

Constructing Chivalry:
The Symbolism of King Mark in Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*

by

Julie Anne Heikel
Bachelor of Music, McGill University, 2007

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTERS OF ARTS

in the School of Music

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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Despite *Tristan*'s place as a cornerstone of the operatic repertory, there has been surprisingly little scholarship on King Mark, whom scholars often overlook in favour of the title characters. This study examines Wagner's adaptation of his source, the *Tristan* of Gottfried von Strassburg, to construct a character that represents the courtly chivalric society of the opera in opposition to the new order represented in Tristan's passionate pursuit of love and, ultimately, of death. Building on literary scholarship of the Tristan tradition, this study explores issues of duality and decline in Mark's character and the elements of his chivalric friendship with Tristan within the homosocial constructs of the courts. Through his use of traditional operatic lament form, associative orchestration, and text expression, Wagner constructs a king who is more nuanced than any of his predecessors: one cleansed by tragedy and capable of forgiveness.

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Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 (ESV)

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Thank you.

Dedication

*For Johann and for Holberg.
You were my summer.*

Preface

Richard Wagner was the first composer to successfully set the Tristan legend to opera in his famous *Tristan und Isolde*. Despite *Tristan*'s place as a cornerstone of the operatic repertory since its premiere in Munich in June of 1865, there has been surprisingly little scholarship on King Mark, whom scholars often overlook in favour of the title characters. The prevailing view among scholars is that Mark is a minor figure in the drama: he is merely the unwanted husband in the eternal triangle and unworthy of Isolde's love. However, the significance of the king in Wagner's construction of the *Tristan* drama is far greater than such a meagre role: Mark represents both the courtly society of the opera and of the class-based Germany of Wagner's time. On one level Wagner not only challenges his audience to choose which man is Isolde's worthy lover, but also compels them to make a similar decision between the chivalric code represented by the king and the personal liberation pursued by the title characters. When considered in conjunction with Wagner's political views, an even deeper narrative emerges: Mark encompasses the aspects of hierarchical society that Wagner held in such disdain. This study examines Wagner's adaptation of his source, the *Tristan* of Gottfried von Strassburg, to construct a character that represents the courtly chivalric society of the opera in opposition to the new order represented in *Tristan*'s passionate pursuit of love and, ultimately, of death. Building on literary scholarship of the *Tristan* tradition, this study explores issues of duality and decline in Mark's character and the elements of his chivalric friendship with *Tristan* within the homosocial constructs of the courts. Through his use of traditional operatic lament form, associative orchestration, and text expression,

Wagner constructs a king who is more nuanced than any of his predecessors: one cleansed by tragedy and capable of forgiveness.

In literary studies, the most extended treatment of the character of Mark is Thomas Kerth's essay, "Mark's Royal Decline,"¹ which traces the king's character development within the *Tristan* of Gottfried von Strassburg as he "declines" from an honourable king to a less virtuous ruler, constructing an eternal love triangle that allows audiences to sympathize with Tristan and Isolde. Furthermore, Mark has been aligned with Arthurian traits by William C. McDonald, who views the king's decline in character not as a means to gain audience sympathy for the lovers, but rather as the natural result of appropriating characteristics of King Arthur into King Mark's character.² He introduces the two kings as character foils of each other, pointing to King Arthur's relative absence in Gottfried's poem in support of this alternative interpretation.

In "The Role of King Marke in Gottfried's *Tristan* – and Elsewhere"³ Michael Batts analyzes the pervasive issue of the love triangle in the Tristan legend and how the audience's perception of—and their sympathy towards—each relationship within the triangle relies on their view of each character. This study considers Wagner's treatment of Mark's place in the eternal love triangle. Understanding Gottfried's portrayal of King Mark in the context of other versions of *Tristan* with which Wagner would have been familiar reveals Wagner's own intent regarding the complexities of the character of King

¹ Thomas Kerth, "Mark's Royal Decline," in *Gottfried Von Strassburg and the Medieval Tristan Legend*, eds. Adrian Stevens and Roy Wisbey, 105-16 (Cambridge and London: D. S. Brewer and The Institute of Germanic Studies, University of London, 1990).

This paper appears as part of a collection from papers from an Anglo-North American symposium on Tristan held at the Institute of Germanic Studies in London on 24-26 March 1986.

² William C. McDonald, *Arthur and Tristan: On the Intersection of Legends in German Medieval Literature*, eds. Ulrich Goebel and Peter I. Barta, Vol. Two, Tristania Monographs Series (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1991).

³ Michael Batts, "The Role of King Marke in Gottfried's *Tristan* – and Elsewhere," in *Gottfried Von Strassburg and the Medieval Tristan Legend*, eds. Stevens and Wisbey, 117-26.

Mark through his relationship to Tristan and Isolde. Building on analyses of Mark's character in literary studies, this work compares Wagner's King Mark to the Mark of Gottfried's poem. By identifying Wagner's characterization of Mark within the eternal triangle, this study defines the type of king that Wagner constructed for his version of the *Tristan* drama.

Discussions of Mark's music tend to focus on assigning thematic labels to Wagner's motives. In *Wagner's Themes: A Study in Musical Expression*,⁴ F. E. Kirby identifies two themes specific to Mark: "King Mark's Land" and "King Mark's Sorrow." In the appendix of his *Death-Devoted Heart: Sex and the Sacred in Wagner's Tristan and Isolde*,⁵ Roger Scruton presents Mark's motives as "Mark's Grief," "Consternation" or "Mark," and "Betrayal". Because the names given to these motives imply an emotional narrative that may not be otherwise implicit or intended, this study does not rely on the practice of naming Wagner's themes in *Tristan*.

Eric Chafe's "Tristan's Answer to King Mark: Moral and Philosophical Questions," provides the only in-depth analysis of Mark's music, examining Tristan's music in Mark's central passage Act Two, Scene Two.⁶ As the title suggests, Chafe's focus is not on the music of Mark, but on that of Tristan. The king's arrival is equated with the arrival of day and its music, followed by the main motive of Mark's lament. The scene is approached from Tristan's point of view: Mark's questions prompt Tristan's

⁴ F. E. Kirby, *Wagner's Themes: A Study in Musical Expression* (Warren, Michigan: Harmonie Park Press, 2004).

⁵ Roger Scruton, *Death-Devoted Heart: Sex and the Sacred in Wagner's Tristan and Isolde* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁶ Eric Chafe, "Tristan's Answer to King Mark: Moral and Philosophical Questions," in *The Tragic and the Ecstatic: The Musical Revolution of Wagner's Tristan and Isolde*, 221-29 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

answers while Mark's music provides a sharp contrast to the music of Tristan's answers and the music of the night that permeates the scene before it.

In light of the minimal research on Wagner's music for King Mark, this study of Mark draws upon literature written on Wagnerian characters outside of *Tristan*. Carolyn Abbate's *Unsung Voices*⁷ addresses narrative ballads in *Die fliegende Holländer* and *Die Walküre*. Mark's music for Act Two can best be compared to Wotan's Act Two monologue in *Die Walküre* which, according to Abbate, "is not dependant on leitmotifs for its meaning," but instead "draws upon formal gestures peculiar to operatic narrative music."⁸ It is significant that Abbate calls Wotan's monologues a "song [Abbate's emphasis], [...] signalled by the break from its context that *song* will always engender within opera."⁹ In a similar manner, Wagner's Music for Mark in Act Two sets it apart from the rest of the act as a song; Abbate's analysis of Wagner as song, however, can be taken one step further: the narrative flashback of Mark's music may be understood as the central section of the typical Greek lament. Due to the paucity of any mention of formal analysis of his works in Wagner's own prose, it is necessary to turn elsewhere for viable analytical models for this work. This thesis builds its textual and musical analysis on Casey Dué's discussion of the lament in Greek tragedy,¹⁰ Carolyn Abbate's work on the operatic narrative,¹¹ and Ellen Rosand's study of the lament aria in seventeenth-century

⁷ Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 170.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 201.

¹⁰ Casey Dué, *The Captive Woman's Lament in Greek Tragedy* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2006).

¹¹ Carolyn Abbate, "Erik's Dream and Tannhäuser's Journey," in *Reading Opera*, eds. Arthur Groos and Roger Parker, 129-67 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988) and *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

opera,¹² rather than solely on Wagnerian scholarship. Dué's study of the formal conventions of the lament identifies a three-part structure in which the first and last sections consist of a direct address and lamentation, while the middle section is narrative.¹³ Recognizing Mark's *song* as a lament engenders an analysis of the number as a formal operatic lament such as discussed by Rosand.

Mark's appearances in Act Two, Scene Two and Act Three, Scene Two and the narrative flashback scenes of Act One, Scene Two and Act Three, Scene One in which he is mentioned reveal a multifaceted character of the king: Mark interacts with the title characters as friend, husband, king, and father figure, but also represents the chivalric tradition. The *Oxford English Dictionary Online* defines chivalry as "the knightly system of feudal times with its attendant religious, moral, and social code, usages, and practices."¹⁴ This code included the societal regulations of virtue, honour, and courtly love which provided a structure of expectations for the way in which members of the court interacted with each other. In a similar manner, the formal conventions of the number opera governed operatic composition from the seventeenth through the nineteenth century. Wagner symbolically uses the literary form of the lament and operatic lament techniques as identified respectively by Dué and Rosand to construct King Mark as a picture of traditionalism and chivalric conduct in the drama. Mark's role in *Tristan* is representative of chivalric society not only because of his dramatic function as the obstacle to Tristan and Isolde's love, but also because of Wagner's retrospective departure from the revolutionary harmonic and orchestral palette by which *Tristan* is

¹² Ellen Rosand, "Il Lamento: The Fusion of Music and Drama," in *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice*, 361-86 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

¹³ Dué, *The Captive Woman's Lament in Greek Tragedy*, 10.

¹⁴ *The Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Accessed February 1, 2010.

characterized in his use of traditional operatic form. Wagner turns to the conventions of the number opera in his use of the lament tradition as an embodiment of the rigid expectations of the chivalric code, while Mark's expressive disjunct vocal line represents the depth of dysfunction in each of his relationships with the title characters.

However, these artistic decisions depart in significant ways from Wagner's own writings. In his *Oper und Drama* of 1851, Wagner speaks out against the direction opera had taken, condemning the number opera and the use of sectional forms. Instead, he proposes the concept of "endless melody"—an idea that he further explores in his *Zukunftsmusik* in 1860. Despite his aversion to the number opera, Wagner uses stylistic contrasts to define the formal shape of Mark's lament in Act Two and set it apart from the remainder of the work.

Wagner's music for Mark is sparsely orchestrated, featuring a more basic harmonic structure than that of the rest of the work, and is presented in a clear sectional form in his Act Two lament. In contrast, the orchestral accompaniment for Tristan and Isolde's music is dense and lush. The Act Two love duets that precede Mark's number are highly chromatic and cycle through many tonal centres. By linking Mark's character with the bass clarinet in the lament, Wagner allows this instrument to symbolize not only King Mark but also the constraints of society in the narrative scenes in which Mark is not present (Act One, Scene Three and Act Three, Scene One). Identifying conventional operatic forms and techniques in Wagner's writing for Mark is problematic when viewed in light of his prose works, but for Mark's music Wagner deliberately contradicts his formal convictions in order to symbolically portray the position of kingly rule, courtly love, and the bond of marriage as similar forms of structure and artifice in the age of

chivalry. Through the dramatic nuances, forms, associative orchestration, and melodic construction of his writing for King Mark, Wagner metaphorically portrays the rigidity of the chivalric (and aristocratic) code, its social and moral order, and ultimately the stratification of his own society. Furthermore, he constructs a king who loves Tristan and reaches reconciliation and freedom from hierarchal society through forgiveness.

Chapter One: Gottfried's Tristan

The legend of Tristan exists in many variations. The late nineteenth century showed an increased interest in Arthurian legends like that of Tristan, and Wagner was not the only composer to attempt an opera on this subject; Schumann's scenario and sketches for *Tristan und Isolde*, written in 1845-46, reveal a treatment of the plot quite unlike Wagner's.¹⁵ As with any work based on a story that exists in multiple forms, it is important to be familiar with the artist's source and to ascertain why that particular version was selected as a source. It is equally crucial—and perhaps even more telling—to determine the ways in which the new work varies from its source. Examining the evolution of a legend can reveal much about the artist's intent and the audience for which the work was intended. Thus, in order to understand Wagner's work fully—the predominant struggles therein, and his portrayal of the character of King Mark—it is crucial to examine the history and key plot elements of his source, the epic German poem *Tristan* by Gottfried von Strassburg. This study then examines these plot elements in Wagner's libretto and their musical treatment.

History of the Tristan Legend

As is the case with other Arthurian legends, the Tristan legend stems from the folklore of Celtic Britain and comes from the *matière de Bretagne* cycle that celebrates the heroes of British provenance. The first discernable literary version of the Tristan legend is an Anglo-Norman source from c. 1150 AD.¹⁶ Scholars refer to this version, which is known only through the reconstruction of its derivatives, as the archetype to

¹⁵ Friedrich Schnapp, "Robert Schumann's Plan for a Tristan-Opera," in *The Musical Quarterly* 10, no. 4 (1924): 485-491.

¹⁶ An archaic form, *Ystoria Trystan*, c. 1100 also exists.

which all successive versions are compared.¹⁷ Another text from that time, *Cligès* (c. 1176) by the Arthurian *romancier trouvère* Chrétien de Troyes, also contains stories of Tristan, Isolde, and Mark.

The historical lives of these characters are largely unknown. Though oral legends, such as that of Tristan, often immortalize the actual historical figures that inspired them, eventually the legendary characters eventually become a part of the literary canon apart from historical fact. Thus, while one can be certain of the historical existence of King Mark, extant legends may not be used to infer any historical fact concerning him. The origins of the name Tristan possibly stem from historical record of Drust, son of Talorc, King of the Picts, in the ninth-century work, the *Vita Sancti Pauli Aureliani*; this same work makes mention of a King Mark of Cornwall, who is said to have reigned during the sixth century.¹⁸ It is from these two early sources that the extant versions of the early Tristan tradition stem.¹⁹

¹⁷ Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan: With the 'Tristan' of Thomas*, trans. A. T. Hatto (London: Penguin Books, 1960; rpt. London: Penguin Books, 1967), 8. The derivatives from which it was reconstructed include the *Tristans* by Oberge, Béroul, and Thomas.

¹⁸ Michael Batts, *Gottfried Von Strassburg* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1971), 24.

¹⁹ Alternatively, the later tradition, the best-known version of which is Sir Thomas Malory's *La Morte d'Arthur* (c. 1469), finds its origins in the Prose *Tristan* (c. 1240).

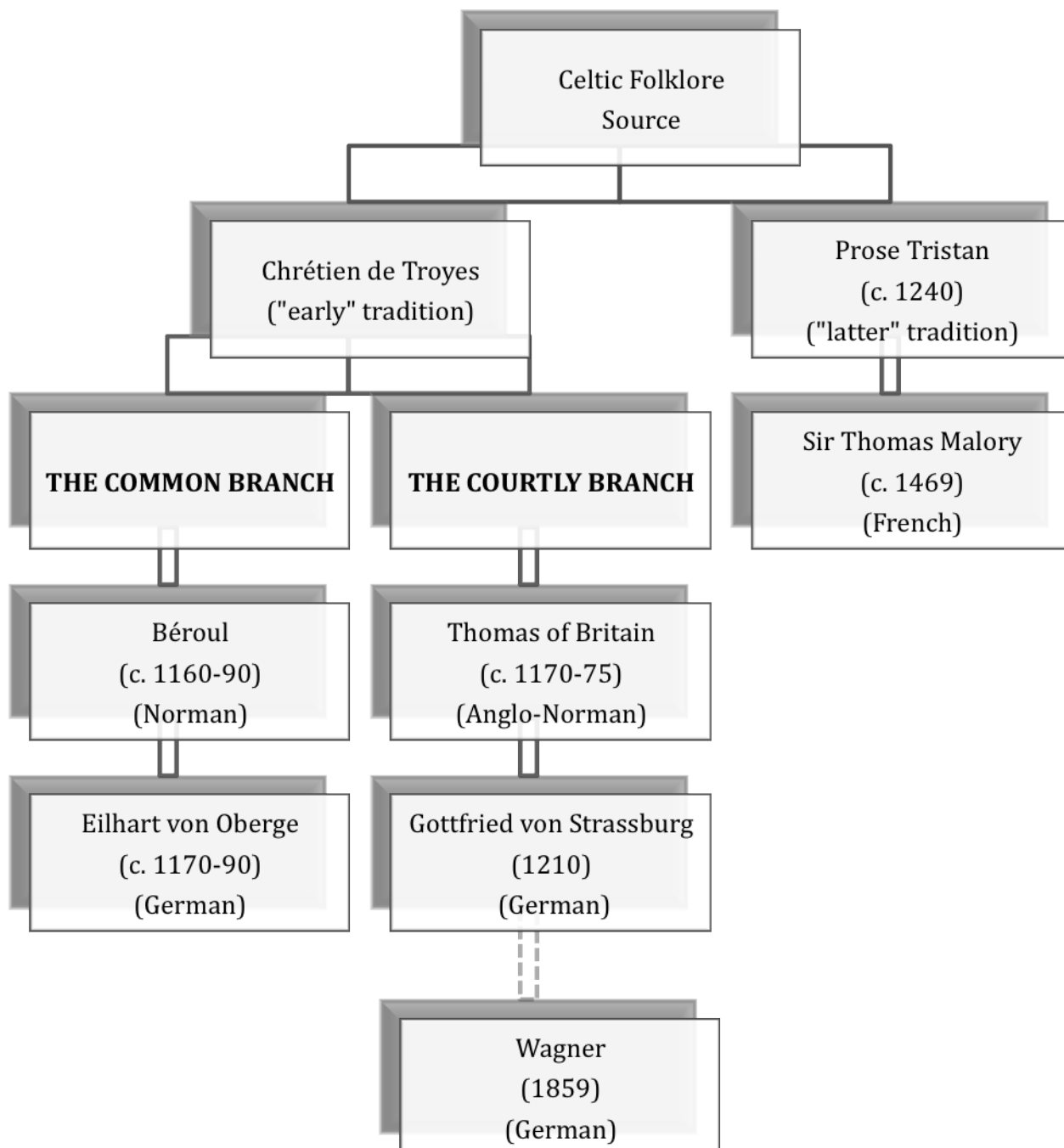


Figure 1: Sources of the Tristan legend

Extant versions of the early Tristan tradition fall into one of two categories: the common or vulgar branch and the courtly branch. Figure 1 illustrates an early history and

development of the two branches. The difference between the two is primarily ideological: how they view and treat the human condition, the role of the working class in society, and the place of everyday realities in art. These ideological themes have remained in the forefront of society's consciousness throughout history and were important to the writers of Gottfried's time.

Six centuries later, Wagner's prose writings on politics and society continually emphasize ideas of total commonality and the collective. He preaches necessity over luxury, the group over the individual, and aspects of communism over egoism.²⁰ Though Wagner advocates a king in his ideal for a new world order, his plan requires that the nobility see the necessity of "the extinction of the last glimmer of aristocratism; as [the] gentlemen of nobility no longer are feudal lords with power to enslave and clout as they please."²¹ Wagner never develops any practical wisdom regarding the nature of power and the political process, but he supports the battle of man against established society.²² Wagner's main premise is the mid-nineteenth-century Romantic illusion that love and power were irreconcilable.²³

When *Tristan und Isolde* premiered in 1865 a Munich newspaper called it "the glorification of sensual pleasure."²⁴ If Tristan and Isolde's relationship is a glorification of human desires and their fulfillment, Mark represents all that thwarts this reckless sensual pleasure in society. Mark and his position in the feudal society symbolize the old order that must be destroyed so that the new may emerge. When it came to electing a

²⁰ Alan David Aberbach, *The Ideas of Richard Wagner: An Examination and Analysis of His Major Aesthetic, Political, Economic, Social, and Religious Thoughts*, rev. ed. (Lanham: University Press of America, 1988), 73.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 105.

²² *Ibid.*, 80.

²³ *Ibid.*, 78.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 96.

source for *Tristan's* libretto, it was crucial that Wagner utilize a version that portrayed the courtly feudal values that would serve as a direct opposition to the sensual pleasures glorified in Tristan and Isolde's love.

The common branch of the Tristan legend reflects the artistic representations of society of Late Antiquity in its depiction of the vulgarities of everyday life and the common folk within a non-chivalric, non-courtly tradition of storytelling.²⁵ The courtly branch of the legend, on the other hand, features less of the unrefined or common details of everyday life and instead highlights more of the courtly attributes of the story while providing insight on the inner thoughts of the characters. This branch of the legend receives a refined treatment that revolves around the courtly and chivalric standards, emphasizing those of love, honour, loyalty, friendship, and family. By selecting a courtly source that accentuates the structure of feudal society, Wagner is able to portray the disintegration of those facets of society in favour of an opposing romantic ideal: love liberated.

In 1210, Gottfried von Strassburg based his Middle High German epic poem on the Anglo-Norman *Tristan* of Thomas of Britain from 1170-75. Gottfried's poem is the oldest courtly German source of the legend and, together with the extant conclusions of Thomas' *Tristan*, comprises the earliest surviving complete version of the courtly branch. Gottfried's *Tristan* is incomplete (he died before completing the final sixth of the poem) and is astonishingly loyal to his source.²⁶ His poem remains the only key to the first five

²⁵ The earliest *extant* version of the common branch is Béroul's incomplete Norman poem, dating from c. 1160-90. The oldest surviving *complete* "common" *Tristan* is Eilhart von Oberg's *Tristan* from c. 1170-90. Eilhart's German text is the oldest surviving complete version of the legend (from either tradition), and is the one thought to have most significantly influenced German works based on Tristan into the seventeenth century.

²⁶ Gottfried, *Tristan*, trans. A. T. Hatto, 10.

sixths of Thomas' work. Arthur Thomas Hatto's introduction to his English adaptation of Gottfried's *Tristan* even calls the poem the classic form of the romance.²⁷

Large-scale prose versions of the legend enjoyed widespread popularity in Western Europe and the story of *Tristan* was the most popular of secular literature in the Middle Ages. The legend remained in popular consciousness from that time until the revival of interest in the Middle Ages and Celtic chivalry at the end of the late eighteenth century. Though Gottfried's version was well known in German speaking countries, Ulrich Müller indicates that it is not likely that it was read throughout the span of time between Gottfried and Wagner. Nevertheless, educated society of Wagner's time would have been familiar with *Tristan* through various new editions and translations of prose versions of the legend.²⁸ Scholars and educated audiences in German-speaking regions during the nineteenth century regarded the legend as immoral and indecent.²⁹ Nevertheless, the new editions of and conclusions to Gottfried's tale that appeared in Germany in the early years of the nineteenth century³⁰ testify to the growing popularity of this medieval legend.

Furthermore, Romantic and post-Romantic artists—musicians in particular—disagreed with scholars and were fascinated by both Gottfried's epic poem and the medieval legend on which it was based. With the increased interest in the Middle Ages and Arthurian legends during the nineteenth century came plans to produce *Tristan*-based works by such German writers as August Wilhelm Schlegel (1801), Achim von Arnim

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁸ A discussion of these editions and their reception can be found in Ulrich Müller, "The Modern Reception of Gottfried's *Tristan* and the Medieval Legend of *Tristan and Isolde* in *A Companion to Gottfried Von Strassburg's "Tristan,"* ed. Will Hasty (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2003), 285-304.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 287.

³⁰ Eberhard von Groote in Berlin, 1821; Friedrich von der Hagen in Breslau, 1823; and Hans Ferdinand Massmann in Leipzig, 1843.

and Clemens Brentano (1804), August von Platen (1825-27), Friedrich Rückert (1839), and Karl Immermann (1840). Of these, only Wagner's opera progressed beyond unrealized drafts and fragments.³¹

Though both the courtly and the common branch of *Tristan* differ in the treatment of many aspects of the characters and how the legend is presented, they do share major plot elements. Because of this, early versions of the legend can be generalized into a single narrative. A summary of this conglomerate narrative, the prototype of the Tristan legend, is provided in Appendix One.

The Eternal Triangle: The Characters and the Relationships Within

The more refined courtly branch of the legend recognizes the psychological component of the drama: as a result, the *relational* aspects of the story become the drama's focus. In particular, the *Tristans* of Thomas and Gottfried are noted for their epic themes: the conflict between life and death and its tragic conclusion. Central to the literary form of the courtly epic is the theme of the eternal love triangle: a knight loves the wife of another, most often above the knight's rank and station.

