

Tristan

Gottfried Von Strassburg

(with the concluding Thomas fragments)

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Introduction

Little or nothing is known of Gottfried von Strassburg, whose main work is this unfinished 'Tristan', probably composed at the beginning of the 13th century. He seems to have been well-born and highly educated but neither a knight nor of the clergy. According to his own testimony, he based his 'Tristan', written in Middle High German, on the work of the same name, by Thomas of England, written in Anglo-French around the middle of the 12th century. The work by Thomas survives only in fragments, four of which, translated here, provide a conclusion to the tale.

PART I: Rivalin and Blanche-flor

The Prologue

(Note: The first letters of each of verses 2-11 of the original reveal the acrostic 'DIETERICHT'. The first letter of the first verse is G in the original, presumably signifying Gottfried)

WHAT would there be of true value,
In the good for us which men do
If we then failed to grant value
To all those who that same good do?

The good from good men that we've won,
That solely for our good was done,
We should praise, and then have done,
Or other than good it is we've won.

I hear people speaking ill
Of that which they seek for still;
Such is a foolish act, and ill,
To will what you would not, still.

A man indeed does well to praise
That which he has need of, always,
And may such true desire to praise
Please him who does so, always.

Worthy and dear that man, to me,
Who both the good and bad can see,
Who, judging other men, and me,
Each man's proper worth can see.

Skill doth thrive on esteem and praise,
When skill's deployed right worthily:
Art blossoms, flowering worthily
Where true skill is adorned with praise.

Just as what fails to win esteem
Is washed away in life's swift stream,
So what is praised upon life's stream
Sails on, and meets with fair esteem.

Tis sorry to see all those who stray,
Mistaking bad for good, since they
Mistake the good for bad, and they
Judge not aright but ever stray.

Criticism is born of wit,
Yet howe'er well art bears with it,
If envy comes between, then it
Stifles, together, art and wit.

O, excellence, how strait your ways,
And how arduous your days!
Happy the man, his ways, his days,
Who lives your days, who treads your ways!

If I should spend my time in vain,
Though ripe for effort, it is plain
My standing in the world would wane,
And bring to loss what's meant for gain.

SO, a labour now I undertake,
For the world I love, for its sake,
To solace every noble heart,
Hearts that I hold within my heart,
The world that by my heart is seen,
And not that common world, I mean,
Of those men, of whom I hear tell
That none of them bear sorrow well,
But only long to live in bliss,
And may God indeed grant them this!

But with their world and life, in turn,
This tale of mine has no concern,
Their life doth stray full far from mine,
Another world I have in mind,
That, in one heart, doth bear, complete,
Its dear grief, its bitter sweet,
Its heart's joy, its painful breath,
Its dear life, its sorrowful death,
Its dear death, and sorrowful life;
To this life may I give my life,
Be part thus of this world, I've craved,
To be damned with it, or be saved.
I have lived, so far, in this way,
Have passed my hours so, day by day,
Receiving both help and guidance,
In every troubling instance.
The fruits of my labour now I proffer;
To this world, diversion offer;
So that with this tale of mine,
Its keenest sorrow it may find
Softened, half-alleviated,
Its dire anguish part-abated.
If any keep before their sight
Whatever sets an ill mind right,
It frees them from pain, by its art,
And does good to what hurts the heart.

All will agree, by any measure,
That when a man is left at leisure,
And with love's longing is troubled,
The weight of longing is re-doubled,
Leisure coupled to longing's pain
Increases longing once again.
That's why it's good for anyone
By heartache and longing wrung,
To do whatever thing he ought
To seek distraction for his thought,
For that will help lighten his mind,
And do his spirit good, he'll find.
Yet I'd never advise a man
To follow after any plan,
In seeking out his true pleasure,
That doth mar love's pure measure.
Let those in longing sing
A tale of love's longing,
Heart and lips the tale devour,
And so, while away the hour.

Yet we hear it often said, and I
All but agree, though with a sigh,
That to occupy a yearning mind
With a tale of yearning, you'll find,
Will only make the suffering worse.
Tis a saying I would rehearse,
Except for this one objection;
When we are deep in love's passion,
However love may hurt the heart,
Yet the heart would play its part.
The deeper thus in passion's fire
Burns the lover with desire,
So the hotter still he will burn,
And the fiercer still he will yearn.
So full of love it is, this pain,
This ill so warms the heart again,

That the noble heart that knows it,
Never willingly foregoes it.
I know it too, as sure as death,
Learnt it all, with anguished breath,
That the man of noble longing
Loves a tale about love's burning.
Who then wants longing in a tale,
Go no further: for, without fail,
I'll tell you one, so I here declare,
Of noble lovers who'll show there,
Proof of pure love: each to other,
A noble lord, and his noble lover,
A man, a woman; a woman, a man:
Tristan, Iseult; Iseult, Tristan.

There are many, and rightly so,
Who may have read of Tristan, though
There are not many, even so,
Who've read his tale aright, I know.

For me to criticise them now,
Claim they re-told it anyhow,
Would yet be to deny them good,
Acting otherwise than I should,
And would wrong the tale I tell.
That I will not. They wrote well,
Their motive noble, true and fine,
For the world's good, indeed, and mine.
They did it wishing good to us,
And whate'er good a man so does
Is both good itself and well done.
But when I claim that they have sung
The tale, yet read it not aright,
Then, say I, I am in the right.
They did not tell it without fail,
As Thomas of Britain tells the tale,
Master of such romances, who
In British books has read them true,
The lives of all the princes, then
Related them for us again.

All that there is of Tristan writ,
Rightly, truly, and as is fit,
I did then seek for everywhere,
All writ, as Thomas wrote, with care,
In Latin tongue or in Romance,
And adopting his very stance,
With many a pain, many a sigh,
As Thomas wrote, then so write I.
Thus after many a search around,
In a single book there I found
All that he spoke of that occurred

In this fair story, every word.
And now after all my reading
Of this tale, full of true longing,
I freely offer this my art
To everyone of noble heart,
As a distraction, and diversion.
Good reading is in my version.
Good? Yes, deepest good you'll find.
It makes love lovable, lifts the mind,
Strengthens trust so, purifies life,
Adds virtue here where ill is rife.
Should the true man hear or see,
A tale of such pure constancy,
Then virtue and true loyalty
Arise in him accordingly,
Love, constancy, the faithful mind,
Honour; of virtue every kind,
That never otherwise endear
So strongly, or so well, I fear,
As when we tell of loving heart,
Or mourn love's heartfelt pain, in art.
Love, in truth, is so blessed a thing,
And so blessed in the doing,
Honour and worth no man can reach,
Who will not learn what love doth teach.
So worthy the lives love inspires
So great the virtue that it fires,
Alas, that every thing alive
Does not for such heart's love yet strive,
And that I see so few who make
Pure longing theirs, for their lover's sake,
Enduring it without relief,
Expecting no reward but grief,
That when the days of sorrow start
Lies deep, concealed in the heart!

Why would noble mind, if it could,

Not suffer ill for endless good,
For many joys but one sorrow?
He that the pain of love's arrow
Ne'er hath felt, ne'er knew love's joy.
For joy and pain in love's employ
Are forever found together.
Man must win praise and honour,
While both of them experiencing,
Or without them come to nothing.
If the two whose tale I tell again
Had not for love suffered such pain,
Such sorrow for the sake of joy,
Within one heart, without alloy,
Their name and story would never
Have brought such rapture ever
To many a noble heart, such blessing.
The tale's good too, in the hearing,
Still is as sweet and ever new,
And their devotion ever true,
Joy, and pain, anguish and need.
And though they died, as we now read,
Long since, yet their sweet name lives on,
And in the world their death, in song,
Will live on and on, forever,
To honour-seekers bringing honour,
Inspiring the loyal with loyalty.
Their death must live eternally,
For us, the living, fresh as before.

For to hear the tale told once more,
Of such trust, such perfect loyalty,
Heart's joy, heart's sorrow, endlessly,
This to all noble hearts is bread.

With this their death lives on, the dead,
We read their life, we read their death,
As sweet as bread in every breath;
Our bread their death, their living breath;
So lives their life, so lives their death.
So they live still and yet are dead,
For the living, their death is bread.

Now whichever of you would hear again,
Their life, their death, their joy, their pain,
Let him lend heart and ears, to me,
And all he desires shall come to be.

Rivalin

THERE was a lord, in Parmenie,
Of tender years, such the story,
All this have I, a true account
Of his adventures, from the fount.
In birth he was the peer of kings,
A prince in lands, and sundry things,
Handsome in person, and delightful,
Brave, noble, generous and faithful;
To those whose joy in his gift lay
This lord, he brought joy every day,
As with its brightness does the sun.
He brought delight to everyone,
A paragon of knighthood he,
Bringing his race greater glory,
He was the true hope of his land.
Of all the qualities in a man
A knight should have he lacked none,

Except for prudence; he was one,
Fond of pleasures dear to his heart,
Who did as he wished from the start.
Thus he suffered, as will be seen,
For, sadly, it has ever been,
That youth and wealth will yet advance
Hand in hand with pure arrogance.
It never occurred to him to forbear,
As they do who wield power with care.
Evil for evil, was his course,
Ever countering force with force.
Such was the substance of his thought,
Not following virtue as he ought.

Now, such things can't last forever,
That for each wrong he may suffer,
A man repays such coin in kind.
God knows, we often must be blind
In life to much that meets the eye,
Or meet with ruin, by and by.
If we'll not overlook harm done,
Then greater harm from it will come.
That's how a wild bear is brought low,
The creature dealing blow for blow
Until the hammer dazes it.
That glove this lord must surely fit,
Or so I think, since he went on
Taking revenge yet fell headlong,
Bringing vengeance on his own head,
In fatal error – as I have said.
Yet there was no malice in him,
Which is oft the common failing,
It was but his tender youth again,
That spurred him on and led to pain.
It was simply his thoughtless youth,
A young lord's taste of power, in truth,
That opposed his own best interest,
An adventurous spirit, no less;
Youth, in the heart, full blossoming,
With all the arrogance that may bring.
He did as do those nobly bred
Who never learn to think ahead,
Shut his eyes to unhappiness,
Loved life, and living, to excess.
And when that life was on the rise,
Like to the daystar in the skies,
Smiling down on earth below,
He thought (it can never be so!)
That he would always live that way,
That life's sweetness would ever stay.

Ah, no: his life, but scarce begun,
Was but in one swift moment done.
Just when his own bright morning star
Was set to shine out from afar,
Evening, concealed until then,
Began to fall; his star again
Descending suddenly from sight,
Turned his brief dawn to darkest night.

What he was called, this history
Reveals to us, all the story
Of his adventures writ within.
His own true name was Rivalin,
Though men called him Canelengres.
Many believe, and others guess,
That he was a lord of Lyonesse,
And was king of that land no less,
But, from all his sources, Thomas,
Having read their tales, assures us
That, wholly to the contrary,
He was in truth of Parmenie,
And held another land in fief
From a Breton lord, and that he
Owed fealty thus to that man,
Whom Thomas names as Duke Morgan.

Now when this lord named Rivalin
Had, as his rank required of him,
Been a knight for three years or so,
And knew all that a knight must know,
Acquiring the art of chivalry,
Of war the skills and mastery,
(For he had wealth, and land, and men)
Whether he was provoked then,
Or proved arrogant, I cannot say,
But the book says, be it as it may,
He attacked Morgan before long,

Accusing Morgan of some wrong;
Invading his lands, in full strength,
So effectively that, at length
Fortresses fell into his hands,
With all of their surrounding lands;
The citizens were forced to yield,
Their surrender both signed and sealed,
To ransom their lives and property,
Till he'd swelled his mighty army,
From all the plunder that he took,
And, so it says in my fair book,
He steadily increased his power,
Increasing it from hour to hour,
Wherever he progressed, until,
He could take towns and forts at will.
Rivalin though was not unscathed,
With loss of many a man he paid,
For Morgan was ever on his guard;
Rivalin, countering, fought hard,
In open battle, time and again,
And in this manner loss and gain
Form part of war and chivalry.
Such is war from its beginning
To its end; losing and winning.
Morgan, indeed, did the same,
Forts and towns his spoils became,
Depriving his foe of goods and men,
Taking possession, now and then,
Harming him as much as he could,
Although it did him little good,
For he was assailed by Rivalin,
Who attacked, and penned him in,
So far reduced him too that he
Was defenceless, failed to see
A way to save himself at all,
Watching his towns and castles fall.
Everywhere he found hard pressed,

Even the strongest forts and best.
Rivalin attacked these anew,
Invested them and skirmished too,
Fighting so relentlessly
Their defenders had to flee
Scurrying back inside the walls,
While, before them, Rivalin calls
For tournaments and such displays.
So Rivalin found a hundred ways
To harass Morgan on every hand,
With pillage and with fiery brand,
Till Morgan requested parley,
And, after prolonged entreaty,
A truce between them was agreed
A year's peace, or so we read,
And both gave their security,
With oaths, and forts as surety,
As custom evermore demands.
So Rivalin returned to his lands,
Delighted with his victory,
Rewarding his men handsomely,
And, filling them too with delight,
Sent them home, footman and knight,
All equally in rare good spirits,
While doing himself much credit.

Not long after this success,
Rivalin thought to progress,
Making an expedition again
More for pleasure than for gain,
Equipped as magnificently
As ambition aspires to be.
Everything required, indeed
All the stores he might need
On his travels, were laid by,
Aboard a vessel moored nearby,
Enough for a year and a day.
Now he had often heard men say
How full of courtliness and noble
Was the young King of Cornwall,
Whose star was in the heavens high,
King Mark, who did, beneath the sky,
Order his realm with a strong hand,
His Cornwall, and thus all England.

Now, Cornwall it was his by birth,
But England came to him of worth;
He'd held it all, so tell the tales,
Since the Saxons, men of Gales,
Drove out the Britons, everywhere
Made themselves the masters there,
Such that the land once called Britain
Lost its name then and so became,
In honour of that former land
Of the Saxon Gales: their England.
When they had thus achieved its fall,
And shared it out amongst them all,
They all wished to be little kings,
And be the petty lords of things,
All to their own sad detriment,
For they wrought such devilment,
Butchering, slaying one another,
In the end they had no other

Recourse but King Mark's protection.
Since then under his direction,
They had indeed served him so well,
So reverently, as tales tell,
No kingdom ever served a king
More faithfully in everything.
And thus his name, we understand,
Was known in every neighbouring land,
No other was so esteemed as he;
His court where Rivalin longed to be.
And there he now planned to stay,
With Mark, a year and a day,
That he a better knight might be,
Devoting himself to chivalry,
Polishing his manners more.
For, in his noble mind, he saw
That if he learned the courtly ways
Of foreign lands he'd earn more praise
For his own manners, without doubt.
With this in mind, he set out,
Leaving his people and his lands
In his loyal marshal's hands,
A fair lord born of that country,
Who'd served him long and faithfully,
His name Rual, *li Foitenant*.
So Rivalin was swiftly gone,
With twelve lords he crossed the sea,
Needing no company but these,
They were an ample following.

Now, after sundry journeyings,
Near to Cornwall's coast he heard,
(For at sea they brought him word),
That the most noble King Mark
Was at Tintagel; so his barque
He now sailed towards that place,
Landing there, in a brief space,

And, to put a swift end to care,
He found the king established there.
Rivalin then attired his men
In rich clothes, as befitted them,
And when he reached the royal court,
King Mark received him as he ought
Honouring him and all his men.

The welcome shown to Rivalin
The high honour, his reception,
Surpassed in their high distinction
Any such shown to him before,
In any place, on any shore.
Musing on all this was pleasant,
The courtly life so elegant,
That more than once Rivalin thought:
'It must be God Himself that brought
Me to this land, and this people,
Fortune desires to treat me well.
All that I've heard of Mark is true,
Here all's so open to the view,
And his is a courtly existence.'
So he told King Mark the essence
Of all that had led to his visit.
And when Mark was apprised of it,
And understood his every need,
He answered: 'Welcome then indeed!
I, and my wealth, throughout the land,
All shall be at your own command!'

Rivalin found the court pleased him,
The court again was pleased by him.
Rich and poor found him worthy,
Everyone esteemed him truly,
Fonder of him than any guest;
He was deserving of success,
Rivalin, in his excellence,
Was ready to serve, in every sense,
That entire courtly company,
With his wealth, and personally,
In a spirit of friendliness.
Thus he lived there in true goodness,
And high esteem, every day
Pursuant of the knight's true way,
And all courtly qualities, too,
Until Mark's festival was due.

This annual festivity
Mark so requested and decreed,
That when the knights from far and wide
Were summoned they would swiftly ride,
Journeying, on every hand,
From the Kingdom of England,
Every year, at the royal call,
Into the realm of far Cornwall,
And brought with them in company,
Full many a lovely lady,
And many a beauteous thing.

Now all of this great gathering,
Was agreed, appointed and set
For blossom-time: and there they met,
During the sweet month of May,
Between its birth and its last day,
At Tintagel, or hard nearby,
Where all-comers could meet the eye,
On the loveliest meadow seen,
The fairest there has ever been,
Before or since, in any age.
Soft summertime had decked the stage
With all her sweetest industry,
And smoothed the fields in gaiety.
With every little woodland bird,
All delighting to be heard,
Flowers, grass, leaves, buds that vie
In soothing of the gentle eye,
With all that delights the noble
Heart was that May-meadow full.
All that a man might want was there
Of all the riches May might share,
Both the sunlight and the shade,
Near the fount, the lime-tree glade,
Every soft and tender breeze
Regaling King Mark's company,
In its own particular way;
The flowers there all bright and gay
Smiling from the dew-wet grass;
And the green turf, as they did pass,
May's companion, sweetly dressed
Decked in all her summer best,
And the flowers, in shining wise,
Reflected brightly in their eyes.
The sweet blossom on every tree,
Seemed to smile so pleasantly,
That the heart and then the mind
Went out to it and so, in kind,

Returned again its radiant smile,
Through the eyes, that shone the while.
The sweet birds' pure and gentle song
So lovely, echoing all along
The vale, and all about the hills,
The mind and all the hearing fills
Refreshing both along the dale.
Then the heaven-sent nightingale –
So sweet that bird, and dear to me,
May it sing on ever sweetly –
Sang, among the blossoms free,
Singing with such mastery,
Many a fine and noble heart
Was roused, inspired by its sweet art.

So all of that fair company
Were lodged among the greenery,
In joy and perfect merriment
Each one according to their bent.
As each had hopes of true pleasure
So each there displayed their measure.
The rich encamped there all richly,
The courtly beside the courtly;
Here beneath the silk they lie,
There beneath the flowery sky.
Some beneath the linden trees,
Others in arbours of green leaves,
Sheltered by the living bough.
Neither hosts nor guests, I avow,
Were ever lodged so pleasantly
As, on that field, that company.
And all things too were plentiful,
The food and dress were bountiful,
Of which the king had laid in store,
For a noble feast, and then full more,
Than any guest could ever wish.
King Mark was so lavish in this,

His feast it proved so rich and fine,
That not a man there was might pine,
They were all happy to a man.

Blancheflor

And so the festival began.
Whatever a man might wish to see,
Here was his opportunity,
Every spectacle to delight;
Whatever man longed to see, he might.
With some the ladies were their aim,
Some sought the jousting, or a game
Performed with shields and blunt lances,
Others there preferred the dances.
Of whatever a man might love
There was indeed more than enough,
For all the world thus, it appears,
All who then were young in years,
Vied together, at their leisure,
To contest that festive pleasure.
And King Mark, the noble and good,
The paragon there of knighthood,
Beside the beauties there arrayed,
Among the pavilions displayed,
Set there another gem, alone,
A rarest wonder of his own,
And that was Blancheflor, his sister,
A lovely girl, far lovelier
Than all fair women anywhere.
For of her beauty they declare,
That no man alive ever glanced
At her face, with eyes entranced,
Without his loving woman more,
With all her graces, than before.

This heavenly sight, so displayed

There, upon the meadow, made
Many a knight high-spirited,
Left many a heart exalted.
And within that fine field of view,
Was many another woman too,
Who might well indeed have been
In beauty's noble ranks a queen.
They by their mere presence there
Shed joy and rapture everywhere,
And gladdened many a true heart.
Now, to display his martial art,
Came each knightly host and guest,
Crowding, the noblest and the best,
Gathering from every direction.
And King Mark himself made one,
With his companion Rivalin,
And others of his noblemen,
Who all took the greatest trouble,
To appear both fine and noble,
To attract polite attention,
And gain creditable mention.
Draped with sendal and rare silk,
Trappings of snow, as white as milk,
Or decked out in scarlet or green,
Many a charger now was seen,
In blue, yellow, violet; bright,
Wherever a man turned his sight,
Were others clad in subtle fabric,
Fine-woven as if by magic,
Chequered cloth, or parti-coloured,
Diversely sprigged and flowered.
The knights they were in garments dressed
Of wondrous sumptuousness,
Pleated and slashed, did there parade.
And summer too itself displayed
A wish to keep Mark company,
Scattered through all that assembly

You saw many a coronet
Of flowers, its gifts all nobly set.

In their sweet summertime array
They now indulged in courtly play.
Here, and there, and everywhere,
Wove together, and fought with flair,
Displaying their skills, ever new,
Until they passed, in fine review,
Before the place where fair Blancheflor
That miracle on earth, and more
Sweet lovely women sat that day
To watch the knights at their display;
For all the men they rode so nobly,
So majestically, so proudly,
That they attracted every eye.
And yet none there could e'er deny
Whate'er there was to lose or win,
It was the courtly Rivalin
Who excelled all others that day
And bore the greatest prize away.
The ladies were quick to name him,
Declaring that no man beside him
Revealed a horsemanship so fine,
So expert was he, so divine;
And so they praised his every move.
'Behold!' as one they cried, 'that youth:
Now there goes a heavenly man,
How everything of his is done
And in such a heavenly way!
And then how truly handsome, pray!
For he is so well formed and strong,
See how nobly he rides along!
How firmly he doth hold his shield
It barely wavers in the field!
How the lance sits there in his hand!
How fine his robes and elegant!

How he holds his head! His hair!
How charming all that's present there!
He's altogether heavenly,
And then how happy she will be,
Destined to be loved by him!

Now, as she watched brave Rivalin,
Blancheflor the fair and the good
Noted all that ever she could,
For everything the women said
Re-echoed sweetly in her head.
She had welcomed him, for her part,
For he had entered in her heart;
Despotically now had he come
To rule there in her heart's kingdom,
Take up the sceptre and the crown,
Yet so deep in her did it sound,
So well concealed, as to forestall
Suspicion there, among them all.

Now that the horsemanship was over,
The riders there began to scatter,
And each knight then took his own way
Went wherever his own thoughts lay:
It so fell out that Rivalin
Chanced, in the course of his, to win
A place near to lovely Blancheflor,
She it was that he passed before,
Catching her eye, he addressed her,
In French he spoke, as he neared her:
'Ah, Dieu vous sauvez, belle!'
'Merci!' replied the courteous girl,
And then, continuing modestly:
'May God indeed, who so richly
Enriches every heart, I find,
So enrich your heart and mind!
And my grateful thanks to you,

Though there is a small matter too,
I can't absolve you of, for one.'
'What, sweet lady, can I have done?'
Replied the courteous Rivalin.
She said: 'Why, through a friend within
My knowledge, ever the very best,
You've caused me great pain and unrest.'
'Good God,' he thought, 'now what is this?
What can it be has gone amiss,
And has so greatly displeased her?
What error must I discover?'
Deeming that, all unwittingly,
In doing his knightly duty
He might have dealt harm to someone,
Some kinsman of her own undone,
So rendering her heart full sore,
Something that she now blamed him for.

Not so. For the true friend, she meant,
Was her heart, it was his advent
Had brought her pain: without a doubt,
This was the friend, she spoke about.
But he knew naught of the matter,
And so in his own sweet manner,
He apologised profusely:
'Lovely woman, don't be angry,
Or bear any ill will towards me,
If all this is true you tell me,
Then pass judgement upon me too,
And whatever you wish, I will do.'
The sweet girl answered: 'It may be
That I don't hate you precisely,
Yet love you not for it either.
Hereafter we'll see, however,
What amends to me you might offer,
For the wrong you've made me suffer.'

And so he bowed, as if to go,
And she then, with a sigh, spoke low,
The lovely girl, as from the far
Depths of her heart there, saying: 'Ah,
Dear Friend, may God on high bless you!'
From that time onwards, these two
Thought of each other constantly.
Rivalin went pondering deeply,
Considering, from every aspect,
Why Blanche-flor should be so vexed,
And what indeed it all might mean.
Upon each gesture he had seen,
And her greeting, he quietly mused,
Her sigh, farewell, the words she'd used,
He marked them all and separately,
And by so doing came to see
Her sweet blessing and her low sigh
As signs of love and, by and by,
He'd soon arrived at the belief,
That both of these two things, in brief,
Revealed nothing less than love.
So deeply then did this thought move
His soul, it swift turned towards her,
And, drawing Blanche-flor, it led her,
So that she might his heart command,
Into that kingdom, his heart's land,
With all now that this thing might mean,
And crowned her there as his true Queen.
Now Blanche-flor and Rivalin
The King, that is, and his sweet Queen,
Ruled as one, and in equal part,
Their own fair kingdom of the heart;
Her heart it fell to Rivalin,
His became hers, there within.
Yet all the while neither lover
Knew how it was with the other.
They had, the two, so deeply won,

So single-mindedly, their One,
And with such harmonious thought,
That Justice was rightly wrought.
He had taken her to his heart,
Feeling there the selfsame dart,
That she had felt: the selfsame pain.
So he began to doubt again
What it was she truly desired,
And by what motive she was fired,
Whether it was by love or hate,
He wavered thus from state to state,
His spirit flying to and fro,
His thoughts indeed wandering so,
Now settling here, now settling there,
That he was netted in the snare;
Twisting about, this way and that,
By his own mind he was trapped,
Till he, entangled so in thought,
Powerless to escape, was caught.

And so, involved in his own plight,
Rivalin showed, as well he might,
The lover's spirit is precisely
Like a bird that's flying freely,
That, in freedom, might have climbed
But settles on a twig that's limed,
And on discovering its mistake,
When a fresh flight it would make,
Is stuck by its feet in the lime.
It beats its wings then, for a time,
And, as it does so, tries to rise,
And yet however hard it tries,
Has but to touch the twig lightly,
To find itself held more tightly.
It struggles then with all its might,
This way and that, in crippled flight,
Till it exhausts itself, wholly,

Glued there, be-limed, to the tree.
Likewise, destined to act the slave,
So does the freest mind behave.
When it is lost in sad love-longing,
So will love, its wonders working,
Snare a man in love-born sadness:
Then will the lover strive, in madness,
His former freedom to regain,
And yet love's sweetness, once again,
Be-limes him there, and drags him down,
Until he's so ensnared, so bound,
That struggle fiercely as he can,
Nothing he does can free the man.
And so it was with Rivalin,
Longing so closely drew him in,
Love so ensnared him with its art,
Love, for the Queen now of his heart,
That the entanglement, we see,
Brought him great uncertainty,
For in his mind he failed to tell
Whether she wished him ill or well.
He was doubtful as to his fate,
Whether he'd won her love or hate.
Nor dreaming in hope, nor in despair,
Brought him closer or further there.
Hope and despair, cruelly though,
Drove him endlessly to and fro.
Hope spoke of love, despair of hate.
Mired in this conflict so, his fate
Was such that he must fail to find,
In either, assurance for the mind,
Neither in hatred nor in love.
So his thoughts all unsettled move
Drifting about uncertainly,
Hope flows, despair's an ebbing sea.
In neither is there constancy,
Both ever at war, discordantly.

Now when despair attacked him so,
Claiming Blancheflor was his foe,
Then he faltered and sought to flee:
Yet hope returning endlessly,
Offered him love and fond illusion,
So he was left there, in confusion.
Such was the conflict that his feet
Could neither advance nor retreat.
Love drew him in with greater might,
The more he tried to take to flight.
The greater his efforts to resist
The more firmly did love insist.
So love won through adversity
Till hope achieved its victory,
Despair was overcome at last,
And Rivalin believed, heart-fast,
He was loved by his Blancheflor.
Heart and mind, in accord once more,
Were fixed on her in such a way,
That not a thing could say him nay.

And yet, though love with its sweet art
Had seized both Rivalin's mind and heart
Subduing them both to her will,
Yet he had scant idea, still,
How keen might be the suffering;
How great the pain that love might bring.
Reflecting on his adventure
With her, his very own Blancheflor,
And every detail from the start
To this day, etched upon his heart:
Her golden hair, her face, her brow,
Her cheeks, her chin, her sweet mouth,
The Easter Morning, that sunrise,
That dawned smiling in her eyes,
Then Love came to seize him, truly,
That most fierce incendiary,

Stoking the flames of his desire,
Setting his burning heart on fire,
Till suddenly true Love revealed,
No longer left within, concealed,
The heartfelt sadness, now made plain
Love's pure longing and its deep pain.
Another life would now begin,
A fresh new life was granted him,
In action and in deepest thought,
So great the change that it had brought,
Rivalin was a different man,
And all then that he now began
All was wondrous in its strangeness,
As if twere done out of blindness.
For now his innate temperament
True love had altered, his intent
As wild now and capricious
As ever true Love can make us.
His former life now went awry,
His heartfelt laughter now did die,
And the smile once seen so often,
Now appeared so very seldom,
That silence and deep sadness too
Was now the only life he knew,
Seeing that all his joyfulness
Had yielded so to lovesickness.

Nor might Blanche-flor now elude
Love's longing and inquietude.
The one longing she must suffer,
The same for him as he for her.
Love, the great tyrant over all,
It held her also in its thrall,
Invading her so powerfully
That it had robbed her utterly
Of all her previous composure.
And now, in her own demeanour,

She was at odds, unusually,
With herself and reality.
Whatever delighted her before,
Whatever she used to adore,
All seemed nothing to her now.
Her life indeed was forced to bow
To the dictates of Love's sweet art,
The pain that lay so near her heart.
And yet with all she suffered there
All her burden of pain and care,
She knew not what this was she bore,
For never had she known before
Such heartache, such great heaviness,
Such yearning, such deep weariness.
'Alas!' time and again, she cried,
'God, what a life I live!' And why?
What comes now to trouble me?
Many a man I've chanced to see,
And yet no harm was ever done.
Now, ever since I saw this one,
My heart has never been as free
Or happy as it once used to be.
The glances that I cast on him,
They are indeed the very thing
That has made me so heart-sore.
My heart was never hurt before,
Yet has been deeply wounded now.
It has transformed me, I allow,
Has altered me in body and soul.
And yet, if what has happened so,
Happens to every woman, who
Hears him and sees him as I do,
If this is his nature, this the cost,
Then, oh, what beauty will be lost
And wasted on this ruinous man.
Or if it's some sorcery he planned,
Some enchantment he has learned,

That this strange marvel now has earned,
And all this marvellous suffering,
Best he were banished from the living,
Ne'er to be seen by any woman.
God knows, because of him, I am
In pain and sorrow here below!
I've ne'er looked at him, even so,
Or looked on any man I see,
With eyes that spoke hostility,
Nor signified ill will to any.
What fault of mine then can it be,
That can have hurt me so deeply
By one to whom I was ever friendly?

Yet why should I blame this fair knight?
The fault can scarce on him alight.
Whate'er heartache I have from him,
Or take upon myself through him,
Is, God knows, all my own doing,
My own heart its fate pursuing.
I saw many, besides this one,
How could he help it, if alone
Of all the others in that field,
Tis he to whom my feelings yield?
I heard many a lady fair,
Bandyng his fame here and there,
Like a ball struck to left and right,
Singing his praises as a knight,
Praising his body, and his wit,
Speaking always to his credit.
With my own eyes I saw them too,
All his fine qualities on view,
And in my own heart have I read
What in him was so nobly bred,
My senses were infatuated
And my heart on him fixated.
In truth these things have blinded me,

They were the real sorcery,
These through which I was lost, the charm,
For he himself did me no harm,
That loved one, of whom I complain,
And in complaint accuse again.
My foolish and wayward mind,
This, it is, has the power to blind,
This, it is, that will do me ill;
So wilful, all the while, to will
What it would cease to desire
If it but thought now to aspire
To all that is noble and right.
Yet it cares only to delight
In its own wishes, where it can,
Concerning this godlike man,
With whom it was so easily
Taken, and indeed so swiftly.
And then, Dear God, what is more,
If I may think this with honour,
And need not blush with deepest shame,
A maiden, for my own good name,
I think that this heavy heart's-pain
That I suffer, all my heart's strain,
This can only be caused by love.
Love it is that makes my thoughts move
Towards him with inner longing.
And whatever is its meaning,
Something of all this here at hand
Speaks of love now and of a man.
All that, my life through, I have heard
Of love, each and every word
Of what women do truly feel,
Into my own heart now doth steal.
All that sweet and true heart's-pain
All that doth noble hearts so strain
With its sweetest pain, in part
All that now stirs in my own heart!'

Now the courtly lady seeing
Within the depths of her being,
In her heart, and in her mind too,
As true lovers are bound to do,
That Rivalin her companion
Would her heart's happiness become,
Her highest hope, and her life's best,
Her gaze on him she did arrest,
At every opportunity.
Whenever, with propriety,
She could greet him all covertly,
Exchanging glances tenderly.
Whenever, with love invested,
Her eyes now strayed and rested
On him, the much enamoured man,
With love's sweet gaze, then he began
To note it: love, and all that hope
He placed in her, now gave full scope
To his courage, so fuelled desire,
So lit, within, love's burning fire,
He returned her gaze as swiftly,
More boldly, and more tenderly
Than ever he had done before.
When opportunity he saw,
He greeted her too, with his eyes.
Once the lovely girl realised
That he now thought as did she,
She was rid of anxiety,
All the care that she did suffer,
Fear that he'd little love for her.
Now she knew that within his mind
His thoughts of her were true and kind,
As lovers' of their lover, should be.
He knew that of hers equally.
Knowing this set them both on fire.
Both were filled with the one desire,

Loving, they doted on each other
With all their loving heart's power.
They knew in truth what men do say
That there, where lovers' glances play,
Tis there the flames of love arise,
Desire blazes in such eyes.

Now when Mark's festival was done,
And all the crowd of nobles gone,
Then there came fresh news to him
That his harsh foe, a rival king,
Had invaded his royal land
With such a mighty force in hand
That if he were not defeated
He would swiftly see completed
The ruin of all he overran.
So then a host, an armed band
Of fair warriors Mark gathered
And in strength he met and countered,
Fought the foe and conquered him,
Killed and captured so many men
That great good fortune did him shield
Who, all unscathed, escaped that field.
There noble Rivalin, it did betide,
Was wounded deeply in the side,
So penetrated by a spear,
The hurt so deep, and so severe,
That, in sorrow, his loyal men
Now carried him swift home again
To Tintagel, as one half-dead,
And laid him down upon his bed,
As one who was about to die.
Then the news spread, by and by,
That Canelengres a mortal
Wound had suffered in the battle.
Lament was heard on every hand
At court and all throughout the land,

For they grieved who knew his talents
Regretting that his excellence
His sweet youth, handsome body
His much-admired nobility,
Must now vanish with their friend,
Who'd met so untimely an end.
His friend King Mark did equally
Grieve for him and most sorely,
Lamenting o'er Rivalin more
Than for any other before.
Many a noblewoman sighed,
Many a lady mourned and cried,
And all who'd ever met his sight,
Were moved most deeply at his plight.

But howe'er deep the misery
That they felt at the tragedy
There was one now above all
His own Blancheflor we recall,
She the noble, pure, and courtly
Who grieved now for him constantly,
And in her heart, and eyes again
Revealing there her dear heart's pain,
Wept for him, as she made moan.
And whene'er she was alone,
Able then to vent her sorrow,
Dealt herself blow after blow,
Upon herself, she now beat *there*
A thousand times and more, just *there*,
Above her heart in deepest pain,
Struck hard again and yet again.
So did she treat, this sweet lady,
All her lovely sweet young body,
Lost in such piercing misery
That she would indeed have gladly
Bartered her life away, all for
Any death not born of Amor.

And in truth she would have died
Of the sorrow that she must hide,
But for this one hope that fed her,
One prospect that yet buoyed her
That of once more seeing him,
However to that she might win;
And having once more seen him there,
Then she would gladly suffer care,
All that her fate to her might bring.

This kept her among the living,
Until she felt sufficiently
Calm to reflect in what way she
Might gain but that one sight of him
Demanded by her suffering;
And this roused her to remember
The kind nurse who had raised her,
Who had at all times everywhere
Taught her ward and cared for her,
And never let her from her side.
In her she sought now to confide,
Speaking to her nurse privately,
Complaining to her mournfully,
As ever they do, and have done,
Who are in a like condition.
In her eyes the sadness showed,
And now her hot tears overflowed,
Descending in a brimming stream
Making her saddened face to gleam.
Clasping her hands together, she
Gestured at her imploringly:
'Ah, my life!' did Blanche-flor cry,
'Ah,' she moaned, 'Ah, now I die!
Ah, my dearest nurse come show
Me your devotion, for I know
A wondrous thing it is, no less!
Since you are the soul of goodness

On which my fate and life depend,
And you alone may succour send,
I'll tell you all my heart's distress,
Relying still upon that goodness.
Now, help me, nurse, or I must die!
'My lady, say then why you cry
And thus complain so bitterly?'
'Ah, dare I say it openly?'
'Yes, dear lady, so speak again.'
'A dying man, he kills me, then,
Of Parmenie, this Rivalin.
If I can, I would yet see him,
If I might find a way you see,
Before he's ever lost to me.
He, I fear, will not recover.
If you'll only bring me succour,
I shall then deny you nothing,
While I am among the living.'
The nurse she did consider now:
'If this one thing I should allow
What harm indeed could it e'er do?
The man's half-dead and, tis true,
Who knows but that he'll die today,
Or tomorrow, I'd save, I say,
My lady's life and her honour,
And she would love me forever
More than any other woman.'
'My lady', she cried, 'my dear one,
Your sorrow pains me at the heart,
If I can but muster the art
To ease your bitter suffering
Why then, I'll do that very thing.
I'll go myself, at once, to view
The man, and so return to you.
I shall discover his true state,
Where and what his impending fate,
And who indeed is nursing him.'

So she went away to find him
And as if she were there to grieve,
She let him know, all privily,
Her lady's desire to visit
If he might only arrange it
Fittingly, and honourably.
Then she returned again swiftly
To tell her lady of what befell.

Next she cloaked the girl, right well,
Beneath a beggar-woman's dress,
Hiding her face, and her distress,
With the aid of a heavy veil,
And led her onwards without fail,
Clasping her hand, to Rivalin.
All the people that lay within
He now quietly sent away,
So that there, all alone, he lay,
Claiming that in such solitude
Relief from his cruel pain ensued.
Then the nurse at once appeared,
With a doctor, so she declared,
Successfully admitted then,
She bolted the door tight again;
'And now, my lady, here he lies!'
Then gazing deep into his eyes
The lovely girl at once drew close,
'Ah woe the day, and ever woe
To me the day that I was born!
Lost is my hope, and I forlorn!'

Rivalin did his best to bow
His head as much as did allow
His wound a dying man to do.
But this his Blancheflor scarcely knew,
Paying him now indeed no mind,
Seated beside him as if blind,

Laying her face now and then
Against the face of Rivalin,
Until it seemed gradually
From joy and grief, quietly, slowly,
All the strength fled from her body.
Now her lips that once showed rosy
Grew pallid, and her flesh also
Lost its hue, all that bright glow
That was its customary state;
In her eyes daylight did abate
And all grew sombre, dark as night.
She lay there, without sense or sight;
Helpless now, and quite motionless,
Her cheek against his she did press
As though she were a woman dead.
But then she rallied, roused instead,
From this direst extremity,
She clasped him to her side gently,
And laying her mouth close to his,
She granted him kiss after kiss,
A hundred thousand, and swiftly,
Till her mouth indeed had truly
Aroused all his concealed desire,
For on her lips there burned love's fire:
Her mouth it brought to him delight,
Her mouth it so restored his might,
He pressed the noble girl fiercely
To his almost half-dead body,
Full closely, and with tenderness.
And soon desire achieved success,
And both their loving aim achieved,
For the sweet woman now conceived,
A child obtained of his body,
Though poor Rivalin was nearly
Dead, of the girl and of her love.
Had it not been for God above
He would have perished utterly,

Yet lived: as it was meant to be.

Thus Rivalin did yet recover,
And the lovely girl, Blanche-flor,
Unburdened, burdened was again,
Though otherwise, with fresh heart's-pain.
Freed of great sorrow for the man,
But with greater sorrow at hand;
Freed from the pain of her heartache,
Yet, with her, death she yet doth take:
Her heart's ache is by love exiled,
Yet death received with the child.
But whatever form her recovery,
However it came about that she
Was unburdened, and burdened again,
Then with joy, and now with pain,
She saw nothing else before her
But beloved love and the lover.
Nor child nor mortal tragedy
Within her claimed her reverie,
Love and the man it was she knew,
She acted in ways true lovers do,
To which the living should aspire.
Her heart, her thought, her true desire,
Dwelt wholly now on Rivalin,
And his thought dwelt on her again
And then upon her love also,
In their thoughts they both did know
One love alone, and but one bliss,
For he was hers, and she was his;
He was now her, and she was him,
There Blanche-flor, there Rivalin.
There Rivalin, there Blanche-flor,
Where the two: there true amour.

Now there life was lived together,
There they found joy in each other,

And brighter now their spirits fared,
With all that they together shared.
And so whenever circumstance
Could further ought of their romance,
They were so full of earthly joy,
Their happiness without alloy,
They'd not have given their two lives,
For any other paradise.

The Elopement

BUT nothing here lasts for long,
And hardly had these two begun
To live life at its very best,
Enjoying all true happiness,
When news there came to Rivalin
That his foe, Morgan, once again
Was invading Rivalin's land.
A vessel lay there close at hand
And this boat now was soon equipped,
For Rivalin, and stores were shipped,
And horses then were slung aboard,
For this sudden voyage abroad.
Now when the lovely Blancheflor
Knew what journey lay in store,
Why then, for her beloved man
Once more indeed her ills began.
For her heart-ache was such that she
Could barely hear and scarcely see.
The colour of her living flesh
Was now once more as pale as death.
One word her lips alone let pass,
One anguished cry she gave: 'Alas!'
That was all she uttered plain,
'Alas!' cried, ever and again.
'Alas: the man! Alas for Love!
What toil to me you now do prove,

To me, how harsh is your burden,
Love; that is the world's affliction!
So fleeting is the joy in you,
Fickle you are, and never true,
In you what is't the world doth see?
Rewarding us with treachery,
What you deliver in the end
Is ne'er as fine as you pretend
When with such brief joy you lure
Us to sorrow for evermore!
Every one of your false phantoms,
And all of your sweet deceptions,
Delude all things alive in truth,
Of which I am the living proof.
Of all the joy I thought was mine
Only, of all, heart's-death I find.
The man I set my hopes upon
He from me must soon be gone!

To this lament there entered in
Her faithful lover Rivalin,
Who came to her with heavy heart
To speak his farewell and depart.
'Your servant' he cried, 'my lady,
I must leave for my own country.
Sweet woman: God keep your days
Right full of joy and health always!'
Once more now her heart must suffer,
Once more now her senses leave her;
For in her nurse's lap she lay,
As pale as death, fainting away.
When her loyal fellow-sufferer
In longing, saw the far greater
Suffering of his dearest one,
He played the good companion,
For what she suffered lovingly
He shared, in tender sympathy.

Colour, strength now left his body,
And he slumped down dejectedly,
Burdened by their sorrowful fate,
And yet he could scarcely wait
For his lady to recover
From her swoon to gently clasp her
And take her thus, the unhappy
Woman to him all tenderly
And kiss her face now and her eyes
And her mouth, in many a guise,
And there he did caress her so,
That, at last, his lover also
Gaining awareness, by and by,
Raised herself and with heartfelt sigh
Of her own will she, as before,
Sat herself upright once more.

Now Blanche-flor was herself again,
And saw her lover, now her bane,
In agony at this, his plan,
'Ah' she cried, 'my blessed man,
How I suffer because of you!
My lord, since I saw you, tis true,
Many a heartache have I borne,
And in my heart bear still this morn,
Because of you, of you alone!
If I may now hereby make moan,
Without offence, I would yet see
You act more kindly towards me.
My lord and friend, you dealt to me
Many wounds but, above all, three
Lasting, fatal, unreconciled,
The first is that I am with child,
Whose birth will be the death of me,
Unless God grants His aid to me.
The second is far worse; dishonour
He will know, my lord and brother,

When he learns what has occurred,
When he hears that shameful word,
He'll have me slain then, in a breath,
And in disgrace I'll meet my death.
And yet the third doth wound the most,
More bitter tis than death almost.
For I know well, that it may be
My brother lets me live, you see,
And does not slay me but instead
Disinherits me, and on my head
Heaps disgrace, takes all I own,
Goods and honour, I'll be known
Forever as one without a name.
My child I must raise, that same
Will have indeed a living father,
Yet helpless to aid its mother.
And yet I would ne'er complain
If I alone might bear the shame,
If, with my royal family,
The king my brother, might be free,
Of the dishonour it must bring,
And of myself; of all this thing.
For when folk tell of the matter,
Say that I am with child, rather,
And spread the news everywhere,
Two realms will be, by this affair,
Disgraced indeed, you understand,
This Cornwall: and then England.
And woe to me, if that should be,
That all do set their gaze on me,
And cry that two realms, mine the blame,
Were both disgraced and put to shame.
Better I were dead, and forgot,
You see, my lord, such is my lot,
This my sorrow, my heart's lament,
The which for all my days is meant
To prove a living death to me,

Unless you aid me, certainly,
My lord, and God doth ease my pain,
Or ne'er shall I feel joy again.'

