

EVALUATING ISOLDE IN MALORY'S LE MORTED'ARTHUR AND STRAßBURG'S TRISTAN AND ISEULT- A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

The following paper- a review of the literature is an adaption from the first thesis the author wrote at St. John Fisher College, Rochester, NY as an undergraduate in 1999. It is a preliminary assessment of how the character La Belle Isolde differs in the chapter Sir Tristram de Lyonesse of Sir Thomas Malory's (1993, 2015, 1998) Le Morted'Arthur, and Tristan and Iseult of Gottfried Straßburg (1929). Malory's depiction of Isolde holds more negative imagery than that of Straßburg's. The latter author, however, depicts Isolde as a powerful woman, who often holds Tristan's life in her hands. However, in Straßburg's view, La Belle Isolde is the role of a strong woman who is neither subjugated nor docile. Straßburg's characterization is reflected further in Richard Wagner's romantic opera Tristan und Isolde. In this opera that debuted in Munich in 1865, Wagner keeps equal the pair of co-protagonists (Deathridge & Dahlhaus, 1984; Jansen, 1998). On the contrary, Sir Malory viewed La Belle Isolde as the mere shadow of the chivalrous Tristan, albeit she had with background importance as a minor character. The following review of the literature will assess three examples of the conflicting treatments of La Belle Isolde: 1) her epithet, 2) a downplay of her medicinal knowledge, and 3) the effects of the love potion on the couple.

Keywords: Arthurian Literature, Sir Thomas Malory, Gottfried von Straßburg, Tristan and Isolde, Richard Wagner.

1. Sir Thomas Malory's Depiction of La Belle Isolde

Malory names three characters "Isolde" in his work *Le Morted'Arthur*. The first is the Irish queen who is La Belle Isolde's mother. La Belle Isolde is also named "Princess Isolde" to show this lineage. Also there is Isolde Les Blanches Mains, whom Tristan marries platonically. This Isolde is the daughter of the English King Howell of Brittany (Malory, 1993; Malory, 2015; Malory, 1998).

The contrast of La Belle Isolde to the other works of Straßburg and Wagner begins with the chapter title in the Winchester version *Sir Tristram de Lyonesse*, whereas Straßburg and Wagner include Isolde in their titles. The journey of Tristan as King Arthur's grail knight is in the foreground; and La Belle Isolde's role remains in the background of the plot line. Another example is Isolde's epithet: *la belle Isolde*, which reflects only her beauty and

mentions nothing about her medical knowledge of her contributions in Ireland. It shows how beautiful she is and disregards that she is the best surgeon in Ireland.

Malory (1993, 2015, 1998) negates Isolde's importance by focusing on the strength of Tristan. There are two female images before Tristan encounters La Belle Isolde of Ireland. They are his mother Queen Elizabeth and his stepmother. The first image is the death of Queen Elizabeth after giving birth to Tristan in the forest. She commented that his very name Tristan, the sorrowful-born child, is an unusually strong and forceful baby. She comments before her death that if this Tristan could cause so much pain at minutes old, then he would grow to be a powerful, forceful man. "Ah, my little son, thou hast murdered thy mother! And therefore, I suppose thou that art a murderer so young, thou art full likely to be a manly

man in thine age"(Malory, 1998, p. 169-170).

The tragic first step in Tristan's infancy foreshadows his dominance as an adult. This plays into the next image that we come across, which is that of the evil stepmother, the King's second wife, the daughter of King Howell of Brittany. Tristan's stepmother, apparently wroth with anger that he will ascend to the throne before her own children, plots to kill the seven-year-old boy. However, in this attempt she poisons her own children and almost kills her husband (Malory, 1993; Malory, 2015; Malory, 1998). Tristan's strength prevails because it is he who decides that the traitor shall not burn at the stake by the barons. Tristan dissuades his father, King Meliodas, from killing her. This creates, however, an indebted loyalty to Tristan from the Queen. The pacified Queen heeds Tristan afterwards all the days of her life. That incident pleased King Meliodas and the queen his wife; forever after in her life, because Sir Tristan saved her from the fire, she never hated him again, but loved him forever (Malory, 1998, P.172)..169-170).