On the surface, the story of Tristan, Isolde, and King Mark fits the prototype of the courtly epic love triangle (Figure 2). In order for the triangle to function effectively as a dramatic literary device, it is key for the narrative to promote one lover over the other: knight or husband. Most frequently, only the knight and lady hold the sympathy of the audience, with little sentiment or consideration for the husband. Indeed, the audience is often led to believe that the husband has only himself to blame for the loss of his lady's loyalty. Because only one romantic pairing may be favoured, the eternal triangle must

³¹ Müller, "The Modern Reception of Gottfried's *Tristan*," 285-304.

feature a balance between the noble and the ignoble. One of the men—either the husband or the knight—must be portrayed as ignoble in order to generate audience sympathy for the other. If the storyteller’s aim is comic, the ignoble suitor is eliminated from the equation and the victorious suitor is united with the lady. If the end is tragic, the ignoble husband discovers the affair and one or both of the lovers die, or — more uncommonly— the lady abandons her noble husband for her ignoble lover, unaware of her mistake until it is too late. The final and least common outcome of the eternal triangle is neither comic nor tragic and therefore ambiguous: neither man is portrayed in an unsympathetic way and both hold the affections of the lady. In such cases, the storyteller’s difficulty is to retain audience sympathy for the heroine while they sympathize with both men, each of whom is wronged by her in some way.³²

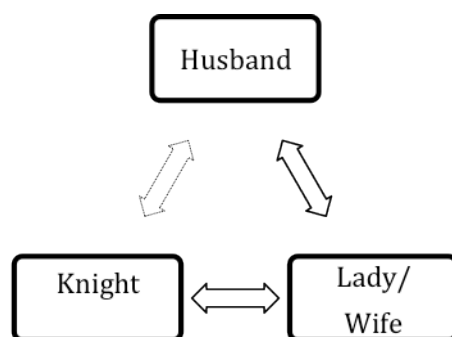


Figure 2: Epic Love Triangle Prototype

In the case of Wagner’s *Tristan*, however, the eternal triangle takes a significantly more complicated course (Figure 3). Much like the triangle in the legend of Arthur, Lancelot, and Guinevere, the triangle between Tristan, Isolde, and Mark is a complete one with affections flowing between all parties. (Typically, the link between the lady and her husband is weak, while the one between her husband and the knight is understated or

³² Batts, “The Role of King Marke”, 117.

completely non-existent.) The nuances of each character and relationship within the triangle have greater potential to shift audience expectations for the outcome of the story. It is reasonable to believe that Tristan is noble, for he is a knight and hero. And, though it is apparent that Isolde loves him, there remains the question of the cause of her love for Tristan. Is it true love? Nothing more than *eros*? Or simply the product of a magic elixir? It becomes crucial to determine whether Mark is a noble or ignoble king and husband in order to discern how his character affects the balance of the triangle. How does he rule his kingdom? What is the nature of his love for Isolde? What are Isolde's feelings regarding her political marriage to Mark? Finally, the relationship between the two men must be examined, as Tristan and Mark have more numerous and far deeper ties binding them than the jealous men typical of the literary eternal triangle. The answers to these questions are not the same in each version of the Tristan legend. In comparing Gottfried's poem with his contemporaries, one can build a picture of the kind of eternal triangle Wagner wished for his drama when he selected Gottfried as his source for his libretto.

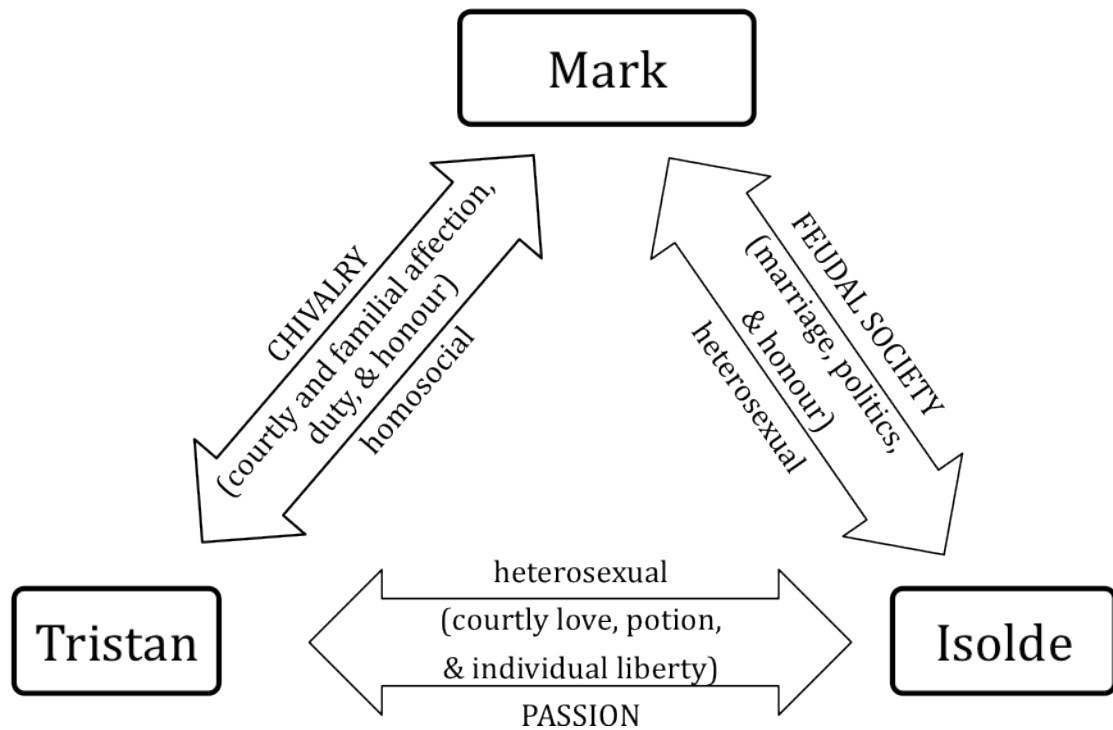


Figure 3: The 'Tristan' Eternal Triangle

The relationship between King Mark and Tristan in Gottfried's version is multifaceted and complex. When Tristan first arrives at Mark's court, he impresses the court and gains their acceptance through his skills in hunting, music, and languages.³³ As Tristan unveils his many talents to the king and court, Mark is impressed and "entreats him to stay, not as a knight, but rather as a courtier [...] and becomes to a large degree dependant for his pleasures on Tristan."³⁴ Even before any of them are aware of Tristan's familial ties with the king, they form a friendship that scholars define as chivalric companionship. Reginald Hyatte describes the literary representations of such relationships as similar to that of a knight's chivalric love of a woman: claiming that epic poetry "offers a model of affection and devotion in knightly friendship *far superior* to

³³ Gottfried, *Tristan*, trans. A. T. Hatto, 49.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 78.

[the] love of [a] knight and a woman.”³⁵ Perfectly faithful chivalric friendships in poetry and legends such as *Tristan* serve as a complementary and comparative standard for erotic *fine amor*.³⁶ Hyatte’s book on the idealization of friendship in Medieval and early Renaissance literature examines Tristan’s chivalric friendship, not with Mark, but with Kaherdin, the brother of Iseult of the White Hand. However, the same criteria that he uses to establish the nature of Tristan’s relationship with Kaherdin can also be applied to his relationship with Mark. Hyatte outlines six “characteristics of excellent male friendship in the Aristotelian-Ciceronian tradition”: mutual admiration, confidence, affection, shared mental attitudes, living together, and the pursuit of wisdom and honour.³⁷ Each of these characteristics is clearly present in Gottfried’s portrayal of the relationship between Tristan and Mark.

Mutual admiration is shown most explicitly in Mark’s admiration for the young Tristan. Mark immediately recognizes and praises Tristan’s talents as a master-huntsman who is well versed in lore and articulate. Upon hearing Tristan sing, Mark questions him and discovers that the youth is also fluent in Breton, Welsh, Latin, and French, and becomes captivated by him.

‘Tristan, listen to me,’ said the king, ‘you can do everything I want—hunting, languages, music. To crown it let us be companions. You be mine and I will be yours. By day we shall ride out hunting, at night here at home we shall sustain ourselves with courtly pursuits, such as harping, fiddling, and singing. You are good at these things; do them for me. For you, in return, I will play a thing, *I* know, which perhaps your heart desires—of fine clothes and horses I will give you all you want! [...] Look, my companion, I entrust my sword, spurs, cross-bow, and

³⁵ Reginald Hyatte, *The Arts of Friendship: The Idealization of Friendship in Medieval and Early Renaissance Literature* (Leiden, the Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1994), 87.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 90.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 109.

golden horn to you. Take charge of them, look after them
for me—be a merry courtier!’³⁸

Tristan’s reciprocal respect is not so explicitly laid out in the text, but the fact that Tristan complies with Mark’s wishes and becomes his companion is sufficient evidence that the admiration is, at least to an extent, mutual.

What began as admiration quickly progresses to affection. First, Tristan earns laudations of the court: “*Tristan, Tristan li Parmenois cum est beas et cum curtois!* [Tristan, Tristan of Parmenie, how handsome and courteous he is!].”³⁹ “Whatever [Tristan] did, whatever he said seemed (and was) so good that all cherished friendly feelings and tender affection for him.”⁴⁰ King Mark shares these affectionate feelings: “The king liked to see [Tristan] since he was drawn to him in his heart. He loved to serve him and often did so, for Tristan was at all times discreetly at his side, ministering to his needs whenever he found occasion.”⁴¹

In response, the youth is with him at all times as both royal retainer and companion: “Wherever Mark was or wherever he went, Tristan always made a second. This Mark took in very good part. He held Tristan in high favour, it cheered him when he saw him.”⁴² This constant companionship undoubtedly leads to a sharing of confidence between the men. When Mark questions Tristan for details on his musical abilities, Tristan confides candidly in the King: “‘My Lord,’ answered Tristan swiftly, ‘you need not have pressed me so far to tell you, despite myself, since, if you wish to know it, I am

³⁸ Gottfried, *Tristan*, trans. A. T. Hatto, 91.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁴² *Ibid.*

bound to tell.”⁴³ Whether Tristan’s confidence in Mark is because of the king’s rank above him, or due to the devotion of a comrade, confidence between the two is apparent. Mark’s confidence in Tristan, however, is absolute: he trusts him with his knights and kingdom, with the land of Parmenie, and he trusts Tristan’s counsel enough to consent to taking a wife, allowing his nephew to oversee the task of choosing and obtaining Isolde as his queen.⁴⁴

Hyatte lists shared mental attitudes and the pursuit of wisdom and honour as the final two characteristics of excellent male friendship. They serve as the most prominent indicators of Tristan’s relationship with Mark. Tristan takes his role within the chivalric code—towards his king and court—very seriously; even before he knew of his blood relationship to Mark, these factors drove his relationship with his king. The two characters are like-minded and share many attitudes. When Mark asks “grant me a wish that I shall not be denied,” Tristan dutifully responds, “whatever you command, my lord.”⁴⁵ The pursuit of courtly attributes such as a liberal education, kindness and humility, a fine and cultivated appearance, devotion toward women, loyalty and generosity, felicity, courteousness, and chivalry are important to both men.⁴⁶ Though many members of the court at Cornwall likely shared these attributes, wisdom and honour would certainly have fostered the relationship between Tristan and Mark.

Once it is discovered that Tristan is Mark’s nephew, the king is elevated to a sort of father figure to whom Tristan owes everything. Whereas Mark had served as a respected example of chivalry for Tristan’s birth father Rivalin, for Tristan he becomes “a

⁴³ Ibid., 91.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 153.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 86.

⁴⁶ These courtly attributes and quotations are as evidenced in pages 95-110 of Hatto’s translation.

father figure from whom he has received everything he possesses.”⁴⁷ Gottfried proposes that a man is “compounded of his wealth and his person: take the former away and you will have but half a man.”⁴⁸ They become everything to one another in a truly symbiotic relationship. As Mark’s nephew Tristan’s place in the court is elevated from lowly merchant’s son or royal retainer: Tristan becomes the king’s only heir with legitimate claim to the wealth of the kingdom. Thus in finding a bride for Mark, Tristan expands his uncle’s kingdom while simultaneously relinquishing his claim to it.

The nature of the relationship between Mark and Isolde also has its basis in the ideals of the courtly tradition. For Mark, his marital bond to Isolde is one of honour and duty. It was common for marriage in a feudal society to provide political benefit for both or either parties, and Mark’s union with Isolde brings stability to Cornwall’s relationship with Ireland. For Isolde, the union is a loveless move in which she is only a political pawn. Her detachment from Mark is further encouraged by the fact that their marriage is not consummated on their marriage night.⁴⁹ The chivalric construct of courtly love operated with the understanding that love and marriage were incompatible.⁵⁰ Because of this belief, courtly love (the love between a knight and a married noblewoman) was acceptable and at times even considered ennobling. Courtly love arose “as a reaction to the brutal lawlessness of feudal manner”⁵¹: typically unconsummated, extra marital love was tolerated *because* it was the expected place for love in society. The story of Tristan and Isolde illustrates a conflict between courtly chivalry and the feudal law. Under feudal

⁴⁷ Batts, “The Role of King Mark,” 119.

⁴⁸ Gottfried, *Tristan*, trans. A. T. Hatto, 12.

⁴⁹ Isolde sent Brangäne in her stead, in order to conceal the nature of her affair with Tristan.

⁵⁰ As per a judgment by the countess of Champagne.

Denis de Rougemont, *Passion and Society*, trans. Montgomery Belgion, rev. exp. ed. (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1940; rpt. 1956), 33-34.

⁵¹ Rougemont, 33.

law, barons (or vassals) had the responsibility to alert their lord to anything that threatened his rights and honour. Under the courtly code, on the other hand, anyone who disclosed the secrets of courtly love was considered a felon. Denis de Rougemont proposes that Tristan's experience could be "intended to illustrate a conflict between chivalry and feudal society—and hence a conflict between two kinds of duty."⁵² This understanding of the refinements and expectations of both the chivalric and feudal aspects of society leads to the conclusion that, in the eternal triangle, the links between Tristan and Isolde and Mark and Isolde are not only nearly equitable in strength and propriety, but are less binding than the link between the two men in regards to sentiment and honour. While Tristan and Isolde did not act honourably in the extent to which their amorous relationship prevailed, they were acting within the rights of the individual in society when they sought true love outside the bonds of marriage: the passion that drove their "noble hearts"⁵³ justified much of their actions. Paradoxically, the side of the triangle that is least often developed in epic love poetry is the strongest bond of the Tristan triangle. And, as the weakest link, the bond between Isolde and Mark is the first to be broken and, as will be seen in Wagner's libretto in the next chapter, the last to be mourned.

Issue of the Potion and the Dual Nature of King Mark

Though the nature of the love potion differs among versions of the legend, it is significant to any discussion of the relationships in the Tristan legend. The role of the potion varies from being the entire cause of the love between Tristan and Isolde to serving as a mere symbol of the passage from unconscious to conscious love and not the

⁵² Ibid., 33.

⁵³ Gottfried was the first to use this term to describe the lovers.

cause of love at all. In either case, however, the potion has some degree of control over the future of the lovers, thus freeing them to express an emotion and compulsion that until that point had remained unacknowledged and undeclared. The potion that Isolde's mother had intended to sweeten her daughter's union with the king quickly poisons their union.

In the *Tristan* of Thomas, the love between Tristan and Isolde is *amour fine e veraie* and exists before they drink the potion.⁵⁴ Gottfried alters this detail in his poem, making the potion the *cause* of the love, thus giving it greater prominence in the drama. Unlike Thomas, Gottfried preserves the idea that the love potion causes the lovers to succumb to a mindless physical compulsion greater than themselves. Neil Thomas indicates that Gottfried retains this idea because of its effectiveness in upholding the theme of love as a disruption to feudal society and in order to further support his model of the eternal triangle.⁵⁵

Michael Batts argues that whether the potion causes the love and death of the lovers is not what matters most.⁵⁶ Instead, he sees the duration of the potion's effects, and Mark's response to these effects, as the more important question. In some versions of the legend, the potion fully wears off after a few years, the lovers are temporarily compelled to a love that they do not want, and all is blamed on the potion. In others, the potion does not wear off over time, but remains an *unseliger Trank* [disastrous drink]

⁵⁴ Neil Thomas, *Tristan in the Underworld: A Study of Gottfried Von Strassburg's Tristan Together with the Tristan of Thomas*, Studies in Mediaeval Literature (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1991), 44. This is one factor on which various version of the legend differ: some view the potion as the *cause* of the love between the title characters, while in others the potion provides an excuse to display a previously existing affection. For further reading on other versions of the *Tristan* legend, including literary versions pre-dating Gottfried, see: Michael Batts, "The Development of the Tristan Legend," in *Gottfried Von Strassburg* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1971).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁵⁶ Batts, "The Role of King Mark," 122-123.

resulting in the *unseliger Tod* [disastrous death] of the lovers. In each case the love resulting from the potion is viewed negatively, reducing Mark's role in the drama. In many versions he even banishes the lovers from the kingdom until the effects of the potion wear off. The majority of modern versions of the legend follow one of these two traditions. The third tradition features a permanent potion. While the permanence of the effects of the potion redeems the lovers from most feelings of regret, it most frequently results in Mark taking action against Tristan and killing him. In Gottfried's poem, the potion's effect is permanent, but the lovers choose not to reveal the potion or their resulting love to their king. Though the nature of the potion in this version liberates the lovers from their moral obligation to feel guilt over their affair, they remain self-conscious of the societal *faux pas* of their infidelity. In making the decision not to inform Mark about the potion, Batts explains that Tristan and Isolde place themselves under Mark's obligation: he is not in the position to relinquish his claim on his bride, nor is he free to banish them to a life together outside the court. By keeping the potion concealed from Mark, the lovers willingly lock themselves into the eternal triangle, devoid of any hope of Mark's forgiveness.

Duality of Mark's Character

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, the most prominent factor affecting how an audience wishes the story to end is which hero is championed as the successful lover. Among the versions of the Tristan legend, the feature that most affects this outcome is whether Mark is portrayed as a good king or a bad king. When Tristan offers to duel Morolt to free Mark from a legal subordination to Ireland, Mark unsuccessfully tries to dissuade Tristan from risking his life for the sake of the kingdom. Thomas Kerth

suggests that this disregard for his kingdom was not a knightly attitude for Mark— and Gottfried goes so far to liken him to the “timidest woman.”⁵⁷ In his negative characterization of the king, Gottfried sets Tristan up as a better courtly figure than Mark because of his boldness in battle. It is significant to note that Gottfried’s negative portrayal of Mark in this situation is not universal to all versions of the legend. Other versions, like Brother Robert’s from 1227, ameliorate any potentially negative reference to Mark when accounting the same event.⁵⁸ Gottfried’s negative portrayal of the King affects the balance of tension in the eternal triangle, for as Mark’s status declines, Tristan’s grows—and with it, audience sympathy for Tristan as Isolde’s lover.

Alternatively, Craig Palmer builds on Rüdiger Krohn’s argument that Gottfried “defames courtly society”⁵⁹ by planting an initially harmless flaw in Mark’s masculinity by insinuating the homoerotic.⁶⁰ With reference to Krohn, Palmer identifies Mark’s decision to name Tristan as heir rather than to marry and his declaration of devoted friendship to Tristan, a young Ganymede, as support for an intimate relationship with Tristan.⁶¹ Palmer claims that the narrative need not portray homosexuality and heterosexuality as mutually exclusive and that a sexual duality is as plausible as Kerth’s picture of Mark as both cuckolded husband and model king. Palmer’s narrative for Gottfried places Tristan under a homoerotic, sexual subordination by Mark until the point that he prepares himself for battle against Morold. The fact that Gottfried provides no

⁵⁷ Gottfried, *Tristan*, trans. A. T. Hatto, 129.

⁵⁸ Thomas Kerth, “Mark’s Royal Decline,” 110.

⁵⁹ Rüdiger Krohn, “Erotik und Tabu in Gottfrieds ‘Tristan’: König Mark,” *Stauferzeit: Geschichte, Literatur, Kunst*, ed. Rüdiger Krohn, Bernd Thum and Peter Wapnewski (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1979), 362-76. Quoted in reference below.

⁶⁰ Craig Palmer, “A Question of Manhood: Overcoming the Paternal Homoerotic in Gottfried’s ‘Tristan!’” *Monatshefte* 88, no. 1 (1996), 17.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 17-18 and 28 (footnote five).

fundamental continuity in Mark's character allows for Palmer to view the king as both homosexual *and* cuckolded husband.⁶²

Judith Peraino's article, "Courtly Obsessions," points to Eve Sedgwick's definition of the "homosocial desire" as an intrinsic force in courtly culture: "the social bonds between persons of the same sex that are potentially erotic."⁶³ She identifies Tristan's musical expertise—and Marks' appreciation thereof—as from the realm of the feminine.⁶⁴ She similarly distinguishes Tristan's courtly conquests in his early time at court from the masculine displays of power he exhibits later in the legend.⁶⁵ Tristan's development towards knightly conquest in battles abroad marks his self-removal from the symbiotic relationship he shared with Mark—the Ganymede matures into a self-sufficient man. Mark's perception of Tristan, however, remains in the realm of homosocial desire; Tristan and his courtliness take the place of the feminine as the object of his desire.⁶⁶ Peraino refers to this narrative as the "'undoing' of Mark's masculine identity, [as a] function of the absence of a real woman in the *romance*."⁶⁷ She paints an effeminate picture of Gottfried's Mark: a king who "enjoys refinement without the proper motivation of a real woman, [becoming] like a woman himself—passive, complacent, and fearful, while Tristan fights his battles[...], content without a woman at court—content with the purely homosocial contract as it stands."⁶⁸

Peraino quotes the opening of Krohn's argument as support for why the homosocial tendencies in Gottfried's poem might have remained veiled:

⁶² Ibid., 27.

⁶³ Judith Ann Peraino, "Courtly Obsessions: Music and Masculine Identity in Gottfried Von Strassburg's *Tristan*," *repercussions* 4, no. 2 (1995): 69.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 65.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 63-64.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 68.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 69.

homosexuality existed and was known in the Middle Ages. It was considered a grave sin and was as a rule very harshly punished because it grossly offended against the church as well as against secular norms. ... Thus this explains that the vice of “sodomy” in the fictional poetry was altogether not thematisized—or, on the contrary, only thematisized in a carefully disguised form.⁶⁹

She then references Kerth’s consideration of the Mark’s social gender in his account of the king’s decline:

There is ample evidence to suggest, however, that for the medieval audience, the absence of a queen, and, therefore, the impossibility of a legitimate heir would have been the focus of concern, not to say disbelief at Marke’s dereliction of royal duty, long before the appearance of Tristan.⁷⁰

Though Rüdiger’s and Palmer’s explicit claims of Mark’s homoerotic or homosexual desire for Tristan are not universally accepted, Peraino’s application of the idea of homosocial desires for Mark illustrates Mark’s character’s increasingly effeminate development over the trajectory of Gottfried’s poem, furthering Kerth’s picture of Mark’s social decline in courtly society.

Mark’s decline results in a fascinating duality within Gottfried’s character of the king. On one hand, Gottfried reveals that Mark was a good king, both feared and loved by his barons. On the other hand, he accuses Mark of being one who seeks pleasure for himself above the prosperity of his kingdom.⁷¹ When Isolde sends Brangäne in her stead on the wedding night to conceal the loss of her maidenhood to Tristan from the king, Mark does not even notice that it is not Isolde at his side: “to him one woman was as another [...] there was nothing to choose between them [...] they both paid him their

⁶⁹ Krohn, 365, quoted and translated in Peraino, “Courtly Obsessions,” 70.

⁷⁰ Kerth, “Mark’s Royal Decline,” 114, quoted in Peraino, “Courtly Obsessions,” 71.

⁷¹ Hatto, 26.

duties, one way or another, so that he noticed nothing amiss.”⁷² By portraying Mark as a selfish and callous lover, Gottfried unsympathetically lays blame for Isolde’s infidelity on Mark. He speaks critically of deceived husbands in general, saying that they “have only themselves to blame, for they are blinded by lust”⁷³ and that it was “Mark’s fault that he was deceived, because he closed his eyes—the lovers concealed nothing!”⁷⁴ Gottfried sacrifices the character of the king, whom he had first described as an irreproachable courtier, an ideal Arthurian ruler and guardian of virtue, in order to provide an effective character foil to Tristan’s honour.⁷⁵ Mark is no longer the warrior he had been at the beginning of the legend. Honour, instead, is depicted by Tristan. The success of Gottfried’s portrayal of Mark, according to Batts, lies in the distinction between the private and public man.⁷⁶ The public king is representative of the ideal state: he holds a position of honour and so is above reproach. As his relationship with Tristan grows, Mark becomes more human and his personal feelings gradually take priority over his office as king. Gottfried sets up a highly complex character in the role of the husband in the eternal triangle, allowing future writers to adapt the figure of the king as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ depending on their circumstances and dramatic needs. The balance of the Private and the Public Mark directly affects the balance of the eternal triangle and thus, the level of audience sympathy towards his plight.

Mark’s dual nature is further developed when considered in light of the place King Arthur may hold in the drama. In the versions of the common tradition (those of

⁷² Gottfried, quoted in Neil Thomas, 51.

⁷³ Hatto, 17.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁷⁵ Gottfried, quoted in Kerth, “Mark’s Royal Decline,” 105.

⁷⁶ Batts, “The Role of King Marke,” 124.

Eilhart and Béroul), Tristan is a knight of the Round Table in Arthur's court;⁷⁷ instead of arriving at Mark's court, Tristan arrives at Arthur's court. In such cases, it is Arthur's court, rather than Mark's, that presents the ideal of courtly grandeur. In contrast, Mark's court represents the tyrannical realm and is tainted by strife. In the common branch, the two kings confront each other. Mark is a weak, self-absorbed king, looking out only for himself and seeking only to reinforce his authority over his wife and Tristan; Arthur plays the character foil to Mark and defends the lovers.⁷⁸ Each king displays qualities that the other lacks. The courtly branch differs from the common on this aspect; Thomas severs the association of Tristan and Arthur by assigning them to different time periods, rather than making them contemporaries.⁷⁹ His version portrays Mark as a jealous lover while depicting King Arthur as a perfect Christian ruler who is both invincible and compassionate, but is one step further removed from the love story than in Eilhart's and Béroul's.⁸⁰ While the Arthur of the latter defends the lovers, Thomas's Arthur is not present in space and time to pass such a judgment or offer his blessing.⁸¹ In doing so, Thomas challenges the courtly ideals of the identity of *amour* and *chevalerie*, suggesting that they no longer apply—thus making the love between Tristan and Isolde the polar opposite of conjugal courtly love.⁸² Thomas does not eliminate King Arthur from the drama entirely, but places him in the margins, shifting Arthurian society with him.⁸³ The implications are that in Thomas' *Tristan*, Arthur becomes a symbolic relative of Tristan

⁷⁷ William C. McDonald, *Arthur and Tristan: On the Intersection of Legends in German Medieval Literature*, edited by Ulrich Goebel and Peter I. Barta, Two, Tristania Monographs Series (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1991), 6.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 65.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 67.

and the youth becomes the heir to Arthur's glory.⁸⁴ In this tradition, Gottfried's version assigns Arthurian qualities of virtue, kindness, and forbearance to Mark, while continuing to display qualities that the common branch of the myth attributed to him: fickleness, weakness, suspicion, and an indiscriminating attitude.⁸⁵ The contrast in characteristics that other writers set up *between* the two kings is no longer present and Mark instead acts as Arthur's surrogate—Arthur is not truly absent from the story, but remains present in the character of the other King of England.⁸⁶ Gottfried weakens the courtly ideal of love's influence on the couple's affair by removing Arthur, but does so without completely removing the king's noble qualities from the drama.