'My dear lady', replied her lord,
If any sorrow I have caused,
I will atone for it come what may,
And I do swear that, from this day,
Never on my account again
Shall you be caused or shame or pain.
For I have had such joy of you,
That whate'er may come to us two,
A deep injustice it would prove
If ever, for my sake, my love,
You should bear the least distress.
My lady, to you I now confess,
So you may know my heart and mind:
The pain, the joy, good, ill, you find,
All of whate'er may befall you,
All that I take upon me too;
Beside you I shall ever be,
However great the trials you see.
And now to your wish give voice,
And let your heart make the choice,
Whether I yet should stay or go.
If you'd have me stay, be it so,
Then I will know what befalls you,
Or if you would the voyage approve,
And chance your fate upon the sea,
To travel to my home with me,
Then I myself, and all I own,
Will e'er be yours and yours alone.
You have treated me so well, here,
I must strive all I can, tis clear,
To return your favour, fully.
Whate'er you decide, my lady,
Your wish is my desire too,

What you command, so I will do.’
‘Bless you, my lord,’ she replied,
You have so favoured me beside,
May God grant you reward also;
I should kneel at your feet and so
Bear thanks towards you evermore.
My lord, and love, I can no more,
As you know well, now linger here.
I cannot hide from folk, I fear,
My trouble, and the child I bear,
If I could steal away somewhere,
That would be the wisest thing,
Knowing not what fate may bring.
My lord, what may your counsel be?’
‘My lady, he said, ‘hark to me:
Tonight, when I shall go aboard
Be there already, let none record
Your coming there, all eyes deceive,
Meanwhile I shall be taking leave
Of all, and I will meet you there,
With my own followers, with care
It shall be so! Thus it must be.’

Once they had spoken then, swiftly,
An audience he did demand,
And told the news of his own land
To King Mark, of the trouble there.
He asked leave, and away did fare,
Took leave of all the company;
At this arose a heartfelt plea:
The cries, for Rivalin, of regret
Were greater than for any yet.
Many the blessing wished on him,
That God might, in gazing on him,
Guard his life and honour, in all.
Now, as evening began to fall,
He came to his ship in harbour,

And taking his things aboard her,
Found his lady already there,
The lovely Blancheflor; with care
The ship was readied, and set sail,
And bravely weathered every gale.

Rivalin takes Blancheflor to Parmenie

NOW when Rivalin reached his land
And heard of all the trouble on hand
That Morgan on his people wrought,
The mighty forces he had brought,
He summoned his marshal to him,
A man he knew was loyal to him,
One in whom he had trusted fully,
In his absence, to rule the country,
Holding power through all the land:
This was Rual, *li Foitenant*.
Ever a worthy man and true,
For never had he proved untrue.
He told Rivalin the state of all,
For he knew well, and did recall
For his lord the forces on hand,
And the trouble throughout the land.
'But now, my lord, that you are here,'
He said, 'in time, I have no fear,
Since God Himself grants your return,
The cure, our victory, we shall earn;
These troubles we shall overcome,
Our hearts now high, there is no room
For anguish, we shall banish fear.'
Then Rivalin spoke of his dear,
Of his sweet adventure, more
Concerning his own Blancheflor.
The marshal was more than pleased,
'Indeed, my lord,' he said, 'I see
How you honour grows on earth

Your reputation and your worth,
All the joy that you have won;
All rising like the rising sun.
Never upon this earth you'd find
Another woman, to my mind,
Could add to yours such a name.
So, my lord, as regards that same,
Since she has treated you so well,
Then you should in your thanks excel.
As soon as this business is won,
The burden lifted, when tis done,
That lies so heavy upon us all,
You should proclaim a festival,
A noble feast, appointed richly,
And name her there quite openly
Before your friends and family,
As your wife, and thus I'd advise:
That in God's church you realise,
The marriage, as customary,
For laymen and clergy to see,
In accord with Christian law,
For the good of your soul, and more.
And thus, believe me when I say,
In all your affairs, from that day
Greater benefit will be won.'

Rivalin and Blancheflor are wed

AND as he said, so it was done,
For in marriage he did take her,
And once wedded to each other
Rivalin placed her in the hands
Of faithful Rual, *li Foitenant*,
Who led her then to Canoel,
And into that selfsame castle
From which his lord took his name,
For Canelengres was that same.

Canel derives from Canoel,
And within that very castle,
There dwelt Rual's wife, a woman
Who had, with wifely devotion,
And her heart and soul, accepted
The life that they had elected.
Rual commended their mistress
To his good wife, who her did bless
With all that her rank did require.

The death of Rivalin

RUAL returned then to his sire,
And the pair conferred together,
Regarding all the land did suffer,
The present trouble and discord.
So they sent messengers abroad
Calling the armed knights to gather,
Turning all their skill and power
On the matter of their defence.
Then with the army they went thence
To meet with Morgan and his host.
Their advance was thwarted almost,
For Morgan and those about him
Being prepared for Rivalin,
Granted him a hard-fought battle.
And, there, many a brave knight fell,
Many were struck or put to rout!
Scant the mercy shown thereabout!
Many a man was sorely pressed,
Many were wounded in the breast,
Many lay dead upon that field.
In that fell war where few did yield
Fell, worthy of lament, that knight,
Whom the world should grieve outright,
If it were not a waste of breath
To grieve for one long lost to death.

For Rivalin, the Good, lay there,
Who yielded never a foot where
Knightly prowess or lordliness
Were put severely to the test.
Despite the crush of the mêlée,
His men defended him that day,
And brought his body from the fight,
Lamenting o'er that noble knight,
In deepest grief bore him away
And buried him as one who may
Be said to have thus borne no less
Than their honour from the press,
To lie with him within the grave.

And if I were to wildly rave
And say how each of them lamented,
How each man cried as if demented,
What good were that? None! For all
Were dead with him; with him did fall
Their honour, and their wealth, indeed
All that a brave man doth most need,
All that with which a lord may bless
His people and grant happiness.
Now all is over, all, be it said,
For now brave Rivalin is dead.
No more can now be done for him,
Than any fallen knight, I mean,
Except what's fitting for the dead.
Tis how things are, when all is said;
The world must do without him now,
May God in heaven lave his brow,
Who never failed a like brave heart!

The birth of Tristan

NOW must I exercise my art,
And tell what became of Blancheflor.

For when to her the news they bore
That lovely woman, and did impart
Those tidings, what she felt at heart,
Lord God, preserve us from knowing
What that was, beyond all showing!
This I doubt not, for it is plain
Ne'er did a woman know such pain,
Ne'er such heartbreak for any man,
As she: nor does, nor will, nor can.
Her heart with sorrow overflowed
To all the world indeed she showed,
How much she took his death to heart.
And yet her suffering ne'er did start
A single tear that eyes might see,
Dear Lord above, how could that be,
That she shed not one tear alone?
Her heart, in truth, had turned to stone.
No life at all remained within her,
Except the life that made her suffer,
The child within that suffering brought,
That life that with her own life fought.
Did she cry out in pain ever,
In her distress? No, forever,
From that sad moment she was dumb.
Not one cry from her mouth did come,
Her mouth, her voice, her heart, her mind,
They were lost to her; all confined,
The lovely girl spoke not nor cried
With bitter grief, nor groaned nor sighed,
She but sank down in her dismay,
And so lay there till the fourth day,
More piteous than any woman.
Writhing and bending she began
Her labour, twisting to and fro,
Without ceasing, till she bore so,
In pain and anguish there, a son;
Lo, he was born; her life was done.

PART II: Tristan

The mourning for Rivalin and Blanche-flor

OH, the sad and sorrowful sight,
Finding one in desperate plight
Yet only then a sadder plight
To see; a more sorrowful sight!

Such honour lay with Rivalin
As he, when life still lived in him,
Had practised, while God did will
That he indeed practised it still,
That now the mourning was as great,
In excess of the common state.
For loyalty, and fair prowess,
Fine deeds, and knightly courtliness,
By his death had been laid low,
Leaving but the pain and sorrow.
As noble as his death had been
So was hers piteous, his queen.
However great the weight of care
Felt by the land and people there,
At the death of their dear master,
Yet the burden was far greater
Of lacking the power wholly
To ease the suffering of his lady
Seized upon by pitiless death.
Let all lament, at every breath,
Her anguish and their sore distress,
Whoever has been roused, no less,
By woman, or hopes so to be,
Should reflect now, profoundly,
Upon how swiftly disaster,
After joy, may fall thereafter
Upon the good and their estate,

How swiftly they may meet ill-fate,
All joy now gone: and life itself.
And then request of God Himself
His favour on true womanhood,
That His mercy, for He is good,
May grant them ease and aid them,
But of the child I'll speak, of him,
Fatherless and motherless sent
Into this world, and God's intent.

The Guardians of the Child

REGRET and remembrance true,
For a lost friend, ever new,
Exalts that friendship anew;
So prove the truest of the true.

Regret for a departed friend
Shows loyalty beyond life's end,
This the recompense, we call
The crown of loyalty, for all
The pain and care; a crown, tis said,
Well befitting, as I have read,
The Marshall, Rual, and his wife,
Who were as faithful in this life
To God as to the world indeed,
Bearing themselves, in word and deed
As one, before the world and God,
Practising well the word of God,
Perfect in faithfulness, and then
This loyalty they did maintain,
Without fail, towards their friend,
Until they reached their own life's end.
If any on earth deserved to be
Crowned king and queen of loyalty,
For their devotion then, I say,
It must most certainly be they,

For I will tell you, faithfully,
Of this most loyal pair, how he
Acted, and what she did beside.
After Blancheflor, their lady, died,
Once Rivalin was laid to rest,
The infant's situation, at best,
Seemed adverse, though he'd survived;
And yet he prospered now and thrived.
The Marshal and his good woman
Took care of the little orphan,
And so that none there might pry,
Concealed him from every eye.
They said, and had this proclaimed,
That their lady, or so they claimed,
Had been with child, and it had died
Within the womb, and so twas cried;
And this third death, one grief the more,
Caused greater mourning than before.
All grieved that Rivalin was dead,
Grieved that Blancheflor's life had fled,
Then grieved that the child was lost,
Who had now perished, to their cost,
Who of all hopes had been their best.
Then, their thoughts were yet distressed
By Morgan, troubling every breath
As much as did their master's death.
The worst cause of anxiety
The worst thing, of a surety,
Is to have one's enemy in sight,
Night and day, day and night.
It grips the heart, arrests the breath,
It proves indeed a living death.
In the midst of this, Blancheflor
Was carried to her grave; full sore
Was the weeping above that grave,
To her due honour there they gave;
For, you must know, such bitter grief

All showed, it seemed beyond belief.
Yet I'll afflict your ears no further
With all the tale of this sad matter,
All their deep mourning and distress,
For too much grief and bitterness
Offends the hearing, and the ear
Can only bear so much, I fear.
And there is naught that is so fine
It does not pall. This tale of mine
Must leave their endless lament
And turn itself, with fresh intent,
To the child who is, without fail
The proper subject of this tale.

The Marshal, li Foitenant

SO doth this world, full oft, from good
To rank ill-fortune swiftly turn,
And afterwards from ill return,
From all that grieves, to what is good.

A true man in the depths of sorrow
Yet must think about the morrow,
And how to save himself and thrive.
For all the while he is alive,
He should live among the living,
Hope to his own self thus giving.
So the Marshal, Foitenant,
He whom ill-fortune thus did haunt,
Bethought himself, at every breath,
Of his land's ruin, of his own death.
Since all defence had proved in vain,
Nor could he by sheer force obtain
The victory gainst his enemy,
He saved himself by policy.
He spoke to the barons at once,
Gathering to him many a one

From all the land, to sue for peace,
Since there was no other strategy
But to yield now to this Morgan
And then beg mercy of the man.
Their lives and goods they surrendered
Into Morgan's hands, and rendered
Themselves subject, swore fealty,
Ending the fierce hostility,
Between themselves and Morgan so,
Suing for peace with this strong foe,
So saving the people, and their land.

The faithful Marshal, Foitenant,
Once home, consulted with his wife,
And then, on forfeit of her life,
Commanded her to lie abed,
Like a woman on her childbed,
And after a certain time, to say
That she had borne a child that day
One who was born to be their lord.
With this, the Marshal's worthy wife,
Good and true, of spotless life,
Floraete, the soul of honour,
Of womanly virtue the mirror,
A gem of goodness, did concur,
Since it redounded to her honour.
She set her mind and body to
Appear in pain to those in view,
Like a woman near to giving
Birth, prepared her furnishings
And room as for her confinement
And knowing well how such things went,
She then feigned to be in labour,
Pretending likewise to suffer
Distraction of mind and body,
Like a woman making ready
To bear the pangs as she must do,

Summoning all her strength anew
So that all her women might see.
Then the infant, in secrecy,
Was laid beside her, so none knew
Except the midwife good and true;
Thus it appeared he was her son.
At once the news about did run
That a son she had borne, within,
The good Marshal's lady, wherein
Lay truth indeed, for it proved so.
The child that lay beside her, know,
Showed filial loyalty to the end.
That same sweet child did extend
The same sweet affection to her,
That any child indeed should offer
To its mother, and it was well
That he did so, the tale doth tell,
For she devoted all her thought
To him, a motherly love she brought,
As steadfast in her intention
As constant in her affection
As if she'd borne him neath her heart.
For, as the story doth impart,
Never before, and never after
Did man and wife raise their master
With such love, and we shall see
As this tale proceeds, how that he,
The loyal marshal, showed his care,
The paternal affection there,
The efforts he did undertake,
The toil endured for his ward's sake.

The Christening

NOW that the Marshal's good wife
Was deemed recovered from the strife
Of childbirth, that is six weeks later,

As customary after labour,
The churching of her child was due,
The son whose tale I tell to you,
And so in her arms she took him,
Becomingly, she carried him,
Into God's House, most tenderly.
And when, with due ceremony,
She had rendered her offering,
Her retinue accompanying,
In all their splendour, then her son
Was readied for holy baptism,
So that he could, in God's name,
Be received in that very same
Sacred creed, Christianity,
And whate'er the fate he might see
In time to come, yet he would be,
With no shadow of uncertainty,
Nevertheless, a Christian.
Now, once the priest had on hand
All needed for the christening,
As customary in such a thing,
He asked, regarding the child's name,
How he should now baptise that same.
The gracious lady went to speak
With her husband then, and did seek
To know what name he wished to be
Conferred upon the child. Now he,
The Marshal, was long silent, there,
Thinking the matter o'er, with care,
As to what name would be fitting,
Considering, from the beginning,
All that accompanied its birth,
All that had happened on this earth,
How all this thing had come to be,
Knowing full well the whole story.
'My lady,' he said, 'all the tale
I had from his father, without fail,

Of all his time spent with Blanche-flor.
In such deep sorrow, what is more,
Her longing for him was relieved,
In deep sorrow the child conceived,
In deep sorrow his life began,
So let us call the child Tristan.’
Triste means sorrowful, and so,
Because of all that you now know,
The infant was christened that same,
At once; and Tristan was, by name.
Tristan he was called, from *triste*,
A name that suited him at least,
In every way appropriate;
We see it in all that we relate,
See what sorrow indeed was there
When his mother the child did bear,
See how swiftly trouble and pain
Burdened him, and proved his bane,
See now how sorrowful a life
He was given, filled with strife,
See now the sorrow of his death
That brought about, with his last breath,
An end to his heart’s pain, at last
And did all other deaths surpass
In a sorrow more bitter than gall.
All that shall read this story, all
Shall know then that Tristan’s name
Accorded what befell that same.
His name indeed described the man,
Named, rightly, as he was, Tristan.
And if you would know why a plan
Was wrought now by the Foitenant,
What drove him to spread a rumour
That the child died with the mother,
There, in the throes of childbirth, lost
With Blanche-flor, to their sad cost,
I give you answer then that he

Did all he did from loyalty.
The faithful man did this, you see,
For fear of Morgan's enmity,
That if he knew about the child
Through force, or perchance through guile,
He would have him murdered, there,
And rob the country of its heir.
That is why that most loyal man,
Adopted the child, you understand,
And raised the lad with such care
That all true people, everywhere,
Should wish him God's grace, indeed,
Who well-deserved it for his deed.

Tristan's childhood and youth

NOW that the child had been blessed,
Baptised, as the tale doth attest,
The Marshal's most virtuous lady
Took the beloved child swiftly
Into her close care once more,
Wishing at all times to ensure
His comfort and his contentment.
This sweet mother was so intent
On tending to his every need,
That if she'd had her way, indeed,
He would never have feared a fall,
But walked on velvet cloth withal.
And she continued to do so
To watch with care how he did go,
Till he his seventh year attained
And understanding he had gained
Of all that people did and said;
The which he had, being thus led.
And then the Marshal, his father,
Placed him with a learned teacher,
And sent him abroad with this man

To acquire the speech of each land,
And so ensured that he did study
And knew all his books right fully,
Setting such work before the rest,
Above all other tasks the best.
This then was the first incursion
Upon his accustomed freedom,
For with this he now entered in
To the constraints of discipline,
Which till then were not revealed
To him, remaining well-concealed.
In these the tender early years,
When he was ready it appears
To taste the first joys of living
The best of them were departing.
Just as he first began to bloom,
The frost of care cast its gloom
That ravages many a young boy,
Withering the first flower of joy.
In his first freedom, the first seed
Of freedom was smothered indeed.
Book-learning and strict discipline
With these his cares did now begin.
Yet one he had started on it,
He so set his mind upon it,
So applied himself with vigour,
That he then did swiftly master
More books, in that short space, faster
Than any child, before or after.
While this study he undertook
Of languages, and book on book,
He also spent long hours intent
On playing each stringed instrument
He found, and practised morn and night,
Learning what was wrong or right,
Till he was marvellously adept.
Long hours of study thus he kept;

One skill today, the next another,
This year well, but next year better.
Along with this, he learned to ride
With shield and lance at his side,
And how to spur his mount lightly
Put it to the gallop boldly,
Then wheel about, give it free rein,
And urge it with his knees again,
All done as it was meant to be,
In true accord with chivalry.
He found constant recreation
And pleasurable occupation,
In fencing hard, in wrestling,
In jumping high, and in running
And in throwing the javelin,
While showing all his skill therein.
And we know of a certainty,
That none, whoever they might be,
Could ever track and hunt as well
As he, for such the tale doth tell.
At many a game and courtly art
He excelled, and knew his part.
And beauty too, did so adorn
This young man that no other born
Of woman ever showed so fine,
For all about him was sublime
In quality of mind and manner.
Yet his good-fortune was later
Clouded, as I have read, by ill,
Doomed, as he was, to trouble still.

Now, Rual the Marshal, was fain
To summon the lad home again,
When he was in his fourteenth year,
And had him ride, and thus appear
About the realm, and at first-hand,
Study the people of that land,

So their ways he might know well.
And this he did, the tale doth tell,
Performing all so thoroughly
That in his time no youth might be
As highly skilled in that country
Or well-equipped as was Tristan.
And all, whether woman or man,
Showed goodwill and a friendly eye,
As we rightly should, say I,
To him whom worthiness did bless,
Who kept from all unworthiness.

The Abduction

NOW, at this time, there chanced to be
A merchant-ship off Parmenie,
One that had sailed there from Norway,
A lone ship that had made its way
Across the sea, and came to shore,
And after a while, then did moor
In the harbour at Canoel,
At the foot of that same castle
Where the Marshal did reside,
And had indeed there at his side
His ward, the young lord Tristan.
Now came, from the merchantman,
Its traders to display their wares,
And it was soon known, everywhere,
What merchandise they had for sale.
And there among, so runs the tale,
Was that which would bring Tristan ill,
For there were falcons, trained to kill,
And other fine birds of the chase.
These were talked of in every place,
So that two of the Marshal's sons
(Boys being eager for their fun)
Took Tristan, their foster-brother,

With them to seek out their father.
And when to the Marshal they came,
Then they asked, in Tristan's name,
Indeed, right earnestly they sought,
That the falcons should be bought
To please them and their brother.
Now, the noble Rual would never
Have left a single thing undone
That could please his foster-son,
For he so cherished this Tristan,
That it was known by every man,
How he yet favoured the lad more
Than he had favoured any before
In the court, or that whole country.
Nor showed such devotion even
Towards his very own children,
Thus to all the world he showed
With what loyalty he followed
His dead lord, his worth and honour.

He rose and as a loving father
He now took Tristan by the hand,
And made his way toward the strand
Accompanied by all his sons,
And his retainers who, as one,
Either for business or pleasure,
Followed their lord at their leisure,
Down to the ship; what gives delight
Or takes one's fancy was in sight,
All that might the heart regale
Gems, clothing, silk was there on sale,
All that might catch the buyer's eye
Was heaped up there, in vast supply.
There the finest hunting-birds too,
Young goshawks just out of mew,
Sparrow-hawks, and peregrines,
Kestrels, hobbies and merlins,

And hawks that had not learnt to fly,
Red-feathered eyasses, met the eye,
Of all then of this goodly supply,
Tristan was now allowed to buy
Fine sparrow-hawks, merlins also.
And then because he wished it so,
Hawks were purchased for the others,
Whom he thought of as his brothers,
Thus each received gifts, as required.

But when they had what each desired,
And purchased aught that they did lack,
And were intent on journeying back,
It chanced that Tristan saw, aboard,
Hanging there, a fine chessboard,
With its field of squares and frame
All decorated, full fine that same,
And wondrously made and fair,
A work of beauty, I declare.
A set of fine chessmen beside
Superbly carved he then espied,
Fashioned of purest ivory.
He looked at them attentively,
Tristan, that accomplished youth.
'Oh, noble merchants, speak the truth,
So help you God, come now, confess,'
He cried, 'know you the game of chess?'
He spoke all this in their own tongue.
They gazed at the lad, one so young,
For next to none in those parts knew
Their speech; with interest anew,
Examining the boy closely,
And thought that never did they see
So handsome a youth, one blessed
With manners far above the rest.
'Yes, my young friend,' one replied,
'Not a few of us here take pride

In our skills, versed in the game.
If you would like, come, test my claim.'
For I will take you on, indeed!
Done!' Tristan cried, 'tis so agreed!'
And thus the two sat down to play.
The Marshal spoke: 'I shall away,
For to the castle I must return,
Stay here if you wish, in turn
My other sons will go with me,
Your tutor stays for company,
He'll see that you come to no harm.'

So the Marshal, noble and calm,
Returned with all his retinue,
Except for Tristan's tutor who
I can declare, most truthfully,
And as doth witness the story,
Was reared far more carefully,
For noble thought and courtesy,
Than any other squire was ever,
Most fitting as Tristan's tutor,
And Curvenal that was his name.
He had learned much, that same,
Had many an accomplishment
Appropriate for his intent
Of teaching the boy, in turn.
That gifted lad, eager to learn,
That well-bred youth, Tristan,
Now sat and played, man for man,
So skilfully and courteously
That all the merchant company
Who gazed at him, now, as one,
Confessed in their hearts, each one,
No youth had they seen, of sense,
Adorned with so much excellence.
But whate'er talent for the game
He showed, their greater acclaim

Was for the thing that in their eyes
Occasioned the greater surprise,
That a child so spoke many tongues,
So fluent from his lips, that none
Had ever heard them spoken so
In any place where they did go.
This most courtly of courtiers,
Now and then did grant their ears
Items of courtly information,
And terms, of foreign derivation,
Correctly pronounced, by the way,
With which he did adorn his play.
Then he sang, excellently well,
Chansons, subtle in their spell,
And *refloits* too, and *estampies*.
And he so persevered with these
And other marks of courtliness,
That the merchants did confess,
Speaking together, secretly,
That if, by means of trickery,
They could perchance lure him away,
They would find the thing would pay;
Profit and honour they would reap.
So they bade their oarsmen keep
Alert and stand by to depart,
While they exercised some art
In weighing anchor, their intention
That it escape the lad's attention.
They put to sea, so quietly,
And so gently, that neither he
Nor Curvenal was quite aware,
Until they were a mile from there,
The landing-place left far behind.
So intent, thus rendered blind,
Upon that very game of chess,
Their only thought was of success.

But now they their wits did gather,
Once Tristan had proved the winner,
And they began to look about,
Then Tristan was filled with doubt,
Recognising what they had done.
You ne'er saw man born of woman,
So thoroughly discomforted,
And rising to his feet, he said:
'Ah, noble merchants, speak to me,
By God what would you do with me?
Where are you taking me, this day?'
'Look friend,' said one, 'have now your say,
But none can save you from your fate,
You must sail with us, soon and late,
So behave well, and be content.'
Tristan, now knowing their intent,
Raised such a cry that Curvenal,
Who till then felt no fears at all,
Began to grieve at his very heart,
And so troubled them from the start,
That, now indeed, the whole ship's crew
So miserable and sullen grew,
Because of Curvenal and the lad,
The good in them now turned to bad.
They set the tutor in a skiff
And before setting it adrift,
Gave him an oar that he could ply,
And a loaf, that he might not die,
And told him then to set a course
For where'er he chose, but perforce
Tristan must go along with them.
With this, they voyaged on again,
And left him there to wander so,
Now prey to many a care and woe.

Curvenal, the tutor, is set adrift

CURVENAL drifted on the water,
Many a woe then he did suffer,
Woe for the fate you understand
That had o'er-taken his Tristan,
Woe at his own fate, by and by,
For he thought that he must die,
Since he could not row a boat,
Never once having taken note
Of such, and so he cried aloud:
'Lord God, what must I do now?
Lord, I have never known such fear.
For there is not another here,
And Lord, to sail I know not how.
Lord God, may you preserve me now,
And be my shipmate on the sea!
For I'll attempt, if you'll aid me,
A venture I've ne'er made before;
Guide me to safety, I implore!

The Marshal receives the sad news

WITH this he laid hold of the oar,
And, in God's name, he sought the shore;
Thus in a short while he reached land
(God in his grace did so command),
And reaching the castle did confess
The dire events. In their distress
The Marshal and his good lady
Were so grieved in soul and body
So lamented, and gave such sighs,
Had Tristan died before their eyes
They could have felt no deeper
Sorrow nor a pain more bitter.
So the pair went down together,
Full of the grief they did suffer,
And all their followers beside
To the shore, at the ebbing tide,

To mourn for the child they'd lost.
Many a tongue bemoaned the cost,
Praying God's aid to him be sent.
There rose many a true lament,
Their grief was such, their grief was so;
And when at eve they sought to go,
When it was time thence to depart,
Though they had each mourned apart,
Now they joined their voices as one,
And chanted, as if in unison;
So chanted here, so chanted there,
The one refrain, they all did share:
*'Beas Tristant, curtois Tristant,
Tun cors, ta vie, a de comant!*
Fair Tristan, courteous Tristan,
Your body and life be in God's hand!
Your dear life and your sweet body
We here commend to God's mercy!'

The Storm

THE Norwegians, meanwhile, sailed on,
Bearing the lad where'er they'd gone,
And they had so conceived the thing
They would have realised everything
Concerning him, most profitably.
But He that orders all things, He
Who, ordering them, sets them aright,
Whom wind, and sea, and all in sight
Must serve in fear and trembling,
Frustrated now that very thing.
For by his will and his command,
A storm arose o'er sea and land,
So perilous and powerful proved it,
They could make no way against it,
And must let the ship be driven
By the wild wind out of heaven,

And fearing it could not survive,
Despaired of coming out alive;
Having abandoned, one and all,
Themselves to that vile force they call
Chance, where all's set at a venture;
Trusting in fate as to whether
They survived this elemental war,
For indeed they could do no more
Than leave all things to destiny,
And face the fury of the sea.
First heaving up towards the sky,
Then plunging down from on high
Into the depths there, far below,
The rising breakers tossed them so
Up and down, and here and there,
Not one could stand in that affair.
Thrown now to one side of the ship,
Now to the other, away they'd slip,
Not one of them could keep his feet.
For eight days and nights complete
This was their state of existence,
Without the power of resistance,
Exhausted, till there came a shout,
One of the crew at last cried out:
'My masters all, by God, I swear
The wretchedness of this affair
Is brought about by God's command.
That we are driven so far from land
That the waves rage, the wind roars,
And we half-dead, must have its cause,
In the treachery that we did plan,
Our kidnapping of this Tristan,
Our snatching of him from his friends.'
'Yes, tis why this storm God sends,'
They cried as one, 'yes, yes, tis so!'

Tristan is abandoned on shore

THUS they resolved to let him go,
And if there were to come a calm,
If wind and water scorned to harm
Them all and they put in to shore,
They would hinder him no more;
Let him go free, where'er he pleased.
And thus the raging tempest ceased,
For now that they were all agreed,
The rigours of their voyage indeed
Abated, at that very hour.
The storm it ended in a shower,
The sea grew calm, the strong wind died,
The waves did, in a breath, subside,
The sun shone brightly as before.
Now they were free to act once more,
And swiftly, for in those eight days
The wind had driven them astray,
Toward Cornwall's coast, and now
They were so close to shore, I vow,
The cliffs were clearly in their sight,
And so they went about, outright,
And then sought out a sheltered bay.
Tristan they landed straight away,
Set him ashore, and once on land,
Pressed a loaf of bread in his hand,
And some other stores of theirs.
'Friend, be you now in God's good care,
Find better fortune in his keeping!'
They called out, in swiftly leaving;
Then to their ship the longboat ran.

He laments and prays

AND what did he do then, Tristan,
Tristan the castaway? Why, yes

He wept as doth a child, no less;
For such is all a child can do
When all goes wrong for him, tis true.
There the poor wretched castaway
Clasped his hands, then he did pray
Earnestly to the Lord above.
'Oh now, Almighty God of Love,
In the fullness of your mercy,
Extend all your goodness to me,
Sweet God, humbly now, I pray,
Have mercy upon me this day,
And show your kindness to me now,
Since you have chosen to allow
My severance from home like this.
Be my guide so, and lead me then
To sight here of my fellow men.
I gaze around, and find nearby
No living thing that meets the eye,
No creature does my vision bless.
How I do dread this wilderness!
On whate'er place my sight I bend,
I can see naught but this world's end;
Where'er I turn my eyes, see only
Desert spaces, wasteland, merely
Empty ground, wild cliffs, wild sea.
Sad the vision it brings to me!
More than all, I fear some creature,
A wolf, or other fierce of feature,
Will to my frail life put an end.
Moreover the sun doth descend,
And evening now begins to fall.
It will go ill for me withal,
If I delay here much longer.
If I go not twill prove an error,
If I go not soon, benighted,
In this waste, wild, unlighted,
All for me will soon be over.

And in front of me, moreover,
There are hills and rocky heights.
While the descending sun still lights
Their crests, I'll climb one if I can,
And look for any signs of man.
Perchance some hovel I might see
Or a larger dwelling there may be
Further off, where I might find
Help from folk if they prove kind,
So that then somehow or other
I'll keep body and soul together.'

And so he stood, and turned to go.
His clothing I will mention though,
He had a robe and mantle on,
Of rich silk, marvellously done.
The Saracens had made the thing,
Its hems edged with fine braiding,
Corded with silks, subtly chosen,
Embroidered and interwoven,
In their exotic style, so tailored
To his handsome form moreover,
It seemed, from their fair effect,
That finer clothes were never yet
Cut more nobly, to better plan,
By any woman, nor any man;
And the story claims, moreover
That this fine brocade was greener
Than is the greenest grass in May,
Its ermine lining, it doth say,
Was so white that none whiter
Is, or was, or could be, brighter.

He reaches a broad road

NOW, since he was obliged to go
Tristan, troubled and full of woe,

Prepared himself for his journey.
So he tucked his robe up neatly,
A little higher beneath his belt,
Rolled his cloak up like a pelt,
And hoisted it on his shoulder;
Then before the day grew older,
He set off swiftly into the waste,
And made his way with some haste
Through forest and more open land,
Finding no track there to hand,
And not a sign of one displayed,
Except the one he himself made.
He forged a trail there with his feet,
As with his hands a track he beat;
His arms and legs he used alone.
Over brushwood, over stones,
Higher and higher, he did fare,
Until he reached an upland where
He came upon a woodland pass,
Narrow and overgrown with grass,
This he followed as he descended
Hoping that where the track ended
He might then find a broader road.
In a little while, as on he strode,
He came to a wider road indeed,
One good for any man or steed,
A beaten track in every way.
Beside it for some time he lay,
To rest himself; lamenting yet.
His heart would not let him forget
His dear friends and his own land,
With those he'd known on every hand,
Such that his thoughts grieved him sore.
Thus he began to pray once more
To God, and most piteously:
Gazing towards heaven, devoutly:
'Lord,' he prayed, 'oh, Lord above,

How far I am now from the love
Of my father and my mother!
How much better if I had rather
Shunned the cursed game of chess,
That I will no more love or bless!
And be damned to the peregrine,
The sparrow-hawk, and the merlin;
For I was torn from my father;
Because of them, and my other
Friends: from all my acquaintance.
Those who would my fate advance,
Those who wished me good-fortune,
Sorrow and grief is now their tune.
I know dear mother how you torment
Yourself and how your soul is rent.
Father your heart is filled with pain;
You both are bowed with grief again.
If only, dear Lord, both could know
I was alive, and I knew so,
Great then would be your mercy,
To both of them, and then to me.
I know only too well that they
Will ne'er be happy for a day,
Unless by God's will they know
That I live; oh, may it be so,
Lord that doth bring comfort here
To all who are troubled, be near,
Let them count me with the living!'

The Two Pilgrims

NOW, while Tristan was lamenting
By the roadside, there did appear,
Two aged pilgrims, drawing near,
Of godly aspect, and full of days,
Men who do travel all the ways;
And their white hair was all unshorn,

Long beards they had, such as are borne
By God's children, and those who go
As pilgrims wandering to and fro.
Linen cowls each man did wear,
And such clothes as those who fare
On pilgrimage are wont to do,
And on their outer garments too
Seashells were sewn, all around,
And many a token was found
There also, from some foreign land.
Each bore a staff in his right hand,
Their head-gear and their other dress,
Their state and calling did profess.
These servants of God to cover
Their thighs wore linen trousers
Tied tightly about their legs down
To near their ankles, all around,
Leaving but a hand's breadth bare,
As were the ankles; they did fare
Bare-footed thus, along the way,
Over whate'er upon it lay.
To show that they were penitent,
Upon their backs, as on they went,
They bore fronds of sacred palm,
And chanted now some holy psalm,
Or prayer; all the good they knew,
They chanted as they came in view.

Tristan, seeing two men appear,
Spoke to himself again, in fear.
'Dear Lord', he cried, anxiously.
'What now is to become of me?
If these coming towards me now
Catch sight of me, then I allow
I may be captured, once again!'
But as they neared him, these two men,
He recognised, by staff and dress,

That they were pilgrims no less;
And seeing they were holy men,
He found his courage once again,
And so his spirits rose, and he
Prayed yet again most fervently.
'Praise be to you, O Lord,' he cried,
Good folk are these that I have spied,
Of these two I need have no fear.'

They saw the boy as they drew near,
Where he reclined, while Tristan,
Rising, and crossing his two hands
On his breast, did most politely,
Rise to greet them. Then, intently,
They both gazed, for by his gesture
They perceived his courtly manner.
Speaking then in voices no less
Filled with a pleasant friendliness,
The pair, saluting him on meeting,
Both uttered a gentle greeting,
With a '*deu sal, beas amis,*
God save you, whoe'er you be,
Fair friend!' While Tristan then bowed
His thanks to them, and spoke aloud,
In his good French, '*de benei*'
He cried, '*si sainte companie!*
May God in beneficence bless
Those graced with such saintliness!'
Then they asked of him, these two:
'Now dear child, say, whence come you,
Or who was it that brought you here?'

Tristan was wise beyond his years,
Cautious and shrewd, so did assail
Their ears with a marvellous tale.
'Most holy ones,' he said to them,
'I was born here, and had ridden

With some others to the chase,
Hunting in this wooded waste,
But then indeed, I know not how,
Was parted from the rest, I vow,
From both the huntsmen and the hounds.
They know all the woodland bounds,
And forest paths, as I do not,
So that I strayed, by who knows what
Strange paths, till I was utterly lost.
I found a trail, that to my cost
But brought me to a deep ravine,
Where my horse, the slope unseen,
Suddenly plunged headlong down.
I felt myself thrown to the ground,
And found that both the horse and I
Lay in a heap, and by and by
The horse rose, but I could not mount,
Nor grasp the reins, on any account,
Or even reach the stirrup, while he
Careered away among the trees.
And then, since he had fled, I came
To where you find me, in the same
Wandering manner, nor do I know
Where I am, nor which way to go.
And now good people, be so kind
As to tell me, to ease my mind,
What place you might be headed to?
'Friend, they answered him, 'we two,
If the good Lord so wills, intend
That we, at this day's journey's end,
Shall rest in Tintagel this night.'
Tristan, who proved no less polite,
Then asked to join their company.
'Why yes, dear child, most certainly,'
Cried the pilgrims, 'if there you'd go,
Then come with us, let it be so.'

Tristan set out then with this pair,
And many a thing spoke of there,
As they went along together.
Courtly Tristan, as was his manner,
Was cautious in his speech, and so
Whene'er they showed a wish to know
Aught about him, he gave answer
As needs required, and went no further.
His words and bearing were both such,
While never saying overmuch,
That indeed these holy people,
Wise through age, thus venerable,
Considered him blessed with favour,
In both his manner and demeanour,
And in his handsome form as well,
His elegant clothes they could tell
Were of rich fabrics, finely made;
His situation thus they weighed:
'God of Goodness, Lord on high,
Who is this lad, and whence and why
Comes he here?' said each inwardly.
'He bears himself so courteously.'
So they wondered, all their intent
To watch him closely as they went,
And thus the three progressed the while
Till they had marched a goodly mile.

The Hunt

NOW there came both sights and sounds.
King Mark of Cornwall's baying hounds,
His uncle's pack, so runs the tale,
Were, at that moment, on the trail
Of an antlered stag, in full flight;
Nearby it turned, as if to fight.
It having thus been run to ground,
The hounds their quarry did surround,

While the stag itself stood at bay.
The harrying while it sped away,
Had robbed the creature of its strength.
The huntsmen closed in, at length,
With a great clamour as, at will,
Their horns sounded for the kill.
Tristan when the hart he saw,
A red deer of five years or more,
Addressed the pilgrims full wisely,
'Sirs, here are the hounds, you see,
The people those I lost today,
And here they bring a stag to bay,
But now I've found them all, tis plain,
And I am with my friends again.
By your leave, I'll join them now.'
'God bless you child, may He allow
Good fortune to attend you too!'
'My thanks then, may God preserve you!'
Tristan, the courteous, replied.
Then he swiftly turned aside,
And ran to where the hart was slain.

The master of the hunt was fain
To dress the quarry on the grass,
Set on its haunches, one great mass,
As boars are placed; twas all amiss.
'How now, master, and what is this?'
Cried Tristan, courteous as ever:
'In God's name, halt, for whoever
Saw a fine stag butchered thus?'
The master rose from the carcase,
And gazing held him in his view.
'Well then, boy, what should I do?
When we dress a deer in this land,
We work this way, you understand,
First skin the stag, and then divide
It top to bottom, then either side,

And into four, so no quarter
Proves larger than any other.
That's the method here, we employ.
Are you versed in the art, my boy?'
'Yes, master,' cautiously he phrased
His answer, 'but where I was raised,
That's not the way in which tis done.'
'How so?' There rose the next question.
'Why, we eviscerate the hart.'
'My friend, unless you play a part
And show me how to "eviscerate",
How can I know of what you prate.
For no man knows of such, I fear,
In all of this great kingdom here,
Nor have I heard it named either,
By any, native-born or stranger.
Dear boy, what is "eviscerate"?
Be so kind as to demonstrate.
Come now, "eviscerate" this hart!'

'Why yes, dear master, for my part,'
Said Tristan, 'since you so request,
By your leave, I'll do my best
To perform it in our manner,
If such would give you pleasure,
As far as I've retained it all,
And can our custom yet recall.'
The master viewed the young stranger
With a smile, himself another
Bred to courtesy, familiar
With all the graces moreover
A man of quality should show.
'Yes, dear friend,' he said, 'do so!
And if you've need of anyone,
Then I, and my companions,
Will right willingly lend a hand,
Place or turn him, you understand,

In any way whatsoever;
You only need point a finger.'

Tristan the exile, doffed his cloak,
And placed it on a stump of oak,
Then he tucked his robe higher,
And after adjusting his attire,
Rolled up his sleeves, and then
Addressed his hair once again,
Smoothing it behind his ears.
Then, despite his tender years,
All those present at the kill,
Who were gazing at him still,
Eyed him ever more closely,
As they considered inwardly
All his bearing and his manner,
Which brought them, indeed, great pleasure,
They considered all about him
And in their hearts knew everything
Was excellent and noble there;
His garments all proved rich and rare,
His form was fine, so his stature,
For he possessed a manly figure.
The huntsmen all pressed around,
To gaze upon this lad they'd found.

Then the exile, this young Tristan,
Who now played the true huntsman,
Approached the stag, and seized it,
And on its back he tried to ease it.
Yet, using all the strength he had,
Twas still too heavy for the lad.
So he asked them courteously
To place it so, as it should be,
Setting it on its back at rest,
And readying it to be dressed.

The dressing of the stag

ALL he asked was swiftly done.
First to the head he did come,
And began to remove the hide,
Slitting the skin, and once inside,
Stripping it from the muzzle down,
There where it lay upon the ground.
Then returned to the forequarters,
And freeing them in short order,
First to the right, then the left;
Then from the rear-quarters cleft
The hide, flaying them likewise.
Then from the flanks he did prise
The skin, carefully, at each side;
Then from the holds he cut the hide,
Working downwards from the head,
And on the ground the hide he spread.
Back to the fore-quarters, without rest,
He now parted them from the breast,
Leaving the breast and ribs still whole.
The quarters he set aside. His goal
Was then to sever breast from chine,
And from the flanks, tine by tine,
Yet with three ribs from either side.
(Such is the way to dress a hart,
Take the breast, but where you part
It from the chine take three ribs too,
Just as the art requires you to)
Then Tristan turned swiftly about
And cut the hind-quarters right out;
Both legs together, you will conceive,
For what should be left he did leave,
The meat where the back doth sail
Beyond the loins toward the tail,
For nigh a hand's breadth and a half,
The cut that's called, in cow or calf,

The haunch, by those who know the art.
The ribs on either side he did part,
Those he had left, from the backbone,
Then the paunch to the gut, I own,
And since this ill became his hands,
He cried: 'Two men it now demands!
Pull this away and so prepare
Our taking up the hide, with care!'
So was the stag now dismembered,
The hide ta'en, as he'd remembered,
According to the rules of the chase.
The breast and flanks, they did place,
And all the quarters, fore and hind,
To a place apart, there assigned;
With that the breaking-up was done.

'There, master,' cried the exiled one,
'The kill is dressed, such is the art
Of evisceration of a hart.
When you have gathered your men
You may do the *fourchie* then.'
'The *fourchie*, what is that, dear boy?
What term is this that you employ?
You have shown us hunting lore,
And excellent it is, and more,
And performed it like a master.
Now go on and show hereafter
All your skill to the full, and we
Will grant our aid as previously.'
Tristan to the woods ran speedily,
And cut a forked branch from a tree,
Which those who do the *fourchie* know
Term the *fourche* indeed, although
There is no need to use that name,
Since fork and *fourche* both mean the same.
Having returned with the branch,
The liver now he did retransch,

And then the entrails separately,
Then next the testes he did free
From the pizzle, and on the grass
He sat and some fibres did pass
About these parts, and then did cast
Round his fork a length of green bast,
And tied them to the *fourche*, so.
'Now, gentlemen, you must know
That this we name the *fourchie*
For so tis called in my country,
Since all to the *fourche* is so tied,
And that tis fitting can't be denied;
Since on the fork is where it fits,
Tis on the fork that it now sits.
Let some bearer take it in hand;
Nor doth the day pass in our land
Without remembering the quarry.'
'The "quarry" why Lord bless me,
And what is that?' the huntsmen said,
'Better speak Saracen instead.
What then is the "quarry", dear boy?
No explanation need you employ,
Just do the thing, that we might see,
Show us this, of your courtesy;
We then shall understand it more!'

Tristan was ready as before.
He took the heartstrings, where hung
The heart (for from them tis strung),
Cutting the heart from the pluck;
Each half of the heart he then took
Slicing downwards, and then, once more,
Sliced each, to cut the whole in four,
And threw all down upon the hide.
Once more then he delved inside,
And took the spleen and lungs also
Then onto the hide they too did go.

Pluck-string and gorge, and the rest,
He cut at the top of the upper breast,
Then swiftly he removed the head
And antlers from the neck, and said:
'Place these with the breast, quickly,
Then remove the backbone, wholly,
And if any poor folk have a mind
To that, give it them and be kind,
Or do whate'er is customary.
Now see how I prepare the quarry.'

Then all the company gathered round
To inspect the hide on the ground.
Tristan took up what now lay there
All in its place, and then did prepare,
The quarry, as he had said. The four
Quarters of the heart they now saw
On the corners of the hide, displayed
As custom sought, had been so laid.
He chopped up the lungs and spleen
The paunch and gut, all that was seen
As fitting for the hounds to claim,
Into small pieces for those same,
And spread them all out on the hide.
This done, to the hounds he cried,
With a: '*Ça, ça, ça!*' summoning all,
They came in a trice to the call,
And stood there over their reward.
'There you are, said the young lord,
And this, back home in Parmenie,
We huntsmen do call the quarry,
And I'll tell you the reason why:
On the *cuire*, the hide, it doth lie,
And so tis now a hunting term,
And quarry comes from *cuire* in turn,
Derived thus from a word for hide.
For the hounds must ne'er be denied,

And then the practise does them good,
Since they like the taste of blood,
And so the bits that are put aside
Flesh the hounds, set on the hide.
Now you have seen the quartering
Is all the art to your liking?
For that is all there is to it.'
'Young lord,' they said, 'indeed tis fit
For all and what else could you mean?
We clearly know, for we have seen,
That all this last was well-devised
For the hounds' good, and is so prized.'

Tristan is asked his name

THEN spoke out the good Tristan:
'Since I have done all that I can,
You may carry the hide away.
And believe me if, on this day,
I could have served you further,
It would be so. Now each bearer,
Should cut his withies, and truss
His portion separately. With us,
Should go the head, borne in hand,
Conveyed to court, you understand,
With appropriate ceremony.
Take it yourselves, and you will be
More courtly still in every way.
For you know yourselves, I say,
How a stag should be presented,
Which as a fair gift is intended.
Present it there then, fittingly!'