2. La Belle Isolde as Surgeon

La Belle Isolde's role as a surgeon is indeed significant, however only in the plot to aid Tristan, which relegates her as a minor character in Malory's view. The section in *Le MorteD'Arthur* begins when Tristan is sent off to Ireland to find the noblest surgeon who can provide an antidote for his sword wound that his rival, Marhalt, envenomed. This wound is unique because Tristan must travel to the location of the regional snake. Therefore, no other surgeon except for La Belle Isolde has the capability to save him. She is from (Ireland) and it is she who knows the particulars pertaining to Tristan's wound. In addition, her knowledge of sorcery and the occult come to her aid. Malory shows Tristan to be at Isolde's mercy (Malory, 1993; Malory, 2015; Malory, 1998).

Malory (1993, 2015, 1998) also shows that the knight only seeks her help because he fears death. He fears it so much that he changes his name to Sir Tramtrist. This disguise tricks the royal family who does not know that Tristan slew La Belle Isolde's uncle, Marhalt. Tristan enters the kingdom with full knowledge that he must go to his

enemies for help or he will perish. This trickery benefits his sole thought of aiding himself.

The moment Malory mentions that Isolde healed Tristan's wound, he also states that it was then that he conceived her to be the fairest lady and maiden of the world. This sentence weakens the effect of Isolde's knowledge because the latter half of the sentence returns to Tristan's own thoughts. Isolde stops acting like a far-removed surgeon and begins to fall in love with him. She even does not question how he received the wound or from whom. He is her main interest. The next sentence then states how Tristan then taught her how to play the harp. Thus, Malory does not spend too much time on the action that saved his hero's life.

And so she healed him in a while; and therefore Sir Tramtrist cast great love for La Belle Isolde, for she was at that time the fairest lady and maiden of the world. Tramtrist taught her to play the harp and she began to have a great fancy unto him. (Malory, 1998, p. 179).

Isolde distracts herself from what she has previously learned, i.e., her healing powers and knowledge as a surgeon, with her interest of Tristan's ability of playing the harp. She sees him as the stronger, dominant force, and she wants to learn what he can offer. Tristan's background shows that he has experienced and learned more than her. Tristan left for France in order to learn the language, as well as how to fence and know the deeds of arms, especially how to be a gentleman (Malory, 1998). His tutor and seneschal, Gouvernail (Wagner's "Kurwenal") assisted him on his journeys. In addition, the mighty hero surpasses all in harping, hunting, hawking and lost in joust to no one. His physical strength and handsomeness was second to none (Malory, 1998). Although he wants to share his knowledge of the instrument out of love, La Belle Isolde in Malory's work is not able to reciprocate the idea of knowledge sharing. Tristan is then effectively Isolde's teacher. We also do not see the depth of Isolde's knowledge of medicine nor do we learn of her capability to teach him (Malory, 1993; Malory, 2015; Malory, 1998).

La Belle Isolde grows suspicious of Tristan under the pseudonym "Tramtrist." However, she never verbalized her

thoughts. When the squire from France spotted him at the tournament, Tramtrist begged the boy not to reveal his true name. Isolde was very worried about this, but yet she did not further inquire, but rather held her peace. She thought that he was a man of great worth and loved him even more. La Belle Isode (sic) had great suspicion on Tramtrist but she comforted herself with the thought that he was some man of worship proved; and cast more love unto him (Malory, 1998, p.181).

This role of passivity shows that La Belle Isolde is not only submitting to him, but she does not even inquire that he may be a traitor. It is Queen Isolde, her mother, who learns that Tramtrist is really Tristan, who killed her brother Marhalt in battle (Malory, 1993; Malory, 2015; Malory, 1998). Princess Isolde, playing a role in the background, does not really mourn for her uncle because she is smitten with Tristan. Her only reaction is fear. She is afraid of her mother's rage and also afraid of her father's reaction. Yet, she does absolutely nothing to distract them from the situation. The only verbal reaction occurs when Tristan takes his leave of her, promising to marry her in seven years is she weeps and states. "Ah gentle knight . . . full woe am I of thy departing, for I saw never a man that I owed so good will to" and therewith she wept heartily (Malory, 1998, p.185). When Tristan returns to Ireland, he retrieves Princess Isolde, but not for her hand in marriage, but on the contrary, she will be the bride of his uncle Marke.

