfulness, no intensity. There is nothing spiritual in it that lifts it into the imaginative world. He hints to Isolt that his love will be loyal only so long as her youth and beauty last. He becomes detestable in his claims for free love and in the nonchalance with which he defends it on the ground that the wild animals of the forest mate after that fashion. Despicable he is and totally unlike the old Tristram when he lightly ignores Isolt's request for the same freedom in love that he claims, and turns the con-
versation to his gift of the rubies which he places about her neck, at the same time asking for food and drink. With his wife's love for him he dallies even more, unable to decide whether he desires her love or is indifferent to her hate.

The portrait of Queen Isolt is drawn with less vividness, but she manifests more warmth of affection than does Tristram. Her own account of her loneliness at Tintagel, her yearnings for her lover, her jealousy of her rival, of whom she learned when Mark hissed the information at her, her desire for flattery, her sadness that gleams through her haughtiness reveal her as one who has tasted the bitter fruits of life and would turn from them if she knew where to turn. In her there is something of hopeless resignation to fate as she sets before Tristram the food he asks for in the scene just alluded to. The splendor and radiance of the Irish princess of the old legend is nowhere to be felt in this version. The other Isolt is scarcely more than mentioned here. The little Dagonet refers to her as the queen's "daintier namesake" with whom Tristram is making "broken music." Tristram himself lightly dismisses her as

"Patient, and prayerful, meek,  
Pale-blooded, she will yield herself to God." (1)

Allusion has already been made to the character of Mark. He is utterly lacking in the nobility and meekness that characterize him in the older legends. But this interpretation is necessary for Tennyson's plan and is also in keeping with his source, Malory's version.

(1) Tennyson's Poetical Works, p. 550.
The literary style of "The Last Tournament," and of the entire *Idyll* as well, is but typical of much of Tennyson's poetry. Blank verse is used as the form best suited to the serious nature of the poem. Variety is secured in the frequent substitutions of other feet for the iambus, in the use of unaccented end syllables, in variation in the caesura, and in the frequent use of run-on lines. Alliteration and figures of speech add to the beauty and polish of the lines. The two light and graceful songs by Tristram contrast pleasingly with the more stately blank verse of the narrative portion. Tennyson is particularly facile as a pictorial poet, and his skill is evident here. He has a fine sense of the dramatic effects of nature, as is seen in the ever present autumnal atmosphere pervading the account of the dying out of the high ideals of the courtly group. He recognizes too the romantic value of nature to the end of creating a suitable background, and arouse and stimulate the emotions. The description of the forest bower where Tristram and Isolt had spent some time together is a gem of compressed, vivid pictorial effects,

A lodge of intertwined beechen-boughs Furze-crammed, and bracken-roofit. (1)

"The Last Tournament" is less successful in the matter of proportion than some of the other *Idylls*. The second part, which relates Tristram's visit to Isolt and his death at the hand of Mark, has so little to do with the thought of this idyll in its relation to the main theme that it is hardly justified from the point of view of construction. But the

(1) Tennyson's Poetical Works, p. 546.
weaving out of a mass of chaotic material a harmonious work so completely unified about one central theme as is the Idylls, docs indicate Tennyson's discriminating and selective powers. With the material thus chosen he succeeds in telling a story well. His method is narrative to a greater degree than is that of most of the poets with whom this paper is concerned. He carries the action onward with considerable swiftness so that interest in events seldom flags. The movement is usually light and poised and the music even and melodious. Tennyson is careful also to preserve a fitting air of mediaevalism in the customs, scenery, and characters, in spite of the fact that he gives the reader a feeling that in this pretendâdly old story of days of chivalry what we really have is nineteenth century men and women dealing with a nineteenth century problem.

This insinuating of a modern theme into legendary material in the manner in which Tennyson has done it is typical of the poet's reaction to his own age. He felt the social strife and turmoil of the times, but he dared not enter it unqualifiedly and he dared not ignore it. Therefore he compromised. The Idylls of the King presents a marked illustration of this compromise and in a peculiar way shows both the subjective and objective qualities of the author's treatment. The conception of the moral problem, the struggle of the flesh and the spirit is a reflection of Tennyson's own thought. He recognized the strife that arises from passion, but he could not see that that passion should have any rightful claims in man's nature. Hence the strife must all be bad. Tennyson, as a result, so over-emphasizes the spiritual side of man that his
characters lose reality and to that extent his poem lacks balance and force. His deep reverence for the conventional, the orderly, the law-abiding, made him feel that what had been right must still be so. He was instinctively repelled by the coarse and vulgar and inspired by the refined and spiritual. But he could not see that man's spiritual nature might be vitalized by a recognition of the claims of passion and the proper control of that passion. He, therefore, in his use of the Tristram material reveals in a very large sense his own attitude toward his age and its problems.

The fact that Tennyson was the spokesman of so many of his contemporaries accounts for the almost universal words of praise for the Idylls by nineteenth century critics. This commendation is in strong contrast to the reaction against the poet and his Victorianism in the twentieth century. Each group of critics is too ardent to be altogether authoritative. The two groups do, however, present an interesting case of the swinging of the pendulum of time over a literary reputation. The Tristram story, being so subordinate a part of the whole poem, has received a negligible amount of comment, either favorable or unfavorable. Yet whatever the verdict on the Idylls as a whole, the critics agree in condemning Tennyson's mangling of the Tristram legend. The changing or adapting of incidents in an old story and the giving of new character interpretations in the light of a new age are not to be objected to, for such changes are in harmony with the law of growth to which all mythical and legendary literature is subjected. Indeed, growth is a vital feature of such litera-
ture. But for an author to destroy the genuine identity of a legend in order to make it illustrate some theme of his own is to appropriate for a personal interest that which belongs to all time and to all people. This cannot be accepted complacently.
CHAPTER FOUR

Tristram of Lyonesse

by

Algernon Charles Swinburne

As an implied protest against the Victorian conventions which Tennyson accepted stands Swinburne's Tristram of Lyonesse. Mr. MacCallum has even suggested that Swinburne may have been stimulated to write his poem by a feeling that the legend had suffered in Tennyson's "The Last Tournament," on account of the changes he introduced to make it serve his general plan of teaching a moral lesson in the Idylls. (1) Besides, Tennyson had left almost a clear field, for his modification and subordination of the tale had so stripped it of its vital beauty that little of its independence was left; and Arnold thirty years before had made use of scarcely more than the closing scenes of the hero's life. Hence the legend as a whole had been almost untouched in the nineteenth century.

Moreover, the tale was a congenial one to Swinburne and admirably adapted to his interests, temperament, and methods. The subject had evidently been in this thought since his boyhood, for he speaks of Tristrarm as having been a "close and common" friend at Eton. In 1858, while he was

(1) MacCallum, M. W., Tennyson's Idylls of the King and Arthurian Story from the XVIth Century, p. 279.
a student at Oxford, and doubtless influenced somewhat by Morris, Burne-Jones, and Rossetti, who were there decorating the Oxford Union, he published his "Queen Yseult." It appeared in a student magazine called Undergraduate Papers, as the first canto of a proposed long poem of ten cantos, only six of which were ever written and but one ever published by Swinburne. (1) Morris is said to have praised the work highly; but the poet himself was much less certain of its excellence, fearing in 1857 that it was "too imperfect to appear for a year or two," and speaking of it years afterward when somewhat resentful of the pre-Raphaelite influence, as "some awful doggerel on the subject of Tristram" and as "literally a boy's work—legally an infant's." (2) A later effort to deal with the subject is found in the poem, Joyeuse Garde, which, according to Mr. Welby, possesses more individuality than does "Queen Yseult." (3) This poem was not published during the poet's lifetime, if at all.

Although the legend of Tristram was often meditated upon by Swinburne as a subject worthy of more mature handling, he did not seriously consider it until about 1868, when interest in his published works was flagging. (4) He desired, says Mr. Gosse, "to ensphere all that was most

(1) The six cantos were privately printed in 1918 with an introduction by Sir Edmund Gosse. Nicolson, Harold, Swinburne, p. 50.
(2) Ibid., p. 49.
(3) Welby T. Barle, A Study of Swinburne, p. 64.
(4) When Swinburne was under the influence of the pre-Raphaelites, Rossetti, Morris, and Burne-Jones had often discussed Tristram and Iseult and had tacitly admitted it as matter adapted to extended treatment by Swinburne. Gosse, Edmund, The Life of Algernon Charles Swinburne, p. 261.
glowing in his own imagination in one rounded epic poem."
It was only natural, then, that he should have turned to
the Tristram legend with its passionate tale of love and
fate, for Swinburne's greatest gift was the ability to feel
and express passion, and two of his lifelong interests were
man's loves and hates. Moreover, the primitive, elemental
qualities of the tale had a strong attraction for him,
both for their own sake and because, handled with the bold-
ness and naturalness of their time, they presented a protest
against what Swinburne considered the empty convictions of
the age, against which his spirit often burned in revolt.
He finally determined on his subject and toward the end of
December, 1869, he wrote the prelude of two hundred and
fifty lines at almost a single sitting. (1) This was soon
published in a holiday-book called Pleasure. Swinburne then
turned to the writing of Bothwell, although during the years
that followed before he again took up the composition of
Tristram and Lyonesse, he now and then engaged in writing
what he called "parcels of Tristram." In 1881, however,
he resolutely began work again on his poem and finished it
in the following April. It was published in July of 1882
in a thick volume entitled Tristram of Lyonesse and Other
Poems.

For sources Swinburne goes to the three main
versions, Béroul, Thomas, and Malory, with all of which he
seems to have been intimately familiar. He uses freely from

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(1) The authority for this date rather than the one
usually given, 1871, is a letter from Swinburne to D. G.
Rossetti, dated December 22, 1869. Welby, T. Earle, A Study
of Swinburne, p. 172.
first one and then another as he needs events or atmosphere to present the theme as he sees it. Occasionally, too, he uses an incident from one version but puts in it characters from another. This is true in the case of Palamède's coming disguised as a harper, who by his beautiful singing, wins Iseult from Mark, and thus provides Tristram with a chance to rescue her. (1) In the Thomas poem the incident is associated with an Irish harper, and in the Malory story Palamede is a Saracen and former lover of Iseult, who has often fought in her behalf, but is not a harper. Such innovations, however, are always of minor importance and only for the purpose of re-enforcing the great love of Tristram and Iseult; they never violate the spirit of the tradition. Swinburne felt that legendary lore was sacred and should not be tampered with. This, doubtless, accounts for the fact that he uses more of the old material, either directly or by allusion, than does any other poet considered in this paper. Where the three versions differ, he chooses incidents largely from Béroul and Malory, but recreates the mood of Thomas's poem which more nearly preserves the essentially Celtic spirit of the tale—a spirit altogether in keeping with Swinburne's own impulsive, intense temperament. The poet's interest, however, is never in events themselves, but in the passion back of them and in the relation of that to fate. He loves to play upon emotional experiences, and in his case these experiences are highly subjective.

(1) Cf. Mr. Carr's play.
Perhaps to no other treatment of the Tristram legend, therefore, does one need to come with more reverence for the poet's own interpretation, whatever that may be, and with a greater willingness to enter into that poet's vision of the story than he does to the Tristram of Lyonesse of Swinburne. One needs to realize Swinburne's conception of the affection of Tristram and Iseult as an incarnation of romantic love, which had always had a peculiar fascination for his burning, highly imaginative nature. To him their love was a complete and altogether natural expression of their being and the fulfillment of their fate. In his treatment, consequently, he makes this consuming, elemental passion his theme. He enters upon his task with all the sympathy and ardor of which his enthusiastic being is capable. One needs to feel, too, something of the music and buoyancy with which the poet's thought is swept along and to share with him the adoration of the sun and the passionate love of the sea. Doing this, one is not surprised, then, to find, in spite of the narrative sources and plan of the poem, what MacCallum calls an "emotional symphony in verse."

The poem begins with a prelude which is an elaborate and splendid rhapsody of

Love, that is first and last of all things made,
The light that has the living world for shade,
The spirit that for temporal veil has on
The souls of all men woven in unison,
One fiery raiment with all lives inwrought
And lights of sunny and starry deed and thought,
And alway through new act and passion new
Shines the divine same body and beauty through,
The body spiritual of fire and light
That is to worldly noon as noon to night.

Love is eulogized—with its universality, its exultant joy in spite of "things alternative," its timeless, changeless qualities, its unifying, harmonizing effect, as Love, that keeps all the choir of lives in chime, (2) chime, (2) and its triumphant power,

So strong that heaven, could love bid heaven farewell,
Would turn to fruitless and unflowering hell;
So sweet that hell, to hell could love be given,
Would turn to splendid and sonorous heaven. (3)

Then with delicate fancy the poet identifies with the months of the year twelve famous heroines of the world's great love stories—among them, Helen, Hero, Iseult, Cleopatra, Francesca, Guenevere—as signs by which "love severs light from darkness." Thus Swinburne announces his theme and creates the atmosphere through which his lyrical narrative is to move.

Because of this plan he does not give a swift straightforward recital of events, but rather he omits all the early episodes of the legend, alluding only to such of them as he needs, and chooses from later parts of the story significant scenes of the tale which he incorporates into the nine sections of his poem, giving to each scene a separate and a more or less individual treatment. Each part or scene has its own emotional motif, its own melody.

(1) Swinburne, A. C., Tristram of Lyonesse, p. 5.
(2) Ibid.
(3) Ibid., p. 6.
and accompaniment in keeping with its mood—all in harmony with the feeling and spirit of the poem as a whole. Into each changing scene Swinburne enters with as complete abandon as if that were the sole material for his poem.

Part I, "The Sailing of the Swallow," opens with an account of Tristram’s return to the court of King Mark with the Irish princess whom he had been sent to win as the king’s bride. The freshness of the morning, the beauty of the sea, and the happiness of the two voyagers are in keeping with the awakening of love which is the motif of this scene. Isseult sits on the deck at dawn, her countenance "more fair than sunrise," and on her face "a silent light as of a God content." Beside her is the knight and harper, Tristram, "a light to look on and be loved," and one already counted "second symbol of the world for fame." Swinburne gives to the treatment of these two a lightness and naïveté in keeping with the simple delicate sentiment now felt toward each other—a marked contrast to the passionate love they are soon to experience.

As a background for the calm and unaroused emotions in this section he describes nature in its fresh and buoyant aspects more fully and with greater ornamentation and color than he does in any other section of the poem. For example, he pictures the sea at dawn:

The quick sea shone
And shivered like spread wings of angels blown
By the sun’s breath before him; and a low
Sweet gale shook all the foam-flowers of thin snow
As into rainfall of sea-roses shed
Leaf by wild leaf on that green garden-bed
Which tempests till and sea-winds turn and plough;
For rosy and fiery round the running prow
Fluttered the flakes and feathers of the spray,
And bloomed like blossoms cast by God away
To waste on the ardent water.  

(1)

In this setting the conversation of Tristram and Iseult about Arthur's court is carried on simply and artlessly. Sometimes it is as romantically realistic as the following concerning Morgause:

Ah," said Iseult "is she more tall than I
Look, I am tall;" and struck the mast hard by,
With utmost upward reach of her bright hand;
"And look, fair lord, now, when I rise and stand,
How high with feet uplifted I can touch
Standing straight up; could this queen do thus much?
Nay, over tall she must be then, like me."  

(2)

But at other times it touches questions of greater import to Tristram and Iseult than they are aware of, as in the story of Arthur and Morgause. This calls forth Tristram's remark concerning the prophecy of the retribution that should be heaped upon Arthur for his sin,

So shall God not suffer scorn,
Nor in men's souls and lives his law lie dead,

(3)

and Iseult's answering comment, which suggests a precedent for looking upon the love of Tristram and Iseult as blameless because then sinned unknowingly. At least the reader's thought is challenged, and preparation is thus made for enlisting his sympathy for the lovers after the drinking of the love potion with its all-consuming power.

(2) Ibid., p. 21.
(3) Ibid., p. 25.
However, since Swinburne stresses the forces of love and fate in the tale he dares not attribute too much to the philtre. He thus adroitly leads to the unconscious dawning of affection between the two from the early part of the story to Iseult's meditation after Tristram's song of love and light, when she wonders if love should come to her, whether she would be able to know and recognize it. Moreover, as a subtle, overcasting influence, Swinburne makes the reader feel the sublime seriousness of his theme when he says,

Yet was not love between them, for their fate Lay wrapt in its appointed hour at wait. (1)

Thus skillfully does the poet come to the account of the drinking of the love potion and the dramatic suggestion of its fatal consequences for the lovers, whose "life changed in them, for they quaffed Death."

The second part, "The Queen's Pleasance," presents an idyllic picture of the life of the lovers in the forest. The narrative is hurried over briefly—the marriage of Iseult and Mark, their life at the court, the secret visit of the knight Palamede, his singing for Mark who offered him any gift he should ask, the request for the queen, her rescue by Tristram, and the escape of the lovers into the forest. The three months they spend there is described with something of the beauty and abandon with which Gottfried portrays the life in the love-grotto. The "soft live gleams" that penetrate the dark, the "fleet butterflies—

(1) Swinburne, A. C., Tristram of Lyonesse, p. 17.
white, blue, and sere leaf-colored," and the thrill of 
the "soft sea" form a peaceful, harmonious setting for 
the happiness of Tristram and Iseult in these days of 
their stolen joy. This section ends with a lovely 
description of dawn, and Tristram's saying to the waking 
Iseult,

As the dawn loves the sunlight I love thee. 
These words are the motif for the action and the lyrical 
rhapsodies. Both lovers give themselves up to this emotion, 
which is symbolized in the closing line,

And all the sea lay subject to the sun. 
Here, as in much of Swinburne's work, he uses the sun as 
the symbol of the sun-god to whom the natures of the lovers 
are in complete submission.

Portrayal of Tristram under the influence of the 
love potion is the central theme of Part III, "Tristram 
in Brittany." Three years elapse between the parts, and 
no explanation is made here of how the life in the forest 
is terminated, nor why Tristram is now a banished man 
wandering on the shores of Brittany. Almost half of this 
scene is devoted to his soliloquy on love and fate. He 
recalls his remark to Iseult,

As the dawn loves the sunlight I love thee, 
and with this begins his reflections. He bewails the power 
of forbidden love to slay those who are caught in its 
grasp; yet he realizes that its action is governed by laws 
in harmony with the laws of the universe. Then comes a 
hope that
Out of this moonless and faint-hearted night
That love yet lives in,

there shall be light, and with a wild cry he prays for the
fulfillment of his love even though it means death. But
as he communes with himself,

His great heart being greater than his grief,
he endeavors to rise above his own passion—to view it
composedly. As he meditates, he feels that even prayer
in behalf of his love would be foolish, for he says:

How should fate,
That is not good nor evil, wise nor mad,
Nor just nor unjust, neither glad nor sad—

How should it turn from its great way to give
Man that must die a clearer space to live?

How should the storms of heaven and kindled lights
And all the depths of things and topless heights
And air and earth and fire and water change
Their likeness, and the natural world grow strange,

That man might have a larger hour for love?

(2)

But Tristram is not bowed down by fate, nor even
ready to meditate long on its grasp upon him. In
characteristic fashion, Swinburne brings him to the con-
soling, reviving power of nature.

Yet as he went fresh courage on him came,
Till dawn rose too within him as a flame;
The heart of the ancient hills and his were one;
The winds took counsel with him, and the sun
Spoke comfort; in his ears the shout of birds
Was as the sound of clear sweet-spirited words,
The noise of streams as laughter from above
Of the old wild lands, and as a cry of love
Spring's trumpet blast blown over moor and lea.