The master and his men saw he
Was wondrously knowledgeable;
The lad had shown he was able
To practise all the hunting art

As to the dressing of the hart,
And was well-versed what's more
In every kind of hunting lore.
'Listen, dear boy,' they now replied,
'These hunting terms that you applied,
All that you have shown and told,
Are so intricate and manifold,
Unless we see to what they tend
And of this business make an end,
All that's done will count for little.'
A horse they did swiftly saddle,
And begged him to be pleased to ride
With them to court, all by their side,
In the way that custom dictated,
If he were not with hunting sated,
And display his arts to the end.
'That would be fitting,' Tristan said,
'Take up the hart, and bear the head!'
Then he mounted and they set out.

They could scarce wait to turn about
And ride together in company,
Awaiting their opportunity,
To talk together of this affair,
Of whence he came, and how got there,
And longed to know his situation.
And this, their topic of conversation,
Tristan too, was considering gravely;
So he began, and very subtly,
To invent for them a tale,
With which he might their ears regale.
Whate'er one thinks of what he told,
Twas no child's tale he did unfold.
'Between these shores and Brittany,
There, lies a land called Parmenie,'
So Tristan artfully began,
'My father is a well-known man,

A merchant there, and he doth lead
 A fine and pleasant life indeed,
 Fitting to a merchant I mean,
 But, that all the truth be seen,
 He is known less for wealth you'd find,
 Than for his qualities of mind.
 He taught me everything I know.
 Now, merchants came there also
 From foreign countries, and I
 Their speech and customs learnt thereby,
 And I was seized with the intent,
 An urge that would scarce relent,
 To go into those foreign lands.
 As I conceived twas in my hands
 To visit many a far kingdom,
 And strange peoples, I did come
 Upon a way to elude my father,
 And finding where they did gather,
 Voyaged with the merchants here.
 Thus in your country I appear;
 And now that you all have heard
 My story, true in every word,
 I trust you will like my answer.'
 'Ah, dear child,' all did concur,
 'It was a noble wish of yours.
 Curiosity leads hearts to explore;
 Good things it teaches everyone.
 Fair lad, and our true companion,
 May God bless that pleasant land
 Where so excellent a young man
 Was raised by a mere merchant!
 Of all the kings, on earth present,
 Not a one could raise one better.
 But tell us, now: your noble father,
 How did he name you, that good man?'
 'Tristan,' he said, 'my name's Tristan.'
 '*Deus adjut*: God help me, though'

Cried one, 'why did he name you so,
Better he'd named you, at the font,
"Juvente bele et la riant:
The fine lad and full of laughter".
So they rode conversing after
Each in his own manner, yet
The jests and thoughts of all were set
On the lad who rode by their side,
While each of his companions tried
To ask some question of the same.

It was not long before they came
To where a castle could be seen.
Tristan toward a linden did lean,
Broke a leafy branch of that tree,
And wove two garlands, then he,
Setting one of them on his head,
The larger on the master's, said:
'Ah! Dear master, of courtesy,
Tell me what stronghold tis I see,
There's a castle fit for a king!'
'Tintagel,' said the master, slowing.
'Tintagel? How fine a castle!
De te sau, fair Tintagel!
God save you, and all within!
'Ah, well said, lad! And may you win
True blessing, and fare as well there,
As we have done in this affair!'

Tintagel

SO they came to the castle gate.
Tristan asked the huntsmen to wait.
'Gentlemen,' he addressed them all,
'As a stranger, you will recall,
I know not your names, yet ride
Two by two, and close beside,

And make the shape of the hart!
So let the antlers play their part
And go ahead, and then the breast,
Ribs and forequarters, and the rest;
The hind-parts go behind the rack,
Quarry and fourchic at the back,
For they indeed bring up the rear.
So let true huntsman-ship appear!
And do not be in too great haste,
Ride in due order, each in place,
One pair thus behind another,
Keeping a true shape together.
My master here, and I as groom,
Will ride together, so make room,
If with my words you all agree.’
‘As you wish, then so do we,
They cried, ‘tis well indeed, dear boy!’
‘Then lend me a horn to employ,’
Said Tristan, ‘of a size to suit me,
And when I begin, list carefully,
And whate’er I blow, you must blow!’
Then the master answered him so:
‘Blow as you wish, my dear friend,
Blow as if all the world doth end,
And we shall follow you, as one,
Each and every companion,’
Cried the master, ‘I and my men.’
‘*À bon eure!*’ cried Tristan then,
‘Splendid! Let the thing be born.’
Then he was handed a little horn,
High-pitched, bright-toned, ere they were gone.
‘*Allez avant!*’ he called, ‘ride on!’

And so they rode in, two by two,
As was but right and proper too.
And when the men were all inside,
He took up the horn at his side,

And then he blew so brilliantly,
So sweetly, so entrancingly,
That all those who rode behind him,
Could scarcely do aught but join him,
From sheer delight, and all did so,
All took up their horns to blow,
And sounded them in unison,
Following his measure as one.
He led them, set the melody,
And they played well and skilfully,
Until indeed the castle did fill
With music to announce the kill.

Tristan is met by King Mark

WHEN the king and his folk all
Heard this brave new hunting call,
They were startled; never before
Had such been heard at their door,
A strange new music, at the court,
And all there were amazed, in short.
But now the troop made their entry
Into the palace, blowing loudly,
And all the courtiers were there,
Drawn to this sonorous affair;
And all most curious to know
Why the horns were sounded so.
King Mark too, the illustrious,
Had come to the entrance thus,
To discover the cause, and there
His courtiers gathered to stare.
Now when Tristan saw the king
Then he took an instant liking
To this man more than all the rest.
His heart their kinship did attest,
For King Mark was of his blood;
His eyes gazed at him where he stood,

For nature drew them. He prepared
To sound an exotic fanfare,
Blowing his horn so forcefully
That none could follow readily.
But all this soon came to an end,
His fine music he did suspend,
The high-born exile, bowing low,
All his sweet charm he did show,
Greeting the king most courteously.
'Deus sal roi et sa mehnie:
May God above, in his goodness,
The king and all his household bless!'
Mark the noble-hearted, and all
The company on whom he did call,
Now thanked the lad most politely
As one they considered worthy.
'Ah,' they answered, one and all,
The great at court, and the small,
'De duin duze aventure,
Si duze creature:
May God grant a sweet future
To so sweet a living creature!'

The king now gazed at him, intently,
And summoning his huntsman, swiftly,
Said: 'Tell me now, who is this boy,
Who doth such eloquence employ?'
'My lord, he comes from Parmenie,
And he displays such courtesy,
Is so accomplished, that no child
Has ever so my heart beguiled.
He says that he is named Tristan,
And that his father's but a man
Of trade, a merchant, and yet I
Believe it not, for how, say I,
Could a merchant blessed with all
Of his affairs, have time, withal,

To devote to him the leisure
To make of him such a treasure?
And, Sire, he has many a skill
Look at this new art, if you will,
We bring on our return to court;
These hunting rites to us he taught.
See the clever order he sought
Us to keep, while thus we brought
The hart: our shape that of a hart.
Have you e'er seen such subtle art?
Regard, the head thus goes before,
The breast follows, then the four
Quarters, and so on, and so on,
Ne'er more elegantly twas done,
No finer show before our court.
Behold now, see what he has brought
Before you, this is the *fourchie*,
Such a thing did you e'er see?
Nor I, in all my hunting days.
Ere that, he showed us the ways
In which to "eviscerate" a hart.
And so well do I like this art,
That whene'er I do hunt again
Then indeed I'll ne'er be fain
To simply hack a deer in four,
Hart or hind, as I did before.'
He now the whole tale did extend,
From its beginning to its end,
Of Tristan, and his mastery
Of all the art of venery,
And how the quarry he had set
Before the hounds; from how they met,
To how they came before the king.
Mark listened there to everything,
Then had the boy brought to him,
And sent the huntsmen from him
About their duties, every man,

While, master of the hunt, Tristan,
Returned the horn that he did sound,
And then alighted on the ground.

All the young pages, meanwhile,
Hasten to this wondrous child,
And lead him, ceremoniously,
Arm in arm, before royalty.
Tristan, his elegance doth prove,
His form as if tis shaped by Love;
His mouth as crimson as the rose,
Within a countenance that glows;
The eyes bright, the hair unfurls
In tawny locks, that end in curls.
Hands and arms shapely, white,
His form perfection in its height,
His feet and legs serving to show
His beauty, and deservedly so,
Evoking such praise as one man
May well grant to another man;
His garments too, as I have said,
Fashioned nobly; from toe to head
So fine in manner and in bearing,
Twas e'er a joy to behold him.

Mark gazed at Tristan, and began:
'Friend,' he said, 'is your name Tristan?
'Yes, sire, Tristan indeed, *deu sal!*
'*Deu sal, beas vassal,*
God save you, and grant you blessing,
Fair vassal,' thus declared the king.
'*Merci*, my thanks, *gentil rois*. All
Praise to the high King of Cornwall,
You and your house,' cried their guest,
May you all, forever, be blessed
Among God's children, and thus be
Favoured for all eternity!'

All thanked him, again and again,
Amazed, and chanted this refrain:
'Tristan, Tristan li Parmenois
Cum est beas et cum courtois:
Tristan, Tristan of Parmenie,
How fair and courteous is he!
Mark spoke to Tristan once more.
'Tristan, this you must do,' he swore,
'Grant me what must not be denied.'
'Whate'er you wish,' the lad replied.
'Of my hunt you shall be Master!'
A burst of laughter followed after
From those around. 'Sire,' said Tristan,
'Dispose of me; I am your man;
What you command, that I shall be,
To the best of my ability,
Your huntsman then, both good and true,
Your huntsman, and your servant too.'
'Tis well, my friend,' King Mark replied,
'Tis done; by this all shall abide!'

Tristan the king's master of the hunt

NOW, Tristan had unwittingly
Come home, thus runs the story,
Though he thought himself still lost,
Abducted yet and tempest-tossed.
His father, all unknowingly,
Was noble Mark now, legally.
He acted well for the lad's good,
As there was need that he should.
Telling his house to be gracious,
To the child and prove generous,
Honour him with their company,
Ever treat him respectfully,
Grace him with their conversation;
And all of them, of every station

Were more than happy to comply.
So was Tristan, the good, say I,
Now a royal man, a treasure,
One the king beheld with pleasure,
Liking to sit with him apart,
Being drawn to him in his heart.
He loved to have him in his sight,
And often did so, to his delight.
Wherever Mark was, wherever
He went, Tristan made another.
King Mark took this in good part,
For he held Tristan near his heart,
And it pleased the king to see him.

Before a week had passed, the king
Chose to set himself to the chase,
With Tristan in some wooded place,
And with him many of the court;
To study Tristan's skill he sought,
In all the noble art of hunting.
Mark ordered the squires to bring
His own mount to give Tristan.
Tristan ne'er better e'er began
A chase, for it was strong and sleek,
As handsome as a man might seek.
A hunting-horn both sweet and clear,
Its tone melodious to the ear,
Mark found, and set it in his hand.
'Remember now,' he said, 'Tristan,
You are my huntsman good and true,
For hunting-lore we look to you.
Take your hounds and ride away,
And then post them at each relay,
Where'er you think that they should be.'
'No, sire,' said Tristan, 'courteously,
For that is not the way tis done,
But tell the huntsmen to be gone

And man the relays thus, and then
They may unleash the hounds again,
For they do know the country best,
And I know less than all the rest,
As to where now the stag may be,
And which way it may choose to flee.
They know all the best stations,
As for me I have ne'er ridden
Hereabouts and am a stranger;
I know not the hounds moreover.
'God knows,' Tristan, 'but you are right!
You'd ne'er be shown in a fair light;
The huntsmen themselves must go,
And order things as they best know.'

So the huntsmen then rode away;
Coupled their hounds; set each relay
In the places that they thought best,
And roused a stag, being so blessed,
A hart, of ten points, a creature
Fine and true in every feature,
And hunted the beast hard all day,
Till the hounds, at eve, brought it to bay.
At that very moment arrived
Mark and Tristan, who had contrived
Along with many a courtier,
All set for the kill, to thus appear.
The horns were sounded at pleasure,
In many a varying measure,
And were blown so sonorously
Amongst that goodly company,
That it did Mark good to hear it,
And many another man near it.

Now when they had killed the hart,
They called on their master's art,
On Tristan, now a familiar guest,

To show, there, as he knew best,
'Dressing the stag', from end to end.
Tristan said: 'Be it so, my friends!'
And then he made himself ready,
And I'm of the opinion, truly,
That there is little need for me
To repeat the same old story,
For just as he had done before,
He showed the huntsmen, once more,
All of the cutting, and the *fourchie*,
The preparation of the quarry,
Such that they declared as one,
That no man could better it, none;
This was the best practise they
Could e'er devise in many a day.
The king told them to truss the hart,
And then he turned round, to depart,
Taking with him this Tristan,
Who was now his own huntsman,
And so together, with all his train
Of courtiers, rode home again,
The horns preceding the *fourchie*.

From this time, a courtier was he,
For Tristan was beloved, you see.
The king kept company with him,
As did his household, and he them,
And he was generous and more
To all alike, both rich and poor,
And if it had been in his power
To oblige them at every hour,
Then he would gladly so have done,
And given pleasure to everyone;
God granted him, you understand,
To live but for his fellow man.
Whether laughing, singing, dancing,
Riding, running hard, or prancing,

With restraint, or yet without,
He was in there, at the shout.
He lived as all the others would
Him do, and as a young man should.
Whatever pleasure was begun,
Then of that company he made one.

PART III: Cornwall and Parmenie

Tristan the musician

NOW, it happened upon a day,
After supper, when folk do play,
That Mark was seated, listening
To a harpist's music-making;
The harpist was a master too,
The finest that any there knew.
He was a Welshman, and Mark
Did to his playing closely hark.
The harpist, he performed a lay,
Sang low, and sweetly did play;
And now Tristan of Parmenie
Came there and sat, at his knee,
Listening, with such rapture,
To the verses and the nature
Of that sweet music that had he
Been forbidden speech, utterly,
He could not have held his peace;
His delight did but increase,
While his heart did overflow.
'Master, he murmured, 'thus you show
Your skill here, and play correctly,
With longing in the melody;
Indeed the Bretons made the lay,
About my Lord Gurun, for they
Speak there of him and of his love.'
The man did silently approve,

Yet, all intent upon his art,
Given truly, and from the heart,
Acted as if he had not heard,
Till he was done, spoke not a word;
Then, turning, said: My child, this same
Music, how know you whence it came?
Do you, perchance, play a little?’
‘Why, yes,’ said Tristan, ‘fair minstrel,
I once was master of the art,
But now I take so poor a part,
I dare not play so before you.’
‘Ah, say not so, my friend, but do,
Come, play for us here, harp in hand,
The music of your native land.’
‘Then by your leave, if it is still
Your wish I play for you, I will.’
‘It is dear boy, now, harp away!’
When Tristan took the harp to play,
Twas as if shaped for his own hands,
And they were, you will understand,
Of such beauty none were finer,
For they were full long and slender,
Soft and smooth, and as white
As ermine is, and shaped aright.
Sweeping them across the strings
He toyed with a few haunting things,
Preludes, phrases, fine and sweet,
Breton sounds, but incomplete.
Then, taking up the plectrum, he
Tuned the strings to find the key,
Tightening one, slackening another,
Setting some higher, some lower,
And working skilfully at this,
Until they all were as he wished.
It was soon done, and Tristan,
The new minstrel, gently began,
His mind upon his art intent,

As notes flowed from the instrument,
Preludes, and then whole melodies,
Drawn sweetly and harmoniously
Making the strings thus to resound
With the beauty of his pure sound,
Such that all folk hastened to hear,
Calling to others to draw near,
None thinking they were too soon there.
Now Mark marvelled at this affair,
Listening closely and, in thought,
Considering how Tristan wrought,
And how he had so long concealed
The courtly skill he now revealed,
The virtuosity he now showed,
The strains that from his fingers flowed.
Meanwhile Tristan began to play
The opening notes of a fine lay,
That spoke of Graland the Fair
And his proud sweetheart, a sweet air,
That Tristan played delightfully,
In the Breton style, so skilfully
That many folk who stood around,
Forgot themselves, at that sweet sound;
Hearts and minds began to stray,
And thus desert their rightful way,
Such that many a varied thought,
Inwardly, to their minds it brought:
'Ah,' they mused, 'blessed be the one
Who sired such a noble son!'
But nimbly was each white finger
Fain to scatter notes, or linger
Upon the strings till the sweet sound
Penetrating the halls around
Filled the palace with its beauty.
Nor did his audience fail to see
His skill as well as hear, for they
Gazed ever closer as he did play.

And now the lay came to an end,
And the good King Mark did send
To ask him then to sing another,
For it had given such pleasure.
'*Mu volontiers,*' replied Tristan,
'Most willingly!' and he began
A second lay, full of yearning,
'*De la curtoise, Tispe*', meaning
Thisbe of Babylon, long ago.
He played this wondrously also,
Drawing out the melody,
In a manner so masterly,
That the harpist was amazed.
And his song, so sweetly phrased,
He would weave appropriately,
Melodiously, and rapturously.
He sang there, this talented youth,
Right marvellously, in truth,
In Welsh and in Breton also,
And in French and Latin, so
That no listener could say
Which was sweeter in its way,
More praiseworthy or pleasing,
His harp-playing or his singing;
And much discussion did begin
Of himself, and his true origin,
And his accomplishments, indeed;
Yet on one thing they all agreed,
That in their land they had never
Known such skill and talent, ever,
So clearly present in one man.
'What kind of child is this Tristan?
What this companion we have found?'
They murmured here, there, all around:
'Of all the children in the world
None can compare with this our pearl,

None can compare with this Tristan.’

When Tristan had finished his chant,
And ended the lay to his liking,
‘Tristan, come hither,’ cried the king,
‘May whoever taught you to play,
Be blessed in God’s sight this day,
And you with him, for you play well.
So let me listen, for a spell,
To your lays; at eve twere best,
When perchance you win no rest.
Say you will do this thing for me,
And yourself.’ ‘Sire, most willingly.’
Now come tell me, kindly say
What other instruments you play.’
‘No others, sire,’ the lad replied.
‘Surely, you must; come now, confide,
By the love that you bear for me.’
‘My lord,’ Tristan answered swiftly,
You need not have pressed me so
To tell you all; if you would know,
Despite myself, I’m bound to speak.
I studied, sire, week after week,
Stringed instruments of every kind,
Yet none so well that, to my mind,
I’d not wish to play them better.
I have spent little time however
Studying the art, though it’s been
Full seven years or so, I mean,
On and off, to tell you truly.
Tutors in Parmentie taught me
The fiddle and the organistrum;
The harp and the rote, Welshmen;
Two masters from Wales, indeed,
Of my harping did sow the seed;
While Bretons from the town of Lut
Taught me the lyre and sambute.’

‘What is this “sambute”, dear boy?’
‘The one that I do best employ.’
‘Now see,’ cried all the company,
‘God has truly heaped his bounty
Upon this child who, in His sight,
Grants such pleasure and delight!’

Mark now questioned him further:
‘Tristan, I heard you, moreover,
Singing in Breton, I do avow,
And Welsh, Latin, French, but now.
Do you know these tongues? ‘Yes, sire,
Though not as well as I desire.’
The courtiers came crowding round,
And those of them who had a sound
Knowledge of the tongues spoken
In neighbouring lands, did hasten
To try him, in one or another,
While to their speech he did answer,
In Norwegian or in Irish,
In German, or Scots, or Danish.
And many a heart there did long
For Tristan’s talents, in that throng;
Many there yearned to be as him;
Many a heart there invoked him,
Many a mind too in its fervour,
Held the wish both sweet and tender:
‘Tristan, would I resembled you!
Ah, Tristan life goes well for you:
Tristan, tis true, you are blessed
With all the gifts e’er possessed
In all this world by any man,
For all show here, in you, Tristan.’
Then turning to speak together,
Thus they expressed their wonder:
‘Hark!’ cried one, ‘Hark!’ another,
‘All the world must listen, brother,

For a fourteen year old doth know
All the arts taught here below!’

‘Now hear me, Tristan,’ said the king,
‘You can do each and every thing
Hunt, sing, and speak, as I desire,
In you is all I might require.
Let us then keep close company,
You will be mine, yours I will be.
By day we’ll ride out to the chase,
At eve, returning to this place,
Enjoy all that doth to it belong,
With harp, and fiddle, and sweet song.
What you know well, perform for me,
And my performance that shall be
To bring you all your heart’s desire,
Lively mounts, and splendid attire,
All that you wish for, that you see;
All this shall be performed by me.
My spurs, my sword shall you adorn,
My cross-bow and my gilded horn.
My companion, these I grant to you.
Take charge of them, employ them too,
And so be happy at our side!’

The exile, who did thus abide,
Became a favourite at court,
And ne’er before had any thought
To find such gifts in one so young;
Whate’er he did, whate’er he sung,
Seemed so pleasing and so good,
That, in their hearts, all, as they should,
Held for the lad deep affection,
And all showed him their devotion.
Yet no more now of this matter,
We must return to his ‘father’,
And speak of the Marshal, Rual,

Li Foitenant et li leal,
And of the effort that it cost
That lord to find the 'son' he'd lost.

Rual searches for Tristan

NOW Lord Rual, the Foitenant,
Had taken ship, in an instant,
And crossed the sea; being wise,
Well-stocked with vital supplies,
Resolving not to return before
He had news of his young lord,
And had indeed established where
The lad was, and how he did fare.
To Norway first the ship did go,
And he enquired high and low,
Seeking throughout all that land
For his ward, his dear Tristan.
In vain, for Tristan was not there:
Useless indeed proved that affair.
And so not finding him, perforce,
To Ireland then he set his course;
Yet there again he found no more
Sign of him than he had before.
And now his goods and gold ran low,
All set to fail him, so much so
That he was obliged to dismount,
And sell his horses, on account,
And send home all his loyal band
Of followers to their homeland.
He himself was but barely fed,
And went begging for his bread,
Continuing his wandering, though,
From kingdom to kingdom, so,
Begging still, from land to land,
Searching always for his Tristan.
Three years he did search, or more,

Till, from life amongst the poor,
His fine complexion and form,
Had so waned that no man born,
Seeing him, would have thought
That he had been a lord at court.
Lord Rual bore his load of shame,
As a vagabond bears the same,
Yet ne'er from want and poverty,
As doth happen with so many,
Lost his spirit, or his goodwill.

Now he, in the fourth year, when still
Upon his search, to Denmark came,
Wandering about in much the same
Way, searching from place to place.
Sent to and fro, by God's good grace,
He chanced upon those pilgrims who
Had met his Tristan, when the two
Came upon him, on the forest road,
As onward on their path they strode.
He questioned them at once and they
Told him that it was many a day
Since they had seen that very youth
Whom Rual had described, in truth,
Yet how they had allowed the lad
To journey with them, and still had
In mind his visage, flowing hair,
His mode of speech, his manner there,
His handsome form, and his attire,
A grasp of tongues all could admire,
And other skills they might mention.
Rual knew from their description
That it was he, and begged these same
Pilgrims to tell him, in God's name,
Where they had left him, of their grace,
Given their knowledge of the place.
And they replied to Lord Rual,

That it had been in far Cornwall,
Near the stronghold of Tintagel.
He asked the name of that castle
Over and over, and then did cry:
'Where doth this place called Cornwall lie?'
'Right next all Britain' they replied,
'Beyond there, on the farther side.'

'Ah!' he thought, 'Lord God I see
Now indeed you show your mercy.
If Tristan, as I've learned today,
Has sailed to Cornwall, then, I say,
Such did prove a homecoming,
For Mark, his uncle, is its king.
Now Lord God, but lead me there,
Command my will in this affair,
And grant me sight of my Tristan!
And may this news, if tis your plan,
Bring me joy, for as it seems good
It has cheered me now, so it should,
For this has given me heart again.'
'Holy pilgrims,' Rual said, then,
'The Son of the Maid be your guide,
For I upon my road must stride,
And all my powers of search employ.'
'May He thus lead you to the boy,
The Lord, who sets the world in play.'
My thanks!' he said, 'I must delay
No longer, but take leave of you.'
'Then, friend,' they cried, '*adieu, adieu!*'

Rual reaches Tintagel

THEN Lord Rual went on his way,
Never resting for e'en half a day,
Until he came near the sea-shore,
Yet had to rest there, for he saw

No vessel there, prepared to sail.
And yet at length he did prevail,
And sailed to Britain o'er the sea.
Through Britain he marched, steadily,
Such that e'en with the fading light,
He trudged on still, into the night.
What bolstered the strength he had
Was that hopeful news of the lad;
It gave him courage and so eased
His efforts, which never ceased.
When once to Cornwall he came,
He asked for Tintagel by name,
And found the road toward the place;
Again he took his way apace.
And came to Tintagel at last,
As the folk there were off to mass,
On the evening of the Sabbath,
And so he took that very path,
And before the minster did go,
Where people passed, to and fro,
As he gazed about here and there,
While he cast his eyes everywhere,
To see if he could find someone
Whom he could rightly question;
For, indeed, to himself he thought
'These people will hold me as naught,
They are all better dressed than I,
And I fear that any I ask, thereby
Will think it lowering to answer,
Any question that I might proffer,
About the lad, on seeing me
So beaten down by poverty:
Tell me, Lord God, what should I do!'

But now King Mark hove into view,
With all his splendid company.
The faithful Marshal sought to see

The object of his search but failed.
When on his way the king had sailed,
Returning from the Mass to court,
Then Rual turned aside, and sought
To speak with an aged courtier.
'My lord,' he asked him, 'is there here,
A page, perchance, a mere fledgling,
Who, tis said, attends upon the king,
And goes by the name of Tristan?'
'A page? There is a fine young man,
A squire indeed, who serves of right,
And soon is to be made a knight.
One who is versed in many an art,
One who has won the king's own heart,
With many an accomplishment,
Forever on courtly ways intent.
He is a fine young man, it's true,
With curling auburn hair, one who
Is an exile from his own land,
A youngster whom we call, Tristan.'

'My lord,' said Rual, eagerly,
'Are you a courtier here?' 'Indeed.'
'Why then, by your honour, my lord,
Add but this to what's gone before,
For you are kindness itself; but say
To the lad that, here, there doth stay
A poor man who would meet with him,
And speak with him, but assure him,
That I come from his own country.'
The other did so, accordingly,
He gave the message to Tristan
That here was a fellow countryman,
Who wished to see him, urgently,
And Tristan came there readily,
And the moment he saw Rual,
With a full mind and heart, withal,

He cried: 'Now may the good Lord
Be blessed forever, and adored,
Since, father, it is you I meet!'
Thus his father he first did greet;
And then he ran to him, smiling,
After that very first greeting,
And kissed that faithful retainer,
As a child should kiss his father.
And this was all as it should be;
This was his father, his child he.
Of all the fathers that ever were
Or live now, none has, I swear,
Treated in a more fatherly way
Their child than Rual did that day,
And Tristan clasped there no other
Than kith and kin, father, mother,
And all the friends he had ever
Known in one embrace, together.
'Oh, my good and loyal father,'
He cried, warmly, 'tell me whether
My dearest mother is yet alive;
And my brothers, do they thrive?'
Rual answered him, 'I know not
For cruel hardship has been my lot;
They were alive when last I saw
Them all, though they were troubled sore,
By your long absence, and since then
I cannot tell how they fare, again,
Because tis many a day since I
Saw any man known to my eye,
Nor have I set foot in our land
Since that ill hour, you understand,
When I experienced such distress
Through you, for I can say no less.'
'Ah,' said Tristan, 'my dear father,
Tell me the tale of all this matter!
Where now are all your fine looks gone?'

‘You have robbed me of them, my son.’
‘Then I shall give them back again.’
‘Then may we live, to see that same.’
‘Yes, my father, now come to court.’
‘No son, for such must not be sought.
I am not fit, as you can see
To mix with courtly company.’
‘But father,’ cried Tristan, ‘you must go,
‘My lord the king must see you so.’
Rual, the good and noble, mused
On what might pass, if he refused:
‘My bare poverty need not matter,
For in this state, or any other,
The king will yet be glad to view
My face, if I speak of his nephew.
And when I relate all to the king
All I’ve done since the beginning,
What I am wearing, to my mind,
Will seem to him finer than fine.’

Tristan brings Rual to the king

Now Tristan took him by the hand;
His clothes were but as they did stand,
His appearance as one might expect,
His robe was but a patchwork object,
Worn through indeed, and all threadbare,
In shreds and tatters everywhere;
Not even a cloak did he possess.
What he wore beneath was no less
Miserable, both soiled and holed.
And the hair that his head did hold,
And his beard, matted from neglect,
As if he were some poor reject,
Some savage banished to the wild.
Moreover the knight, as if exiled,
Went bare-legged and bare-foot,

All weather-beaten, scarred and cut,
As all must be whom fierce hunger,
Sun, and wind, and freezing winter,
Have robbed of their true native hue.
In such a state King Mark did view
Rual the Marshal, face to face.
'Tell me,' cried Mark, from his place,
'Now, what is this, who is this man?'
'My father, sire,' replied Tristan.
'Is this the truth?' Why, yes, my lord'
'Then welcome we must him afford:
He has our heartiest welcome now!'
And Rual thanked him with a bow.
At that, the gathering of knights
Came forward to see these sights,
With all the royal retinue.
All cried: 'Sire, sire, God save you!'
'*Sire, sire, deu sal!*'
Now you must know that this Rual,
Howe'er shabbily he was dressed,
Was, with regard to all the rest,
Faultless and splendid in physique
His form as fine as one might seek,
Princely in both limbs and stature,
Like a hero, in looks and nature,
Of ancient times; of goodly length,
His legs and arms, full of strength,
His walk stately, his whole frame
Was fine. Nor young nor old this same,
For he was in his prime, as yet,
When youth and age both do set
Their mark on life's maturity.
And then, in outer majesty,
He was many an emperor's peer.
His voice rang out loud and clear,
His speech was ever eloquent.
He stood amongst the complement

Of lords with noble assurance;
Nor was this his first audience.

And now a great murmur began
The knights, barons, every man,
Whispering to and fro, eagerly:
'Oh,' they all said, 'and is this he,
This the noble merchant we see?
Is this indeed the very man
We heard of, from his son Tristan,
Who speaks so of his excellence?
Yet like this he makes an entrance?'
They spoke together in this manner.
Then the good king gave an order,
That Rual be shown to a room,
Where fine clothes he might assume.
Tristan the matter soon addressed,
Had him bathed and had him dressed;
A cap was ready, his hand it met,
The cap upon his head he set,
Which suited Rual perfectly,
A handsome countenance had he.
None could have suited better,
For he then cut a noble figure.

Tristan now took him by the hand,
Lovingly, and, as he had planned,
Brought him again before the king.
Now Rual appeared more pleasing,
And delighted them, great and small.
The word soon passed among them all:
'See how fine clothes will transform
The man, see now his noble form!
Those clothes suit him splendidly,
And the merchant himself, you see,
Must be a most sovereign fellow;
He acts indeed as if twere so.

See his progress, oh so stately,
And then regard how elegantly
He displays those courtly robes;
His virtues too we may suppose,
As reflected in our Tristan,
For how in truth could any man
Have ever raised so fine a lad,
Unless a noble heart he had?’

They washed their hands, at a sign,
And now the king sat down to dine.
He seated Rual at his own board,
And honour thus did him afford,
Then had him served courteously,
Among the high nobility.
‘Tristan,’ he said, ‘yourself rather
Should now wait upon your father!’
And, take my word, Tristan did so,
To his father did honour show,
With all the due respect he should,
Revealing his own heart as good.
And, indeed, Rual feasted well,
Since to Tristan the service fell;
For Tristan acting as his host
Was his greatest comfort almost.
When they had all left the feast,
And the hubbub there had ceased,
The king now spoke to his guest,
And sundry questions he addressed
To him, concerning his journey,
His travels, and his native country,
And asked him to tell his whole tale.
And while Rual did so regale
The king’s ears, all there eagerly
Attended to the Marshal’s story.

Rual tells his tale

‘SIRE, said Rual, tis nigh on four
Years since I set out, or more,
And left my own fair land behind;
Yet, where’er I went, could not find
A trace of what still drove me on,
No ne’er a word from any one,
Of that toward which I did veer.’
‘And what was that?’ ‘Why, Tristan here.
Know, Sire, I have other children,
That, by God’s will, I’ve been given,
And I wish them as well indeed
As any man doth wish his seed;
Three sons, of whom if I’d had sight
One or other would be a knight;
But half the effort that I employ
Spent on all three as on this boy
Though he is not of my blood
Might have done a deal of good.’
‘Not of your blood? How can that be?
He is your son, so he tells me.’
‘No, Sire, there is no connection,
Twixt us there is no relation,
Other than that I am his man.’

A tremor passed through Tristan,
Who gazed at Rual, intently.
‘Then, said the king, ‘explain to me,
Why you have endured such strife,
Absent from your home, your wife,
So long a time, as you have done,
Given that he is not your son.’
‘That only God, Sire, and I know.’
‘Share it, my friend, if that be so!’
Kind-hearted Mark said in reply:
‘I wonder at it, so tell me why.’

‘Were I assured I’d not regret it,
And it were fitting to speak it
In this place,’ said the loyal man,
‘I could tell you, of this Tristan,
A whole tale, all free of doubt,
As to how this thing came about.’
King Mark, and his whole company
Begged him to relate his story,
All calling out to him, as one,
Addressing him, in unison:
‘Tell us, noble and faithful man,
Oh, man of truth, who is Tristan?’

The good Rual continued so:
‘My lord, it was some time ago,
As you, and all those who were here
In that time past, do know full clear,
That my own master, Rivalin,
Whose man I then was, and had been
Still, had it pleased the Lord to grant
Him life yet, who was His servant,
Heard of yourself such things that he
Gave all his realm into my hand,
To guard both his people and land,
And journeyed here to this country,
Since this was where he wished to be,
To serve; a member of your court.
And you know how he then sought,
To be with your sister, Blancheflor,
And won her favour, furthermore,
And how she fled away with him.
When to his home she came with him
And they were wed, she then tarried
(From my house they were married,
As I and others can attest)
There with me, for he now blessed
Me with her care (and thereafter

I treated her much like a daughter)
While he assembled an army,
And with others of that country,
Kinsmen and followers, set out
On a venture, as you no doubt
Have heard, and in that lost his life.
Now when the news came to his wife,
That lovely lady, learning all,
Into the deepest grief did fall,
A mortal woe, such that she
Struck to the heart, did instantly
Begin her labour, furthermore,
(Tristan stands here, whom she bore)
She gave their child life ere she
Herself was lost thus, tragically.'

Upon this, loyal Rual, struck
By deep sorrow, long time he took
Unable to conceal his grief,
But wept like a child for relief.
The eyes of all the others too
Moistened, and of them not a few
Were so moved by Rual's story,
That they too shed tears profusely.
King Mark was pierced to the heart,
And moved so deeply, for his part,
That tears, born of heartfelt pain,
Flowing from his eyes like rain,
Streamed all down his cheeks to wet
His robes until the ground they met.
Tristan was moved by deep distress
And he was grieved at heart, no less
By this, that a second father
He had lost, now and forever,
In this true and faithful man;
Once his father and guardian.

And now Rual the good, sadly
Troubled in spirit, told the story
Of the unfortunate child, of how
No carelessness he did allow
In nursing it, once the mother
Had borne it, and how thereafter
He ordered it be hidden away
In a secret place, day upon day,
While he had spread the rumour
That it had died with the mother;
And how, as I have said before,
He ordered his wife to be sure
To lie abed as long as fitting
And afterwards to go on telling
Everyone she had born a child;
And how, having them beguiled,
She had been churched with Tristan,
And thus had fulfilled all his plan,
And how the child was baptised there,
And named Tristan, by the pair;
And how then he'd sent him abroad,
How over his books the lad pored,
And learnt the speech of every land,
All the skills of tongue and hand;
Then how he'd left him that day,
And how he'd been stolen away;
How he himself had then set out
To find the lad, and all about
Had gone, and suffering endured.

Thus he the whole tale did afford,
From its beginning to its end.
From Mark's eyes did the tears descend
At one passage, while at another
His tears he was forced to smother,
A third compelled all there to weep
Except for Tristan who did keep

Silent, unable to lament,
So deeply was his own heart rent.
But whatever Rual that good man
Related, you must understand,
About Rivalin and Blancheflor,
The sad happenings gone before,
Seemed little beside the loyalty
That Rual had shown; all that he,
After their deaths, with such care,
As I have told you, enacted there
For the child, that went to prove
In this true heart, the truest love,
That any man had for his master,
His lady and their child thereafter.

Rual reveals his true identity

WHEN his tongue had come to rest,
King Mark then asked of his guest:
'My lord, is this whole story true?'
Rual, the good, a ring then drew
From his finger, a precious thing,
And handed it now to the king,
Saying: 'My lord, remember all
I have told you that did befall.'
Good and noble Mark accepted
The ring which he then inspected,
Old grief returning, in full force,
Troubling him with its fresh course.
'Alas,' he cried, then, 'sweet sister,
This ring belonged to my father
He gave it me on his deathbed,
I granted it you, in my stead;
Now I can believe this story.
Tristan, come near and kiss me!
I swear, if we both live hereafter,
Of right I'll be your foster-father.

God have mercy on your mother,
Blancheflor, and on your father,
Rivalin, and, beyond all strife,
Grant them an ever-living life.
Since this thing has come to be,
And my sweet sister's granted me
This gift, then if my life be blest,
Why, you shall be my happiness,
Until I too must seek my rest.'

He spoke again then to his guest.
'Now, dear friend, your help I claim;
Say who you are, and speak your name.'
'Rual, my lord.' 'Rual?' 'Tis so.
Then Mark recalled that he did know
Of this Rual, and had heard tell
Of how he was wise and faithful,
Unquestioning in his loyalty.
'Rual, li Foitenant?' said he.
'Indeed, my lord, the very same,
For men do call me by that name.'
At this Mark rose and went to him,
And kissed him in formal greeting,
And welcomed him with honour.
All the lords then followed after,
And kissed him also, one by one,
After their first surprise had run
Its course, and there embraced him,
With their courtesies did grace him,
Crying: 'Welcome, Rual, in worth
A mighty wonder on this earth!'

Rual was thus right welcome there.
And the king led him everywhere
By the hand then, and sat him down
Beside himself, and him did sound,
Yet speaking most affectionately,

While listening to the whole story,
Regarding Tristan and Blancheflor,
And of all that had gone before,
What Rivalin and Morgan had done
To each other, once they'd begun
Their conflict, and how it ended.
The conversation soon extended
To the king telling Rual, of how,
And with what great cunning now,
Tristan had first arrived at court,
And of the tale that he had taught,
That some merchant was his father.
Rual looked at Tristan harder:
'My friend,' said he, 'for love of you
I have in poverty, tis true
Offered up all my merchandise,
And in a most beggarly wise.
Yet it has ended well, and I
Now lift my hands toward the sky,
And to God my thanks I render!'
Tristan said: 'Tis clear, however,
That the story that I have heard
Is not such as will, at a word,
Bring me a wealth of happiness.
If I understand it, I am blessed
Here by a strange state of affairs,
That simply adds to all my cares.
For I've heard my father explain
That long since my father was slain,
And with that fact he disowns me,
And thus I must fatherless be,
I who had won my way to two!
Ah, father, and my belief, of you
I have been robbed, of both indeed!
I said my father was here, and see
That same man has cost me two;
Himself, and one I never knew!'

To this the good Marshal replied,
Having gazed at him and sighed:
'How now,' he said, 'dear Tristan,
There's naught in all that, my man.
Due to my presence, you are now
Of greater consequence, I vow,
Than you thought you were, and you
Have gained more honour from it, too;
And have two fathers, despite all;
My lord the king and I too call
Ourselves your father: he as I.
Take my advice, and be thereby
The true equal of any king.
Cease such talk, be up and doing.
Ask my lord, your uncle, here
To dub you knight, as our true peer,
And help you to your home again,
Since you are capable, tis plain,
Of managing your own affairs.
Your lordships, dispel his cares,
Declare that he should be as you,
And call on the king thus to do!'

The barons then answered as one:
'Sire, tis fitting and should be done;
Tristan is old enough and strong,
A well-made lad will not go wrong.'
'Tristan, my nephew, 'said the king
'What is your will as to this thing?
Is it your wish that I do so?'
'My lord,' he said, 'that you shall know.
If I were wealthy enough outright
To live in true style as a knight,
Not fearing to blush at the name,
Or bring on knighthood any shame,
Or feel the honour of chivalry
Was in some way debased in me,

Then gladly I would be a knight,
And set youth's idleness to right,
Directing it to worldly honour,
And seek to emulate my father.
For chivalry must thus begin,
They say, in childhood, if we'd win
A way to it, and continue long,
Or else twill ne'er be true and strong.
That, in the innocence of youth,
I have so seldom looked, in truth,
To pursue worth and chivalry,
Was indeed most wrong of me,
And causes me bitter regret,
Such that now I can ne'er forget,
That comfort and honour ever,
In truth, go but ill together.
And I myself have often read
That honour seeks out pain instead,
While comfort is death to honour,
If in one's youth one doth suffer
Its indulgence; and I say this,
Had I known a year ago that tis
My destiny to aim as high
As I have learned this day, then I
Would have sought to be a knight.
Yet since I did not, it is right
That I should now make that my goal.
For I myself am sound and whole
In body and will, and God aid me
Yet to fulfil my destiny,
And so achieve what I do will!

'Nephew,' said Mark, 'if you'd fulfil
Your aim, then think how it would be
If you were king of this country,
The sole ruler of this Cornwall.
For here sits your father, Rual,

And he loves you with all his heart,
Let him advise you from the start,
And be your good counsellor still,
So that you might achieve your will.
And then, my dear nephew, Tristan,
Think of yourself as no poor man,
Parmenie is yours, as you know,
And ever will Parmenie be so,
While your father Rual and I
Remain here beneath the sky.
My people, land, these and all
I have, shall be at your disposal,
This then shall be your revenue.
If you now turn that heart in you
Toward the highest distinction,
Then, as such is your ambition,
Employ what's mine to your gain;
Let Cornwall now be your domain,
Let my realm pay tribute to you.
Graciously, grant me so to do;
If in this world you seek honour,
Be rich in spirit, and I will ever
Grant you the wealth that you may need;
You wealth's an emperor's indeed;
Do not in yourself deny your state,
But highly now your own self rate,
And show the spirit, as you should,
That you avowed to me you would.
If I find in you the will to rule,
Then you will find in me the fuel
To feed your noblest aspiration.
Mine shall be, as twere, your nation;
Tintagel then shall ever be
Your storehouse and your treasury.
If you thus took the lead from me
In glorious generosity,
And I then failed to make all good,

Then all Cornwall surely would,
Have gone to rack and ruin, and I
Own not one thing beneath the sky.'

Tristan assumes his rightful role

The courtiers bowed in sympathy,
Honouring, with that courtesy,
His generous words, and all there,
The lords present at this affair,
Showing their approval, thereby,
'King Mark!' in unison, did cry,
'Your words reveal the noble man,
And grace the Crown; may your hand,
Your heart, your speech, rule us all!
Forever, be king of this Cornwall!'
Lord Rual, that most faithful man,
Alongside his young lord, Tristan,
Established themselves on a scale
That matched, in broad detail,
The magnificence so decreed
By the king, as they had agreed.
But lest I cause here confusion,
Regarding the father and the son,
Since age and youth ne'er do see
Alike in this thing, usually,
The young treating wealth lightly,
While the old do grasp it tightly,
One might ask how they arranged
Between them not to be estranged
But each achieve his satisfaction,
And exercise his right of action,
Such that Rual could observe
Temperance, and yet wealth serve
Tristan's ambition, readily,
And support his generosity.
I'll solve the riddle openly:

They behaved so respectfully
Toward each other, that neither
Sought to influence the other
In any manner, for good or ill,
That agreed not with their will,
Or with the rules of propriety.
Rual knew Tristan well, you see,
Trusting his character, in truth,
So he paid regard to his youth,
While Tristan deferred indeed
To Rual's wisdom and did heed
His counsel so, each played their role,
In aiming at a common goal;
The one wishing for no other
Than what both did will together.
These two, in all that must be done,
In mind and purpose were as one,
And thus as regards extravagance,
Age and youth had but one stance:
Pride gave way before good sense.
For neither sought to cause offence,
And thus they upheld, together,
Tristan's right to strive for honour,
Rual's care to seek a measure
Of restraint in expenditure,
Each staying true to his nature.

Tristan's preparations for knighthood

SO Lord Rual, and young Tristan,
Their preparations now began,
As means allowed, and hearts desired.
Thus clothes and harness they acquired,
Over thirty days, day by day,
For thirty knights in full array;
Tristan sought these men to sponsor
As his companions in honour.

If any ask about their gear,
And how splendid they did appear,
And how all this folk did create,
I'll take a moment to relate
Exactly what the story says;
And if I mar what it conveys,
Let them refute all that I say,
And relate it in their own way.
The gear was made by four powers,
Of which each separately dowers
With its own richness the whole,
So happily all reach their goal:
High Spirits was the first of these,
The second Wealth all set to please,
The third Discretion then to cut
And match these two, foot by foot,
Then Courtliness to stitch for all,
And make all fit for field and hall.
Each did separately feature
According to their proper nature:
High Spirits strove there to attain,
Wealth sought to grant that very same,
Discretion toiled and snipped away,
Then Courtliness did sew all day,
Stitching at their splendid vestments
And the rest of their adornments,
Their pennants and caparisons,
And many other fine additions
To all that doth adorn a knight.
Whatever sets the mark aright
Of chivalry on man or steed
Showed there so richly indeed,
A king might rightly thus appear,
And so be knighted in that gear.

Gottfried's literary excursus

NOW that the company are dressed
As I have said, in all their best,
How shall I start my description
And prepare their noble captain,
Tristan, for this ceremony,
Of knighthood, such that all gladly
Will listen to me, without fail,
And I do justice to the tale?
I hardly know what to tell you,
That might please and satisfy you,
And also might adorn the story.
In my lifetime, and before me,
Poets have shown how to render
Such worldly pomp and splendour,
So well that if I had a dozen
Times my fund of inspiration,
And had a dozen tongues to speak
In my one mouth, and each did seek
To utter as well as e'er I can,
I would not know, ere I began,
How to describe such splendour
Well enough to match or better
All that has been done before.
Courtly magnificence, what's more,
Has been so variously portrayed
And with such excess displayed,
I can say naught now I've begun
That is sure to please anyone.