La Belle Isolde's father is surprised that his daughter will not be Tristan's bride but then he realizes that he must keep his promise to Marke. therefore he does nothing to stop Tristan instead without La Belle Isolde's consent he delivers her into his enemy's hands (Malory, 1993; Malory, 2015; Malory, 1998). This sparks the reaction of her mother, who ardently studies magic and the occult, comes up with the love potion for Isolde and Marke. Queen Isolde gives the love potion to Dame Brangæne (Brangwain) and Gouvernail (Kurwenal) for safe-keeping.

So to make short conclusion, La Belle Isode(sic) was made ready to go with Sir Tristram, but Dame Brangwain went with her for her chief gentlewoman, with many others (Malory, 1998, p.194-195).

3. Malory's Love Potion

La Belle Isolde never speaks of her feelings directly, although it is inferred that she only wishes to be in the company of Tristan. On the ship, she distances herself to him until they discover the love potion in the trunk. Ironically, thinking that the wine has been stashed away for the purpose of Queen Isolde's servant Brangæne's and Tristan's servant Kurwenal's private consumption, Tristan and Isolde mockingly parallel the situation. They drink it and fall helplessly in love with one another.

And thus it happed first the love betwixt Sir Tristram and La Belle Isode (sic), the love which never departed days of their life (Malory, 1998, p.195).

Here Malory ends his section of Tristan's longing and retrieval of Isolde and continues with Tristan's digressions and other sub-plots that make the effects of the love potion almost minimal. By Malory suggesting that there are many new subplots, romances and adventures against King Marke of Cornwall and Sirs Palomides, Lancelot etc., Malory lessens the significance of the love potion. This, in contrast is a major theme of Straßburg and Wagner. Much like Malory's attitude of Isolde saving Tristan's life, he does not spend a lot of time on the love potion, but rather he jumps to the marriage of Isolde and King Marke.

This aside to the main story of La Belle Isolde shows that the love potion is mildly effective, but certainly not to the extent that Straßburg and Wagner have made it. Straßburg and Wagner make Tristan wild with love and lust after drinking the bottle. It could suggest that Malory wishes to preserve Tristan's goodness and purity.

In Malory's work, the love potion plays a minor role second Tristan's freedom, thus making Isolde a small part of Tristan's life. He continues to fight and live for her, but he does not have the drive that makes him abscond her from Marke and ride off into the sunset. Although she states that her true love is the fearless knight, she shows this, by hopefully waiting for him as he rides around, fighting for her and combating other knights in her honor. In one adventure, Tristan saves her from the lazar-cote (house for lepers) (Malory, 1998, p.205). La Belle Isolde attempts

passively to help him when he is injured by an arrow in his shoulder. Since King Marke had received word that his wife and Tristan were together in the forest, he and his men rode out to carry Isolde back to the castle. When Tristan returned, he was still wounded by the arrow and Isolde was nowhere to be found. Isolde once again takes a passive role and does not break away from Marke. Rather, she sends the cousin of Dame Brangæne to help him. This woman suggests that she might go to King Howell of Brittany so that his daughter Isolde les Blanchés Mains can help him (Malory, 1998, p.206).