(3) Swinburne, A. C., Tristram of Lyonesse, p. 55.
(2) Ibid., pp. 59-60.
(3) Ibid., pp. 60-61.
Then as a writer describing his favorite hero, the poet continues in highly suggestive images the lyric characterization of Tristram. Surely "the spring loved him," he says,

A spirit as morning, fair and clear and strong,
Whose thought and work were as one harp and song
Heard through the world as in a strange king's hall
Some great guest's voice that sings of festival.
So seemed all things to love him. (1)

Nowhere in the poem is Swinburne's hero-worship more evident than in the pages dealing with Tristram. Perhaps this accounts for his making of him a more nearly normal human being—though idealized—than he does of Iseult of Ireland in whom is no other interest, no other thought than love. Having thus presented Tristram, the author hurries with more or less speed over the story of the meeting with the second Iseult, the consuming power upon him of her name, her failure to understand its fascination for Tristram, the awakening of her maiden love for him, and the almost unwitting exchange of vows.

So, dawned the moonrise of their marriage night, says Swinburne, in direct contrast to the closing line of "The Queen's Pleasance,"

And all the sea lay subject to the sun.

The next part, "The Maiden Marriage," follows immediately so far as time is concerned, although almost half of it is devoted to Tristram's recollections of his past. Many of the well known episodes of the legend are

(1) Swinburne, A. C., Tristram of Lyonesse, p. 62.
thys introduced—the incident of the sword in the forest; Mark's recall of the lovers, the jealous actions of Tristram's kinsman, probably the Andret of other versions; the attempt on Tristram's life; his bragging of how he had redeemed Cornwall from the power of Moraunt; his banishment; his leap from the crag and swimming to safety; and the loyal rendering of aid by Gouvernayle, his squire. In the foreground of Tristram's thought, however, even on his marriage night, is his great timeless, changeless love for Iseult of Ireland. Although Swinburne idealizes Tristram's love for the Cornish queen, he also portrays with sympathy and pathos the character of the Breton princess and her simple devotion to Tristram. With fine skill he keeps both Iseults in the picture and divides the reader's sympathy between them. He figuratively alludes to them, the one as a "rose full-hearted from the south and passion-coloured," the other as one of the "mild wild roses nigh the northward sea." The description of the younger Iseult, especially, is given with convincing charm:

her eyes
Were emerald-soft as evening-coloured skies,
And a smile in them like the light therein
Slept, or shone out in joy that knew not sin,
Clear as a child's own laughter. (1)

The brevity of the section may be explained by Swinburne's problem in dealing with her. Her position is one which arouses pity; he cannot eulogize her and yet dares not berate her.

(1) Swinburne, A. C., Tristram of Lyonesse, p. 73.
It is in Part V, "Iseult at Tintagel," that the poetry reaches its greatest intensity. No part of the poem shows more passionately the two chords of the poet's thought, love and fate. In a sense it is a companion to each of the two preceding sections. While "Tristram in Brittany" reveals the strength and the power of Tristram's love, it also shows him able to take a philosophical view of it as one of the great forces of the world, bound to follow its own law as do other workings of the universe. After a few moments of wild cries he resigns himself to his fate and finds joy and reviving interest in his normal activities. In contrast, this section presents Iseult of Ireland with her whole being engulfed by the passion of love and, except for what meager comfort she can get from the presence of her lover's dog, she finds none in the life about her. This scene is also a companion to "The Maiden Marriage," in that the events take place on the same night that the Irish Iseult gives expression to her wild prayer for help. In this part also the music of the poem reaches its highest level with the impressive choral accompaniment of the sea. Nature is in perfect accord with the tragic intensity of the emotion. Here is no quiet picture of a rosy dawn made sweet with the singing of birds and the rustle of soft breezes as in Parts I and II, but rather a portrayal of wind and wave battling each other in the mad rush of a "shattering storm." Through various moods Iseult's prayer rises and falls and each mood is supplemented by a chant of the sea echoing
the change.

"Joyous Gard," the title of Part VI, is a fitting sequence to Iseult's passionate prayer. It begins with a brief lyric to love, the first two lines of which express the motif of the whole section:

A little time, O Love, a little light,
A little hour for ease before the night. (1)

The action takes place in Lancelot's "castle of the north" where on an invitation of Guenevere to Iseult the lovers have fled for a few months of respite. The account then goes back to explain Tristram's return to Cornwall with his brother-in-law, Ganhardine, that the latter might see the Irish Iseult and thus understand the reason for Tristram's attitude toward his wife. On that visit the lovers plan and make their escape to Joyous Gard.

This section serves as a companion picture to "The Queen's Pleasance" in which the lovers are portrayed in the hey-dey of their passion. The joy of the experience in Part II is heightened by an atmosphere of brightness and hope—in appropriate contrast to the spirit of exultant resignation to fate that pervades this later passage. Mingled with this, however, is a sense of happiness in the fulfillment of their passion. Nature is in accord with both the theme and atmosphere as is seen in the following lines:

Day by day
The mighty moorlands and the sea-walls grey,

(1) Swinburne, A. C., *Tristram of Lyonesse*, p. 87.
The brown bright waters of the green fells that
sing
One song to rocks and flowers and birds on wing,
Beheld the joy and glory that they had;
Passing, and how the whole world made them glad,
And their great love was mixed with all things great,
As life being lovely, and yet being strong like fate.

(1)

Their time is spent in hunting, in boating, in wandering
over the moorland, and in quiet "communing of things past."
The conversation turns to Merlin, "the great good wizard,"
as Tristram names him, in whose doom—or reward—of love
the two see an illustration of the fate that may be theirs.
Into their talk comes something of wistful yearning,
especially when Iseult expresses regret that her full and
complete love has yet brought Tristram but "peril and
sleepless watches," "fearful breath of dread" more bitter
than death. In the end the lovers look forward to
happiness and peace in a death that will forever unite them.
With consummate art Swinburne closes this passage with its
overhanging atmosphere of fate by a brief nature descript-
ion. The "sounding soft funereal shore," the "far grey
sky," the "long grey sea," the "sweet mist of moor and
lea," and the "silence of the night" are in perfect harmony
with the emotional tone of this part of the poem.

While Tristram and Iseult of Ireland are enjoying
their few brief hours of respite before their tragic end,
the other Iseult is waiting in her home in Brittany for
her husband's return. Part VII, "The Wife's Vigil," is
devoted entirely to her and to the change wrought in her

(1) Swinburne, A. C., Tristram of Lyonesse, pp. 93-4.
nature from the sweet spirit manifest in her youth to the present one of bitterest jealousy and hatred. The scene has almost no narrative element, no digressions, no relief from the one chord that vibrates through Iseult's whole being. This section also forms a counterpart to Part V, which describes Iseult of Ireland, whose passionate cry of love is opposed to the passionate cry of hate here; the one shows sacrificial defense of Tristram, the other exultant blame. Both parts are compact; both sustain but one emotion to which all others become subordinate.

With clear cut lines Swinburne draws the portrait of Iseult of Brittany. First jealousy consumes her hope and drives out love, only to be replaced with hate. In the bitterness of her lonely life she calls down God's judgment upon the two who have wronged her. As wrath possesses her she loses the sense of being wronged and becomes self-righteous, insolently so, until her soul exults in the fate and retribution that she feels must come to the lovers. She prays that she may be "the sword" that shall bring judgment upon them. Here again Swinburne uses nature to deepen the effect of the emotion. The wild fury of Iseult is reflected in the harsh northwest wind which seems to speak to her incensed soul, and as the day passes, to carry with it not darkness but death.

From these highly emotional scenes, chiefly lyrical, the reader turns in Part VIII, "The Last Pilgrimage," to one of greater narrative interest. The keynote of the section is indicated by the opening lines in a lyric
addressed to Love but hinting of the "shadow of night" that is soon to fall. The action takes place some time after the life at Joyous Gard whence Iseult had been restored to her husband and Tristram called to the aid of a neighboring king whose kingdom was beset by the giant Urgan. Tristram, now the knight seeking fame, starts out

High-hearted with desire of happy fight
And strong in soul with merrier sense of might
Than since the fair first years that hailed him knight:
For all his will was toward the war, so long
Had love repressed and wrought his glory wrong,
So far the triumph and so fair the praise
Seemed now that kindled all his April days.  

With characteristic acceptance of his fate, Tristram turns from the happy hours at Joyous Gard with a renewed interest in adventure. Following the battle with Urgan, which is described with considerable vividness, Tristram sets sail for Brittany. His soul finds comfort in the sun and earth and sea, favorite elements with Swinburne. Mingled, however, with Tristram's joy in the world about him and suggested by it is his yearning for Iseult. He feels, too, a foreboding of approaching death or tragedy; yet as he recalls his love, there comes a consciousness of hope and of happiness, whatever the end may be.

Soon Tristram lands on the shores of Brittany; but scarcely has he done so when a knight bearing his own name prays for aid in rescuing his bride. It is a bit of dramatic irony that leads him to make his request in the name of Tristram's wife, Iseult of the White Hands. Bidding

(1) Swinburne, A. C., Tristram of Lyonesse, p. 115.
Ganhardine carry the message of his quest to Iseult, Tristram again starts on an adventure of knightly honor. Ganhardine goes to his sister with the news, but can hardly believe the change in her nature that her bitter, ironical answer indicates. This brief scene between brother and sister helps to make more real and vital the character of Iseult of Brittany and helps also to maintain the reader's sympathy for the lovers. The interest then turns to Tristram again. The famous swimming scene is introduced after which the narrative hurries on with the account of the winning of the quest, the wounding of Tristram, his intense suffering, Iseult's cold reception of him as he is carried into his castle by his men, and the dark spells that her wrathful eyes seem to cast upon him.

The note of foreshadowing with which Part VIII closes is strengthened in the opening lines of the final section of the poem, "The Sailing of the Swan." The fulfillment of fate as it concerns love and as it is illustrated in the lives of Tristram and Iseult becomes the theme of this closing passage. In the first four pages Swinburne, not in the guise of any character in the tale, but in his own, gives the long address to fate. As the prelude with its invocation to love announces the theme of the poem, this passage with its invocation to fate becomes the epilogue. To Swinburne both love and fate are eternal forces in the world--forces from which man cannot escape, but with which he may grapple heroically. Thus the reader is prepared to view the death of the lovers, not
so much a lost battle as a noble achievement and the lovers worthy of sympathy and admiration to the last.

After three nights of keenest suffering, Tristram, lying in his castle in Brittany, so longs for the presence of the loved Iseult that he sends Ganhardine for her, giving him the "troth-plight ring" with which to gain audience with the queen. In his fevered ravings the dying knight recalls his amorous past as his wife sits near, her jealous wrath burning her words into silence. Finally, as he expresses a fear that death with its healing power may not come, she is made to answer in words of poignant, dramatic irony,

Fear not but death shall come—and after death Judgment.

(1)

The hate of Iseult of Brittany is well sustained through this scene, reaching its climax in her false announcement of the approaching ship bearing a black sail. Tristram tries to rise to see for himself but falls dead. With excellent directness, Swinburne tells of the queen's arrival, the wail of the people for the dead, the blow to the queen's heart, and her death at the side of her lover. By means of a scroll around Tristram's sword Mark learns of the cause of the lovers' passion. In grief he murmurs,

Had I wist,
Ye had never sinned nor died thus, nor had I
So sore a part of sorrow.

(2)

Mark builds a chapel wherein their bodies are interred, but

(1) Swinburne, A. C., Tristram of Lyonesse, p. 141.
(2) Ibid., p. 150.
as time passes it falls into the sea and is swallowed up by the waves and no trace of it is left. This final burial of the lovers in the waters whose music has been the accompaniment for the varying emotions of the whole poem indicates Swinburne's fineness of poetic sense. The last lines mark the subsidence of passion and the gaining of rest "that no love can give," as over the pair forever continue

The light and sound and darkness of the sea.

Thus on a more or less comprehensive scale has Swinburne built his poem. He has used the old story with greater completeness, both directly and by allusion, than have any of the other poets whose works are treated in this paper. But while he has chosen narrative material he has selected from it with dramatic values in mind, and handled the larger part of it lyrically. This is not surprising, however, when one considers Swinburne's temperament and cast of mind. The choice of the legend dealt with, the theme that runs through it, the atmosphere that surrounds it, the interpretation of character, and the poetic expression are all typically Swinburne's.

The congeniality of the subject, the author's conception of love and fate, and the mood accompanying the theme have already been suggested. The fact that the material was literary, remote in time from his own, did not deter Swinburne from treating it subjectively, for to an unusual degree he was able to project himself into any story or into any age that had a definite appeal to him, as he
did in this tale of passionate love in its elemental setting. Moreover, he had a marked abhorrence of changing the essentials of mediaeval matter. This accounts, therefore, for the little invention of incident in *Tristram of Lyonesse*; Swinburne, with a deep reverence for the great themes of the imagination, which he felt were given to man, not created by him for a single age, kept close to the twelfth century sources. He maintains this mediaeval atmosphere by the use of the love potion; by the primitive traits he gives to the characters, especially to Tristram, the knight, the harper, the lover of dogs; by the elemental love and fate which he describes; and by the use of nature not only to create atmosphere but sometimes to motivate the soliloquies. The frequent allusions to Merlin and his magical fate also help to preserve a feeling of mysticism and strangeness that belongs to the Middle Ages.

It is, however, in the interpretation of characters that Swinburne's own personality is most clearly evident. To Tristram, whom he idealizes, he gives his own joy in radiant landscapes and his ardent love of the sea. The poet's enthusiasm runs riot when he describes Tristram's rowing in the storm scene of Part I. The music and triumph of the strong strokes of the oars, the vigor that drives them and the speed with which they carry the boat along serve as an outlet for Swinburne's own love of battling with the sea. The same is true of the two swimming scenes. But it is in more than love of nature that Tristram reveals the poet himself. The burning ardor of the former's love
passion is only an expression of the exuberance and completeness with which Swinburne delighted in abandoning himself to any emotion; and love was the emotion into which he could enter most rapturously. Closely associated with love in the poet's mind was the consciousness of an overhanging fate, and he puts into Tristram's experience an exultant acceptance of it, even though he must fight to escape the end it may have for him. Because of this acceptance Tristram can turn from the sweet hours of the queen's pleasance or of Joyous Gard and find consolation in nature and pleasure in adventure. The heroism with which Tristram approaches death shows Swinburne's own ideal of how man should take his part in a struggle in which he must inevitably fail, but one in which his mettle is revealed by his attitude toward the experience, influenced as it is by love and fate.

Although Swinburne draws the portrait of the hero with a great deal of vividness and reality, he limits the two Iseults to scarcely more than personifications of single emotions; the one of love, the other of hate. One hardly thinks of Iseult of Ireland as experiencing any other passion than love nor of having any other interest than one pertaining to its fulfillment. Thus, while she is not Swinburne's ideal of womanhood, she is his ideal of a person under the delirium of romantic ardor. But the poet is almost as great a hater as he is a lover; hence, his success in portraying the intense hatred of Iseult, the wife. He does, however, whether by accident or design, make of the younger woman a
more real person than her namesake. Her malice has a
to the love of Iseult of Ireland. In addition to her
more normal development and passes through more stages than
conversations with Tristram and her soliloquies, her
does the love of Iseult of Ireland. In addition to her
relations to her brother Canhardine reveal her changing
conversations with Tristram and her soliloquies, her
personality. Consequently, though less space is devoted to
relations to her brother Canhardine reveal her changing
her, the reader is better acquainted with her than with her
personality. Consequently, though less space is devoted to
rival. One knows the older Iseult chiefly through
her relations to her brother Canhardine reveal her changing
soliloquies, when to be sure, her innermost soul is laid
personality. Consequently, though less space is devoted to
bare, and through her relations to her lover, when also she
her, the reader is better acquainted with her than with her
is in an ecstasy of joy or grief.

Of the few other characters introduced, only Mark
rival. One knows the older Iseult chiefly through
has any personality in his own right. He is the Mark of
soliloquies, when to be sure, her innermost soul is laid
the Thomas version, mild, almost unsuspecting, generous,
bare, and through her relations to her lover, when also she
forgiving, and regretful of his share in the tragic deaths.
is in an ecstasy of joy or grief.
Swinburne weaves him into his theme by having even the
Of the few other characters introduced, only Mark
wronged husband recognize the transcendent power of love
has any personality in his own right. He is the Mark of
and fate.
the Thomas version, mild, almost unsuspecting, generous,
The poet's style is as definitely a result of his
forgiving, and regretful of his share in the tragic deaths.
individuality as are his conception and interpretation of
Swinburne weaves him into his theme by having even the
characters. The hurried, melodic sweep of his verse is a
wronged husband recognize the transcendent power of love
direct expression of his own exuberant temperament. He is
and fate.
metrical artist and perhaps no poem better shows the
direct expression of his own exuberant temperament. He is
details by which he attains this excellence than does this
a metrical artist and perhaps no poem better shows the
one. He uses the rhymed couplet; but, instead of "stopped"
details by which he attains this excellence than does this
lines, he makes almost constant use of enjambement except
one. He uses the rhymed couplet; but, instead of "stopped"
in the Prelude which is written in heroic couplets. He
lines, he makes almost constant use of enjambement except
frequently substitutes for an iambus an anapest, a foot
more adapted to imaginative and suggestive expression than
the former. Frequent, almost excessive, alliteration,
combined with a preference for liquid sounds, contributes
greatly to the musical effect which makes Swinburne's
verse distinctive. Illustrations are superfluous, for almost
any passage chosen at random will reveal examples of these
qualities. Part of Swinburne's success in music of
expression, moreover, is due to the consummate art with
which he chooses the right word. His words and phrases
are hardly memorable in themselves but for what they
contribute to an entire passage, for their blending with
the atmosphere and emotional life of the whole. Yet with
all his mastery of words, the range of his poetic vocabulary
is comparatively narrow. He seizes upon certain words not
so much for their intellectual import as for tonal and
connotative value, and then uses them in an infinite variety
of combinations. Thus "foam-flowers of the sea" and other
expressions are so overworked that they lose their exact
meaning and become abstractions. To other words he definitely
and effectively attributes symbolic significance, as to
the sea, the wind, the stars, the sun. Swinburne has a
fondness for color impressions and uses them freely to
heighten or sustain emotional moods: white is a favorite
and he uses it in many combinations; red he associates with
love, and green with hope. His poetry has the gorgeous,
ornate effects that suggest much rhetorical imagery; and
yet, except for personification, figures of speech are
comparatively rare. He gains the rich, vivid pictures that
are so characteristic of him largely by elaborate care in regard to details rather than by comparison. Although he is always master of his language, it tends to overstimulate him until he is swept away by "sheer delight of verbal and metrical artifice" and lets "decoration overflood construction." Thus this more or less regular rhythmic swell of rhymed verse and the almost delirious use of words tend to produce a strange dream-like quality that often obscures the thought. Swinburne himself foresaw the danger when he spoke of "the dulcet and luscious form of verbosity which has to be guarded against." (1)

A second quality of Swinburne's style in this poem is his temperamental use of nature. He sees it always in perfect harmony with man's spirit. The dawning of love is ushered in by the freshness and beauty of a morning on the sea; the jealous hatred of the younger Iseult is reiterated by the wild wind; the waves are ever responsive to the emotional moods of the lovers. Doubtless the poet's own worship of the sea led him to associate it chiefly with those two passion-tossed lovers.

Perhaps no finer illustration of the musical accompaniment of wind and wave can be found in English poetry than the choral response to the passionate prayer of Iseult of Ireland as she gives utterance to the varying strains of the one emotion that consumes her. (2) In the first wild delirium of her petition she becomes defiant and glories in

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(2) Swinburne, A. C., *Tristram of Lyonesse*, pp. 79-86.
her love and in what she terms the "perfection of her transgression." To this the storm utters its avenging refrain:

And swordlike was the sound of the iron wind,
And as a breaking battle was the sea.

Then in her sudden remembrance that Tristram is losing his hope of salvation through their passion, she reveals the sacrificial character of her love as in agony of soul she prays,

Let me be
Hated of him so he be loved of thee,
Lord: for I would not have him with me there
Out of thy sight and love in the unlit air,
Out of thy sight in the unseen hell where I
Go gladly, going alone, so thou on high
Lift up his soul and love--

while outside her castle walls

As a full field charging was the sea
And as the cry of slain men was the wind.