Recognizing Gottfried's "great achievement [of creating] Mark as a character who functions as a representative of society or of a social class in which he has his being and also as [an] intensely human individual"⁸⁷ is key to understanding Wagner's portrayal of the king in his libretto. The prevailing themes of love, familial ties, honour, duty, and loyalty of the courtly *Tristan* tradition lend themselves to Wagner's portrayal of the pursuit of passionate love in direct contrast to the chivalric code of medieval feudal society.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 84.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 72.

⁸⁶ I.e., King of Cornwall, Mark. Ibid., 83.

⁸⁷ Batts, "The Role of King Marke," 124.

Chapter Two: Wagner's Literary *Tristan*

Genesis of Wagner's Libretto

Richard Wagner's libretto for *Tristan und Isolde* was published in Leipzig under the title *Tristan und Isolde von Richard Wagner* in January 1859, six years before the opera premiered in Munich. Though it was common for Wagner to have his libretti printed for the public before setting them to music, this was not a typical practice for composers of Romantic opera. The fact that Wagner made the libretto available to the public before the opera was completed indicates that he saw his libretto as having its own artistic merit independent of its role within the entire opera. This independence of the libretto from the score warrants a detailed study of Wagner's treatment of King Mark in a strictly literary sense before examining it from a musical perspective. According to Arthur Groos, Wagner's libretto differs from the libretti used by other composers "not only in its independence from the music, but also in its independence from its source."⁸⁸ Groos explains that libretti deriving from famous or well-known literature usually reflect a relationship with the original work: either by "celebrating the source by keeping it more or less intact" or by "celebrating its revision or transposition to another medium."⁸⁹ In both cases, the libretto is validated or legitimized by its source; on the other hand, Wagner's deviations from his source material reveal that the only thing Wagner intended to celebrate was the legend of *Tristan* and the pursuit of passion itself rather than any

⁸⁸ Arthur Groos, "Goethefried Von Straßburg? [sic] Appropriation and Anxiety in Wagner's *Tristan* Libretto," in *Gottfried Von Strassburg and the Medieval Tristan Legend*, eds. Adrian Stevens and Roy Wisbey (Cambridge and London: D. S. Brewer and The Institute of Germanic Studies, University of London, 1990), 93.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

particular poet or version.⁹⁰ It is this artistic independence from both source and musical setting that makes Wagner's rendition of the universal legend of Tristan particularly interesting.

Wagner's source for his libretto for *Tristan* is Gottfried's more than 19,000-line unfinished poem, *Tristan*. Gottfried was a member of Strassburg's urban patriciate and was well read in Latin, French, and German as well as a lover of music and the hunt.⁹¹ Despite Gottfried's cultural refinement, his poem was not considered to be "high literature" by Wagner or his literary contemporaries.⁹² Wagner makes little reference to Gottfried in essays, letters, and diaries, and Cosima's diaries only mention the poet three times—each time in a negative light.⁹³ Groos argues that by basing his *Tristan* on a source that was considered to be an uncultured part of the contemporary canon, Wagner gave himself a greater degree of independence from the source than if he had selected a source that was treated as an immutable facet of high culture.⁹⁴

Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* is not a "simple 'adaptation' or 'transportation' [from one medium to another] of Gottfried's romance, but rather a work that *appropriates* the medieval fragment into a definitive modern realization."⁹⁵ Because Gottfried's courtly Tristan emphasizes the conflict between love and honour within the chivalric code and the lives of the lovers, it is undoubtedly this focus and the relationship within Gottfried's triangle that led Wagner to choose the poet as the source of his *Tristan*. However, Wagner does not use Gottfried's plot unchanged. His libretto simplifies the

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Hatto, forward to *Tristan*, 7.

⁹² Groos, 94.

⁹³ Ibid., 93.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 94.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 95.

legend to facilitate staging it as an opera. In the case of each act, the psychological drama rests nearly entirely on one character or relationship, only broadening in scope near the end of the act. The action of the first act centres on Isolde and the journey from Ireland to Cornwall from her point of view. The second act finds its focus on Tristan and Isolde together, while the third focuses primarily on Tristan until Isolde's famous *Verklärung* [transfiguration] at the opera's close. A detailed plot summary of Wagner's treatment of the legend can be found in Appendix Two.

Comparison of Wagner's Narrative to Gottfried's

While Wagner's portrayal of the Tristan legend bears many similarities to Gottfried's telling, it is striking in its differences. Scholars agree that many of the differences between Wagner's source and his setting of *Tristan* stem from his nihilist "Schopenhauerian vision of the world as essentially tragic."⁹⁶ The composer's letters to friends begin to reference the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer by late 1854.⁹⁷ In a letter to August Röckel in 1856, Wagner writes of how his reading of Schopenhauer's *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* [The World as Will and Representation] influenced his "conceptions ... [and] ... artistic influences" in the *[R]ing*.⁹⁸ The philosopher "provided the exact blend of the poetic, philosophical, and metaphysical" for which Wagner had been seeking. As a result, Wagner's aesthetics became more "explicitly philosophical" in their framework, emphasizing "both the tragic character of existence and the possibility of redemption of that existence."⁹⁹ Wagner integrates these aspects of Schopenhauerian philosophy into *Tristan* in his representation of night and day, where the realm of day

⁹⁶ Eric Chafe, "Tristan's Answer to King Mark: Moral and Philosophical Questions," 45.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

encompasses everything false and only in the darkness of night—and ultimately death—may the Will find expression of its true desires. In Act Two, Scene Two, Wagner’s libretto and orchestral score portray the resulting dualities of Day/Night, Falsehood/Truth, and Life/Death as the driving characters in the forefront of the drama.¹⁰⁰

Neil Thomas argues that Wagner’s “distance from the ideological basis of the source” led him to ignore the important knightly dimension of his original, changing his characters into timeless figures.¹⁰¹ He claims that Wagner used Gottfried’s courtly source but ignored much of it in his portrayal, arguing further that the social conflict inherent in its courtly roots, though understood by medieval audiences, would be lost on Romantic audiences.¹⁰² However, Wagner did not ignore this aspect. Through his dramatic contrast in past and present storytelling and his use of contrasting styles and forms of music for the King and the rest of his characters, Wagner not only acknowledges the cultural implications of his source, but also manipulates it to further his Schopenhauerian duality. The conflict between the structured chivalric system and passionate abandon present in Gottfried’s poem is further emphasized in Wagner’s libretto. He melds Tristan’s pursuit of unfettered love with the existential search for the manifestation of the Will, presenting it as the philosophical “other” to the chivalric code.

For his portrayal, Wagner reduces a cast that would have otherwise been quite large, involving both supporting minor characters and a chorus of members of multiple

¹⁰⁰ Much has been written on Wagner’s casting of these dualities. For more information on Wagner’s Schopenhauerian influences, refer to the studies on which the above overview is based: Eric Chafe, *The Tragic and the Ecstatic: The Musical Revolution of Wagner's Tristan and Isolde* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Bryan Magee, *The Tristan Chord: Wagner and Philosophy*. (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2000), reprint as *Wagner and Philosophy* (London: Penguin Press, 2000); Roger Scruton, *Death-Devoted Heart: Sex and the Sacred in Wagner's Tristan and Isolde* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹⁰¹ Thomas, 18.

¹⁰² Ibid.

courts at various points of Tristan's life, to three main and three supporting named characters, a shepherd, a steersman, and a small men's chorus which functions as sailors, knights, and esquires. Wagner's cuts to the temporal realm of the story are even more dramatic: while the original legend spans more than Tristan's entire lifetime, Wagner's version can be understood as merely spanning a few days. Figure 4 summarizes the main events of both versions and illustrates how Wagner's plot corresponds with his source. The comparison identifies two main techniques used by Wagner to make a legend of this breadth feasible for the operatic stage: compression and dramatic narrative flashback.

Gottfried

Birth and Early Life		Tristan & Isolde First Love		Tristan & Isolde Banned		Tristan & Isolde Discovered		Isolde of the White Hands	
A	Death of Tristan's parents, Rivalin and Blancheflor	A	T&I take love potion intended for M&I, Brangäne take's I's place with M on wedding night	A	Time in the love idyll, forest, cave of lovers	A	Gottfried on women.	A	Tristan flees from court.
B	Tristan's court service with King Mark Duels Morholt (Isolde's Uncle)	B	Plots against Tristan, M doubts T's honour, Iron test, Tristan returns to court	B	Royal Hunt: Mark discovers the lovers	B	Isolde compared to Eve. Mark discovers the lovers in the garden.	A	Tristan flees to Normandy; Isolde's lament.
C	Dragon, Sword chunk discovered in the bath, Trial			C	Tristan & Isolde return to court	C	Tristan pledges Loyalty to Isolde; Isolde promises SUICIDE .	B	Isolde of the White Hands & Kaedin Tristan gains fame in Norman court
								C	Tristan replaces Isolde the Fair with the "new Isolde"

ends with Thomas

Wagner

Act One: Liebestrank					Act Two: Liebesnacht			Act Three: Liebestod		
Scene I	Isolde and Brangäne on ship from Ireland. Isolde wishes the ship will sink.	Scene I	In Cornwall, Brangäne warns Isolde of Melot's spying but provides a torch for Isolde's visit with Tristan. Laments giving them the love potion.	Scene I	Castle in Brittany : Tristan, mortally wounded, needs Isolde's healing. Tristan has flashback to his life at court. Isolde arrives.	Scene I	Tristan tears off his bandages and dies.	Scene I	Kurwenal kills Melot out of revenge. Brangäne confesses to administering the love potion. Mark arrives to forgive everyone, only to find all but Isolde dead. Isolde's Transfiguration.	
Scene II	Tristan avoids Isolde during the journey. Isolde summons him. (N.B.: Morold is Isolde's Fiance)	Scene II	Tristan and Isolde meet in the safety of darkness. Three love duets. Brangäne warns the lovers of the approaching royal hunting party.	Scene II		Scene II		Scene II		
Scene III	Isolde laments healing Tantris and curses Tristan, wishing death on them both. Sends Brangäne for potion.	Scene III	Brangäne shrieks and Kurwenal cries warning. Mark returns from hunting, discovers the lovers, and sings his lament (including flashback to past events).	Scene III		Scene III		Scene III		
Scene IV	Isolde summons Tristan for an apology and commands Brangäne to pour death potion.	Scene IV								
Scene V	Tristan arrives at Isolde's chamber where she demands atonement for Morold's death. Both drink 'death potion' (love potion).	Scene V								

Present tense **PASSION**; Flashback to **HONOUR**; plot **INCONSISTENCIES**.

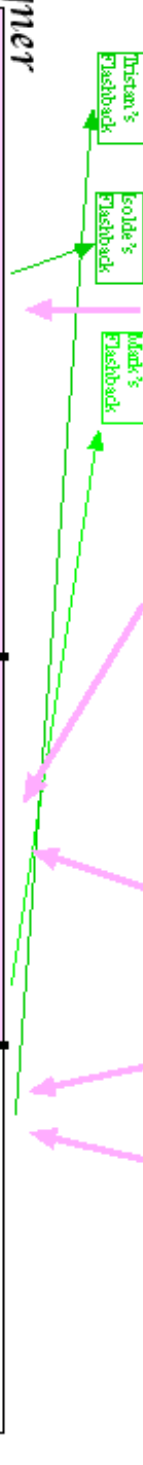


Figure 4: Plot Summary Comparison: Gottfried vs. Wagner

Wagner's Act One comes from section A of the second part of Gottfried's poem on Figure 4, marked as "Tristan and Isolde: First Love." Though the entire scene takes place on the ship during the voyage from Ireland to Cornwall, Wagner relies on Isolde's dramatic narrative flashback to provide important details from before the opening of the movement for his audience. A particular benefit of this technique is that an omniscient narrator is not required to move the drama along and the audience becomes privy to the inner thoughts and feelings of the character retelling the past. The flashbacks allow Wagner to take Gottfried's poem, a version of the Tristan tale that already relied on the drama of the human psyche, for its material and to emphasize these elements; for Wagner the drama of *Tristan* was predominantly psychological. Through Isolde's narrative, the audience learns not only of how she met Tristan and came to be on the ship to Cornwall, but also of her ever changing emotions during those times. Wagner reveals that Isolde had had the opportunity to take Tristan's life when he was under her care, and why she did not; Isolde's retelling of the moment she and Tristan locked eyes gives the audience reason to believe that the heart of Mark's betrothed may already belong to another.

In Act Two, Wagner relies on Mark's dramatic narrative flashback to fill in the missing details of the dramatic events outside of the time frame of the opera. Through Mark's lament, the audience learns of the depth of his relationship with Tristan. Mark calls Tristan his friend and strong shield of honour. He tells of how Tristan won honour, greatness, and power for the Kingdom, and how it was he who had convinced Mark to remarry for the sake of the kingdom after his first wife had died, even if it meant losing his inheritance of that kingdom. Mark's account reveals the depth of his respect for Isolde as he calls her wonderful wife and himself blessed. He tells Tristan that Isolde has opened

him to pain because she has rendered him *zart und offen* [vulnerable and open]. Above all, Mark's narrative illustrates the conflict between passionate love and courtly honour. Gottfried's version had emphasized the courtly elements of the legend, and Wagner's retelling brings that duality into even greater prominence. Mark's lament shows the underlying importance of honour, duty, and loyalty both in the court and in his relationship with Tristan. Mark cherished his loyal friend above all else, while Tristan, though he loved his uncle, cherished honour and loyalty to the station of king and kingdom. For Tristan, Mark symbolized all that was honourable and upstanding in the feudal system. When Mark pauses in his lament, expecting an answer, Tristan's inability to provide an explanation indicates that he is aware that he has acted in a manner outside of this system: "*O König, das kann ich dir nicht sagen; und was du fragst, das kannst du nie erfahren*" [O King, that I cannot tell you: and what you ask, you can never come to know]. Tristan's loss for words reveals that this conflict stems from more than the love potion. He finds himself outside of the system of his youth — unable to appeal to honour or his king. The dawning of *der öde Tag* [the dreary day] illuminates the chasm between who Tristan once was and who he has become: not only is he unable to explain his actions to his King, but Mark simply cannot come to know or understand. Similarly, Tristan dares not speak of honour to Isolde when he implores her to follow him even to death. He does, however, appeal to honour and loyalty when he reveals that Melot had led the crowd that urged him to find a wife for Mark and that Melot had partaken in betrayal by uncovering the affair: "*aus Eifer verriet mich der Freund dem König, den ich verriet!*" [Out of jealousy I was betrayed by my friend to the king, whom I betrayed!].

The narrative flashback of the third act is not as significant in length or scope of content as those of the first two acts. Tristan's questions upon waking in the castle of his childhood allow for Kurwenal to explain how it was that he came to be there, while revealing a glimpse of what Tristan had lost before he joined Mark's court. Tristan's own reflections oscillate between the past and the future following the trajectory of his thoughts from Isolde, to his childhood, to Mark, and back again. He exhausts himself, trapped between the courtly code of honour of his past and the ideology of the painful passion of his present.

Throughout the course of his libretto Wagner sets up a clear duality between the feudal code of honour and that of a Schopenhauerian pursuit of unrestrained passion. He compels the audience not only to choose between Mark and Tristan as Isolde's lover but to make a similar choice between the chivalric code that Mark represents and the passionate, liberated, love-death existence for which Tristan and Isolde so recklessly long. Wagner's use of the dramatic narrative further emphasizes this duality; the acts of passion are all portrayed in present tense in the opera while the honourable chivalric acts are portrayed exclusively as recollections of the past. Honour is only referred to while passion is acted upon. Wagner paints an implicit picture where the break in temporal realms symbolizes a similar disconnect in the structuring of morality. By portraying honourable, courtly behaviours only in past tense and decisions made according to the reckless abandon of love as present action, Wagner implies the chivalric system ought to be a thing of the past and that pursuit of the Will (for Tristan, to be united with Isolde in death) should be embraced as the new order of things.

Neil Thomas claims that Wagner's libretto "does not attempt to address the problem faced by Mark within the sexual triangle"—an issue that the medieval audience would have immediately perceived as threatening to the courtly order.¹⁰³ The modifications that Wagner made in his retelling of *Tristan* change significant elements of the eternal triangle and the audience perception of the balance within it, and so must be re-examined.

Wagner's Eternal Triangle: The Characters and the Relationships Within

While Wagner's portrayal of the relationship within the eternal triangle does not vary greatly from that of Gottfried's, his different treatment of significant plot elements has an effect on the balance of the triangle. A chief difference between them involves the character of Kurwenal in Wagner's libretto. In Gottfried's poem, Mark is Tristan's closest friend in court; Wagner, however, adapts the character of Kaedin (Tristan's best friend and "the other Isolde's" brother from the Isolde of the White Hands period that Wagner completely omits from his *Tristan* narrative) to the character of Kurwenal, whom Tristan calls *trauter Freund*, *treuer ohne Wanken*, and *treuer als Gold* [truest faithful friend, true without faltering, and truer than gold]. Kurwenal slays the traitor, Melot, and his final words to Tristan after his death indicate that Tristan's faith in him was not misplaced: "*Tristan! Trauter Freund! Schilt mich nicht, das Treue auch mitkommt!*" [Do not scold me, the true one (your faithful friend) comes with you!]. In Wagner's story, Tristan has no need to depend on his friendship with Mark as exclusively as he does in Gottfried's poem because of the presence of Kurwenal.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

Regarding Mark's relationship with Tristan, there are yet more significant differences between Wagner and Gottfried. Wagner's omission of any mention of Tristan's adoptive parents, Rual and Floraete, arguably strengthens his familial bond with Mark. Nevertheless, the blood relationship between Tristan and his king is understated in Wagner's libretto: Mark only mentions this aspect once in his Act Two narrative. Though Isolde imagines Tristan addressing the king as *Ohm* [uncle] in Act One, Tristan never uses the term. For Wagner, the relationship between these two men, while predominantly affectionate from Mark's side, has courtly honour rather than familial affection as Tristan's main motivator, at least initially. This is evidenced in Act One, Scene Five when Tristan explains custom's role in dictating his conduct towards Isolde during their voyage: *Sitte lehrt, wo ich gelebt: zur Brautfahrt der Brautwerber meide fern die Braut.* [Where I lived, customs [manners] taught: on courtship voyage the suitor should keep his distance from the bride.]

In a similar manner, Mark's relationship with Isolde has at its core the workings of the feudal society and a marital bond decreed by the chivalric code. Though not unlike Gottfried's portrayal of the marriage, Wagner's projects it as a means by which to improve the moral profile of the king. The opera's libretto contains no indication of Mark's insensitivities on the wedding night. Because Wagner's retelling makes no mention of Brangäne's consummation of the marriage on Isolde's behalf, there is no cause to condemn him for seeing "one woman as another."¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, Mark's affection for Isolde is clear; he might have agreed to take a wife because of Tristan's threat of self-exile, but his words are nothing but complimentary on the subject of his queen. Neither does Wagner's Isolde criticize Mark. Her initial hesitancy in Act One

¹⁰⁴ Gottfried, quoted in Neil Thomas, 51.

stems only from having not yet met him, made more poignant by her already growing affection for Tristan. It is evident that while many *Tristan* poets wished to paint Mark as an inadequate husband and king, Wagner did not intend to present such a reality. Instead Wagner portrays Isolde's hesitancy towards the union without revealing any conclusive evidence as to whether her apprehension is founded on fact.¹⁰⁵

Wagner's Treatment of the Potion and King Mark's Character

The main factor that distinguishes Wagner's version of *Tristan und Isolde* from others is his treatment of the potion. Isolde's narrative in Act One reveals that she is already vying for the attention of the noble knight. Her encounter with Tantris is one that easily lends itself to a traditional courtly love narrative; a beautiful princess falls for a brave hero as she nurses him back to health. But Wagner further complicates the issue of Isolde as the love interest by altering her relationship with Morold [Morolt]. In Gottfried's poem Morolt is her uncle; in Wagner's libretto, he is her fiancé. With this change, Wagner alters Isolde's hatred of Tristan over Morold's death from that of familial honour to that of passionate rage. Despite her rage, Isolde still does not kill Tristan when she has the opportunity. Wagner's account of the scene where Isolde discovers the true identity of 'Tantris' and ponders her opportunity to kill Tristan is unique in the way that the audience hears of the deciding moment from Isolde herself. Isolde tells Brangäne that she lost her nerve the moment his eyes met hers. This dramatic *coup de foudre* reveals an important secret: Isolde's passion did not begin with the

¹⁰⁵ The difference between Wagner's representation of Mark's character and Isolde's expectations and perception of his character is discussed further in Chapter Four.

potion. One is left to ponder whether Tristan too felt the dramatic importance of that *Blick* in the bath.

Whether Tristan's romantic feelings for Isolde began during his time as Isolde's patient is unclear, but it is evident that he held Ireland's queen in high regard when he convinced Mark to let him return to claim her as his bride and queen of Cornwall. Though Wagner is clear that Isolde resents being ignored by Tristan for much of the journey (*Dort den Helden, der meinem Blick den seinen birgt* [There, the hero, diverting his gaze from me]), he does not specify whether Tristan's desire to keep his distance from Isolde is due to any feelings he might have for her or if it is only of the code of honour that he cites in his defence: "*wo ich gelebt: zur Brautfahrt der Brautwerber meide fern die Braut.*" [Where I lived, customs taught that on a courtship voyage, the bride-suitors should keep their distance from the bride.] Nevertheless, both lovers are surprised by the effect of the potion that they share: Isolde wishes for death and asks Brangäne to prepare a fatal potion, while Tristan, aware of Isolde's mother's talents, suspects a potion, but knows not what the true consequences of the drink of reconciliation will be. Brangäne gives them neither, instead preparing a love potion.

The nature of the potion has a significant effect on the relationships within the eternal triangle. It may be the entire cause of the love between the title characters or it may be simply a symbol of passage between conscious and unconscious love. Hatto's introduction to his translation of Gottfried's *Tristan* explains, "[I]t would seem that any change in Isolde's character must be attributed to the potion. ...[T]hanks to the fateful error with the potion, she is Love's captive."¹⁰⁶ While Gottfried's poem presents the potion as the cause of the love, Wagner's insight into Isolde's inner psyche indicates that

¹⁰⁶ Gottfried, *Tristan*, trans. A. T. Hatto, 29.

this is likely not the case: “*Nun leb wohl, Brangäne! Grüss mir die Welt, grüsse mir Vater und Mutter!*” [Now farewell, Brangäne! Bid the world farewell for me; greet my father and mother for me!] Isolde believes she is going to die with Tristan by sharing the draught and so feels released to act upon or speak of her feelings in what she believes to be her final moments. It is perhaps for this reason that Wagner has her be the first to speak after drinking the potion, even though she is the last to drink.

Though Tristan immediately falls into Isolde’s embrace, Wagner’s stage directions indicate that he is not a confident lover, but a bewildered knight who questions, “*Was träumte mir von Tristans Ehre?*” [What did I dream of Tristan’s honour?]. After uttering his beloved’s name, Tristan questions his previous concern for his honour. Despite this concern and Isolde’s initial yearning for death, the two spend the rest of the drama sacrificing all else for their pursuit of existential passion. The true depth of the importance that the potion might have been the cause of their love rather than of their own volition is revealed in the final scene of the drama; Brangäne tells the king about the potion in order to redeem the lovers from the inevitable consequence of their folly, infidelity, and dishonour. In other versions of the legend, including Gottfried’s, Mark does not gain awareness of the potion or its effects and so forgiveness is not granted. Because of Brangäne’s confession, Wagner’s Mark acts compassionately and immediately summons a ship so that he may seek reconciliation with his friends.

Repeatedly Wagner makes seemingly minor dramatic alterations that ultimately portray Mark in a positive light. This indicates that the downfall of Mark’s character was not as important for Wagner as it was for Gottfried. Wagner’s Mark is not a timid man, nor is he the ‘bad king’ foil to the good King Arthur. In fact, Wagner’s libretto makes no

reference to Arthur at all. Neither does Wagner's text explicitly reveal homoerotic overtones that might defame Mark's standing in his society.¹⁰⁷ Wagner's dramatic portrayal of Mark is not plagued by duality to the same extent as Gottfried's. Where Gottfried's Mark is selfish, lustful, and weak, Wagner's is noble, honourable, and good in the eyes of his society. He is not too prideful to be forgiving and his actions appear to be predominately driven by his desire for the best for Tristan and Isolde, and then—to a lesser extent—his kingdom. Wagner does not need a 'bad' king Mark to contrast with a 'good' Tristan. Though Batts' claim that Gottfried's "great achievement [of constructing] Mark as a character who functions as a representative of society or a social class in which he has his being and also as [an] intensely human individual"¹⁰⁸ is valid, this duality *within* Mark appears to hold less importance for Wagner. Instead, it is more critical that Mark be the good, honourable, traditional king to play foil to Tristan's reckless pursuit of passionate love, and ultimately, of death.

¹⁰⁷ Wagner's literary and musical formal representations of the king as will be explored in the following chapter, however, do reveal him to portray effeminate qualities.

¹⁰⁸ Batts, "The Role of King Marke," 124.

Chapter Three: *// Lamento: the Lament Tradition in Greek Tragedy and Early Opera*

The previous two chapters have traced the development of the character of King Mark from his predecessors in early Arthurian legend and that of Gottfried's epic poem to that of Wagner's libretto. The result is a king whom Wagner has carefully crafted for his dramatic purposes. Wagner's Mark is multifaceted: he interacts with the title characters as friend, husband, and king but also serves as the dramatic personification of the chivalric tradition. This chapter examines how Wagner's theories on politics and Greek drama meet the Romantic chivalric and Celtic revivals, combining with his own forward thinking techniques of the dramatic narrative to create a formal operatic lament for King Mark in Act Two, Scene Three. Wagner's use of this traditional form complements and furthers his depiction of Mark, emphasizing the artifice of kingly rule and courtly honour, and strengthening the case for the king as the weaker, androgynous, and even effeminate male in the eternal triangle.