Hartmann von Aue, oh, how he doth
Paint and adorn his tales, in truth,
Both within them and then without,
With words and sense, and all about!
How with eloquence he doth venture
To shape the form of some adventure!
How clear the pure and transparent
Crystalline words he doth present,

And so they will remain forever!
His words do steal upon you ever,
Gently, and do flatter a man,
And charm those that they rightly can.
Whoe'er fine language doth esteem
And all that fair and pleasant stream
Of words doth rightly understand,
Must grant the man of Aue, Hartmann,
His chaplets and laurel to wear.

But if Wolfram, friend of the hare,
Skipping and leaping on the heath
Of Poesy, seeks a flowery wreath,
Browsing there, he who doth scatter
Words about, all at a venture,
Let him accept whom we prefer,
Since we cannot with him concur.
We must be part of the judgement,
We who assist, with true intent,
By culling the flowers that we find
With which the twigs are then entwined,
To bring about that flowery wreath;
Why he seeks it we would know.
For if a man thinks it should be so
Let him leap up and add his flowers!
We shall judge them amongst ours,
And see if they grace it so sweetly,
That from the poet of Aue thus we
Must take it and bestow it on him.
But since as yet no man doth dim
His glory, or has a better claim,
Let us leave it be, in God's name!
We shall not let the wreath be worn
By any whose words are not born
Smoothly, purely, from the spring,
Their diction polished in everything,
Lest any who draw near at a pace,

Upright, and seated in their place,
Stumble there, and so take a fall;
Upon those folk we shall not call.
Those who spin wild tales to please,
Those who hunt the wild for stories,
Who with snares deceive their prey
And deceive dull minds, I say,
Who from trifles forge fool's gold,
For children or the foolish old,
And from some magic box unfurl
Dust that doth seem all made of pearl,
They but shade us with a bare branch,
Not with May's green living tranche
Of leaves, about the lovely bough.
The shade they cast doth ne'er allow
The traveller rest, nor soothe his eyes.
To tell the truth, naught can arise
From there, no pleasure from their art,
Nor aught that will delight the heart;
Their verse, the words that they employ,
Not such as noble hearts enjoy.
These hunters of some wild story
Needs send guides to accompany
Their tale, since none it would appear
Can unpick what they see or hear.
And we have not the time indeed
To seek a gloss on what we read,
And thus be forced at length to look
The matter up in some black book.

There's many another colourist:
Bligger von Steinach doth enlist
Words that are ever a delight,
As if ladies, at their work, might
Have woven them in silk and gold,
Embroidered thus, in every fold,
Trimmed with a classical border.

A gift his; sweet words so to order.
For they convey such sense to me,
I think them spun by some fairy,
And taken to their fountain where
She cleans and washes them with care;
They are so wondrously refined.
His tongue, as doth his shield I find,
Bears a harp and is doubly blessed
By these twin felicities, no less,
One his words his sense the other.
These two, both entwined together,
Harmonise with rare excellence.
What marvels of both sound and sense,
This master of words doth trace upon
His tapestry as he works thereon;
See how swift and sure he rhymes,
His couplets sharp as knives betimes,
Or clasped together as if they'd grown
As one; he bears some open book,
Some pamphlet there, if you but you look,
I think, like wings, on his cap there:
His words like eagles ride the air.

Now whom else might I select?
There are many midst the elect,
Many who eloquence have won,
Heinrich von Veldeke, for one.
What a gifted poet he did prove,
How sweetly he did sing of love!
How well he did express his thought!
I think that he his wisdom brought
From Pegasus' fount, to us below,
From which all eloquence doth flow.
Though he himself I never knew,
It seems the best of all those who
Were masters then, and since his time,
Award him the prize for, in rhyme,

Planting the first seed of that tree,
That is Teutonic poetry;
From which the bole and branches rose,
And the blossom sprang, whence those
Who write did draw the invention
And wit to master their intention.
And now this artistry has spread
Its boughs so far above our head,
And then been trained so variously,
That, seeking word and melody,
All pick blossom and spray at will,
And speak and sing as he did still.

Of nightingales there are many;
Though here I speak not of any
Who are not of this company.
So I shall say no more, you see,
Of them than I must ever say:
They are all skilled, in their way,
And sing their summer songs sweetly,
Most excellently and discreetly.
Their voices are clear and pleasing,
Raising every spirit and easing
Pain with joy that lifts the heart.
All unaware, without such art,
Of the world they live among,
Were folk but for this bird-song,
Sweetly reminding anyone
Who once has loved, of what has gone,
Things both delightful and good,
And many a feeling that should
Soothe and calm a noble heart.
When this sweet display of art,
Begins to pour forth all its joy,
Tender feelings without alloy
Awaken, and gentle thought,
Such beauty to the mind is brought

As these sweet warblers tell their tales.
'So tell us of the nightingales!'
They all know their calling well,
And of their longing they can tell
Sweetly both in words and song.
So who shall bear the banner on,
Now that their leader, I avow,
As was, Reinmar von Hagenau,
Who the secret of music bore
Sealed in his tongue, is no more,
And in this world leaves a silence?
I often think of his fair presence,
His sweet and lovely tunes I mean,
His melodies pure and serene,
Wondering where he found the same,
The many airs that I might name,
The countless melodies men sung.
I fancy it was Orpheus' tongue,
Whose music drew all things to him,
That sweetly through his mouth did sing.

But since he is no longer with us,
Then grant your true counsel to us!
Let some kind spirit speak, swiftly.
Who now shall lead the company,
With their whole retinue behind?
I think, perchance, that I may find
The one who must bear the banner;
One who of that art is master,
Walther von der Vogelweide,
How his song lifts ever higher
Clear and sweet above the heath!
What wonders now for those beneath!
How deftly he harmonises!
How varies its falls and rises!
(In that fair mode, the Dorian
I mean, from Cythera, whereon

And wherein the Love-Goddess
Doth all things guide, and all things bless)
He is chamberlain at that court,
No other leader need be sought!
He knows how to lead them well,
He well knows, for he can tell
Where to seek Love's melody.
May he and all his company
Sing sweetly, and forever sing
So truly that in time they bring
To joy their sad complaint, I say,
And may I live to see that day!

Gottfried seeks inspiration

I'VE spoken long enough to you,
Exercised your indulgence too,
Concerning all these good people.
For unequipped is Tristan still,
And I unsure how I'll proceed;
My wit shies from the task, indeed.
Without the mind's inspiration,
From which it gains its vocation,
The tongue knows not what to do.
Yet what has confounded these two
I will explain to you sincerely.

It is the same thing, precisely,
That troubles many thousands more.
If one who's spoken little before
Is faced with an eloquent man,
The very things that he did plan
To say are smothered on his lips.
I likewise now am in eclipse.
I read and have read ere now
So much eloquence I avow
That there is naught I can write

That might serve to give delight
Compared to this present style.
For authors now and for some while
Have proved so eloquent, I'm bound
To weigh my words and hope to sound,
In verse, as pleasing in my way
As other authors sound today,
And pen such things as shall move
As much as do those I approve.

And yet I know not how to start.
My tongue, my wit, my very heart
Are powerless to help me here;
The words I might have said, I fear,
Are rudely stifled on my lips,
I know not what to do in this,
Unless it is that thing I'm sure
That I have never done before.
With my heart, with pen in hand,
I will send my prayers, o'er land
And sea, to reach Mount Helicon,
Up to the nine-fold throne thereon,
Whence the fount doth pour below,
The fount that carries in its flow
The gift of words and wit entire.
Its lord, Apollo, and the choir,
The Camenae, the sirens nine,
Of the ear, whose court divine
Rules the gift, those who dispense
Their favours of sound and sense
To folk below, just as they choose,
Those who send the living muse
To other men so willingly,
Will not deny one drop to me;
And if that single drop I win,
Why, I shall then maintain my place
In poesy, when I show my face.

Though but a drop and no more,
It will to their old paths restore
My tongue and my imagination,
From which I stray, in this fashion.
With it my words I shall pass through
The glowing crucible anew,
Of Camenian inspiration,
And purify them in that station,
Refining them most wondrously
Like the pure gold of Araby.
May those same divine graces
Of Helicon's highest places,
From which the words, sweet, profound,
That echo in the ear resound,
That bring deep joy to the heart,
And make true poesy an art
Whose every word may prove as clear
As a rare gem, to the mortal ear,
May they deign to hear my prayer,
High above in the heavenly air,
Hear it as I implore them now.

Yet suppose that prayer they allow:
And I be granted all I seek
Regarding the words I do speak,
And I possess them in full measure,
Such that all ears will treasure
What I sing; and they, with their art,
Grant their shade to every heart,
That cast by the green linden tree;
And they flow so smoothly for me,
That at every step I sweep away
Each speck of dust that might stray
Across the track of my fair verse,
Which shall the flowery path traverse
Of shining blossom and sweet clover:
Despite all that, I'll not, however,

Turn my skills, though they be slight,
Towards what others had in sight
Who tempted thus, have gone astray
Truly, I'll follow not, I say.

For if I applied all my skill
To what Tristan has need of still,
All the equipment of a knight,
As, God knows, many an author might,
And I were then to tell you how
Vulcan the wise, with knotted brow,
Vulcan the famed, the fine maker,
The god of fire, the mountain-shaker,
Set his hand to Tristan's blade,
His greaves and mail swiftly made,
All that for a knight was needed,
Forged superbly, and succeeded
That by drawing, and incising,
The image of a wild Boar rising,
The emblem of boundless valour,
On his shield, and then moreover
Beat out his helm, and with intent
To signify fierce Love's torment,
Set high upon it, with his art,
The rendering of Love's fiery dart,
And how he polished every section
Of that armour to perfection,
And how, in the Trojan manner,
His clothes my Lady Cassandra,
That insightful woman, arranged,
And where twas needed, changed,
Ordering all there for the best,
Ensuring he was properly dressed,
With all her wit (for I have read
The gods above gave her, instead
Of mortal wits, heavenly powers)
And worked away at him for hours;

How much by all that could be won,
More than I have already done,
When I equipped his retinue,
For their investiture, say you?
Since I think, trusting you'll agree,
The fact of the matter to be,
That if you employ those two,
High Spirits and Wealth, and if you
Add Discretion and Courtliness,
Those four together will address
Your needs as well as any others.
Surely, Vulcan's and Cassandra's
Efforts ne'er clad knights in their day
In any more glorious a way.

Tristan is dubbed a knight

NOW since these four things are sure
To suit our rich investiture,
Let us our friend Tristan entrust
To the four, and here we must
Let them take thus the lad in hand,
And dress him as a noble man,
In the same rich style and manner,
Since naught else will serve him better,
As that in which his company
Have been attired so splendidly.
And let them lead Tristan to court,
And let the jousting-ring be sought,
He now in all his courtly dress,
As rich and fine as all the rest
Clad in the same brave finery
As the others in his company,
Apparel made by human hand
Not such, you will understand,
As we acquire at the start,
From the seamstress of the heart,

That which we name nobility,
That grants spirit and bravery
To a man, and in the giving,
Ennobles both life and living:
Such apparel was not, you see,
Granted to all that company
In the same measure as their lord.
For, as God knows, she did afford
To this most spirited Tristan
Clothes peculiar to the man,
Gracing him with bearing, manner
Beyond those of any other.
In virtue and in courtliness,
He was a cut above the rest,
Yet in the clothes, you understand,
Turned out by some human hand,
There appeared no difference.
The noble captain, in that sense,
Was dressed just like his company.

And so the lord of Parmenie,
Spirited, and ambitious too,
With his following, clad anew,
To the minster now was gone,
And received the benediction,
That it was proper to bestow.
Mark took Tristan's hand also,
And there bound on his spurs and sword.
'Tristan, my nephew, and my ward,
With this true, consecrated blade
A knight of you I now have made,'
He said, 'give thought to chivalry,
Your birth, and your nobility,
So that such thoughts you may find
Forever present in your mind.
Appear well-bred, shun all deceit,
Be truthful, and avoid conceit.

Ever be proud when you're before
The rich; be gracious to the poor.
Value your appearance, be sure
All women to honour and adore.
Be temperate and loyal too,
For, by my honour, I tell you,
That gold leaf and sable never
Suited shield and spear better
Than temperance and loyalty.'

With this he handed him his shield,
Kissed him and these words did yield:
'Now go forth, nephew, and may He
Above reward your chivalry,
For in His power all such doth lie,
Be courteous, and win joy, say I!'
Tristan then turned and did invest
With spurs, sword, shield, and the rest,
His companions, every one,
As with him the king had done;
To each commending honesty,
Temperance, and true loyalty,
Adding some considered word,
With which his own heart concurred.
Now, without delay, they went,
To ride in youthful tournament,
But how they broke from the ring,
What thrusts they dealt in so doing,
How many lances they did shatter,
Why, let the squires decide the matter,
Who helped to stage the whole affair,
And cleared away the remnants there:
I am no herald for their jousting.
Yet I will offer them one thing;
One thing I'll do here, willingly,
That is, I wish that they may see
Their fair renown and honour grow,

In every way; may God, also,
Grant them a goodly life indeed,
For every true and knightly deed!

Tristan and Rual return to Parmenie

IF any suffered lasting woe
Yet lasting good-fortune also,
Tristan suffered lasting woe
Yet lasting good fortune also.

As I shall now explain to you,
Tristan was bound between the two
Realms, of sorrow and success,
For in all he did, I will confess,
He seemed to instantly succeed,
Yet success did sorrow breed,
Even though these two possess
Little in common, yet success
And ill-fortune went hand in hand
In company, in a single man.
'God save you, so now say on!
With the ceremony undergone,
Had not Tristan achieved success
The honour of knighthood, no less?
Let us hear then; what sorrow now
Did he suffer, and fate allow?'
The Lord knows, one thing there is
Pains every heart, and so pained his:
For of his father's death he'd heard,
Rual conveyed how that occurred,
And this lay heavy on his mind.
Thus good and bad, here we find,
Success and sorrow; joy and pain,
To mingle in one heart were fain.
And all agree that constant ire,
Born by a young man, is more dire,

More relentless in its power, than
That same ire in an older man.
Over Tristan's honours a shadow
Was cast by this weight of sorrow,
A hidden grief so well-concealed
That to none other was it revealed,
His anger that Rivalin was dead,
And Morgan living in his stead;
This grief burdened him with care.
So Tristan did, silently, prepare
A barque with all rich furnishings
The richest to be found, fine things,
Helped by his loyal lieutenant,
The good Rual, the Foitenant,
Whose name yet stands for loyalty,
And then King Mark they did see.
Tristan began thus: 'My dear Lord,
I beg that leave you will afford,
So I might sail to Parmenie,
That I might, as you counselled me,
Discover how all things there stand
Regarding the folk and that land,
Which as you say is truly mine.'

The king, seeing his true design,
Answered: 'Nephew, it shall be so,
I grant you your request, although
I shall indeed miss you sorely.
Sail homeward then, to Parmenie,
Both you and all your company,
And whate'er you need from me,
Men and horses, silver and gold,
Take all, and in choosing be bold,
Take what you wish and you require,
Take what satisfies your desire.
And whoe'er is in your company,
Treat them all so generously

And with such comradeship that they,
Will serve you ever and a day,
And stand by you, most faithfully.
Dear Nephew, act continually
In accord with Rual's counsel,
Your loyal father here, who all
This time has acted loyally
Towards you, and honourably.
And if God grant that you prevail,
Given whate'er that may entail,
And you set your affairs to rights,
And with honour maintain your rights,
Then you must pledge me to return,
Return and I will pledge, in turn,
This one thing, which I will do,
And here's my hand upon it too,
That we will ever share this land
And all I have, as I have planned.
And if you're fated to survive me,
Then you'll inherit all, for, see,
I'll rest unmarried all my life,
Ne'er take to me a legal wife.
Nephew on me your ear you bent,
And you have heard all my intent;
Now, if you love me as I love you,
If your heart doth, as mine, hold true,
Then God knows we shall, I say,
Be happy for ever and a day,
And we shall spend all our lives so.
With this I give you leave to go.
May the Virgin's Son defend you!
Your affairs, and your honour too,
Are in your own hands, guard them well!
Without delay, the tale doth tell,
Tristan and his good friend Rual,
Took ship, and sailed from Cornwall,
Returning, from that far country,

To their own home in Parmenie.
If you would be pleased to learn
What welcome these two did earn
I will tell you all, that I did learn,
Of the welcome the two did earn.

So, landing then, ahead of all,
The honest and faithful Rual,
Stepped ashore, and then did doff
His cap and mantle and, once off,
He hastened to embrace Tristan,
Kissed him, and this speech began:
'Welcome in God's name, my lord,
And mine, to your country's shore!
Look here, my lord, do you see
This fair land set beside the sea?
Fine cities, many a stronghold,
Many fair castles you'll behold.
Well, Rivalin, your father, he
Left you this heritage you see.
If you are watchful and strong,
Naught you see shall e'er be gone
From you; I'll be your surety!'
With this, he turned, right happily,
Greeting now, with joyful heart,
The band of knights, each apart;
Welcoming them with eloquence
Saluting them, his joy immense.
Then to Canoel he led the way,
Surrendering to Tristan, that day,
All those castles, every city,
Every stronghold in that country,
Which he had held for Rivalin;
And with his own he did begin,
Which were his of ancestral right.
What more to say of this fair knight?
He had both rank and property,

Supporting his lord accordingly,
As a man of property and rank;
Tristan, and all, had him to thank
For all the effort and the care,
With generous heart, taken there,
More than any man e'er did see,
To please all Tristan's company.

But wait? What's this I am about?
I have forgot myself, sans doubt:
What was I thinking, by my life,
To have neglected the Marshal's wife,
Floraete, the loyal and virtuous?
How rank discourteous of us!
I'll do penance and make amends
To that sweet woman, my friends.
For she, the courteous and good,
Most temperate of womanhood,
She the worthiest and the best,
I know would not receive a guest
With polite words spoken merely
For effect, she meant, sincerely,
All she uttered, whene'er a word
Passed her lips, then all men heard
The goodwill that flew before it;
Her heart rose up to speak for it,
As it were borne on silent wings.
Her speech then, her fine feelings,
Were both in perfect harmony,
And both flowed forth delightfully
As she was welcoming her guests.
This Floraete, the fair and blessed,
The joy she felt, at heart, toward
The young man there and her lord
(Her son, Tristan, was the former)
I divine, from reading of her
Virtues and accomplishments;

And I divine too her intent
To thus bestow them, no small few,
As only the best of women can do,
Upon the child, and his company,
Showing them such generosity,
And honour, there was ne'er a knight
Had greater granted, as of right.

Thereon a summons went swiftly
Through all the land of Parmenie,
To all the lords and nobles who
Ruled both cities and castles too.
When to Canoel they were come,
Then they all made Tristan welcome,
On hearing the truth about the lad
That the tale tells, all you have had
From me; a thousand times did they
Rejoice to see him on that fair day.
And the country for Tristan's sake,
From its long sorrow then did wake,
And wondrously they all embraced
Happier thoughts, so long effaced.
One by one from Tristan's hand
They received fiefs, men and land,
And then swore fealty, to a man.

Tristan seeks Morgan in Brittany

BUT, throughout all this, Tristan
Suffered from the hidden pain
That in his heart did yet remain,
Of which Morgan was the cause.
All night and day, without pause,
It now tormented him, and so
He took counsel with his folk,
All his retainers and kinsmen,
And told them it was his intent

To hasten into Brittany,
There to approach his enemy,
Receive his fiefdom from his hands,
So that he might hold his lands
All of his father's territories,
And claim his kingdom openly.
As he had spoken, it was done.
He and his company were gone
From Parmenie, but well-prepared,
Since into danger now they dared
To ride, equipped as men must be
Who would confront an enemy.

When Tristan into Brittany came,
He chanced to hear that this same
Duke Morgan was about the chase,
On forest trails, from place to place,
And so he told his men to arm,
But so as to avoid alarm,
To wear their hauberks, and the rest,
Beneath their clothing that, so dressed,
Not one gleam of shining mail
Might the watching eye regale.
As he commanded, it was done,
And over his war-gear each one
Donned his travelling cloak once more,
And mounted, seeming as before.
Then he told the baggage train
To ride back silently again,
Stopping for none, as they went,
Next he divided the armed men,
Into two parties, and gave order
As to withdrawal of the larger,
To help the baggage train away;
While the other knights would stay
Behind with him, a mere thirty,
While those returning made sixty.

Now it soon chanced that Tristan
Caught sight of a stray huntsman,
And asked this huntsman where he
Might find the Duke; and readily.
He pointed out to them the trail,
And of this hint they took avail,
And, true enough, they swiftly found
Beside a stream, on open ground
A hunting-band of Breton knights,
Their raised pavilions, fair and bright,
Dispersed about them on the grass,
With greenery and flowers, en masse,
Inside and out; and near this band
The hawks and hounds close at hand.
The knights returned Tristan's greeting
With proper courtesy, on meeting,
And told him that their lord, Morgan,
Was hunting the nearby woodland,
Not far away, so on they went,
Swiftly fulfilling their intent,
For soon this Morgan came in sight,
With many another Breton knight
Each on his Castalian steed.

Tristan slays Morgan

AS they approached, though indeed
They were men of unknown purpose,
Morgan's greeting proved courteous,
And then his countrymen likewise,
Welcomed the troop without surprise;
And after all these formalities,
Tristan addressed Morgan with these
Brief words: 'Sire, for my fief I come,
And ask you, by right and custom,
That you invest me with it here,

For the title, that I have clear
Right to, should not be denied.’
To this the other soon replied.
‘My lord,’ said Morgan, ‘whence come you?
Tell me your name, sir; who are you?’
‘I am of the House of Parmenie,
For Rivalin he fathered me.
My lord, I now should be his heir.
Tristan, my name, I here declare.’
‘My lord, before me you appear
And accost me with an old tale here,
That is as well, by that same token,
Better forgotten now than spoken!
This needs no time to think upon.
Were you entitled to aught, as one
With claim on me, twould soon be met;
For naught would, were I in your debt,
Be denied you, as a man right fit
For honour where’er ere you sought it.
But we all know, for all tell the tale,
How Blancheflor fled and did sail
With your father, and what ‘honour’
Did thereby descend upon her,
And how their ‘friendship’ ended.’
‘Friendship?’ Tristan cried, offended,
‘What mean you?’ ‘I will say no more,
The matter stands now as heretofore.’
‘My lord,’ did Tristan answer then,
‘You leave me in no doubt, again,
As to your meaning, you claim I
Am born out of wedlock, thereby
Denying me my fief, and claim?’
‘Indeed, and many do say the same.’
‘You speak slander,’ cried Tristan,
‘I have ever thought when a man
Wronged another it was seemly
To act with sense and decency;

At least in words avoid offence.
Had you such decency and sense,
Given the wrong that you do me,
Such words as these you'd spare me,
Instead of stirring my grief anew,
Resurrecting old scores as you do.
Not content with slaying my father,
Now you declare my poor mother
Bore me out of wedlock! Dear Lord!
Many and many a noble lord,
I will not deign to name them now,
Placed their hands in mine, I vow,
In token of their homage to me!
Had they blamed me, though wrongly,
For the fault that you now claim,
Not one would have done that same!
Their lord, indeed, in me they saw;
They knew, in truth, not long before
My father, Rivalin, lost his life,
He made Blancheflor his lawful wife.
If I must prove upon your person
That that was so, then I, for one,
Am ready now to prove it so,
And witness its truth, blow by blow!
'Away!' cried Morgan, 'Damn the man!
Draw weapon against a nobleman?
You shall not fight with anyone,
Who has legal standing! Be done!'
'That we shall see': called out Tristan;
Drawing his sword then, he began,
Ran at him, and shattered his skull,
With a downward sweep, that sank full
Through his brain to still the tongue;
Then withdrew it, while Morgan hung
A moment there, with consummate art,
And plunged it deep into his heart.
So was the proverb proven true,

That they say, of debts yet due,
That they lie there, and never rot
Even when folk think them forgot.

A pitched battle ensues

NONE of Morgan's companions
Those brave hot-blooded Bretons
Proved of any use to him then,
For not one of those valiant men
Could come to his aid so swiftly
As to save him from difficulty;
None of them could save the knight,
Yet stood to arms as best they might.
And now they gathered quickly,
Though taken by surprise, ready
To take the fight to the enemy
Whom they attacked courageously.
They paid no attention to defence,
But pressing forward, from thence
They drove Tristan's forces out
Into the open, then raised a shout,
Topping the woods in its ascent,
A cry of mourning and lament,
Such that the news of Morgan's death
Rose through the air, in a breath.
Grief, borne aloft as if on wings,
Everywhere announced ill tidings,
O'er country and city told its tale
Of all their lord's death did entail.
To all, the evil news it brought,
'*Â noster sires, il est mort:*
Alas for our lord, he is dead!
Who will govern us in his stead?
What will become of this land now?
Gather brave knights, fulfil your vow,
Gather from every castle and town,

Fell these strangers, hack them down,
For all the wrong they've done to us!
And they, indeed, proved courageous.
Harrying their enemy's rear,
From here and there, they would appear,
Yet meeting with fierce resistance,
That served to keep them at a distance;
Tristan's forces fighting back,
And blunting their every attack,
While withdrawing in their flight
Until the baggage came in sight.
At last they joined their reserves,
And on a nearby hill, that served
As their defence, they spent the night.

Tristan's forces are surrounded

BUT in the darkness many a knight
Was added to the enemy force,
And, as the sun began its course,
Attacked them, alongside the rest,
Driving at their unwanted guests
As they defended furiously,
Losing many a casualty
Who fell there to the sword or spear;
Though such were soon shattered, I fear,
They proved short-lived in that affair,
Many were lost and broken there,
In the mass charges by both sides;
For the little army fought besides
With such courage they inflicted
Heavy losses as they evicted
The enemy from their ranks once more.
The squadrons on both sides bore
Increasing losses as time ran on,
They dealt blows to many a man,
And many a blow they too received,

Though Tristan's force went unrelieved;
Thus as their enemy grew stronger
His men's resistance could no longer
Match that strength as theirs declined.
Now the enemy could find
Fresh numbers and dispositions,
So that, bolstering their positions,
Before night, they had hemmed in
Tristan's company, deep within
A watery fastness, where they stood,
And their defence yet proving good,
Survived the assaults made overnight.
So the one army, penned in tight,
Was now encircled by the other,
As if by a fence, or ring of steel.

Rual comes to Tristan's rescue

HOW then did these strangers feel
Tristan, and his anxious army,
Facing a strengthened enemy?
What were his forces to do now?
How did they fare? I'll tell you how
The saw their risk of death abate
And were rescued, all but too late,
And thus enabled to break free;
And how they won their victory.

Since Tristan had sought to travel,
And received Rual's approval
To gain his fiefdom and then
Return at once with all his men,
Rual had been anxious at heart
Suspecting what, on Tristan's part,
Might follow, yet did not foresee
That Morgan might fall so swiftly.
Rual mustered a hundred knights,

And took the same path to the fight
That Tristan had, and in a while
Arrived in Brittany and, in style,
Learning how everything had gone,
Guided by rumour, he marched on,
Toward the site of the Breton siege,
And, once in sight of the enemy,
His men indeed proved no disgrace
Not one broke ranks there, or turned face,
Not on the flanks, nor at the rear.
With flying pennants they did steer
Towards the foe, their battle-cry
Rising o'er the ranks, on high:
'Chevalier Parmenie:
Behold the knights of Parmenie!
Then pennant after pennant raced
Through the Breton tents apace,
Causing havoc and destruction,
Thrusting the Bretons, in that ruction,
Through many a pavilion,
Dealing sore wounds, and driving on.
As soon as the besieged did spy
Their country's pennants gainst the sky,
They drove against the enemy,
Quickly reaching open country,
For Tristan launched a strong attack
Such that the Bretons now fell back,
Tristan's forces penetrating,
Thrusting, grappling, felling, slaying,
Amongst their ranks, on either side,
And what broke their will beside
Was the sound of that battle-cry,
Rising, from their foes, on high,
Tristan's men and Rual's army:
'Chevelier Parmenie!'
Thus ended Breton resistance,
They lost all heart, at that instant,

To form ranks, or attack again;
All will to fight against the grain;
But sought concealment or retreat,
Scurrying away in their defeat,
Hastening to the woods in fear,
Or to some castle that lay near.
Of all defences flight was best,
The surest against death's arrest.

Tristan must choose: Cornwall or Parmenie?

AFTER the utter rout had ended,
The knights of Parmenie descended
From their mounts, then pitched camp there;
Gave proper burial to their share
Of dead who lay upon the field;
Set the wounded who might be healed,
On litters; then struck camp, and turned
For home, their victory hard-earned,
Returning now to their own land.
Tristan had thus, by his own hand
Conferred upon himself his fief,
And his own separate territory;
Thus he was lord and vassal of one
From whom his father naught had won.
So he had set himself to rights,
And settled his affairs: 'to rights'
As regards material things,
'Settled' as regards his feelings.
His lack, of right, was set aright,
His injured pride was settled quite.
He had won his father's legacy
And held it incontestably,
Since none, as things now were, had claim
To aught that stood against his name.
This achieved, his thoughts returned
To Cornwall, with the victory earned,

The king's advice, his invitation;
Yet Rual's fatherly devotion
Engaged his feelings equally,
Rual who'd served so loyally.
His heart then was drawn withal
Towards both Mark and Rual;
All his mind was on these two,
And yet divided in its view.

Now some thoughtful man might say:
'How will Tristan find a way
To grant each man his proper due
By pleasing Mark and Rual too?'
Well, all do know that Tristan must
In seeking to reward their trust,
Renounce the one to seek the other.
Tell us then whose cause he'll further!
If he returns to Cornwall he
Will dent the pride of Parmenie,
And Rual too will be dismayed,
His spirits lowered, joy will fade,
Erasing all the good that came
And gave such pleasure to that same.
But should Tristan choose to stay,
Then he may never see the day
When he attains to highest honour,
And he must ignore, moreover,
Mark's counsel and invitation,
Mark, to whom he owes his station.
How can he act without self-harm?
Lord knows, he should feel no qualm
In returning; such we'll sanction.
For he must rise and seek position,
Gain in self-esteem and honour,
Seek, once again, the king's favour,
If he is to achieve success,
Fame, happiness, and all the rest;

He has the right thus to aspire
To every honour, and mount higher.
And if Fortune means to grant
Such a fate to this Tristan,
She has the power, now, so to do,
Since all his thoughts tend that way too.

PART IV: Lord Morolt

Tristan leaves Parmenie for Cornwall

NOW clever Tristan did address
His problem with all cleverness,
Deciding, most ingeniously,
To share himself out equally,
As if he had been cut in two;
And grant each father his due
As one divides an egg, for he,
Would grant each man separately
What was best suited to each one
In this and that one's situation.
If none of you have ever heard
Of such division, in a word
I'll tell you how the thing is done:
For it is clear to everyone,
But two things shape anyone,
Their possessions and their person.
These two support nobility
And worldly honour equally;
For if you separate the two,
Rank poverty will then ensue,
And the person disregarded
Is scorned and goes unrewarded.
A man becomes but half a man,
And the same is true of woman,
Though as persons they are whole,
Intact in body as in soul.

Be it then a man or woman,
Their possessions and their person
Work as one, their cause the same,
In giving form to one whole name;
But if one's parted from the other,
Then nothing will come of either.

Tristan embarked thus on his course
With a will, and talent, perforce,
And worked the business cleverly.
With meat and drink, and finery,
He ordered up many a fine steed,
Whate'er festivities might need,
And then a feast he did declare.
He summoned all the nobles there,
All those with power in the land,
And they all came at his command,
As friends do when they are bidden.
Tristan was thus prepared when
All were assembled, at his board.
On two youths he bestowed the sword,
Both Rual's sons, to be his heirs,
And the successors in his affairs,
And whate'er of all his treasure
He could grant in ample measure
Towards their dignity and honour,
He was as keen to grant them ever
As if they were sons of his own.

Nor were these two knighted alone,
On twelve companions they did call,
Including courtly Curvenal.
And then the courteous Tristan
Took his brothers by the hand
And led them ceremoniously.
On all of his retainers did he,
His vassals, and his kinsmen, call,

Of wit and knowledge; to the hall,
All those of sense and judgement,
Were summoned to hear his intent.

Behold, good sirs, now all are here!
Tristan stood tall, and they gave ear:
'My lords,' he said, 'on whom I call,
And summoned here, whom, one and all,
I shall ever be pleased to serve
In every way that you deserve,
Loyally and sincerely, each hour,
To the utmost of my power,
My kinsmen and my vassals bold,
By whose grace it is I hold
Whate'er honours God has given,
All who, victoriously, have striven,
With your aid, I have thus achieved
All that, ere now, my heart conceived.
Though God has granted it, I know
Your skill and courage made it so.
What more, then, can I add to this?
In these past days you have risked
All, shown generosity and honour,
In so many ways, that sooner
Shall this world end, I doubt not,
Than your faithfulness be forgot.
Friends and vassals sworn to me,
Here out of love or loyalty,
Be not displeased at what I say,
For I declare to you all today,
My father Rual bears witness,
That my uncle chooses to bless
Me with Cornwall's co-regency.
He shall forever unmarried be,
So I shall be thus his sole heir.
He wishes me to attend him there,
Where'er he is, where'er he goes.

I have resolved, since this arose,
And my heart is set on it, that I
Shall do as he wishes and thereby
Return to him, depart from you.
But all the revenues that are due
From these lands, I grant them all,
In fee, to my father Rual.
Whether in Cornwall aught goes ill,
Whether I die or live on still,
They shall remain his forever.
And his sons here, shall ever,
With his other children, bear,
And also any future heir,
True title to those revenues.
My vassals, such as I may choose,
And my right to the land, remain,
Thus I am sovereign in name,
Still, through all my years and days.'

At this there rose shouts of dismay,
Among all the assembled knights.
They were now disheartened quite;
Spirit and confidence were gone.
'Ah, my lord,' they cried, as one,
'Better had it been, we say true,
If we had ne'er set eyes on you,
And thus been spared all this distress
That casts a shadow on our success.
My lord, our faith and trust was all
In you, and you gave life to all.
Now the life we'd hoped to see,
Where we might live on happily,
Tis dead and buried, if you go.
Lord, you've added to our sorrow,
Increased it and not made it less,
We felt the surge of happiness,
But now that surge recedes again.'

As sure as death, this fact I know,
However deep the grief did go
In others' hearts thus, in Rual
It sank more cruelly, withal,
Though it was to his benefit,
For of it he'd see great profit.
Lord knows, he had ne'er received
A gift with such sharp unrelieved
Misery as he now accepted.

Now the thing had been effected,
And Rual was his viceroy there,
The revenues his, and his heirs,
All granted him by Tristan's hand,
Tristan now commended the land
And all its folk to God, and then
He took ship for Cornwall again.
With him his tutor, Curvenal.
Was the sorrow of good Rual,
And that of all his following,
Of all folk, indeed, some small thing,
Their heart's-sadness at their loss?
Believe me; they all felt the cost;
All Parmenie was full of woe,
And sad lament, and deeper woe;
While Floraete, the Marshal's wife,
Both true and faithful in this life,
Brought herself such heart-pain,
As a good woman will maintain,
When the Lord has granted her
A life of womanly honour.

Morolt demands tribute from King Mark

TO what fresh matter shall I turn?
Homeless for now, Tristan did learn,
On reaching Cornwall, of a rumour,

Troubling, and touching his honour,
That Morolt had come from Ireland,
Who, of Mark, tribute did demand,
Threatening single combat unless,
He received what was due, no less,
The payment from Mark's whole land,
From Cornwall, and from England.
The tale of this tribute runs thus,
For in the histories they discuss
The matter, and tradition doth tell
This same tale I have read, as well;
The king of Ireland, they relate,
Was named Gurmun the Fortunate,
A son of the House of Africa,
Whose father was a ruler there.
Now when the latter died, his land
Then passed into Gurmun's hands,
And those of his brother, equally,
Who alike was heir of that country.
But Gurmun, proud and ambitious,
Scorned to share a kingdom thus;
His heart insisted he should rule,
As sole monarch, and as his tools
He enlisted strong, steadfast men,
The bravest known in conflict when
The odds were high, the boldest knights,
And sergeants blooded in hot fights,
Whom he wooed by wealth and charm,
And then proceeded these to arm,
Then left his share to his brother
Of that land, and sought another.

He swiftly departed those shores,
Once having carefully secured
Leave from the sovereign power of Rome,
To win for himself a foreign home,
Gaining possession of all he won,

But conceding to Rome when done
Some right and title to that land.
He tarried not, you'll understand,
But left there, with his little army
And wandered over land and sea,
Till he came at last to Ireland,
Subdued the people, sword in hand,
And forced them, though unwilling,
To take him as their lawful king.
After which they helped him fight
Against their neighbours, and contend
So fiercely that Gurmun, in the end,
Through assaults, and pitched battles
Conquered all, lands, cities, castles;
And, in due course, his ruthless hand
Subdued all Cornwall and England.
At that time Mark was but a child,
And most unwarlike, like a child,
And, losing power, when all was done
Was but a tributary to Gurmun.

It aided Gurmun, at that hour,
Adding to his honour and power,
That he married Morolt's sister
And was much feared thereafter,
For Morolt held a dukedom there,
Yet desired some country where
He might be sole ruler, for he,
Was bold, spirited, and wealthy,
Strong in himself, and his dukedom.
Morolt was Gurmun's champion.

The nature of the tribute

WHAT tribute then did they demand
Be sent from Cornwall and England?
What then was Ireland to receive?

I'll tell you truly; would you believe
In that first year, such was their fate,
Of bronze three hundred marks in weight
No less, they had to send, then silver
In the second, and gold thereafter
In the third year. Then, in the fourth,
Morolt from Ireland came forth,
In strength, prepared for war or combat.
Barons and knights knelt where he sat,
The lords of England and Cornwall,
And before him he made them all
Draw lots as to which should render
Up to him their young and tender
Children, of those now capable
Of service, and agreeable
In appearance, as demanded
By the customary standard;
No daughters though, but only sons,
Of the latter thirty at once,
To be chosen from either land,
And with no way, you understand,
To oppose such degradation,
Than battle, nation against nation,
Or, perchance, instead of that,
Champions in single combat.

Now, the oppressed placed little hope
In open warfare, since their scope
For battle, much reduced at length,
Had led them to decline in strength;
While Morolt was harsh to excess,
Proving powerful and merciless,
Such that scarce any, eye to eye
With Morolt, dared risk their life,
No more than any woman would.
Once that tribute was made good,
Their sons despatched to Ireland,

When the fifth year was at hand,
At the solstice they were required
To send envoys, as Rome desired,
To that place to hear the demands
To be placed on all subject lands;
For each year did Rome proclaim
How those lands were to maintain
Justice, and thus dispense the laws,
And obey the statutes, every clause,
As was indeed the Roman manner.
And they were obliged, thereafter,
To live in strict accord with all
Such orders, at Rome's beck and call.
So every year, thus, the two lands
Sent tribute, meeting the demands
Of Rome that was, indeed, no less
Than their great and noble mistress;
Yet they honoured her, not as a due,
A debt that did to Rome accrue,
Required by custom or religion,
But rather by the will of Gurmun.

We now return to the story;
Tristan knew of the misery
That was visited on Cornwall,
And the harsh terms whereby all
Was now demanded in this way;
He knew the tribute they must pay.
And now he heard the folk lament,
Through all the land, as on he went,
Their country's suffering and shame,
In every stronghold where he came.
And when he had reached the court,
Tintagel's castle, as he had sought,
He witnessed now such tears and woe
As along the streets he did go,
That he was affected deeply.

The news of his arrival swiftly
Reached King Mark, and all were glad
Of it, at court, I mean as glad
As their sad state would allow.
For all the noble lords were now
Assembled there, as you have heard,
Though full of shame, to keep their word;
To draw lots all those peers were come,
With the loss of their sons to some.
And thus did Tristan find them all
All the great lords of Cornwall,
Kneeling all, but praying alone,
Openly there, and making moan,
Without shame, tears flowing free,
Body and soul in agony,
Begging the good Lord, that He
Toward their sons show mercy.

Now Tristan approached the court,
As the peers God's mercy sought,
And how was Tristan there received?
That may be answered, readily.
To tell the truth, their welcome showed
Less affection than he was owed
By that household, and the king,
Than it would if this dread thing
Had not brought such oppression.
Yet Tristan payed it no attention,
Making his way, resolutely,
Among the lords, but readily,
To where the lots were being drawn,
Before the lords, their looks forlorn;
There, Mark and Morolt were seated.
Tristan this crowd of peers greeted:
'My lords, to name you with one name,'
He cried: 'Are you not filled with shame,
Hastening to draw lots, and sell

Your noble blood, your land as well,
Bringing your country to dishonour,
With this burden placed upon her?
Brave as you were in other days,
Should you not seek your country's praise,
Earn for yourselves, and her, respect;
Should not her glory be your object?
Yet you lay your freedom, in defeat,
Abjectly, at your enemy's feet,
In paying this tribute of shame,
As you have ever granted his claim,
Yielding your sons to servitude
Who must, if you showed gratitude
To God, be your supreme delight,
Your very life itself, your light!
And yet not one of you can show
The reason for his doing so,
Or what enforces this demand,
Except the threats made by one man!
No other reason can you give.
And yet you cannot, as I live,
Find one among you who will set
His life at risk, and try if yet
He shall prevail against this man
Or glorious death defeat his plan!
And if he seeks to, and yet dies,
Heaven and Earth will then prize
His glorious death, for they value
Not this shame you bring on you.
If he the right though doth maintain,
And proves this unjust tribute vain,
By conquering, honour he'll achieve
In this world and God's grace receive
In the next, for eternity.
Fathers should give their lives to see
Their children live, since both are one,
Such God wills for father and son.

Yet it goes against God's command
To yield to such a sorry demand,
To surrender a child's freedom,
Giving your sons up to serfdom,
And rather than pursuing a feud,
Delivering them to servitude,
While you yourselves, living free,
Yet doom yourselves to misery!
If you now would hear from me
A course more fitting in piety
And honour, then choose a man
Where'er he may be, of this land,
Who is adept at single combat,
Willing to take the risk, at that,
As to whether fate doth bring
Him victory, or some other thing.
And do you pray, in God's name,
That the Holy Ghost grants that same
Victory, and brings him honour,
And protects him from dishonour,
So that he need show no great fear,
At the size and strength of Morolt here.
And in God let that man trust,
Who never will desert the just,
Nor any with right on their side.
Take counsel swiftly and decide,
How to avoid this sore disgrace,
And challenge the man to his face!
Dishonour your heritage no more,
And show your courage as before!

Tristan proposes to challenge Morolt

'AH, my lord,' they all cried, as one,
'It is not so with him, there are none
Who could face the man and survive!'
'Enough!' said Tristan, 'are you alive

To what you are, by birth the peers
Of kings and emperors? It appears
You mean to disown every son,
Barter your children, one by one,
Though they're of noble birth, to go,
Rendered by you, as bondsmen so?
If it is true that, to your shame,
Not one will fight in God's name,
Not one has the courage to so dare,
And fight in a just cause, to spare
You from the wrong that you suffer,
That burdens this land like no other,
Be good enough to leave to me,
And to God, this thing, and see
How my life I shall adventure,
Setting my youth at a venture,
And undertake this fight for you!
God grant it turn out well for you,
And so restore you all your rights.
And if it so happen in this fight,
That I should fare less than well,
Your cause, as far as I can tell,
Is harmed not, for if I should fall,
It will not change what would befall,
Neither averting nor incurring,
Increasing, nor diminishing
The sorrow that you all will feel;
This wound here I shall not heal,
All will stand as it did before.
And if it happens that I do more
And defeat him it is God's will,
God alone be thanked for it still,
For the man I am about to meet
Is a man who knows not defeat,
Whose strength and skill have stood the test,
Of war, as many will here attest,
While my powers are immature,

And I am not as suited to war,
Or deeds of arms, as need demands;
And yet this lies in my two hands,
And two means of victory I share,
God and justice will aid me there!
And they shall fight alongside me,
And there is a willing heart in me,
Which serves a man well in a fight,
So that if these three see me right,
I shall not yield to but one man,
Howe'er this matter shall stand.'

'My lord,' the knights cried together,
'May the holy power that ever
Maintains this world, its Creator,
Reward you in this endeavour,
For your aid and inspiration,
And the hope that you occasion,
With which you now fill us all.
Let us our counsels now recall;
Our deliberations proved in vain;
Had Fortune meant, it is plain,
To favour us, given the efforts we
Have made to end this misery;
For we of Cornwall have oft sought
To see him challenged, and fought,
We would not have so delayed;
Yet every attempt we have made
Every discussion, and every plan,
Has not brought forth a single man
Who would not sooner have seen
His sons as slaves than come between
That fate and this man; in such strife
Each man fearing to lose his life,
Facing this devil of a man.'
'How can you speak thus?' cried Tristan.
Many a strange thing comes about,

And many a time, despite all doubt,
Lawless arrogance is overthrown,
By lesser force, as is well known,
And it might happen here, indeed,
If a man dare but work the deed.'

Now Morolt was listening the while,
And was annoyed to hear this style
Of address from a lad like Tristan,
Who talked as fiercely as any man,
Claiming this duel so forcefully,
And was angered at heart, privily.
But Tristan continued to speak:
'My lords, all say what you do seek,
What is it that you'd wish me do?'
'Sire,' they answered, 'we say to you,
If the hope you have offered us
Could be fulfilled by duelling thus,
We would all wish you to proceed.'
'Is that your pleasure? Then, indeed,
Since all yet suffer endlessly,
And the mantle doth fall to me,
Then I'll take up this very thing,
I will try the matter, God willing,
And see whether God will favour
You through my art, and whether
Good Fortune will desert the man.'