But realizing that answer to her prayer would mean eternal separation from her lover, she calls out for him and yearns for his presence until

All their past came wailing in the wind,
And all their future thundered in the sea.

Her prayer changes then to a loud cry for one hour of love as she has known it, to which the elements mutter their rebuke:

And as man's anguish clamouring cried the wind,
And as God's anger answering rang the sea.

Soon comes to her the consciousness of her guilt and she grows wrathful and bitter in her accusations; but the next instant she is aware of God's understanding and compassion. Yet that thought only leads her to meditation on the great-
ness of Tristram's love to her, and with it comes a quieting effect echoed by the music of the vanishing storm:

And like man's heart relenting sighed the wind,
And as God's wrath subsiding sank the sea.

In the closing words of her prayer Iseult pleads with infinite yearning that whatever be their doom it may not separate her and Tristram. And with this

heaven stirred eastward, and there came
Up the rough ripple a labouring light like flame,

an emblem of hope to her. Her soul has now spent itself in the wildness of her petition and she turns again to the dog Hodain, and her heart finds comfort in tears. Here the poem rises to the highest emotional level and is in no way weakened by the over-elaboration that sometimes quiets and dulls Swinburne's readers instead of stimulating them.

Another example of Swinburne's use of nature is found in the famous swimming scene. The incident occurs just before the battle in which Tristram receives his mortal wound. Not only does nature respond to him but it animates his thoughts and gives significance to them. The passage is marred only by the long digressions in which the poet describes the sea and analyzes in detail the hero's feelings as he plunges into the water. In spite of these deviations, however, the scene is unsurpassed in vigor and beauty of pictorial effects. One other example may be noted, the final burial of the lovers in the ocean that had for a long time echoed their joys and griefs. The peace that is theirs in death is associated with cosmic forces of the world and in a return to the universal, harmonious processes of nature.
Swinburne is less sensitive to structural form than to metrical. He lacks the qualities of a narrative artist; an exploit leads him to pause and rhapsodize on the emotions it suggests rather than to move to the next step in the action. He cannot develop a straightforward plot. Always his narrative tends to become an extended lyric. He does, however, have dramatic ability, and with real skill he chooses his scenes, always mindful of the significance of the event and the intensity of the situation and its relation to his main theme of love and hate. In these he preserves the interest in events by carefully chosen allusions to incidents in the legend which tend to keep in the reader's mind the continuity of the plot, even though the emphasis is upon the passions thus aroused. Contrast is the device he most commonly uses to enforce his emotional mood and emphasize the unity of the poem. Moreover, frequent repetition, constant, varied use of nature, reiteration of theme contribute toward the building up of the poem as a whole. The unity or balance of the poem on the other hand, however, is sometimes weakened by Swinburne's capriciousness. He lets himself be led into long digressions which detract from the development of his theme. For example, one becomes so interested in Tristram's account of Morgause that it is only with effort that he returns to the description of the first symptoms of love between Tristram and Iseult.

Critics of Swinburne have been almost unanimous in their praise of the lyrical and metrical qualities of
Tristram of Lyonesse, and of its expression of emotion. Mr. Welby says it is "unrivalled for long sustained passion, for rapture maintained at a pitch one would suppose possible only in brief lyrics." (1) But he also calls it a "sublime failure," chiefly because the style is monotonous and not in keeping with the narrative subject. (2) Edmund Gosse gives a similar verdict. But he calls the "prelude" as "learned and brilliant a piece of versification" as is met with in "the whole of English literature;" and he says that for "sustained splendor of language the zodiac of amorous constellations is unequalled." (3) Mr. Woodberry considers the work "most representative of his [Swinburne's] qualities, each at its best." (4)

The poem with all its virtues and weaknesses must stand as a magnificent performance, best enjoyed by those who are willing to approach it with respect for the author's conception and interpretation of the legend. Such an attitude, combined with a spirit of leisure and an abandonment to emotional stimuli, will yield the reader a pleasurable experience, one, perhaps, more often enjoyed later by recalling than by repeating. One turns from it, thrilled possibly, but emotionally exhausted. Herein may be the chief defect of the work. Every passage so nearly approaches a purple one in manner of expression and in intensity of passion that the very uniformity produces a sense of fatigue.

(2) Ibid., p. 237.
(3) Gosse, Edmund, The Life of Algernon Chas. Swinburne, pp.242-3
(4) Woodberry, Geo. E., Swinburne, p. 29.
It lacks heights and depths that a more narrative treatment might have yielded. Yet Swinburne never could have made it other than he did.

In the last analysis *Tristram of Lyonesse* stands as an intimate study of the poet's own emotional life. Passion, not fate, is Swinburne's chief interest; but to give passion fullest play he makes it a direct fulfillment of fate. In treating this dual theme he reveals the lovers' reactions to fate as impersonal, not limited to one time or place, but as cosmic and eternal. He shows his belief in the fundamental unity of the world and the harmony of creation. The sun, the wind, the sea, therefore, are ever in tune with man's experiences. Back of these experiences and ever leading them, is fate. The universe is in its grasp. To Swinburne, only revolt and resistance are worthy. Consequently, passion leads not to misery and bitter wailing, but to a heroic failure which was inevitable from the first, but which ennobled man by his struggle against it.
CHAPTER FIVE

Tristram's End

by

Laurence Binyon

An antithesis of Swinburne's poem in almost every respect is the next treatment of the legend, that of Mr. Laurence Binyon. Where the former gives a comprehensive recital of the main outline of events from the first introduction of Iseult of Ireland into the story to the end, the latter confines its material to a mere fragment at the close of the hero's life; the one is exuberant, overflowing, exultant in joy and grief, the other quiet, restrained, regretful; the one conceived on a grand scale and executed with the flourish of abounding vigor, the other a small thing exquisitely done by a man sensitive rather than impassioned. In only one particular can the men claim kinship; both are scholars and their work shows the influence of a love of books and an acquaintance with life through literature.

Mr. Binyon's poem, "Tristram's End," was written thirty years ago when the author was scarcely that many years of age. (1) What led him to the material we do not know, but at least he was sufficiently interested in it to

(1) Mr. Binyon says in a letter dated October 22, 1927, "It is thirty years since that poem ('Tristram's End') was written."
prepare a scenario for a play on the subject a few years later, though the play itself was never written. (1) Mr.
Binyon limits himself as to sources more than any other poet studied. His text reveals a very close following of
the version of Thomas of Brittany as translated by the poet, Gottfried. He seems to catch the gentle, kindly
spirit of these two, and from the translation he makes judicious and sparing selections for his own. He uses
directly only the few events connected with the deaths of Tristram and Iscuit and alludes to such earlier incidents
as he needs to clarify and heighten his selected scenes. Accordingly he makes reference to the killing of Morolt
and Tristram's consequent wound from the poisoned sword of the giant, Tristram's going to Ireland to seek healing of
the Irish queen, his harp playing, and his pretense at being shipwrecked, the drinking of the love-potion, the
loyalty of Rual and Brangian, and Tristram's dropping leaves into the stream that flowed through Isoult's apartments as
a signal for her to meet him.

Thus the poem is scarcely more than a fragment; it contains but four hundred and twenty-two lines divided into
three parts. Part I describes Tristram in his fatal illness awaiting the coming of Queen Isoult, for whom a messenger
has been sent. Beside him watches his wife, her kindly, compassionate nature struggling against the pangs of jealousy.
The strife reaches its climax when

".....with eyes bright in divining dread,
Hardening her anguished heart she bends above his head.

(1) Letter of Mr. Binyon, October 22, 1927.
"O Tristram!—How her low voice strangely rings!—
There comes a ship, ah, rise not, turn not pale.
I know not what this means, it is a sail
Black, black as night!" She shot her word, and fled."

This quick, realistic passage with its terse, almost epigrammatic close is followed by the weakest part of the entire poem, the meeting of the lovers. A situation that should be strong in genuineness of emotion becomes almost sentimental. The effect, however, is counteracted by scattered bits of charming poetry, such as the following:

"...........the breeze
Blows like a blue cloak; and now
Like magic brought to his divining ears,
A voice, that empties all the earth and sky,
Comes clear across the water, "It is I!"

Part II is dramatic in form and feeling, and recounts the lovers' last hours together. Through their conversation come all the allusions to the earlier incidents of the legend. The poem gathers momentum both in interest and intensity, checked only by the cold regularity of alternating speeches exactly eight lines in length. A note, hardly of tragedy or fate, but rather of plaintiveness pervades this section—and indeed the whole poem—deepening into melancholy in the next part. Despair is present for a moment, but it gives place to regret and then to comforting memories of the triumphs that love has brought in spite of strife, tears, failure, and dismay. Much is made of the sad sweetness of the past and the passionate joy of the present—a joy which has now come too late. It is in this irony of fate that the

(2) Ibid., p. 25.
tragedy comes, though one feels it not so much tragedy as very deep and moving pathos. This, however, becomes tinged with bitterness when Tristram says,

"Only joy we meant,  
Yet woe and wrong we have wrought.  
I vowed a vow in the dark,  
And thee, who wert mine, I gave  
For a word's sake, to King Mark!  
Words, words have digged our graves.

............

Assurst be still that day,  
When lightly I vowed the king  
Whatever he might pray  
Home to his hands I'd bring;  
Thee, thee he asked! And I  
Who never feared man's sword,  
Yielded myself to a lie,  
To save the truth of a word."

Indeed from this struggle of Tristram and Isoult to harmonize a double loyalty: loyalty to Mark and the man-made promises given to him innocently, and loyalty to the love that had unconsciously developed in them and was beyond their power to limit or control--from this struggle springs the most poignant passion of the entire poem. This is the thing which makes it stand apart from the other six interpretations of the legend. Isoult voices the nobility of this conflict--and its futility--when she says,

"When last we said farewell,  
Remember how we dreamed  
Wild love to have learned to quell;  
Our hearts grown wise we deemed.  
Tender, parted friends  
We vowed to be; but the will  
Of Love meant other ends.  
Words fool us, Tristram, still."

This last line is like a "leit-motif" running through the

(1) Binyon, Laurence, Selected Poems, p. 30.  
(2) Ibid., pp. 31-32.
entire poem, but with more force and power in this part. With fine skill the poet carries the conversation on to the emotional climax, accompanied and heightened by the dashing of the dim waves without the castle walls. The last stanza is broken into three speeches, brief, tense, genuine, and closes with Isoult's passionate cry to her lover,

"O leave me not in the grave
Of the dark world! Me too take!
Save me, O Tristram, save! "

(1)

Part III begins with a quiet nature lyric, a direct and fitting contrast to the dramatic close of the previous scene. All night long the calm, slow waters roll on the shore,

"And fall in soft thunder, and upsurge
For ever out of unexhausted night."

(2)

Human death is present, but the sea voices no dirge of grief. The morning steals softly into the room and with it comes the faltering tread of the young wife, learning by keen degrees

"That with the dawn her widowhood is there."

(3)

Sharp and piteous is her cry of woe as she remorsefully upbraids herself for her part in the tragedy. Recognizing the infinite power of such a love as theirs, she calls for the "wedding robes," prepares a bier, and sends Tristram and Isoult back to Cornwall with her last sad, submissive words,

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(1) Binyon, Laurence, Selected Poems, p. 34.
(2) Ibid., p. 34.
(3) Ibid., p. 35.
ending in a dolorous wail,

"Carry him hence, proud queen, for he is thine,
Not mine, not mine, not mine!" (1)

The scene then changes to Tintagel where the lonely Mark each day looks eagerly southward for the return of his queen. He is the kindly, forgiving Mark of the Thomas version, aware now that love had a claim superior to his. Stupid, unsuspecting he may have been, but he recognizes with rare penetration not only the power of fate but also the greatness of human fidelity and devotion and the sore wrestling of Tristram's love for Isoult with his oath to the king; and Mark knows that death has left him "loyal unto both." The pathos strikes its deepest note in the closing lines of the poem when the aged man, the victim of circumstances, looks on death and says,

"But I lack all things that ever I had,
My wife, my friend, yea, even my jealous rage;"

and to Isoult he murmurs,

"And now the end is come, alone I stand,
And the hand that lies in thine is not my hand;" (3)

an echo to the wail of Isoult of Brittany as she saw the sails carry the funeral bier away.

The style of the composition indicates the careful and discerning word artist that Mr. Binyon is. His poetic expression is the result of scholarly culture and a nature

(1) Binyon, Laurence, Selected Poems, p. 37.
(2) Ibid., p. 39.
(3) Ibid., p. 40.
sensitive to beauty. Mr. Maynard says that in spite of certain defects he is perhaps the best balanced of the living poets. (1) However true that may be, the poet here seems to have an original inspiration to recognize man's striving for the highest in love and beauty, and to express it in words that are always discriminating and occasionally of unusual force and charm. One could hardly express more in a whole page than is found in the following brief sentence: "She shot her word, and fled." Many of the passages already quoted illustrate the beauty of diction. Figures of speech are rare but effective. Alliteration and repetition are perhaps overworked, especially the latter. One almost suspects that repetition is sometimes used for the purpose of buoying up a cooled passion or resuscitating an over-restrained one.

Mr. Binyon makes use of the conventional meters, varying them to suit the ebb and flow of emotion. Parts I and II, which are largely lyric and narrative, are written in iambic pentameters with frequent lines of three feet and at least one of two. The serious note pervading the poem is struck at once by the initial trochees in the first lines. Alternating rhymes and rhyming couplets are common throughout the production. The meter of Part II with its dialogue between Tristram and Isoult of Ireland is almost entirely in three beat lines; and the iambus is the usual rhythm. Only in one passage do anapests prevail. Here their quick, light movement suggests the thrill and dreamy

(1) Maynard, Theodore, Our Best Poets: English and American, Chap. XI.
happiness of the incident recalled.

"Isoult, let it all be a dream,
The days and the deeds, let them be
As the bough that I cast on the stream
And that lived but to bring thee to me;
As the leaves that I broke from the bough
To float by the window, and say
That I waited thy coming--0 now
Thou art come, let the world be as they:"

(1)

It is chiefly in this evenness and beauty of expression and in the unity of design combined with the high ideals underlying the conception of the poem that Mr. Binyon most truly reveals himself. Moreover, he often inserts his own reflections on human nature and conduct as called forth by the events transpiring in the poem. Thus he comments on the younger Isoult's deceit:

"Tenderest hearts by pain grow oft the bitterest
And haste to wound the thing they love the best."

(2)

Nature is used only sparingly and then for adornment except in the description of the quiet of the sea on the night of the tragedy when it seems brought in for its contribution to the thought back of the action. Here, like Arnold, Mr. Binyon views nature calmly performing her function regardless of man's turmoil and strife.

He pays little attention to the creation of a mediaeval atmosphere, which some poets have felt essential to the appropriate treatment of the legend. The poem is definitely of the nineteenth century, influenced greatly by the ideals of the Victorian age in which it was written, and

(1) Binyon, Laurence, Selected Poems, pp. 52-33.
(2) Ibid., p. 23.
by the kindly, refined, scholarly temperament of the author; it lacks much of the overflowing passion that other poets have found inherent in the material. "Tristram's End" is perhaps not a great poem, but it is one in which genuineness of emotion and intense and varied reactions against the powers of fate find simple and vivid expression. All these, however, seem chastened, refined, and under restraint. The conception of the characters is not outstanding; but each of the four is given a clean, finely drawn portrait, entirely in keeping with the source material and at the same time having those distinguishing marks that justify a new telling of the story.

Almost no critical comments on the poem have been available. Of the volume of Selected Poems which includes this treatment the Greensboro Daily News of North Carolina is quoted by the Book Review Digest for 1922 as characterizing Mr. Binyon's poetry thus: "His verses are full of a beauty, which if not of the highest order of loveliness is still beauty." This comment aptly applies to the poem under discussion. Only one direct criticism to it has been found. Mr. Harold Williams says, "The third part of 'Tristram's End' is finely conceived and impasioned." (1) On the whole, the poem, though scarcely more than a fragment, stands as an enrichment of the old legend.

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(1) Williams, Harold, Modern English Writers, p. 84.
CHAPTER SIX
The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall
by
Thomas Hardy

The twentieth century has seen three major literary treatments of the "world's greatest love-tale," all of them coming within a period of five years. Of this group the earliest is by Thomas Hardy with The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall. The first edition was printed in November, 1923, when the author was eighty-three years of age. Hardy, who for a long time had been eminent as a novelist and had more recently won distinction as a poet, found in the Tristram legend congenial material for his first real play, he himself saying that though The Dynasts was cast in the mould of a drama it was hardly intended for the stage.

Professor Chew suggests three reasons for Hardy's being drawn to the material: a practical, a sentimental, and an antiquarian interest. (1) For several years the Dorchester Players, a group of amateurs, had presented dramatic scenes from the Hardy novels, and this play was written for them. Second, the ancient site of the tradition had a romantic fascination for the poet. The rocky coast of Cornwall was the scene of his first successful novel,

the theme of several of his lyrics, and the place where
he was associated with those to whom he dedicates the play.
Third, Hardy's life-long interest in folk-traditions made
the legend attractive to him. A fourth reason may be
found in the fact that the tale illustrates one aspect of
his philosophy of life, man as an unwilling instrument in
the hands of an inescapable destiny. Whatever the reason
for his interest, we do know that it was a theme he had
in mind for some years; in a letter to Mr. Cockerell, the
Director of the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, he says
that as early as 1915 or 1916 he had begun work on a
drama of "Breton's Helen," but had abandoned it until 1923
when it was completed. (1)

The title page outlines concisely the purpose and
general plan—"a new version of an old story arranged as a
play for mummers in one act requiring no theater or
scenery." He then indicates the setting by means of two
curiously interesting drawings, one an "Imaginary View of
Tintagel Castle at the Time of the Tragedy" and the other
an "Imaginary Aspect of the Great Hall at the Time of the
Tragedy." That the production might be acted under the
simplest conditions, he briefly suggests the meager stage
furnishings necessary: rushes strewn across the floor,
curtains, screens, or chairs to denote openings, and a
settle spread with skins; and the costumes of the players
which, he says, should be the conventional ones of bright

(1) Henderson, Archibald, "Thomas Hardy in a New Role,"
Forum, 71: 783-790.
linens trimmed with ribbon, as in the old mumming shows. With due regard to the compression his scheme would require, the author chooses to depict only the closing hours in the lives of Tristram and Iseult when events are rushing swiftly toward the final catastrophe. For this reason he limits the time covered by events to about the time required for presentation, and so arranges incidents that they may all take place within the one room. From this simple plan the drama proceeds.

The play consists of twenty-four brief scenes enclosed within a prologue and an epilogue spoken by Merlin, who "being ageless, deathless," combines the spirit of both the past and the future. He presents the situation, introduces its tragic theme, and finally anticipates the appraising attitude of the reader by asking that for the two women he

"Judge them not harshly in love
Whose hold on them was strong;
Sorrow therein they tasted of,
And deeply, and too long!"

(1)

Then enter the "shades of dead old Cornish" men and women, who in recitatives contribute necessary explanations throughout the play, create and maintain an atmosphere of moral and philosophical questioning, and often echo the response of the reader to the action. The presence of these spirits of the dead at all times upon the stage, and their grim sobriety, shorn of all subtleties and dis-

(1) Hardy, Thomas, The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall, p. 6.
tractions, deepen the note of sincerity that pervades the work.