The chivalric order saw a decline in the early Renaissance, and by the nineteenth century chivalry was no longer supported as an institution with knightly conquests and codes of conduct. In 1790, Edmund Burke mourned the end of the age of chivalry—the very act of which Gary Dyer has identified as a “sign, even a catalyst of chivalry's rebirth.”¹⁰⁹ This revival of the Middle Ages at the turn of the nineteenth century heralded

¹⁰⁹ Gary Dyer, “Irresolute Ravishers and the Sexual Economy of Chivalry in the Romantic Novel,” *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 55, no. 3 (2000): 342.

a renewal of interest in chivalric values—values thought to be medieval.¹¹⁰ What resulted was a rise of a Romantic *spirit* of chivalry, apart from the social infrastructure of the age.

It is important to note that a Celtic revival spurred on by the emergence of the Ossianic tradition coincided with Europe's return to the spirit of chivalric values. In 1763 James Macpherson published *Temora, an Ancient Epic Poem... together with several other Poems, composed by Ossian, the son of Fingal*. Macpherson claimed that the publication—together with the one that followed two years later—contained his translations of the poet Ossian's third-century Gaelic texts. Although scholars have since identified the works as forgery, Macpherson's work experienced great popularity throughout late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Europe. The prose narratives, sung lays, and laments were translated into French, German, Spanish, Danish, Dutch, Czech, Russian, Hungarian, and Greek.¹¹¹ Art music was not unaffected by the rise in popularity of the Ossianic texts; Donizetti, Gottschalk, Loewe, Bizet, Saint-Saëns, Schubert, Mendelssohn, and Brahms all are known to have composed works with a connection to the Ossianic works.¹¹²

The musical manifestations of the Ossian texts in German-speaking countries reflect the late enlightenment European attraction to gloom and the quest for forms outside of the classical influence in what was understood then as the Celtic tradition.¹¹³ Schubert set Ossian texts that lamented heroes slain in battle.¹¹⁴ Though the texts

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ John Daverio, "Schumann's Ossianic Manner," in *19th-Century Music* 21, no. 3 (1998): 247-248.

¹¹² Ibid., 248-249.

¹¹³ Christopher Smith, "Ossian in Music," in *The Reception of Ossian in Europe*, ed. Howard Gaskill, 375-92 (Wiltshire: Cromwell Press, 2004), 386-387, and 392.

¹¹⁴ Christopher Smith hesitantly speculates that these songs might be referred to as "'dirges' were it not that the term nowadays seems to have pejorative implications" and may "fail to convey the [nobility of Schubert's setting]." Ibid., 387.

“translated” by Macpherson represent the Bardic ballad tradition more than that of the Greek tragedy, one would not be remiss to identify the resulting *lieder* as a Romantic lament due to their “direct language, strong situations, relatively simple developments, and clear symbolism.”¹¹⁵

It is doubtful that Wagner would have avoided exposure to the influence of Macpherson’s Ossianic texts. Familiarity with the manuscripts of any one of the many translations of the text mentioned above might have influenced his decision to turn to the traditional literary lament for Mark: the allusion to a third-century Celtic literary tradition provided Wagner’s much sought connection with the ostensible authority of the classics¹¹⁶ and the formal constructs of the Celtic isles in the pre-Middle Ages.

Wagner’s Theories: Society & the *Volk*, Greek Drama, & *Gesamtkunstwerk*

Wagner’s prose writings display a dislike for the rich and a call for a new order.¹¹⁷ His writings emphasize total commonality and the collective: necessity over luxury, the group over the individual, and communism over egoism.¹¹⁸ He believed that the nobility must see the necessity for “the extinction of the last glimmer of aristocratism; as [Germany’s] gentlemen of nobility no longer [were] feudal lords with power to enslave and clout [the *Volk*] as they please.”¹¹⁹ Wagner called for a fundamental re-examination of man in society and for the old to be completely destroyed in order for the new to be

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 388.

¹¹⁶ Wagner was “a fervid believer in the authority of classics,” constantly “invok[ing] the names of Shakespeare and Beethoven,” in his prose writings. Thomas S. Grey, “Wagner, the Overture, and the Aesthetics of Musical Form,” *19th-Century Music* 12, no. 1 (1988): 5.

¹¹⁷ Aberbach, 75.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 73.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

created.¹²⁰ Furthermore, the composer bought into the mid-nineteenth-century Romantic illusion that love and power were irreconcilable.¹²¹ However, even without the setting of knightly roles and medieval courts, the Romantic appropriation of the chivalric moral code and Celtic sentiment relies on the existence of a hierarchal class system. In the feudal system of the chivalric code, loyalty was expected both within each class (i.e., lords to lords, and knights to knights) and upwards in the hierarchy (knights to their king).

Wagner's vendetta for the battle of man (or the *Volk*) against established society parallels his own theories of nineteenth-century opera. Thomas S. Grey's "Opera in the Age of Revolution" stresses Wagner's qualification that he had no intent to "explain the nature of opera [...] as a mirror of political developments," asserting rather that the composer does not maintain his resolve throughout his prose. Wagner instead proceeds to criticize the national tendencies of melodic practice as "so telling—in their fractiousness, their sterility—and they correspond so well with the errors of [...] political life over the last forty years [c. 1810 to 1850], that we really can't forgo pointing this out."¹²²

Wagner's prose writings called for a German opera—independent of the status quo of the Italian forms—that grew out of the *Volk's* need for a *Gesamtkunstwerk*.¹²³ Rather than implement a gradual shift in aesthetics, Wagner called for a revolutionary change to meet this need. Part of his call for a revolution of opera stemmed from his fervent belief in the authority of classics¹²⁴ and his reverence for the art forms of Ancient Greece.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 83.

¹²¹ Ibid., 78.

¹²² Wagner's *Oper und Drama* quoted in Thomas S. Grey, "Commentary: Opera in the Age of Revolution," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 36, no. 3 (2006): 555.

¹²³ Literally, synthesis of the arts.

¹²⁴ Grey, "Wagner, the Overture, and the Aesthetics of Musical Form," 5.

In *Artwork of the Future*, Wagner wrote: “the highest aim of man is the artistic aim; the highest artistic aim—the Drama [*sic*].”¹²⁵ He often criticized the operas of his forerunners and contemporaries, arguing that they only addressed part of the dramatic whole, and proposed an artwork for the future that was a whole art: drama. Earlier in the same publication he wrote:

[e]ven the deeds of Gluck and Mozart were but one-sided deeds, i.e., they revealed the capability and the instinctive will of Music without their being understood by her sister arts [Poetry and Dance], without the latter contributing towards those deeds from a like-felt genuine impulse to be absorbed in one another, and in fact without any response from their side. Only, however, from a like and common impulse of all three sister arts, can their redemption into the true Art-work, and thus this artwork itself; become a possibility.¹²⁶

He called the modern operatic Aria “nothing but a mutilated folk-tune”¹²⁷ and claimed that the error in the art-genre of Opera was that “a Means of expression (Music) [had] been made the end, while the End of expression (the Drama) has been made a means.”¹²⁸ According to Wagner, the problem with opera was that it had become fixated on the music and lacked in drama. He believed that drama, the “most perfect artwork, differ[ed] from all other forms of poetry in just this,—that in it the Aim is lifted into utmost imperceptibility, but its *entire realization*.”¹²⁹

¹²⁵ Richard Wagner, “The Art-Work of the Future,” in *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, edited by William Ashton Ellis, Vol. 1, 69-213 (New York: Broude Bros., 1895), 185.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 154.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹²⁸ Richard Wagner, “Oper und Drama,” in *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, edited by William Ashton Ellis Vol. 2, 1-376 (New York: Broude Bros., 1893), introduction.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 208. Emphasis in original.

In *Wagner's Musical Prose: Texts and Contexts*,¹³⁰ Grey outlines Wagner's distaste for number operas and other contrived forms of Italianate opera. In *Artwork of the Future*, Wagner goes as far as to call the opera conventions used by his contemporaries "hideous juxtapositions of absolute Recitative and absolute Aria."¹³¹ He argues that "no Form [*sic*] was more balking and unfit for achievement of the genuine Drama, however, than the Opera-form with its once-for-all division into vocal numbers, quite heedless of the dramatic matter [...]"¹³² In place of what had become this standard operatic convention of the "number opera" with arias and recitative, Wagner proposed an "endless melody" for a fluid drama with no contrived breaks for conventional form. In *Oper und Drama* he explains: "[i]n the Drama, we must become *knowers* through the *Feeling*. The understanding tells us '*So is it*' – only when the Feeling has told us: '*So must it be.*'"¹³³ Pointing to the Greek Tragedy as the ultimate dramatic art form, he called it the "artistic embodiment of the spirit and content of Greek Mythos"¹³⁴ and the only true combination of the sister arts (*Tanzkunst, Tonkunst, Tichtkunst* [Dance-Art, Tone-Art, Poetic-Art.]): "only from the Greek world-view, has the genuine Artwork of Drama been able as yet to blossom forth."¹³⁵

Despite, or perhaps even because of, his distaste for operatic formal conventions, Wagner turned to one such form for his music for King Mark. By using a lament aria form rather than strictly adhering to his concept of endless melody, Wagner uses the voice as a musical portrayal of the chivalric code. Wagner portrays the structure of

¹³⁰ Thomas S. Grey, *Wagner's Musical Prose: Texts and Contexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

¹³¹ Richard Wagner, "The Art-Work of the Future," in *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, edited by William Ashton Ellis, Vol. 1, (New York: Broude Bros., 1895), 341-342.

¹³² Wagner, *Oper und Drama*, 342.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 209.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 155.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 152.

expectations for the way in which members of the court interacted provided by the feudal chivalric code and its Romantic revival by setting Mark's text and music to comparable literary and operatic conventions and forms. Mark's role in *Tristan und Isolde* is representative of chivalric society not only because of his dramatic function as the obstacle to Tristan and Isolde's love, but also because of Wagner's adherence to traditional forms in his music, in opposition to the writing for the other characters in the drama. Given Wagner's idealization of the Tragedy of Ancient Greece, it is only logical that he turned to an operatic form that found its roots in Greek Drama: the tragic lament.

Mark's Lament as the Literary Lament in Greek Tragedy

The lament of the Greek Tragedy typically belonged to a woman lamenting her separation from a homeland or lover. In *The Captive Woman's Lament in Greek Tragedy*, Casey Dué shows how women in tragedy use the “‘language of lament’ to manipulate their listeners and achieve various goals.”¹³⁶ Traditionally, the position of lament in the Greek Tragedy was to allow women to “voice subversive concerns, and speak in ways that they [could not] under any [other] circumstances.”¹³⁷

Dué says that the women, who usually were either unmarried women who had lost their fathers or married women who had lost their husbands, would “frequently lament themselves in anticipation of death and disaster, because [the] lament [was] the only medium through which women [had] a sanctioned public voice”¹³⁸—it was their only means of self-expression or weapon of defence in desperate circumstances. For the dramatist, it was the most effective way to portray ‘the other’; in the tale of Troy, a

¹³⁶ Casey Dué, *The Captive Woman's Lament in Greek Tragedy*, 8-9.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 16.

captive woman's lament allows the audience to "visualize events through the other side [the Trojans]." ¹³⁹ For Wagner, this aspect of the form was extremely pertinent; the lament allows for Wagner's audience to have a fleeting glimpse into Mark's point of view in a drama that is otherwise all about Tristan and Isolde and their own perceptions of their predicament. In Wagner's drama, Mark is the 'other' who has no dramatic voice outside of the lament. Choosing to set Mark's reaction to finding the lovers, Wagner allows the audience to see the passionate love affair from a point of view outside that of the lovers. By allowing the 'wronged lover' in the eternal love triangle to have a voice, Wagner moves the affair out of the usual constraints that would be considered acceptable as a facet of courtly love. Furthermore, Wagner counterbalances the importance that this might have placed on the king by casting him in the effeminate role of the lament. Though strengthened beyond his typical role according to the eternal triangle by being given a voice in the drama, Mark—and the society he represents—is depicted as powerless against the display of passionate love that dominates the rest of the drama. The lament form, typically called upon to depict failed or tragic cases of heterosexual love, laments Tristan's growing independence from Mark and the severance of their homosocial bonds.

Du  summarizes how laments for the dead in the Greek tradition conform to a three-part literary form. The first takes the form of a direct address; the second part is a narrative of the past or the future (i.e., an explanation of the cause for lament); and the final section consists of a renewed address, accompanied by reproach and further lamentation. ¹⁴⁰ The ways in which these three parts interact and are combined with each

¹³⁹ Ibid., 18.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 10.

other vary in degree of tragedy. Each combination evokes the genre, emotions, and ritual of the lament in a different way to portray an atmosphere of sorrow to awaken the pity of the audience.

Mark's lament is for neither a fallen city nor the death of a loved one, but for the metaphorical death of his relationship with Tristan and the courtly honour his union with Isolde should have brought him. In keeping with this sentiment, Wagner's libretto for the King in Act Two follows this poetic form of the Greek tragic lament. The first section of Mark's lament consists of the first thirty lines of his part in Act Two, Scene Three. His first utterances take the form of questions for Melot, the scheming driving force behind Mark's discovery of the lovers.

Tatest du's wirklich? Wähnst du das? Sieh ihn dort, den
 treu'sten aller Treuen; blick auf ihn, den freundlichsten der
 Freunde: seiner Treue freiste Tat traf mein Herz mit
 schmerzlichstem Verrat! Trog mich Tristan, sollt' ich
 hoffen, was sein Trügen mir getroffen, sei durch Melots
 Rat redlich mir bewahrt?

[Did you really? Is that what you think? See him there,
 loyalest of loyal; look at him, the friendliest of friends: his
 loyalty's freest deed pierced my heart with the most hostile
 betrayal. If Tristan were to deceive me, I should hope that
 his deception's affecting of me should be safeguarded
 against by Melot's honest advice.]¹⁴¹

Tristan interjects violently, not to respond to the king's lament, but instead to curse the light and Spirits of Day. Tristan's outbursts only upset the king further and he continues in his lament, this time addressing Tristan directly:

Mir dies? Dies, Tristan, mir? Wohin nun Treue, da Tristan
 mich betrog? Wohin nun Ehr' und echte Art, da aller Ehren
 Hort, da Tristan sie verlor? Die Tristan sich zum Schild

¹⁴¹ All English translations of Wagner's libretto by author, unless otherwise stated.

erkor, wohin ist Tugend nun entflohn, da meinen Freund
sie flieht, da Tristan mich verriet?

[This to me? This, Tristan, to me? Where has loyalty gone,
now that Tristan has betrayed me? Where now are honour
and honesty [true nature] now that Tristan, honour's
stronghold, has lost them? As Tristan has chosen himself as
its emblem, whither has virtue flown, from my friend, from
Tristan, who has betrayed me?]

Together, these two sections of text comprise the first formal section of Mark's lament.

According to Dué's description, this section takes the form a direct address. First Mark addresses Melot, then Tristan; both entirely in questions. Citing the research of Margaret Alexiou, Dué explains that questions beginning with 'where,' accompanied by an answer in the perfect tense, are most often a mark of a lament for fallen cities, but are also a common feature of laments for the dead.¹⁴² In this first section, Mark doesn't offer any new information about his story with Tristan. Instead his monologue¹⁴³ focuses on the present; Mark is fixated on how he had trusted Tristan rather than believe Melot and how Tristan had acted dishonourably and betrayed him.

As Mark moves into the second section of his lament, he begins to abandon the questions and becomes more reflective; he enters a narrative flashback akin to Wagner's other flashbacks:

Wozu die Dienste ohne Zahl, der Ehren Ruhm, der Grösse
Macht, die Marken du gewannst; musst' Ehr' und Ruhm,
Gröss' und Macht, mussten die Dienste ohne Zahl dir
Markes Schmach bezahlen? Dünkte zu wenig dich mein
Dank, dass, was du mir erworben, Ruhm und Reich, ich zu
Erb' und Eigen dir gab? Da kinderlos einst schwand sein
Weib, so liebt' er dich, dass nie aufs neu' sich Marke wollt'
vermählen. Da alles Volk zu Hof und Land mit Bitt' und
Dräuen in ihn drang, die Königin dem Lande, die Gattin

¹⁴² Ibid., 12.

¹⁴³ Though it is an address, the lack of response from the other characters results in the lament's function as a monologue.

sich zu kiesen; da selber du den Ohm beschworst, des Hofes Wunsch, des Landes Willen gütlich zu erfüllen; in Wehr wider Hof und Land, in Wehr selbst gegen dich, mit List und Güte weigerte er sich, bis, Tristan, du ihm drohtest, für immer zu meiden Hof und Land, würdest du selber nicht entsandt, dem König die Braut zu frein. Da liess er's denn so sein. --- Dies wundervolle Weib, das mir dein Mut gewann, wer durft' es sehen, wer es kennen, wer mit Stolze sein es nennen, ohne selig sich zu preisen? Der mein Wille nie zu nahen wagte, der mein Wunsch ehrfurchtscheu entsagte, die so herrlich hold erhaben mir die Seele musste laben, trotz Feind und Gefahr, die fürstliche Braut brachtest du mir dar."

[Why did you serve me for countless days? Why the reputation of honour and immense power that you won for King Mark? Must honour and reputation, greatness and power, and innumerable services be repaid by King Mark's dishonour? Did you value so little my gratitude, that I gave to you as your inheritance, yours alone, what you yourself won for me, my glory and kingdom? When his wife died childless, he loved you so much that King Mark wanted never to wed again. When all the people from court and country threatened him and pleaded for him to give the land a queen, to select a wife for himself; when you yourself swore to your uncle that you would gladly carry out the court's wishes and country's will, then, against the wishes of court and country, even against you, with guile and benevolence, he refused it until you, Tristan, threatened to shun kingdom and country forever, if you yourself were not dispatched to win a bride for the king. And so he let it be. This wonderful woman that your courage won for me, who could behold her, who could know her, who could proudly call her his own, without thinking himself blessed? She, whom I could never dare to approach, she for whom I renounced my own desires out of reverence, so wonderful, fair, sublime, who could not but refresh my soul, despite enemies and dangers, this regal bride you presented to me.]

Through this second part of Mark's narrative lament the audience hears the story of his relationship with Tristan for the first time: how Tristan had brought honours to both court and King, but more importantly how Mark came to depend on Tristan and how it was

only by Tristan's advice that Mark took Isolde as a wife. This middle section is not as highly emotional in content as the sections that frame it; while Mark's language is descriptive and imaginative here, it belies the intensity of his present turmoil.

With one word, "*Nun*," Mark pulls himself back into the present time to return to lamenting again. This third section, like the laments referenced by Dué, is comprised of a renewed address, accompanied by reproach and lamentation. Though his entire lament appears to be addressed towards Tristan, it is in the third section that Mark returns to his questions in earnest, asking his friend, "*Die kein Himmel erlöst, warum mir diese Hölle?*" [No heaven will redeem it—why this hell for me?] and "*Die kein Elend sühnt, warum mir diese Schmach?*" [No misery will atone for it—why this disgrace to me?] The audience again becomes privy to the depth of the king's pathos. Comprised of these three literary sections, Wagner's text for Mark in Act Two, Scene Three displays distinct formal traits of the lament in Greek Tragedy.

Mark's Lament as a Wagnerian Narrative

Because of the minimal research on Wagner's music for King Mark, it is important to draw upon literature on Wagnerian characters outside of *Tristan*. Carolyn Abbate's *Unsung Voices* addresses narrative ballads like that of Wotan in *Die Walküre* which "[are] not dependant on leitmotifs for [their] meaning[s]," but instead "[draw] upon formal gestures particular to operatic narrative music."¹⁴⁴ Thus, Mark's music—for the middle section of his lament, in particular—may be considered a narrative monologue. Mark's music shares forward-looking features with Wotan's monologue in

¹⁴⁴ Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 170.

Die Walküre: the similarities in instrumentation, overall sentiment, and narrative qualities of the work cannot be overlooked.

In her chapter in *Reading Opera*, Abbate discusses narrative in nineteenth-century opera, stating that it halts dramatic time. Though it was common in spoken drama, it was not frequently used in opera before 1850.¹⁴⁵ Narrative in early Romantic opera appeared either as recitative or an inserted song.¹⁴⁶ Later in the same chapter, during her discussion of Senta's ballad, Abbate argues that "the singing of a strophic narrative song invokes convention and the historical archetype. And the convention carries a meaning."¹⁴⁷ For Mark, his use of a similarly prescriptive poetic form depicts his deep connection to the structure of the chivalric code.

Abbate's research identifies that Wagner's operatic narratives begin with "an exhortation, an invitation to listen, not only to words but also to a musical performance."¹⁴⁸ Tannhäuser composes music; Wolfram cries "*Hör an, Hör an!*" [Listen, listen!]; Senta sings a song; Erik opens with a plea for those around him to "*hören.*" [To listen.]; and Isolde's preface to her flashback in Act One, Scene Three, "*Nun höre, was sie mir schuf*" [Hear now, what it meant for me]. Though Wagner's libretto does not indicate that the king's lament is a strictly musical event within the realistic scope of the drama, Mark's questions function as call for the others to listen, akin to the questions that would attract an audience to the songful traditional lament. Wagner's use of the bass clarinet's emergence from the orchestral text in this moment functions as an unmistakable call to sympathy.

¹⁴⁵ Carolyn Abbate, "Erik's Dream and Tannhäuser's Journey," in *Reading Opera*, edited by Arthur Groos and Roger Parker (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 129.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 130.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 138.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 166.

The narratives of both Tannhäuser and Senta reach a point where “all formality is abandoned, and the music is created from an assemblage of unrelated, fragmentary moments that react to the narrative.”¹⁴⁹ Mark’s lament is similar in that it is an emotional narrative within a social context that is traditionally musical. That is, lamenting was a social event that often included an element of song. It is different in that Mark does not have to depart from his traditional form of the operatic lament to express his pathos fully. Like Wagner’s music for Wotan’s monologue, Mark’s music in Act Two, Scene Three “is not dependant on leitmotifs for its meaning: it draws upon formal gestures peculiar to operatic narrative music.”¹⁵⁰

Yet, just as Mark’s character is a multifaceted one, so too is Wagner’s portrayal of his character. It is significant that Abbate calls Wotan’s monologue a “*song* [Abbate’s emphasis], ... signalled by the break from its context that *song* will always engender within opera.”¹⁵¹ The way in which Wagner’s music for Mark’s Act Two number sets it apart from the rest of the act as a *song* can be taken a step further: Mark’s music may be understood not only as the central section of the typical Greek lament and as a lament aria in the style of seventeenth-century opera, but also as a nineteenth-century song that appropriates characteristics of Wagner’s style present in the Ring. Subsequently, recognizing Mark’s *song* as a traditional lament allows for the analysis of the ‘number’ as a formal *operatic* lament.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 170.

¹⁵¹ Abbate, *Unsung Voices*, 201.

Mark's Lament as an Early Operatic Lament

Ellen Rosand's study, *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice*,¹⁵² traces the lament's move from its dramatic role in the Greek Tragedy to its place in seventeenth-century opera, as in Cavalli's "Rosinda" or Monteverdi's "Lasciatemi Morire" (Arianna's Lament). Rosand's discussion in her twelfth chapter, *Il Lamento*, identifies characteristics of the lament: a sectional form, a slow tempo, the use of a minor key, frequent suspension figures, sparse (most often string) accompaniment, the descending tetrachord ostinato, and an expansive expressive setting of the text. Each of these features can be found in Wagner's music for Mark in Act Two. Anthony Newcomb's article on Wagnerian formal analysis¹⁵³ identifies elements in Wagner's music that define a clear form: changes in tonality, tempo or instrumentation (or texture), dramatic rhetorical structure of text such as the literary lament form discussed above, and motives.¹⁵⁴ The remainder of this chapter examines each of these elements in turn as they are used in Wagner's music for Mark in Act Two, Scene Three to indicate the lament aria form.

¹⁵² Ellen Rosand, *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice* (Berkeley; University of California Press, 1991).

¹⁵³ Anthony Newcomb, "The Birth of Music out of the Spirit of Drama: An Essay in Wagnerian Formal Analysis," *19th-Century Music* 5, no. 1 (1981): 38-66.

¹⁵⁴ The fifth element, that of the periodicity and syntax of phrase structure does not factor into the present discussion. Some of these elements (motive, instrumentation) can be either form-defining as shown here, or purely referential. *Ibid.*, 44-50.

Table 1: Formal Analysis of Mark's Act Two, Scene Three Lament¹⁵⁵

Orchestral Interlude: (p.428, mm. 1-58)				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • m.1 Brangäne's shriek, b^{o7} harmony • m. 27 <i>Stürben Wir</i> material • m. 46 horn – dotted theme alludes to day 				
Mark's Lament				
	Tonality/ Harmony	Texture	Text	Motives
Section 1 (A) (pp. 433-436, mm. 59-92) Reprise (pp. 436-437, mm. 99-120)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • d minor • frequent use of Neapolitan • slow progression 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sparse texture • predominantly bass clarinet and low strings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • questions <i>Tatest du's wirklich?...</i> and <i>Mir dies?...</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theme #1 (Example 4) • descending tetrachord, predominantly in bass clarinet • disjunct vocal lines
Section 2 (B) (pp. 437-444, mm. 120-201)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • d minor (more chromatic than A) • departure to D Major (mm. 177-200) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increased energy • more fluid • denser orchestration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • narrative section (flashback of past) <i>Wozu die Dienste ohne Zahl...</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theme #2 (Examples 5 and 6) • lyrical vocal lines • first in orchestra, than in Mark's vocal line
Section 3 (A¹) (pp. 444-448, mm. 201-260)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • d minor (more chromatic than A, less than B) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increased figuration • reawakened strings • greater dynamic range than A 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • return to present time and disbelief <i>Nun, da durch...</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recurrence of head motive (Example #2) in bass clarinet
Lovers' Response: (p. 448-460, mm. 260-400)				
Themes used: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mm. 260, 267, 275 re-orchestration of Matrix (Example 3) • m. 284 <i>O sink hernieder</i> (cf. p. 374, m. 715) • m. 284 <i>Stürben wir</i> (cf. p. 387, m.832) • m. 387 dotted theme alluding to day 				

¹⁵⁵ All measure and page numbers refer to *Tristan und Isolde in Full Score* (Leipzig: Peters, 1911), rpt. (New York: Dover Publications, Inc, 1973). Measure numbering begins anew for each scene.