Tristan does so

AT this, Mark tried to turn Tristan
From his purpose, with all his skill,
Thinking to win him from it still,
And so renounce it, for his sake.
Lord, he would not, and no mistake!
By neither entreaty nor command
Could he be brought to understand

What Mark desired, but stood fast,
And he would have his way at last.
Instead he went to where Morolt sat,
And continued his speech, at that:
'Tell me, my Lord, why you are here?'
'Why do you ask, my friend, tis clear,'
Morolt replied, 'why I am come;
You know full well, tis the custom!'
'Now list to me, you nobles all,
My lord the king, and each vassal;'
In his wisdom, Tristan replied,
'My lord, it cannot be denied,'
He said to Morolt, 'you say right,
I will admit the thing outright,
Shameful as it must ever be
This land has been a tributary
And, with England, to Ireland sent,
Without the law's due consent,
Harsh payment for far too long.
The weak gave way before the strong,
And after many a weary hour,
Were subjugated by your power,
With many an act of violence.
These countries lacking sure defence
Saw many a stronghold laid low,
And their inhabitants also
Suffered such heavy losses they
Were overwhelmed many a day
By oppression and injustice.
And the brave men who survived this,
Were forced into subjugation,
Since they feared for their nation,
And their own lives, and acted now
As circumstances would allow.
And so, as we still see today,
Injustice long has had its way,
And yet the people should by now

Have sought to scorn and disavow
Such tribute, by true acts of war;
For these lands are weak no more,
And great advances have they seen,
Growing in numbers here, I mean,
Natives and foreigners, both lands,
Have prospered greatly, as it stands,
Adding towns and fortresses,
Growing in status and in riches.
Now we must have returned to us
All that has thus been lost to us.
Our salvation depends on force!
Indeed there's no other recourse,
If we are to enjoy such gains,
Except to armies and campaigns.
As far as numbers are concerned,
Both lands are, as I have learned,
Well-peopled, thus we have no lack
Of men; the Irish shall give back
All that they have stolen ever,
And we shall go ourselves, together,
As soon as God will this allow,
And whate'er of ours they now
Possess, whether much or little,
They will repay us, every tittle,
If you but do now, as I say,
And follow my advice today.
And then our bronze we shall see
Turn to bright gold, for full many
A strange thing has come to pass
And none foresaw it, at the last.
The noble sons of these barons
May yet still regain their freedom
Those who are serfs now in Ireland,
Though they dream not tis at hand.
May God grant me yet that favour!
For I desire that, in His honour,

It be granted to me to stand
With my fair banner in my hand,
After our warlike sweat and toil,
And plant it there in Irish soil,
With these noblemen beside me,
And humble Ireland entirely,
And hold the very soil they tread,
And make that land our own instead!’

Morholt accepts the challenge

THEN spoke Morholt: ‘My lord Tristan,
I think it might profit a man
To think less on such a matter,
For howe’er men might chatter
We will not yield what’s ours by right,
To you or any other knight!’
Then he went and stood before Mark.
‘My lord, speak now, and I will hark
To you, and all those present here
To talk of their sons with me; I’d hear
Your opinion of what was said,
Is it your will, upon this head,
And your intention, every man,
That all shall be as lord Tristan
Has stated; is all then as he says?’
‘Yes, my lord, his speech conveys
Our will, whate’er he says or does
Is policy, and approved by us.’

Morolt spoke out: ‘Then you do break,
Your oath to my lord, and forsake
The terms agreed on by us all!’
The courteous Tristan stood tall:
‘Not so, my lord, I fear your tongue
Runs away with you, tis wrong
To question thus men’s loyalty.

Not one noble here doth seek
To break his oath of allegiance.
Tis an agreement, in this instance,
Was sworn between you this while,
And it shall be upheld, its style
That, of goodwill, from out the land
Of Cornwall here, and from England,
To Ireland tribute would be sent,
Given both countries free consent,
Or that instead they would defend
Themselves, by battle, to the end,
Or by single combat if so wished.
They will be granting you justice
If they are willing so to do,
And thus redeem their pledge to you,
Either by duel or by battle.
My lord, with yourself take counsel,
And tell me which one you prefer,
For whichever of the two you, sir,
Decide on, single combat or war,
Then count on us, as on the law,
To meet you any time from now.
For spear and sword, I here avow,
Shall now decide twixt us and you.
Choose then, my lord, twixt the two,
And tell us what our course shall be,
This tribute we like not, you see.'

Morolt spoke then: 'My lord, Tristan,
I came in some haste to this land,
And thus do know what I desire.
I've not the men I would require
To offer a warlike defence.
Indeed, when I came from thence,
I sailed with but a token force,
And I arrived here, in due course
With a most peaceable intent

Towards this double realm, content
To do as I have done before;
Little did I dream then of war.
I foresaw naught of this indeed
With folk with whom I'd agreed
To depart with my rightful due
And with goodwill, yet now you
Ask that which I'm unready for.'

Tristan replied: 'If you wish for war,
Sail back home to your own country,
Summon your knights, in assembly
Muster your forces, then return
And see what fate we each may earn.
If in six months that be not done,
Expect us there, for we shall come!
We have been told, this while before,
That acts of war will be met by war,
And force will be countered with force.
If men are left with no recourse
Except to be humbled in this way,
And noblemen made slaves, I say,
And this be deemed right and fair,
We'll trust to God in this affair,
And that our past humiliation,
Will be visited on your nation.'

'God knows,' cried Morolt, 'Lord Tristan,
Your words might trouble any man,
And fill his heart with dread, indeed,
If he'd ne'er been forced to pay heed
To such boasting. An empty threat;
I'll escape, I trust, unscathed yet!
I've found myself often enough
Where pride spoke, and heard such stuff.
But tis in my thoughts that Gurmun
Has little to fear, when said and done,

From your strength, and your banners.
And, what's more, this lack of manners,
This insolent scorning of your pledge,
Since I refute all you allege,
Will not be heard of in Ireland,
Since we'll decide it, man to man,
We'll confirm in the duelling ring
Who owns the right, in this thing,
Whether it is I, or it is you.'

'With God's aid I shall prove all true
That I have said,' spoke out Tristan,
'And may He grant death to that man,
Whoe'er he be, that is in the wrong.'
Drawing his glove, he strode among
The lords, and offered it to Morolt.
'Gentlemen, now,' he said, 'take note,
My king and all the nobles, hear;
I declare before all men here,
The terms on which I undertake this,
That there might be no injustice:
Neither my lord Morolt nor he
Who sent him, no man rightfully
Had aught from Cornwall or England!
This I will prove with my own hand,
And confirm before God and men,
On his lordship's person; again,
I say, he has this long while past
Subjected these realms, first and last,
To the greatest pain and degradation
That e'er fell upon these nations.'
At this, there broke out, instantly,
Fervent shouts from all and sundry,
Many a tongue to God did cry,
Calling out to the Lord on high,
Begging Him, in what must follow
To remember their shame and woe,

And free them from this oppression.
Yet Morolt offered no concession,
Despite all their cries of concern,
Not a tremor did all this earn,
It failed to touch the man deeply.
He took the glove, disdainfully;
A seasoned dueller, he accepted
The challenge as twas presented;
And returned it, with proud mien,
And a hostile countenance, I ween.
Such a venture was to his liking,
For he felt quite sure of winning.

The combatants arm themselves

NOW the terms had been declared,
In order that they might prepare
They parted until the third day,
When the barons made their way,
With a mass of folk, toward the shore
Where those two would go to war,
Such that this field by the sea,
Was crowded through its entirety.
Morolt now sought to arm himself,
And for this duel equip himself.
I'll not blunt my fair intention,
Nor burden my imagination,
By painting, meticulously,
A portrait of his weaponry,
Of Morolt's armour, or his strength,
While he has been praised at length
For his valour and his bravery.
Full many a warlike quality
Was granted him in every land;
Acclaimed he was, on every hand,
For he was famed for his stature,
His courage, and steady nature,

For all that makes a perfect knight.
Let this suffice. I know, aright,
He was in this, as he was ever,
Able his full strength to deliver
According to the knightly code,
Whether alone or whether he rode
To battle; for all the skills of war
He had displayed so oft before.

But good King Mark was troubled
By the advent of this duel,
As deeply as might a woman
Suffer sore heartache for a man.
He was as certain as could be
Tristan would die, and would gladly
Have continued thus to endure
The tribute, as had been before,
If the duel might thus be waived
And the lad from death be saved;
But that was not how matters sat,
Thanks to this, and thanks to that,
Thanks to the tribute, and the man.
Now, the as yet untried Tristan,
Unused to any such encounter,
Clad himself in chain-mail armour,
As best he could, without delay.
Thus, in the customary way,
Body and limbs were encased
In one suit, o'er this he placed
Steel pieces of the finest work,
Twin greaves, and a strong hauberk,
Wrought with all the maker's skill,
Bright and gleaming, to serve his will.
Then Mark, as Tristan's noble friend,
Bound on his spurs, though he did bend
To do so with a grieving heart;
He tightened all the straps, an art

Most needed to make all secure,
With his own hand, and furthermore
Added a surcoat, finely woven,
Its design all carefully chosen,
Its every seam and fold wrought
By fair hands that had sought,
With peculiar intricacy,
To execute it marvellously,
Upon their embroidery frames,
Weaving perfection in that same.

Oh, what a story I might tell,
Of how it suited him so well,
How admirable and handsome,
He looked once the thing was on!
Except that I would not lengthen
This whole tale; were I to mention
All that each matter might deserve,
It would prove a surfeit of words.
You must accept the facts to be:
He graced the surcoat admirably,
And granted it more lustre than
The coat conferred upon the man.
Howe'er splendid it was, and fine,
In no way, in form or design,
Did it equal in worth the man
Who wore it now with such élan.
Mark girded on a sword, above,
One that his very life did prove,
His heart and soul and salvation
From Morolt, and on occasion
From many a danger thereafter.
It was so true in its stroke, surer
In its course than any other,
Stronger than many another,
Nor up nor downward did it bend,
But sped on straight toward its end.

A helm they brought, both fine and bright,
Gleaming with a crystalline light,
The strongest helmet and the best
That any noble there possessed;
Nor do I think that, among all,
Was e'er a better in Cornwall.
And on that helm, Love's fiery dart
Was rendered, with most subtle art,
That presage of a future love;
A presage love's effects would prove
True, within him, in their might,
However lengthy the respite.
Mark set the helm on Tristan's head.
'Nephew, I now lament,' he said,
'Before God, that I e'er saw you!
If I must suffer pain through you,
Then I will be driven to forsake
All things that do happiness make.'

A shield for Tristan now was brought,
Which a well-practised hand had wrought
With all the skill at its command.
It had been burnished too, by hand,
Till it possessed a silvery gleam,
To match the helm and it did seem,
As did his mail, to shine with light,
As bright as a new mirror might.
A wild boar was embossed on it,
A masterpiece of workmanship,
All cut from sable black as coal.
The shield too, to complete the whole,
His uncle took up in his hands,
And hung upon the splendid man,
It suited him, shaped to his side
As if with his own form it vied,
So that it would leave him never,
And he would wield it thus forever.

Now that the excellent Tristan,
That fine and laudable young man,
Had mail and helmet, greaves and shield,
The four one perfect whole did yield,
As if the armourer had sought
Each one to heighten and support
In its beauty, the rest, in turn,
And be beautified in return,
Such that the splendour of the four
Could ne'er have been matched so before.
And what of the greater wonder
Hidden there, within and under,
To the peril of his enemies?
Was that of less account than these
Rare works of craft, the outer layer?
I know, as sure as day, though fair
The outside, that the form beneath
That these outer forms did sheathe,
Designed and wrought with artistry,
Was made with greater mastery,
To form the pattern of a knight,
Than ever outward beauty might.
The work of art that lay therein
Was, in conception and within
Its form, contrived to be most fair:
How the art of its maker there
Shone forth! Arms, legs and torso,
Were fine and noble, and did show
As both well-formed and elegant.
And his chain-mail, in its intent,
Became him marvellously well,
Fairer than any man could tell.
His steed was managed by a squire,
No finer a mount in the entire
World; not Spain or anywhere.
It was not sunken here or there,

But deep and broad in the chest,
And quarters, fine in all respects,
Strong in the flank, and in the joints,
A perfect mount in all its points.
Its legs and hooves too showed
It met the needs of all who rode
To battle, the hooves were rounded
The legs straight and well-founded,
And long, their form as true and clear
As those of the finest wild deer.
Of excellent line, about the chest
And forward of the saddle, the rest
Was as it should be in a charger.
A white trapping was thrown over,
Shining there as pure and bright
As ever did the clear daylight,
Matching thus the armour's gleam,
Of a length and ample, I deem,
To cover all smoothly and evenly:
It fell just short there of the knee.

Now that Tristan was splendidly
Equipped for battle, as chivalry
Demanded, and the duelling code,
Of those who to such battle rode,
Judges of men and armour, all
To whom such judgement did fall,
Agreed that of armour and men
None had seemed so fair to them.
Yet howe'er fine seemed the sight,
It was much finer once the knight
Had mounted and then, lance in hand,
He and his charger took their stand;
Then did it make the fairest sight
Then was there no more splendid knight,
All above the saddle, and below.
Shoulders and arms did freely flow,

While his knowledge was complete
Regarding how to keep his seat
In the saddle, both well and firmly.
His legs fell stylishly and neatly,
At his steed's shoulders, strong
And straight, and smooth as wands.
Man and steed suited each other
So well, so sweetly went together,
That you might think them born
As one, and bred so, night and morn.
In the saddle he sat right well,
Kept the saddle, whate'er befell,
Smoothly, and deliberately,
Showing his true nobility.
And yet howe'er agreeable
Tristan might be, howe'er noble
His presence was, outwardly,
His spirit was of such quality,
So noble, within, and so fine,
A finer spirit you'd not find;
No nobler soul, nor finer nature,
Beneath a helm did ever feature.

The duelling ground is a sea-girt isle

NOW they chose the duelling ground,
An isle the sea did full surround,
Yet near enough still to the shore
For all to watch what lay in store.
It was agreed as well that none
But those two should set foot thereon
Until the finish of the duel,
And this rule was adhered to well.
Accordingly two skiffs lay there
To ferry them both to the affair.
Each could ship a man and steed
All fully armed, and they indeed

Were full ready now and waiting.
Morolt boarded one, and taking
The sweep, sculled himself across.
Arriving at the isle, he lost
No time in making the skiff fast,
This once done he mounted at last,
Took hold of his lance and rode
At full tilt, and in splendid style,
The length and breadth of the isle,
Wheeling and galloping his steed,
And, as if it were a jest indeed,
Upon the ground would advance
Feigning light blows with his lance.

Tristan too prepared his course,
Saw aboard his lance and horse,
With all the gear he needed now,
And took up his stance in the bow.
'My king,' he cried, 'my lord Mark,
Fear not for my safety for, hark,
All of this is in God's good hands.
Our fears are vain, and if, perchance,
All goes better than men foresee?
Our good fortune and our victory
Would not be due to my poor skill,
But to God's power and his will.
Forgo then all your fear and dread,
For I may conquer here instead.
On me this affair weighs lightly,
So let it be with you, and rightly,
Take heart! Be of good cheer, with me!
For all will be as it must be.
Take heart now and howe'er this end,
To Him in whom I trust, commend
Your land and people, and may He
Be at the duelling ground with me,
And there grant justice to his own!

God must conquer, or be shown
To suffer in me a sore defeat:
His the judgement, when we two meet!’

Tristan is wounded in the thigh

HE gave the sign of the cross at this,
And with God’s name upon his lips
Set his skiff moving, toward the isle,
While many prayed for him the while.
Many commended his life and body
To God, and blessed him fervently,
Many a hand sent sweet farewell
After him; hearts wished him well.
Once he stood on the further shore,
He cast the skiff adrift once more,
Then swiftly he mounted his steed.
Morolt rode up to him, at speed.
‘Tell me, now, what the meaning is,
Of setting your boat adrift like this?’
‘For this reason,’ he answered then,
‘Here is a boat, and here two men.
Certain it is, unless both fall,
That one will need no boat at all,
Given the victor who lives on
Needs but the one boat to be gone,
The one you brought to this isle.’
‘Clearly we shall not reconcile,’
Said Morolt, ‘and this duel must be;
Though if we parted amicably,
If you renounced it even now,
And you agreed to then allow
The tribute, granting me my due,
Twould bring good fortune to you;
For I shall be sorry, in a breath,
To be the one to cause your death;
No knight that I e’er had in view

Has pleased me as greatly as you.’
But the good Tristan thus replied:
‘The tribute must be set aside,
If now between us you seek peace.’
‘No, no’ answered the other, ‘cease
To speak about such terms as these,
You shall not set us thus at ease;
Take my word for it, we’ll not be
Friends thus; the tribute goes with me!’
‘Then we are parleying in vain,’
Tristan replied, ‘speak not again.
Since, Lord Morolt, you seem so sure
Of killing me, then let us war;
Defend yourself if you would live,
No other warning shall I give!’

Tristan now wheeled his steed about,
And then, returning straight, set out
Upon a charge against his foe,
Gripping his lance, levelled low,
With all the ardour he was able,
Of which his heart was capable.
With legs that beat much like wings,
His spur-clad ankles rowelling
Into his charger’s flanks, he sped.
Should the other linger, instead,
He whose life was now at stake?
He did as all men do who take
Their decision and choose prowess.
At his heart’s bidding he, no less
Ardent, wheeled about, so turned,
And then more rapidly returned,
Raising, then lowering, his lance;
And, like the devil, did advance,
Horse and rider thus came upon
Tristan, swift as any falcon,
While Tristan was just as eager.

Thus they flew at one another,
With equal fire and bravery,
Breaking their spears, both equally,
Shattering them against the shields,
As each a thousand fragments yields.
Now both drew their swords, and fought,
And, hand to hand, each other sought;
Mounted, engaged as savagely
As God Himself might joy to see!

Now I've heard all the world declare,
And in the tale it is laid bare,
That this was single combat; all
Are agreed it did so befall,
And that there were no more than two.
And yet I shall now prove to you,
That it comprised a general action
Fought between faction and faction;
And though I found it not, tis true,
In the tale of Tristan, I will for you
Render the thing believable;
For the true version, I recall,
Has always said, and doth so still,
That Morolt in both power and will
Possessed the force of four strong men.
Such was his fourfold faction then;
While for the other side did fight,
First God, and secondly true Right,
Thirdly, their vassal and their man,
The faithful and steadfast Tristan,
While the fourth was Willing Heart,
Who ever plays a wondrous part
In direst need; from four and four,
Though at deployment I am poor,
I quickly two clear factions make,
Or even a battle amongst eight.

No doubt, at first, you thought the thing
Foolish, on hearing me saying
That two armies, on but two steeds,
Did there contest the field. Indeed,
But now you see how, on each side,
Four knights beneath one helm did ride,
Or else a fighting strength of four,
Did gainst another go to war.
So now then, without more delay,
Each faction sought to win the day;
Morolt, with the strength of four,
Fell upon Tristan, with a roar
Like thunder; that limb of Satan
Struck so savagely at Tristan
That he almost robbed the knight,
At a stroke, of sense and sight.
Had not his solid shield instead,
Protected both his helm, and head,
For Tristan had acquired the skill
To thus defend himself, at will,
Both his helm and his chain-mail
Would have proved of slight avail,
And both had failed to halt Morolt,
Who had then dealt a mortal blow.
Indeed, Morolt forced him to bow,
So harsh a rain of blows fell now.

Thus he continued; hammering,
Until that rain of blows did bring
A moment when Tristan did yield
A little, and thrust up his shield
An inch too far, his guard so high
That Morolt struck him in the thigh,
An ugly blow, near fatal, there,
Laying both flesh and bone full bare,
Piercing through leg-guard and mail,
So that the blood from him did sail

Into the air, and stained the ground,
And moistened all the isle around.
'How now?' cried Morolt, 'will you yield?
For now you learn, upon this field,
No man when he is in the wrong
Can e'er maintain a cause for long;
The wrongness of your cause is seen,
If you would live, you must, I ween,
Consider how; for that deep wound
Must end in death, and that full soon;
Except through me, no other man
Can provide the cure, no woman;
The blade, with deadly poison bated,
Upon your flesh its greed has sated.
No physic, no physician can
Save you from dying, other than
Ireland's queen, Iseult the Elder,
She who is my own dear sister.
Versed in many a herb is she,
To medicine she holds the key,
And she alone knows all the art
Of healing, and may such impart.
If she should fail to cure this thing,
Then you must be past all healing.
If you would but take heed of me
And grant the tribute due to me,
I will ask the queen, my sister,
To work, for you, all in her power;
And I will share with you entire,
In friendship, all you may desire,
Deny you nothing you may wish
If you but grant my right in this.'
Tristan answered. 'Neither my right
Nor yet my honour in this fight,
Will I yield for your sister or you.
I have brought the freedom of two
Lands with me, freely, in my hand,

And with it leave, you understand,
Else must I suffer, with each breath,
Far greater hurt, and e'en my death.
No single wound leads me to yield,
Nor thus relinquish this fine field.
For we must now fight on anew,
Naught's decided twixt I and you.
The tribute means your death or mine,
There is no help for that, I find!
With this he launched a fresh attack.

Morolt is conquered

NOW, some will cry: 'Alack, alack,'
As I myself must, I avow,
'God and true Right, where are they now?
Why are Tristan's friends not here?
Will they aid him, and now appear?
The company are punished sorely,
Yet they arrive with help unsurely,
They must come soon, or be too late;
Let it be now, to baffle fate.
For here are two set against four,
Both fighting for their lives, and sure
To fail; if aught these two shall save,
Aid must come soon to help the brave.
But then God and true Right rode in,
Granting just verdict, and did begin
To achieve their friend's salvation
And his enemy's destruction.
Now they were ranged equally,
Four against four, company
Riding there against company.
And so Tristan, as soon as he,
Felt the presence of his friends,
His courage rose, on which depends
All victory; to him they brought

Strength and fresh encouragement.
He spurred his steed with fierce intent,
And galloped on at such a pace
That, meeting his foe, face to face,
Filled with joy and battle-lust,
In his ardour, his steed he thrust
Against the enemy with such force
He felled the foe, both man and horse.
No sooner had Morolt recovered
And sought to mount, than the other
Was fast upon him and, in a trice
Struck his helmet, and so did slice
It from his brow he sent it flying.
At this Morolt, on strength relying,
Rode and struck at his steed, wholly
Severing the foreleg above the knee,
Through the trappings, nigh a span;
It sank to the ground, neath Tristan,
While Morolt, after his swift attack,
Shifted his shield onto his back,
Having cunningly leapt aside,
While his experience he applied,
Retrieving his helm, ere he sought
To mount again, for once, he thought,
He was astride and donned his helm,
He might attack and overwhelm
His enemy; but though he found
His helmet, and covered the ground,
Enough to seize his horse's bridle,
And thrust his left foot, little idle,
Into the stirrup, and with his hand
Grasp the saddle, he found Tristan
Had overtaken him, who struck so
Savagely across the saddle-bow,
Morolt's heavily mailed sword-hand,
With sword, and all, fell to the sand.
As it fell, Tristan struck a blow;

Deep in the skull, the blade did go,
Such that when Tristan then withdrew
The sword again, to strike anew,
He left a fragment of the blade
Embedded in the wound he'd made.
And this would bring Tristan later
To great fear, and greater danger,
For, as I'll show you, in a breath,
That sliver near caused his death.

Morolt was now the doomed party,
A weak and powerless adversary,
Who tottered and swayed, reeled and fell.
'How now!' cried Tristan, 'now come tell
Me, Lord Morolt, can you make sense
Of this; where now is your defence?
Your wound is deep it seems to me,
And seeks to harm you seriously.
Howe'er my wound may be, within,
You'll need some potent medicine;
All that physic Iseult, your sister,
Ever heard of, if you'd recover!
God who is e'er the just and true,
Has judged your injustice and you,
And through me, as his instrument,
Grants justice to the innocent.
May he keep watch yet over me!
May arrogance learn humility!'
Then he strode towards Morolt,
And grasping his sword, he smote
With both hands, and from his foe
Severed the head, with its cap also.

Queen Iseult the Elder preserves the sword-fragment

TRISTAN turned to the landing-place,
Which Morolt's skiff did yet embrace,

Boarded the boat, and made for shore,
And when upon dry land once more,
He heard great joy, and great lament;
Lament and joy, and tis my intent
To tell you why: for all, you see,
Who were heartened by his victory
A blessed day had dawned, and they
Now clapped their hands, and then did pray,
Praising God with their lips, and sang.
There many a hymn of triumph rang
Out loud; yet for the foreigners,
Those poor accursed Irish strangers,
The day but brought them tragedy,
And they keened now as fervently,
As the others yet prayed and sang,
And, in deep sorrow, wrung their hands.

As these grief-stricken Irishmen,
Sorrowing now, with loud lament,
Prepared to board, and sail once more,
Tristan drew near them on the shore.
'My lords,' said Tristan, 'go gather
The tribute, bear it to your master,
That you upon that isle will find.
My uncle, King Mark, has consigned
To you this gift, thereby; go, say,
If he should choose, upon a day,
To send his emissaries here,
Seeking tribute, if they appear,
We shall not let them leave our lands
And voyage back, with empty hands.
They with such honours will return,
Whate'er it costs us, let him learn.'
Now all the while Tristan did hide
His blood be-drenched wound, in pride,
Concealing it beneath his shield,
From the foreigners on that field;

A fact that saved his life indeed
In days to come, so fate decreed.
For they saw naught, and so returned
Not knowing of the wound he'd earned.
But now they left him, and crossed
To the isle, to seek him they'd lost,
Found there a mutilated man,
And bore the remnants to their land.

Now when to Ireland they came,
They took up that gift, the same
Three parts, the head, the torso,
And then the severed hand also,
Setting the three together, as one,
So that no further harm be done.
They carried them to their master,
And all the message I gave earlier
As I related it to you,
They repeated to their lord too.
I imagine now, and would expect,
As one has every right to expect,
That King Gormun the Fortunate
Was far from happy at this state
Of affairs, nor had cause to be,
For now, in this one man, had he
Lost heart and spirit, hope, and then
The fighting-strength of many men.
The banner of his authority
Which Morolt once had borne, freely,
Through all the neighbouring lands,
Had now fallen from his hands.

As for Queen Iseult the Elder,
The sister, her grief was greater;
Her mourning now, and her lament,
Proved fiercer, and more vehement.
She, and Iseult the Fair, her daughter,

Were anguished, one and the other,
And they lamented loud together.
You know the heart-rending manner
In which women grieve when they
Are thus bereaved; on such a day
They gaze upon the dead intently
As if bent on grieving wholly,
So that the sorrow in their hearts
Might grow greater ere it departs.
These kissed now the head and hand;
Which had conquered many a land
Subjecting folk to oath and vow,
As I've described to you ere now;
Then they eyed the head-wound nearly,
Above, beneath, closely and sadly.
And now the wise and watchful queen,
Spied the steel splinter lodged between
The bone and tissue, deep embedded.
She sent for pincers which, inserted,
Allowed extraction of the fragment,
When worked within, at full extent.
Sadly, the queen and her daughter,
Examined the nature of the splinter,
Then took the thing up, carefully,
And placed it in a reliquary,
Where later, you will understand,
It brought great peril on Tristan.

So now the lord Morolt is dead.
If I were to bring upon your head
The tale of all their grief and sorrow
We would still be here the morrow.
What use? Who could portray it all?
Morolt was, as those are who fall,
Borne to his burial and then
Placed in the grave, like other men.
Gurmun mourned, and then did he

Send messengers with his decree
Through all the Kingdom of Ireland,
That every woman and every man
Should watch for any living thing,
From Cornwall, any mortal being,
Though that thing be woman or man,
And slay the thing, and cleanse the land!
This law was firmly set in place,
And none who was of Cornish race
Could journey there, free of strife,
Without it costing them their life,
No matter what surety they gave;
Till many there had found a grave,
Many a mother's guiltless child,
Killed, that the land be undefiled.
Yet all of it was wrought in vain,
For Morolt had been justly slain.
Not in God his trust he placed,
But in his strength, and he had faced
His foes in violence and pride,
In which state he lived and died.

PART V: 'Tantris' in Ireland

Tristan sails for Ireland to seek a cure

I turn now to the tale once more;
Once Tristan had gained the shore
Without his steed, without his lance,
Crowds of folk did then advance,
Mounted or on foot, towards him,
In their thousands there to meet him.
Never had king or kingdom known
So joyous a day, for he alone
Had brought an end to all their shame
And misery; all said the same,
That he had brought them great honour.

As to the wound which he did suffer,
They sorrowed over it, and grieved,
Yet thinking he had but received
A small hurt, they thought it naught,
And thus to the palace they brought
The man, and unarmed him straight,
Saw to his comfort, then did wait
On his ease, as each might suggest.

But now the doctors, the very best
To be found throughout the land,
Were summoned and their command
Of medicine they demonstrated.
Yet to what end? For their belated
Treatment saw him none the better.
Though they delivered to the letter,
In application of their learning,
It proved of no advantage to him.
For the venom was such, they found,
It spread within, and all around
His body, till a ghastly hue
Tainted his flesh; yet naught they knew
Allowed the poison's removal;
He seemed unrecognisable;
Moreover the site of the blow
Gave off an evil stench, one so
Noisome life became a burden,
And his own body wearisome.
Yet his grief was greater when
He realised that it gave offence
To the many friends who stood
By him, and thus he understood
More and more, the whole meaning
Of Morolt's earlier warning;
Yet he had heard, in days past,
How lovely Morolt's sister was,
And of Iseult's accomplishments,

For all men paid her compliments.
There was a saying in those lands,
Those neighbouring on her Ireland,
To which the people would refer,
Whenever her name did occur:
'Iseult the fair, Iseult the wise,
Shining bright as morning skies.'

Now Tristan, that care-laden man,
Knowing of this, conceived a plan
That aimed at his recovery;
For he saw it could only be
Through the skill of one, I ween,
Who of the subtle arts was queen.
Although he still was full of doubt
As to the bringing it about.
He summarised it, in a breath:
In this matter of life or death,
There was little to choose between
Placing his life with the queen,
Or this death-like extremity.
He set his mind accordingly,
On setting sail for Ireland,
To seek a cure in foreign land,
If God but willed that it might be
That such were now his destiny.
So for his uncle now he sent,
And told him all his true intent,
As friend to friend, and how that he
Would seek, for his infirmity,
The cure Morolt had spoken of.
Mark liked it, and he liked it not.
Yet one must suffer as one may
The trouble met upon one's way;
To choose the lesser of two evils,
As fate dictates, proves ever useful.
Together they agreed his course

Of action, how he would perforce
Effect his journey, how they might
Supress the news of sudden flight
To Ireland, and spread the rumour
That he had simply left however,
For Salerno, to take the cure.
When this was settled, and much more,
They summoned to them Curvenal,
And told him all that must befall,
Their common purpose and intent,
And Curvenal gave his consent
To accompanying Tristan,
To live or die his loyal man.

A barque, with a small skiff as well,
Was made ready, as evening fell;
Food and water were laid aboard,
And all else for the voyage stored.
Then, with a quiet show of grief,
Tristan was set on deck, in brief,
In such great secrecy that none
But those who witnessed the thing done,
Knew of his journey; at the end,
He did his own affairs commend
To Mark, with all his retinue,
Requesting that he should eschew
All thought of dispersing aught
Of his, till certain news arrive
As to whether he was yet alive.
His harp he did request also,
That being all he asked for though,
All of his own he sought to take.

Then they upon their course did make,
And soon they were well out to sea,
The crew of eight had faithfully
Pledged their lives, and in God's name,

Sworn not to swerve from the same
Obeying Tristan's every command.
When they had parted from the land.
King Mark, I know, gazed on the sea,
With little pleasure; twould seem to me,
This parting pierced him to the heart,
Bone-deep, and yet, despite the start,
To both the voyage brought happiness
And a large measure of success.
Now when all the nobles heard
The tale of what had thus occurred,
The suffering that then prevailed,
When Tristan for Salerno sailed,
To seek a cure; his state on shore,
And now at sea, then not one more
Tear could they have shed had he
Been their own child in misery.
And since Tristan had suffered this
Sad mischance all in their service,
It moved their hearts more deeply still.

Tristan reaches Dublin

TAXED to the utmost of his will
And strength, Tristan sailed to Ireland,
Steered by the experienced hand
Of his master-mariner, and when
The ship drew near to land again,
Tristan told him to set a course
For Dublin, the capital, perforce,
Being aware that the wise queen,
Dwelt there; there she must be seen.
They sailed swiftly to the city,
And soon could discern it clearly.
'See, my lord!' cried the master,
'Tis the city, give your order.'
'We'll drop anchor here,' Tristan

Replied, 'and not too near the land,
And wait here, in the fading light,
And spend a part thus of the night.'
So they dropped anchor there and lay
Offshore that evening, and when day
Was done, then in the dark of night
Tristan had them heave to, in sight
Of the city, and this being done,
Once the ship had taken station
Half a mile from the harbour,
Tristan gave a further order.
He asked now for the poorest clothes
In the barque and, dressed in those,
Had them remove him straight away,
Into the skiff and, with scant delay,
Hand him enough food and water,
For three days or four, thereafter,
And set his harp down in the boat,
And prepare to set the skiff afloat.
As he desired, the crew wrought all.

And then he summoned Curvenal,
Calling, before him, all the crew,
Addressed him, and the others too:
'Friend Curvenal, I ask you to take
Charge of the men and, for my sake,
Care for the ship and them, full well
And when you are home again, tell
Them to keep this, our secret, safe.
And reward them all, in good faith,
That they might say no word to any.
Go, return to Cornwall swiftly.
Greet my uncle, say I yet live,
And may be cured, if God give
His aid, and say to him that he
Should not sorrow now for me.
Say, if I'm destined to recover,

I'll return ere the year is over;
And that if my affairs go well,
Some that news will swiftly tell.
But tell both the court and country
I died of my debility;
Say that I perished on the way.
Take care that my followers stay
In company, and do not disband.
See that they wait, and are on hand,
Through all the time I named to you;
But if no news has come to you
Within the year, treat me as lost.
God keep my soul, and at all cost
Look to your own self, set sail
You and my men and, without fail,
Go, safe and sound, to Parmenie,
And settle there, in our country,
Beside my dear father, Rual.
Ask him, from me, to care for all,
And through you, as he loves me,
Repay my love for him, faithfully,
Treating you handsomely and well,
And then to him my wishes tell,
Concerning those who have served
Till now; for, as they have deserved,
So he must thank them and, in this,
Reward each man for his service.
Thus, dear folk,' he reached an end,
'To God your lives I now commend;
Set me adrift then take your way,
And for God's mercy I will pray;
Tis time that you put out to sea,
Sailing, now, for life, and safety;
For tis high time, fast fades the night,
And o'er the sea twill soon be light.'

Tristan is helped ashore

AND so, with many a lament,
Many a pang of grief they went,
And left him there, tearfully,
Adrift on the turbulent sea.
No parting ever pained them so.
Every faithful man doth know,
Who e'er had a faithful friend,
And swore to love him to the end,
The sore distress Curvenal knew,
And yet, though he was ever true,
Heavy of heart, and suffering,
He kept a true course in parting.
Tristan was thus left there alone,
Drifting to and fro, to moan,
In anguish, and in misery,
Till dawn broke brightly o'er the sea.
Now when the Dubliners caught sight
Of the craft, in the morning light,
All pilotless, upon the wave,
They sent a crew at once to save
Any that might yet be aboard,
And learn what aid they might afford.

Now, while they were drawing near,
They saw naught, but yet could hear,
As they were swiftly approaching,
The sweet strains of a harp, floating
O'er the water, to their delight.
And then a voice did there alight,
Of one who sang, enchantingly,
So that they thought it wondrously
Strange, in truth a marvellous thing;
And as long as that voice did sing,
They remained so, without moving,
While he harped, slowly drifting.

Yet the momentary pleasure,
Lasted not, for them to treasure,
For the sounds that were relayed,
Music hands and lips had made,
Issued not from deep within him;
His heart was not in the playing.
To music's nature it doth belong,
That no artist can play for long
Unless their heart is in the task,
Though little it may seem to ask;
For, though it is a common thing,
That cursory mode of playing,
Heartless, soulless, unmelodic,
Tis scarce worth the name of music.
Though fair Youth made Tristan,
Divert her, with voice and hand,
By harping and singing for her,
It seemed, for that poor sufferer,
A vile torment and martyrdom,
To which his artistry had come.

And now, as Tristan ceased to play,
The other boat beside his lay.
Its crew grappled his vessel's side,
And sought to see who was inside.
When they at last had sight of him,
And the sad condition he was in,
It troubled them that such music
Could be made, such sweet magic,
By his poor hands and lips, alone;
Yet, as one who should be shown
Fair greeting, for his fair playing,
They greeted Tristan, while asking
What fate he'd met with on the sea,
Seeking an answer, courteously.
'All shall I tell you, said Tristan,
'I was a minstrel, and so a man

Versed in the ways of the court;
When to be silent, when to talk,
Or play the lyre, or the fiddle,
The harp, or the rote right well,
Or smile, or tell a tale in jest.
I held my station with the best,
As all who are at court must do.
But I desired more than my due,
Having gained sufficient wealth
More than was good for my health.
I took up trade, and that has been
My undoing, as you have seen.
A rich merchant was my partner,
We filled a ship with whatever
Cargo pleased us, there in Spain,
And set sail for Britain, for gain.
Yet, once we were out at sea,
A band of brigands, furiously,
Attacked our vessel, then they stole
All we had loaded in the hold,
Regardless of value, everything,
Slaughtering every living thing,
My partner too; yet I survived,
Sore wounded tis true, but alive,
For from my harp they could see
I was born and bred to minstrelsy;
While I assured them it was so.
I begged them then to let me go,
Was granted this skiff and supplies
Enough to live on, to my surprise,
And I have drifted thus till now,
In pain, where'er the waves allow,
For well on forty days and nights,
Alone among their vales and heights,
Wherever the wind has driven me,
Or the savage seas have borne me,
Now one way, and now another,

Not knowing one from the other,
And even less where I was driven.
Now sirs, if you'd be forgiven,
And have our Lord reward you well,
Help me to where good people dwell!
'My friend,' the crew then replied,
'No help could ever be denied
Your sweet voice, and fine playing;
We'll put an end to such straying,
For you shall float here no longer,
Helpless, while the wind grows stronger;
Whate'er it was that brought you here,
Wind, waves, or God, whom we revere,
We shall lead you, indeed, to land!'

And then they took his boat in hand,
And true to their word, skiff and all,
Into the harbour, no long haul,
They towed him, and there made fast,
Exactly as Tristan had asked;
And cried: 'Look, minstrel, now behold
This fine city, and fair stronghold,
Know you what place this might be?'
'No, good sirs, for tis new to me.'
'Then we shall tell you; here at hand
Is Dublin; you are in Ireland!'
'The Lord be praised, then,' Tristan said,
'Amongst good people am I led,
For one among you there must be
Who will show their kindness to me;
One here will grant aid and counsel.'

The boatmen made for the citadel
And told of their strange adventure
And their marvellous encounter
With this man, who scarce seemed
A wonder, and yet was, they deemed.

They related all that had occurred,
Telling their story, word for word:
How, while they were some way away,
They heard a harp, so sweetly played,
And a song, its notes accompanying,
God might well find to his liking,
If sung by all the heavenly choir.
There they'd discovered one in dire
Straits, a minstrel, wounded to death,
Like, indeed, to sigh his last breath.
'Go now, and look, and there you may
See one who'll die perchance this day,
Or this night, yet though he suffers
He has such spirit, among all others
You'll not find one, in any land,
So little troubled, you understand,
By such sad and grievous mischance.'

Queen Iseult is informed of his sad state

A crowd of folk did then advance
And engaged him in conversation,
Asking him question after question,
Though he repeated the same story.
Then they asked him to play sweetly
On his harp, and he, willingly,
Set all his mind on their request,
And sought to deliver of his best.
For whate'er he could sing or play
To win their favour, on that day,
That was his wish, and he did so.
The poor minstrel's singing though
And his harping, done so sweetly,
Moved his audience to pity;
Twas beyond his bodily strength.
So they had him moved, at length,
And saw him borne to a safe place,

Where a physician of their race
Would attend him diligently,
The people paying the man's fee,
And do whatever he might please
To bring the minstrel help and ease.
All this was done, and the doctor
Did all that he could do; however,
Though the sage worked all his skill
To treat him and ease him, still
It did the sufferer little good.

The tale of this was understood
Throughout the city of Dublin;
As one group left, the next were in
That house, all voicing their lament,
Grieving over this guest God sent.
And in a while, there came a priest,
Who'd noted, ere the singing ceased,
The minstrel's skill with hand and voice,
For the man was himself a choice
Performer there, on every kind
Of instrument that comes to mind,
And knew all songs that were sung,
And was master of many a tongue,
For he had devoted all his days
To learning and to courtly ways.
This man was tutor to the queen,
A member of her suite, I mean,
And then, from her childhood on
He had sharpened her perception,
With many a goodly precept, and
To many an art he turned his hand,
Learning that the queen had sought.
And her daughter too he taught,
Iseult the Fair, that rarest girl
She of whom the whole wide world
Spoke, as does this tale of mine.

She was the loveliest of her kind,
And as she was her only daughter,
The queen had paid attention to her,
And her alone, from the moment
When the daughter showed intent
To play an instrument of choice
And learn the arts of hand and voice.
The priest too had her in his charge
He whose learning was writ large,
And sought to teach her all he knew,
Book-learning, and then music too,
And upon all stringed instruments.

Witnessing Tristan's acquirements,
His skills and his capacity,
The priest was moved to deep pity
By the suffering he had seen,
And quickly went to find the queen.
He told her that, to her city,
Had come a man of quality,
A minstrel and yet, in a breath,
One suffering a living death,
Racked with pain, a wounded man,
And yet no man, born of woman,
Was e'er so skilful in his art,
Nor seemed so spirited at heart.
'Ah,' he cried, 'most noble queen,
If but by you he might be seen,
In a place where you might be
And that miracle you might see
And hear, that of a dying man,
Who yet harps, as only he can,
And sings so finely and sweetly;
Though he is wounded so deeply
He can ne'er be cured, I vow,
For he is past all helping now.
His host, who is a fine physician,

Now despairs of his condition,
And has discontinued treatment,
Although it was his first intent
To cure him, having failed with all
The medicine at his beck and call.'

The queen sets about his cure

'SEE now,' the queen said, thoughtfully,
'I'll tell the chamberlain that, if he
Can stand to be moved from there,
They are to place him in my care,
To discover if, in his sad state,
He may yet be cured, soon or late.'
What she asked was soon achieved.
And once the queen had perceived
The anguish which he did suffer,
And viewed the wound's ugly colour,
She knew there was venom within.
'Ah, sad minstrel,' she did begin
Her speech to him, 'the true reason
For your plight's a noxious poison!'
'I knew it not,' said Tristan, swiftly,
'Such things are all unknown to me;
Yet, whate'er has been the treatment,
Naught has brought me improvement.
Who knows what life I yet may see?
Yet I know that naught is left to me,
But to place myself in God's hands,
And live for as long now as I can.
Though if any pity my state,
If any can make my pain abate,
May God reward them! Help I need;
For this is living death, indeed!'

Then the wise lady, spoke again:
'Tell me now, what is your name?'

‘My lady, I am called Tantris.’
Then, Tantris, take it not amiss,
If I profess that I shall heal you,
Whate’er I say, I will make true.
Take heart, and be now of good cheer!
For I shall be your doctor, here.’
‘My thanks to you, most gracious queen;
Like to those leaves forever green,
May your speech forever flourish,
And may your heart never perish,
So may your wisdom live forever,
To grant, to the helpless, succour.
And may your name honoured be
Now, and throughout eternity!’
‘Tantris,’ to this, the queen replied,
‘Let not my wish now be denied:
If your condition will permit,
Though you are weakened so by it,
I would be pleased to hear you play
Upon your harp, for all do say,
That you perform most skilfully.’
Oh, think naught of it, my lady!
For no sad misfortune of mine,
Shall deny you a wish so fine,
And I shall here display my art;
I shall play, with mind and heart.’

So, to him, his harp they brought.
And then the young princess they sought,
She, love’s true signet-ring, with which
His heart was to be sealed, through which
Twas kept from all the world, unknown,
Unseen, except by her alone,
Iseult the Fair; she came also,
And right closely did she follow
As Tristan took his harp and played.
His finest skills he now displayed,

Played better than he had before,
In hopes that all his woes were o'er,
Played not lifelessly, as a man
Half-dead, but as an artist can
When in the fullness of his powers,
As if he might play so for hours.
And then Tristan played so well
And sang so that, ere one could tell,
He had won, from all, their favour,
His fortunes now all set to prosper.
Yet as he played, now and elsewhere,
His wound gave off such odour there,
That none who came within its power
Could yet remain with him an hour.

'Tantris,' the queen now did say,
'If ever there should come a day
When this odour shall leave you,
And people may remain with you,
Let me commend the young girl there,
The maiden, Iseult, to your care.
She studies hard, and she doth work
At books and music, will not shirk,
And given such brief time, as yet,
Little she learns doth she forget.
If you have greater skill than I,
Or her tutor's, in aught, then try
Her knowledge, and then instruct her.
I shall repay you in another
Manner, for I shall now restore
Body and life to you once more,
Returning you to perfect health,
Which is better far than wealth.
I can grant you such, or deny
You my healing; in this, say I,
I hold the power in my hand!'
'Indeed, if that is how things stand,'

The suffering minstrel replied,
‘If such indeed may heal the sick,
And I be cured so through music,
Then if God wills, I shall be healed!
Since your own thoughts do yield,
Most gracious queen, this intent
For your daughter, I must consent,
And all my reading, I believe,
Allows me now to thus conceive
A way to winning your goodwill,
Through her, if such I can instil.
And then I know tis true of me
That no one, of my years, can be
As skilful at playing on so many,
So rich and rare a variety
Of noble stringed instruments.
Whate’er your wish and your intent,
Ask; it shall be performed by me
To the best of my ability.’

‘Tantris’ is cured of his wound

THEY furnished a chamber for him
And all attention was shown him
That he required while, day by day,
They saw to his ease in every way.
Now he reaped good value from all
The caution he’d shown in Cornwall,
His wounded side there concealed,
From the Irishmen, by his shield.
Thus, his wound unknown to them,
In ignorance, they had sailed again,
While, had they known of his state,
They might have sought to relate
The tale of his wound; folk might
Think this was now a similar sight
To wounds Morolt had dealt in war,

And ponder then on what they saw.
And thus Tristan might have fared
Otherwise in all that he'd dared;
For now his foresight helped to save
His life; such prescience may pave
The path to profit and respect
For the prudent and circumspect.