The action begins on the evening of Queen Iseult's return from her secret voyage to Brittany, made useless by the false report of the sails by Iseult, the wife. Events follow each other rapidly—Mark's unexpected and suspicious entrance; the current rumors concerning the arrival of queen; doubt as to Tristram's death; Tristram's arrival, disguised as a minstrel; his wife's coming; her guileless revelations; the lovers' last hours together; Mark's treachery; Tristram's death; Queen Iseult's revenge; her suicide by the leap into the sea; the younger Iseult's puzzled comments on the deeds just accomplished and her departure in wonderment as to why and how things have fallen out as they have. Then follows the melancholy dirge of the chanters and the epilogue spoken by Merlin, in which he again refers to man's age-long query over the problem of life and its attendant sufferings.

For sources Hardy makes free use of all versions, but in the main he follows the Béroul and Malory renderings. He keeps the spirit of the former but uses details largely from the latter. Thus the time is during the reign of King Arthur; and allusions are made to him, to Launcelot, and to Palomides. Of the seven major interpretations of the legend treated in this paper this is the only one that refers to Tristram's having been reared by a jealous stepmother as he is in Malory's story. (1) The influence of

(1) Cf. Mr. Carr's play.
the Thomas version is seen in the fact that the love potion is of lasting effect. The unusual fidelity of Tristram's favorite hound, Houdain, shown in his leaping to death with Queen Iseult recalls the version formerly attributed to Thomas of Erceldoun in which he recounts Houdain's licking from the floor of the deck the drops of the love drink that had fallen there, and of his increased devotion to his master—and, we infer, to the mistress also. (1) Possibly the conflicting conclusions of the legends in the main versions, together with a desire to adhere to the classical unity of place, led Hardy to invent a new ending. He does this by combining two old endings with some original additions. He uses the story of the sails as in the Béroul and Thomas versions; but, instead of Queen Iseult's landing on hearing the wife's false message of Tristram's death, she returns to Cornwall. Hardy then invents the incident of Tristram's recovery and his journey to the castle of Tintagel, to which place he is followed by Iseult of Brittany. The author turns to the Malory account for Mark's murder of Tristram. But the killing of Mark by Queen Iseult and her suicidal death in the sea are original in this rendering of the legend.

The manner of handling the material, the characterization, the style of writing, and the philosophy underlying the production are all typical of Hardy, and could scarcely have had the same combination in the hands of any other poet. The influence of his early training as an

architect is evident in the care and economy of literary construction. The play is one of greatest compression, almost a five-act drama confined within the narrow limits of a one-act play; yet nothing essential to the emotional intensity or dramatic effect has been sacrificed thereby. It is only the art of Thomas Hardy that has made this possible. With discriminating skill he has prepared for the culminating moment of the play. Through Merlin the theme and atmosphere are suggested; a spirit of dark and foreboding despair broods over the action. The chanters review the necessary facts of the legend; and the immediate events are presented with deftness and deliberation. Though details are scanty, one after another is carefully set forth, seemingly with little attention to feeling. There is brevity, yet no spirit of undue haste. One is conscious, however, that inevitably the actors are being drawn to a doom, unalterable and invincible. On the whole this manner of development does not stimulate the emotions until the latter part of the play; it is a synthetic, intellectual method. But this does not mean that there is no high point in the drama. Indeed, the very method causes the tragic intensity of the situation to burst upon one suddenly; and only on reflection does one see that the end was carefully anticipated.

It is thus that the reader comes to Scene XXI where the passion rises to its highest level. All in the earlier scenes that was light, petulant, fault-finding, temporary, gives place here to the eternal, elemental qualities which
are the very essence of the legend. Nowhere is Hardy's idea of the awful presence of a great unthinking, uncaring Destiny more evident than in this climactic scene. But even here the lovers find compensation in the rapture of their love and in their triumphant acceptance of its doom as expressed in Tristram's final song:

"If, Love, the night fall on us, dark of hope, Let us be true, whatever else may be; Let us be strong, and without waver cope With heavy dooms, dooms we could not foresee!"

(1)

A moment passes and Tristram murmurs thoughtfully a question about Mark which is answered by the thick voice of the king himself as he lifts his dagger to deal Tristram the fatal blow. Action is quick and emotion tense here, each made more effective by the slight lull, in which in characteristic fashion Tristram recounts his eminent services to his uncle and cousin. Then follow quickly Queen Iseult's desperate act of murdering Mark and her own renunciation of life in ironical, almost defiant terms:

"I have lived! I have loved! O I have loved indeed: Not Heaven itself could size my vast of love!"

(2)

She rushes to the door in the rear, and in the gloom without slowly mounts the parapet, from which with arms uplifted in farewell she leaps into the sounding sea beneath. Brangwain voices the close harmony of man and nature, which is a cardinal point in Hardy's philosophy, when she says:

"The sea's dark voice last night, the sky's vast yawning"

(1) Hardy, Thomas, The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall, p. 69.
(2) Ibid., p. 73.
Of hollow bloodshot cloud, meant murder, then,  
As I divined!"

(1)

It is thus by careful accumulation of details that the poet reaches his climax. With equal skill and economy he barely hints at succeeding events in order to center final attention upon the younger Iseult with her wide open, childlike questioning.

Hardy is concise not only in building his plot, but also in the manner of revealing his characters. Few details are given, but each of the main persons emerges with a clear cut portrait, familiar, yet new and distinctive. Tristram lacks something of the buoyancy attributed to him in most of the other renderings of the legend. His love is not quite so exuberant; it is still passionate, though possibly more settled and subdued. He is the old Tristram, however, in his readiness at making excuses and laying blame upon others, (even when he is at the point of death) in his boastfulness over his accomplishments. Toward the two Iseults he preserves well balanced relations. His devotion to Queen Iseult is all that a lover of the old story could ask; and to her he addresses the lovely little lyric beginning,

"Let's meet again to-night, my Fair."

His attitude toward the younger Iseult is almost new in this version. His chivalric qualities make him pity her, though he blames her for her treachery. Her childishness he accepts as graciously as he can, but he reproves her all the while.

(1) Hardy, Thomas, The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall, p. 76.
His attitude toward her as revealed in his explanations to Iseult of Ireland is almost cowardly and irresponsible—not at all that of the wandering knight who fought for King Howel and received the gratitude of his whole family and the love of his daughter. The gracious courtesy that one always associates with Tristram is absent. One cannot say that Hardy fails in his treatment of Tristram. Yet the feeling remains that here is not quite the traditional hero.

More successful are the pictures of the two Iseults. Mr. Lascelles Abercrombie says that the contest of these two is the thing which most versions slur or botch, but it is the thing which Hardy's genius holds best. (1) At least both women are made very real and human. Iseult of Ireland is as completely consumed by the love passion as she is in Swinburne's poem; she says that love, which is to others a "freakful dainty" is her "starved, all-day meal." Love determines her every action, but at the same time it makes of her a very human person; in its behalf she becomes evasive, blaming, sarcastic, petulant, indignant, despairing by turns. She constantly battles between devotion to her lover and jealousy of her namesake, with whom she fears she must share her love. Yet toward this rival she shows one woman's sympathetic understanding of another. She realizes, even in her jealous passion, the love motive of the wife, and with quick keenness of feeling she comments pointedly, "Yes, women are so." Just as clearly does she

sense the innate variance of their natures when she says,

"Why, she and I are oil and water here:
Other than disunite we cannot be." (1)

Another illustration of her penetration of human nature may be cited from her conversation with Tristram when he is trying to explain and excuse his marriage, and she answers poignantly,

"A woman's heart has room for one alone;
A man's for two or three!" (2)

Toward Brangwain she maintains the privileged air of a queen toward her favorite maid, as when interrupted by the maid's remonstrating comment she calls out impatiently,

"Don't speak, Brangwain, but hear me," (3)

and again,

"Brangwain, I would you did not argue so" (3)

But Hardy makes her exalted also. Striking is her courage when we know her consciousness of the hopeless struggle of her love against fate. It is thus superb courage that in the end enables her to exult over the greatness of her passion and challenge Heaven itself to measure the vastness of it. Fate ennobles her nature until of the lewd and hated Mark she can say,

We will not jeer at him:
Such darkness overdraws us, it may whelm Us even with him my master!" (4)

(1) Hardy, Thomas, The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall, p. 59.
(2) Ibid., p. 39.
(3) Ibid., p. 24.
(4) Ibid., p. 68.
It is through these real and lifelike attributes that Hardy succeeds best in individualizing his portrayal of the older Iseult. He first makes us feel her humanness; then he reveals the sincerity and power of the emotion that controls her. His treatment is more varied and to that extent more successful than that of either Arnold or Swinburne and justifies his giving her the title role.

In this play also we have a distinctive treatment of Iseult of Brittany. She is childlike almost to the point of stupidity, gullible when she should be wary, blundering when the greatest of discretion is needed, ready to abase herself before both Tristram and the queen, unconscious of the lack of convention in her actions, and totally unable to understand the love between her husband and the rival Iseult. With utter guilelessness she turns from the scene of the harsh and revengful murders to comment blandly upon the beauty of the queen. Her very innocence wins our sympathy. Yet Iseult of Brittany is not a child only; or if she is, she has a child's unpremeditated grasp of some of the world's eternal questions, for intuitively she tries to evaluate life and with a cry of poignant despair she says of the queen's suicide,

"...O she should not Have done it to herself! Nor life nor death Is worth a special quest."

(1)

In his comment on Iseult of Brittany Mr. Lloyd Morris says that fate makes sport of her, for Tristram and the queen

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(1) Hardy, Thomas, *The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall*, p. 77.
had the ecstasy of their love to compensate their sufferings and Mark had his revenge; she had nothing. (1) It seems indeed that it is the irony of her lot to see the wholesome devotion of love for her husband bring forth only evil results. She becomes the unconscious means of hastening the catastrophe. But even in it she accepts fate with a child's simplicity. Piteously she comments,

"...Well, well; she's lost him,

Even as have I." (2)

The minor characters receive brief treatment, Brangwain's being the most original. In this play she is more than a mere puppet or the embodiment of devotion to a superior. She is still the faithful maid but one who dares to have a mind of her own and to remonstrate with the high-strung queen. She is quick also to understand the love inspiring the actions of Iseult, the wife. Mark is the treacherous, vicious king of the Morte Darthur, only rougher, coarser, more unfeeling, tyrannical, and sensual. He is shown here as never having loved Tristram nor Iseult and as having sent Tristram for her only in the hope that he would be slain on the voyage. Andret is equally lacking in chivalric virtues and is scarcely more than a tool of the king, his one outstanding quality being eagerness to spy upon the lovers. He is quicker, however, at sensing a situation than the more stupid Mark. Both men belong to the later prose romances.

The chanters are hardly characters but figures

(2) Hardy, Thomas, The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall, p. 80.
introduced to create a drab background and an atmosphere of grim foreboding. They, moreover, served as a force to give significance to the events taking place. Hardy suggests their purpose and value in his preface to the first volume of The Dynasts. In speaking of the past triumphs of the Hellenic and Elizabethan theatres and why those triumphs can hardly be repeated, he suggests that practicable compromise between plays of the past and of the present may be made in "the shape of a monotonic delivery of speeches, with dreamy conventional gestures, something in the manner traditionally maintained by the old Christmas mummers, the curiously hypnotizing impressions of whose automatic style, that of persons who spoke by no will of their own--will be remembered by all who ever experienced it." (1) This explains many of the speeches of the chanters and the part those speeches contribute to the mood and action. The shades are, moreover, like the Greek chorus that stands about the "two or three passionate souls in travail." They symbolize wisdom and experience with which the fortunes of the chief actors are in contrast. The fact that they are spirits detaches them from the action itself, and makes more authoritative their utterances than would be possible if they were living characters necessarily influenced by a variety of possible consequences of their speech and action. Being dead, they must be sincere; and this sincerity becomes a note in the entire play.

This note is also at the basis of the almost austere

(1) Hardy, Thomas. The Dynasts, Preface, p. xi.
style of the production. Here are no shimmering display of words, no extravagant display of imagery, no elaborate metrical patterns. The greatest of concentration in the use of language is maintained. This partly accounts for the shortened forms that appear, as "honesuck" for "honesuckle," "whelm" for "overwhelm," and "doe" for "condoel;" for the very marked use of compound adjectives, as "storm-strid air," "letters rapid-wrought," "held-dearest dower," "a queen shore-reached in safety;" and for the coining of verbs from other parts of speech, as "She shall not foot this deadly land," "the weather worsed," and "Queen Isseult had homed." Hardy manifests, moreover, an unusual fondness for Anglo-Saxon terms. Such words as "cark," "fetched," "holt," "recked of," and "simplified" reenforce the idea of strict adherence to truth and are particularly in keeping with the character of the shades of old men and women, who make the freest use of them. Doubtless, too, the fact that the story was arranged as a play for mummers led to an unusual use of native words.

Figures of speech are comparatively rare but effective: "Seas sloped like housetops," "love....my starved, all-day meal," and "nerve stretched like a lute string." Only in the use of alliteration is there excess; but such expressions as "ghostly grave array," "holt and hurst," "foil and fence" deepen that hypnotic effect which the chanters produce. Genuine poetic charm and beauty are attained in these alliterative lines of blank verse:

"Aye! Sudden-shaken souls guess not at guile."
and

"She deemed that it had dealt him death indeed."
The compound epithets, Anglo-Saxon words, archaisms, new formations, shortened forms, together with the profuse alliteration, tend to recreate the mediaeval atmosphere of the legend. This is further suggested by the meager stage furnishings of rushes and skins and by the peculiarly even and rhythmic verse.

The meter of the play presents an interesting study in variety and regularity. The prologue and epilogue contain uniform iambic tetrameter lines, relief from monotony coming only in the use of varied stanza lengths and rhyme schemes. The effect is a stately dignity in keeping with the prophetic utterance of the sage. The play itself, with the exception of the lines of the chanters and three short lyrics, is written in blank verse which is free and easy in order to satisfy the demands of dialogue. Caesuras come at irregular intervals, and occasionally a trochee or an anapest is substituted for an iambus. The lyrics are dainty and musical. The first is sung by Queen Iseult and reflects her sad, contemplative mood. The poem consists of two stanzas of seven lines, each beginning with four trimeter lines followed by a pentameter, a trimeter, and a dimeter line, with an abaabaa rhyme scheme. The other two are sung by Tristram. Here again the meter is in harmony with the mood. The earlier one is delicate and graceful with the light and dainty movement of the ballad measure. It is an effective contrast to the heavier music of the main part of the
tragedy. The first two stanzas are typical of its qualities:

"Let's meet again to-night, my Fair,  
Let's meet unseen of all;  
The day-god labours to his lair,  
And then the evenfall!"

"O living lute, O lily-rose,  
O form of fantasie,  
When torches waste and warders doze  
Steal to the stars will we!"

These are among the loveliest lines of the play. In Tristram's other lyric, iambic pentameter lines are used to express the deeper feeling of impending doom that is drawing in upon the lovers.

The speeches of the chanters have uniformly even beats which enhance the weirdness of their mutterings. Variety is gained by diverse patterns for stanzas, rhythm, meters, and rhymes. Two, three, and four beat lines are common and many rhyming couplets appear. Not until one really scans parts of the play is he aware of Hardy's scrupulous regard for poetical structure. This, combined with economy of words and a preference for native expressions, contributes to the highly individual treatment that Hardy gives to his version of the legend. In the main his style is successful; yet the inordinate compression sometimes obscures the meaning to one unfamiliar with the legend; the frequent inverted word order and intricate oddities of expression are often harsh; and on a few occasions the choice of words jars the sensibilities and destroys the prevailing mood. In the most dramatic moment of the play when Queen Iseult has

(1) Hardy, Thomas, The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall, p. 40.
murdered Mark and is going to her own death the watchman says,

"She's glode off like a ghost, with deathly mien; It seems toward the sea,—yes, she—the Queen."  
(1)

Almost as bad is Brangwain's comment a few minutes later,

"Here's more of this same stuff of death."  
(2)

"Glode" and "stuff" are hardly reconcilable with the dignified and tragic tone of the play.

In spite of Hardy's careful expression one feels that thought is always paramount to form; and it is in the philosophy underlying this treatment of the legend that the poet reveals himself best. It is not strange that he should have been drawn to the Tristram story, for it is essentially one of fate. He saw in it three people, the unwilling victims of an unescapable destiny; they come in conflict with the laws of nature which Hardy sees as "mighty, eternal, and pitiless as iron." They are brought into this conflict by events seemingly trivial and yet momentous and unalterable in their consequences. Two of the characters are tempted and do wrong; Hardy would not hold them responsible, however, for they have no power to cope with fate. They are conscious of the evil of their action, yet helpless; and in this the poet sees the great tragedy of the legend. Though he is interested in them as individuals, he is so conscious of the invincible, unfeeling power that overtakes them that he sees also their insignificance and the utter futility of

(1) Hardy, Thomas, The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall, p. 74.  
(2) Ibid., p. 75.
their action. His passion is quiet, for rebellion is useless. Never does he find comfort in a "triumphant defeat" as do Swinburne and Robinson. It is this absence of activity in meeting fate that makes Hardy's treatment of the legend seem at first lacking in passion. Rather the passion is there; but it is passive, not because restraint is honorable, but because any other reaction is useless. His characters are noble in that they meet fate bravely though with defeat. Only in the consolation of their love do Tristram and Queen Iseult find their compensation, and Iseult of Brittany finds her compensation, if such it can be called, in memories. This is the fulfillment of their hope.

Thus it seems that the legend was singularly suited to Hardy's conception of it and to his art. The careful development of dramatic action, the evil destiny overhanging that action, and the sympathy that such a situation arouses are individual to him. Critics have disagreed as to the measure of success in his production. Mr. Lloyd Morris says that out of the legend the poet "has shaped a finely proportioned and nobly imaginative tragedy; at once a play magnificently effective in its dramatic intensity;" and again he characterizes it as a play wherein tragic power and poetic beauty are inseparable and produce in the reader's imagination that sustained incandescence which is an effect only of noble art. (1) Mr. Lescelles Abercrombie sees the

legend "reduced to an action of such passionless, naïve simplicity, that it is only to be recognized by the names of the characters:" but he adds that it is a "beautiful piece of shapely artistic logic." (1)

Mr. Archibald Henderson combines his criticism with his account of seeing the play presented. (2) Since Dorchester had no theatre the play was produced in the Corn Exchange by the Dorchester players, an amateur company (including a grocer, a doctor, a clerk, an auctioneer, a saddler, and a head brewer) who had previously presented scenes from Hardy's novels and for whom the play was written. It was coached by the author, assisted by Mrs. Hardy. The latter witnessed the production together with several distinguished visitors. Hardy was not present but greeted friends genially at his home at Max Gate. The play was broadcast by the British Broadcasting Company. The stage, Mr. Henderson says, was almost an exact reproduction of the second of the drawings on the front page of the book. The chanters he describes with some detail. "A chill seizes the auditor as the Chanters--three men and three women, ghostly, grey-gowned figures, priestly in garb and mien,--glide forward, chanting in weird monotone, and seat themselves, facing the audience at each side of the proscenium arch." They remained seated throughout the performance in semi-darkness, their faces partially covered. They spoke in unison but in such a monotone that their words were

(1) Abercrombie, Lascelles, "Mr. Hardy's Play," Nation and the Athenaeum, 34: 491.
not well understood. This, Mr. Henderson feels, is a 
fatal defect of the play as acting drama, for too much of 
the action that definitely contributes to the development 
of the plot is left to them. He feels also that the effect 
attained is that of too great complication of plot, too 
close compression. While the performance was quite up to 
the level of amateur theatricals, he believes it is really 
not a "play for mummers" but a "close knit drama which would 
tax the utmost resources of dramatic and dramaturgic art 
for successful production."