Tonality/Harmony

Michael Batts calls Mark's arrival in Act Two, Scene Three, which opens with Brangäne's final shriek of warning (p. 428, m. 1) "the end of the idyll and [the] introduction of the grossness of the normal world."¹⁵⁶ Wagner's music for the king portrays the harsh end to the idyllic night in a distinct way. The entirety of Act Two, Scene Two portrayed Tristan and Isolde's secret meeting at night. Wagner uses Tristan's set piece *Was dort in keuscher Nacht* (p. 304, m. 258) to introduce the key of A \flat , the key of the night and of his love scene with Isolde. The lovers then sing *O sink hernieder, Nacht der Liebe* (p. 374, m. 715) in A \flat before Brangäne interrupts with her "watch music" and begins the scene's drive toward the key of B major, the goal key of the entire work. Instead of heeding her warning, the lovers are oblivious to Brangäne's warnings and continue to sing their second love duet, *Stürben wir, daß ungetrennt* (p. 387, m. 832), also in their key of A \flat . By the end of their third love duet, *O ewige Nacht* (p. 401, m. 936), Wagner has begun to shift the lover's music from their key of A \flat towards the key of fulfillment, B Major, and the final twelve measures of the scene sit on F \sharp , the dominant of the goal key.

It is at this point (p. 428, m. 1) that a dramatic $b^{\circ 7}$ chord sounds and serves as a portal between worlds as Mark enters surrounded by his courtiers to interrupt the love idyll at its very moment of resolution. Containing the pitches B-D-F-A \flat ,¹⁵⁷ this chord serves as the pivot on which the work turns. The B represents the tonic of the key that Wagner sets up as the key of the fulfillment of Tristan and Isolde's love and yearning for

¹⁵⁶ Richard Wagner, "The Art-Work of the Future," in *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, edited by William Ashton Ellis, Vol. 1 (New York: Broude Bros., 1895), 66.

¹⁵⁷ The spelling of the chord varies according to the key of each instrument in the score.

Liebestod: B Major, the eventual tonal goal of the entire opera. The A \flat harkens back to the love scene – the music of the night. The D is the tonic of the new sound world: the music of day and the lament of King Mark. Never before has D been encountered as a tonal centre in the work. For Tristan, this deceptive cadence bridges his love and devotion for Isolde (A \flat major) and his love and loyalty for King Mark (d minor). Just as Wagner uses tritone key relationships and the diminished seven chord that links them to portray the dual concept of *Wahn* in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, Wagner moves the listener from the A \flat sound world of the night to the d minor music of the day through the b $^{\circ 7}$ chord.

The orchestra sequences through motives originating in the previous scene over a string tremolo before settling again after Tristan's distressed cry (*Der öde Tag zum letzten Mal!* [The day has dawned for the last time!]) on the D pedal (p. 432, m. 74) for Melot's music.¹⁵⁸ Melot's line cadences through the Neapolitan (p. 433, m. 57) to what appears to be an important arrival in d minor in m. 59 for the beginning of Mark's lament. The weight of the cadence is undermined by the tremolo B \natural pedal in the lower strings essentially creating a deceptive cadence. A single sustained A 3 on the bass clarinet emerges as the rest of the orchestra dies away. The bass clarinet line continues into a descending line providing the outline of the characteristic perfect fifth tetrachord of d minor: A-G-F-E-E \flat -D.

¹⁵⁸ Measures are numbered starting from the beginning of the scene.

Example 1: Descending Tetrachord skeleton based on mm. 59-62 of *Tristan 2:III*¹⁵⁹



The arrival on the D_2^4 in the bass clarinet in m. 62 is left unresolved. Nevertheless, the key is firmly established as d minor with Mark's vocal entry for the start of Section 1 of the lament on the characteristic descending fifth (A-D) in the same measure. Wagner has clearly chosen the lament-appropriate key of d minor. The Neapolitan implications in the melody (such as the melodic inflections on $E\flat$ for the text: *Wähnst du das?*) provide a Phrygian colour for Mark's text. Wagner's frequent allusion to the Neapolitan harmony ($E\flat$) in Mark's music serves as a frequent acknowledgement of the love scene that he interrupted. The $E\flat$ yearns to function as a dominant to pull the lovers back into their $A\flat$ sound world of night and love, but again and again, Wagner resolves this chord back to Mark's tonic chord of d minor. For the lovers there is no returning to the solace of the night.

Texture

Wagner's orchestration also reflects the textual form of the lament. The scene opens with Brangäne's final shriek of warning accompanied by the b diminished-seventh chord in full orchestra. The end of the previous scene featured a similarly lush and string-driven orchestration, with the wind parts supporting the voices in their proclamations of love. Immediately after the interruption, the orchestra drops away, only to begin frantically to ebb and flow as the introduction to Mark's lament (pp. 428-433, mm. 1-58) portrays this collision of the two tonal and ideological worlds. The motive that is

¹⁵⁹ All musical examples have been created by the author using the software Sibelius in consultation with *Tristan und Isolde*, ed. Gabriele E. Meyer and Egon Voss, Band 8, Heften I, II, III, *Richard Wagner Sämtliche Werke* (Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne, 1993).

frequently connected with day and the deception it brings soars from the horns as the winds proclaim themes from the previous scene's love duets. Out of this frantic chaos, a single note swells from the bass clarinet as the music truly settles on the key of d minor and King Mark begins to sing.

The first section of the literary lament (pp. 433-437, mm. 59-120) is slow and sombre, set almost exclusively to the bass clarinet and low strings. The texture is notably light for Wagner; the section has minimal thematic material over cello tremolos and suspended harmonies. All forward direction from Tristan and Isolde's themes from the previous scene has dissipated and the orchestra portrays a state of musical stasis. The king and the bass clarinet take turns singing their mournful song and the dark colour of the low strings lends its sparse support. The harmonic motion of this section is slow, only picking up briefly when Tristan interrupts with his frantic, Schopenhauerian rebuke of the phantoms of day and mornings dreams (p. 436, mm. 93-97). Tristan's music is disruptive: boisterous, accelerating, and cycling through diminished harmonies at the interval of a third. It is not until Mark speaks again at the *sehr zurückhaltend, wieder mässig langsam* in measure 101 (*Mir dies?*) that the orchestration settles to re-establish D as its tonal centre in measure 104 for the end of the first section of the lament form.

The sparse orchestration continues in a similar manner to the beginning until Mark begins the second, narrative section of his text in measure 127. This section contains the marking *belebend* and *mehr belebend* and features a denser orchestration. In measure 179 after a repeated statement of the dominant by the lone English horn, the music slips into a *sehr zart* D Major as Mark begins to speak of his *wundervolle Weib*, his *fürstliche Braut* [wondrous wife; queenly bride]. This increased energy continues in D

Major until the end of the central literary section in measure 201 where the bass clarinet reintroduces its head motive in d minor.

Example 2: Bass Clarinet Head Motive mm. 201-207 of 2:III

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The top staff is labeled 'Bass Clarinet in A' and begins at measure 201. It features a series of notes with slurs and accents, starting with a forte (*f*) dynamic, followed by a decrescendo (*dim.*) and ending with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The bottom staff is labeled 'B. Cl.' and begins at measure 204. It also features a series of notes with slurs and accents, starting with a piano (*p*) dynamic, followed by a decrescendo (*dim.*) and a triplet of eighth notes.

Musically, this final section of text is set in a similar manner to the first section; string tremolos accompany the vocal line again, only this time with greater dynamic and emotional range. Here, Mark's suffering builds towards its height in measure 233 where the word *Ehren* [honour] is set with a *fortissimo* e^7 harmony in the orchestra with the voice on the tonic D. Mark's pathos reaches its climax in measure 242 where the vocal line dramatically drops an octave on the Neapolitan with a *fortissimo* $f\#^{o7}$ sonority over a tonic pedal in the orchestra on the phrase "*Warum mir diese Hölle?*" [Why, for me, this hell?]. After this painful climax, the orchestra ebbs again and the bass clarinet takes over from the voice, extending the idea of Mark's final word, *Schmach* [pain]. As quietly as he began, Mark fades out with a deep philosophical question: "*Den unerforschlich tief geheimnisvollen Grund, wer macht der Welt ihn kund?*" [The unsearchable depths of its mysterious causes, who will make them known to the world?]

The form closes with a return to d minor as the king asks Tristan again, "Why must I suffer this hell that no heaven can restore? Why this dishonour for which no

misery can atone?”¹⁶⁰ Wagner uses a re-orchestration of what Roger Scruton calls “The Matrix”¹⁶¹ to mark the formal end of Mark’s lament, ushering Tristan and Isolde back into the spotlight as the meter changes from $\frac{6}{8}$ to $\frac{4}{8}$ and Tristan begins to answer his king. Wagner’s use of this motive that is so central to the opera as a thematic bridge from Mark’s lament to the lovers’ response enhances the king’s importance to the drama and the thematic centrality of the eternal triangle.

Example 3: The Matrix

‘The Matrix’ (Roger Scruton)

The musical score for 'The Matrix' consists of two staves: Oboe (top) and Violoncello (bottom). The score is divided into two parts. Part One (measures 1-4) is in 6/8 time and features the Violoncello playing a melodic line with a slur over the first two notes and a fermata over the third. Part Two (measures 5-8) is in 4/8 time and features the Oboe playing a melodic line with a slur over the first two notes and a fermata over the third. The key signature is one sharp (F#).

Motives

Wagner’s use of motives in this scene only further sets Mark’s lament apart from the rest of the work. While the music immediately surrounding the lament uses themes found elsewhere in the work, King Mark’s lament contains themes not yet featured in the opera. The use of new material for Mark’s lament further distinguishes it as a self-contained entity within the entire work.

¹⁶⁰ Lines 115-118 of King Mark’s lament.

¹⁶¹ Scruton, 200.

Example 4: Theme #1: mm. 59-67

Bass Clarinet in A

59

p *f* *dim.* *p* *p*

B. Cl.

64

cresc. *f* *dim.* *p*

Example 5: Theme #2: mm. 84-85 and 86-87

Mark

84

Trog mich Tri - stan, sollt ich hof - fen

Example 6: Theme #3: mm. 120-125

Bass Clarinet in A

120

p *ausdrucksvoll und weich*

Example 7: Chromatic extension of Theme #3 mm. 124-126

Violoncello

123

p *ausdrucksvoll* *cresc.* *f*

Vc.

126

dim. *p*

Theme One (Example 4) and the extension of Theme Three (Example 7) contain the downward chromatic motion of the second half of the lower voice in Scruton's matrix. Likewise, the second and third measures of Theme Three contain the outline of the characteristic minor-sixth leap that opens this lower voice of the matrix. This characteristic leap is expanded upon in Theme Two where Wagner juxtaposes a

descending leap with the ascending one. Because the opening part of the matrix is often viewed as being representative of Tristan and sorrow, these references may be seen as an indication that it is the disloyalty of Tristan, not Isolde, that is the object of the king's lament. Mark's entire piece is constructed exclusively of these three themes and fragments or extensions thereof.

Of the main characteristics of the lament listed in Rosand's book, the three-part form of the lament and melodic contours and presence of the descending tetrachord figure—particularly in its structural and expressive functions—best confirm Wagner's intent for Mark's music as a traditional lament number. Rosand identifies the descending tetrachord as a feature of the lament made popular by pieces like Francesco Cavalli's "Teti's Lament" and Claudio Monteverdi's "Nymph's Lament." Though the most basic use of this figure is an ostinato pattern that is repeated in the bass line throughout a lament (as in "Dido's Lament" in Henry Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*), Cavalli was known to treat the tetrachord with greater freedom. In "The Descending Tetrachord: An Emblem of Lament,"¹⁶² Rosand recounts the challenge that lament texts presented to the composer: "setting the lament as a formal aria would have deprived the situation of its dramatic impact [...] obscur[ing] the audibility and weight of the text, thereby diminishing its impact."¹⁶³ According to Rosand, the descending tetrachord ostinato offered the ideal solution; it set the lament apart from its context while maintaining its intense emotional power. For Cavalli, the descending tetrachord offered "a compromise between the spontaneous expressivity of recitative and the lyrical expressivity of aria,

¹⁶² Ellen Rosand, "Il Lamento: The Fusion of Music and Drama," in *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 361-86,

¹⁶³ Ellen Rosand, "The Descending Tetrachord: An Emblem of Lament," in *The Musical Quarterly* 65, no. 3 (1979): 356.

providing a means of affective structuring without necessarily imposing closure.” By the latter part of the seventeenth century the formal reasons for the use of the descending tetrachord ostinato had lost their relevance and the practice was abandoned. However, “in some later operas,” writes Rosand, “the tetrachord-aria lament seems to have assumed the role of an intentional, self-conscious archaism.”¹⁶⁴ By using the lament form for Mark’s music, Wagner, like Cavalli, succeeded in setting the lament apart from its context while maintaining its intense emotional power, but also in providing intentional archaism for the king.

Wagner’s use of the descending tetrachord serves formally to define Mark’s lament. Though, like Cavalli, Wagner treats the tetrachord with greater freedom than was typical during its popularity in the seventeenth century, the tetrachord clarifies Wagner’s poetic lament form in the libretto. The first occurrence of the descending tetrachord-like figure in Act Two, Scene Three is the bass clarinet line that emerges out of the deceptive cadence in measure 59 (Example 8).

Example 8: *Tristan 2:III* mm. 59-62

The descending figure first outlines the descending perfect fourth from the written C to G (concert A-E) and then continues chromatically down to outline the characteristic perfect fifth of the key as Mark begins to sing his text. Throughout the declamation of the first section of Mark’s libretto, the voice and bass clarinet alternate in statements of this descending figure in various modes (predominantly Phrygian and Ionian) and varying

¹⁶⁴ Rosand, “Il Lamento: The Fusion of Music and Drama,” 384.

extents of chromaticism. The size of interval outlined in each statement also varies. In measures 59-62 (Example 8) and measures 63-65b (Example 9) the diatonic perfect fourth is chromatically expanded to a perfect fifth. In other cases, as in measures 69-71 (Example 10) the fourth is only expanded as far as the diminished fifth. Despite the variance in the appearances of the figure, its prominence throughout the first section of Mark's lament text, its absence in Tristan's interjectory passage, and reappearance for the end of Mark's first section confirms its function as a lament gesture.

Example 9: *Tristan 2:III* mm. 63-65a



Example 10: *Tristan 2:III* mm. 69-71



The general mood of the music lightens for the middle section of Mark's lament text, and neither the orchestra nor the vocal line feature Wagner's descending tetrachord. Instead, Mark's declamation of the text and tempo quicken: both voice and orchestra adopt a new thematic motive that is passed in turn between Mark, the bass clarinet, and low strings. The melodic contour changes for the second section; rather than frequent leaps and the melodic outlines of diminished chords, melody lines in both the orchestra and voice conform to a more conjunct line. This musical change reflects Mark's change in affect as he narrates the now bittersweet past rather than emoting over the painful present.

The beginning of the third and final section of Mark's lament is marked by the return of the descending line in the bass clarinet at the *wieder bewegter* in measure 201(Example 11).

Example 11: *Tristan 2:III* mm. 201-207

The image displays two staves of musical notation. The top staff is labeled 'Bass Clarinet in A' and the bottom staff is labeled 'B. Cl.'. Both staves are in a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat) and a 4/4 time signature. The Bass Clarinet part features a descending melodic line with several slurs and accents, starting on a whole note and moving through half notes and quarter notes. The B. Cl. part begins with a quarter rest, followed by a descending line of eighth notes, a triplet of eighth notes, and ends with a quarter rest. The notation includes various musical symbols such as slurs, accents, and rests.

In this section, the descending passages extend well beyond the interval of the fourth, often as far as seventh or ninths, and are highly chromatic. Though the overall tempo has slowed to match that of the first section, Mark's text declamation and the orchestral gestures that reflect those lines are more dynamic in forward motion, as Mark returns to asking Tristan questions about what has become their friendship and their honour. Wagner's use of the descending tetrachord, varying orchestral textures, and melodic contours provides a clear formal structure for Mark's music that matches the poetic form of his text.

Identifying Wagner's Act Two music for Mark as a conventional operatic lament, complete with traditional harmonic and melodic word painting and text expression, initially appears problematic when viewed in light of his prose works, but consideration of his aesthetic and political convictions reveals that Wagner used conventional forms to construct a class allegory. In his use of the seventeenth-century lament aria form for King Mark, Wagner deliberately contradicts his formal convictions in order to portray symbolically the position of kingly rule, courtly love, and the bond of marriage as similar forms of artifice in the age of chivalry and its nineteenth-century revival.

Chapter Four: The Bass Clarinet as a Unifying Symbol of Honour and Betrayal

Wagner employs expressive techniques of the seventeenth-century lament for Mark in Act Two, Scene Three, yet the orchestration is unmistakably Wagnerian. Though *Tristan's* pit orchestra is not as expansive as the one Wagner scores for the Ring cycle, his orchestral writing for much of the work reflects and anticipates the grandeur of his scoring for the cycle.¹⁶⁵ Wagner's orchestration for Mark's lament juxtaposed against this sound world is striking: his use of the bass clarinet is crucial to the character of the lament and his depiction of the king, honour, and ultimately, of loss. Wagner's choice to cast Mark as a bass is equally striking. The bass tessitura blends with the colour of the bass clarinet, allowing for an associative connection between the king and the instrument to be made. Furthermore, this casting reinforces the previously outlined duality between the two men; Tristan's Heldentenor exudes youth and vigour while Mark's deep bass depicts him as a tired old sage.

Wagner opens the fifth section of Part Three of his *Oper und Drama* with a bold claim regarding the descriptive powers of orchestration: "the orchestra indisputably possesses a *faculty of speech* and the creations of modern Instrumental-music have disclosed it to us."¹⁶⁶ He explains that orchestra has the "Speaking-faculty [...] of uttering the *unspeakable*" and that it is used to convey a "real and palpable" idea.¹⁶⁷ The orchestra

¹⁶⁵ Wagner's instructions call for the players of the bowed string instruments to be "especially skilful and numerous" and his indication for "a pair of kettledrums" calls for a third, reinforcement drum for proper changing of pitch. All wind and brass sections reflect that of a full late romantic orchestra and Wagner calls for a substantial onstage or backstage ensemble consisting of three trumpets, three trombones, six horns (more if possible) and an English horn.

¹⁶⁶ Richard Wagner, "Oper und Drama," in *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, edited by William Ashton Ellis, Vol. 2 (New York: Broude Bros., 1893), 316. (Emphasis and capitalizations in this and all following quotations as in original, unless otherwise stated.)

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 316-317.

“is no mere compost of washy tone-ingredients, but consists of a rich association of instruments—with unbounded power of adding to its numbers; whilst each of these is a definite individuality [...] and that “Tone-speech” of each instrument is a “pure organ of the Feeling, it speaks out the very thing which Word-speech in itself can *not* speak out.”¹⁶⁸ According to Wagner, the orchestra speaks in “tone-figures peculiar to the individual character of specially appropriate instruments” that “shap[e] themselves into the specific Orchestral-melody.”¹⁶⁹ In *Unsung Voices*, Carolyn Abbate carefully distinguishes the voice of the orchestra as separate from the composer: “the music that [the orchestra] speaks is a commentary of a narrator [... who] knows the outcome of the plot [...and] *looks back* [...] as if all action in it were already past at the moment that it speaks [...]”¹⁷⁰ Wagner’s theories of the orchestra’s ability to speak and portray meaning beyond the text suggest that Wagner’s instrumentation holds a key to understanding his drama—that the role of the bass clarinet is crucial to understanding Mark and Tristan.

When Richard Strauss revised and expanded Berlioz’s *Treatise on Orchestration* in 1904, he referred to Wagner’s scores as “the alpha and omega of [his] additions to [Berlioz’s] work,”¹⁷¹ adding King Mark’s lament as an example for the section on the bass clarinet.¹⁷² Strauss identifies that Wagner always uses the bass clarinet in “the character of solemn resignation.”¹⁷³ It is this solemn resignation that makes the bass clarinet an appropriate feature instrument for Mark’s lament. Its dark colouring and low range enhance the character of the lament, and Wagner’s writing for the bass clarinet in

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 317.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 323.

¹⁷⁰ Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices*, 169.

¹⁷¹ Hector Berlioz, *Treatise on Instrumentation*, trans. Theodore Front, rev. exp. ed. Richard Strauss (New York: Edwin F. Kalmus, 1948), forward: ii.

¹⁷² Strauss’ entries from *Tristan* are the only examples added exclusively for the bass clarinet. Berlioz’s original example is from Act Five of Meyerbeer’s *Les Huguenots*, Op. 90.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 223.

the lament matches the melodic contour and pathos of Mark's vocal line. This chapter identifies these prominent bass clarinet lines,¹⁷⁴ studying the accompanying libretto and its place in the overall drama to establish King Mark's dramatic presence and the honour of the chivalric code in the opera outside of Act Two, Scene Three and Act Three, Scene Three. Identifying Mark's literal and symbolic presence throughout the drama confirms the extent of Mark's importance as a dramatic and musical force in Wagner's *Tristan*.

Peter Conrad writes, "Wagner's people are characterized by music, not drama [...]." ¹⁷⁵ By matching the bass clarinet so closely with Mark's vocal line in the lament, Wagner symbolically equates the instrument with the king. Linking the identity of the king with the bass clarinet allows Wagner to create a chain of symbolism. The most obvious symbolic association for the bass clarinet is the one where its presence evokes that of the king. The symbolism then shifts to a more abstract level, where instead of accompanying a description of Mark, it represents the chivalric elements of his character. By divorcing itself from its portrayal of the king himself, the bass clarinet encompasses noble characteristics that are universal and eternal: honour and loyalty were as pertinent in the chivalric revival as they were in the Middle Ages. Wagner shifts his symbolism in Act Three when the King reappears and the death of these noble attributes becomes apparent. Again he marries the bass clarinet with lament tropes, as Tristan laments the tragic end to the passionate love of his parents and his disconnection from tradition and honour.

¹⁷⁴ For large sections of the work, the bass clarinet is absent from the orchestral texture. When it does appear, it often functions as the bass line to a woodwind choir as part of the overall *forte tutti* texture. The note values in these passages are predominantly half and whole notes and so are not identified as predominant melodic passages. These lines are not considered as a part of this analysis. The bass clarinet's role in the orchestral preludes is also difficult to address without text to consider with them as this is *not* a study of leitmotifs but of the orchestral interplay of meaning with the text.

¹⁷⁵ Peter Conrad, *Romantic Opera and Literary Form* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 27.

Wagner's narrative flashbacks for Isolde and Tristan in Act One, Scene Three, and Act Three, Scene One reveal events from outside of the temporal scope of the opera, often by referring to characters who are not present. These narrative flashbacks do not only refer to these absent characters through their text, but also through their orchestration. In both scenes, the bass clarinet's voice is heard along side text pertaining to the king and his grief. The bass clarinet also is featured predominantly in passages that speak of honour within the courtly society or that express a tragic sentiment akin to Mark's Act Two lament, as in Tristan's grief in Act Three. In these ways Wagner capitalizes on the sombre, noble, and tragic tone of the instrument to fully express the variant layers of drama in his work.

The first symbolic association of the bass clarinet in *Tristan und Isolde* is the one that demands the least amount of interpretation; the melodic presence of the noble instrument indicates the character of the king. In measures 194-200 (Example 12) of Isolde's flashback in Act One, Scene Three, she recounts how Tristan had claimed her as Mark's bride: "*Irlands Erbin begehrt er zur Eh' für Cornwall's müden König, für Marke, seinen Ohm.*" [He sought Ireland's heiress as a bride for Cornwall's tired king, for King Mark, his uncle.] In this passage, the bass clarinet begins as a part of the bass line with the bassoons but in the third measure, just before Isolde refers to the *müden König*, it breaks out of this texture with a full measure trill, resolving into a chromatic passage before settling back into the bass line. Here, the bass clarinet is a representation of Mark, and the trill of his *Müdigkeit* [weariness].

Example 12: *Tristan 1:III* mm. 194-200

194

Oboe

Clarinet in Bb

English Horn

Bass Clarinet in Bb

Bassoon

Bassoon

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Isolde

Violoncello

Contrabass

p *cresc.* *tr*

p *cresc.*

p *cresc.*

p *cresc.*

p *cresc.*

p *cresc.*

Bord, Ir - lands Er - bin be - gehrt er zur Eh' für

p *cresc.*

197 **Etwas gedehnt** **rallent.** **Schnell**

Ob. *ff* *p* *cresc.*

Cl. *ff* *p* *cresc.*

Eng. Hn. *ff* *dim.* *p* *cresc.*
cresc.

B. Cl. *ff* *dim.* *p* *cresc.*
cresc.

Bsn. *ff* *p cresc.*

Bsn. *ff* *p cresc.*

Vln. I *f* *p pizz.* *Bog.*
p cresc.

Vln. II *f* *p pizz.* *Bog.*
p cresc.

Vla. *f* *p* *rallent.* *Schnell* *Bog.*
p cresc.

I. *gedeht*
Korn walls mü - den Kö - nig, für Mar - ke, sei-nen Ohm.
Etwas gedehnt **rallent.** **Schnell**

Vc. *f* *p pizz.* *Bog.*
p cresc.