But now, the wise and learned queen
Turning her mind to all she'd seen
Of his wound, was wholly intent
On healing one on whom she bent
All her skill, for whose life, I own
She would have laid down her own.
Her reputation too was at stake;
Yet who he was she did mistake,
For had she known whom she saw,
She would have hated this man more
Than she did love herself, yet she
Wrought all towards his recovery,
His comfort, and his well-being;
Setting her mind on his healing,
Was at that task, both night and day.
Yet there is naught that one can say
About this, for she knew him not;
Had she known twas he had fought
And slain Morolt, on whom her care
Was lavished, and the patient there,
Whom she was helping from death's door,
Her enemy, then whate'er was more
Bitter than death she'd have granted
Him more readily than aught he wanted,
Than life, tis certain, yet good she knew
Of him, and good thus would she do.

Now if I were to speak at length
Of how Tristan regained his strength,

Of the queen's skill in medicine,
Of her potions, how she did win
Him to health, would it achieve
A single thing? No, I believe
A seemly word sounds far better
In noble ears than any doctor's.
I will refrain from all things here
That might indeed offend your ear
Or your feelings, I'll say naught
In language not meant for court,
So that my story may not seem
Harsh or unpleasant in its theme.
Regarding my lady's skill and art,
And the medicines she did impart,
I'll tell you briefly, in twenty days
She aided him, in so many ways,
All could endure his company,
And his sad wound cured wholly
No longer did they keep away
From his presence, but sought to stay.

'Tantris' acts as tutor to Iseult the Fair

FROM this time on, the young princess
Was tutored by her learned guest,
And he gave all his attention,
Time, and effort, to her instruction,
Teaching the best of what he knew,
In book-learning, and music too;
I will not name all he did present
To her, each book or instrument,
One by one, so she might choose
Whate'er she liked of what was new,
But here is what Iseult achieved:
She took the best that she received
Through this, and most diligently
Improved her capability,

Assisted, indeed, by all that she
Had learned of such things formerly;
She owned already to refinements,
And to courtly accomplishments,
That called for use of voice and hand
And many such skills did she command.
Hers was the language of Dublin,
But she could speak French and Latin,
And played the viol, excellently,
In the Welsh manner, and if she
Set her fingers to the lyre, then
She played most deftly, and again,
From the harp drew plangent sound,
Tone, pitch, and modulation found,
And did so with dexterity.
Moreover she sang well and sweetly,
This girl blessed with skill and sense;
Her previous accomplishments
Much improved by her new tutor,
The minstrel, he who now taught her.

Among his various teachings he
Gave her a sense of the courtly
Art of pleasant manners, the art
With which a maiden should start
Her schooling, and her studying,
Since tis a fine and decent thing,
Worthy of both God and others.
Its dictates teach us the manner
Of pleasing others and God too,
Tis a nursemaid that is given to
All noble hearts so they may find
Life and nurture and, in the mind,
Lodge its precepts, for unless
Good manners aid their address
They'll gain no profit or esteem.
Twas the chief pursuit, I'd deem,

Among the rest, of this princess;
As she sought ever to impress
Its principles upon her mind,
Her ways grew sweet and refined,
And full of charm, and courtesy.

Thus, the lovely girl, readily,
Acquired, in learning and bearing,
All that was noble and endearing,
Such that in less than half a year
All those who could see and hear
Her spoke of her true excellence.
The king, her father, took immense
Pleasure in all this, and the sight
Of her to her mother brought delight.

So, if it chanced that King Gurmun
Was joyful, or that knights had come
From other parts to join the court,
Then Iseult the Fair was sought,
And summoned before her father
To divert him, and those others,
With all her courtly attainments,
Adding, thus, noble entertainments,
To please her father and them all.
For whether they were rich or poor,
She pleased their eyes, and her arts
Delighted both their ears and hearts;
Thus, within them and without,
True pleasure was brought about.
Iseult the Fair, sweet, refined,
Sang, read, wrote for them, her mind
Joyful at their delight; whenever
They were pleased it gave her pleasure.
She would strike up an *estampie*,
Or play rare lays sung, exotically,
In the French style, of Saint-Denis,

And Sanze, for indeed she knew
Tune and words of more than a few.
She struck the strings of harp and lyre
As sweetly as one might desire,
With hands that were as white as snow;
And from her fingers notes did flow.
No woman played with such sweet ease
No, not in Lut, nor in Thamise,
As she, with grace and skill, did there,
Iseult the sweet, Iseult the Fair,
La dûze Iseult, la bête;
And she would sing a *pastourelle*,
A *rotruenge* or a *rondeau*,
A *chanson*, or a *refloit*, so,
Or a *folate* and sang them well,
Well, and well, and all too well,
For many a heart, at her singing,
Thereby was filled with longing;
Her songs roused many a thought,
Many an idle dream they brought,
Wondrous things came to mind,
Which happens, as we ever find,
When such a wonder we behold,
Of grace and loveliness untold,
As in Iseult was manifest.

To whom this girl, by fortune blessed,
Should I compare if not the Sirens,
Who, with the lodestone, would commence
To draw ships near, of their singing?
For thus, to my way of thinking,
Iseult to her drew thoughts and hearts,
Deemed secure from all such arts,
Safe from the disquiet of longing.
And these two, ships and thoughts, straying
Are a comparison worth making;
Neither keep true course, oft lying

In uncertain havens, heaving
To and fro, pitching, tossing.
Just so does an aimless yearning,
Desire this and that way turning,
Wander like an anchorless boat,
Here and there. With every note,
This young and learned princess,
Iseult the wise, charmed her guests,
Drew forth feelings, with her art,
Those enshrined within the heart,
As the lodestone draws ships in,
That sound of the Sirens' singing.
Many a heart her singing reached,
Both openly and covertly,
Through the ears and through the eyes.
Openly, there, sounds would rise,
The music of her sweet singing;
And the strings, softly sounding,
Played both here and elsewhere,
Echoed for all, and entered there
Through the ears' realm, to dart
Straight to the depths of the heart.
But ever the song that covertly
Was sung, was her wondrous beauty,
That stole, with enraptured thought,
Wholly unbidden and unsought,
Through the windows of the eyes
Into the heart, stirred noble sighs,
Sweetly its enchantment sought,
Readily seized on every thought,
And bound it captive, fettering
The mind with desire and longing.

And thus, with Tristan's tutoring,
Iseult the Fair, in many a thing,
Had much improved; she was charming
In her manner, and her bearing,

Played many a fine instrument,
Refined in each accomplishment,
And just as she could read and write,
So too she made songs to delight,
Creating both words and melody
Composing them most beautifully.

‘Tantris’ seeks leave to return home

TRISTAN now was quite recovered,
Such that his countenance and colour,
Which the treatment did thus restore,
Had returned to as they were before
His wound, yet he lived in fear
Lest he might be recognised here,
Among the people, or at court,
And was forever seeking in thought
Some courteous way of taking leave
So that his mind he might relieve,
Though the queen and her daughter
Were sure to resist his departure;
Nonetheless his life was surely
At risk, dogged by uncertainty,
And so he approached the queen
And spoke courteously as had been
His custom, and most eloquently,
Knelt before her, saying, humbly:
‘My lady, may God see you repaid
Eternally, for the comfort and aid,
And the favour you grace me with!
I pray that the Lord will ever give
You due reward for treating me
With such great kindness and mercy.
I’ll seek to deserve it, every way
I can, until my dying day,
And, poor man though I am, your name,
I’ll seek to ever advance that same.

Most generous queen, by your leave,
One further blessing I'd receive,
I would return to my own land,
For my affairs, you'll understand,
Mean that I can no longer stay.'

The queen smiled, and then did say:
'Flattery will not avail you so.
I shall not grant you leave to go.
You shall not leave within the year.'
'Nay, noble queen, consider here
The nature of the marriage vow;
What two hearts' love doth here allow;
For in that land I have a wife,
Who is dearer to me than life.
And I am sure she must believe
That I am dead. Should she receive
Another, for such is my fear,
My life, my joy would disappear,
For all my comfort would be gone,
And with it everything whereon
I set my hopes, and I should be
Doomed to a life of misery.'
'Truly,' the wise queen replied,
'Such bonds are not to be denied.
For no such close a pair, I'd state,
Should any seek to separate.
May God grant his blessing then
To you and your good wife, again!
And though I would not see you go,
For God's sake, I'll suffer it so,
And will yet remain your friend.
Iseult, my daughter, and I extend
The gift to you for your journey,
For your sustenance, as may be,
Two marks in weight of fine red gold;
From Iseult then; to have and hold!'

The exile then his palms did place
Together, with courtesy and grace,
To give thanks, in spirit and body,
To the queen, and to the lady,
To the mother, and the daughter:
'Thanks be to you, and all honour
In God's name,' Tristan now cried.
Since he would no more there abide,
He crossed the sea towards England;
Yet once he had approached the land,
Sailed southward towards Cornwall.

Tristan lands in Cornwall

WHEN his uncle, King Mark, and all
The folk around, heard that Tristan
In perfect health, was there at hand,
Then the people rejoiced, as one,
Through the whole of that kingdom.
The king, his friend, asked him how
He had fared on the waves, till now,
And Tristan then told his story
In all its details, as precisely
As he could. All showed their wonder
Yet amazement turned to laughter,
As their ears he did thus regale
With the substance of his tale,
How he had voyaged to Ireland,
And how, in that far distant land,
He had been healed, mercifully,
By one who was yet his enemy;
And of all that he had done there,
Among the Irish. All did declare,
They'd ne'er heard such a thing before.

When their marvelling at his cure,
And their laughter at his story,

Had abated, they were ready
To ask him of the people there,
And, most of all, Iseult the Fair.
'Iseult,' he said, 'is so lovely,
All that was e'er said of beauty,
Beside her beauty, is as naught.
None shines so bright in any court.
Iseult is a girl so charming,
So entrancing, and so pleasing,
Both in person and in manner,
None was born, or will be ever,
So delightful, so enchanting.
Iseult the fair, brightly shining,
Bright as the gold of Araby!
No more now, that old tale for me,
Which praises that Helen born
Fair as a daughter of the dawn,
And how that one girl, in bloom,
All women's beauty did assume.
The fault was all mine; forever,
Iseult has rid me of that error.
Never again shall I, for one,
Think that Mycenae bore the sun,
Perfect beauty shone not in Greece,
Here it shines, and without cease.
Let all men turn their thoughts and gaze
On Ireland, in these latter days,
Therein let their eyes find delight,
And on the new sun fix their sight,
That follows thus upon the dawn,
Fair Iseult, after Iseult, born,
That from Dublin to these parts,
Shines now into all men's hearts!
This dazzling and enchanting light
Sheds everywhere its lustre bright.
All that folk may say in praise
Of woman's naught before its rays.

Whoe'er sees Iseult, heart and soul
Refined, in him, as is true gold
By fire, delights in them and life.
Other women, maiden or wife,
Are not diminished in any way
By her, as many a man will say
Of his lady, for her great beauty
Serves to render others lovely,
For she adorns and crowns, we find,
Each, in the name of womankind.
Such that none need feel ashamed.'

When Tristan every joy had named
Roused in him by this fair lady,
She, of all Ireland the glory,
Those who listened to the story,
And were moved, and not by art,
But felt it there, along the heart,
Found that it sweetened all the mind,
As the blood is by May-dew, we find;
And all who heard it were inspired.

Tristan is the victim of envy

TRISTAN resumed his old life, fired
By new pleasures, as if enchanted.
A second life he'd been granted,
And he was as a man new-born.
He began to live; with that dawn
Found happiness and peace again,
And the king and his noblemen
Were happy to seek his pleasure,
Till an insidious rumour,
Born of accursed envy, stirred
Such as seldom goes unheard,
Altering opinions and manners,
Till men begrudged him honours,

And the distinction that he sought,
Once granted by people and court.
To his past actions they'd refer,
Claiming he was a sorcerer,
Disparaging him, recalling now
How he had slain Morolt, and how
He had then fared when in Ireland,
Supposedly a hostile land,
Saying it was worked by magic.
'Look,' they would murmur, 'think on it,
And say now, how he could counter
The strength of Morolt, and after
Deceive Iseult, the all-knowing,
Trick a mortal foe into caring
For him so well that, in Ireland,
He was healed by her own hand?
List! Is it not a mighty wonder
How this most cunning deceiver
Draws a mist o'er people's eyes,
And gains by every enterprise?

Then those men of Mark's council,
Conspired to work Tristan evil,
Counselling Mark night and morn
To take a wife; let there be born
An heir, whether son or daughter.
Mark then gave them good answer:
'The Lord indeed an heir did give;
By God's grace, long may he live!
While Tristan, has health and life,
Know, I shall never take a wife;
Once and for all, there will be no
Queen or consort; it shall be so!'
This but increased their enmity,
And swelled the accursed envy
They all bore towards Tristan,
Visible in many a man

Who could hide it no longer.
Their hostility grew stronger,
Appearing in their attitude
And the language that they used,
So often that he felt his life
Was in danger, and this strife
Would, he feared, turn shortly
To cunning and conspiracy;
That indeed they'd seek further
So to bring about his murder.
He begged his uncle, good King Mark,
In God's name, to attend, to hark
To his fears, and view the danger,
And then agree to whatever
The barons wished; let that be done:
He knew not when his death might come.

His uncle, wise and faithful too,
Said: 'I wish for no heir but you,
Tristan, my nephew, never fear,
I shall ever protect you here.
Fear not for your body or life.
How then can such malice and strife
Harm you? A man who's worthy
Is oft by malice beset, and envy.
And if he's subject to men's envy,
Indeed a man shows more worthy,
For envy and worth, together,
Are like a child and its mother;
Worth bears, and envy is its fruit.
Who meets not malice in pursuit
Of fortune and honour? That fate
Is of little worth, poor its state,
That never meets with enmity.
Struggle, that you might be free
Of folk's spite for a single day,
Yet you'll ne'er succeed, I say,

Of their spite you'll ne'er be free.
But if quite free of such you'd be,
Then sing their tune, and be as they,
Their envy then will ebb away.
Tristan, whate'er others do
Remember what you are and who;
Aim always at nobility,
Look to where honour may be,
And what may be to your benefit,
And urge me not to counter it
With what works to your detriment.
Whate'er is their or your intent,
I'll not attend to such a wish!
'Sire, if you will but grant me this,
I'll go from court now; allow me;
I'm no match for their enmity.
If my downfall now is sought,
I must no longer live at court.
If tis amongst such malice here,
I must live, and live in fear,
Rather than realms in my hand,
I'd rather lack both realms and land.'

An embassy to Ireland is agreed

MARK, seeing he'd not be denied,
Interrupted, and then replied:
'Nephew, as much as I would wish
To prove my love to you, in this,
And my good faith, you'll not allow
My doing so; then, I avow,
Whate'er ensues I'll take no blame,
And you shall have whate'er you name,
Tell me, what would you have me do?'
'Summon your councillors to you,
Those who encourage you to wed,
And sound them out, as I have said,

And seek to know what they commend,
And find what it is they intend;
Then all may be settled readily.'

The councillors were summoned swiftly,
And they, aiming at Tristan's death,
Agreed at once, with barely a breath,
That if a marriage they could contrive,
Iseult the Fair should be Mark's wife,
For she, indeed, was more than fitting,
In her person, birth, and breeding.
This they thought was the very thing.
Then they had audience of the king.
One man, possessed of eloquence,
Delivered the meaning and sense
Of their counsel, on behalf of all,
Their will and purpose, in the hall:
'Sire,' he declared, 'we understand,
That Iseult the Fair, of Ireland,
(For this is known in lands around,
And by all there on Irish ground)
Is a maiden on whom the power
Of womanly grace has sought to shower,
All the blessings there might be;
As you yourself have frequently
Heard of her, she is Fortune's child,
Perfect in life, limb, undefiled.
If you obtain her as your wife,
And as our lady, no more in life,
No greater good, could come our way,
Where woman is involved, we say.'
The king answered: 'My lord, explain,
Granted I wished her hand to gain,
How could that ever come to be?
Consider, now, the enmity
That has long existed between
The Irish and ourselves, I mean.

All of these people are our foes.
Gurmun himself, you must suppose,
Hates us all, and detests my name,
And rightly so; I too feel the same.
That any could ever bring about
Friendship between us: that I doubt.'

'Sire', they replied, 'tis oft the case,
There is enmity twixt race and race.
But let the two sides take counsel
And make peace among the people,
Then we and they are reconciled,
Every man, woman, and child.
For enduring hostility
May oft yet end in amity;
And if you bear this in mind today,
You may yet live to see the day
When over Ireland you hold sway,
For only three stand in your way:
A king, a queen, Iseult the Fair,
Who, indeed, is their sole heir:
Ireland's future's with these three.'

'King Mark replied: 'Tristan has me
Thinking on her seriously,
For she has been much in my mind
Since he praised her, and thus I find,
Because of such thoughts, I too
Rejecting others, think as you.
I have dwelt so much upon her
That, if indeed I cannot wed her,
I will take no other to wife
I swear, by God, upon my life!'
Yet he swore the oath although
His true feelings were not so
Inclined, but as mere policy,
Never dreaming that it might be.

But his counsellors now replied:
‘If Tristan here doth take our side,
Who is acquainted with that court,
And you arrange that he do aught
That is required in this affair,
And deliver your proposal there,
Then all will readily be achieved,
The thing shall be as we conceived.
He is wise, prudent and fortunate
In all he seeks to undertake,
And he knows their language well.
He does all, as if by some spell.’
‘Tis evil counsel,’ King Mark cried,
‘Once, for you, he has all but died,
Fighting for you and for your heirs.
You are too intent on your affairs,
It seems, and would harm Tristan.
Do you seek again to kill the man?
No, you lords of my Cornwall,
You yourselves shall deal with all.
Go there yourselves, and be sure
To plot against Tristan no more!’

‘My lord,’ for thus spoke up Tristan,
‘Naught ill was said by any man,
It would be most fitting for me
To perform this, better twould be,
Indeed, than if another you chose;
And it is right that I do so.
I am the man, indeed, my lord;
None better can the realm afford.
Yet command them to sail with me,
Both there and back, to oversee
This thing, and maintain your honour,
Guarding your interest in the matter.’
‘You shall not lie in enemy hands

A second time; from that hostile land,
God Himself brought you back to us.'
'Nay, Sire, it shall not transpire thus;
And whether these barons live or die,
I must share their destiny; tis I
Who'll allow them thus to see,
That the fault will not lie with me,
If this land is left without an heir.
Tell them to make all ready, there.
I'll steer the ship with my own hand,
And pilot it to that blessed land,
And so to Dublin once again,
And that sun that doth maintain
Happiness in many a heart.
Who knows but that we may depart
Again having won such beauty?
If she were yours, Iseult, the lovely
Girl, and yet we chanced to die,
Twere a small price to pay, say I.'
But when Mark's counsellors perceived,
How Tristan's speech was there received,
They were more downcast in spirit
That ever in their lives but there, it
Was settled, and must go forward.

Tristan prepares to return to Ireland

TRISTAN told the king's steward
To find him twenty loyal knights,
From the household, fit to fight;
And sixty mercenaries he found,
Natives and foreigners, all sound;
And from the barons, twenty that day
He chose, to sail there without pay,
To make that company entire:
A hundred, levied or for hire.
This then was Tristan's company

With which to cross the open sea.
He gathered also clothes and stores,
Assembling them all on shore,
Such that no ship that sailed before
Was ever so well provided for.

Now, one reads in the old 'Tristan',
That a swallow flew to Ireland,
From Cornwall, and a lock of hair
It plucked from the lady's head there,
With which it then might build a nest,
(Though none knows, I would suggest,
How the swallow knew of the lady)
And brought it back across the sea,
So fair it led to Tristan's journey;
Though, given that in Mark's country
There was a plentiful supply
Of things to build a nest, then why
Would a swallow need to fly so far
To foreign lands? I swear there are
Few more fantastic tales; I fear
Tis nonsense they were talking here.
God knows, tis even more absurd
To say that Tristan, at Mark's word,
But sailed the ocean at a venture,
While taking no account whatever
Of where he sailed to, or how far,
Yet following some fortunate star,
Nor knowing whom he was seeking.
What old score was he settling
With the book, who wrote that down,
And then spread the tale around?
If it were so then Mark, the king,
And all he sent about this thing,
The whole crowd of councillors,
And then the sad ambassadors
Who on a fool's errand did go,

Would have been but fools also.

The envoys reach Ireland

NOW, Tristan and his company,
Sailed away upon their journey,
Though some, were most uneasy,
I mean the councillors, the twenty,
The barons of the Cornish nation,
Who, in their state of trepidation,
All fearing they would surely die,
Cursed the hour, and heaved a sigh,
The moment that their embassy
Sailed forth towards the enemy.
They saw no chance of salvation,
Discussing every sort of action,
But failing to reach agreement,
On aught to which all might consent.
Nor was that any great surprise;
Since any way to save their lives
Involved a choice between those two,
Boldness or cunning, and but few
Of them were eager to venture,
Or possessed of any measure
Of cleverness. And yet they said:
'Tristan has thoughts in his head,
The man is clever, and versatile,
If God is kind to us the while,
And Tristan curbs his recklessness,
The which he shows to fine excess,
Then we may yet emerge alive.
Careless of himself, he'll strive
Indifferent to our lives, or his,
Yet ever our best hopes in this
Our bound up with his success,
And his great resourcefulness
Is the key to our salvation.'

Once these doyens of their nation
Had reached the shores of Ireland
And at Wexford sought to land
Where they thought the king to be,
Then Tristan anchored out at sea,
Out of bowshot of the harbour.
His barons begged him, with ardour,
To tell them now, in God's name,
How he would, for twas no game,
Win the lady, since all their lives
Rested on it, and twould be wise
If he spoke of his intention there.
'Enough,' cried Tristan, 'now take care
That none of you meet their eyes.
Lie low within, we must disguise
Our purpose; members of the crew,
Rather than any one of you,
Will ask for news now, as they go
About the harbour, to and fro,
For none of you must yet be seen.
Be silent, and lie there between
Decks, I who speak their tongue
Will do the talking; soon will come,
Many a hostile questioner,
From the town, to the harbour.
I must tell smoother lies today
Than ever I have, so hide away.
If they see you, then understand
We'll have a fight on our hands,
And all the country against us.
Tomorrow I go to speak for us;
I shall ride out early to chance
Our fortune and seek to advance
Our cause here, for well or ill.
While I'm away be hidden still,
Let Curvenal stand, at his ease,

By the dock, with any of these
Crewmen who speak the tongue,
And if I should be away too long,
If I do not, in four days, return,
Then wait no longer death to earn.
Save your lives, and take to sea.
For I'll have lost my life indeed
Trying to arrange this affair;
And you may choose a wife back there
For your lord, from where'er you wish.
Thus do I think, and advise in this.'

Now the King of Ireland's marshal,
One who had power over all
Dublin's city and the harbour,
Came riding down in full armour,
With a great host in company,
Of citizens and emissaries,
With his orders from the court,
As this tale has already sought
To tell of, for, just as before,
All folk who landed on their shore,
He had his fixed orders to seize,
And discover if any of these
Was a native of Mark's country,
To whom the Irish denied entry.
And thus this band of tormenters,
These bold and accursed killers,
Who many an innocent had slain,
To protect their master's domain,
Came marching down to the harbour,
With their crossbows, in full armour,
Much like a band of brigands; so
Tristan donned a travelling cloak,
To disguise himself more readily,
And had a fine cup, marvellously
Wrought of pure gold, brought to him,

Done in the English style, and then
Took to his skiff with Curvenal,
And made towards the harbour wall.
He saluted the citizens and bowed
With all the grace that such allowed,
But, ignoring his every greeting,
Many a boat came out to meet him,
While the rest but shouted the more:
'Put in to land now, seek the shore!'

Tristan promptly sought the land.
'My noble lord,' he did command,
Tell me why you come so armed,
As if indeed one might be harmed?
What mean you now by all this show?
What one should think I barely know.
Do me the honour, in God's name,
Of telling me, what means this same?
If there is one here in this harbour
Who commands, then in all honour
Let him give fair hearing to me!
'That man is I, whom you now see,'
Said the Marshal, 'and you will find
That we are armed in looks and mind,
To search out, and thus discover,
Why you are here and every other
Thing, down to the very last oar.'
'Truly, my lord, I can assure
Your lordship I am at your pleasure.
If one might calm the crowd, at leisure,
And then allow me to have my say,
I would request that man, this day,
To hear me, in courteous manner,
As befits my country's honour.'

With this he was granted a hearing.
'My lord,' said Tristan, with cunning,

'Our trade, and standing, and country,
I now declare, to all and sundry.
We are men who live for profit,
Nor need we be ashamed of it.
We are merchants of Normandy
I and all of my company;
And there our wives and children are.
We travel from land to land, afar,
Trading our goods where'er we go,
Here and there, and to and fro,
And earn enough by that to live;
Whate'er gain our trade doth give.
A month ago we put out to sea,
I and two other ships, all three
Vessels, in convoy, bound for here,
And yet, but a week ago, I fear,
A storm-wind blew us far off course,
As gales will do, and so perforce
Dispersed our company of three,
And drove the others far from me.
I know not what's become of them.
God preserve them, and so keep them!
During those eight days, the sea
Beat at our ship most cruelly,
And sent us on a wayward course.
Yesterday noon, the greater force
Of the gale being spent, I saw
The cliffs and headlands of this shore.
I hove to and anchored in the bay
Where we have lain until today.
Then this morning, when it was light,
I sailed for Wexford; yet my plight
Seems worse indeed than out at sea.
Though I came here seeking safety,
My life seems now to be in danger,
Though I sought welcome for the stranger,
For I have known this place before,

With other merchants found this shore,
And so hoped all the more to find
Safety, welcome; where men were kind.
Into a fresh storm now I sailed,
Yet God preserve me from the gale,
For if I find no safety here,
Among these folk, why then, tis clear,
That I must put to sea again,
There, where I may command the main
I'll show any vessel fair fight,
Though in the way of taking flight.
Yet show me honour and courtesy,
And I shall be more than happy,
To gift you what my means allow.
If I may moor here, such I vow,
In return thus for some brief stay,
On the understanding, this day,
That you protect me, and my boat,
And all aboard, for still afloat
The other pair of ships may be,
And we may gather in company.
If you then would have me stay,
See to our safety; keep away
This fleet of skiffs whoe'er they be,
For if you do not, you shall see
I'll return to my ship and crew
And think the less of all of you.'

The marshal, thereon, did command
The fleet of boats to head for land,
And then demanded of the stranger:
'What will you give the king, if ever
I guarantee your life and vessel,
And grant you safe passage to travel,
To his court, and defend your stay?'
'A mark of red gold, every day,
I'll give, my lord, from our trade,

And this gold cup too, shall be made
Your very own, if I, thereby,
Upon your word may so rely.'
'Indeed you may!' on every hand,
The cry arose, 'for in this land
He is the marshal.' So the lord
Took that princely gift on board,
And bade Tristan seek the shore.
And then he ordered, furthermore,
The safety and security
Of Tristan and his company.
Rich and fine that tax and toll,
Rich and fine the king's red gold,
And the goblet rich and fine,
For both now Tristan did resign,
And each of them magnificent,
So that he might thus gain consent
To both shelter and protection,
And save their lives by misdirection.

The encounter with the dragon

THUS Tristan has won safe passage,
And yet not e'en the wisest sage,
Knows what he may do with it.
You shall be told the whole of it,
And thus not tire of the story.
A serpent dwelt, in that country,
A vile monster, you understand,
That had brought upon the land
And its people such destruction,
That the king, driven to action,
Swore by his royal oath that he
Who rid them of their enemy,
Should wed his daughter, if of worth,
A knight, that is, of noble birth.
This report, when widely known,

And the beauty of the girl alone,
Led to the deaths of many a man
Who came there to try his hand;
From far and wide they did wend,
Their way; but to meet their end.
Everywhere the tale was known,
To Tristan also it had flown;
For this alone he had chosen
To embark on the expedition,
And upon it, in the absence
Of aught else, he placed reliance.
Now is the hour, cometh the man!

And early the next morn, Tristan,
Armed himself as a man must do
Who knows that danger will ensue.
He took the strongest and the best
Lance aboard, in armour dressed,
Then mounted a sturdy war-horse,
Seized the lance, and set a course
Through the wastes and open land.
Twisting, turning, on every hand
To cross that tangled wilderness;
And as the morning did progress,
He sought the Vale of Anferginan,
Where lay the lair of the dragon,
As you may know from the story.
There, afar off, he saw a flurry
Of action, four men hard-riding
Across country, plainly fleeing
At a good pace; somewhat faster,
Than a pleasant morning canter!
One of the four that he had seen
He was the steward to the queen,
And sought the love of the princess,
Counter to all that she expressed.
Whene'er knights, seeking honour,

Rode forth to try deeds of valour,
The steward also would appear,
At any hour, be it there or here,
Solely that he too might be said
To venture forth where others led.
Though that was all he sought to do,
Since, if the dragon hove in view,
At the very first hint of dragon,
He turned swiftly, and was gone.

Now Tristan, he could clearly see
From the way these men did flee,
That the dragon was close nearby,
And so, holding his lance on high,
He rode that way and yet no more
Than a mile had he ridden before
He saw the dreadful sight ahead
Of the dragon, flame about its head,
Belching smoke from out its maw,
Twas the devil's spawn: it saw
Man and horse there, and did advance.
Tristan, now lowering his lance,
Set his spurs to his faithful steed,
And galloped forward at full speed,
Thrusting the lance such that it tore
Through the throat beneath the jaw,
And sank deeper full near the heart
While he and his steed, for their part,
Now met the dragon with such force,
The horse fell dying, in mid-course,
And he was fortunate to survive.
But the dragon, still, as yet, alive,
Attacked the horse, scorching it,
Till through the lifeless corpse it bit,
And then that offspring of the devil,
Consumed the steed to the saddle.
Yet as the lance-wound pained it so,

It turned away, and did swiftly go
Towards the cliff there, while Tristan
Dogging its tracks, behind it ran.
The doomed creature forged ahead
Filling all the forest with dread
Of its vast roaring, while it burned
The trees, and through the thickets churned,
Till it was overcome with pain,
Whilst seeking for its lair again,
And wedged itself, for refuge, deep
Beneath a dark and rocky steep.

Tristan approached and drew his sword,
Thinking to find it wounded sore,
But no the danger now was greater.
And yet howe'er fierce the monster
Tristan attacked it, undeterred.
Despite the wound it had incurred,
It reduced him to such dire straits
He thought that he had met his fate.
But that he kept it at arm's length,
It would have robbed him of the strength
To cut and thrust, and then indeed
Other fell foes it seemed to breed,
As smoke and steam, fire and teeth,
And claws that raked him from beneath,
So sharp, and closely ranked together,
They proved wicked as a razor.
Thus it chased him here and there,
Through trees and bushes, everywhere,
With many a tortuous twist and turn,
While he did some protection earn
From their scant cover, on the run,
Since the result of all he'd done,
Was that his shield was now torched,
Down near to his hand, and so scorched
To fragments, it was scant defence,

Against the flames, a poor pretence.

Yet none of this endured for long,
The murderous creature, strong
Though it was, found that strength
Ebbing fast, and the spear gone deep
Brought the monster down, to reap
The evil it sowed, in agony.

Tristan ran towards it swiftly,
Raising his sword; on his advance
Thrusting it, hard beside the lance,
Into the heart, hilt-deep; hurt sore,
The vile creature sent out a roar,
So frightful, and so appalling,
The sky seemed as it were falling,
While earth shook; the mortal cry
Filling the land about, thereby,
With that shriek, stunning Tristan.
But seeing it fallen, by his hand,
And lying there in death, he tore
Its jaws apart, and from the maw
Cut out the tongue with his sword
As far as his reach would afford,
Placing it neath his hauberk there,
To bring an end to that affair.

He withdrew to the wilderness,
Seeking there for a place to rest,
And recover, while it was light,
Then return to his friends at night.
But, suffering still from the heat
Of the dragon, and near defeat,
He knew so wearisome a feeling,
He thought his own death nearing.
Yet, looking all around, he saw
A gleam of water that did pour
From a cliff, both tall and sheer,

Into a long and narrow mere.
In he plunged, armour and all,
Upon his back there he did fall,
With naught but his face in sight.
There he lay, a day and a night,
For the dragon's tongue he bore
Had stolen his strength and more,
Senseless he lay: the fumes alone
Rendered him the colour of stone.
And there indeed must Tristan lie,
Till the princess shall him espy.

The steward seeks out the dead dragon

NOW the steward, as I said above,
Wished to win the princess' love,
And be her knight, the lovely maid.
Hearing the death-roar, unafraid,
Now, of the beast whose mortal cry
Filled the woods and wastes nearby,
Rehearsing its death in his mind,
He fresh assurance thus did find,
Thinking: 'It surely must be dead
Or, if not, so near to death instead,
That I can readily follow through
With a little cunning.' So from view
He stole, left his three companions,
Rode down a slope, in the direction
Of that cry, spurring on his horse
And so arriving, in due course,
At the remains of Tristan's mount,
Where he halted to take account,
Anxiously swept his gaze around
Then slowly covering the ground,
He weighed the matter in his mind,
Fearful of what else he might find.

Nonetheless, twas not too long
Before he stirred, and then rode on,
In a somewhat desultory manner,
Nervously now, following after
The trail of burnt leaves and grass,
Where the evil creature had passed;
And suddenly, but half-aware,
He came upon the dragon there.
The steward was shocked indeed,
Astonished by his daring deed
At having approached so near,
Nearly losing his seat, that here
He wheeled his mount so swiftly
Horse and man collapsed entirely.
Once his scattered wits he'd found,
(Gathering himself from the ground)
It was more than he could do
To remount his war-horse too,
Given his state of abject fear;
So the sad steward disappeared,
Leaving his mount there, and fled.
Yet since naught behind him sped,
He halted, and returned once more,
Picked his lance up from the floor,
Grasped his mount by the bridle,
And scrambled into the saddle,
From a tree-trunk that lay nearby,
Settling again, with a deep sigh.
Then he galloped some way away,
And looked at where the dragon lay
To judge if it was dead and gone,
Or if some life still lingered on.

The steward claims the victory

ONCE he determined it was dead:
'By God's good will, now,' he said,

‘My fortune’s made, at a venture;
For here’s a veritable treasure:
Fortune indeed has brought me here.’
And with this he lowered his spear,
Spoke to his mount, and gave it rein,
Then put it to the gallop again,
Spurring its flanks on either side,
And as he spurred it on, he cried:
‘*Schevelier damoisèle,*
Ma blunde Iseult, ma bête!
Iseult the blonde, Iseult the fair,
My lady’s knight am I, beware!’
He gave the dragon a thrust, aft,
So forceful that the ashen shaft
Slid backwards through his grip.
Yet that he fought no more with it
Was due to a fresh thought, you see:
‘If its destroyer, whoe’er he be,
Is still alive, then all my scheme
Must prove as idle as a dream.’
So the steward rode here and there,
Searching the ground everywhere,
In hopes of discovering the man,
(For this was now his secret plan)
So badly wounded, and so weary,
That he might overcome him; clearly
He could engage him in a fight,
Kill him, and lodge him out of sight.
But searching, and yet finding naught,
‘Enough of this, my lord!’ he thought,
‘Whether he’s dead or still alive,
My find it is, and I shall thrive.
For I have kin, a host of friends,
On whom, in this, I may depend,
So notable, such men of worth,
That never a man on this earth
Could dispute the matter with me.’

He spurred back now to his enemy,
Dismounted, and hacked away,
As if he had the thing at bay,
Stabbing and thrusting with his blade,
Here and there until he had made
Sufficient holes, peck after peck.
And then he started on the neck,
And would have liked to sever it,
But found its hide so tough and thick,
That of the task he soon was weary.
He broke his lance across a tree,
And forced the half with its tip,
Into the dragon's throat, as if
It was the outcome of a blow.

Then he mounted, and off did go,
To Wexford on his Spanish steed,
Where he ordered men with speed
To take a cart, and fetch the head,
While he the wondrous news did spread,
Of his victorious encounter,
How he'd been in dreadful danger,
And yet, despite all he had borne,
Had slain the dragon that fair morn.
'Yes, yes, my lords, let everyone
Hear all the wonders I have done,
And see what a courageous man
May venture yet for a fair woman,
A man who's steadfast to the end.
I can scarce believe, my friends,
That I've returned safe and alive,
From what few heroes could survive.
I'd not have done so, were I weak
And tender; of that man I speak
I know not whom, some knight errant,
Who'd ventured first on this errand,
And came upon it before me,

And yet had not the victory,
For then, indeed, he met his death,
Both man and steed lost in a breath,
Since God had there forsaken him;
And they are dead the pair of them.
Half the horse remains in place,
That jaws and fire did not deface;
But why should I prolong the tale,
Since in the end I did prevail,
Yet suffered more for this dragon
Than man e'er suffered for a woman.'
He gathered all his friends together,
And they returned to see the creature.
He showed the wonder, then he asked
That all bear witness, if so tasked,
To the gospel truth of all he'd said,
And then they carted off the head.
He sought his kin, and called his men,
And then he sought the king again,
There to remind him of his oath;
And thus a day was set when both
He and all the lords might meet
At Wexford, and there complete
Discussion of the matter; and so
That the thing might duly follow,
The whole council was summoned,
By which I mean here, every baron;
And they made ready as required
To gather there as the king desired.

PART VI: Tristan revealed

Iseult the Elder divines the truth

NOW, when all the court ladies knew
Of this matter, and realised who
Had slain the dragon, you ne'er saw

Such pain and anguish e'er before.
That lovely maid, Iseult the Fair,
Her heart was filled with despair.
She had ne'er known so vile a day.
And yet she heard her mother say:
'No, fair daughter, suffer this thing,
For naught so ill the day shall bring.
Whether there's truth in it or lies,
Show no distress, quell your sighs,
For we shall see it comes to naught.
God will protect us at this court.
Weep not, fair daughter of mine,
Those eyes that so brightly shine
Shall ne'er be reddened, I pray,
By small ills that come their way.'
'Ah, mother,' cried the girl, 'tis woe
To dishonour birth and person so.
Ere he shall have me, I shall find
Some blade and, with fixed mind,
Pierce thus my heart, so lose my life.
He shall find nor woman nor wife
In Iseult, for he'll see me dead.'
'No, fair daughter, fear not, I said,
Whate'er the other shall demand
You shall not be at his command;
He'll not wed you, never mourn,
Not if all the world had so sworn.
Your husband he shall never be.'

The wise queen, as the daylight died,
Skilled in her secret arts, applied
Herself to her fair daughter's plight,
And saw, in a vision, in the night,
That all had happened differently.
And so, in the dawn light, did she
Swiftly, arising with the day,
Seek out Iseult the Fair, and say:

‘Fair daughter, are you wide awake?’
‘Yes, my gracious mother.’ ‘Then take
Heart now; forgo all grief and fear;
I bring good news that you shall hear.
Twas not the steward slew the dragon,
But some stranger, some other man,
Brought here, by hopes of adventure;
Twas he against the beast did venture.
Up now, for we must hasten there,
And seek the truth of this affair.
Brangwen, arise, and quietly
Have Paranis saddle four steeds,
And tell him we all four must ride,
You and he, my daughter and I,
Forth from out the hidden postern
Where the orchard and the garden
Overlook the fields below;
And quickly now, for we must go!’

The queen and her daughter seek the dead dragon

AS soon as ever this was done
They mounted and rode, as one,
Towards the place where, it was said,
The dragon was slain, and lay dead.
Finding the half-ruined charger,
They looked closely, to discover
The nature of its tack; the trappings
Seemed quite unfamiliar things;
They’d never seen, they were sure,
Such gear in Ireland before;
Yet they assumed that whoe’er
The rider was the steed bore there,
It was he had slain the creature.
Then they rode on a little further,
Finding its carcass too, at last.
Now, this devil’s spawn was vast

So hideous that the three women
The instant they came upon him,
Turned pale as death at the sight.
'And now I'm certain I was right,'
Said the wise queen to her daughter,
'Whoever's steel did this slaughter,
The steward would ne'er have dared;
Against this thing he'd not have fared!
We may now rid ourselves of fear;
And yet the man must still be here,
Iseult, my daughter, whether dead,
Or living and but wounded instead,
Something tells me he is nearby.
If you grant it, then let us try
The wilds about and by God's grace
We may find him in this place,
And with his help we can end
This heartfelt pain, and defend
Ourselves from all, in a breath,
That weighs on the heart, like death.'
The four agreed, and so took action;
Each rode in a separate direction,
One here, another there did ride,
Searching the place, on every side.

Iseult the Fair finds the unconscious Tristan

NOW it happened, as if twas meant,
As if twas destiny's intent,
That Fair Iseult, the young princess,
Her eyes the first were to address
A sight that would steal her breath,
Prove her life, and prove her death,
Prove her joy, and prove her sorrow.
A gleam from his helm, that morrow,
Betrayed the presence of the man.
She saw the helm, she saw the man,

And then to her mother she cried:
‘My lady, look, upon this side!
I see it shining, I know not what;
A helm, if I but doubt it not,
If I see truly what glimmers there.’
Her mother, to Iseult the Fair,
Replied: ‘Indeed, I see it too,
God favours us now, I and you,
I think we’ve found the one we sought.’
The cry they gave the others brought,
And all four rode towards the place.
As towards him they drew apace,
They saw an armed man lying there,
And judged him lost beyond all care.
‘He’s dead!’ cried Iseult, one and both,
‘Such is the end of all our hopes.
The steward he has murdered him,
And into the mere then rolled him.’
They dismounted though, and all
Dragged him out, armour and all.
Now Iseult the wise, she felt then
That he still lived, though, yet again,
His life was hanging by a thread.
‘No, no, the man lives still,’ she said,
‘Remove the breastplate let me see
For I yet may find a remedy,
If this be not a mortal wound,
If the knight has merely swooned.’
The three women, each a beauty,
The fair and radiant company,
Unlacing now his body armour,
Disarming the hapless stranger
With hands as white as is the snow.
Revealed the dragon’s tongue below.
‘What have we here?’ cried the queen,
‘This object, what then may it mean?
Brangwen, fair niece, now, what think you?’

‘The creature’s tongue, and cut anew
It doth appear.’ ‘Brangwen is right!
The dragon’s tongue, and in plain sight.
Fortune now wakes, may God yet keep
Us in His favour, this man doth sleep,
This knight; Fair Iseult, sweet daughter,
I swear to death that he’ll recover;
This dragon’s tongue has nonetheless
Robbed him of strength and consciousness.’
They raised the visor an inch, and she
Then poured a true potion, gently
Between the man’s lips: ‘As I said,
The man who lies here is not dead,
The fumes the tongue gives off, I vow,
Are swiftly fleeing from him now,
He may soon speak, and ope his eyes.’
So they took the helm, and did prise
It from his brow, he oped them then,
And looked about, once and again.

Tristan is recognised, as ‘Tantris’

WHEN first that heavenly company
He saw about him, those fair three,
He thought: ‘Ah, gracious Lord, I see
That Thou has ne’er forgotten me.
Three lights encompass me, no less,
The brightest this world doth possess,
The joy and life of many an eye,
The reason too for many a sigh,
Comfort and aid to many a one;
Iseult the Fair, the shining sun,
Iseult her mother, the glowing dawn,
And then Brangwen, the nobly born,
Clear as is the bright full moon.’
With this he rallied, and quite soon,
Though faintly, spoke, by and by:

‘Oh, who are you, and where am I?’
Iseult the Fair gazed at his face:
‘If ever such features I might place,
Then Tantris the minstrel lies here!’
The others spoke then: ‘Yes, tis clear;
For so it seems to us also.’
‘Knight, if you can speak, now, do so,’
Said Iseult, ‘to your aid we’ve come.’
‘Ah yes, sweet lady, heavenly one,
I know not why I’m weakened so,
Or why from me my strength did flow.’
‘Are you not Tantris?’ asked the queen.
‘I am, my lady.’ ‘Then by what means
Did you come here, and whence indeed,
And then, how came about this deed?’
‘Oh, most blessed among women, I
Am yet weak, and my mind thereby
Lacks the power to speak at length
Of all you ask, nor is my strength
Of body equal to such a claim.
Have me conveyed, in God’s name,
To some quiet place where I might
Be granted care, this day and night.
As soon as I own strength and leisure,
I will speak of it, at your pleasure.’

‘Tantris’ tells his tale and makes a promise

SO, the four took hold of Tristan,
Raising him with their own hands,
And set him upon a palfrey,
And led them both away slowly.
Returning by the postern gate,
So none saw him or his state,
Or learnt of their expedition,
The care now and close attention,
That he required for his ease,

They saw to now, ere they did cease.
As for the tongue, of which I spoke,
His armour, and his sword and cloak,
They had gathered up everything,
To the very last strap and ring,
So they had the whole in hand,
Both the harness and the man.

When the following day arrived,
The wise queen sat down beside
Tristan, took his hand, and said:
'Tantris, who lay there as one dead,
Tell me, by all I've done for you,
Now and before (for, it is true,
Twice thus have I saved your life)
And by your faith in your true wife,
When came you here to Ireland?
And how did you slay the dragon?'
'My lady, I will tell you plain,
But recently it was I came,
Three days ago, it was, today
That we merchants found our way,
Aboard ship, to this fair harbour.
But then a band of men in armour
Came from the town, I know not why;
Yet these men I did pacify,
By making them a gift, or they
Had taken all our goods away,
And our lives, no doubt, as well.
Now we are such men as must dwell
In foreign places, you understand,
And live and trade in every land,
Without our knowing whom to trust,
For our treatment is oft unjust.
Thus I've learned that if he can
Do so, it benefits a man,
To be known throughout a place.