These adverse criticisms, however, do not effect the 
poem as a reading drama, for Hardy has written not so much 
for the eye as for the ear, the heart, and the imagination. 
The play can hardly be called a great version of the legend; 
but it is one, the force and power of which increases with 
repeated readings. The compression with its carefully wrought 
and suggested details furnishes material for many of what 
Hardy calls "mental performances." No other poem within the 
scope of this paper is more typical of its author or more 
revealing of his outlook upon life. Pessimistic it is, but 
not altogether without a faint glimmer of that "unconquerable 
hope" for which its author sought—vainly, perhaps. The 
tragedy of the "Famous Queen of Cornwall" gives a new 
perspective of the legend, and is an additional proof of 
the eternal qualities of a thousand-year-old story.
CHAPTER SEVEN

Tristram

by

Edwin Arlington Robinson

The eternal youth of legendary lore is evident with new force in the only long narrative treatment of the Tristram material in the twentieth century, the recent poem entitled Tristram, by Mr. Edwin Arlington Robinson. To a singular degree the poet is spokesman for his age with its predilection for human passion heightened by psychological analysis and intellectual interpretation. He has heard in this legend the deathless voices of love and tragic disaster and has expressed concretely and minutely for his contemporaries the interplay of personality which he sees associated with the struggle of man's inmost desires against time and fate. No other poet discussed in this paper has been so bold as to throw off the haze of mediaevalism and bring his characters out into the light of the noonday sun under which they battle with problems as old as man himself, and at the same time has held so closely to the basal facts and elemental spirit of the legend as has Mr. Robinson.

After reading the poem one feels that this is neither a tale of the past projected into the present nor a tale of the present with the trappings of the past. Rather one finds in it men and women of flesh and blood, who yearn,
who become consumed with passionate emotion, who struggle, who go down in defeat, who die victoriously in spite of that defeat—another evidence that human nature does not change. The fact that the poet has thus written for his age of that which is ageless and at the same time has composed a poem colored by his own philosophy and personal characteristics is the distinguishing mark of this very modern rendering of the legend. To appreciate best the effectiveness and skill with which this has been accomplished one needs to know something of Mr. Robinson's interests and methods of poetical procedure.

He has been called a "biographer of souls," (1) an estimation which indicates his almost exclusive interest in people. That interest, combined with his fondness for dealing with ideas, marks his literary range. But no poet, of this age particularly, has gone deeper into a study of these two subjects than has he. They have led him to such a constant and serious pondering of life as to have gained for him from certain critics at one time a reputation for a "pessimistic philosophy." His reply to that criticism, uttered many years ago, reveals his real attitude toward life and people: "The world is....a kind of spiritual kindergarten, where millions of bewildered infants are trying to spell God with the wrong blocks." (2) Always Mr. Robinson is concerned with what men and women of every class are able to make of life. Their struggle to know

(2) Ibid., p. 35.
God and his universe and their reaction to it has an intense fascination for him. He brings all of his own ideas and experience to bear and all he has gained from contact with other people. He is ever preparing to draw his final conclusion. He works as a scientist not yet through with his observation of human souls in action, not yet ready to render his final verdict, if indeed he can ever render one. His poems are records of laboratory experiments. He examines one soul after another in all its various reactions to find his answer; and then he realizes that a new case may bring new readings. To it he turns with the same eager, curious interest which he has brought to every other one. The particular ideas he associates with the question of life are passion, time, and fate. His conception of the eternal values of these themes forbids him to pass judgment—a judgment at best only a surface and transitory estimation of success or failure. If he shows any preference, however, in his poetry it is for the man whom the world calls a failure.

His interest in people and their questions has extended beyond modern life. In history and legend he has also found fruitful sources for his literary studies. Indeed in legendary lore, he is able to make his study of motives all the more concentrated, since he considers it necessary to re-create the past, and consequently has none of the distractions that vivid realism of today often calls forth. In writing this poem, therefore, the author was not entering a new field, for already he had made two ventures
into the Arthurian cycle with his Merlin and Lancelot. Both of these, in spite of his marked interest in philosophy and symbolism, are told first of all as love stories. It seems natural then that he should next deal with a legend the essence of which is the love passion. Doubtless, also, he was attracted by the overhanging fate that led the lovers to their "success in defeat," a favorite theme with him, and by the interactions and reactions of those persons who were necessarily associated with the fulfillment of that fate.

Tristram was first published in the spring of 1927 and was reprinted four times in April and May following. Immediately it was the subject of extended articles by critics and reviewers, and Mr. Robinson became at once one of the most frequently discussed American poets, if he did not already hold that position. The poem is narrative in form and consists of approximately 4500 lines of blank verse divided into ten parts, the divisions being chiefly to mark a new focusing for the minute character analysis. In spite of the uniformity of meter the interest is now narrative, now lyric, now dramatic. Indeed Mr. Robinson's keen dramatic insight gives vitality to all the work, even the lyric passages.

The study of the sources of the poem is as interesting for the things excluded as for those included. In the main the Béroul version is followed. The action takes place during the reign of Arthur by whom Tristram is made a knight of the Round Table; Tristram himself is King of Lyonesse.
and his father is still living. The influence of Malory is evident in the hero's insanity in the forest; Mark's imprisonment, though for a new reason; the lovers' life at Joyous Gard; and the lewd character of Mark. The change that comes over the latter after the lovers die in keeping with Gottfried's translation of the Thomas version. Traces of Gottfried are to be seen also in Griffon, the scourge of Brittany, suggestive of two incidents in the old poem—Tristram's slaying of the giant, Urgan, which devastated Wales, and his vanquishing the marauding neighbors of the younger Isolt's father. The events referred to that are common to all sources, are the killing of Princess Isolt's kinsman, Morhaus, her healing of Tristram's wound, and his wooing of her for his uncle Mark. Original in Mr. Robinson's treatment are the gift of the agate to Isolt of Brittany, the part Gawaine and Morgan (1) play in the story, and the death of Tristram at the hands of Andred.

Though this is one of the longest of the modern treatments of the legend, it contains comparatively few allusions to the conventionalized tradition. The reason, doubtless, is to be found in the concentration of interest upon persons, not events. The most noteworthy omission is that of all supernatural elements. There is no love potion and Queen Morgan is shorn of all her unreal powers. This

(1) This is the Morgan le Fay of Malory who furnishes the magic horn from which Isulot must drink to test her chastity. Pollard, Alfred W., The Romance of King Arthur and His Knights of the Round Table, pp. 153 ff.
does not mean that there is no magic in the poem; it has, one may say, a rationalized magic which attributes large influence to the enchantment of love, the mystery of the sea, and the strange, resistless sweep of time and fate. These, with their effect upon the people of the story, are the distinguishing features of this version, and they are altogether in harmony with the spirit of the old legend.

In brief, the story begins with a picture of Isolt of the White Hands at her castle window in Brittany, looking wistfully for the return of Tristram. At that moment the hero himself is in Cornwall, standing without the castle of Tintagel, cursing the blind fate that kept him from recognizing his love for Isolt of Ireland until she is promised to another. Unwittingly, by refusal to attend the wedding festivities, he makes enemies of Mark, Morgan, and Andred. He is banished from Cornwall and wanders insanely in a forest attended by the faithful Gouvernail and later by Morgan. In search of alleviation for grief he returns to King Howel's land, where he saves his host from the attacks of Griffon, the giant scourge of Brittany. Overcome by the gratitude of the king's daughter, Isolt, and attracted by her "white need" of him, he marries her. For two years he rules in his wife's native land; then at the instance of a visit from Gawaine he goes to Camelot to be knighted by King Arthur. Before he and Gawaine depart, however, Isolt of Brittany confides to Gawaine her foreboding that Mark will kill Tristram. In answer she learns that Mark is imprisoned; as a result of this knowledge her alarm
for Tristram is increased by her fears of the Irish Isolt. Arrived at Camelot, Tristram establishes himself at Joyous Gard where soon Mark's queen joins him, having been brought there through the agency of Guinevere. Heedless of danger, the lovers remain together until one day in Tristram's absence Mark, realizing he can hold neither body nor soul of the now pining Isolt, opens his doors to Tristram. The lovers have a last meeting, which terminates in Andred's killing of Tristram and in the queen's death beside him. Mark then recognizes the hand of fate and sees in the death of the lovers a peace they could not attain in life. While the lonely Mark is pondering the failure of his plan, Isolt of Brittany, hearing of the death of Tristram, finds a solace which she lacked when he was alive.

It is not in the action, however, but in the many-sided and detailed portrayal of people that the poem reaches its highest achievement. In this Mr. Robinson's objective method is most evident. He views his characters from many angles, under many conditions, always so aloof from them that no personal prejudice or predisposition may influence his observation. At the same time his kindly, sympathetic understanding of human nature, his penetration into the motives that underlie human conduct, and his obsession for learning what men and women can make of the paramount question of life are always present despite his somewhat cold laboratory procedure.

Since he is primarily interested in watching the
effect of one personality upon another, no one character can be drawn apart from others. In this triple love story, therefore, Tristram must be considered chiefly in his relation to the two Isolts, although each of the other seven persons throws additional light upon him. Mr. Robinson begins with an indirect approach, first presenting Tristram through the effect that a previous visit to Brittany has had upon Isolt of the White Hands. What kind of a knight could it have been who left an agate in the hands and a promise in the heart of this child-woman that have so consumed her being that she is ever watching to the northward for a fulfillment of that promise? Then the scene shifts to Cornwall, where on Mark's wedding night Tristram, unwilling to be a witness to the ceremonies in the hall, stands without at the foot of the castle steps cursing fate and blind folly for his tardy realization of his love for the Irish Isolt, who, he says, is soon to be the "bartered prey to an unholy sacrifice." As the regretful thought of the past comes over him, his passionate love for Isolt grows in intensity. Under its sway he reacts with varying emotions: indulgently to the kindly solicitation of Gouernail, his friend and body servant since childhood; with cold courtesy to the wily lures of the sensual Morgan; generously to the fealty and devotion of Brangwaine; and with wild ecstasy of joy to the coming of Isolt. His love for the latter is always above mere physical attraction; it is at once self-sacrificing and passionate. At Joyous Gard it is the controlling force even in his enjoyment of nature.
And the green grass was music as he walked—
Until beyond it there were trees again,
And through them was the sea, still silver-white,
And flashing as before. Wherever he looked,
He saw dark eyes and hair and a white face
That was not white, but was the color of love.

(1)

He meditates much upon the eternal quality of his and Isolt's love despite time and change. He believes that back of it is fate ever leading it on to fulfillment.

Another side of Tristram's character appears in his relation to the younger Isolt. Her childlike simplicity and her complete trust bring out the more tender and gentle qualities in him.

And he sang many a time to her thereafter
Songs of old warriors, and old songs of love
Triumphant over wars that were forgotten;
And many a time he found in her gray eyes,
And in the rose-white warmth of her attention
Dominion of a sure necessity
Beyone experience and the need of reason.

...............And many a time
He would have gone, if he had not perforce
As many a time remained to sing for her
Those old songs over, and as many a time
Found in her gaze that sure necessity
Which held him with a wisdom beyond thought,
Or with an innocence beyond all wisdom,
Until he sang one night for the last time
To the King's child. For she was his child now,
And for as long as there was life in him
Was his to cherish and to wonder at,
That he should have this white wise fiery thing
To call his wife.

(2)

After his marriage he enters with feverish zest upon reorganizing the Breton kingdom and tries to shut out the love for the Irish Isolt that ever recurs to him as the tragic refrain of a song. But he is torn constantly by these two ties which he sees as written by fate upon his heart "in red and white."

(2) Ibid., p. 92-3.
When his wife's jealous anger, "new and unforetold," is aroused, he understands with a guilty twinge of conscience the suffering that lies beneath her emotion; yet he knows that "cold lies" will have no comfort or virtue now. The honesty in her challenges the honesty in him.

Thus he is ever trying to adjust himself to life. When Gouvernail makes the loyal assertion of Tristram's innate kingliness, it elicits the bitter reply,

There's a contentious kingdom in myself
For me to rule before I shall rule others. (1)

Time, change, love, fate are always presenting new problems, problems that at the last work themselves toward a solution mingled still with regret. Yet thorough as the analysis of Tristram is, varied as the pictures are, one feels that this Tristram is not quite the distinctive one of the old legends. Mr. Robinson meets with the same difficulties in making his hero real that most of the other authors dealing with the legend have met, unless it be Swinburne, who idealizes him at the expense of all other persons in the poem. Mr. Conrad Aiken accounts for what he calls the "comparative failure" of Mr. Robinson with Tristram to the fact that he is not sufficiently a "man of action," that he is a "kind of helpless introspective Hamlet." (2)

On the whole, the two Isolts receive more fascinating and successful treatments than the hero receives. A possible explanation is the fact that the reader sees them change and

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grow. The author makes use of the same method as with Tristram, although with fewer characters reacting upon them.

In Isolt of Ireland one sees the hate in behalf of a dead kinsman transformed to the most passionate love. Delicately she relates to Tristram how its first dawning came to her.

Alone once in the moonlight on that ship,
I believed that you would speak,
For I could hear your silence like a song
Out of the sea. I stood by the ship’s rail,
Looking away into the night, with only
You and the ocean and the moon and stars
There with me.”

(1)

Tristram then was not aware of that love that was to consume them both. But at last the realization does come to both of them, she is awed by the fate which has withheld a knowledge of love until its consummation seems impossible. The love passion in Isolt is of a little finer, more delicate texture than it is in Tristram. It permeates and transcends her whole being so that she can say,

My life to me is not a little thing;
It is a fearful and a lovely thing;
Only my love is more.

(2)

But her love, she realizes, is a spiritualized passion not to find fulfillment in a home, for, she says, “We are not for’ the fireside.” It is always intense and sacrificial, but under its sway varying glimpses of Isolt may be caught. She is at first hopeful that time is on their side, then fearful of accumulating danger, then brave with

(2) Ibid., p. 144.
confidence in the strength and power of love. Under the completeness of her surrender to its sway at Joyous Gard she is so childlike that

\[ \text{her dark eyes became} \]
\[ \text{For a dim moment gray, and were like eyes} \]
\[ \text{That he [Tristram] had left behind in Brittany. (1)} \]

She is laughing, dreaming, enthralled in her emotions, yet ever pursued by a vague foreboding. Back at Tintagel where at last the doors have been opened to Tristram she shows perfect understanding of her lover when she says to him in the moment of their meeting,

"I shall hear all you do not say to me, Tristram." (2)

In these last hours before the tragic end she refuses to give room to vain regret, for she believes their passion is one that defies time and change. Toward the end her love mellows into complete resignation, symbolized by the awesome stillness that has fallen upon the sea. Almost the last words are a complete renunciation of all but love which is for them eternal.

One reason for the greater realism in the treatment of Isolt of Ireland may be her ability for self-analysis without self-absorption and her ability to penetrate into the moods and attitudes of other people. For Mark who can arouse only hate in her she has an unexpected understanding. She sees in him

A nature not so base as it was common,
And not so cruel as it was ruinous
To itself and all who thwarted it.

This tempers her loathing with pity. Again, when Mark, aware that fate has defeated him, gives permission for Tristram to come to the castle, she is quick to react with generous appreciation to what he roughly calls not mercy but reason. "There was your side, always," she says. It is this sensitiveness of Isolt of Ireland to respond to the varying moods of others, her ability to give herself wholly to love that draw the reader to her.

Without lessening the reader's interest in Queen Isolt, Mr. Robinson with rare and discriminating power directs attention to the younger Isolt. The opening lines of the poem present a delicately etched picture of Isolt of the White Hands as she awaits the return of Tristram. Her trust in him she naively pits against her father's warning of too much confidence in the knight who lightly made a promise of return. King Howel's kindly, fatherly solicitude is met by a quaint wisdom that transcends ordinary childhood's experience.

....."I have no more a child,"
He thought, "and what she is I do not know.

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A changeling down from one of those white stars
Were more like her than like a child of mine."

Her chief charm lies in this rare combination of child, woman, and elf, which is suggested in the sympathetic opening

conversation between father and daughter, revealing both personalities at the same time. Her character is further developed by the coming of Tristram. The method of delineation is here, as often, indirect and built up slowly. Her helplessness and childlike candor arouse his sense of protection until in amusing her with song he unwittingly grows into the "soul and fabric of her life," and fearing what would be her fate "in the cold game of kings," he marries her. The father throws additional light upon his daughter's character when with exceptional discernment he says to Tristram just before the marriage,

..."You have a child that was a woman
Before she was a child, and is today
Woman and child, and something not of either,
For you to keep or crush—without a sound
Of pain from her to tell you so. Beware
Somewhat of that, Tristram; and may you both
Be wise enough not to ask more of life
Than to be life, and fate."

(1)

This ability to suffer in silence is indicated in her words to Gawaine expressing the fear that Mark will kill Tristram, words she believed

.........tamed in her
Enough to be released and to return
To the same cage there in her aching heart.

(2)

Only once does this quiet suffering break out in a moment of jealous anger, revealed merely by the curl of the lip and the calm, ironical questions that cover up the seething emotion within.

(1) Robinson, E.A., Tristram, p. 94.
(2) Ibid., p. 107.
Toward the love making of Gawaine of the "soon-
recuperating heart" she maintains a playful, half
satirical, half indulgent attitude:

"You were not making love to me,
Gawaine, and if you were it wouldn't matter.
Your words, and even with edges a bit worn
By this time, will do service for years yet.

Do you like that?
If you do not, say it was never said,
And listen as if my words were bells of gold,
Or what you will. You will be hanged some day
For saying things, and I shall not be there
To save you, saying how little you meant to them."

(1)

But with all her jesting she wins the light-hearted Gawaine
to a sincerity and earnestness seldom felt by him.

It is, however, in the depth and devotion of her
love to her husband, in the grimness with which she meets
fate, and in the suffrance with which she resigns herself
to it that her strength is evident. To the comforting
words of her father after Tristram's death she says,

"But I shall never be all alone--not now;
And I shall know there was a fate more swift
Than yours or mine that hurried him farther on
Than we are yet. I would have been the world
And heaven to Tristram, and was nothing to him;
And that was why the night came down so dark
On me when Tristram died. But there was always
Attending him an almost visible doom
That I see now; and while he moved and looked
As one too mighty and too secure to die,
He was not mingled and equipped to live
Very long. It was not earth in him that burned
Itself to death; and she that died for him
Must have been more than earth. If he had lived,
He would have pitied me and smiled at me,
And he would always have been kind to me--
If he had lived; and I should not have known,
Not even when in his arms, how far away
He was from me. Now, when I cannot sleep,
Thinking of him, I shall know where he is."

(2) Ibid., pp. 207-8.
The final picture of her is similar to the first, a lovely face at a castle window gazing with dreaming eyes across the white waves above which are flying, ever flying the white birds—the symbol of the quiet resignation and the dreams that must ever after be the source of her joy in life.

To the remaining seven characters Mr. Robinson gives scarcely more than outline sketches, but these are equally penetrating studies. Brangwaine and Gouvenail have significant parts, but their few appearances already referred to suggest their conventional roles; Gawaine's personality in its reaction upon Isolt of Brittany has been cited; Andred here is not so much a villain as a half-insane degenerate, inspired by jealousy; Morgan, foiled by her efforts to lure Tristram to herself, is suspected of a share in the murder; the portrayal of King Howel with his fine understanding of and deep respect for his daughter's wisdom is convincingly drawn; King Mark demands more than a summary sentence. He, too, changes under the reader's scrutiny. Like the Mark of Malory's version he is lewd, and sensual, a man of action; yet as he sees the power of fate and its undeviating working, he becomes a half morbid psychologizing king, marveling at the peace the lovers have found in death, and wondering if the blow of Andred's knife, dealt not by Andred but by the hand of fate, was not after all an act well done. Dimly conscious he is that Tristram and Isolt have experienced a joy that never could have been his, that was outside his power to experience. "One more
weary thing" it is, he says, "to learn, always too late."

Thus Mr. Robinson has centered interest upon characters, and yet retained the love passion, the essence of the legend. His manner of presenting his people is a fascinating one. Significant moments and experiences are chosen; enough setting is presented to make both the cause and the effect of the reactions clear. It is a method that challenges the intellectual alertness of the reader and accounts largely for the pleasure to be derived from the poem.