Cb. *f* *p*

Later in the same act, in measures 394-406 (Example 13), when Isolde complains of unrequited love and attention, Brangäne assumes that the girl speaks out of fear of her union with Mark and tries to console her with assurances of Mark's character:

und warb er Marke dir zum Gemahl, wie wolltest du die
Wahl doch schelten, muss er nicht wert dir gelten? Von
edler Art und mildem Mut, wer gliche dem Mann an Macht
und Glanz? Dem ein hehrster Held so treulich dient, wer
möchte sein Glück nicht teilen, als Gattin bei ihm weilen?

[And if he recruited King Mark as a husband for you, why
did you have to scorn his selection? Do you not see its
worth? Of noble blood and mild manner, who equals the
man in power and glory? He whom a noble hero so
faithfully serves, who would not share his happiness and
tarry next to him as his wife?]

Example 13: *Tristan 1:III* mm. 394-406

394

Oboe *p*

Bass Clarinet in Bb

Violin I *p*

Violin II

Viola *p dolce*

Brangäne
gel - ten? Von ed - - ler Art

Violoncello *p*

Contrabass

2

399

Ob.

B. Cl.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

B.

Vc.

Cb.

— und mil - dem Mut, wer gli - -

p

p

p

p

pizz.

p

403

Ob.

B. Cl.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

B.

che dem Mann an Macht und Glanz?

Vc.

Cb.

Brangäne continues, again accompanied by the bass clarinet, assuring Isolde that Mark is not only noble and good, but as he has selected Isolde as his wife, he surely would love her (Example 14: mm. 455-500):

Wo lebte der Mann, der dich nicht liebte? Der Isolde sah',
 und in Isolden selig nicht ganz verging'? Doch, der dir
 erkoren, wär'er so kalt, zög' ihn von dir ein Zauber ab: den
 bösen wüsst' ich bald zu binden; ihn bannte der Minne
 Macht.

[Where lives the man who would not love you? who could
 see Isolde and not be blessedly, completely consumed by
 Isolde/her? Yet, he who chose you, however cold he might
 be, or if a spell turned him away from you, I would

Example 14: *Tristan 1:III* mm. 455-467

455

Flute
p dolce *p*

Oboe
p dolce *p*

Clarinet in Bb
p

Bassoon
p dolce

Bass Clarinet in Bb

Violin I
p

Violin II

Viola

Brangäne
lieb - te? der I - sol - - den säh, und in I -

Violoncello
p

Contrabass

2

461

Fl. *p*

Ob. *p*

Cl. *p*

Bsn.

B. Cl. *p dolce* *p*

Vln. I *p*

Vln. II *p* *p*

Vla. *p* *p*

B. sol - den se - lig nicht ganz ver - ging?

Vc. *p* *sehr weich* *p*

Cb. *p* *sehr weich* *p*

constrain the wicked one quickly: the power of Love would avoid it.]

These three examples of bass clarinet passages from Act One, Scene Three, all serve to reveal a picture of the king whom neither Brangäne nor Isolde have yet met. Through these passages, the audience's picture of the yet unseen king also grows. Just as it is important to note that the bass clarinet does not cry out at every mention of the kingdom or Mark's name,¹⁷⁶ it is necessary to distinguish between an objective and imagined picture of the King. The bass clarinet is absent in measures 286-304 of Act One Scene Three where Isolde mockingly mimics how Tristan might have convinced his uncle to take her as his wife. Isolde is merely speculating what Tristan might have said to an imaginary Mark, and so the bass clarinet remains silent. Likewise, the bass clarinet line in Examples 12-14 is a subtle one: it functions as more than a mere bass line, but neither does it take over the orchestral texture. Instead, its prevalence amidst the woodwind choir provides a nuance to the text. It cannot be objectively said that Mark is *müde* or even that he will be loving towards his bride—it can only be understood that Isolde and Brangäne believe him to be.

The apprehensive and transplanted Irish princess, already smitten with Tristan, criticizes the king, calling him feeble, while Brangäne—likely more objective in such a time—can only speak well of the king: noble blood, gentle disposition, possessing not only power and glory but the faith and dedication of Tristan, able to provide for his kingdom, and capable of love. Whether Brangäne naively clings to the romantic notions of traditional love and honour in the court or whether or not Isolde's apprehensions are

¹⁷⁶ N.B.: The orchestration at the first mention of "*König Markes Land*" (mm. 179-180) is completely devoid of bass clarinet.

founded, Wagner emphasizes the honourable elements in the Good King Mark through his text and use of the bass clarinet in these passages.

It is precisely out of this definition of Mark's character that Wagner derives his second level of symbolism for the bass clarinet. In the following examples, the bass clarinet does not strictly accompany descriptions of Mark's character, but rather the description or the embodiment of the noble facets of his character: honour and loyalty. In measures 62-70 of Act One, Scene Five (Example 15), Isolde confronts Tristan, demanding a reason for his avoidance of her during the journey. His answer reveals honour's place at the core of his decisions: *Sitte lehrt, wo ich gelebt: zur Brautfahrt der Brautwerber meide fern die Braut.* [Where I lived, customs taught that on a courtship voyage, the bride-suitor keeps his distance from the bride.]

66

Ob.

Cl.

Eng. Hn.

Hn.

Bsn.

B. Cl.

Timp.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

I.

T.

Vc.

Cb.

cresc.

mf

dim.

p

cresc.

ten.

a2

tr

Aus wel-cher

Bra - ut wer-ber mei - de fern die Braut.

Bog.

p

geteilt. *pizz.*

Here the bass clarinet has a distinctive noble rhythmic figure as a part of a larger texture consisting of the clarinets, horns, and bassoons. Together, they illustrate what Tristan attempts to make Isolde understand, “*Fragt die Sitte!*” [The custom asks (dictates or says)!] By choosing to honour Isolde on the journey, Tristan honours Mark, and in doing so he observes the chivalric code of honour under which he was raised.

What results is a battle of wits and nerve as Tristan and Isolde each strive to find ways to manipulate the other in Honour’s name. First, in measures 216-224, Tristan appeals to Isolde’s sense of honour, challenging her to kill him to avenge her fiancé’s death as she avowed: “*War Morold dir so wert, nun wieder nimm das Schwert, und führ es sicher und fest, dass du nicht dir’s entfallen lässt!*” [If Morold was worth so much to you, now take the sword again and wield it sure and strong, so that it may not fall from you.] In turn, Isolde appeals to Tristan’s sense of honour in measures 229-278 (includes Example 16), which is unequivocally tied up in his king:

Wie sorgt’ ich schlecht um deinen Herren; was würde
 König Marke sagen, erschlög’ich ihm den besten Knecht,
 der Kron’ und Land ihm gewann, den allertreusten Mann?
 Dünkt dich so wenig, was er dir dankt, bringst du die Irin
 ihm als Braut, dass er nicht schölte, schlög’ich den Werber,
 der Urfehde-Pfand so treu ihm liefert zur Hand? Wahre
 dein Schwert! Da einst ich’s schwang, als mir die Rache im
 Busen rang:—als dein messender Blick mein Bild sich
 stahl, ob ich Herrn Marke taug als Gemahl:—das
 Schwert—da liess ich’s sinken. Nun lass uns Sühne
 trinken!

What scant regard I should have for your Lord; What
 would King Mark say were I to slay his best knight, who
 won for him crown and country, the truest man of all? Do
 you value so little what he owes you, to bring him the Irish
 maid as his bride? Would he not scold me were I to slay the
 suitor, who delivered that treaty’s pledge so faithfully into
 his hand? Take up your sword! When I wielded it, when
 vengeance struggled at my breast:—when your measuring

gaze stole my likeness to see if I would be suited as a wife
to King Mark:—the sword—I let it sink. Now let us drink
Atonement!

Example 16: *Tristan* 1:V mm. 232-244

232

Bass Clarinet in Bb

Trombone

Timpani

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Isolde

Her - ren; was wür - de Kö - nig Mark - ke sa - gen. er - schlüg ich ihm den

Violoncello

Contrabass

2

237

B. Cl.

Tbn.

Timp.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

I.
be - sten Knecht, der Kron und Land ihm ge - wann, den al - ler -

Vc.

Cb.

Detailed description: This page of a musical score contains measures 237 through 240. The score is for a full orchestra and a vocal soloist. The instruments shown are B. Cl. (Bass Clarinet), Tbn. (Tuba), Timp. (Timpani), Vln. I (Violin I), Vln. II (Violin II), Vla. (Viola), I. (Soprano voice), Vc. (Violoncello), and Cb. (Contrabass). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The vocal line in measure 237 begins with the lyrics 'be - sten Knecht, der Kron und Land ihm ge - wann, den al - ler -'. The orchestral parts include sustained notes and melodic lines for the strings and woodwinds.

241

zu 2 3

B. Cl. *p*

Tbn. *pp* *p*

Timp. *tr* *pp*

Vln. I *dim.* *p*

Vln. II *dim.* *p*

Vla. *dim.* *p*

I. treu - sten Mann? Dünkt dich so

Vc. *p*

Cb. pizz

The bass clarinet offers a few thematic interjections while Isolde explains that if she were to honour the oath she vowed to avenge Morold's death, she would be breaking Tristan's oath to Mark to bring back his bride and the oath she in turn implied by making the journey to Cornwall to become his queen. They find themselves at an impasse: neither can honour their oath without breaking another. Isolde's suggestion to share a drink of Atonement and Reconciliation is their only option. Ironically, the only action that the lovers believe would honour their relationships to Mark becomes the cause of his dishonour.

The melodic interjections of the bass clarinet continue in measures 312-314 (Example 17) as the lovers determine that their most honourable option is that of Atonement¹⁷⁷ and extend into the instrumental passage in measures 451-490 (Example 18) that accompany the drinking of the potions right up to the moment after their declaration of love where Tristan first remembers his honour: "*Was träumte mir von Tristans Ehre?*" [What did I dream of Tristan's honour?] At this moment neither King Mark nor the courtly honour he has come to represent are anywhere near the dramatic action of this scene. The bass clarinet has fled the action at the opening of the act in a stealthy fleeting dotted passage joining the King as he departs with his hunting party.

¹⁷⁷ Isolde believes this atonement will come through death. While Tristan knew that the draught was a potion of some variety, he was not necessarily initially aware of its supposed deadly nature.

Example 17: *Tristan* 1:V mm. 312-317

312

English Horn

Bass Clarinet in B \flat

Timpani

Violin II

Viola

Soprano

Tristan

Violoncello

p

p

(geteilt) *trem.*

pp

Bog. *trem.*

(get.)

pp

8

fasst.

pp

2

315 **accelerando** **Lebhafter**

Eng. Hn. *cresc.*

B. Cl. *tr*

Timp. *p*

Vln. II

Vla. *cresc.*

S. *cresc.*

Tenor (Shipmen)

Vc. **accelerando** **Lebhafter**

Dein Schwei - gen fass ich, weichst du mir aus. Wei -
Ho - he - ha - he!

relegated exclusively to its bass role in the woodwind choir passages and full orchestral moments. Its tone helps to provide the dark colour of the night as the lovers meet in secret, but any prevalent melodic treatment of the instrument is absent until Scene Three when Mark discovers the lovers and sings the lament discussed in Chapters Three. Following Mark's lament, the absence of the bass clarinet during textual references to honour is as poignant as its earlier presence. In measures 179-188 of Act Three, Scene One, Kurwenal speaks of the courtly attributes with which Tristan should re-enter Cornwall, but the bass clarinet is absent: "*Hei! Nach Kornwall: kühn und wonnig was sich da Glanzes, Glück and Ehren Tristan, mein Held, hehr ertrotzt!*" [Hey! to Cornwall: boldly and blissfully, what glory, fortune and honour Tristan, my hero, nobly won for himself there!] Despite Kurwenal's enthusiasm, the truth cannot be avoided: just as the bass clarinet is absent in his declaration so, too, is honour. It is not until later in the dialogue when Kurwenal extols Tristan's homeland, Kareol, that the bass clarinet reappears (Example 19, mm. 223-230), this time in remembrance of the honour and blessing of Tristan's childhood.

Example 19: *Tristan 3: I mm. 223-230*

Sehr allmählich ein wenig zurückhaltend

223

Oboe *p* *zart* Ob. Cl. Clarinet in Bb *p*

Bass Clarinet in Bb *p*

Horn in F *p* *p*

Horn in F *p*

Horn in F *p*

Violin I *p* *più p*

Violin II *p* *più p*

Viola *p* *più p*

Kurwenal *den.*

Sehr allmählich ein wenig zurückhaltend

Violoncello *p*

Contrabass *p*

2

225

Cl.

B. Cl.

Hn.

Hn.

Hn.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

K./T.

Vc.

Cb.

più p

ausdrucksvoll

p

più p

Detailed description: This page of a musical score covers measures 225, 226, and 227. The woodwind section includes Clarinet (Cl.), Bass Clarinet (B. Cl.), and three Horns (Hn.). The string section consists of Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), and Viola (Vla.). The brass section includes Trumpet/Trumpet in F (K./T.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Contrabass (Cb.). The score is in a key with one sharp (F#) and a common time signature. The woodwinds play a melodic line starting in measure 225, with the Bass Clarinet part marked *ausdrucksvoll* and *p* in measure 227. The strings provide a harmonic accompaniment, with the Cb. part marked *più p* in measure 225. The Horns play chords, with the first Horn marked *più p* in measure 225 and the second Horn marked *p* in measure 227. The K./T. part is mostly silent, with a few notes in measure 227.

228

Cl.

B. Cl.

Hn.

Hn.

Hn.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

K./T.

Vc.

Cb.

dim.

pp

pp

pp

dim.

pp

dim.

pp

più p

più p

TRISTAN:

Dü nkt dich das?

p

dim.

p

p

p

Later, when Tristan extols Kurwenal for his loyalty in the conflict, the bass clarinet is conspicuously missing. Kurwenal's honourable loyalty is moot if Tristan himself is not honourable. Tristan praises: "*Wen ich gehasst, den hasstest du; wen ich geminnt, den minntest du. Dem guten Marke, dient' ich ihm hold, wie warst du ihm treuer als Gold! Must' ich verraten den edlen Herrn, wie betrogst du ihn da so gern!!*" [He that I hated, you hated too; he that I worshipped, you worshipped too. To the good King Mark, when I served him well, how you were truer to him than Gold! When I had to betray that noble Lord, how gladly you betrayed him too!] Though Wagner's text depicts Tristan thanking Kurwenal for his faithfulness, the lack of bass clarinet in the texture of Wagner's orchestration illustrates how honour has flown the situation and is no longer part of Tristan's decision making.

Once the absence of honour is acknowledged, Wagner again shifts the symbolism of the bass clarinet for the remainder of the work. The bass clarinet no longer directly mirrors the king's music when he reappears in the final scene, and there remains no honour intact to be symbolized, so it resumes its lamenting tone from Act Two, Scene Three instead. This time, it accompanies Tristan's text in Act Three, Scene One (Example 20: mm. 107-116) when he hears the nostalgic *alte Weise* [old melody, representative of the old way of doing things] and mournfully reminisces his loss of his parents and his break with the past.

Example 20: *Tristan* 3:I mm. 107-116

107 **Langsam.**

Horn in E

English Horn
(on Stage) *sehr zögernd*

Bass Clarinet in B \flat

Violin II/
Viola

Tristan

Violoncello/
Contrabass **Langsam.** *sehr zögernd*

p *allmählich schwindend* *pp*

2

112 **a tempo** Hn. III allein *pp*

Eng. Hn.

B. Cl.

VIII/
Vla.

T.
8

Die al - te Wei - se; was weckt sie

a tempo

Vc.

115 Kurwenal Bsn. *pp*

Eng. Hn.

B. Cl.

VIII/
Vla.

T.
8

mich? Wo bin ich?

poco cresc.

Vc.

The dark and sombre tone of the bass clarinet is appropriate for Tristan's lamenting because as Tristan mourns the loss of his parents, he also symbolically mourns his disconnection with tradition and honour: *Die alte Weise drang durch Morgengrauen bang und bänger, als der Sohn der Mutter Los vernahm. Da er mich zeugt' und starb, sie sterbend mich gebar.*" [The old melody came through the dawn, ever more foreboding, as the son became aware of his mother's lot As he begat me and died, so, dying, she bore me.] (Example 21, mm. 612-616; Example 22, mm. 621-625.) Because Tristan never had the opportunity to know either of his parents, his only connections to them are the system under which he was raised and his uncle, King Mark. Tristan is mourning more than the loss of his parents — he is mourning the breach with his past. The bass clarinet's adaptation of the English horn's *Alte Weise* melody (as in Examples 20, 22, and 23) embodies a melancholy longing for the past.

Example 21: *Tristan* 3:I mm.612-616

612 Bsn.

Clarinet in Bb

Horn in F

Bass Clarinet in Bb

English Horn

Tristan

Viola

Violoncello

Contrabass

sfz dim.

sf

dim.

p

pizz.

p

(on Stage) 3

durch Mor -

2

614

Cl.

Hn.

B. Cl.

Eng. Hn.

T.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

gen-grau - en bang und bäng - er,

p *sf* *p* 3 *sf*

Example 22: *Tristan* 3:I mm.621-625

621 Etwas weniger zurückgehalten. Erstes Zeitmas

Clarinet in Bb *pp*

Horn in F *pp*

Bass Clarinet in Bb *Eng. Hn.* *p* *p*

Timpani *tr* *pp*

Violin I (mit Dämpfer) *poco riten.* *p*

Violin II (mit Dämpfer) *p* *trem.*

Viola (mit Dämpfer) *p* *trem.*

Tenor *p*
Da er mich zeugt' und starb, sie ster-bend mich ge-bar,

Violoncello (mit Dämpfer) *p*

Tristan calls out to the old tune (played by the onstage English horn, representing the watch that the Shepherd is keeping for an advancing ship), remembering the loss of his parents, and questioning fate and his *raison d'être*. He then recalls his near death upon his first arrival to Ireland (Example 23, mm. 676-682): “*Die nie erstirbt, sehnend nun ruft um Sterbens Ruh’ sie der fernen Ärztin zu.—Sterbend lag ich stumm im Kahn, der Wunde Gift dem Herzen nah: Sehnsucht klagend klang die Weise; den Segel blähte der Wind hin zu Irlands Kind.*” [Never dying, yearning, now calling out for death’s peace to the distant healer. Dying, I lay in the barge, silent, the wound’s poison near to my heart: plaintively yearning, the melody sounded; the wind blew the sail towards Ireland’s child.]

Example 23: *Tristan* 3:I mm. 676-682

676

Clarinet in Bb *morendo* *pp*

Bass Clarinet in Bb *p (ausdrucksvoll)*

Bassoon *p (zart)*

Horn in F *p* *pp*

Violin II *(mit Dämpfer)* *p*

Viola *pp*

Tristan
8 Ruh sie der fer - nen Ärz - tin zu.

Violoncello *pp*

Contrabass *nur2* *pizz.* *p*

2

679

Cl.

B. Cl.

Bsn.

Hn.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

T.

Vc.

Cb.

dim.

più p

pp

(ausdrucksvoll)

Ster - bend

(mit Dämpfer)

nur2

pizz.

p

p

While the English horn evokes Tristan's mourning and subsequent yearning, the bass clarinet is the instrument that truly accompanies his lament. Its dark and deeply melancholic voice joins the cello in measures 915-920 (Example 24), to create a similar orchestral colour as in Mark's lament. Though the melodic contour is very different from that of Act Two, Scene Three, the orchestration illustrates Tristan's yearning for Isolde to heal him, much as Mark yearned for his wife and peace with his friend.

Example 24: *Tristan* 3:I mm.915-920

915 Lebhafter

Bass Clarinet in A *p*

Bassoon *p*

Horn in F *p*

Violin I/II *pp*

Viola *pp*

Tristan
du!

Violoncello *p*
(staccato, aber gut gehalten)
pizz.

Contrabass *p*

Detailed description of the musical score: The score is for measures 915-920 of Tristan 3:I. It is in 3/4 time and the key signature has three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The tempo is 'Lebhafter'. The instruments and their parts are: Bass Clarinet in A (melodic line, *p*), Bassoon (melodic line, *p*), Horn in F (pulsating accompaniment, *p*), Violin I/II (pulsating accompaniment, *pp*), Viola (pulsating accompaniment, *pp*), Tristan (voice, 'du!', *pp*), Violoncello (melodic line, *p*, *(staccato, aber gut gehalten)*, *pizz.*), and Contrabass (pulsating accompaniment, *p*).

2

918

B. Cl.

Bsn.

Hn.

Vln. I/II

Vla.

T.

Vc.

Cb.

Und Kur - wen - al

The bass clarinet enjoys only one final melodic fragment in measures 194-195 (Example 25) before it is relegated to bass lines as part of the overall texture for Isolde's closing *Verklärung* [transfiguration] in Act Three, Scene Three. The bass clarinet doubles Isolde's melody for the first two measures of the *Verklärung* before the clarinet takes the melodic line and passes it through the other instruments. Her song tells of her vision of Tristan, her beloved; it tells of love triumphing over the constraints of tradition and honour. The absence of melodic material following this statement serves as a reminder that Wagner has raised Tristan over Mark and Love over traditional chivalric Honour.

Example 25: *Tristan 3:III mm. 194-197*

Sehr mäßig beginnend

Clarinet in A

Bass Clarinet in A

Trombone

Isolde

Viola

Violoncello

Violoncello

Contrabass

Mild und lei-se wie er lä-chelt, wie das Au-ge hold er öff-net,-

p

ppp

ppp

trem.

pp

trem.

pp (get.)

pp

pp

nur2

4

Wagner's use of the bass clarinet in the orchestration to symbolize first Mark's lament, then the presence and subsequent loss of Honour, and finally the defeat of both at

the hand of a passionate Love in disregard for the tradition of honour in the chivalric code, draws the audience's attention to this narrative throughout the work. By linking both Mark and the loss of Honour to the instrument, Wagner has made them equal entities where one may represent the other over the course of the drama.

Chapter Five: Text Expression and Melodic Analysis of Mark's Music

Identifying Mark's Act Two music as a traditional operatic lament aria enables an analysis of his vocal line as an expressive song. This final chapter considers Wagner's text setting for Mark's Act Two lament and reappearance in Act Three, using text expression analysis techniques typically applied to expressive song. Following Mark's emotions and the sentiment featured in this analysis from the Act Two lament to the king's appearance in Act Three, the audience gains an awareness of how the events of the drama have changed Mark.

Though Wagner's prose works do not include any specific insight into his means of melodic text expression, he repeatedly revisits the concept of a total artwork, or *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which unites the ideals of Greek drama with music. For this reason, Ellen Rosand's title for the section of her book on the lament, "*Il lamento: The Fusion of Music and Drama*," would likely have pleased the composer. Rosand's chapter asserts that laments "especially attracted composers of the sixteenth century who were *preoccupied with the transition of poetic affect into musical language*; the strongest emotions cried out most loudly for musical expression"¹⁷⁸ (emphasis mine). Though Wagner wrote extensively on the union of poetry and music in the drama, none of his many prose writings on music present a straightforward treatise on text setting or text expression. Instead, Wagner's discourse on the matter is vague and metaphorical at best. In "On the Name 'Musikdrama,'" Wagner surmises that "*Dramamusik*" would be a more accurate description of his works,¹⁷⁹ concluding that he would "gladly have called [his]

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 361.

¹⁷⁹ Based on the nature of emphasis in compound words in the German language.

dramas *ersichtlich gewordene Thaten der Musik.*” [Deeds of music which have become visible.] Additionally, in Part Three, Section 7 of *Oper und Drama* he refers to the “musical expression of words” but does not provide an explicit account of the sort of expression he deemed preferable.¹⁸⁰ Nevertheless, Wagner’s prose works repeatedly return to the idea that the trinity of “art sisters”—*Tanzkunst, Tonkunst, and Tichtkunst*—should together, arm-in-arm, serve the total art-work: the drama.¹⁸¹

It is in this spirit that this study examines expression in Wagner’s union of text and music for Mark’s music and how Wagner uses text expression at the word level, both to achieve an overarching expression of grief and to evince character development. Analysis of the size and direction of the melodic leaps in the vocal line intensifies the sombre sentiment of the lament and identifies the varying degrees of pathos apparent in Wagner’s text.

The most striking feature of Mark’s melody in the Act Two is not the themes that are exclusive to the lament but the angular, often dissonant, melodic contour that prevails for the entirety of the scene. An analysis of all melodic leaps spanning a perfect fifth or greater reveals how Wagner exploits the melodic contour as a formal and expressive device. The interconnectivity of Wagner’s themes coupled with the distinctive leap of a minor sixth as the opening of the opera (the first part of Scruton’s Matrix) indicate the important expressive role of these large leaps throughout the work. The leaps in Mark’s music, however, are unique in the density of their distribution and prevalence of the more severe descending intervals. Grouping leaps of the same direction and size reveals that

¹⁸⁰ Richard Wagner, “Oper und Drama,” 368.

¹⁸¹ Richard Wagner, “The Art-Work of the Future,” in *Richard Wagner’s Prose Works*, edited by William Ashton Ellis, Vol. 1, (New York: Broude Bros., 1895), 47. The “three primeval human arts”: *Dance, Tone, and Poetry*.

Wagner employs these melodic characteristics as an expressive device to illustrate the depth and extent of pathos present in the text. The descending intervals that are so prevalent in Mark's vocal lines present themselves in direct opposition to the ascending intervals that accompany Isolde's transcendent opening lines in the *Verklärung* [transfiguration] at the close of the opera (Example 26). Overall, the melodic analysis in this chapter supports the earlier chapters' claims on the balance of affection within the eternal triangle; though Mark's music reveals his fondness for Isolde, it is Tristan whom he truly loves.