This event once again causes Tristan to venture off to Brittany. This furthered his physical and mental distance to the Belle Isolde. In Brittany, he ends up with Howell's kingdom, riches and daughter, Isolde les Blanchés Mains. And like before with La Belle Isolde, there now grew a love that could never be consummated between Tristan and Isolde les Blanchés Mains (Rasmussen, 1996). This woman was also good and fair, and a woman of noble blood and fame (Malory, 1998, p.207). He almost forgets about his love for La Belle Isolde of Ireland, who is now named as his old lady. In a pathetic attempt that Tristan uses to restore his honor in La Belle Isolde of Ireland, he states that he and his wife only kissed and clipped (embraced) (Malory, 1998, p.207). It was regarded so pitifully, that even Sir Lancelot wanted to fight him for betraying La Belle Isolde. Although Lancelot respected him as a fellow knight of the Table, he swore that from this day forth [he] will be his mortal enemy (Malory, 1998, p.208). Tristan is now perceived as a false knight.

One of the few times that La Belle Isolde shows her emotion, is when she learns of Tristan in Brittany. She communicates, however, with Guinevere before writing to Tristan. She asks her if she could cast her magic on him. Her only emotion, though, is seen through another character. This brings Tristan back to Cornwall and back to King Marke where he must explain his actions. He is extremely angry that La Belle Isolde of Ireland would think that he betrayed her with Isolde les Blanchés Mains. Weakly stating that he married her only for the land, riches and kingdom. Ergo, it is a platonic relationship: he remained loyal to La Belle Isolde. His description of Isolde

les Blanchés Mains is as a clean maiden (Malory, 1998, p.212).

The reader sees yet another instance of Tristan's dominance in the ongoing struggle of Sir Palomides abduction of Isolde. Palomides takes her off to his castle and Tristan is called on again to save her. Sir Tristan treats her abduction as more of a slight against his knighthood. For his honor and for his knighthood, he must save the fair lady in distress. Palomides and Marke are the male competition who will steal her away from him if he does not react quickly.

Once again Isolde takes the role of the passive weakling, who does nothing to defend herself. She wants Tristan to save her but throughout the tale she won't let him kill Palomides. This feature permits Malory to continue the male struggle between the two knights for the fair maiden throughout the plot until Palomides' surrender and Christianization at the end of the work. Palomides, the pagan, will surely not go to heaven if hasn't been baptized. Therefore, La Belle Isolde's emotions play a humanitarian approach by not permitting the death of a Saracen Knight. This humanitarian approach weakens her sudden dominance over the knight. Tristan fears that he will be shamed if he does not kill him, but heeds her words. Here, the idea of the love potion recurs and makes Tristan loyal to her words but yet he responds by leaving the situation and venturing off into freedom. Although he complies, he could not understand how he was not permitted to finally kill the pagan. He thinks solely of his knighthood and his honor that was fringing on shameful.

The Isolde of Malory stays in the background despite her influence on Tristan. Therefore, the plot still revolves around the hero. The different female characters and the love potion on the ship therefore are less important. In addition, Isolde is not significant enough to come into the foreground of Tristan's adventures. She is not the co-hero that Straßburg and Wagner make of her. Therefore, any significant factor that Isolde did i.e. saving the hero's life, are lessened or perhaps relegated to being the mere shadow of a valiant knight.

4. Straßburg and Wagner's Depiction of Isolde

The treatment of La Belle Isolde in *Tristan und Iseult* of Gottfried von Straßburg is much more elevated than Malory's treatment. In this section Wagner's opera is also used to describe his views of her. This title implies that both lovers are of equal significance because both are mentioned: they are co-heroes. Malory does not permit this in his tale. Straßburg and Wagner raise La Belle Isolde to be stronger, more forceful, and dominant over our the romantic knight. This is depicted with Isolde's forcefulness and Tristan's dependence on her (Jackson, 1971).

The first two men in the foreground are Queen Isolde's Seneschal and Tristan. In a ranking system of which the male is weaker, the seneschal is second to Tristan, and Tristan is certainly not as elevated as Princess Isolde. The seneschal is regarded as a very weak and dishonorable figure. The first image we see, is the seneschal riding along with a group of the king's knights. He is not thought of highly by them and is known to retreat on horseback whenever danger arose. When the dragon terrorizes Ireland, the group of knights fought it head on and the seneschal galloped away at full speed. Unlike Malory who makes even Palomides the Pagan a dominant male force over Princess Isolde, Straßburg depicts the seneschal as a dishonorable man, who will lie and deceive just to get Princess Isolde's hand in marriage.