Interwoven with the action and characterization are the guiding forces of the poet's own philosophy of life, centering about the ideas of love and time and fate. But the keynote of the entire poem is love, and it is not better expressed than in Tristram's own words to Isolt at Joyous Gard,

"Love is the only thing that in its being Is what it seems to be."

(1)

About this idea everything revolves, yet the enjoyment of even this can be frustrated by time. The lovers are ever conscious of its presence from their hope in the early part of the poem that it may be on their side, through their few moments of defiance of it at Joyous Gard, until it finally overtakes them at Tintagel. Only when they can look into the future and catch a vision of eternal peace in death does love transcend time. In equally close association with the underlying thought of the poem is the brooding, melancholy

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fatalism of the Anglo-Saxon. It is significant to note that in this poem fate has a two-sided nature, each at variance with the other; the lovers are ever torn by the earthly necessity which divides them and the ideal necessity which makes them one. (1) The four characters most closely touched by this triple love story are all aware, before the end, of the fact that fate has made the tragic termination the inevitable one. Slowly the realization dawns upon each; and the two who survive, Mark and Isolt of Brittany, reconcile themselves to what fate has left them. Not as directly but with as sure a touch as Hardy, Mr. Robinson makes one feel the unchangeableness of destiny.

In no treatment of the legend since Swinburne's has there been more adornment brought to the poetic expression than in this poem, unobtrusive and simple though that adornment is. Most mysterious and awful is the steady, relentless wash of the sea, sounding its messages of foreboding or of comfort as ceaselessly upon Breton shores as upon Cornish rocks. It becomes almost an accompaniment to the emotional levels of the poem: to Tristram the wild beating of the waves is a symbol of the struggle his passionate love for Isolt must ever engage in; to Isolt herself the brooding calm of the waves on the night of her last conversations with both her husband and her lover, is a forecast of the peace for which she yearns:

"The sea was never so still as this before,"

She said, "It is like something after life,  
And it is not like death;" (1) 
to Isolt of Brittany it is not so much the "blank ocean" 
across which she gazes, but the 

........ white birds flying 
Flying, and always flying, and still flying, 
And the white sunlight flashing on the sea, (2) 

that are representative of the dreams that always must be 
hers to compensate for the love that she has lost. In other 
ways nature lends enchantment to the atmosphere of the poem: 
Tristram's love is reflected in the sea, the forest, the 
grass, the birds, and the flowers; and the sensitive, 
imaginative ears of the Irish Isolt are equally responsive 
to the language of the stars. 

Mr. Robinson uses pictorial effects only as he 
mingles them with the workings of the mind. The most striking 
instance of this combination with its vivid realism is that 
of Tristram's return to Joyous Gard after Isolt has been 
taken back to Tintagel. Deftly the author fills in details 
suggestive of her presence, and at the same time describes 
minutely how the fact of her absence slowly dawns in her 
lover's mind. For almost five pages interest is maintained 
as the emotional intensity rises steadily to Gawain's 
confirmation of the gathering fears. Figures of speech are 
comparatively few in number; but when used, they often 
contribute to the sheer magic of Mr. Robinson's verse:

(1) Robinson, E. A., Tristram, p. 177.  
Like a wild wine her love
Went singing through him and all over him;

and again,

....he was listening to the blended gold
And velvet that was always in her voice;

and yet again,

.....his words ached
Like slaves feeling a lash.

More often, however, it is not rhetorical imagery that
creates the charm of any particular passage but the simple,
almost offhand, manner of working accumulatively through to
a vivid and effective conclusion. After the minute analysis
of Tristram's yearning for Isolt when he finds himself alone
at Joyous Gard and after the first wild ecstasy of their
meeting one feels the poignant wistfulness of her quaint
plea to him:

"Tell me how many lives ago it was
I left you in the moonlight on those stairs,
And went up to that music and those voices,
And for God's reason then did not go mad!
Tell me how old the world was when it died--
For I have been alone with time so long
That time and I are strangers."

Mr. Robinson has no tricks of style. He uses
regular blank verse meter throughout, but he succeeds in
giving it a quality peculiar to himself partly by the
frequent use of feminine endings and partly by placing the
caesura as nearly as possible to the beginning of a line.

(2) Ibid., p. 141.
(3) Ibid., p. 191.
(4) Ibid., p. 154.
He repeats words and phrases, usually with skill, and uses but little alliteration. His language is that of everyday life, which he fits naturally and musically into the prevailing meter. It is these qualities largely which enable him to achieve the striking, aggregate effects which lend distinction to this poem. A scarcely better illustration of this can be pointed out than the last meeting of the lovers with its tragic culmination in murder and death:

They did not see
The stairs where they had stood once in the moonlight,
Before the moon went out and Tristram went
From her to darkness, into time and rain,
Leaving her there with Mark and the cold sound
Of waves that foamed all night. They did not see
The silent shore below, or the black rocks,
Or the black shadow of fate that came unfelt,
Or, following it, like evil dresses as man,
A shape that crept and crawled along to Tristram,
And lept upon him with a shining knife
That ceased to shine. After one cry to God,
And her last cry, she could hear Tristram, saying
"If it was Andred--give him thanks--for me--
It was not Mark..... Isol!"

Here are mingled simplicity of language, skillful repetition, vivid pictorial detail, the symbolic accompaniment of the sea, dramatic intensity, the hand of fate, and jealous hatred even in murder defeated by passionate love—all inherent qualities of this long poem.

A part of Mr. Robinson's success comes in his accurate, discriminating knowledge of words and his effectiveness in handling them. Particularly facile is he in his apt use of epithets: "soul-retching verse," "the last scorching ounce of desperation," "the pursuing clutch of a mad

retrospect," "eager cinders," "metal-laughing," "demure
determination," and "climbing silence." Occasionally this
habit leads him to affectation in such expressions as
"necessary little neck," and King Howel's warning to his
daughter that she "relinquish[her] commendable affection, "
for she is "too high and too essential" to be the sport of
fancies. But these instances are exceptional.

The poem is narrative throughout, a narrative
enhanced by dramatic and lyrical moods investing certain
passages. This form, combined with Mr. Robinson's proneness
to psychological and philosophical elaboration, has led in
some instances to aridity in style. At time this element
is further increased by the poet's habit(already referred
to) of repeating his idea over and over with only slight
change of words. Mr. Conrad Aiken, who is the only magazine
critic read that is definitely meager with his praise, says
that sometimes these passages conceal a subtlety worth the
effort; but often they do not; he comments, also, unfavorably
upon this "elaborate obscurity," the "absence of tactile
qualities in language," and the lack of "ruggedness in
blank verse." Moreover, he feels that the poem contains
too little action, and though the lyricism is sometimes
beautiful and the analytic dialogue often acute, there is a
great deal too much of both. (1)

It is concerning the narrative element in the poem
that the critics speak most definitely. In contrast to Mr.
Aiken's criticism is that of Mr. Lloyd Morris, in which he

May, 1927.
says this is Mr. Robinson's finest narrative poem and is "among the very few fine modern narrative poems in English." (1) Mr. Gorman pronounces it the "best long poem in American letters," and the version that "immediately supersedes all other variants of the legend." (2) He comments further on the sustained mood and unbroken charm of the poem. John Farrar says here is a "mature poet writing a poem which is, for beauty, for technique, for passion, for dramatic skill, the equal at least of any great narrative poem in the English language," and then adds, "Here is a book that your great grandchildren will know, even if you neglect it!" (3)

Thus do critics judge this highly modernized version of the Tristram legend, shorn of all its old magic but invested with a new magic of the sea and love and fate. Nothing essential to the story has been omitted, and not a great deal has been added; rather Mr. Robinson, in the light of his own interests and preferences and in harmony with his own questioning concerning life, has taken the tradition, endowed it with twentieth century habits of thought and revealed to his readers not so much what events signify as what actually happens without and within the soul of his characters and bids his readers judge for themselves the meaning of life and love and fate. The tale in his hands becomes detached from both past and present and centers its interest upon the unchanging qualities of human nature.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Tristan and Isolt

by

John Masefield

The latest treatment of the legend is Mr. John Masefield's recent play Tristan and Isolt, which appeared in the summer of 1927. Although printed after Mr. Robinson's Tristram, it is really an earlier writing, having been first performed in February preceding its publication. Two renderings, however, could scarcely be more unlike. In contrast to Mr. Robinson's carefully elaborated analysis of character and motive, with little attention to plot, the reader here finds the action, stripped of all expository or embellishing material, speeding forward with such breathless haste that the characters are reduced to scarcely more than tragic types of emotional experiences.

Knowing Mr. Masefield's almost habitual use of narration, one is not surprised that plot and action should be paramount in his treatment, but what led him to legendary lore and to this story in particular would be a matter of random conjecture. But, having chosen his material, with characteristic disregard for conventions, he boldly selected incidents and atmosphere from the most primitive and least familiar sources of the legend.

The study of sources, therefore, presents an intere-
In addition to the material of the Welsh triads, the poet has selected from both the Béroul and the Thomas versions: Tristan's challenging an enemy of Marc and of the kingdom of Cornwall and the resulting fight on an island in the sea; the faithfulness of Tristan's foster father, Dinan, the Rual of the Thomas poem; the voyage to Ireland for the princess Isolt; the love potion; the substitution of

Brangwen on the wedding night; the use of rye-meal to prove Tristan's secret visit to Isolt; the ordeal by drink; the banishment to the forest and the incident of the glove on the sword; and Tristan's appearance disguised as a harper, used elsewhere only in the Hardy play. But with these are some outstanding omissions. There is no mention made of Tristan's fame as a hunter, a distinction doubtless gained after the legend was carried to Europe, and but little is made of his skill as a harper; the love grotto is only a "den" in the forest; there is no Gouvernail, nor Andret, nor second Isolt—all proof of the poet's desire to get away as much as possible from the time worn incidents and stress the fresher ones of the more primitive beginnings.

Just as notable as Mr. Masefield's return to the dim origins of the legend are his inventions, suggested indirectly perhaps by some parts of the traditional story. He merges the two voyages to Ireland into one and so accounts for Isolt's relationship to Kolbein that she feels no antagonism toward Tristan, rather gratitude for his having killed her hated foster father. Consequently, their love has an opportunity for natural development. Despite this fact, the love potion figures importantly in the story; not once but three times is it used: first by Tristan and Isolt when they are waiting for the ship that is to bear them to Cornwall, again by them just before the potion is carried to the bridal chamber, and finally by Brangwen and Marc. At this last time Brangwen so trembles after she has drunk that she drops the gold cup and spills the liquid. Thus
she ever after loves Marc, but her affection is not returned.

The most original invention in the play is the conclusion and the events leading to it. After the lovers discover Marc's glove laid upon the drawn sword between them, Isolt insists on returning to her husband that he may know she recognizes his greatness in sparing their lives—and possibly that she may find relief from a sudden prick of conscience. She arrives at the castle in time to receive Marc's forgiveness and accept from him the leadership of the country during his absence in Arthur's wars. In the days that follow word is brought to her that her lover is wandering insanely in the forest, but she remains obdurate. Even when, half dead, he steals into the castle and gains entrance to her, does she heartlessly order him removed and flogged. Only when Marc's death is reported and she hears Brangwen's bitter mourning for him, does jealousy lead her to the forest to find the dying Tristan. She reaches him just as he expires, and in a passion of bitter remorse she stabs herself and dies—an end which is hardly an improvement on the traditional one of the sails. A reminder of the old conclusion, however, is Tristan's death in the forest. Attended by the faithful Pixnie, he moans his desire to see Isolt. Again and again he asks the girl to look for a black horse coming through the forest, Black Eagle, whom he had given Isolt in more fortunate days. Getting a negative answer, he pleads with her to go once more to learn if a brown horse appears, for Isolt, he believes, may send Brangwen
ahead to announce her coming. Just as Tristan is at the point of death, he hears the sound of horses' hoofs in the distance and intuitively knows it is Black Eagle bearing Isolt to him. In pathos and tragedy, though not in incident, the final scene is comparable to that of the older versions.

The action of the story, therefore, touches upon various incidents in the lives of Tristan and Isolt, from the first acquaintance of the former with Moré to the death of the lovers. Comprehensive as that is, the actual presentation on the stage requires only two hours and twenty minutes, according to a note which Mr. Masefield adds to the published play. In this note also, he indicates the severe setting needed. "The play was written," he says, "for a theatre with a fore stage, or apron, and a main stage on a somewhat higher level. At the back of, and above, the main stage, there is a gallery or balcony, approached by stairs on each side." Such an arrangement, together with the very meagerest furnishings, makes possible the rapid progress of the action through the frequently changing scenes. The barbaric atmosphere is enhanced by the bright and vivid colors worn by the actors.

The events take place in Ireland, Tintagel, a swineyard, and a forest; and except in two or three instances, the time elapsing between scenes is limited to a few hours—a few minutes in some cases. Destiny appears as the controlling force in the play and speaks both the prologue and the epilogue. But her presence is manifest constantly throughout the tragedy by the reactions of various characters,
particularly Thurid and Isolt. In the prologue, Destiny sounds a dignified note, suggests the aspect from which the situation is to be viewed, and presents the theme. There is something as grim, as unchangeable, as hypnotic in manner and atmosphere in the first words of Destiny as in the chants of the dead Cornish men and women in Hardy's Famous Tragedy:

I am She who began ere Man was begotten,  
I am deathless, unsleeping; my task is to make  
Beginnings prosper to glory and crumble to rotten  
By the deeds of women and men and the ways that they take.  

I am the apple and snake.  

I show Tristan, the prince, in glory beginning,  
And Isolt, the maid, in her beauty; I show these two  
Passing from peace into bitter burning and sinning  
From a love that was lighted of old. I display them anew  
And the deaths that were due.  

The action itself is divided into twelve scenes, marked in the text only by directions for the curtain. The play opens with two explanatory conversations by which the reader learns that Cornwall is under the curse of the pirate, Kolbein, who has killed King Meirchyon and King Tallorc, Marc's father and brother-in-law, respectively; that he is now demanding a tribute of thirty boys; and that Dinan has brought Tristan hither to reveal to him his troubled heritage. From this beginning the action moves on rapidly through the visit to Ireland, the first meeting of the lovers, the drinking of the love potion, and the marriage of Isolt and Marc. The speed slackens only long enough for the subtle Kai to set alive suspicion of the new queen and her lover. Then, inserted between the tragic incidents of the marriage
night and the banishment of the lovers, are the three comic scenes presenting the misadventures in the swineyard. From this the action hastens to its tragic close.

But on the whole one has the feeling that Mr. Masefield has only outlined the events—events that should be made pertinent by a fuller development of the personalities connected with them. Only occasionally is his character portrayal convincing; seldom do his people seem real, a direct contrast to the men and women who move through Mr. Robinson's poem. Marc is the most consistently drawn. In the first scene he is the mild-tempered king desiring protection for his men, willing to pay double the tribute but in some medium other than men. Even the glowing passion of the lovers fails to make him appear cruel or lewd as he is in the later prose romances. When rumors against the queen must be considered, he comes to her directly. The same evenness of disposition and leniency, in spite of his wife's open guilt, make him permit the lovers to escape unharmed to the forest, and later so stirs his pity that he leaves in the forest the sign of forgiveness. He does not once drop out of the character first set for him.

Isolt, on the other hand, is so changeable, so wanton at times, so violent and bold in her protestations of love, so cruel when in a place of power, and occasionally so unfeeling in her affections that one recognizes the traditional Isolt only by her name and a few familiar incidents. She is the fearless and passionate queen, who with the poison drink of ordeal in her hands, can declare,
"I drink to the setting free of the soul within me,
That it may follow my love, my Tristan slain,"

and later can say of that same man,

"Carry that frantic madman into the court,
Deliver him to the guard as a cast felon,
And let the marshall flog him with fifty stripes
And drag him upon a hurdle out of the bounds.
Remove him."

The only explanation for such an erratic change is that the king pitied and forgave her and her lover went insane for love of her! Only in her generous judgment of Marc on the discovery of his glove in the forest,

"Sorrow has ennobled him; he has done such a deed
As none but a great man could,"

does one catch the fineness of her struggle against wrong, her desire to be loyal to Marc, and at the same time the genuineness of her affection for Tristan. But even here the love for Tristan is piteous rather than passionate. Marc calls forth a sense of duty, not love, from her; and her reactions to him reflect her determination to fulfill her own destiny and to consider him only in relation to that; thus when word is brought of the king's death, she prays for help to govern Cornwall rightly, thinking of his death only when asked concerning his burial and then replying nonchantly,

"God made the earth where he is; he will sleep sweeter
Under the milkwort and the larks of heaven
Than in this charnel of bones and dead sin."

Were this person a creation of the poet's mind purely, one

(1) Masefield, John, Tristan and Isolt, p. 105.
(2) Ibid., p. 151.
(3) Ibid., p. 115.
(4) Ibid., p. 134.
might feel that here was a woman, capricious and temperamental, trying to find herself in a world of constantly changing situations; but such an interpretation cannot be harmonized with the innately unselfish character of the Isolt that Tristan loved.

Traces of the familiar Isolt are evident, however, when Brangwen's expression of grief over the death of Marc moves Isolt to go to her lover who lies in the forest at the point of death. Almost bitterly she comments,

"Love is so terrible,
A love like mine. I have killed Tristan, my lover;
Killed him as though with a sword.
I have been perilous to Tristan and Marc.
What have they had from me but fever in the bones?"(1)

But ever here is chiefly dissatisfaction with the way she has met life notwithstanding her effort to make restitution to Marc, and only a suggestion is found of the compensation that love in death can bring, a compensation that is characteristic of former dealings.

Tristan, on the other hand, follows the conventional role more closely, though the delineation of his character lacks special distinction. As foster son and nephew he is loyal, faithful, and valorous; as lover, fearless, almost foolhardy, and devoted even to the point of insanity. But he lacks much of graciousness of manner so often attributed to him; and some of his remarks and reactions to stimuli are inane and senseless. Only in the closing lines does the weak and dying hero arouse the reader's sympathy. Something of his

(1) Masefield, John, Tristan and Isolt, p. 134.
former charm returns as he eagerly, piteously awaits the sound of Black Eagle's hoofs announcing the arrival of Isolt. Here too the poetry with its tense passion and deep pathos rises to a higher level than is usual in the work:

There was no horse on the moor, no horse at all.
Save a rider with a spare horse drawing nearer.
I shall mount and ride with him and not return.
But there is a horse upon the moor: I hear him.
I will look to see: alas, I am so weak
That I cannot stand, nor see. But on the moorland
A horse is at a gallop heading hither....
It is she...yes.....it is she...
But she cannot know my dwelling, she will pass me.
Isolt, I am here! Isolt, Queen Isolt, Isolt.
No, no, no, she has passed: she could not hear me.
What time of year is it? are the harebells come?
It's the end of the year with me, Tristan, the Prince.

Isolt the maid, Isolt the Queen,
Isolt the April, budding green.

Those are Black Eagle's hoofs. Eagle, boy Eagle!
Yes, it is Eagle, he hears me: Isolt is coming.
It is Isolt coming to see me before I die.

(1)

Characterization of the three officials of the king's court, Kai, Bedwyr, and Arthur, affords opportunity for subtle interplay of personality, unencumbered by later tradition, for these men are so far removed from their conventional roles in Malory that one recognizes them only by their names. Kai is an artful study of a man a little too self-conceited concerning his own ability to judge his fellowmen—evident from his first comment on Bedwyr, "a good man...but...no subtlety, no breadth," and on Arthur, "a good man, but no depth," to his finally being tricked by the latter when the actual stealing of the hog takes place. Arthur shrewdly manages to keep a foot in both camps. He aids with plans

(1) Masefield, John, Tristan and Isolt, p. 140.
for the theft; but when the alarm in the swineyard is sounded, he is far enough away to return with Marc and, free from suspicion, listen to the mumbled explanations of his mates. At the same time Arthur puts himself in favor with Tristan by his veiled warnings of possible trouble—a favor in which he constantly grows by his sympathy with the lovers in their affection for each other. (1) Thus in an incident entirely foreign to the play, plainly farcical in nature, and having to do with minor parts only, has Mr. Masefield given his shrewdest, most subtle character revelation of the whole work.