Example 26: *Tristan* 3:III mm. 194-197

Sehr mäßig beginnend

Clarinet in A

Bass Clarinet in A

Trombone

Isolde

Viola

Violoncello

Violoncello

Contrabass

Mild und lei-se wie er lä-chelt, wie das Au-ge hold er öff-net,-

p

ppp

ppp

trem.

pp

trem.

pp (get.)

pp

pp

nur2

4

Wagner weaves layers of meaning throughout Mark's lament. His form and musical expression of the text both depict the depths of Mark's character, the many facets of his

relationship with the title characters, and the varying degree of pathos expressed in his lament.

Melodic Analysis of Act Two, Scene Three: Lamenting the *treulos treuster Freund*

The first group of intervals consists of ascending leaps of a perfect fifth or more in Act Two, Scene Three. This group is unique among the collections for this scene in that it is the only one displaying consonant or ascending intervals. Each of the intervals in Table 2, with the exception of the major sixth occurring on Melot's "*Schmach*" in measure 370, corresponds with text expressing a positive attribute, whether the name or title of a person or place valued by the speaker or a term of honourable morality.

While the major and minor intervals identified in the second column are linked with places (*des Hofes* or *Landes*) and conventional descriptions of chivalric attributes (*truen, freundlich, etc.*), the intervals of all ascending perfect fifths are reserved for lofty references to things the character speaking reveres the most: Mark sings of his *Treue*, Tristan, and *Himmel*, while Tristan sings of his beloved Isolde, his friendship with the king, and honour. Wagner's use of the ascending leaps reveals each man's priorities and illustrates Tristan's conflicting allegiances to honour his friend and king, Mark, and Isolde, his love.

Table 2: Ascending Leaps \geq P5¹⁸²

Measure	Interval	Character	Text	Translation
m. 67-68	m7	Mark	Sieh 'ihn dort, den <i>Treu'sten aller Treuen</i>	see him there, the truest, most faithful of true
m. 71	m7	Mark	blick auf ihn , den <i>freundlichstes der Freunde</i>	look at him, the friendliest of friends
m. 76	m6	Mark	seiner Treue freiste	his faithful deed
m. 79-80	m6	Mark	mit feindlichstem	with most hostile
m. 104	P5	Mark	Treue, da Tristan	loyal (true), Tristan there
m. 155	m6	Mark	Bitt	prayers/requests/petitions
m. 160	m6	Mark	des Hofes	courts
m. 161	m6	Mark	des Landes	country
m. 231	P5	Mark	beschliche	befriend
m. 239	P5	Mark	kein Himmel	no heaven
m. 331	P5	Tristan	Isolde	———
m. 370	M6	Melot	diese Schmach	this dishonour
m. 376	P5	Tristan	mein Freund war	my friend was
m. 380	P5	Tristan	Ehr' und Ruhm	honour and fame

Only two of the cases of ascending leaps in Table 2 do not follow this trend. The first occurs in measures 79–80 on the word *feindlichstem* [most hostile] and is used to set up the word *Verrat* [betrayal] over a $b^{\circ 7}$ harmony. In this case, Wagner's use of the same diminished harmony that opened the scene carries enough turmoil for the words depicted to negate any positive implications the ascending leap might have. The second, which occurs on the word *Schmach*, is sung by Melot and is accounted for in as much as it punctuates the end of a question. All other cases of predominant ascending intervals of a

¹⁸² In this and the following tables the words affected by the featured interval will be indicated in bold. In some cases, surrounding text is provided for context.

perfect fifth or greater carry positive connotations, despite the negative tone of the lament.

The following four tables (Tables 3, 4, 5, and 6) list melodic descending leaps in increasing order. In each case, the descending leaps portray the opposing perspective to the ascending ones listed above. Each character's first descending intervals in this scene are perfect fifths, as shown in Table 3, creating a formal continuity. For each of these characters, the falling perfect fifth marks the beginning of their distress.¹⁸³

Table 3: Descending Perfect Intervals (P5, P8)

Measure	Interval	Character	Text	Translation
m. 6	P5	Kurwenal	<i>Tristan</i>	———
m. 44	P5	Tristan	<i>Tag zum</i>	Day
m. 62	P5	Mark	<i>Tatest du wirklich?</i>	Have you really done [this]?
m. 63	P5	Mark	<i>Wähnst du das?</i>	believe you this?
m. 200	P5	Mark	<i>brachtest du mir dar</i>	you have brought to me
m. 201	P5			
m. 243	P8	Mark	<i>warum mir diese Hölle</i>	why [have you brought] me this Hell?
m. 389	P8	Tristan	<i>König</i>	King
m. 399	P5	Tristan	<i>verriet</i>	betrayed
m. 404	P8	Tristan	<i>Wehr dich</i>	Guard [arm]
	P8		<i>Melot</i>	yourself, Melot

¹⁸³ Though Tristan's descending octave on the word *König* in measure 389 has no formal function, it provides a tragic colouring to his mention of the man he betrayed and his beloved's union to that man in marriage.

As the descending interval increases in size and becomes more dissonant, the intervals express increasingly desperate utterances; each successive set of text shows the king expressing greater and greater emotional distress. With each entry in Table 4, Mark questions the events he just witnessed and begs an explanation from Tristan in utter disbelief. Table 4 represents the next level of Mark's grief; the king moves past the stage of shock and begins to mourn his now broken relationship with Tristan; by name in the first section of the lament form, then as heir to his throne in the second, and finally in the final section, as friend.

Table 4: Descending Minor 6th

Measure	Character	Text	Translation
m. 52*	Tristan	<i>Pfand ich</i>	pledge *
m. 58	Tristan	<i>Schande</i>	shame
m. 101	Mark	<i>Tristan</i>	————
m. 144	Mark	<i>Erb' [Erbe] und Eigen</i>	heir and own
m. 152	Mark	<i>Marke</i>	————
m. 224*	Mark	<i>Freund die</i>	friend the*

*note this is one of few MAJOR 6ths

Note that the two exceptional descending *major* sixths appear on words with positive connotations (*Pfand*, *Freund*) and so illustrates how Wagner treats the falling major sixth in a similar way as he does the ascending leaps. The brighter colouring of the major interval outweighs the darker, negative shading of its descent.

As was the case with Table 4, the increased size and dissonance of the descending intervals represented in Table 5, the minor seventh is met with an increased intensity of pathos. It is in these moments, which occur in each section of the three-part lament form, that Mark's grief is at its most tragic: he no longer fixates on the shame Tristan's

disloyalty brings them both not simply on Tristan's role as heir and friend. Instead, Mark moves on to grieve the loss of the personal relationships involved. Each mention of Tristan's name incites more grief in the king and every thought of his unconsummated marriage to his *wundervolle Weibe* pains him further. He bemoans the betrayal of his truest friend, and mourns the flight of virtue. Finally, at a loss, he returns to the loss of honour with his last descending minor seventh on *diese Schmach*. The descending interval belongs nearly exclusively to Mark who, as the disadvantaged lover in the eternal triangle, is truly the drama's tragic hero. For Tristan, it is his question to Isolde asking whether she will follow him where he goes that fills him with such dread that he sings his most dissonant leap of this scene.

Table 5: Descending Minor 7th

Measure	Character	Text	Translation
m. 99	Mark	<i>Mir dies?</i>	This to me?
m. 111	Mark	<i>Tristan</i>	————
m. 113	Mark	<i>Tristan</i>	————
m. 117-118	Mark	<i>sie flieht</i>	it (virtue/service) flees
mm. 129-130	Mark	<i>ohne Zahl</i>	without number (ie., countless)
m. 169	Mark	<i>Drohstest</i>	threaten
m. 180	Mark	<i>wundervolle Weibe</i>	wonderful wife
m. 187	Mark	<i>Nennen</i>	name ['naming' or 'calling' Isolde his wife ∴ the fact that the marriage was not consummated]
m. 248	Mark	<i>diese Schmach</i>	this dishonour
mm. 288-290	Tristan	<i>Wohin nun Tristan scheidet</i>	[to Isolde] where Tristan departs/separates

Wagner reserves the descending interval of a diminished seventh for the truly most anguished utterances of the characters that sing them. Melot's use of this interval (both ascending and descending) accompanies the words *Verräter* or *Verriet*, referring to Tristan and addressing his king with great sadness. As an indication that Tristan has no remorse over his affair, he doesn't sing this interval at all over the course of the scene. Mark uses this interval only twice: to speak of Melot's advice concerning Tristan's disloyalty and, even more poignantly, to utter Tristan's name. The descending diminished seventh is the mark of the king's undoing.

Table 6: Descending Diminished 7th

Measure	Character	Text	Translation
mm. 90-91	Mark	<i>Melots Rat</i>	Melot's advice/words
m. 119	Mark	<i>Tristan</i>	————
m. 368	Melot	<i>Verräter</i>	betrayed/traitor
m. 397 *	Melot	<i>verriet mich der Freund</i>	betrayed by my friend*
m. 399 *	Melot	<i>König</i>	King*

*note this is one of few ASCENDING diminished 7ths.

A cross-reference of Tables 3 through 6 (in Table 7) reveals that each successive utterance of Tristan's name is voiced with increasing sorrow. Mark's anguish in this last example evidently touches Tristan, as Wagner indicates, "*Tristan senkt langsam den Blick zu Boden; in seinen Mienen ist, während Marke fortfährt,*" [Tristan slowly lowers

his eyes to the ground: as Mark continues, increasing grief can be read in his expression.]
in the stage notes that follow that moment in the score.

Table 7: Mark's Act Two utterances "Tristan"

Measure	Character	Interval
m. 101	Mark	m6
m. 111	Mark	m7
m. 113	Mark	m7
m. 119	Mark	°7

Lastly, Wagner uses consecutive, opposite leaps (ascending followed by descending as seen in Theme Two, Example 5 above) in three cases in Act Two. The allusion to Mark's distress in his earlier scene is appropriate. In each of these three instances, Mark is singing about his present situation: it is as though he is trying to move on from his tragedy. Each time, his attempts to pick up the pieces and move on are thwarted and he circles back to where he began his lament: distressed over the betrayal of his nephew and friend.

Table 8: Consecutive, opposite leaps (ascending then descending as in Theme #2)

Measure	Intervals	Character	Text	Translation
mm. 84-85	m7, m6	Mark	<i>Trog mich Tristan</i>	deceived (tricked) by Tristan
mm. 86-87	m7, m6	Mark	<i>sollt'ich hoffen</i>	Shall I hope?
m. 138	P8, M6	Mark	<i>Markes Schmach bezahlen</i>	Mark's disgrace paid for?

Analysis of Act Three, Scene Three: Forging the *treulos treuster Freund*

Analysis of Mark's music in Act Three, Scene Two reveals that Wagner continues to employ melodic leaps of varying degrees as an expressive device despite the absence of a traditional lament form. Mark's appearance in this scene reveals the dramatic difference that the knowledge of the love potion makes to the legend and the balance within the eternal triangle. This knowledge frees Mark to forgive the two dearest people in his life: his wife and nephew. Though the prevailing sentiment of the king is much the same as in Act Two, Scene Three, his knowledge of the potion and the power of his forgiveness frees him from the formal constraints of the lament aria.

Mark's appearance in Act Three allows for the audience to see the king beyond his moment of absolute grief. His arrival at the castle in Brittany in Act Three, the last physical dramatic event of the opera, follows Brangäne's announcement of "*Glück and Heil!*" [Joy and Salvation!]. Mark arrives after Tristan's impetuously self-inflicted death, in time to witness Kurwenal's death—too late to offer his forgiveness to his friend. Saddened by Tristan's second 'betrayal' in death, he calls Tristan "*du treulos treuster Freund.*" [You most disloyal faithful friend.] Brangäne revives Isolde and explains how she has revealed the story of the love potion to the king. Mark relates how he has sailed to Brittany to forgive them and see them wed. Mark's final tragedy is that Isolde is also incapable of receiving the impact of the king's forgiveness; unaware of and unaffected by anything else in her surroundings, she fixes her gaze on Tristan and sings her Transfiguration *Liebestod*.

Mark's music for the scene (beginning on p. 620, m. 71) is subdued and accompanied primarily by the celli: the bass clarinet and most themes from his Act Two

lament are notably absent. The only intact theme that the orchestra states against Mark's vocal line is Theme Three (Example 6) and a few statements of the interlocking rising and falling leaps present in Theme Two (Example 5). Aside from these two melodic cells, Mark's line is constructed nearly entirely of descending leaps over diminished (and half diminished) harmonies and chromatic lines.

Harmonically, the scene is substantially more turbulent than Mark's appearance in Act Two. Where Mark's lament settles into the key of D minor, Act Three, Scene Three features frequent changes of key signature. Mark shares the scene with the supporting characters: Tristan is already dead and the shocked Isolde remains speechless until her *Verklärung* [transfiguration] at the close of the opera. While the orchestral accompaniment for the other characters features multiple themes from earlier in the opera, Mark's first entry in measure 71 (p. 620) halts the frantic sequencing of the orchestra. Twice, Wagner uses a chain of seventh chords to set up the V⁷ of the work's ultimate goal key of B Major (p. 626, mm. 107 and 119). Each time the F[#]⁷ is denied its resolution to B Major. It is after the second of these harmonic disruptions that Mark sings the first of his lamentation sections: first for Tristan, then for Isolde.

Mark's isolated statements building up to these longer lamenting sections are varied. The statement beginning in measure 101 is extremely static: the first phrase, "*O Trug und Wahn!*," covers a melodic range of only a minor second. Then, in measures 104-107, Mark echoes the descending perfect fifth that opened his Act Two lament, again on Tristan's name. Upon learning of Tristan's death and Isolde's apparent state of death, Mark laments, "*Tristan! Tristan! Isolde*", on a descending perfect fifth and then on two

consecutive minor sevenths, making use of the same method of text expression as the lament of the previous act.

This time, however, Wagner does not employ the *form* of the lament. When the same method of analysis employed in Act Two, Scene Three is applied to this scene, it becomes immediately evident that there are relatively very few ascending leaps to examine. Wagner's music reflects the characters' sombre resignation to the Schopenhauerian quest for unity in death (*Liebestod*) of the title characters. Mark only sings two predominate ascending intervals in this scene; both of which are diminished fifths at the words "*dem Tod*" (mm. 182-182) and "*der Wahn*" (m. 184), intensified by the harsh affect of the tritone.

Table 9: Mark: Ascending Diminished 5^{ths}

Measure	Text	Translation
mm. 182-183	<i>dem Tod</i>	of death
m. 184	<i>der Wahn</i>	madness

The remaining descending leap of a diminished fifth belongs to Brangäne upon her arrival to Brittany, announcing "*Glück und Heil!*" with the hope that Mark's forgiveness is enough to solve all their conflicts. These three examples are the only ascending intervals that are not a part of appearances of the Theme-two-like ascending/descending from Act Two.

Just as in his melodies for the lament in Act Two, Wagner uses descending perfect intervals to portray the most basic level of pathos. This scene features supporting characters more than any other in the drama. For this reason, Tables 10 and 11 show these descending figures separately from those of Mark. As in Act Two, each character

opens their first utterance with a descending perfect interval: the Shepherd's first declaration is a descending perfect fourth; Kurwenal's first descending leap is a descending perfect octave; the Helmsman's first interval is the descending perfect fifth and Brangäne's first text is set to a descending perfect fourth. In each case, the perfect intervals allow the character to either announce their presence or interrupt the orchestra with a new declaration.

Table 10: Supporting Characters: Descending Perfect Intervals (P4, P5, P8)

Measure	Interval	Character	Text	Translation
m. 6	P4	Shepherd	<i>Kurwenal</i>	—
m. 10	P8	Kurwenal	<i>Hölle</i>	Hell (or destruction)
m. 15	P8	Kurwenal	<i>Melot</i>	—
m. 29	P5	Helmsman	<i>Marke</i>	—
m. 32	P8	Helmsman	<i>bewältigt sind wir</i>	we are overpowered
m. 33	P8	Kurwenal	<i>Stell' dich und hilf</i>	stand by and help
m. 51	P5	Kurwenal	<i>Hei-a-ha-ha!</i>	Ah!
m. 64	P4	Brangäne	<i>Kurwenal</i>	—
m. 65	P5	Brangäne	<i>Wüthender!</i>	Lunatic! (Are you mad?)
m. 66	P5	Brangäne	<i>betrügst dich</i>	betraying yourself
m. 66	P8	Kurwenal	<i>Treulose Magd</i>	Disloyal (maid)
m. 90	P5	Brangäne	<i>Isolde</i>	—
mm. 93-94	↑ P5 *	Brangäne	<i>Glück und Heil!</i>	Luck and Joy! *
m. 160	P5	Brangäne	<i>zuzuführen den Freund!</i>	to lead your love to you
m. 187	P4	Brangäne	<i>Hörst du uns nicht?</i>	Do you hear us not?
m. 188	P5	Brangäne	<i>Isolde</i>	—
m. 189	P4	Brangäne	<i>Traute</i>	dearest

* Only *ascending* leap of a perfect interval in this passage.

In contrast to his lament in Act Two, Mark's Act Three music has very few descending perfect intervals. Though his first utterance in measure 101 is static, his next word, "*Tristan*," is set to a descending perfect fifth. After his initial entrance, Mark's lamenting in this act takes on two main sections: in the first, Mark mourns the death of Tristan; in the second, he faces his pain over losing Isolde. Just as in Act Two, Scene

Three, the size and dissonance of the descending intervals varies according to the text; the more extreme the descending interval, the higher the degree of pathos represented by the text. The descending intervals sung by the supporting characters continue to illustrate a basic level of pathos. These characters have less invested in the result of the drama and so perform less expressive leaps.

Table 11: Mark's Descending Perfect Intervals (P5, P8)

Measure	Interval	Text	Translation
mm. 105-106	P5	<i>Tristan</i>	—
m. 136	P8	<i>verrathen</i>	betrayest
m. 171	P5	<i>da fand</i>	there found (found there)
m. 175	P5	<i>vermählen</i>	marry

While the sixths of the supporting characters are nearly all major, Mark's are entirely minor, further illustrating that Mark's musical pathos is greater than that of the supporting characters.

Table 12: Supporting Characters: Descending Major and Minor 6^{ths}

Measure	Interval	Character	Text	Translation
m. 38	m6 *	Kurwenal	<i>Keiner</i>	nobody *
mm. 49-50	M6	Melot	<i>nicht dort</i>	do not resist
m. 62	M6	Melot	<i>Weh mir!</i>	Woe's me!
m. 79	M6	Kurwenal	<i>König</i>	King
m. 98	M6	Brangäne	<i>Lebst du?</i>	Do you live?
m. 190	M6	Brangäne	<i>Treue nicht?</i>	Truth, not?

*Only descending minor 6th in this passage.

Table 13: Mark's Descending Major 6^{ths}

Measure	Text	Translation
m. 71	<i>Halte!</i>	Stop! (Hold!)
m. 168	<i>fassen</i>	grasp (failed to grasp what he saw)
m. 177	<i>flog ich</i>	flew (after you)
m. 179	<i>Ungestüm</i>	impetuous (misfortune's impetuous haste)
m. 180	<i>Frieden</i>	peace

Tables 14-16 show Wagner's use of the descending minor seventh, diminished fifth, and diminished seventh for the libretto of the supporting characters. Each table portrays a deepening in their level of distress. In Table 13, Brangäne and Kurwenal address their respective dearest friends, Isolde and Tristan, by title. In Table 14, they address the same characters, this time by name. The use of the title characters' names brings the exchange—and so also, the pain—to a more personal level. The Shepherd's most emotionally charged moment occurs in measure 7 where he realizes that a second ship, likely bearing the king, is approaching. His moment of deepest pathos stems not from his own emotions, but from his duty to keep watch for approaching ships. Table 16 shows the three named supporting characters (Melot, Kurwenal, and Brangäne) at their most distressed. Just as the naming of these characters reflects the increased importance these characters have over the unnamed supporting roles, so too does their monopoly of the interval in Table 16 illustrate their increased emotional investment. Defensive and eager to defend his king, Kurwenal demands to know for what Brangäne is seeking upon her arrival to the castle at Brittany (m. 43); Melot retaliates against Kurwenal, only to be struck down (m. 48); and Brangäne's cry upon discovering Isolde near death deepens from perfect fifth in measure 90 and minor seventh in measure 93 to diminished sevenths in measures 96 and 99 as she questions what she sees and whether Isolde lives.

Table 14: Supporting Characters: Descending Minor 7th

Measure	Character	Text	Translation
mm. 40-41	Brangäne	<i>Herrin!</i>	Lady/Mistress
m. 80	Kurwenal	<i>holen</i>	taken
m. 118	Kurwenal	<i>Trauter</i>	True-one

Table 15: Supporting Characters: Descending Diminished 5th

Measure	Character	Text	Translation
m. 7	Shepherd	<i>zweites</i>	second (ship)
mm. 39-40	Brangäne	<i>Isolde</i>	—
m. 63	Melot	<i>Tristan</i>	—
m. 117	Kurwenal	<i>Tristan</i>	—
m. 122	Kurwenal	<i>mit kommt!</i>	with (you, I) come!

Table 16: Supporting Characters: Descending Diminished 7th

Measure	Character	Text	Translation
m. 43	Kurwenal	<i>suchst du</i>	[what are] you searching for? [what do you want here?]
m. 48	Kurwenal	<i>Verruchte</i>	wicked woman [Isolde]
m. 48	Melot	<i>Zurück!</i>	Stand back!
m. 96	Brangäne	<i>seh' ich</i>	(What) see I? (do I see?)
m. 99	Brangäne	<i>Isolde</i>	—

The same descending intervals take on different nuances in Wagner's writing for King Mark. Table 17 outlines his use of descending diminished intervals. In each case, Wagner uses the descending diminished interval (like the diminished sevenths shown in Table 16) to accompanying Mark in admonishing the other characters. In the first examples in Table 16, Mark questions Kurwenal's mental state, commands him to stand back, and then calls him a lunatic. Next, the phrases in measures 107 and 113 are directed towards Tristan; in the first instance, Mark calls out for Tristan, in an attempt to find him. The second occurs once Mark has located his dead nephew and sinks to his knees at Tristan's feet in grief. In measure 143 Mark's diminished seventh corresponds with the plea for Tristan to awaken and hear his king's misery.

Table 17: Mark's Descending Diminished 5^{ths} and 7^{ths}

Measure	Interval	Text	Translation
m. 72	°7	<i>Sinnen</i>	(are you) out of your mind (senses)?
m. 84	°5	<i>Wahnsinniger</i>	maniac/lunatic
m. 107	°5	<i>Wo bist du?</i>	Where are you?
m. 113	°5	<i>Tristan</i>	—
m. 143	°7	<i>Jammer!</i>	Misery!/Dispair!

Though it appears that Mark laments only the betrayal of Tristan during his Act Two lament, Table 18 reveals that he also mourns his wife, Isolde. In measures 114 and 115 Mark uses the descending minor seventh to express his grief first for Tristan, next for Isolde. Then, in measures 129-130, his “*Alles todt!*” is a cry for both title characters. Twice he pleads “*Erwache!*,” once for each of his friends. Mark even has, as mentioned above, a sentimental lamenting section for each of them. In measures 124-130 he laments them both over an A pedal (the dominant pedal to the key area of his Act Two lament) introduced by a bass clarinet figure. Though the key signature is that of d minor, the A pedal never finds fulfillment in its tonic. Instead, measures 130-148, in which Mark addresses the dead Tristan, are tonally unstable, accompanied by highly chromatic bass lines.

Table 18: Mark's Descending Minor 7^{ths}

Measure	Text	Translation
m. 114	<i>Tristan</i>	—
m. 115	<i>Isolde</i>	—
mm. 129-130	<i>Alles todt!</i>	All dead!
m. 140	<i>Erwache!</i>	Awaken!
m. 141	<i>Erwache!</i>	Awaken!
m. 147	<i>treuster Freund!</i>	faithful friend!
m. 164	<i>Warum Isolde?</i>	Why Isolde?

Act Three, Scene Three contains two recurrences of Theme Three (Example 6) from Mark's Act Two lament (Table 20). In these two phrases Mark again bemoans Tristan's betrayal, this time without reference to betrayal in the form of Tristan's affair with Isolde: that has been forgiven. Instead, he laments being twice betrayed by Tristan: first in life and love, now in death. In dying, Tristan has robbed Mark of the joy of forgiving the lovers and seeing them happily united.

Table 19: Mark: Reoccurrence of Theme Three (from Act Two, Scene Three)

Measure	Text	Translation
mm. 134-136	<i>Trautester Freund, auch heute noch musst du den Freund berrathen?</i>	Most faithful/trupest of friends, must you today your friend (betrayest?)
mm. 137-139	<i>Heut', wo er kommt die höchste Treue zu bewähren?</i>	Today when he comes to avow to you his deepest faith? (to prove his perfect trust?)

Table 20 illustrates the Act Three usages of the extended form of Theme Two from the Act Two lament (Example 6). Unlike Act Two, the cells are not all constructed in the same manner; instead, half the cells first ascend and then descend, while the remaining two descend before ascending.

Table 20: Mark: Ascending/Descending Cell (related to Theme #2 from Act Two, Scene Three)

Measure	Intervals	Character	Text	Translation
mm. 126-127	↓ ^o 7, ↑P5	Mark	<i>Todt denn Alles!</i>	All of them are dead!
mm. 132-133	↑P5, ↓m7	“	<i>Mein Held, mein Tristan!</i>	My hero, my Tristan!
m. 146	↓m7, ↑P5	“	<i>treulos</i>	disloyal/faithless
mm. 150-152	↑M6, ↑m7, ↓ ^o 5, ↓ ^x 4	Brangäne	<i>Sie wacht, sie lebt! Isolde! Hör'mich!</i>	She wakes, she lives! Isolde! Hear me!

While the first example in measures 126-127 represents the moment in which Mark first realizes the magnitude of death around him, the following three examples are the sort of paradoxical word juxtapositions that might be expected for this melodic cell after the results of this intervallic study of Act Two. Measures 132-133 find Mark first triumphantly declaring Tristan as his hero, then immediately sighing his name. In measures 146-147 he calls Tristan his faithless (on the descending half of the cell) and faithful friend (ascending) by using this effective symbolism.