He hears the dying call of the dragon and then decides that this would be the best time to return to the palace with the dragon's head. This trophy will surely get Isolde's hand. The seneschal is also a physically weak man who turned his mount so sharply after seeing the dead dragon that both horse and rider fell to the ground. He is afraid and horrified at the site, a characteristic not possible for a male character in Malory (Straßburg, 1929, p.29-30). Even Palomides, who is out cast as a pagan, has the physical strength as a good knight and a real threat to Tristan.

Tristan is dying in the forest from the blows he received by the dragon. Although he was physically strong and valiant during the fight, and the dragon perished, if it had not been for the Queen, La Belle Isolde and Brangæne he

would have died. Therefore, his physical strength is flawed, showing that he is still the hero of the tale but he needs the female characters to assist him. When the three come upon the unconscious knight, they strip him of his armor in order to find the hidden wounds. Symbolically, although Tristan is too weak to fight, they removing the armor show that he does not have the capacity to attack. He is submissive in his wounded state. Straßburg (1929) shows that the hero is dependent on these women. In delirium before he is conscious he recognizes the three women and refers to them as the three fairest lights of the world.

When he saw the three women bending over him, he knew them, and said in his heart, 'Now God hath surely thought upon me, and hath sent me the three fairest lights the world doth hold-Iseult [Isolde] the sun, her mother Iseult the fair dawn, and Brangoene the stately moon (Straßburg, 1929, p.33).

Tristan, praising God that these ladies could save him, is never too proud to ask for help, although his immediate intention is to be saved. When Tristan asks where he is, and what they were doing, he also adds that his strength has left him. The women escort him back to the castle where he tells how he is the true dragon slayer. The queen takes him in her care and recognizes him though under the pseudonym Tramtrist.

La Belle Isolde shows her aggression and unfeminine ways in a number of examples: she tells her mother, the queen, that if she must marry the Queen's seneschal, then she will plainly kill herself. This is much different from the passive Isolde of Malory who said nothing as Tristan gave her to Marke to marry. Isolde tells her mother. "Ah Mother," said the maiden, 'insult not thy birth and thyself; ere I be that man's wife I will thrust a knife through my heart" (Straßburg, 1929, p.30-31).

This aggression would be unthinkable for Malory because his Isolde resembles Tristan's dominance. Isolde's aggression is a major motif. It is she, who finds out that Tristan is really the murderer of Marhalt. She searched his room while he was asleep and inspected his sword to see if indeed a piece was missing. She then ran to her mother's

quarters to look through the chest that had the matching piece. This piece was extracted from Marhalt's skull, the injury that killed him. An enraged La Belle Isolde determines that Tristan's sword, the sword that slew her uncle Marhalt, will also fittingly kill Tristan, by her hand (Straßburg, 1929, p.39).

Her face turned from red to white and her heart grew cold as she contemplated his death (Straßburg, 1929). She could not believe that he dared to enter her palace asking for help. He also had become very close with both Isolde and the king was considered a part of the family. Even the difference of "Tramtrist" and Tristan angered her, as she had been deceived. The aggression of Princess Isolde heightens when she runs into his sleeping quarters and draws his sword over his head as he slept. She awakens him by asking if he is indeed Tristan. He lies, but his words do not alter her agenda because Tramtrist and Tristan may be two names, but they are one traitor (Straßburg, 1929). Tristan tries to get out of it by appealing to her honor, saying that her white hands are not meant to hold a sword. But this only enrages her more and at this point that the Queen enters.

Forgetting that Tristan is under the protection of the Queen for the next couple of days until the judgment of the dragon slayer, La Belle Isolde draws nearer to Tristan with the raised sword. She is so enraged and violent, that she tells the queen that the traitor will die regardless of any protection.