Originality in action and character is matched with an equal freedom in meter. The author uses a very free and loose form of blank verse governed by the stress of natural speech. Consequently there are many feminine endings and great variety in length of line. While the foot is prevalingly iambic, often twelve or thirteen syllables are crowded into one line, and occasionally for a specific effect the number is increased to fifteen or reduced to eight. Usually the pause or drop in the musical phrase comes at the end of the line, even at the sacrifice of the thought relationship between the ideas, as in the following lines, in which the first is clearly a dependent time clause of the second:

(1) Some basis for Mr. Masefield's having Marc call upon Arthur to serve as a witness at Isolt's trial may be found in an incident added to the story after its rendering into French. Arthur, urged to decide to which Isolt should belong, Tristram or Marc, declared that one should possess her while the leaves were on the trees and the other while they were off. Marc greedily chose the winter, whereupon Isolt reminded him of the holly, yew and ivy that were never without leaves; hence Marc lost her forever. Bruce, J. D., Evolution of Arthurian Romance, p. 191.
The hunter speared you a salmon in the river. He said that he saw a young man in the forest.

On the whole, however, the quality of the verse used in the dialogue is successful, lending a tone of resignation and finality to events. Moreover, the crowding of syllables produces an effect of tenseness and swift speed, two chief virtues of the work.

Variety in meter is found only in Destiny's prologue and epilogue and in the little insane snatches of song which Tristan utters in the forest. One of the latter, a typical illustration, occurs in Tristan's dying wail, already quoted, where the two lines of song inserted detract rather than add to the highly imaginative temper of the passage. The prologue, a lyric of two five-line stanzas, contains some of the best poetry in the play. Here are brevity, richness of suggestion, candor and directness of expression, and music of verse to an unusual degree. The epilogue is weaker only because of less artistry in choice of words possibly. To try in a short four-line stanza to make "happen" and "shapen" rhyme, and at the same time preserve the seriousness and dignified tone of judgment passed on the dead is difficult, if not impossible.

The diction is sometimes inharmonious or incongruous and occasionally unnecessarily crude; but more often it is merely lacking in distinction. Few words are particularly rich in connotation except those that help to re-create the early period out of which the story rose. Such expressions as "I came to ready his death bed" and "your gear is aboard" adds

(1) Masefield, John, Tristan and Isolt, p. 123.
greatly to the primitive atmosphere. As to the names of the swineherd's family, Hog, Sowkin, and Pigling, one is not quite sure how seriously they are to be taken: whether they are used to heighten the crude, barbaric background of the action or to strengthen the comic effect of the interpolated pig-sty incident. Alliteration is not marked and figures of speech are used sparingly. A few, however, are exceedingly fresh and telling. Thus when Hog is asked if he has hope of his freedom, he answers,

"No, lord, none: that would be heathen, to hope. I feel inside like a pan of eels being boiled, But never let it be thought I dared to hope."

(1)

On the whole Mr. Masefield succeeds in his handling of events and in his verse effects better than in his conception of his main characters. His failure to vitalize his men and women, combined with the stark barrenness and speed of events, sometimes produces an abstract or generalized emotion, bordering on sentimentality, says one critic; (2) and the verdict seems a fair one. The action is the best thing in the play; the incidents are colorful, the movement direct and swift, and the result a vigorous story. But a serious defect of the plot is an utter lack of proportion. Almost one seventh of the work is devoted to the events of the marriage night and a restating of the great love of Tristan and Isolt. The only explanation seems to be a desire to re-emphasize the tragedy and enforce anew the barbaric mood of the period.

(1) Masefield, John, Tristan and Isolt, p. 55.
The defect of balance is evident also in the interlude of the stealing of the swine, the only example of direct comedy introduced into the legend in recent treatments. Over thirty pages out of one hundred forty-two are consumed with this episode, which, fresh, vigorous, and humorous in itself, leads far away from the tragic tone of the play. It is harmonious, and instead of producing emotional relief in the reader, it inspires a new interest, from which he is drawn with effort. Yet, despite this disproportionately long digression in plot, the author proves his ability as a storyteller.

Another outstanding feature of the play is Mr. Masefield's conception of fate. Mention has already been made of it as a controlling force in the action as set forth in the speeches of Destiny and in the reactions of various characters. The poet sees fate as providing both the temptation to wrong and the punishment for it, but he places final responsibility for the latter upon man. Thurid says,

"No fate is to be dreaded, but borne, or changed," and Isolt,

"There is no avoiding fate, going or staying."

Both recognize its presence but experience has taught the older woman that it can be controlled. Consequently, man is not powerless before it as Hardy conceives him to be. It may be a stern and relentless force, but it is one subject to both "the spirit of man and the judgment of God." Like other poets treating the legend, Mr. Masefield sees the acts of the lovers as a transgression of moral law and their lonely,
remorseful deaths the inevitable result which their conduct has elicited from a fate that is both sure and just. Thus he places emphasis upon the consequences of wrong doing and glides lightly over the compensation that death brings to a passionate love impossible of earthly fulfillment—a compensation that other poets have stressed. The emphasis thus made seems characteristic of the poet, for the fate that follows Tristan and Isolt is the same merciless one that guides the action in the Widow in Bye Street and other poems. The play, it seems, met the critics in an evil hour just following the days when almost universal praise was being heaped upon Mr. Robinson's Tristram. This Tristan and Isolt is so radically different, so out of the ordinary, and at the same time so arresting that reviewers were puzzled what to make of it. Mr. Church in an intermittently favorable criticism adds that it gives a "convincing finish to the reader's conviction that this further treatment of a threadbare theme is well justified. (1) Another critic characterizes it as "a pulsing play; quick with intimations of fate, less quick with passion's tide; swift and copious in scene and event, yet, with one exception, thrifty enough in their ordering; wrought in a language pared down to the severest needs of action; and running to a rhythm that at once expresses Destiny's urge and speeds Tragedy on her course." (2) Another accuses Mr. Masefield of being "inclined to rant" and feels that in this play his style, so successful in dealing with

(2) Living Age from Manchester Guardian. 333: 841. November 1, 1927.
original narrative material, is utterly unsatisfactory because the characters are already people of the reader's imagination and conflicting inventions are out of place. [1] Still another criticizes the dramatic technique that fails to develop any incident except the comic one "beyond the scenario stage" so that the "play never seems quite to come off." (2) Perhaps Mr. Stanley Kunitz best expresses the consensus of criticism when he terms it a play "generally effective and superficially lucid and sometimes beautiful and once or twice terribly wise, but hardly memorable or important." (3).

CHAPTER NINE
Miscellaneous Treatments

In addition to the seven major literary interpretations of the legend there are several other poetical works dealing with the material more or less comprehensively. Outstanding among these minor treatments are the two plays by Mr. J. Comyns Carr and Mr. Arthur Symons, respectively. These men have produced full length dramas, which, however, because designed primarily for stage production and deriving part of their success from a studied scenic effect, have lost somewhat in literary excellence. Yet despite this fact they present interesting contributions to the old legend and suggest the adaptability of the material to dramatic forms.

The earlier of these two works is Mr. Carr's Tristram and Iseult, a four-act blank verse tragedy, first presented at the Adelphi Theatre in London, September 4, 1906. The poet had dealt with Arthurian lore in one other play at least, his King Arthur, produced in a London theatre five years before. In the second experiment, as in the first, the author's dominant purpose was to make his poem suitable

(1) Mention may be made here of the plan of Richard Hovey to use the Tristram and Iseult story as an underplot in a poetical drama to be entitled Astolat. His work was never carried beyond a few plans and notes; since his death these have been edited and published by his wife. These notes, together with his completed plays, show his intention of handling the entire Arthurian cycle. Hovey, Richard, The Holy Grail and Other Fragments, pp. 67-77.
for the stage; and for this reason the reading version can only suggest what the entire fulfillment of his plan is.

Plainly, the incidents are those selected for their graphic beauty and dramatic import; and about these he creates an atmosphere of romance and illusion, by elaborate settings and effective lighting arrangement. The central theme is love and death, treated, however, with more picturesqueness and color than passion. Both are developed to the tragic end by superstition, mystery, and a thirst for revenge. Mr. Carr's play handles the legend in a manner different from the usual conception in that fate is not in it an overshadowing motive, although Tristram feels himself led on by it at times.

Mr. Carr has recognized the literary value of the earlier episodes of the legend, and, though he retains the death of the lovers in the final scene, he uses that earlier material often only alluded to by others as background. For such sources he holds closely to the Béroul and Malory versions. He invents little, usually only coloring an incident or scene to suit his dramatic purpose. His chief changes are in the character of Tristram's stepmother, who remains the jealous, scheming woman to the end; in Tristram and Iseult's drinking of the love potion, not for refreshment as in the conventional story, but because they think it poison for Mark; in the conception of the second Iseult as a vision, the identity of which is not quite clear; and in the combining of the death of the lovers with the incident of the queen's bower, an incident that
comes some time before the end in the old stories.

The plot is developed through four acts, the titles of which suggest the somewhat melodramatic atmosphere that pervades the entire work: The Poisoned Sword, The Hands That Heal, The Love Draught, and The Wound Invincible. The play proceeds with comparative leisure, giving ample opportunity for pictorial effects and musical interludes; the action embraces the plotting of Mark, Andred, and the step-mother against Tristram, Tristram's journey to Ireland for healing, his wooing of Iseult to be the bride of Mark, the natural growth of love between her and Tristram, the queen's discovery of Tristram's identity by means of the splintered sword, Tristram's fight with Sir Palomide to prevent his taking Iseult, the sailing of the ship bearing Tristram and Iseult to Cornwall, the drinking of the love potion, the marriage of Mark and Iseult, the plotting of Mark, Andred, and the dwarf against Tristram, and finally the catastrophe in the queen's bower.

The setting is chosen with a very definite view to the appeal to the eye. The first Act takes place on the Cornish shore and affords ample opportunity for pictorial effect: we see a rocky ledge, the ship in the bay, and the wounded knight being carried aboard on a litter attended by a chorus of maidens. The second Act presents the romantic glamour of the palace of the Irish king, with wide windows overlooking the lists where a tournament is in progress. The recessed alcove containing the curtained couch, on which lies the wounded Tristram and beside which upon a
low seat sits Isuelt harping and singing softly, further enhances the mediaeval atmosphere. It is in this act also that the strange phantom of the second Isuelt first appears. As the Irish princess stands gazing at the knight whom she has healed and has now learned to love, a chorus of unseen spirits is heard, and gradually through drawn curtains comes the shadowy form of Isuelt of the White Hands. The vision speaks prophetically:

"My name is thine, I too am called Isuelt, Isuelt of the White Hands, whose marble touch
Like thine hath power to heal. And where I dwell,
In that far moonlit land towards whose pale coast
All sails shall run for haven at the last,
There too at last the sobbing seas shall bear him,
And thou shalt seek him there. Yet, hearken now
And store it in thy heart against that hour
Thou shalt have need of it: whom thou hast healed,
Though all unknowing, thou shalt wound again;
Whom thou hast wounded I alone may cure.
Nay, ask no more, the end shall answer all. (1)

The third Act gives a scene in Isuelt's cabin on board the Swallow, and suggests the mystery and power of the sea during and after a storm. Lighting arrangements reveal the gray dawn of the sky with faint glimmerings of color. The setting doubtless adds materially to the element of superstition, and to the foreboding, that are important in the action centering about the drinking of the love potion by Tristram and Isuelt and their coming under the magic spell of love. The scene, closing with the bustle of the sailors in preparation for landing, contrasts well with the dreamy quietness of the two characters.

Variety and rustic beauty are provided in the last
Act, which takes place chiefly at Iseult's forest bower.
Through it flows a small stream, and beside this Iseult and
Brangwaine keep lonely vigil, looking for the notched piece
of olive wood which signals Tristram's arrival. The lovers
meet, but are soon discovered by Mark, Andred, and the
dwarf. While Mark is enjoying his revenge and planning a
suitable punishment for the lovers, Andred creeps up from
the rear and kills Tristram. The stage grows dark, and
only Tristram and Iseult remain upon it. In the final
tableau the vision of Iseult of the White Hands again appears,
accompanied by a chorus of voices in the distance. A single
shaft of light falls upon her as she bends over the dying
lovers. Tristram's words close the play,

"For all Love's wounds there is no cure but Death!"

The outstanding qualities of this play are the
music of the verse, the use of the supernatural, and the
pictorial effects. The meter is blank verse interspersed
with many lovely lyrics; particularly beautiful are the
short love song by Iseult early in the play and the speeches
of Iseult of the White Hands. Their beauty is produced by
the delicate feeling expressed and the careful choice of
words. The supernatural plays a very important part in
developing the plot. An old sage's prophecy, the intuitions
of the queen, the strange power of the sea in storm upon
the princess Iseult, the cabalistic inscription upon the
flagon containing the love potion:
Those twain who drink of this sweet wine shall dream
An endless dream that knows no waking here,

the quiet talk of shadows followed by the malignant real
tones cast by Tristram's enemies—all suggest the restless
foreboding that runs throughout the play. But strangest of
all is the vision of Iseult of the White Hands, who, unreal
and vague, is probably intended as a symbol of death.

The emphasis, however, is so entirely upon that
which appeals to the eye and the emotions that the thought
has been sacrificed. As a result the play seems superficial
and sentimental. One turns from it, therefore, with little
remembrance of the glowing passion that is inherent in the
legend and with the final catastrophe so softened by the
vision of the second Iseult that he thinks of the catastrophe
not at all as a punishment for transgression.

Mr. Symon's play, Tristram and Iseult, is also a
blank verse tragedy in four acts. The fact that the poet
was born in Wales, of Cornish parents, doubtless accounts
in part for his interest in this legend of Cornwall. The
theme is the fatality of love, first suggested by the Irish
Queen's warning to Iseult,

"Love is more cruel than a savage beast;
Therefore fear love;"

and is carried out undeviatingly to the end.

Four significant and dramatically effective scenes
are chosen dealing with the life of Tristan from his second

(1) Carr, J. Comyns, Tristram and Iseult, p. 42.
(2) Symons, Arthur, Tristram and Iseult, p. 9.
voyage to Ireland to his death. By means of direct presentation and allusion the more important events of the legend are covered. Mr. Symons uses as his one source the Thomas version, even preserving in most cases the exact spelling of proper names found in the Gottfried translation of the Thomas poem. Practically his only invention is in making both Meridoc, a false friend of Tristan in the source, and Iseult of Brittany cousins of Iseult of Ireland. This accounts for the acquaintance between the two girls from the beginning and for the presence of both in the opening scene.

The play is primarily one for acting in a modern theatre which makes use of all the equipment of stagecraft. Possibly this fact deprives it of some of that grim and stern impressiveness which is developed by the simple plans for presentation called for by the Hardy and Masefield treatments. The events are chosen for their dramatic value and center about the following incidents: the discovery of Tristan as the slayer of Morolt by means of the splintered sword, the drinking of the love potion, the surprising of the lovers together in Mark's garden, and the death of Tristan in Brittany before the arrival of Queen Iseult. Each act has its own climax; yet the play moves with increasing force to the culmination.

Considerable skill is shown at times in the development of action and the handling of emotional crises, an illustration of which may be seen in the account of Iseult's discovery of Tristan as the one who killed her uncle, Morolt.
Careful preparation is made for the scene; one is aware of Tristan's strange attraction for Iseult, of her love for Morolt, and of her zeal for finding his slayer and avenging his death. With this introduction the conversation turns to woman's love. Iseult declares a woman can do more than die for love; then, fired with a craving for revenge, she starts to her feet crying,

"Tristan, I had an uncle whom I loved
More than I ever shall love man; this brave,
This tender, more than father to me, this
Glory of Ireland, was most foully slain.
If Morolt's murderer stood before me now
As you stand there, I, woman that I am,
Give me your sword: I do not fear to see
The nakedness of steel: give it to my hand."

(1)

She takes Tristan's sword, lifts it in the air, and utters only the words, "I would dare--" when she stared fixedly at it.

"O, this is some witchcraft. No.
The sword, the sword, it cannot be the sword!"

(2)

And then comes the undeniable realization that Tristan is her uncle's slayer. Here the narrative is swift, the poetry highly imaginative, the character reaction pointed and suggestive, and the emotional quality marked. It might be stated, however, that the affection for Morolt seems somewhat overdrawn for the sake of dramatic effect. Relief from a scene marked by intensity of feeling is secured, not by comedy, but by variety and color of incident. Indeed, no humor occurs unless it be the grim side remark of the jester,

(1) Symons, Arthur, Tristan and Iseult, p. 10.
(2) Ibid., p. 11.
Melot, after he has aided Mark to come upon the lovers in a secret meeting:

"I have cracked the nut; they will scramble for the pieces."

Some interesting light is shed upon the universal and adaptable quality of the legend by Mr. Symon's conception of the characters. Tristan believes himself so completely led on by fate that he hardly seems conscious of sin, though he realizes others hold his conduct as that. But he defends himself before them with the thought that if they knew the power that controls him they, too, would hold him guiltless. Despite Tristan's unconsciousness of personal wrong doing in the matter of love, he has a high sense of honor and feels deeply the shame that his love brings to both Mark and Iseult. He expresses an unusual loyalty to Mark, and when banished, begs Mark's forgiveness. Tristan is much milder, more reserved, less buoyant than one finds him in other versions. But he is still the lover of the sea and a skilled harper and maker of song.

Iseult of Ireland has as much Celtic impulsiveness as Mr. Masefield attributes to her, less the erratic perversity of temperament. She seems older and more mature than Iseult of Brittany, toward whom she preserves an indulgent air in the first scene which is touched by jealousy in the second, and is changed in the last to a wisdom that only experience can bring. Thus when her cousin remorsefully cries out that her false report has killed Tristan, she replies,

"Comfort yourself, Iseult of Brittany,
And hide your head and weep, if you will weep,
Because it had to be, and leave me here. You have done nothing in this mighty death."

(1)

Grief gives her understanding, sympathy, and a resignation to fate. The other Iseult is well characterized by Tristan's remark,

"She has the face of one who is content, Making a little last with loving it."

(2)

The hate that develops within her at the end comes only with a struggle and is gone the moment she sees what it has wrought. She is an almost exact counterpart of Gottfried's character.

Mark also is the Mark of Gottfried, but is here given a vividness and detail of treatment not elsewhere assigned him. He is an old man and concerned that his nephew, even in wooing a bride for him, shall not represent him as younger than he is or without faults. He is so unsuspecting that only after the most definite proof does he believe the lovers guilty. His grief over their sin is so great that he even threatens to kill them and then himself. He shows an unwonted generosity to Iseult not suggested by other versions.

Much of the pictorial beauty that contributes to the success of the play comes from the mediaeval setting indicated in stage furnishings, in costumes and business of characters, and in the mental attitudes suggested by the dialogue. The opening scene is a large hall in an ancient castle where sit the princesses at work with their sewing. Iseult of

(1) Symons, Arthur, Tristan and Iseult, p. 106.
(2) Ibid., p. 9.
Brittany is embroidering the figure of a "knight in armour, dying---" prophetic possibly of her role at the end of the drama. Attention is directed to the character of Tristan as a wandering knight and harper, to the inference that the marriage is arranged chiefly as an alliance between the two nations, to the loyalty to clan, to the formal court customs, to the sacred respect for a guest with the queen's consequent protection of Tristan, to the solemn swearing of vows, and to the belief in spells and supernatural elements as illustrated in the poisoned sword and in the vow that it must be used but once---all characteristic of the period of legendary origins.