The final statement of this ascending/descending cell is, however, addressed by Brangäne toward Isolde as the bride caught between two lovers and two ideologies. Measures 150-152 demonstrate how Brangäne's bond with Isolde is much like Mark's with Tristan. Unlike any of Mark's statements of this thematic cell, Brangäne's statement utilizes a double construction: two ascending leaps, immediately followed by two descending ones. Brangäne rejoices that Isolde is alive and that she awakes, but her rejoicing quickly turns to a petition for her mistress to hear and acknowledge her.

Though the leaping intervals in the ascending/descending cell uncharacteristically portray Mark's pain, gone is the shame and disbelief of Act Two; gone is the bass clarinet's descending tetrachord and stable lament harmonic structure. Gone, too, is the weak and powerless king of Gottfried—the king less favoured in the eternal triangle. In its place stands the Good King Mark; not only traditionally wise and honourable, like any respectable operatic bass, but living a life of forgiveness: cleansed by his tragedy, and free from the constraints of the chivalric code. Wagner has crafted a Mark unlike any of his predecessors: one who need not turn his back on his friends, despite societal constructs, but one who, nevertheless, is doomed to mourn his friend and wife.

Conclusion

Identifying Mark's Act Two aria as a lament in the form and style of the traditional lament not only affects the audience's perception of his role in the eternal triangle, but also determines the king's role in the drama as a picture of chivalric society. Wagner adapts Gottfried's story, constructing a highly nuanced portrayal of the king. He uses Mark as representative of the chivalric code in direct contrast to the existential quest for personal liberation and passionate love of the title characters, and by doing so, adds to the already accepted dualities of Day/Night, Falsehood/Truth, and Life/Death present in the drama. Wagner relies on traditional dramatic, formal, and expressive techniques to construct a picture of King Mark that encompasses all that a structured class-based society entails. Through this, the drama depicts the sort of revolutionary struggle that Wagner's prose writings called for in both opera and the politics of nineteenth-century Germany. His addition of forgiveness to the end of the traditional *Tristan* legend allows for Wagner to provide a political allegory not only of his perception of Germany's state as a nation, but also of a redemptive picture of the changes he advocated. Though Wagner abandoned his own formal operatic convictions in his writing for Mark in the early events of the opera, the second appearance of the King in Act Three, Scene Three shows a relaxation of structure for the king's music more resonant with Wagner's recent style. Through his addition of forgiveness, Wagner's Mark rises above adversity, cleansed by his tragedy, and free of the constraints of chivalry and the operatic lament. Just as Wagner called for a free state with a king that would co-operate in the creation of

a new class-less society that favoured the *Volk*,¹⁸⁴ Wagner constructed the King Mark of his Tristan legend to abandon the chivalric code of feudal society and to join the lovers in forgiveness and solidarity. In forgiving the lovers, Mark attempts to pass the inheritance of a freedom beyond a stratified society rather than a court and kingdom cloaked in shame, to his *treulos, treuster Freund*. Wagner constructs a king unlike any of his predecessors: one who needs not turn his back on his loved ones, despite his political position, but one who, nevertheless, is doomed to mourn his friends.

The conclusions drawn in this study ignite further inquiry into Wagner's portrayal of the ruling class and societal constructs in his other works. The formal and melodic analyses employed here may lend themselves to future studies of Wagner's portrayal of the ruling class in his works. Further examination of the composer's narrative flashbacks is also warranted; the significance of Wagner's choices of temporality in *Tristan* illustrates his ideologies, while his political beliefs must be considered in other such passages (such as those mentioned in the works of Carolyn Abbate, as discussed above in chapter three). Most significantly, this study calls for a further look at Wagner's orchestration and instrumentation in other works; Richard Strauss's characterization of the bass clarinet as the picture of sombre resignation may apply to other passages outside of *Tristan*. The author of this thesis has noted other instances of associative orchestration for characters and ideals in *Tristan* and other works.

Together, consideration of these dramatic elements leads to a more detailed picture of Wagner's lesser characters. Further study of these characters may uncover significant facets of their characterizations that reveal Wagner's own political and

¹⁸⁴ Aberbach, 72-75. Wagner's Romantic nationalism declared that the "monarchy [did] not stand in direct opposition to aspiration [of the republic or the Volk]" and that the ideal state would be one unified as a Free State (Saxony) under King Frederick Augustus II.

personal biases, giving rise to possibilities of alternate interpretations and stagings of these dramas that could make the socio-political themes and implications more apparent and relevant to present day opera audiences.

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Appendix One: Summary of the *Tristan* Prototype¹⁸⁵

The legend traditionally begins with the meeting of Tristan's parents, Rivalin and Blanchefflor. Rivalin meets Mark in battle and is seriously wounded. Blanchefflor steals into the infirmary and Tristan is conceived on what is thought to be his father's deathbed. Later, upon hearing of Rivalin's death, Blanchefflor dies in childbirth, giving her son the tragic name of Tristan and leaving him her ring. It is by this ring that her brother, King Mark, will recognize the youth. The intense passion, disregard for consequences, and tragedy of Blanchefflor and Rivalin's love story foreshadow Tristan's own future tragic love issues.

Despite Blanchefflor's wish that Tristan be raised by her brother, Tristan is raised and given a courtly education by Rual and Floraete: he is schooled in the knightly conquest of riding, hunting, and fencing; the refinement of art, music, and languages; and the workings of ruling, laws, and government. While in his mid-teens, Tristan is kidnapped by Norwegian merchants and abandoned on an unknown shore, from which he unknowingly makes his way to the court of his uncle, King Mark. Though he is not initially aware of his relationship to the youth, Mark is immediately impressed with Tristan's knowledge and abilities and places him at the head of the court's huntsmen and armoury. When Tristan's parentage is discovered, Mark makes him a knight in his court and Tristan, who is Mark's sole heir to the kingdom, rides out to reclaim his father's land, becoming a hero.

Learning that Duke Morholt of Ireland demands regular tributes from Mark and the court of Cornwall and that no other Cornish knights had previously been willing,

¹⁸⁵ Summary by author.

The English spellings of the names of all characters have been used for the purpose of this summary.

Tristan challenges Morholt and kills him, leaving a piece of his sword in the fatal wound. In doing so, Tristan receives a poisonous wound that can only be healed by Morholt's sister, Queen Iseult the Elder. Disguised as Tantris, Tristan goes to the castle to be healed, meeting the queen's daughter, Iseult the Fair. Upon returning to Mark's court, Tristan convinces Mark to take a wife to appease the constituents of his kingdom. Tristan again voyages to Ireland, killing a dragon to win Iseult for his king and is poisoned. Once more "Tantris" arrives at the castle of the Irish queen seeking healing. While Tantris is in the bath, Iseult the Fair sees his sword and recognizes the chip in his sword as the reciprocal of the piece found in her uncle's wound, but for reasons unknown does not take advantage of Tristan's vulnerability to avenge her uncle's death. Instead, she makes plans to return to Cornwall to become Mark's bride. She brings her handmaid, Brangain, and her potions, including one from her mother designed to bring happiness to her marriage with Mark. During the journey to Cornwall she and Tristan drink this potion and fall in love.¹⁸⁶ Unaware and despite of this love, Mark weds Iseult, making her his queen. In order to hide the earlier loss of her maidenhood to Tristan, Brangain spends the wedding night with the king in Iseult's stead. Eventually the court begins to suspect the adulterous relationship between Tristan and Iseult and, through various trials and means, the dwarf Melot reveals their affair to the king. Mark banishes Tristan from the court.¹⁸⁷ Tristan meets and marries another Iseult, Iseult of the White Hands, and befriends her brother, Kaherdin. Unable to forget his true love, Iseult the fair, Tristan never consummates his marriage to Iseult of the White Hands. The time comes that Tristan

¹⁸⁶ Whether the potion is one of love or one of death, or whichever of the two they believe it to be, varies among version, as does the order of events of their drinking the potion or falling in love. While the dramatic implications of these variations will be explored later in this chapter, it is important to note that in every version, the presence of the potion allows Isolde to abandon her need to avenge her uncle's death.

¹⁸⁷ In some versions both lovers are banished until such time that the potion wears off.

(through various means, depending on the version) receives a mortal wound from which only Iseult the Fair can save him and a messenger is sent for Mark's queen. If the returning ship bears a white flag, Iseult is aboard, coming to cure her love; if the flag is black, Iseult is not aboard. As the ailing Tristan lies on his deathbed, his jealous wife sees a white flagged ship approaching but lies to him about the flag's colour. In despair, Tristan dies, hopeless. Iseult arrives, discovers that she is too late to cure her love, and joins Tristan in death of a broken heart.

Appendix Two: Summary of Wagner's *Tristan Drama*¹⁸⁸

Wagner begins the drama of the first act in the middle of the narrative: the first scene throws the audience into life on the ship. Isolde and Brangäne are introduced independently of other characters: they are a part of the life on the ship, yet separate. By introducing these characters separately from the action, Wagner allows the audience to be privy to Isolde's innermost thoughts and her feelings. Where Gottfried uses a narrator, Wagner relies on the narrative capabilities of his characters to reveal past events and their thoughts and feelings thereon. The Isolde the audience encounters in Scene One is exasperated and enraged, though her reasons are not immediately apparent. Like Brangäne, the audience reaches the end of the first scene asking, "*Oh, nun melde was dich müht! Sage, künde, was dich quält!*" [Oh, do tell me what's troubling you! Say, announce, what tortures you!] The beginning of the second scene opens up to the rest of the ship. The audience is introduced to Tristan from afar, again through Isolde's eyes, as she laments his diverted gaze (*Dort den Helden, der meinem Blick den seinen birgt, in Scham und Scheue abwärts schaut? Sag, wie dünkt er dich?* [The hero there, diverting his gaze from mine, eyes cast down in shame and dread. Tell me, how does he seem to you?]) and Isolde somewhat cryptically reveals her distaste for the purpose of their journey. She speaks haughtily of Tristan's indifference towards her and sends Brangäne to request his audience. Through Brangäne's exchange with Tristan and his friend, Kurwenal, Wagner reveals that Tristan has won Isolde's hand for his uncle and king, Mark. Kurwenal recounts how Lord Morold was defeated at Tristan's hand and Scene Two closes with Kurwenal singing Tristan's praise.

¹⁸⁸ Summary by author.

The third scene of Act One finds Isolde and Brangäne alone again. Isolde is insulted by Tristan's perceived devotion to his King over his compliance to her command for an audience with him. (*Wie lenkt' er sicher den Kiel zu König Markes Land? Den Zins ihm auszuzahlen, den er aus Irland zog!* [How could he safely steer the ship to King Mark's land? To pay out to him the tribute owed him by Ireland!]) Wagner makes it apparent that Isolde begrudges the fact that Tristan's sense of honour and duty in captaining the ship to King Mark's land take precedence over her desire to spend time in his presence.

Without any encouragement from Brangäne, Isolde throws herself into a tirade over the past. In the first of the work's narrative flashbacks, Isolde recounts the tale of 'Tantris'; how she found an ailing man in a small boat along the Irish coast and how she nursed him to health before realizing that 'Tantris' was Cornwall's hero, Tristan, who had slain her fiancé, Lord Morold. Rather than seeking the vengeance she had once vowed, Isolde looked into Tristan's eyes and was tormented by his wretchedness. According to Isolde, the presumptuous Tristan had left Ireland and journeyed back to Cornwall, only to triumphantly return to Ireland to claim her as his King's bride. Her anger becomes most vehement at this point in her account as she curses Tristan and wishes death on them both: "*Fluch dir, Verruchter! Fluch deinem Haupt! Rache! Tod! Tod uns beiden!*" [Curse you, Wicked One! A curse on your head! Vengeance! Death! Death to us both!] Brangäne attempts to both console and chastise her charge. She criticizes Isolde's "*Welch eitles Zürnen*" [What vain anger!] and spells out—for both Isolde and the audience—how Tristan, while demonstrating loyalty to his King, effectively gave Isolde *der Welt begehrtichsten Lohn*: the gift of his inheritance of

Mark's kingdom. Isolde cannot grasp the significance of Brangäne's words and broods over the torment of being unloved. Brangäne misunderstands Isolde's bemoaning and questions how anyone could see her mistress and not love her, but assures her that even if that were the case, Isolde's mother had provided the necessary potions to bring happiness to her union with Mark. While Brangäne refers to the Love potion the drama stricken princess fetches the Death potion, suggesting that death, rather than potion-induced love is the solution to her predicament.

Kurwenal arrives at the beginning of Scene Four to announce to Isolde that Tristan requests her presence for the landing. Isolde agrees on the condition that Tristan first come and pay retribution for his *ungesühnte Schuld* [unatoned (moral) debt]. Her parting impetuous words to Brangäne indicate exactly what kind of retribution she has in mind: "*Nun leb wohl, Brangäne! Grüss mir die Welt, grüsse mir Vater und Mutter!*" [Now farewell, Brangäne! Bid the world farewell for me; bid my father and mother farewell!] Brangäne is helpless to dissuade her from preparing the draught of reconciliation: "*Für tiefstes Weh, für höchstes Leid—gab sie den Todestrank.*" [For deepest woe, for greatest suffering—she gave the death potion.]

In Scene Five, Tristan enters Isolde's chamber and Isolde demands to know why he has been avoiding her. Tristan cites respect and obedience alone: "*Sitte lehrt, wo ich gelebt: zur Brautfahrt der Brautwerber meide fern die Braut.*" [Where I lived, customs taught that on a courtship voyage, the bride-suitors keep their distance from the bride.] He recalls his past training and according to this, honours his King. In doing so, he honours the system, in essence honouring Honour. Isolde, drawing upon the same code, beseeches Tristan to be reconciled with her: *den Feind dir zu sühnen, soll er als Freund dich*

rühmen. [for an enemy to be atoned with you, he must pride himself as being your friend.]. Though Tristan claims that all has been *gesühnt* [atoned] in the calling of peace on the battlefield, Isolde appeals that she was not betrayed in battle by Tristan, but in the chamber when she nursed Tantris, when she had the opportunity to honour her oath of vengeance for her fiancé, Morold. (*Nicht da war's, wo ich Tantris barg, wo Tristan mir verfiel.*. [It was not there, that I hid Tantris, where Tristan fell for me.]) Again she appeals to Tristan's sense of honour: "*Da er gefallen, fiel meine Ehr*" [As he (i.e., Merolt) fell, so did my honour.] but then questions why she did not strike him down when she had the chance: "*Warum ich dich da nicht schlug? Das sag dir selbst mit leichtem Fug.*" [Why did I not strike you then and there? You can say for yourself with fair certainty.]

Isolde appeals to Tristan's sense of honour in order to manipulate him further from the path of honour and closer to her yet unnamed desire for passion or vengeance. Tristan calls her bluff and offers her his sword so she may finish what she left undone. Panicked, she clings to the pretence of honour and challenges: *was würde König Marke sagen, erschlög'ich ihm den besten Knecht, der Kron' und Land ihm gewann, den allertreusten Mann?* [What would King Mark say were I to slay his best knight, who won for him crown and country, the truest man of all?] and presses on with her appeal for the potion: "*Nun lass uns Sühne trinken!*" [Now, let us drink atonement [to reconciliation]!].

Repeatedly throughout this scene Wagner uses Isolde's voice to refer to Tristan's honour and its place in his relationship with his uncle. She effectively bullies him into drinking the *Sühnetrank*. [Drink of atonement!] Finally, just as the anchor is lowered to prepare for their arrival in Cornwall, Tristan seizes the goblet and gives his own oath of reconciliation: "*Tristans Ehre—höchste Treu! Tristans Elend—kühnster Trotz! Trug des*

Herzens! Traum der Ahnung! Ew'ger Trauer einz'ger Trost: Vergessens güt'ger Trank,— dich trink' ich sonder Wank!" [Tristan's honour—utmost fidelity!—Tristan's misery—boldest defiance! Deceit of the heart, foreboding dreams! Eternal mourning is the only comfort: Benevolent drink of forgetfulness [merciful potion of amnesia],—I drink you without hesitation!] Isolde, believing it is the death potion, snatches it back from him so she can finish the second half. Wagner's stage directions encapsulate the mixed emotions that would have overtaken them as each experienced emotion very different from what they expected: "*in die Augen, in deren Ausdruck der Todestrotz bald der Liebesglut weicht.—Zittern ergreift sie. Sie fassen sich krampfhaft an das Herz—und führen die Hand wieder an die Stirn.—Dann suchen sie sich wieder mit dem Blick, senken ihn verwirrt und heften ihn wieder mit steigender Sehnsucht auf einander.*" [The expression of the defiance of death in their eyes soon gives way to the glow of love. —They tremble. Convulsing, they first grasp at each other's hearts, then their hands feel upwards to each other's heads.—Once again they seek each other with their eyes; their gazes, first lowered in embarrassment, become riveted to one another with increasing longing [Sehnsucht].]

Unbeknownst to them, Brangäne has prepared the love potion. They embrace and immediately hear men's voices hailing King Mark—a rude reminder of the reality of their situation. The gravity of the situation is not lost on Brangäne, who laments her actions: "*Wehe, Weh! Unabwendbar ew'ge Not für kurzen Tod! Tör'ger Treue trugvolles Werk blüht nun jammernd empor!*" [Woe! Alas! Inevitable eternal misery instead of a quick death! [The deceitful deeds of false fidelity now wailingly blossom.] As the lovers face each other, each questions their own earlier motives. Tristan: *Was träumte mir von*

Tristans Ehre? [What did I dream of Tristan's honour?] Isolde: *Was träumte mir von Isoldes Schmach?* [What did I dream of Isolde's disgrace?] Together, they sing of passion and their loss of awareness of everything else: *Du mir einzig bewusst, höchste Liebeslust.* [You, my only awareness, love's pure delight.] Nearly immediately, Brangäne begins to prepare Isolde to meet Mark while the men of the ship sing the king's praises. Wagner does not use the text to simply relate the conflict between passionate desire and honourable duty, he relies on their words and the surrounding drama to illustrate it; the lovers are enraptured in each other's eyes while all around them prepare for King Mark. As the ship finally arrives at Cornwall, Brangäne reveals to her mistress that the potion was that of love and Act One is brought to a close.

Wagner's Second Act begins with Isolde and Brangäne. The two women discuss the sounds of the distant hunting party, attempting to discern their distance. Isolde waits for them to be far enough that she might meet with Tristan. Brangäne warns Isolde of her suspicions that Melot is spitefully plotting against the lovers. Isolde dismisses Brangäne's concern, certain that Melot is only a dear friend of Tristan. Each refuses to truly entertain the words of the other, and Isolde rushes off to meet Tristan, leaving Brangäne to keep watch for the returning hunting party.

The Second Scene depicts Tristan and Isolde meeting amorously in the garden. Wagner does not make it apparent whether this is one of many nocturnal garden excursions for the lovers or whether it is the first and only of its kind. Their dialogue likens their secret relationship to the holiness of night and the realistic deception of day to the honourable code by which they are bound to the spitefulness of day. For the lovers, day is equivalent to artifice, death, and their responsibility to Mark, while night veils their

conduct and allows for the freedom of passion. Together they yearn for ‘the sacred twilight’ and ultimately for death where they could be united permanently. Brangäne calls out a warning from her watch in the tower, interrupting the lovers, but twice they do not heed her council. Scene Two’s closing *höchste Liebslust* is rudely interrupted by the arrival of Kurwenal, Mark, Melot and the courtiers and the lovers are discovered in a *verzüchter Stellung* [in an enraptured embrace].

Kurwenal is the first on the scene, sword unsheathed, urging Tristan to save himself. Isolde, ashamed, withdraws from the situation and Tristan hides her with his cloak. Tristan finally breaks the silence, only not to address those who discovered him, but to address *Der öde Tag zum letztenmal* [Dreary day for the last time]. Melot confronts the King with the evidence, and Mark is only able to respond in shock. Mark questions Tristan’s actions and Tristan’s next utterance is fanciful, not acknowledging the others at all. Mark appeals to Tristan’s sense of loyalty and honour, questioning how Tristan could betray him in such a manner. First grieving, then reminiscent, Mark has the second major narrative flashback of the opera. Mark relates how he had made Tristan the heir of the kingdom after Tristan had freed it from the tribute to Ireland. He reveals that he had been married once before Isolde, that his wife had died childless, and that it was Tristan who had convinced the reluctant King to remarry for the honour and duty of giving the country a queen, even if it meant giving up his own claim to that inheritance. Mark emphasizes the history of his relationship with Tristan while indicating his own admiration for Isolde. The focus of his lament however, is not the betrayal by Isolde but that of Tristan.

Finally Tristan does respond to his King; he is sympathetic but makes no pretence at an apology. Instead, Tristan has already resigned himself to being misunderstood: “*O König, das kann ich dir nicht sagen; und was du frägst, das kannst du nie erfahren.*” [O King, this I cannot tell you. And what you ask? This you can never come to know.] Rather than petition Mark for forgiveness and to retain his honour and his place in the kingdom, Tristan instead turns to Isolde, beseeching her to follow him to *Dem Land, das Tristan meint, der Sonne Licht nicht scheint* [On the land of which Tristan spoke, the sun’s light does not shine]; to night, to darkness, ultimately, to death. In response Isolde pledges her loyalty to Tristan: *Wo Tristans Haus und Heim, da kehr’ Isolde ein: auf dem sie folge treu und hold* [Wherever Tristan’s house and home may be, there let Isolde come: she follows him, faithful and graceful].

Melot hears this exchange and draws his sword on Tristan. Tristan remains unrepentant but instead reprises Mark’s lament for loyalty lost by bemoaning his betrayal at the hands of Melot. Tristan challenges Melot and is injured before Mark constrains Melot from slaying him.

Wagner’s Third Act takes place in the gardens of the castle of Tristan’s childhood. Tristan is laid out as though lifeless, sleeping under Kurwenal’s faithful watch. The scene is meant to portray neglect; the stage directions state that things are to be in poor repair and overgrown. A shepherd can be heard playing a *sehnsüchtig und traurig* [longingly and sadly] tune on a reed pipe. Dialogue between Kurwenal and the shepherd indicates that Tristan, though only sleeping, will be sure to die without Isolde’s healing. The shepherd assures Kurwenal that he would be playing a happier tune if his watch revealed an approaching ship. Tristan awakens and Kurwenal’s answers to his

companion's questions reveal events from both the immediate and distant past: Tristan is reminded and the audience learns that the house, court and castle had been his. However, Tristan is unable to remember where he is or how he got there and, instead, he tries to verbalize his troubled dreams like confusion of Day and Night and Death. He is convinced that he has returned from the brink of death to redeem Isolde from the *Verfluchter Tag* [cursed day] and its deceitful light. Kurwenal consoles him that Isolde will come while Tristan repeatedly complains about the daylight. Kurwenal continues to feed Tristan a mixture of calming condolences and details of the past events: namely that she who saved him from Morolt's wound will easily heal his injury from Melot's sword. In his excitement, Tristan praises Kurwenal's loyalty in his plight against Mark and then, unexpectedly, slips into the work's third and final extended narrative flashback. Tristan laments the tragedy of his birth, illustrating how its fateful circumstances are paralleled by his own unfortunate love life. (*Da er mich zeugt' und starb, sie sterbend mich gebar.* [As he begat me and died, so, dying, she bore me.]) He continues by recounting his experience with Isolde: "*Die Wunde, die sie heilend schloss, riss mit dem Schwert sie wieder los [...] den Gifttrank gab sie mir zu trinken: wie ich da hoffte, ganz zu genesen, da war der sehrendste Zauber erlesen: dass nie ich sollte sterben, mich ew'ger qual vererben!*" [The wound that she closed healed, she tore open again with the sword [...]] She gave to me the poison to drink: as I hoped to be fully cured by it, the most horrible spell was effected: that I should never die, but that I be bequeathed eternal agony.]

Tristan's lament oscillates between the fate of his parents' affair and the fateful draught he shared with Isolde. Eventually, he works himself into such fervour that he falls unconscious, leaving a panicked Kurwenal to both revive and calm him. He feigns his

assurance that the ship will surely arrive that day, triggering a waking reverie of Isolde in Tristan. Eventually the shepherd's tune changes and Kurwenal is heartened to see an approaching ship, with the much hoped for *lustig und hell* flag.

Scene Two opens with Tristan's excitement for Isolde's arrival. Unable to restrain himself, he cannot stay on his couch as he had promised Kurwenal. Instead he raises and impetuously tears the dressings from his wounds just as Isolde arrives. Weakened by pain and the inevitable loss of blood, Tristan falls into her arms and dies. Isolde assures her dead lover that she has come to faithfully die with him just as she had promised and yet berates him for robbing her of the joy healing him first. With this promise and scolding she collapses over his body at the end of the scene.

The final scene opens with the arrival of a second ship. Kurwenal fears it is Melot and Mark and he calls the men to defensive arms. Kurwenal is surprised to instead hear Brangäne, who he accuses of being unfaithful. He then meets Melot who he slays, and by whom he is badly injured. Taking Tristan's hand, he joins him faithfully in death as Mark arrives on the scene. The King, shocked and grieved over the death surrounding him, accuses Tristan of betraying him by dying. Tristan, his *treulos treuster Freund* [faithless, most faithful friend], who first betrayed him in love, now betrays him in death.

Meanwhile Brangäne revives Isolde to share the good news they came to proclaim:

Brangäne has revealed the secret of the potion to Mark and he has come to renounce the lovers! Their love is pardoned.

For the first time in Wagner's work Mark addresses Isolde, but she does not seem to hear him. He laments the fact that his arrival was too late for him to see his two friends wed. Just as the King's atoning words are not to be heard by the deaf dead ears of Tristan,

neither can Isolde hear or register Mark's forgiveness. Instead, she rises oblivious to all around her, and sings of a vision of Tristan rising above her, glowing like a star. In a transfigured rapture, the queen sinks into Brangäne's arms and joins her lover in death. According to the stage directions, the curtain falls on Mark blessing the bodies.