Tristan is now so frightened that he cries for mercy: Mercy, fair Iseult (Straßburg, 1929, p.40)! And she retorts: "No mercy shalt thou have, traitor! . . . I will have thy life (Straßburg, 1929, p.40)!" But she could not go through with it. Both Isolde and Brangæne council to see if they should spare his life or not. When Tristan sees them again he kneels before them and asks for his life. A characteristic that Malory's Tristan would never do, because his motives were more towards freedom than anything else.

The Queen Isolde is the other strong female character of Straßburg. She serves as a foreshadow of what La Belle Isolde will be in the future. Tristan und Iseult shows that she takes more of an active role than in Malory. She is an

active member of the story line whereas previously she was in the background trying to assist her daughter. She also has elements that both the seneschal and Tristan do not possess, i.e. her knowledge of the occult. Queen Isolde takes an active role and is successful in completing it. She wants to know who the true dragon slayer is, so she divines in a dream. Straßburg considers her spells cunning (Straßburg, 1929). This connotation shows that her intelligence is matched with her beauty. T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland* echoes this (Conrad, 2003); however, Malory's work does not show this aspect.

Therefore, the love potion of Queen Isolde can also be considered cunning. She prepares it for her daughter and King Marke. Ironically, Princess Isolde does not react as violently as she did against the thought of marrying the seneschal. She is willing to go on the ship with Tristan. Although Isolde does not show emotion when she departs from her family, she certainly is quite vocal on the ship. Before the love potion plays a part in the subject, Isolde is not interested in Tristan and she pushes him physically away when he tries to embrace.

- 'Let be, sir, take thine arm away; thou art a weariful man; wherefore dost thou touch me?'
- 'Do I then vex thee so sore, fair lady?'
- 'Yea forsooth, since I hate thee.'
- 'But wherefore, sweetest lady?'
- 'Thou didst slay mine uncle.'
- 'For that I have made my peace.'
- 'Maybe. Yet I love thee not' (Straßburg, 1929, p.49-50)

La Belle Isolde's aggression to Tristan is also immediately seen in Wagner's Act I, Scene I, of his romantic opera. Isolde, lies in the cabin of the foredeck and buries her face in the cushions of the couch. (Wagner: 45: Isolde auf einem Ruhebett, das Gesicht in die Kissengedrückt.) Isolde shows this aggression by becoming defensive. She calls to a sailor on the foredeck while singing of his Irish love,

- Frisch weht der Wind der Heimat zu: Mein Irisch Kind Wo weilest du? (Wagner, 1994, p.45)
- The wind blows freshly towards home: My Irish child

where are you?

Isolde demands if it is indeed she, of whom the sailor refers. She presumes that the sailor mocks her:

Wer wagt mich zu höhnen? (Wagner, 1994, p.45)

"Who dares to mock me?"

Still quite skeptical of the sailor's sincerity, an aggressive Isolde turns suddenly to Brangäne and inquires where they are. In addition, she will never disembark with Tristan nor set foot on Marke's land. She then says how she hates this new land of Cornwall and how the race is entartet-degenerate (Straßburg, 1929). La Belle Isolde's aggression is brought on rather suddenly; however, she was ready to explode with rage. This was seen earlier when she departed from her family on Ireland's shore. Brangäne asks why La Belle Isolde is angry and if she were holding something back from him verbally.

- "Was bargst du mir so lang?"
- "Nicht eine Träne weintest du Vater und Mutter: kaum einen Gruß den Bleibenden botest du." (Wagner, 1994, p.47)
- "What have you held back from me for so long?"
- "Not a tear did you shed for your parents: hardly one departing word to those who remained behind."

Brangäne dismisses Isolde's anger and aggression by suggesting that her mistress has neither slept nor eaten. She appears wild and uncontrollable. She believes that she wants to talk to Tristan, who navigates from the helm. Again she stares him down and asks her servant what she makes of this hero. Isolde states that both his head and heart are destined for death (Wagner, 1994, p.49: Todgeweihtes Haupt! Todgeweihtes Herz!) The princess that tells her servant that this hero is so shameful that he cannot even look her in the eyes.

- "Dort den Helden, der meinem Blick den seinen birgt, in Scham und Scheue abwärts schaut." (Wagner, 1994, p.49).
- "The hero over there who diverts his look from mine, looks downwards in shame and awe."