The mysterious power of the love potion is given added prominence in this treatment. Instead of drinking it for refreshment as in many versions, Tristan and Iseult here use it to seal a covenant to lay aside enmity for the sake of honor---a topic which they have just been discussing. Dramatic foreshadowing is combined with magic as Iseult speaks, "Pledge me! my husband, Mark!" and Tristan responds, "Health to Iseult, honor and peace to Mark!"

Then follows with considerable emotional intensity the account of the awakening of the fatal spell of love. Foreboding is used almost to the point of extravagance; there is hardly a page that does not contain some word or phrase of ominous import.

Fate in this play is a controlling factor, with foreshadowing, superstition, and even magic contributing
toward its inevitable consequences. It so dominates the characters that they lose much of their free will and become mere puppets. If an act can be proved to be the result of fate, it is at once justified. Hence, Tristan's explanation of it as the force that led him to kill Morolt brings immediate pardon from the queen, who is completely submissive to its power. When Tristan and Iseult are discovered together in the king's garden, the latter shows herself unconscious of any wrong doing, and justifies to her accuser her love to Tristan, which, she says, is "innocent as life or death." Thus, while Mr. Symons indicates the fatality of love as his theme, he scarcely makes more of it than a justification for the acts of the lovers. He seems to make fate the motivating force, directing the action and adding color and dramatic effect, rather than a means through which to express his philosophy of life.

The style of the play may be characterized as marked by some degree of grace and beauty, yet it is not distinctive. The blank verse is dignified in tone, poetic in suggestiveness, and varied and musical in sound. Many of the lines are shortened to only two or three feet, and frequently lines have feminine endings so that ease and naturalness in expression are gained. The diction is appropriate, not often ornamental, but simple and straightforward, in keeping with the narrative emphasis of the drama. Frequent allusions are made to nature, but only the sea is significant in heightening the emotional mood or tone. In the last act, when Tristan lies dying, and Iseult of Brittany
is struggling between love and jealousy, the rushing of the cold wind and the beat of the waves in the gray rain foreshadow the impending doom. The sensitive intensity of emotion attains a beauty here that is unsurpassed elsewhere in the drama and only approached by the scene of the lovers' meeting in the garden at dawn. The poem has many beautiful lines and passages, but none that stand out as memorable.

In the last analysis, in spite of the beauty of the verse, the delicacy and poetry of the feeling, the unusual skill in the choice of incidents, dramatic and picturesque in themselves, the play so over-stresses the magic effect of the love potion that it takes the experiences out of the bounds of normal human reactions and fails to give intellectual stimulus for a modern application; this accounts largely for its lack of permanancy as a contribution to the legend.

Not only in narrative and dramatic form has the legend found expression in recent years, but it has been a fruitful source for lyrics as well. The fact that these appear in current magazines is an evidence of the wide popularity of the story and of its crystalization into a type of unselfish, passionate love. From among these occasional lyrics two or three deserve special mention. "Tristan in Brittany," written by Mr. Lauriston Ward and published in a Harvard undergraduate magazine, the Harvard Monthly, in March, 1902, catches the essential spirit of self-renunciation in love that makes eternal the old tale. (1) Tristan lies on his couch mortally wounded and longing for the coming

(1) Howard Maynadier quotes the greater part of this poem in his **Arthur of the English Poets**, p. 173.
of Iseult. In his fevered ravings he pictures his soul, his body being dead, ascending to the throne of Heaven and there in self-abasement praying forgiveness, only to find that the greatness and utter sincerity of his love has burned his guilt away. Another poem, equally strong in emotion but treating love with much less ennoblement, is Christine Liebeneck Swayne's "Tristram Forethoughtful," (1) which appeared in Poet Lore, 1913. A third poem is "Tristram and Isolt," by Don Marquis, (2) a burlesque, notable chiefly for its criticism of the over-emphasis sometimes put upon the passion of love when unaccompanied by unselfishness and sincerity—an emphasis that can easily produce sentimentality.

(2) Home Book of Modern Verse.
CHAPTER TEN
Comparisons and Contrasts

A study of the Tristram legend as found in English and American poetry since 1850 has revealed a diversity of interpretations in a variety of forms. The fact that the poets have approached the story with different attitudes and habits of mind and have viewed it from different angles affords an opportunity for many comparisons and contrasts. In the mediaeval period, the material, not the author, was important. Subjective treatment was frowned upon. Today, however, this legend maintains an additional interest because people not only find enjoyment in the story but they are interested to see what new light a particular author can shed upon a world-old tale. How Arnold's and Tennyson's serious concern with conduct, how Hardy's grappling with fate in relation to man, how Swinburne's immersion in the delirium of love, and how Mr. Robinson's scientific study of human reactions have varied the form and style of expression, have led to the use of certain sources, have influenced the selection of details already there and the addition of supplementary ones—all of these call forth many comparisons and contrasts which add significance to the study of the Tristram legend.

The material lends itself chiefly to an expression in narrative or dramatic form, though certain strongly
emotional qualities find utterance in lyrical verse, varying from the snatches of song in the dramas to the rhapsodies to love in Swinburne's poem. In the long narratives of Swinburne and Mr. Robinson appear the most striking contrasts. In the one is vivid mediaevalism not only furnishing a rich and appropriate background but closely linking itself with the progress of the action as well; in the other, vivid modernization stripped of the glamour of the past and revealing the questioning, analytical spirit of the thinking of to-day. The one poet shows strong bias in favor of the lovers; the other stands aloof and calmly views the reactions of his characters. One appeals primarily to the emotions, the other to both emotions and intellect. The poems of Arnold and Mr. Binyon present a great similarity in handling of details, in mingling of dramatic and lyric elements with the narrative, and in the restraint brought to bear upon the treatments. Both employ the trappings of the past only as they lend tone and atmosphere to the theme; the one is characterized by vigor of thought, the other by delicacy of feeling.

Likewise the four dramatic handleings suggest certain comparisons and contrasts. Both Hardy and Mr. Masefield make use of meager stage settings, and of compression in style. But, whereas the compression in the one deepens the passion and centers emphasis upon the thought and philosophy underlying, in the other it seems to weaken the passion and produce an abstraction not quite convincing, though it does succeed in speeding the action for the purpose of producing a good story. In contrast to the severity of setting and
style in these plays is the elaboration of pictorial and emotional effects in the Carr and Symons plays. One wonders, however, if it will ever be possible to make the legend successful with an appeal to the eye chiefly. Brilliant stage effects may suggest only; but when they go beyond that with undue filling in of detail, they dwarf the powers of the imagination—powers which must be strong and active if the real passion inherent in the legend is to be felt. At least the fact remains that of the four plays those of Hardy and Mr. Masefield, respectively, seem to have the best hold upon the interest of the reading public. To the extent that Hardy excels in compression, in harmonizing all moods and incident with character and theme, and in preserving a sense of balance in construction, does his play excel that of Mr. Masefield.

The choice of source material also shows a variety of interests and approaches to the legend. The Thomas version, with its gentle, kindly spirit, its picturesque beauty, and its moving pathos has attracted almost every poet except Mr. Masefield and Mr. Carr. The former's hatred of empty conventions and the desire to stress the basic, elemental qualities of life perhaps explain his going back to the most primitive sources; and Mr. Carr's purpose to present a drama, rich in sensuous splendor and romantic charm, probably drew him to the chivalric rendering of Malory. All the poets except Mr. Symons have made use of the Béroul and Malory allusions to Arthur and his court. Arnold uses the story of Merlin's enchantment by the wily Vivian to illustrate the

(1) See note, p. 171.
Breton Iseult's complete self-mastery and her submission to fate through her recounting of a tale of passion similar to that which has made her the victim of circumstances. Tennyson gives to the love of Lancelot and Guinevere the ennoblement that is inherent in the Tristram legend and reserves for subordinate treatment the passion of Tristram and Iseult as an illustration of the degrading effect of the doctrine of free love, which the poet saw as a deteriorating force in the social life of his day. Swinburne, also, strengthens his theme by allusions to the love of Lancelot and Guinevere. Mr. Robinson finds opportunity in his Gawaine incident to throw additional light upon the characters of both Tristram and Iseult of Brittany, and he uses Queen Morgan with her sensual attraction to make more sublime the spiritualized love of the Irish Iseult. Mr. Masefield, true to his penchant for the unusual, takes the Arthur, Kai, and Bedwyr of an old Welsh triad as the leading characters in a comic interlude. Thus even in the choice of sources have the author's interests and personality governed him.

Most of the incidents chosen by the poets whose works are treated in this paper are from the closing scenes of the legend. Only Mr. Carr, Mr. Symons, and Mr. Masefield introduce earlier events not used by others except through allusions. It is noteworthy that children, who appear but infrequently in literature up to the eighteenth century, are here introduced twice. In Arnold's poem, Iseult of Brittany finds peace and

(1) Mr. Symons, however, does make use of the name Elaine for a young woman attendant of Iseult of Brittany at the time of Tristram's fatal illness.
solace from her grief in ministrations to her children.

In Mr. Symons's play, it is a little child who in the absence of Brangwaine carries the flagon containing the love potion to Tristram and Iseult, thus emphasizing the innocence of the lovers in their infatuation. Moreover, the use of Tristram's favorite dog, Houndain, the dog that figures so prominently in the sources that it appears to many students as a proof of the Celtic origins of the legend, is to be noted in three treatments. Arnold conceives it as a source of consolation to the Breton princess in her lonely sorrow. On the other hand, in the poem by Swinburne, the dog is with the Irish Iseult because of the poet's greater sympathy for her; she likewise finds comfort in its presence because of the affection her lover has for it. Hardy varies the details concerned with the dog when he pictures Queen Iseult leaping to her death into the sea, followed by the faithful hound of her dead lover.

The manner of concluding the tale, varied in the sources, has here even greater diversity. Swinburne, Mr. Binyon, and Mr. Symons follow the conventional sail story, changing the minor details only. Swinburne makes use of Iseult of Brittany merely to express jealous hatred of her rival and by this means to enlist the reader's sympathy for the lovers. With this attained, she drops out of the story and the interest centers upon the lovers whose fated passion, nobly struggled for in life, finds consummation in death. Swinburne makes much of this, for it is a cardinal point in his philosophy that fate is inescapable and that man's
victory can come only in fighting heroically in a battle that cannot be other than a losing one. The death of the lovers following such a struggle, therefore, becomes a noble achievement. This idea of a relentless fate is further enforced by the poet's directing attention to Mark, who through the scroll on Tristram's sword hilt learns the source of their love and the transcendent power of its passion, forgives all, and regrets his part in the tragedy. The burial of the lovers in the wave-washed chapel at Tintagel, and finally, the submersion of the tomb into the sea reveal Swinburne's sense of the eternal harmony of nature with man's emotional condition.

Mr. Binyon varies the conventional story only to the extent of having Iseult of Brittany send the bodies to Tintagel, where the lonely Mark is eagerly looking southward, awaiting the return of his queen. This variation affords opportunity for the emphasis upon the wrong to Mark rather than upon the younger Iseult. The generous king recognizes the sore struggle of Tristram to maintain a double loyalty, loyalty to his word and loyalty to his love. Herein is the pathos of the story; man so in the power of fate that two passions, each noble in itself, must oppose each other. Mr. Symons follows the Thomas version closely, introducing only one innovation, a final allusion to the love potion. Iseult of Brittany has prepared some wine for Tristram, and before handing it to him she tastes it. In his feverish condition he thinks he sees the Irish Iseult drinking again of the love potion to reenforce her waning affection. This incident
is brought in doubtless only to emphasize again in the final scene the theme of the play, the magic power of fate. Arnold uses the Thomas ending except for the sail incident. His greater sympathy for the Breton Iseult and his tendency to idealize her necessarily precluded his attributing to her the falsehood of the black sail. Moreover, he passes over the death and burial of the lovers and Mark's reaction in order to stress the ability of the younger woman to find an inner peace and quiet in the presence of the storms of passion about her.

Four of the poets have followed the Malory version more or less closely in the conclusion. Tennyson and Hardy tell of Mark's slipping up behind Tristram and stabbing him, while Mr. Robinson and Mr. Carr substitute Andret. Mr. Robinson, true to his tendency to analyze man's inner life and his outer reactions, reveals Mark as helpless and puzzled in the presence of death, particularly the death of two who love so passionately in spite of dangers as do Tristram and Iseult. Mark wonders if after all the act of Andret was not another indication of the strange and undeviating working of fate and if, with all the suffering struggle of the lovers, death did not give them a peace which life could never afford. Mr. Robinson, somewhat like Swinburne, sees here a final victory in spite of apparent failure. Hardy varies the story by having the death of the Irish Iseult come as an act of her own will, and Mr. Carr by introducing the healing vision of Iseult of the White Hands. Both inventions are in harmony with the dramatic
purpose of the writers, Hardy wishing to enforce the relentless power of fate, and Mr. Carr to add pictorial impressiveness to his final scene. As has been noted in the chapter on his play, Hardy uses the sail story, but with different consequences. He follows it with the catastrophe at Tintagel. The element of chance, an important principle in Hardy's philosophy, brings the Breton Iseult there also and causes her to hasten the tragic culmination despite her innocent and helpful intentions. Mr. Masefield is the only one who turns away from the conventional end entirely. His choosing of incidents from the earlier sources and his elaboration of the events of the wedding night and of the pig stealing episode probably made necessary the compression in other parts of the play which precluded the use of the second Iseult. Consequently, Mr. Masefield closes with the death in the forest of the two lovers, Iseult's being at her own hands. Mention has already been made that there is a hint of the sail story in the pathos surrounding Tristram's eager watching for the appearance of a black horse.

Characterization also presents diversified study. Variants in treatments, however, come chiefly in minor characters and most often in the portrayal of Mark and Iseult of Brittany. Tristram and the other Iseult, whose passion gives identity to the legend, are necessarily hedged about by conventional roles. Tristram is usually the peerless hunter, harper, master of the sea, but always the ardent lover; Iseult of Ireland is ever the proud and beautiful princess and the embodiment of passionate love, though Hardy and Mr.
Robinson make her a more real person than Tristram by attributing to her an unusual insight into the mind and attitude of other characters. In Brangwaine and Kurwenal (or Gouvernail) are personified fidelity and the faithfulness in service of an inferior to his master. Occasionally these become more than mere types as is apparent in the very realistic treatment accorded Brangwaine in the Hardy drama. The villain is always present, whether it be in the person of Marjodo, the dwarf, Andret, or Mark. The delineation of Mark usually follows one of two patterns; he is either the mild-tempered, unsuspecting, forgiving Mark of Thomas, or the cruel, tyrannical, sensual one of Malory. It is, however, in the treatment of Iseult of Brittany that the greatest originality is displayed. Arnold sees her the innocent victim of uncontrolled passion; Tennyson emphasizes through her the wrong of the doctrine of free love; Swinburne uses her to personify hate as he does the other Iseult love, thus employing her almost as a foil for the latter; through her Mr. Binyon shows one person entering with generous sympathy into the sorrow of others when that sorrow has been the source of her own poignant grief. Hardy makes her an illustration of his belief in the element of chance; Mr. Robinson observes her reactions upon Tristram and notes also the pathos of her position; Mr. Carr introduces her as a spirit, the symbol of the healing power of death; and Mr. Symons sees her as only an incident in the workings of fate. Mr. Masefield alone finds no place for her, possibly, as has been suggested, because of the limits of his production.
To a greater or less extent, nature is used by all our authors as a background for characterization, incident, and mood. Arnold and Mr. Binyon see it calmly performing its functions in the presence of human tragedy. For Swinburne also it has a consoling, reviving power, and for Mr. Robinson it is a reflection of human love. But in the sea specifically, which is intimately associated in all the older versions with the tragedy of the legend, do these later poets also find most complete harmony between man and nature. Swinburne and Mr. Robinson—two poets whose natures are radically different, the one a romanticist, the other a realist—both find in the mysterious, relentless breaking of the waves, music that beats in time with the changing levels of man's emotional and intellectual life. Only with slightly less impressiveness do the Arnold and Binyon poems reflect the same thing. In Hardy's play the wild breaking of the water is almost as grim, as foreboding, as closely interwoven with the life of man as is Egdon Heath in the Wessex country related to the human life upon it. Mr. Carr and Mr. Symons recognize the pictorial beauty of the ocean as a setting for part of the scenes in their plays, and Tennyson frequently uses it as ornament for his poem. Only Mr. Masefield has removed his action entirely from the sea, with the exception of the opening incident, and centered it inland. One can but wonder why this man, who is primarily a poet of the sea, should so utterly disregard the foreshadowing mystery that others have found in it. Indeed, this mystery of the wind and wave has become almost inseparable from the tragedy of the legend.
The varying treatment of the love potion is another detail worthy of comparison; important, since it unites the divergent magic beauty of love and the grim, relentless power of fate. Three poets, however, make no allusion to it; Tennyson, because its use would have made impossible his treatment of a modern ethical problem; Hardy, because he chooses incidents at the very close of the lives of the lovers and with little reference to early experiences as it would have lessened the emphasis upon fate; and Mr. Robinson, because of the latter reason also, and for the fact that his purpose is to give a rationalized treatment of the spiritual qualities of a triple love. Arnold, Swinburne, and Mr. Binyon mention the drinking of the love potion, but make it clear that the affection between Tristram and Iseult has already developed and that the potion merely confirms that love and makes the lovers realize and confess its power. Mr. Masefield seemingly overplays the potion and its dramatic possibilities when he introduces it three times. Mr. Carr and Mr. Symons gain variety by introducing new motives for the drinking. In the former's play, Tristram and Iseult both believe it is poison that has been prepared for Mark, the one drinking it out of loyalty to his kinsman and the other to end her own sorrow. In Mr. Symons's play it is drunk to seal a pledge to dismiss enmity for the sake of honor. Usually the poets have handled the love potion with some reserve, since too great emphasis upon it would lessen the guilt of the transgression. At times, too, the love potion merges into fate and becomes a visible representation of it.
Fate, whether symbolized by a magic drink or not, is a dominant factor in the interpretation of the legend with all of the poets except Tennyson, who ignored it because it was not in harmony with his purpose. Its influence has been constantly noted throughout this paper, and each author's attitude toward it is definitely interwoven with his philosophy of life as expressed in the poetry. Arnold looked upon fate as a force to which one must calmly resign himself. One might, however, if he would, find compensation for his submission in new and active interests, just as did Iseult of Brittany. Hardy's attitude toward fate is similar; but he feels man might as well be passive under his submission, for resistance is useless. With all his pessimism, however, Hardy makes his drama a plea for kindly judgment of transgressors, who as victims of fate already suffer. Swinburne also admits man's lack of control over fate, but he would have man fight with heroism; for, as has been previously suggested, it is only in this that life can be lived victoriously. Mr. Robinson has somewhat the same conception. He pushes aside surface judgments, delves into man's inner life, and discovers the noble struggle that man often makes; the sincerity of one's motives and the ardor of his efforts toward right conduct he sets against the world's verdict of failure. Mr. Masefield recognizes the probability of man's being overcome by fate, but he holds that it is only because he lacks or fails to exercise the will to change it.

With all of the changes that the legend has undergone at the hands of English and American poets since 1850, the
essence of the story has remained the same with but one exception. Only when Tennyson used it as a subordinate episode in a handling of the complete Arthurian cycle was it so distorted that except for names and places its identity was destroyed. Remarkable as that handling is in many respects, it does indicate that a group of legends, related only superficially, can hardly be fitted into a preconceived scheme of composition without the perversion or one or more of them. The fact that a tale has come from the distant past and has in the main kept its identity gives evidence of certain universal and eternal qualities. It is these qualities with their spiritual values that have caught the imagination of the poets and have made the retelling of a world old story interesting and profitable. Human nature does not change, and therefore its fundamental problems are constant; but with each age are needed new ways of approach and new interpretations. Through these the poets dealing with the Tristram legend have enriched it and made a contribution to the literature of their time.
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