Every man should know my face,
For to be known by every man,
Puts profit in a merchant's hand.
Such then, my lady, was my thought,
I had long known wise folk's report
Of this dragon, which I might slay,
And gain a wider fame that way,
And so more readily find favour
Among the people, for my labour.'
'Grace and favour,' the queen replied.
'May you receive, while life abide,
And honour too, till your dying day;
Good fortune be it for you, I pray,
And us, that you sailed to our coast.
Now think of what you wish the most,
Whate'er it may be, yet, by and by,
We shall grant it, my lord and I.'
'Thank you, my lady, then will I
Seek protection for myself, my
Crew, and vessel, and trust that we
Find not our lives and property
Threatened, some day, by doing so.'
'No, Tantris you shall not; have no
Fear for your life or company,
Think not on that, but trust in me.
On my honour I swear, my hand
I extend to you; for in Ireland
No ill shall befall you, I give
You my solemn word, while I live.
But now grant a request of mine,
For my daughter doth grieve and pine,
Help me in a matter that, I find,
Affects my honour, and ease my mind.'
And then she told him, as I've told you,
Of the steward's arrogance anew,
Concerning the deed, and how he
Had sought Iseult, persistently;

And how he would defend his cause,
According to the kingdom's laws,
By single combat, if any man
Challenged his lies out of hand.

'Gracious lady,' Tristan replied,
'What you ask shall ne'er be denied.
Twice now have you, with God's good aid,
Saved my life; all must be repaid;
It is but right I serve you now;
In combat, as in all else, I vow,
While I live, I'm at your service.'
'May God reward you, dear Tantris:
Gladly I'd have your help in all;
For if events should ere befall
As he wishes, then, in a breath,
Iseult, and I, face living death.'
'No, my lady, forgo such talk,
Now your protection I have sought,
And have entrusted my property
My life, and my security,
In all respects, to your honour,
Take heart; help me to recover,
And I shall end this; tell me though,
My dear lady, whether you know
If the dragon's tongue is left to me,
Or, if not, where now it may be?'
'Indeed I do, for we have it here,
Together with your own war-gear;
I, with Iseult, my fair daughter,
Returned with the thing, together.'
'That we shall need;' said Tristan,
'Yet gracious queen, all our plan
For now is that you cease from care,
Help me regain my strength, for there
Is the means for me to end the matter.'

The two Iseults, one with another,
Queen and princess, saw to his care;
Whate'er might bring him comfort there,
Whate'er might ease and strengthen him,
Those two now lavished upon him,
Seeking to heal the weakened knight.

Meanwhile in sore and wretched plight
Were those of his ship's company.
A deep despair had gripped full many
For they, not hoping to survive,
Knew not if Tristan were alive,
Having, these two days, heard naught.
Yet others had the rumour brought
Of the dragon's death, and of a knight,
Who'd surely perished in the fight,
And of his steed there half-consumed.
What else would any have assumed,
When speaking now one with another:
'Is this not Tristan? There's no other
It could be; only death, I vow,
Would hinder his return ere now.'

Curvenal finds the remains of Tristan's steed

THEY argued it amongst them all,
And then they sent out Curvenal
To find the steed, and learn its state,
And this he did, and viewed its fate;
Then Curvenal rode further on,
And, as he did so, came upon
The monstrous carcase, yet he found
No sign in all the wastes around
Of Tristan, nor clothes nor armour,
And thus, uncertain of the rumour,
'Ah,' he cried, 'my lord Tristan,
Do you live yet in this vile land,

Or are you lost? Alas and woe,
Iseult, that ever your beauty so
Was lauded there in our Cornwall!
Alas that your fame and glory all
Was destined, all your loveliness,
To bring the ruin of one, the best,
Before whom many a warrior fell,
One that you pleased all too well!

Tristan's company agree to delay their departure

WITH this, he returned, lamenting
To the harbour, and told everything
That he'd found there, to the rest.
The news he brought caused unrest,
For most were saddened but not all;
Some were pleased by Tristan's fall,
Thus their feelings, and their intent
Were varied and brought discontent.
Plagued by such lack of unity,
The now-divided company
Was prone to whispered enmity.
Undismayed despite uncertainty,
The twenty barons swiftly made
Plans to secure their departure,
Demanding that they wait no longer,
For they, the false twenty I mean,
Proposed to sail that night, unseen
From shore, yet the rest would stay,
And linger there till it was day,
In hopes of learning Tristan's fate.
Thus were they in a fractious state,
Some would leave, and some remain,
But since the truth was less than plain,
As to whether the man was dead,
It was agreed, once all was said,
That they would wait for two days yet,

Much to the barons' sore regret.

The steward's claim is heard

AND, meanwhile, the day had come
Which Gurmun had decided on
To seek true judgment at Wexford,
Of the claim brought by the steward,
Concerning Iseult his daughter.
Gurmun's nobles, and his neighbours,
His kinsmen, and all at his court,
All those whom he had sought
To gather to him thus to render
Their advice in all this matter,
Were now assembled together.
He met them, and then sought to know
Their views about the claim, for though
It seemed his judgement to make,
Yet his whole honour was at stake.
Indeed, he had requested, as well,
That his dear wife grant her counsel,
And well might Iseult prove his dear,
Since twin gifts did in her appear,
Those of wisdom and of beauty,
And rich in both was she, truly.
And so his most gracious queen
At the gathering now was seen.

Her royal spouse took her aside,
Uncertain how he might decide.
'What is your counsel? Speak!' said he,
'Like death this thing doth weigh on me.'
'Be well!' said she, 'All shall be well,
For I have now good news to tell,
I've fathomed its depths, utterly.'
'What, dear lady, then tell it me,
Speak, for we have little leisure,

Speak what will grant me pleasure.’
‘Our steward, he who claims he slew
The dragon, speaks what is untrue,
For I know who performed the deed,
And I shall prove it, by the Creed,
At the right time; quell your fears;
At the council now you’ll appear.
Say to them that when you’ve seen
And proved the claim you’ll redeem
The oath you swore to all the realm,
Tell them (and thus grasp the helm),
To take their seats. And have no fear,
But command the steward to appear,
And say whate’er he desires to say.
Iseult and I will make our way
To your side, when the time is right,
And all, I swear, shall see the light;
If you allow me, I’ll speak for you,
And for Iseult, and my own self too.
Let that be all for now, I go
To fetch my daughter here, and lo,
We both shall soon return again.’

The queen departed to explain
All to her daughter, while the king
Returned to the palace, pondering.
He took the judgement seat and there,
Gathered around for this affair,
Stood many a lord now on hand,
All the noblemen of that land;
There too many a handsome knight,
Of knights a host, a splendid sight,
Not so much to honour the king,
But curious to view this thing,
For what might come of the rumour,
Every man was led to wonder.
Now when the queen and her daughter

Entered the palace hall together,
They greeted each great lord in turn,
And high praise they both did earn,
In speech and thought, from many
Concerning their grace and beauty,
Though more was sung to the tune
Of the steward's excellent fortune.
'Behold!' they said, and thought the same,
'Without one true deed to his name,
Till now, this most wretched steward
Is set to gain a fine reward,
This fair maid; for, in the woman
He'll be granted more than any man
Could hope to look for in a bride;
And then the king's favour beside.'

The ladies went to meet the king,
Who rose to greet them, assisting
Them, fondly, to seats at his side.
'Now, steward, speak, ere I decide,
Concerning your request and plea!'
'My lord the king, most willingly!
I ask, sire, that you follow custom,
And do no wrong to our kingdom.
You swore an oath that he might claim
Your daughter Iseult, upon this same
Deed, whate'er knight in this land
Killed the dragon with his own hand.
This oath has cost full many a life,
Yet, seeking this girl as my wife,
I cared not, and sought the danger
More recklessly than any other,
And so slew the beast, on a day.
Here lies the proof of what I say;
Here is the dragon's head, behold!
I seized it there, to have and hold.
Come now, sire, redeem your promise.

For a king's word and oath, in this,
Firm and true must stand, I deem.'

The steward agrees to a duel

'STEWARD, replied the courteous queen,
'One who seeks to wed hereafter
As great a prize as is my daughter,
Without deserving it, I say
Doth overstep his mark, this day.'
'How?' said the steward, 'My lady,
You wrong me, to speak so to me.
My lord, who doth decide the case,
Speaks for himself, in all this place.
Let him speak then and reply to me!'
The king answered: 'Now, my lady,
Speak for yourself, Iseult, and I.'
'Thank you, my lord, and that shall I.'
The queen said: 'Steward, your love
Both noble and honest doth prove;
And you, owning a valiant spirit,
Deserve some woman worthy of it.
Yet if one claims the highest prize
Without earning it, in all eyes,
Surely, he doth commit a wrong.
That which to you doth scarce belong,
You have assumed, or so I hear:
The deed's not yours, it doth appear;
Nor the exploit, nor the manliness;
Or so the rumours would suggest.'
'You err, my lady, for I have clear
Proof of all that I claim; tis here.'
'You brought away its head with you,
And that many a man could do,
If he sought to win Iseult thereby,
But she will not be won, say I,
By so insignificant a deed.'

Iseult the Fair spoke: 'No, indeed!
By no means may I be bought,
Nor my hand gained by less than naught!'
The steward cried: 'Alas, princess,
How, when I love, can you profess
Such indifference to all I've faced
For you, a task by fortune graced?'
'Your love for me will win you naught,'
Said Iseult, 'Such I never sought,
And nor shall I return it ever.'
'Ah yes,' cried he, 'tis the nature,
As I well know, of all you women,
Such hearts and minds are you given,
You e'er mistake the bad for good,
Your whole sex; and the good for bad,
That vein runs in you all; tis sad;
You prove contrary in every way,
The foolish are wise men you say,
And lo, the wisest men are fools;
The straight you tangle like the schools,
And what is tangled call that straight;
Whate'er loves you, that you hate,
And what hates you, that you love,
The thread is knotted, as you prove;
Oh, how you love to contradict;
The one who seeks you, you reject,
And yet you'll seek one who loathes you.
Of all the games one can pursue
Yours is the most perverse of all.
The man who dares to risk his all,
For a woman, must be mad indeed,
Unless the thing is guaranteed.
And yet, I swear, this very day,
Despite all you, and my lady, say,
The game must end quite differently,
Or someone breaks his oath to me.'

To this tirade, the queen replied:
‘Steward, this shall not be denied,
You take a harsh but shrewd view;
To those who judge shrewdly too,
Those attributes that you summon
Are ones woman grants to woman,
And you have expressed them well,
As a ladies’ man, yet I can tell
You know your subject too deeply,
You are drowned in it completely,
Of your manhood it has robbed you,
For, of contrariness, you too
Are far too fond, for it marks you.
So are you knotted, in my view,
And hold likewise to woman’s ways;
You love that which, all its days,
Will love you not, yet you pursue
That which will ne’er pursue you.
Yet such is but our woman’s game,
Then why do you seek out the same?
You are a man, so, God be praised,
Leave us to our womanish ways,
For little good they’ll bring to you.
Keep to the manly way to woo,
And to the lover that loves you,
And pursues you, as you pursue;
That is where profit may be won
When everything is said and done.
Yet you keep telling us, in this,
That it’s Iseult for whom you wish,
Though she herself wants none of it;
Tis her nature, who can change it?
Many a thing she doth deny
She could receive, lets it go by.
Some men she cares for not a whit,
You’re the prime example of it,
Who yet would delight to have her.

But then, like mother like daughter,
I like you little myself, tis true,
Nor, I find, doth Iseult like you,
In this the girl takes after me;
You but waste your love you see.
A lovely girl, a lovely queen,
What value in her were seen,
Were she to welcome any man,
Who desired to seek her hand?
Now, steward, as you have said,
My lord must be prepared to wed
His daughter to you, keep his oath,
But take care that in seeking both,
You justify all that you claim
And neglect naught of that same,
But pursue your case strongly.
I heard one say, perchance wrongly,
That another killed the dragon.
How will you answer such a one?
'And who might that be?' 'I know,
And I, in time, the knight will show.'

'My lady, there is no such knight!
He who deprives me of my right,
Seeks to rob me of my honour,
By deceit, then in full armour,
He must grant me my redress,
For hand to hand I will address
This story, as the court decree,
Ere I shall go on bended knee!
'I swear, and am your surety,'
Said the queen, 'that he shall be
Revealed to all, the brave man who
This monster of a dragon slew,
And fight you, in single combat,
Three days from now for, as to that,
I cannot as yet present him here.'

The king said: 'He shall so appear.'
And all the lords gave their consent.
'Steward, as such is our intent,
And then, tis but a short delay,
Accept fair combat on that day.
Come! Pledge to defend your claim,
And my lady will do the same.'
And thereupon the king did he
Accept from them their surety,
Both parties pledging that the duel
Would take place, a fair battle,
Without fail, on the third day.
And, with this, all went their way.

Tristan regains his strength

THE two women withdrew, and then
Returned to their caring task again,
Of restoring the minstrel's strength,
By every means, until, at length,
Given their conscientiousness,
Their gentle and tender kindness,
He seemed well and altogether
Of a good and healthy colour.
Iseult gazed upon him closely,
Examining his state, quietly,
Stealing many a hidden glance,
At his body and countenance.
She saw that his limbs revealed
Openly that which he concealed,
His princely self, and whate'er
A maid loves in a man was there,
So she praised it in her thoughts.

And so too her heart was caught,
Viewing his magnificent form,
And he as to the manner born,

And noble in every feature,
Such that it spoke within her:
'God of Wonders, if there is aught
In which your deeds e'er fell short,
Then it was in this wondrous man,
To whom you granted, as you can,
Such great perfection, and yet he
Must spend his life perilously
Wandering from place to place.
He should rule some noble race,
A kingdom worthy of his deed.
For tis the strangest world indeed,
Yet one Lord that you have willed,
Where so many thrones are filled
By lesser men, yet he holds none.
Surely so fine and true a person,
Should be born to wealth and honour?
Great wrong indeed he doth suffer,
When his rank and situation
Are so ill-matched to his person.'
The girl repeated all this often.
And her mother she spoke then
To her husband about this man,
Telling him of the merchant and,
In all the detail you have heard,
Of his affairs and, in a word,
That he wished for protection,
On each and every occasion
When he might enter Ireland.
All this the king did understand.

Iseult views the splintered sword

MEANWHILE, Iseult told Paranis,
Her page, to make good and polish,
All Tantris' armour, and attend
To the rest, or replace or mend.

When this had been swiftly done,
And all was laid out in the room,
Bright and shining, and fit for use,
The girl came quietly to amuse
Herself, by gazing at each piece,
Or handling them in pure caprice.
Now it befell Iseult once more,
That she was the first, as before,
To find the torment of her heart,
Ere any other, and by no art
But the workings of destiny,
That come upon folk secretly.
It was her heart that turned her eye
On where his weapon chanced to lie.
Why she should do so I know not,
But in her hands the sword she got,
As children and young maidens do,
And, God knows, many a man too.
The naked blade she then did bare,
And gazed upon it everywhere.
Finding that a fragment was lost,
Inspecting the place, to her cost,
Closely and carefully, she saw
The blade had splintered long before.
'Heaven,' she cried, 'aid and bless!
The broken fragment I possess
May match this very blade; then I
Its edge against the blade must try.'
She fetched the splinter, and did so,
Matching the two, to make a whole,
The steel blade and fragment joining
As if they formed one perfect thing,
As they had done, two years before.

Her heart felt then the icy claw
Of past injury, and her colour
Was altered to a deathly pallor;

Then a flame of pain and anger
Suffused with fire every feature.
'Alas, Iseult the wretched! Woe
On the blade that dealt a grievous blow.
With it my dear uncle was slain,
Tristan was his enemy's name.
Who, from Cornwall, carried this?
Who gave it to this man, Tantris?'
She began to muse on the names,
Sounding them to herself, again.
'Dear Lord,' she cried, 'they disturb
Me so, these like-sounding words.
Why could that be?' and she began
Saying aloud: 'Tantris, Tristan.'
Trying them over on her tongue
The form of each she thought upon,
Noting the letters were the same,
And by re-ordering each name,
She came on the key to all this.
Forwards she spoke it as 'Tan-tris',
Backwards she spoke it as 'Tris-tan'.
And now was certain of the man.
'Yes, yes, I see!' the girl did cry,
'If this is what the names imply,
My heart divined, some time ago,
All his deception, and told me so.
How clearly thus the truth I saw,
When I admired all that I saw,
Of his behaviour and his person,
And in my heart sought the reason:
It seems he is a nobleman!
And who then but this same Tristan
Would dare to sail, as he has done,
From Cornwall, come seeking welcome,
Here, from his sworn enemies?
Twice have we saved him, foolishly.
Saved him! Naught will do so now,

His blade shall slay the man, I vow!
Come, Iseult, take thus your revenge,
For if the same sword should avenge
You uncle, twere right and fitting!’

Iseult unmasks Tristan

NOW, as Tristan was yet sitting
In his bath, she grasped the blade,
And standing over him displayed
Her weapon: ‘So, Tristan,’ she said
Is that not your name?’ With dread
He answered: ‘No, Tantris, I am,
My lady.’ ‘Tantris and Tristan
You are, I know it, and the two
Prove evil; as Tantris, must you
Pay now for what Tristan has done,
My uncle’s death and yours make one!’
‘No, no, sweet lady,’ Tristan cried,
In God’s good name, forgo your pride;
Think of who you are, and spare me,
If you, who now seek to slay me,
Should earn the name of murderess,
A maid, known for her gentleness,
Iseult the Fair, you are no longer,
Forever dead to trust and honour.
The sun that shines from Ireland
That many a heart has gladdened,
Ah, that sun will rise no more,
Nor shed its light as heretofore!
Woe to those bright hands, see how
Ill that sword becomes them now!’

At this point, the queen did enter:
‘Now, now, what means this, daughter?
She demanded, ‘Do young and fair
Maidens behave as you do there?’

Have you forgone all common sense?
Is this true anger, or mere pretence?
Why is the sword there in your hand?’
‘Refresh your grief, this is Tristan!
Ah, mother, here sits the murderer
The very man who slew your brother.
We can avenge the wrong he wrought,
And drive the very blade he brought
Into his breast; tis destiny;
Fate grants this opportunity.’
This is Tristan? How can you know?’
‘I know for certain the thing is so.
This is his sword, look carefully,
And at this fragment, then tell me
He’s not the man; a moment ago
I inserted the steel splinter so
Edge to wretched edge, and oh,
I saw they made one tale of woe.’
‘Ah!’ cried her mother, instantly,
‘You stir so painful a memory;
Alas, that ever my life began!
For if this is indeed Tristan,
How utterly was I deceived
That in the minstrel I believed!’

And now Iseult advanced toward
Tristan, with the upraised sword.
‘Halt, no, Iseult!’ her mother cried,
My own pledge cannot be denied.
You know not what I swore to him.’
‘I care not, this brings death on him.’
‘Mercy, fair Iseult!’ cried Tristan.
‘Oh, you wicked and shameless man,
Replied Iseult, ‘do you seek mercy?
Mercy, indeed, means naught to you.
Here shall I wrest the life from you!’
‘No, daughter!’ the mother spoke again,

‘The matter stands not thus, for then,
By taking vengeance, in this manner,
We break a pledge, incur dishonour.
Be not so swift, for he is here,
And in my own home, not by mere
Chance, for his life and property,
Are in my protection, as you see.
Howe’er the promise came about,
His life is sacred, have no doubt.’
‘Thank you, my lady,’ said Tristan,
Remember, that as an honest man,
Relying thus upon your honour,
I entrusted life and all, forever,
To you, and you did so accept.’
‘You lie!’ the girl cried, and leapt
Towards him, ‘For I know, in this,
To another she made that promise;
Offered no sanctuary to ‘Tristan’,
Not for his goods, nor yet the man!’

Then she flourished the sword again,
And sought that she might prove his bane,
While Tristan cried out, fearfully:
‘Â bèle Iseult, mercî, mercî!’
But her mother was by her side;
The queen did by her pledge abide,
And he had naught at all to fear
From her daughter it doth appear.
Had he been bound in this affair,
Tied to the bath, and Iseult there
Alone with him, yet he would still
Not have died, for she could not kill;
That good, sweet maid, who’d never
Known bitterness or mortal anger,
In her tender heart, how should she
Slaughter a man, mercilessly?
It was because her grief had stirred

Her tongue, to utter an angry word,
That she appeared, outwardly,
As if she would enact the deed,
And would have done so, had she
The heart to act so ruthlessly.

And yet her heart was not so pure
That her acquiescence was assured,
For she yet saw and heard the cause
Of her grief, though she did pause.
She heard her enemy and saw him,
And yet she could not destroy him.
Her tender feelings, as a woman,
Had thwarted her true intention.
They struggled now within her, these
Two oft-conflicting qualities,
Tenderness, and righteous anger,
Which seem to go so ill together.
Thus when fierce anger in her heart
Sought now to tear her foe apart,
Womanly tenderness again
Whispered gently: 'No, refrain!'
Thus was her own heart torn in two,
The one heart harsh yet tender too.
And so she'd fling the sword aside,
And yet her heart could not decide,
And so she'd take the sword again,
Faced with her anger, then refrain.
She wished to slay, and yet did not,
She wished to act and yet could not.
So within her those two clashed,
Till womanly tenderness, at last,
Overcame the weight of anger,
Despite its strength within her,
Such that her enemy went free;
And Morolt? Unavenged was he.

The queen remembers her pledge

THUS Iseult flung the sword aside,
As, weeping angry tears, she cried:
'Alas, that I live to see this day!'
Yet her wise mother had her say:
'My dearest daughter, I too bear
Pain such as weighs on your heart there,
Yet mine is, sadly, crueller still;
God afflicts me, as is His will,
With deeper grief than troubles you.
My brother is dead, that is true,
And that has been my greatest woe,
But now I must fear for you also;
And truly daughter, far deeper
Is this sorrow than the former,
For I love naught as I love you.
Rather than ill come from this duel,
I would renounce it, and so bear
More readily that single care.
Yet because of that wretched man,
Who would wed you, and my plan
To challenge him, we soon must face
Endless dishonour, and disgrace,
You, your father the king, and I,
Unless some champion we espy,
Who may retrieve our happiness.'

Tristan seeks reconciliation

'I have caused you sorrow, I confess,'
Tristan, from his bath, now cried,
'And yet, in this, my hands were tied,
For if, as you ought to, you recall
All that did happen in Cornwall,
There was no other choice to make,
For then my own life was at stake;

And no man gladly suffers death,
But fights on to his dying breath.
Yet, be that as it may, and howe'er
Matters stand with the steward there,
Be not concerned, for I will bring
A right true end to everything;
That is if you will let me live,
And death a breathing-space doth give.
Iseult the wise, Iseult the Fair,
I know you both, in this affair,
As good, true, and considerate;
There is a matter I would state,
Of benefit, if you'd forego
Past hostile feelings, and so
Dispel the hatred that you bear
Towards Tristan, for I declare
I have news that may surprise.'

Iseult's mother, Iseult the wise,
Gazed upon him, flushed with anger,
While her glittering eyes shed bitter
Tears: 'Ah!' she said, 'At last I hear,
And know, that we have Tristan here;
I was unsure till you spoke; though
Now, unasked, you have told me so.
Alas and woe, my lord Tristan,
That I hold your life in my hand,
As I do now, and yet this day
Gain naught from it, in any way!
Yet power is multifarious;
I think I may employ it thus
To triumph o'er an enemy,
Despite my former pledge, for see
It is against a wicked man.
Lord, shall I slay this Tristan?
In truth, I think tis my intent.'

Behold, her niece, the fair Brangwen,
Noble, discerning, with a smile,
Had entered, silently, meanwhile,
And she, all beautifully arrayed,
Now gazed toward the naked blade
And now toward the woeful ladies.
'How now!' she cried, 'what words are these?
Why are you gathered in this way?
What game is it that you three play?
Why do you shed many a tear?
And why should a drawn sword lie here?'
'See, dear cousin, how we have been
Deceived, but see!' cried the queen.
'Brangwen, it was no nightingale
We saved, a serpent we unveiled;
The corn we ground for the dove
Doth nurture for the raven prove;
Dear Lord, our efforts in the end
But healed a foe and not a friend;
Twice have we, with our own hands
Rescued from death this same Tristan!
For it is Tristan who sits there;
Then let him for his death prepare,
Shall I avenge Morholt? Advise
Me, cousin; you are ever wise.'

'No, my lady; no, do not so!
Your mind and heart both tell you no.
You are too good to consider
Such a deed; the crime of murder
Is beyond you; and to this one,
You extended your protection.
Dear God, tis never your intent!
You should dwell on what he meant,
And do what concerns your honour.
Honour then would you surrender
For vengeance on some enemy?'

‘What shall I do then? Counsel me.’
‘Reflect, my lady; meanwhile allow
The man to leave his bath for now,
Let’s seek what course may prove best.’

And so the three retired to rest,
In private, and discuss the matter.
‘Listen,’ said Iseult the Elder,
‘Tell me what news he might bring.
He claims if we prove forgiving,
And forgo our old hatreds, he
Will tell all. What could that be?’
‘Since we know not, then my advice,’
Said Brangwen, ‘is that we think twice
Ere we display hostility,
Or treat him as an enemy.
And wait to know what he intends.
Some good to you it may portend,
Honour to both of you may bring.
Set your sails as blows the wind.
Who knows? His coming to Ireland
May yield advantage to this land.
Spare him for now, for he shall be,
Thanks be to God, the means we see
Whereby this false steward’s lies
May be revealed to all men’s eyes.
God helped us in our search, indeed,
For did not his true guidance lead
Us to Tristan? And had He not,
Death had proved the minstrel’s lot.
And then, young Iseult, this affair
Had left a greater weight of care
Upon your shoulders; so be kind,
For if doubt should grip his mind
He will take flight, and who indeed
Could blame him, in time of need?
Be careful in your choice of words,

And treat him well, as he deserves.
Thus I counsel; do as I'll do:
For Tristan's as noble as you,
His is both well-bred and courtly,
Owns to every fine quality,
So, whate'er your thoughts may be,
Treat him well, and courteously.
And, whate'er his intentions are,
None would have journeyed so far
Without some serious aim in mind,
A mission of some weight, you'll find.'

The ladies rose to seek their man,
And came to where they found Tristan
Sitting on a couch, from which he
Leapt to meet them, courteously,
Then threw himself at their feet.
Kneeling there, in that complete
State of humble supplication,
Yet, in accord with his station,
He then addressed them, all three;
'Mercy, dear ladies, grant mercy!
Let me be spared for journeying
To your land, since news I bring,
To your honour, and benefit!'
At this, the radiant trio saw fit
To look away, and with each other
Exchange glances. Thus, together,
Stood the ladies, and thus knelt he.
Till Brangwen spoke out: 'My lady,
The knight has knelt there too long.'
The queen's reply was swift and strong:
'What would you have me do with him?
For my heart, in regard to him,
Is not inclined to call him friend;
How can the matter rightly end?'
'Well, dear lady,' Brangwen replied,

‘If you both would have me decide,
Though I know that you scarce can find
A way to forgive, in heart or mind,
Past injury, yet let him live,
And so his news the man may give,
Perchance to your benefit and his.’
‘Be it so,’ they replied, to this,
And told him to rise to his feet.

Tristan pursues his mission

THEN they all four took their seat.
Once pledges had been duly given,
Tristan now disclosed his mission.
‘My lady,’ he said, ‘if you will be,
Hereafter, a good friend to me,
Within two days, I can ensure,
Straightforwardly what is more,
Your daughter’s marriage to a king,
One most pleasing in everything,
Well-fitted, thus, to be her lord,
Handsome, his manners unflawed,
A knight illustrious in the field,
Skilled in the use of lance and shield,
Born to a line of noble kings,
And I’ll say, among other things,
A king far wealthier than her father.
‘Indeed,’ said the queen, ‘whatever
Was asked, I would willingly do,
If all that you speak here is true.’
‘My lady’ continued Tristan,
‘Firm guarantees are here to hand,
If, after true reconciliation,
You have them not, withdraw protection
From me and mine, and work my death.’
‘Brangwen, now tell me, in a breath,
What you advise,’ said the wise queen.

‘His offer seems good to me; be seen
To act accordingly, this I’d counsel.
All the doubts that you had dispel,
Rise now and kiss him, both of you.
And I must play peacemaker too,
Though a queen I may not be, yet
Morolt was kin, do not forget.’
And so they kissed him then, all three,
Though there was some uncertainty
In the daughter’s mind, and she
Delayed long ere she would agree.

Now that these four had made their peace,
Tristan once more addressed the ladies:
‘God in his goodness knows that I
Ne’er felt such joy; behind me lie
The dangers I divined, that might
Have undone a far braver knight,
While hoping to win your favour;
Now more than mere hope I savour;
I’ll banish care, do you the same.
From Cornwall to Ireland I came,
On your behalf, as you now hear,
For after my first voyage here,
When you brought about my healing,
Your praise I never ceased to sing
To my lord Mark, and so I brought
The king to turn his every thought,
Towards Iseult the Fair, until
To marry her is all his will;
Though he was in two minds at first,
For then he feared the very worst,
Your anger and your enmity,
And then it was his wish that he
Should e’er remain without a wife,
That when he parted from this life,
I might prove his only heir.

Yet I said that was not my care,
And so in the end he relented,
And, more than that, he consented
To my leading here an expedition;
And that is why I killed the dragon,
And now that you have healed me,
Shown me kindness and courtesy,
Iseult the Fair shall be the queen,
Of Cornwall and England I mean.
And now you know why I am here.
And yet, lest I have aught to fear,
From this thrice-blessed company,
More than blessed indeed by all three,
Let all this be our secret still!’
‘Yet tell me Tristan, if you will,
May I tell the king, and occasion
A public reconciliation?’
‘Indeed, my lady,’ cried Tristan,
‘He’s every right to know our plan,
But let me take no harm thereby.’
‘Fear not my lord, for this say I,
That all such dangers now are past.’

The ladies then withdrew, at last,
And hastened to a private chamber,
There to welcome and consider
His good fortune and cleverness,
All that had led to his success,
In every measure of this affair,
And praised him, the mother there,
In one way, Brangwen in another.
Said the daughter to her mother:
‘Now hear, how I found out the man
Was, without a doubt, Tristan.
Once I had puzzled out the sword,
I turned all my thoughts toward
The two names, ‘Tantris’ and Tristan,

Examining them close at hand,
And, as I uttered both of them,
Realised what they had in common,
The letters in them were the same.
No more there were, I say again,
Than those in 'Tantris' and Tristan,
For both names own to a like plan.
Now, mother, come divide 'Tantris'
Into a *tan* and then a *tris*,
Then say the *tris* before the *tan*
And you will speak the name Tristan.
Next say the *tan* before the *tris*
And you will say, again, 'Tantris'.
'God bless me,' the queen exclaimed,
'What set you thinking of that same?'

Gurmun agrees that Iseult the Fair should wed King Mark

WHILE the three women, together,
Were in discussion on this matter,
Queen Iseult summoned the king
And once she knew he was listening,
Said: My lord, we three require
Something that is our joint desire,
And if you see fit to comply
We shall all benefit, say I.'
'Whate'er you wish, that too I wish,
And you shall have your way in this.'
'Is the matter wholly in my hands?'
Asked the queen. 'As you command.'
'Thank you, my lord, I'm satisfied.
I have Tristan here, who defied
And slew my brother, yet I wish
That you receive him and, in this
Do grant to him your true favour,
For his mission is one of honour,
Tis that of reconciliation,

Binding our nation to his nation.’
‘Truly, I leave this thing to you,
For such would be my desire too,
And without the least hesitation,
For Morolt was your close relation,
And this concerns you more than I.
Morolt was your brother, whereby
The matter is your affair not mine.
If you the injury would consign
To the past, likewise I shall too.’
Iseult now told the tale anew,
As Tristan had relayed it all,
And the king was pleased to call
The offer good, all he had heard:
‘Ensure now that he keeps his word!’

Queen Iseult did, at once, command
Brangwen to bring my lord Tristan,
Who came at once and, on entering,
Threw himself down before the king.
‘Mercy, your Majesty! cried he.
‘Rise up, lord Tristan, come, kiss me.’
Said the king: ‘Loth though I may be
To renounce the feud, since these three
Ladies wish it, then so do I.’
‘And shall this truce of ours, thereby
Include my king, and both his lands?’
‘Indeed it shall, my lord Tristan.’

Now, as their mutual truce began,
The queen took Tristan by the hand,
And seated him beside her daughter,
And bid him tell of his adventure.
So the tale he told, before the king,
From start to end, how everything
Had fallen out, of King Mark’s suit,
His voyage, the dragon, its pursuit.

Then the king asked: 'My lord Tristan,
What guarantees have you to hand?
How may I be sure of this matter?'
'Easily, sire, with me my master
Sent his barons; whate'er you wish
That we can confirm, shall seal this.'

The king departed, while the four,
The ladies and Tristan, once more
Conversed together, then Tristan
Turned to Paranis, the queen's man:
'My friend,' said he, 'to the harbour;
There you'll find my ship at anchor,
Then seek, but do so covertly,
Curvenal, among my company,
And tell him, but in a whisper,
That he must come to his master.
To any other man, say naught;
Bring here, to me, the one you sought.'
The page performed his mission, so
Quietly that none else did know.

When Paranis brought Curvenal,
To the chamber, to meet them all,
Only the queen inclined her head
In greeting, for the page had led
Before them one who, to their sight,
Was not dressed as befits a knight.

Now Curvenal, on seeing Tristan
Safe in these fair ladies' hands,
All talking pleasantly together,
Addressed him in the French manner,
Courteously: '*Â beau douce sire,*
My fair sweet lord, in God's name,
What do you here, in this same
Heavenly paradise, while we

Are given to sore anxiety?
We all thought that we were lost,
And you, my lord, had paid the cost
Of your enterprise; how sorry
And fearful and how melancholy
You've made us! This very morn
The crew were grieving, forlorn,
Mourning you, thinking you dead,
Wishing to leave an ill roadstead,
And are resolved to sail this eve!
'Yet here he is, both safe and happy,
Said the queen, 'and they were wrong.'
Tristan addressed him in Breton:
'Go, Curvenal, and tell them there
That all goes well in this affair,
And I'll succeed in the mission
That they and I were sent upon.'
And then, as fully as he could,
He told him how the matter stood.

Now once the story he had told
Of his efforts, and the whole
Tale of his good-fortune, he said:
Go swiftly now to the roadstead
And tell the knights and barons
They must be ready every one
Tomorrow morn, neatly dressed
In the finest clothes they possess
And then await my messenger.
Once he reaches them however
They must ride here to the court;
And by then let me be brought
My small chest of valuables,
If you would but take the trouble,
To send it with my clothes, the best,
And dress yourself, with the rest,
As befits a true knight in his pride.'

Curvenal bowed, then left his side.
Brangwen asked: 'Who is that man?
For he truly seemed, when he began,
To think this a paradise outright:
Is he your man then, or a knight?'
'Howe'er he may seem to your sight,
He is both my man, and a knight.
Yet let there be doubt that never
Has the sun shone on any better,
Nor a truer friend has there been.'
'Then blessed be he,' said the queen,
And the princess, and then Brangwen,
That courteous well-bred girl. Now, when
Curvenal arrived at the harbour
And Tristan's message did deliver,
As he had been instructed to,
He relayed the tale to the crew,
And spoke of Tristan's success;
And all were filled with happiness,
Like wretches, condemned to death,
Who are yet reprieved in a breath;
But many were happier with peace,
Than with this Tristan's victories,
While the barons turned once more
To envious slanders as before,
Calling his acts of bravery
The products of mere sorcery;
And thus they murmured together:
'Is it really any wonder
That he such wonders can achieve?
Lord, how else can one believe,
In the success that he doth make
Of all he seeks to undertake!'

Queen Iseult presents her case against the steward

NOW the day of the duel had come,

And many nobles did thus assume
Their rightful place before the king
In his hall, with a deal of talking,
Among the young, as to who might
Defend Iseult's cause, in the fight.
The question was tossed to and fro,
But the truth of it no man did know.
Meanwhile Tristan had received
His chest of valuables, and retrieved
A handsome belt from it for each lady,
As fine as any that there might be,
Such that no queen or empress saw
So pleasing a gift, or ever wore
A finer, and this chest was filled
To the lid, so that there spilled
From it fair coronets and rings,
Clasps and purses, pretty things,
Such that in your wildest fancy
You'd ne'er dream aught so lovely.
Yet from it all no more was taken,
Except that Tristan, as a token,
Seized a chaplet, clasp and belt,
That suited him, or so he felt.
'Fair ladies, all the lovely three,
Accept this as a gift from me;
This chest, and all within, review,
Then do with it as it pleases you.'

He departed, to change his clothes,
And dress himself, for now he chose
To present himself as a proud knight
Should do, in all that, to men's sight,
Showed his superiority,
All that enhanced him perfectly.
And then he re-joined the ladies,
Who gazed at him and, secretly
Considered him, handsome and blessed.

To themselves, the three confessed
‘Truly, here’s a manly creature;
For his clothes, and then his figure,
Between them they declare the man;
Indeed the two go hand in hand.
He courts good-fortune certainly.’

Tristan had summoned his company;
They took their places in the hall,
One by one, and observed by all,
The whole gathering inspecting
The fine clothes they were wearing.
And some said that ne’er so many
Had shown in such brave finery.
Yet the barons said not a word,
And naught that any of them heard
Was understood, for none among
Them but Tristan spoke the tongue.

Then the king sent a messenger
For the queen and her daughter.
‘Iseult,’ she said, ‘now, we must go!
Lord Tristan, I shall let you know
When to enter, and then do so;
Walk in a stately manner though,
Let Brangwen here take your hand,
Then follow us, you understand.’
‘Indeed I do, and will, fair queen.’
For thus he intended to be seen.

So Queen Iseult, the bright dawn
Led in her sun, the light of morn,
The wonder of all Ireland,
Iseult the Fair as, hand in hand,
They glided through the hall together,
The fair sun keeping pace ever
With the dawn; the fair daughter

In step with that of her mother;
The girl so pleasing overall,
So well-formed, slender, tall,
As if Love formed her alway
To act as Love's bird of prey,
Shaped her like a young falcon
The crown of bodily perfection.
She wore a robe and a mantle
Of samite, dyed a royal purple,
Cut in the French fashion so
That where the brocade did flow
Down her sides towards the waist
It was gathered, held in place,
By a tasselled belt that hung
As it should, on one so young.
The robe clung to her intimately,
Fitting closely to her body,
Nowhere loose, falling smoothly
Throughout its length, and gently
Flowing, free, about the knees,
In a way that doth ever please.
Her mantle it was lined within,
Heraldically, with white ermine,
Patterned with black-tipped tails,
A perfect length, and the details:
It was edged in front with sable,
Finely trimmed, but serviceable,
Not too narrow and not too wide,
A perfect measure on either side,
The black sable blended with grey,
Grey and black mixed in such a way
As to be indistinguishable.
And all along the seam, the sable
Curved above the ermine there;
They, as ever, a well-matched pair.
A tiny loop of fine white pearls
Served as a clasp, the lovely girl

Placing her left thumb in the string;
With her right hand, she did bring
The mantle together, as you know
One does, to keep a mantle close,
Holding it with but two fingers;
From here where the last fold lingers
It hung freely, and fell, revealing,
This or that; I mean the lining
Or the mantle, outside or in;
The two concealed there, within,
That which Love had formed so finely,
Both in spirit and in body.
Needle and fabric, ne'er did see
So sweetly woven a tapestry,
As this living form did provide.
Hawk-like glances from either side
Flew thick as snow towards her,
And yet I think Iseult, the daughter,
Seized many a man's heart as prey.
Upon her head, a coronet
Of gold was elegantly set,
Slender, wrought with art and skill,
Encrusted with rare gems, at will,
Wondrous stones, highly-prized,
Despite their being small in size,
Emeralds, hyacinths, and rubies,
Sapphires, and chalcedonies,
The finest gems in all the land,
So finely set no goldsmith's hand,
Has worked with greater artistry;
Gold on gold gleamed dazzlingly,
The circlet and her golden hair,
Vying with one another there.
Never was eyesight so discerning,
Except it saw the gems glittering,
As to perceive the circlet there,
So indistinguishable the hair

From the circlet's gleaming gold,
For both a glowing light did hold.
So Iseult with Iseult did enter,
The daughter following the mother,
And rid of all anxiety.
Her pace was regal and yet free,
Her steps neither short nor long,
As she moved amongst the throng,
But twixt the two, in even measure.
A confident and pleasing figure,
Erect as a sparrow-hawk, and sleek
As is a well-preened parakeet;
And then she gazed about her now,
As a falcon might upon the bough,
Keeping a calm lookout, its eyes
Not desperate to seek a prize,
But rather sweeping steadily,
Smoothly, yet perceptively,
Gazing gently, yet so firmly,
That not a one there who did see
Those two mirrors fair and bright
Felt aught but wonder and delight.
The light of this joy-giving sun
Shed its brightness on everyone;
Gliding past, beside her mother,
Gladdening the hall about her.
Thus the pair extended greeting,
The daughter's bow completing
The mother's words of salutation,
And in this pleasing occupation,
The role of each was crystal clear.
One spoke, the other bowing here,
After her mother's words, and so
They courteously about did go.

Now, when the two Iseults, the one
The dawn, and the other the sun,

Took their seats beside the king,
The steward, eager in everything,
Sought for the ladies' champion;
Who might the fellow be, the man
Here as their legal defender?
And yet he received no answer.
So he gathered his kinsmen who
Supported him, no small few,
And went to stand before the king,
He who was to decide this thing.
'Sire, behold,' he said, 'here am I,
Judicial contest I claim, and I
Would view now the goodly knight
Who mars my honour and my right.
I have kinsmen here and friends,
To call upon; if the case depends
On clear proof, then I have it here,
So strong that, since the law is clear,
Justice must now uphold my plea,
And so deliver the prize to me.
I fear no force, or arms, I own,
Unless it be your power alone.'

Tristan reveals the proof

'STEWARD,' if you seek this duel yet,
Said Queen Iseult, 'then I regret,
Your desire, for I assure you,
Uncertain as to what to do,
If you would let the matter rest,
Iseult, my daughter, be blessed
By your renouncing this affair,
It will benefit you, I swear,
As much as it will my daughter.'
'Renounce the thing?' cried the other,
'I think you'd ne'er do that same,
Abandoning a winning game,

My lady for, despite your offer,
I shall pass the trial with honour.
I'd prove a fool, it seems to me,
If I were, after all this, freely,
To cease my efforts in the matter.
My lady, I would win your daughter,
That is my whole desire in this;
If you believe I've done amiss,
And twas your man slew the dragon,
Then summon him now, and have done!'

'Indeed, I hear you,' said the queen,
'It shall be so, as will be seen,
For I now turn to my own side.'
Then she drew Paranis aside:
'Go now!' she said, 'Bring me the man.'
At this the barons, on either hand,
Gazed at each other, and a murmur
Rose, as they questioned in a whisper
As to who her champion might be,
Though none knew of a certainty.

And now the noble Brangwen,
The lovely full moon, once again
Made an entrance, with Tristan,
Leading him gently by the hand.
The well-bred girl there did glide,
Keeping a calm pace, by his side,
In person, and in composure,
Delightful beyond all measure;
In spirit noble, proud, and free.
He escorted her with dignity,
Tristan, marvellously blessed
With every quality possessed
By a chivalrous man, whate'er
Did a true knight thus declare;
His figure, and then his finery,

Were both in perfect harmony,
Proclaiming the courtly spirit,
For he wore, as was his habit,
Exotic clothes, of fine brocade,
Rarely, and wondrously made,
Unlike those handed out at court,
And then gold-thread, of the sort
To richly enhance a garment,
Was more than commonly present,
Such that you could barely trace
The silk beneath, it did so efface
The cloth, with gold wrought so fair,
So deeply sunk in gold thread there,
And there again, and thus throughout,
You could scarce make the fabric out.
Over all this there lay a net
Of tiny pearls, its meshes set
A hand's breadth apart, through which
Glowed the workings, gold-enriched.
The lining was of silk, dyed yet
More purple than the violet,
And quite as purple as the iris.
This gold brocade yet fitted his
Form as smoothly as tis thought,
Amongst all those to be sought,
The finest cloth should ever do.
This handsome man it suited too,
Most handsomely and had won
His approval, for this occasion.
On his head a chaplet he wore,
A wondrous piece of skill, and more,
One that shone like candle-glow
From which the light of gems did flow,
Chrysolites, chalcedonies,
And topazes, and bright rubies,
All shining there like fair stars.
Bright and clear, this work of art

Cast a ring of brightness there,
Around his head, above his hair.
So he paced through the crowd,
Richly arrayed, erect and proud.
His bearing masterful and princely,
His whole array splendid in every
Little detail, so that the nobles all
Made way as he came through the hall.

Now those from Cornwall saw him,
And gathered, in joy, as Brangwen
And Tristan advanced, hand in hand,
Welcoming them, maiden and man,
And leading him, in full splendour
To do the king appropriate honour;
The king and the royal ladies
Showing Tristan honour equally,
Rising to greet him, courteously,
While he bowed low to the three.
They welcomed his company too,
In sovereign style, as was their due.

Then all the knights gathered about,
And welcomed these guests, without
Yet knowing aught of their mission,
While many a Cornish baron
Now recognised his kith or kin,
Sent to Ireland for they had been
Part of the tribute; many a man
Gratefully to some relative ran,
While shedding tears of happiness,
Of pain and gratitude in excess,
Joy mixed with sorrow, I avow,
Though I'll say naught of it now.
The king took Tristan and Brangwen
And as they arrived, seated them,
On one side, the former nearer,

The two Iseults upon the other,
While all Tristan's companions
And the many knights and barons
Took their seats before and below
The tribune, in the great hall, so
The judge and others were in view,
And they could see what might ensue.

Now on the subject of Tristan
There came from many a man
Comments, and questions also,
For, as to that, you must know,
Founts of praise began to well
And flow; I know, and will tell,
How they lauded all they saw
Extolling his figure and more,
Paying him many a compliment,
Gracious in detail and extent.
They spoke indeed in this manner:
'When did God form, or any see,
A man more suited to chivalry?
How well-endowed for a fight,
He is, how easily this knight
Shall enter lists and take the prize!
How rich his garments, to our eyes,
And how beautifully planned!
You ne'er saw such here in Ireland,
Clothes fit for an emperor to wear,
And his company so princely there.
Whoe'er he is this lord must be,
Of wealth and spirit, full and free.
Much of such talk filled the place,
While the steward pulled a sour face.