5. Straßburg and Wagner's Love Potion

The following scenes of the love potion are much different

with Straßburg and Wagner than with Malory. Malory shows Tristan and La Belle Isolde in a short scene merely drinking the love potion disguised as wine and then falling madly in love. Straßburg and Wagner make the drinking of a love potion a very symbolic and major phase in their works. Most importantly, it turns La Belle Isolde's strength and aggression into love for Tristan.

Straßburg's tale shows Tristan and La Belle Isolde unknowingly drinking the flask of wine in the cabin. He, along with Wagner, show the symbolic drinking as a purifier of their souls. The lovers become one and understand each other as if they were a mirror image (Straßburg, 1929). Isolde has no hatred for him after the drink and was sorrowful when he grieved and vice-versa. However, in their confusion of the new feelings, they hide their feelings from each other, because they were ashamed and doubted if the other felt the same way. They were in sorrow as well as in love. Tristan, who felt the wild pangs of love (Straßburg, 1929) fought amongst himself.

"Nay," he said unto himself, "let such things be, Tristan; guard thee well, lest others perceive thy thoughts." So would he turn his heart, fighting against his own will, and desiring against his own desire (Straßburg, 1929, p.52).

Indeed, Wagner makes the drinking of the love potion a dramatic event and one that is the center of all other actions from that point further. (La Belle) Isolde who is still very angry that Tristan did not come to her after he refused to look her direction, uses very sharp words to express how Tristan is still a traitor. Tristan, who is more taken with her than she with him, offers his sword to her. He wanted her to slay him on the spot if he can never come in good graces with her. Here, Wagner lets Isolde have the opportunity to kill, but she refuses. This is, because she has some compassion in her heart for him. Also, she claimed that Marke and his community would not tolerate it.

Then, they drink together. Isolde, who was planning to drink the death potion, has not realized that Brangäne switched this death wine for the love potion. After numerous times clipping (hugging) and calling-out each other's names, the ship enters Marke's harbor. They,

however, express their love to each other in oblivion. Their complete transformation of love horrifies Brangæne as she swoons in and out of consciousness a couple times for dramatic effect. There is "chaos" back and forth as the sailors and the crew prepare to disembark and greet the King. However, the pair only see each other.

- "Wiesich die Herzenwogenderheben!"
- "WiealleSinnewonnigerbeben!"
- "Jach in der Brustjauchzende Lust!"
- "Isolde! Tristan!"
- "Du mireinzigbewußt, höchsteLiebeslust!"
- (Wagner, 1994, p.75)
- "How both hearts are aloft!"
- "How all senses blissfully pulsate!"
- "The breast bursting with exultant feeling!"
- "Isolde! Tristan!"
- "You are my only knowledge, highest feeling of love!"

6. Discussion

The treatment of La Belle Isolde in the aforementioned works is remarkably different (1993, 2015, 1998), it shows how this story revolved around Tristan and La Belle Isolde's dependence on him. Malory treats her as a minor character than the grail knight Tristan.

Straßburg has a much different ending. His elevation of La Belle Isolde is seen, when she demands that Brangæne takes her place in bed with King Marke on the night of their marriage consummation. This way La Belle Isolde can keep her power and her true love to her soul mate Tristan. As that if she bore no heir to Marke, then Tristan will inherit the lands of England and Cornwall (Straßburg, 1929). Here Straßburg shows that La Belle Isolde is loyal only to Tristan and he to her. It proves that the love potion has united them and therefore they will not deviate from one another. Her strength shows that Isolde wants only to be with Tristan, although she is wed unwillingly to Marke. The wedding night wine is the last image that Straßburg shows the reader.

Wagner's ending is the most dramatic of all. Of course, there are many diachronic problems when one compares two medieval texts to a 19th C. opera.

Therefore, the ending must be viewed separately from Malory, as an example of the fact, that there are different versions of the tale.

La Belle Isolde of Malory is set in a much different light than the Isoldes of Straßburg and Wagner. She is not realistic for all intents and purposes because their emotions are not realistically portrayed. It appears as if the knights are the only one who are realistically portrayed. Malory's female characters are considered very weak in the plot mainly because they do not have the physical strength of Tristan.

Throughout the plot, we see how Isolde does heal Tristan and it appears that he uses her only for this sole purpose. A main difference between Malory and Straßburg (and Wagner) is that Tristan does not really depend on Isolde until death threatens him. After she heals him then he is off on his merry way to battle. This lack of dependence throughout the story lessens the love potion and its effect. It appears that Isolde is more dependent on him than vice-versa. Ironically, when La Belle Isolde could not heal one time, he fled to yet another Isolde of Brittany who could help him. Although he only concerns himself with Isolde after he fights in battle.

Wagner (1994), in contrast, elevates the females in his operas, in this case (La Belle) Isolde, to that of a saving goddess in addition to having all the power. He connects the textual characterization of Isolde to his libretto (Zapf, 2014). This is seen in the last scenes of the opera.

Marhalt his former friend, turned traitor, sorely wounds Tristan. Marhalt pulls his sword on him after Tristan asks Isolde if she is ready to die with him. Her positive response causes Marhalt to defend his King Marke and charge the good knight. His good servant Kurwenal (Gouvernail) takes him back to his home castle to rest as they send for the Princess to save him once again. Tristan is passing in and out of consciousness while they hopefully wait for Isolde's ship. Tristan is frantic and hallucinating, thinking that Isolde nears. In his delirium, her ship approaches (Wagner, 1994). He is so enthralled that he strains himself when he learns the truth that Isolde is really disembarking. In fact, he tears the dressing from his wound from Marhalt and opens the wound so the blood rapidly flows out of his body

(Wagner, 1994). He then in his delirium, staggering, and bleeding equates Isolde to his salvation.

- Sienawieein Held,
- SienawirzumHeil! (Wagner, 1994, p.126)
- She nears like a hero, My salvation nears!

He staggers to her while bleeding and hallucinating as she runs forth to save him. He dies in her arms after calling out her name in a very emotional and upsetting scene. She follows him in death after a long speech about how Tristan will always be her true love. Thus, der Liebestod is an example that Isolde remained a pure virgin and Tristan equated her to a savior and a goddess.

Conclusion

Straßburg and Wagner felt a need to empower (La Belle) Isolde so that she could dominate Tristan. This extreme was necessary and intentional; thus, enabling Isolde to break free from the traditional male society. Straßburg defines Isolde as a healer (Altpeter-Jones, 2009). Paradoxically, Wagner shows that, "Communities need [male] authority," with Marke's character as king. (Whittall, 2009, p.3). It is a bit too extreme dichotomy in Wagner's case, but for all intents and purposes, the romantic opera is just that- a medieval tale that glorified the upset of a traditional role of men and women. Wagner's idea of the Liebestod strengthens the love between the co-heroes, especially Isolde, i.e., it is she who decides to follow him into death. Straßburg's creation of his heroine proves that she stays honorable even though she is not married to Tristan. Straßburg elaborates his text with numerous digressions and additions, but continues to stay aligned to the major themes of other authors (Mehl, 1969). La Belle Isolde will have no other man, even her husband Marke. Isolde and Marke never consummate their marriage, and even though Tristan and Isolde are lovers, they are quite honorable in Straßburg's eyes because they will love no other. This Isolde keeps power over Marke by denying him intercourse. In addition, she strengthens her love for Tristan.

La Belle Isolde of Sir Malory (1993, 2015, 1998) differs insofar as he does not upset the traditional role of male dominance. Occasionally, Isolde may have a dominant

moment, but it is normally only for helping Tristan, i.e., saving his life. Through this, she is transformed via "die Verklärung" (Kilbourn, 1998). Wagner affirms the rising connection between characterization and their demotion (Bergstein, 2013). The three examples of the epithet, a downplay of her medicinal knowledge, and the fluctuating effect of the love potion infer that La Belle Isolde's path as a minor character was indeed an important one.

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