Silence was ordered in the hall,
And this was now obeyed by all.
None spoke a word or e'en a part,

‘Steward,’ said the king, ‘stand apart,
And say what deed it is you claim.’
‘I slew the dragon,’ said that same,
‘Tis true, Sire.’ The stranger rose:
‘Sir, you did not. ‘I did, sir; so
Shall I prove, and in this place.’
‘What evidence shall prove your case?
Asked Tristan.’ ‘The dragon’s head,
That I have brought here in its stead.’
‘Your Majesty,’ Tristan replied,
‘Have the thing examined inside,
Since he would by it prove a lie;
And if the tongue is there, say I,
Then I’ll renounce my position,
And so withdraw my opposition.’

So the dragon’s head was opened,
But naught such being present, then
Tristan sent men to bring the tongue.
My lords; he cried ‘from the dragon
I took the tongue; now, come see.’
That it was so all did agree,
Except the steward who, as before,
Denied it, but could show no more
Proof, and so began to stammer,
And tremble in his limbs, and totter,
Unable to speak a word, or stay
Silent, for he had naught to say,
And yet knew not how to behave.
‘Lords, one and all,’ declared Tristan,
‘Consider the deeds of this man,
For when I had killed the dragon
And afterwards cut out the tongue,
And had carried it away, he came,
And slew the monster once again!’
Replied the lords: ‘Little honour
Can a man gain in that manner!

For howe'er any man might boast,
Tis clear that he hath done the most
Who came before; to take the tongue,
He'd first of all to slay the dragon!
This was agreed amongst them all.

Now, once the verdict so did fall,
And the steward's case was lost,
Tristan said: 'Now, Your Majesty,
Recall your pledge, and honour me,
I have a claim upon your daughter.'
The king replied, 'I seek no other,
Than that to which we have agreed.'
'The steward cried: 'My lord, give heed;
Say not so, for some deception
Lies behind this explanation,
Some cunning or some trickery.
Ere I am robbed thus, unjustly,
Of my honour, by this knight,
I first must lose it in the fight;
A duel, and one fairly fought,
I demand; grant what I sought!'

'Now truly,' said Iseult the wise,
Steward your quarrel is unwise.
With whom now do you mean to fight?
This gentleman is in the right,
And to Iseult he now has claim,
Only a child would fight again
When there is naught here left to win.'
'Why naught, my lady?' asked Tristan,
'For I would rather fight the man
Than have him claim that we won
By cunning, as he might have done.
My lord, my lady, if you proclaim
That he must arm, I'll do the same.'

Now as soon as the steward saw
That this thing would lead to war,
He gathered to him kith and kin
And asked them to counsel him;
Yet they, appalled by the affair,
Offered him but scant help there.
'Steward, they were prompt to say,
You brought here an ill suit this day;
Behold, it has not ended well.
What then could be our counsel?
What is this duel you would fight?
If you choose to oppose the right,
Your very life you well may lose.
No honour's here if you thus choose.
Lose your honour, and lose your life,
Where is the reason in such strife?
Our counsel is that this knight here,
And in this we are more than clear,
Would prove your mortal enemy;
And if you sought this victory
Instead twould be the death of you.
Twas the devil's counsel robbed you
Of your honour, yet keep your life,
And ask not Iseult for your wife,
But seek instead to end the case.'
'What would you do in my place?'
Asked the steward. 'Here's our advice,
Return within and, if you are wise,
Declare that concerning your claim
Your friends suggest you drop that same.
And you agree, and tis your wish.'

The steward now accepted this.
He returned, and then conceded
That his followers had pleaded
For him to end the suit, and he
Wished rid of it, and did agree.

‘Steward, said the queen, ‘for one,
I ne’er thought the day would come,
When you would concede the game
Ere you’d contested it; for shame!’
Through the palace there was laughter
At this ending to the matter;
On the steward they all played
As though he were a fiddle; they made
Game of him, as he were a ball,
Tossed, to and fro, about the hall;
The shame indeed was hard to bear,
The mockery amongst all there,
But so that tale its way did wend
To ridicule, and there did end.

PART VII: The Love Potion

Tristan and King Gurmun confirm their agreement

NOW, the king, when all was done,
Told them, every knight and baron,
All the companions of the realm,
All his knights of sword and helm,
That the man who there did stand,
Was, in plain truth, the lord Tristan.
Then he the tale for them began,
Of why Tristan was in Ireland,
And how he’d promised sureties,
On all the various points that he,
Gurmun, demanded, every one,
In the presence of Mark’s barons.
The nobles of Ireland were glad
To hear of this news, and bade
The king to make peace, the thing
Being, indeed, more than fitting,
Since the passage of time only
Brought greater mutual enmity.

The king now asked if Tristan
Would ratify the matter in hand,
Which he had said was his intent,
And Tristan gave it his assent.
Then he and Mark's barons swore
That Cornwall should, for evermore,
Be Iseult's, twas her dower, I mean,
And of all England would be queen.
So Gurmun did Iseult the Fair
Surrender to her enemy there,
Tristan; her enemy yet, I say,
For she still hated him alway.
Tristan now took her by the hand,
'Sire, fair Lord and King of Ireland,
We now request, this lady and I,
In both our names, that those who lie
Here, sent as tribute to this land,
From Cornwall or from England,
Whether they be page or knight,
Be delivered to her, for tis right,
That they should now be legally
Hers, as the queen of their country.'
'Willingly,' said the king, 'tis done.
For my pleasure is that every one
Depart with you.' And many a heart
Joyed at this, and the word 'depart'.

Tristan prepares to depart with Iseult the Fair

TRISTAN then asked for a vessel,
While readying his own, as well,
For himself, Iseult, and for those
Of their company that he chose.
And once this had been secured,
He made arrangements on shore
To learn of all his countrymen,

Now exiled there, and send for them,
Whether elsewhere or yet at court,
And bring them together once sought.

Iseult the Elder prepares a Love-Potion

NOW, while Tristan and company
Were about this, and making ready,
Iseult the wise, with skill and care,
Did a compound in a vial, prepare,
A love-potion, subtly conceived,
Imbued with powers that deceived
Those who sipped it, in such a way,
That any man must love whomever
He drank it with, above any other,
Whether he wished it so, or no,
While she must love that man, also.
They one life, one death would share,
One joy and one sorrow would bear.

This potion the wise queen then
Gave, speaking softly, to Brangwen:
'Brangwen, dear niece, trouble not
Though parting now proves your lot,
Go with my daughter, set your mind
To that, and harken, here you'll find
A draught within that you must keep
Secure, whether you wake or sleep.
Make certain none upon this earth
Learns aught of it, or of its worth.
And take care that none there sip,
Nor touch this vessel to their lip.
Yet now there comes the hardest part:
Once you know that Iseult and Mark
Are joined in true union together,
Then have them both drink this liquor,
As if twere wine, and drink it all.

Yet beware lest it should befall
That any share the drink with them;
Beware such, and then again
Drink not yourself when they do;
For this love-potion I did brew.
Bear that in mind; now sincerely,
I commend her, and most dearly,
To your care, my Iseult; the better
Part of my life's bound up in her.
Now she and I are in your hands,
And I express no more demands,
But, as you hope for blessedness,
Show her all your loving kindness.'
'Dear lady,' came Brangwen's reply,
'If you both wish it, then shall I
Go with her, and guard her honour,
In all that may reflect upon her,
As well, indeed, as ever I can.'

Tristan and Iseult set sail

SO they all took their leave, Tristan
And his company, of whoever,
And then left Wexford together,
Joyfully, while the king and queen,
Out of love for Iseult, were seen
To follow them to the harbour;
Indeed the whole court was there.
His undreamed of love-to-be,
His unending heart's-agony,
Iseult the fair and wondrous,
Went grieving, sadly anxious,
Oft weeping, at Tristan's side.
Her father and mother beside
Passed the precious moments left
Grieving. Iseult brought distress
To many a heart; many an eye

Filled with tears; many a sigh
Was uttered, once and yet again,
For she stirred many a heart's-pain.
For fair Iseult, their eyes' delight
They wept, it was a grievous sight
To view their sorrow, everywhere,
Many a heart and eye wept there,
Whether they grieved so, publicly,
Or privately, and secretly.
And now was there anguish and grief,
Now that they must take their leave,
And Iseult the Fair must depart,
The sun from her dawn must part,
Iseult from Iseult, Brangwen too,
The bright Full Moon, must go, the two
Saying their farewells to the one,
Pain and sorrow seemed scarce begun.
That loyal company of three
Was severed, while repeatedly
Iseult the wise kissed the two.

Once the ladies' Irish retinue,
And the Cornishmen were aboard,
Having cast their farewells abroad,
Tristan was the last to embark
With the bride to be of King Mark,
Leading that flower of Ireland,
The fair princess, by the hand,
She as saddened as ere before.
And then they bowed toward the shore,
And bade God's blessing on that land,
Its folk, and those who there did stand.
And then the ships put out to sea
While, as they left that fair country,
They sang an anthem, one and all:
'Whenas we sail, on God we call!'
In high clear voices; then once more,

As they sped swiftly from the shore.

Tristan and Iseult at odds

NOW Tristan had, for the ladies,
Decked out a cabin, its privacy
Arranged for their ease aboard;
The best the vessel could afford.
There Iseult the Fair could rest,
And, but for Tristan, as a guest,
No other folk might enter there
Except her ladies who did share.
There he would comfort her as she
Sorrowed, weeping copiously,
Saddened at leaving her own land
Where her friends were e'er to hand,
Journeying to wed some stranger,
Sailing now she knew not whither.
Tristan would seek to console her,
His attentions gentle and tender,
Whenever he came to ease her woe,
Taking her hands, in her sorrow,
And yet in no other manner
Than the most faithful courtier,
Loyally seeking to express
His sympathy for her distress.
Yet when he offered to support
Her on his arm, she but thought,
That lovely girl, about the death
Of Morholt, and drew in a breath.
'Let be, master,' she said, 'and stay
Apart from me; no, further away.
What a tiresome man you prove,
Touch me not, your arm remove.'
'Ah, lovely one, do I offend you?
'Indeed tis so, since I do hate you.'
'Blessed girl, why should that be?'

‘Why? Because you did mortally
Wound Morholt, my uncle, no less.’
But that is settled.’ Nonetheless,
I hate you yet, since but for you
Never such care had then ensued.
You, you alone, brought misery,
With your cunning and trickery.
What sent you to our fair land,
From Cornwall to our Ireland,
To work me ill? For you have torn
Me from the place where I was born
And my kin, and brought such care,
Carrying me to I know not where;
Bartered twixt country and country,
Who knows what will become of me?’
‘No, lovely Iseult, ease is at hand;
Better a queen in a foreign land,
Than weak and powerless at home.
Ease and honour, beyond the foam,
Surely seem to promise better
Than a humble place with your father?’
‘No, master, no, whate’er you say;
For I tell you I’d choose, any day,
The most humble place you’ll find,
With affection, and peace of mind,
Than the pain and trouble that goes
With wealth, and all that from it flows.’
‘Well, you are right.’ replied Tristan;
‘You will have here, you understand,
Wealth and contentment, however,
And those two blessings together,
Are better than either one alone.
And then again, recall that at home
You saw no other choice but to be
The steward’s bride, well now, tell me,
Did you not truly desire my aid?
Is this my thanks for the effort I made,

That delivered you from such a fate?’
‘You will have long indeed to wait,
Ere I thank you; if you have saved
Me from the steward, you behaved
In such a way that I’d rather bear
With that marriage than feel such care
And trouble, in setting sail with you,
For his cause he claimed was true.
However worthless he did appear,
If he were with me, have no fear,
He would quickly mend his ways.
Thus he might prove, all his days,
Being finer than you suppose,
That he doth love me, God knows.’
‘Tristan replied: ‘Why, what a tale,
With which my fancy you regale!
To act so against one’s nature
Takes courage. And then win honour?
Why, no one in this world believes
That he will change who once deceives.
Lovely woman, forgo your grief.
You shall have, tis my firm belief,
A king to be your lord that ever
Will bring you both wealth and honour,
With whom you shall find, as his wife,
Great joy, and live the virtuous life.’

Tristan and Iseult drink the Love-Potion

MEANWHILE, the vessels held their course,
The wind blowing with steady force,
So that that they swiftly forged ahead.
Yet Iseult and her ladies, instead,
Unused to the wild wind and water,
Of this voyage, made heavy weather;
And soon they were in sore distress.
Tristan, the master, this did address

By seeking shelter, close at hand,
As they were now in sight of land.
After anchoring they, as oft before,
Or the most of them, went ashore,
To seek diversion, while Tristan
Sought out Iseult the Fair, his hand
He gave her, they spoke together,
And, while sitting there beside her,
Talking of one thing and another,
Of mutual interest to each other,
He called for a cooling beverage.
Only some maids of tender age,
Her youngest ladies-in-waiting,
Were present, and one child, knowing
Of the glass vial, promptly cried:
'There's wine, already set aside.'
And yet no wine from that would flow,
But only ever-lasting sorrow,
That anguish, their true heart's-pain,
That brought but death in its sad train.
Yet that the child could not know;
She rose at once, and she did go
To where the vial had been stowed,
And to Tristan the vial she showed,
And he to Iseult gave the drink,
And she, uncertain what to think,
Delaying long, drank deep, and then
Handed the vial to him again.
Tristan drank deep; there was no sign
The bottle contained aught but wine.
At that moment, Brangwen entered,
Saw the empty vial, and gathered
What had happened and was then
So shocked and fearful her strength
Deserted her, yet, pale as death,
She seized the vial and, in a breath,
Hastened to drown it in the sea.

‘Alas!’ cried Brangwen, ‘woe is me;
Alas that ever I was born!
Honour, and trust, both now I mourn!
May God forgive me, and show pity
That ever I came upon this journey,
That swift death did not prevent me,
From voyaging with Iseult for, see,
What sad fortune befalls them there,
In this fatal, ill-starred, affair!
Tristan, Iseult; it shall prove true,
This potion will bring death to you!’

Tristan and Iseult are overcome by Love

Now when the maiden and the man,
Iseult the Fair, and this Tristan,
Drank the draught, then instantly,
Came Love, that all tranquility
Disturbs, the troubler of the heart,
And entered into theirs; Love’s art
Is such, ere either was aware,
She planted her brave standard there,
Bringing them both beneath her sway,
For both were overcome that day.
They who were two hearts divided,
Became as one and, there, united,
Their minds at variance no longer,
For Iseult’s ire had fled from her;
It was not Tristan now she feared,
For Love, the Reconciler, cleared
Their hearts of all antipathy,
And so bound them in amity,
That each was, before the other,
Bright and clear as any mirror.
They shared but a single heart,
For neither was at peace apart;
Now her sorrow was his pain,

And his pain her sorrow again,
The two were one in joy or woe,
And yet they hid the fact also,
In their uncertainty and shame;
For shame she felt, and he the same,
She was uncertain, as was he,
Both shared the like uncertainty.
However blind the heart's desire,
Fuelled by that same inner fire,
They knew not yet how to begin,
And hid their longing deep within.

When Tristan felt the pangs of love,
The ties of faith and honour proved
Full strong, he sought then to retreat.
'No, forgo this,' he would repeat
In his thoughts, 'distract yourself,
Tristan, and think about aught else
But this.' Yet, ever drawn to her,
His heart her presence did prefer;
Against his wishes, he wished still,
And willed contrary to his will,
Dragged one way and then another.
Held captive, an imprisoned lover,
Tristan struggled thus in the snare,
Yet, endlessly entangled there,
Ever persisted in that state.
It was this true man's bitter fate
To be cursed with a dual pain:
For, on viewing her face again,
Sweet Love piercing heart and mind
Through her, he was forced to bind
Himself to true Honour once more,
And so be healed, yet evermore
Love, who was now his liege lady,
Whom his father had served gladly,
Armed herself, took to the field,

And forced him yet again to yield.
Honour then, and fair Loyalty,
Tormented Tristan endlessly,
But Love the sharper weapon bore,
For she indeed harassed him more,
Than Honour and Loyalty together,
Seeing Iseult his heart smiled ever,
And yet he turned his gaze away;
And yet his greatest grief, I say,
Was when his eyes failed to see her.
Oft, like any poor prisoner,
Escape was foremost in his mind,
As he sought some new path to find
To evade her, and oft he thought:
'Come take this way or that! If caught
Then you must seek a fresh passion,
Grasp whate'er restores your reason,
Find love and friendship elsewhere.'
And yet the noose but tightened there.
He searched within his heart and mind,
Some alteration thought to find,
But naught in either one did move
That spoke not of Iseult and Love.

And for Iseult it proved the same.
Harassed so by longing and shame,
She would change this life of pain.
Feeling the birdlime spread, again
And again, by bewitching Love,
Finding that she could barely move,
She endeavoured to quit the bough
But the birdlime clung to her now
And drew her ever down and back.
The lovely woman, caught alack,
Struggled hard but now stuck fast,
Yielding, against her will, at last,
Twisted and turned, that way and this,

Strove to fly, and yet, all amiss,
With her limbs mired ever deeper
Simply entangled them further,
In the blind sweetness of Love
And the man, and failed to move.
Ne'er could her limed senses find
Any bridge, path, twig to climb,
Take half a step, an inch or two,
Without Love being present too.
Think though she might, she would find
Whatever first entered her mind
There was naught within its span,
Other than Love and this Tristan.
And yet all that none could surmise;
At variance were her heart and eyes.
Though Modesty turned her eyes away,
Love drew her heart to him alway.
From all this warring company,
Man, maid, Love and Modesty,
Her doubt and confusion began;
For the maid desired the man,
And yet she turned her eyes away,
Though he drew her heart alway;
Modesty longed for Love yet she
Told no one of her plight, you see;
What good in that? All are agreed,
A maid, her modesty, is indeed
But a delicate and transient thing,
As brief as the blossom in spring,
And only a moment doth endure.
And thus Iseult struggled no more
And yielded, as she had to do.
Vanquished, without more ado,
Body and soul both, hand in hand,
She rendered to Love and the man.
She sent out glances, now and then,
Watching him secretly, then again,

With clear eyes and mind likewise.
Covertly, lovingly, heart and eyes
Darted eagerly towards the man,
While he with tender looks began
Quietly, then, to return her gaze,
Now yielding in similar ways,
Since Love declined to let him go.
Whenever they met they did so;
On every suitable occasion,
Yet within the bounds of reason,
Feasting their eyes on each other,
For lover seemed fairer to lover,
As is Love's law, affection's way,
And ever has been so, as today,
And shall be so for evermore,
As long as Love shall yet endure;
For among all lovers everywhere,
As love grows and then doth bear
Its blossom, and forth doth bring
Each loved and beloved thing,
Then they please each other more
Than ever the pair did before
When their love at first did spring;
Each to each doth pleasure bring;
For Love makes, as it doth rise,
Each fairer in the other's eyes.
This is the seed of Love, say I,
Such that true Love shall never die.

For Love seems fairer than before,
And so Love's rule shall endure.
If Love remained as heretofore,
Then Love's rule would be no more.

The lovers reveal their love

THE ships put out to sea again,

Sailing happily o'er the main,
Except that Love had now waylaid
Two hearts that from their course had strayed;
Two lovers there were much oppressed,
Burdened now by that sweet unrest
That works its miracles on all,
And can convert honey to gall,
And can render the sweetness sour,
And burn the dewfall, such its power,
And true balm can turn to poison,
And can every heart dishearten,
And turn the whole world upside down.
And had so in its meshes bound
Iseult the Fair and this Tristan.
One woe the woman and the man
Afflicted, in the strangest way,
For neither could find rest, I say,
Except they gazed upon each other;
Yet when they gazed at one another,
The pair seemed troubled ever,
For they could do naught together,
Due to the modesty and shyness,
That ever thwarted their happiness.
For when they tried, all covertly,
With their enraptured eyes to see
Each other, then the heart and mind
The aspect of each face defined.
Love the colourist, thought it not
Sufficient to lie, but half-forgot,
In the depths of each noble heart,
In their faces she showed her art.
Indeed in both was there manifest
The sign of what they both suppressed,
Since but briefly the colour stayed.
Each blushed or paled, as Love bade,
Whene'er the other paled or blushed;
This face paled, those cheeks seemed flushed,

In turn, as Love applied each hue.
It was not long then ere they knew,
As is common in such affairs,
That all their thoughts and their cares
Were enmeshed, and spoke of Love,
And they began at once to prove,
And venture, signs of affection,
Sought each other's conversation,
Whispering the when and where.
Oft now, as Love's hunting pair,
They'd set an ambush or a blind,
Lay nets and snares now for the mind,
With every question, every answer.
The words that Iseult used were ever
Those appropriate to a maid,
For her approach was subtly made,
She circled her friend and lover,
At a distance she would hover,
Nearing from afar, but gently.
She reminded him of how he
Had come floating on the foam,
To Dublin, wounded and alone;
How her mother had cared for him;
How she'd skilfully healed him;
How she, Iseult the Fair, had learned,
With him as tutor, and discerned
The arts of reading, of writing,
And then learned music, and Latin;
And she recalled all she had heard
Of his manly exploits, every word,
And thereby of the dragon too;
And then how twice she saw and knew
That it was he, as twould appear,
Both in his bath, and in the mere.
Thus they conversed with one another;
She spoke with him, and he with her.
'Alas,' cried Iseult, 'had I again

The means to slay you, as I did then,
 In that bath! Heaven, tell me why
 I did not kill you, watch you die.
 Had I known then what I know now,
 I would have slain you, I avow!’
 ‘Why, fair Iseult?’ he cried, ‘Why so?
 What troubles you? What is’t you know?’
 ‘That which I know, it troubles me.
 It brings me pain, that which I see.
 The sky above me, the wide sea,
 Body and soul, all weigh on me!’
 With her arm she leant against him;
 And thus it was they dared begin.
 The bright mirrors of her eyes filled
 With tears, the heart within her swelled,
 Her lips distended, her head bowed
 As far as plain modesty allowed,
 Towards her breast; as for her friend,
 His arms about her he did extend;
 He held her close, yet not too tight,
 Appropriately, as a friend might.
 Then he whispered, softly and gently:
 ‘Sweet lovely woman, come tell me
 What vexes you, what brings you woe?’
 ‘*Lameir* it is that troubles me so,’
 Said Iseult, Love’s Falcon, then,
 ‘*Lameir* it is that brings me pain,
Lameir it is that oppresses me.’
 As she’d cried *lameir* repeatedly,
 Tristan began to think, and weigh
 The meaning of the word, and say
 It to himself, and then review
 The sound carefully, for he knew
L’amer was ‘the beloved’ or ‘love’,
L’amer whatever ‘bitter’ did prove,
 And then *la mer* it was ‘the sea’;
 Indeed it meant at least these three.

He ignored the first and asked her
About the other two; rather
Than Love that surely ruled the pair,
Their mutual hope and despair.
All he mentioned was 'sea' and 'bitter'.
'I think, fair Iseult,' he told her,
'The bitter brine is troubling you,
Sea spray and the wind's taste too.
Is it those two you find so bitter?'
'No, my lord, no; tis not either;
Why say so? Neither troubles me,
Neither the wind's taste nor the sea
Distress me, though I say again,
Lameir alone doth bring me pain.'

When on the word he did begin,
He found 'beloved' there within,
And whispered to her, tenderly:
'Truly, fair one, tis so with me;
Lameir and you are my distress,
For here are love and bitterness.
Beloved Iseult, dear heart,
You alone, through Love's sweet art,
Have so occupied my mind,
And stolen my senses, that I find
Myself so utterly astray
I ne'er again shall find my way.
Much it troubles and oppresses,
Much it weakens and distresses,
All else that I now see about me.
In all the world naught's dear to me
Naught occupies my heart but you.'
Said Iseult: 'Tis thus with me, too.

Now when the two lovers did find
That both of them were of one mind,
With but one heart, and but one will

Between them, this fair balm did fill
Their hearts, and assuage their pain,
And yet exposed the wound again.
For each addressed more openly,
The other, and more daringly,
The man the maid, the maid the man.
They continued as they began,
He kissed her, and she kissed him,
Sweetly, lovingly, and on whim.
Here indeed was a blissful start
To Love's remedy for the heart.
Each poured and drank again, full slow,
Sweetness that from the heart did flow.
As they found opportunity,
So, to and fro, yet secretly,
This sweet traffic flowed between
Such that by none was their love seen;
None knew their mind, or thought it so,
Except one, who could not but know.

Brangwen questions the lovers

THAT one was Brangwen, the wise,
Who cautiously would cast her eyes
Towards them, and seeing how they
Behaved, oft to herself did say:
'Alas, for now I see tis true,
Love indeed doth enchant these two.'
Nor had it taken her long to see
That they were in earnest, for she
Detected, with little need for art,
The pain deep in each one's heart.
And she grieved at their suffering,
Watching them pining and sighing,
And sorrowing and languishing,
And musing deeply and dreaming,
Their faces, oft changing colour.

They were so entranced, moreover,
That they took scant nourishment,
Until the lack and their discontent,
So undermined their health that she,
Brangwen, feared what she did see,
And that twould kill them in the end,
For pain and hunger that way tend,
And said to herself: 'Come, my dear,
Reflect on what is happening here!'

One day the girl, wise, discerning,
Was seated beside them talking,
Full privately, and quietly.
'There are none here but we three,'
She declared: 'So tell me true,
What is it ails the pair of you?
I see you ever lost in thought,
Moping, sorrowing, distraught.'
'Noble lady, Tristan replied,
'If I dared, I would,' and sighed.
'My lord, you may so dare; speak now;
For you may tell me aught, I vow.'
'Lady most blest,' he thus did say,
'I shall speak no more this day,
Unless you give your word of honour,
Kindness, goodness you will show her,
And I, poor wretches that we are,
Or else tis dim and lost, our star.'

Brangwen gave them both her word,
Swore to them that aught she heard
Would be between them, and further,
As God was her witness, whatever
They wished of her, that she would do.
Said Tristan: 'My lady, fair and true,
Think of God and your salvation,
And then consider our situation,

The pain and trouble we endure.
I know, of all this, nothing more
Than you, the ill Iseult and I
Suffer; yet we are like to die
Of this love that's driven us mad,
In a trice, bringing torments sad;
For we can win no time together,
Nor e'en speak one with the other,
For you go always to and fro,
And if we die of your doing so
Twill be no one's fault but yours.
In you doth lie our sole recourse,
Our life or death is in your hand,
What more now need you understand?
Brangwen, have mercy upon us,
Lady, help me, and your mistress.'

Brangwen acts as go-between

BRANGWEN turned to Iseult again:
'My lady, is your own heart's-pain
As great as this man here implied?'
'Yes, dearest cousin,' Iseult replied.
'God have pity then,' Brangwen said,
Sighing deeply, bowing her head,
'The Devil himself thus has sought
To make mock of us, for his sport!
Now I see there's no help for it;
I must act, to my sorrow, in this.
For your sakes, and to your shame,
Rather than let you die of this same,
I'll grant you opportunity
To do whate'er you would, privately.
Apart from aught which you forgo
Because your honour tells you so,
You shall not from aught abstain.
Yet if you can, from this, refrain;

Command yourselves, and restrain
Your love; my counsel is: refrain.
Let this affair a secret be,
Known, indeed, only to us three.
If tis but whispered in conversation,
Then it costs each your reputation.
If any knows of it but we three,
It will bring death to you and me.
Lovely Iseult, my mistress dear,
To your own hands I render here
Your life, your death; you may do
With death and life as pleases you;
Have no fear or concern for me,
But as you wish it, so let it be.'

And that night, as Iseult the Fair
Lay pining for her beloved there,
To her cabin came that same man
Her love, with the true physician
Love, who indeed led in the man;
Love, her physician, led Tristan
Her patient there; and by the hand,
She took Iseult, and there did stand,
Gave her to him, and he to her,
To prove a balm to each other.
What else could have saved them
From the ills that enslaved them,
But that union, beyond all defence,
That knot that binds body and sense?
Love the Ensnarer, snared their hearts
In the net of her sweetness, her arts
Being such, all her wondrous power,
That all their days, for ne'er an hour
Was their bond loosened, nor were they
Free of love, for one single day.

Gottfried's discourse on Love

A long discourse regarding Love
To true minds doth wearisome prove.
But a brief discourse on true Love,
Of benefit to true minds doth prove.

However brief a time I've spent
Suffering from the sweet torment,
That soft and tender heart's pain
That in the heart's depths doth reign,
All gentle in its ungentleness,
Something tells me nonetheless
What I am inclined to believe,
That those two lovers were relieved
And comforted, and truly happy
That Watchfulness, the enemy
The plague oft visited on Love,
From its post had been removed.
Much have I thought, as yet I do,
And ever shall, about those two.
And when I set Love and longing
Before my inward eye, seeking
To know their nature, my yearning
Grows, and my passion, expanding,
The true companion, soars on high,
As if twould mount unto the sky.
And when in detail I consider,
All the wonders upon wonders,
That a man would find in Love
If he could but her virtues prove,
And all the joy in Love he'd know
If he practised those virtues so,
My heart grows, it would appear,
Vaster than the seventh sphere,
And from my heart I pity Love,
Seeing that so many approve

Her; cling to her, and hold her fast,
Yet value her little, at the last.
We all would our passions prove,
And keep fair company with Love.
No Love is not created thus,
As others display her to us,
And we to them, spuriously.
We see things not as they should be.
We sow a patch of bitter weed,
And yet expect that from the seed
Lilies and roses then will grow.
Believe me, truly, tis not so.
We have no choice but to reap
What was sown, shallow or deep,
And accept what the crop bears.
Sow deceit and you gather cares.
We must harvest as we have sown,
Ours the grass that must be mown.
Love we cultivate, every action
Filled with guile and deception,
Thinking then to reap the pleasure,
For body and heart, at leisure,
And yet the harvest is only pain,
Ill crop, ill fruit, and but ill gain;
Just as the field was tilled, I say.
Yet when we bear the crop away,
Sorrow that weighs down the heart,
And ruins us, we claim Love's art
Has worked its way, hers the crime,
Blaming the guiltless, time on time.
We all sow seeds of falsehood; then
Let us all reap but sorrow and pain.
And if the sorrow doth pain a man,
Let him think on woe, beforehand,
Let us sow better, and so reap better.
Oh, we who desire the world ever,
Whether the world be good or ill,

How we squander our days still,
Abusing our lives in Love's name,
And reaping naught but the self-same
Crop that we ever sowed in her,
Ever misconception and failure;
Naught of the good that we desire,
The good which we fail to inspire,
And are denied, and yet approve;
I mean friendship's steadfast love,
Which comforts all of woman born,
And bears the rose, and bears the thorn;
Friendship, in which there lies ever
Love and sorrow bound together,
Yet, in such friendship, joy doth go
There concealed amongst the woe,
To bring forth gladness in the end
Howe'er to cloud its sky doth tend.
A man can hardly find such though,
So badly do we plough and sow.

For it is true what people say,
That: 'Love is ever chased away,
Hounded to the ends of the Earth.'
None know what the word is worth,
For only the name remains to us,
Being so common among us,
And so debased and so abused,
That Love would ne'er have it used,
Being ashamed of her own name,
And dismayed by that very same.
She loathes herself, and goes weary,
Deprived of honour and dignity,
Begging humbly, from door to door,
Dragging a tattered sack, to store,
Within, what she can get or steal,
And from herself her trove conceal,
So she may trade it on the street.

Alas, in that market we compete,
We do such things to her, and yet
That we are the guilty we forget.
Love, our hearts' mistress truly,
The freely given, one and only,
Is for sale in the marketplace.
For we have brought on her disgrace,
Sold her name, ta'en the profit,
And yet we'd have her pay for it!
We've set a false stone in our ring,
And cheat ourselves with the thing.
Tis a sad deception, in the end,
When a man so deceives a friend
That he deceives himself as well,
Yet such is the tale that I do tell.
We lovers who but false do prove,
We cheats and tricksters in love,
How vainly our days slip past,
When tis so seldom, at the last,
That we our sorrows can mend,
By achieving some joyful end!
How we waste our lives upon it,
Lacking love, and lacking profit!
Yet something that concerns us not,
May often serve to ease our lot;
For when we hear a love-story
Or we retell, in poetry,
The tale of people long ago,
Centuries it may be, we know
Our hearts are warmed by the same,
And to our minds it lays such claim,
That there are none, loyal and true
To their lover, and guileless too,
Who'd refuse to create such bliss
In their own heart; yet there's this:
The very thing that gives it birth,
I mean true faithfulness on Earth,

But lies there trampled underfoot.
And in vain her case she would put;
For we all look the other way,
We'd tread upon her, any day.
We stamp upon her in the dust.
Were we to seek as yet we must
Where she doth lie, we at first
Would know not where the accursed
Creature cowered. If fidelity
Is good and wholesome equally,
Twixt friends and lovers, both,
Why to praise it are we so loth?
A tender look, a glance, a gaze,
From loving eyes must soon erase
The hundred thousand pangs that start
Within the body; soothe the heart.
But one kiss from a loving mouth
Will surely end all pain and drouth;
Ah, one kiss from the heart's depths there,
Must that not banish hurt and care!

Tristan and Iseult reach Cornwall.

I know that Iseult and Tristan,
That ardent girl, that eager man,
Rid themselves of many a woe
In reaching their conclusion so,
Achieving now their sole desire,
The goal to which both did aspire.
The longing that constrains the mind
Was sated thus, and left behind.
Whenever circumstance allowed
They paid and gathered tribute now
To and from Love and each other,
Willingly, heart and mind together.
Deep satisfaction they both found,
Voyaging, as if heaven-bound.

Once they were from shyness free
Riches they found, in intimacy,
And this was sensible and wise;
For lovers who do hide their eyes,
Suppress their feelings once revealed,
And out of modesty yet conceal
Themselves and act as strangers,
Of themselves are turned robbers.
The more they restrain themselves
The more they but rob themselves,
Tainting all their joy with sadness.
But this pair, loving to excess,
Held nothing back, they were free
In looks and speech, both he and she.

And so all that voyage they spent
In a world of rapturous intent,
Yet not completely free from care,
Both anxious as to how they'd fare
In Cornwall, feeling, in advance,
The weight of future circumstance,
All that indeed now came to pass,
And spoilt their happiness, just as
It brought about many a danger.
For Iseult must wed a stranger,
Whose wife, indeed, she would not be;
And then her lost virginity,
That was a cause of unease too,
It deeply troubled both these two
And yet such cares were readily
Borne, since the pair repeatedly
Had their joy of one another,
Freely seeking love together.

Now when, at last, they made landfall,
On viewing the shores of Cornwall,
The whole company felt delight,

All save Iseult and our brave knight
To whom it brought unease and fear,
For, if they'd had their way, tis clear
They would never have touched land.
For now they feared, you understand,
That dishonour would be their fate,
With no way to hide Iseult's state,
The loss of her maidenhood; indeed,
Could think of naught, in their need,
No means to hide it from the king.
Yet, as ignorant of everything
As childlike lovers may appear
In the childhood of love, yet here
An answer was granted the child,
A way that Mark might be beguiled.

Brangwen's deception

When Love with guileless children
Starts to toy; when such we find,
Then, in those guileless children,
Guile and cunning we may find.

No long tale need now be wrought.
Iseult, though but a child, had thought
Of the best way by which they might
Fool Mark; that, on the first night,
They should ask Brangwen to lie
Beside Mark and, without a sigh,
Grant him her voiceless company.
Thus he'd be deceived utterly,
For Brangwen was a virgin still,
Her loveliness would serve his will.
So Love teaches the honest mind
To work deceit, full oft we find.
Though honest minds should not know
How to exercise pure cunning so.

This then is what they did occasion.
After a good deal of persuasion,
Brangwen weakened, and agreed
To their plea that she do the deed;
Yet her reluctance was full great,
More than once she blushed, I state,
And then turned pale at the thought,
Much disturbed by what they sought,
So shameful the strange task did seem.
'Your dear mother, our blessed queen,
Entrusted me,' declared Brangwen,
'With your care, sweet lady, and then
Expected me to shield you from care,
And the dangers that lurk everywhere,
All throughout that accursed journey,
For such was the task she gave to me.
And yet the carelessness was mine,
For sorrow and dishonour you find,
And little cause have I to complain,
If subterfuge I must now maintain,
And thus bear the shame with you;
And twould be right and proper too
If I were to bear my shame alone,
As long as you escaped your own.
Merciful Lord above, how though
Could you forget your servant so!'
Iseult now addressed Brangwen:
'Dear cousin, come, tell me then
What mean you, what did you do?
'My lady, that glass vial I threw
From the vessel.' 'Well, and then?
'Alas, that vial,' replied Brangwen,
'And all within, did, in a breath,
On both the pair of you bring death!'
'How cousin?' cried Iseult, 'How so?
'In this way,' said Brangwen, and lo,

Revealed the tale from end to end.
'God wills it so, my dear friend.'
Tristan said. 'Whether life or death,
It poisons with the sweetest breath;
I know not how true death may be,
But this one suits me well indeed!
If my fair Iseult would, forever,
Bring me death in such a manner,
And this the fruit of her bringing,
I'd wish such death everlasting.'

When all the talk is set aside,
If Love is not to be denied,
Then none can set the pain aside;
Pain too is not to be denied.

However easeful love might be,
Before our eyes we yet must see
The raised banner of true honour.
If we seek but bodily pleasure
Then we say farewell to honour.
Howe'er sweet was the pleasure
Of Tristan's life now, yet honour
Restrained him, for his loyalty,
Constrained him greatly, such that he
Forgot it not, in that sweet life,
But brought King Mark a noble wife.
Those two, Honour and Loyalty,
Pressed sore upon him, equally,
Upon his heart, upon his mind,
Seeking to seize him, and bind;
Those two who had lost to Love
When Tristan did her cause approve,
Those two now sought to conquer
Love, and claim the knight forever.

Tristan sent messengers on shore,

In two vessels, who tidings bore
To Mark, the news of his mission,
And how his embassy had gone,
And of the fair Irish princess;
Mark spread the news of his success,
And summoned whoe'er he might
Every lord, and every knight,
Rode forth a thousand messengers.
He greeted the natives and strangers,
Alike, those who from Ireland came.
The best and worst among that same,
The pair with whom he'd spend his life,
He welcomed, one who'd be his wife,
And the one whom he most esteemed,
As warmly as ever honour deemed.

Mark did now the barons appraise
Of his wish, that in eighteen days
They were all to attend the court,
Ready for this marriage he sought.
All was achieved and on that day,
They came there in splendid array.
For came many a wondrous train
Of knights and ladies, eager to gain
A sight of this girl, Iseult the Fair,
And with delight they saw her there,
Bright her beauty, and as they gazed
On her with joy, they cried, amazed:
'Iseult, Iseult la blonde,
Marveil de tout le monde!
Marvel indeed, Iseult the Fair,
Seen as a wonder everywhere,
For what they say of her is true,
This heavenly girl, I tell you
She brings joy to everyone,
Shining here like a living sun;
Never did any mortal kingdom

Gain so beautiful a maiden.’

Now once she was formally wed
And before all the nobles led,
And her rights announced to all,
Namely that she should hold Cornwall
And England too, but that Tristan
Should inherit both of those lands,
If she failed to produce an heir,
And once homage was done her there,
That very night, when she was due
To sleep with Mark, the lovely two,
Brangwen and she, with Lord Tristan,
Began to execute their plan,
Having prepared the time and place
Wisely; then all drew on apace;
There were these three and no more,
In the room, and the king made four.
And now King Mark lay in the bed;
Brangwen, in Iseult’s robes instead
Of her own, they wore each other’s,
Was led to him by Tristan, to suffer
Her martyrdom at King Mark’s hands.
Iseult had quenched the burning brands,
Such that all there was dim and dark;
Brangwen now was clasped by Mark,
And I know not how she liked it;
For in deep quiet she endured it.
Whate’er demands the king now made,
Whate’er he sought, the lovely maid
Paid all, if I may make so bold,
In the silence, with brass like gold,
To his total satisfaction;
Nor have I at least heard mention
That brass of such fine quality
Has paid the bride-price, secretly,
For a like payment due in gold;

No never indeed in times of old;
For in truth, I'd wager my life,
That, since the days of Adam's wife,
False coin of such nobility
Has ne'er been struck, nor equally
So true a counterfeit supplied
To any man, to have at his side.

Now, while these two lay together,
Iseult was in greater fear than ever,
Full deep was her anxiety,
As to fair Brangwen's loyalty:
'The good Lord save and preserve me,
Let my cousin not betray me!'
This she murmured constantly,
Oft aloud, and yet secretly;
'If this thing's carried on too long,
I fear, yet hope that I am wrong,
That she may so enjoy this night
She'll lie there till broad daylight,
We shall be of honour stripped,
The truth of it on all men's lips.'
But no, Brangwen played her role
With a loyalty sound and whole,
And once his demands were met,
And for Iseult she'd paid the debt,
She left the bed, while Iseult there,
Alert and waiting, sealed the affair,
Sitting down beside him as if she
Was, in truth, the same fair lady.

Now the king called out for wine,
As was the custom at that time,
The tradition being that once wed
When he'd taken her maidenhead,
Then the wine would be supplied
To the husband and his new bride,

And they would drink it together
From the same cup as each other,
As one; and now came the man,
Mark's nephew, it was, Tristan,
Brought the wine, and lit the scene:
The king drank as did the queen.
Many there are who tell the tale,
Who will their listeners regale
With the falsehood that they sipped
The very brew that passed the lips
Of Tristan and Iseult, fatally,
And brought that pair heart's agony;
But no, since none remained, for she,
Brangwen, had drowned it in the sea.

Now they had drunk as the custom
Required, honouring the tradition,
The young queen, in great distress,
With many a pain, and no less
Anxiety, in her heart and mind,
Joined the king who soon did find
In her, as he clasped her tight,
All that he had found that night;
To him a woman was a woman,
And it seemed, as a virile man,
That this Iseult suited him well,
At least as far as he could tell.
Both of them had paid their dues,
And naught was known of the ruse;
For gold he took brass, in the two;
And of their scheme he never knew.

PART VIII: Suspicion

Brangwen's loyalty is tested

Iseult was greatly loved and prized,

By Mark, esteemed on every side,
And honoured by all the kingdom,
For, noting, in her, the possession
Of many a gift and virtue, all
Who could praise on praise did call.
Meanwhile Iseult and her lover
Spent pleasurable times together,
Finding joy in many a wise;
For none who for that pair had eyes,
Not one man or woman, thought
That in the friendship there lay aught,
For she was under his protection,
And he served her, at her direction,
In many a place, at many a time,
And they in that could find no crime.

Now Iseult began to reason
About her whole situation:
Since none but Brangwen knew
The secret kept between the two,
Except indeed Tristan, her love,
Who ever-faithful must prove,
Then but for Brangwen alone
She'd no fear of it being known,
And need have none in the future,
In regard to her own honour.
Yet she dreaded lest Brangwen,
Coveting Mark perchance, might then
Reveal the shameful deed to him,
And how the trick was played on him.
In this matter the queen did show
That folk fear scandal and the blow
Scorn may bring more than they
Fear God's commandments any day.
Now Iseult had two squires to hand,
Who had come there from England;
She made them swear oath on oath,

Give pledge on pledge, holding both
To do whatever she wished done,
And keep it hid from everyone.
She revealed a murderous intent:
'Here's my design, show no dissent;
A girl will soon be joining you,
Take her in hand; all three of you
Ride to a place, swift as you can,
Some forest, far or near to hand
So long as it will serve your aim,
And there behead that very same,
The girl I'll give you, but take note
Of all she says, ere you cut her throat.
Retrieve her tongue, and be assured
I shall see you knighted, and more,
Tomorrow, land and gifts will give,
And favour you, while I do live!

They agreed that this they'd do,
And Iseult called Brangwen anew.
'Brangwen,' she cried, 'look at me.
Do I not seem pale? Look closely;
What ails me now I do not know,
And yet my head it hurts me so,
I'll die without some remedy;
There are herbs you must bring to me.'
The faithful Brangwen thus replied:
'My lady, God shall be our guide,
Come tell me swiftly, where indeed,
I may gather the herbs you need.'
'These two squires here, they know,
Ride with them, and they will show
The place now.' 'Willingly, my lady.'
They mounted and departed swiftly.

When they reached the treeline where
The herbs and berries growing there

Would yield the required amount,
Fair Brangwen wished to dismount;
But they led her deep into the wild,
Amidst the wooded wastes they filed,
Until at last, once they had ridden
Far from open land, there, hidden,
They had the girl, the good and noble,
The courteous and ever-faithful,
Brangwen, kneel, upon the ground,
And then their swords the squires found,
While she knelt there quite terrified,
Her poor heart pounding hard inside,
Trembling in every limb, till she,
Staring up at them, anxiously,
Cried: 'Mercy sirs, what is this same?
What would you do, in God's name?'
'You, it seems, are condemned to die.'
'Alas, but why? Come, tell me why.'
'What have you done against the queen?
For that she'd have you dead, I ween,'
Said one, 'your death she doth decree,
And as she orders, so it must be.
Fair Iseult demands your execution.'

She clasped her hands in supplication:
'No, sir!' she said, in tears, 'show mercy,
In God's name, of your charity,
Let me live but a moment longer,
So I may render up an answer;
Soon enough then you may slay me.
Say these words then to my lady,
And know yourselves that this is true:
From naught I've done doth there ensue
Aught to displease, or that might bring
Harm to her, but one little thing,
Which I credit not; when sailing,
We also bore, among everything

From Ireland, each a fair garment,
Chosen from the best, which went
With us, two shifts as white as snow.
And while we were journeying so
On our voyage to this country,
The midday sun shone so warmly,
That our fair queen could not bear
Anything but that shift to wear,
So fond was she of its pure white.
Yet while that smock was her delight,
Which she wore until its whiteness
Faded and she spoiled its brightness,
I kept mine in the cabin, below,
Preserving its pure whiteness so.
When my lady married the king
And was to bed, after the wedding,
Her shift was not as pure and clean
As that garment might have been,
Or as she would have wished it.
So I lent her mine, and except it
Offended her that I did so
Unwillingly, I do not know,
God be my witness, how I might
Have done such wrong in her sight.
Now, in God's name, both of you,
Give her such greeting as is due,
From a young lady to her mistress,
And may the Lord, in his goodness,
Preserve her, and guard her honour!
My death, here, I do forgive her;
My soul to God I now commend,
My body to your bidding lend.'

The two men glanced at each other,
And, led to mercy, took pity on her,
So innocent, in her tearful fervour;
Bitterly regretting moreover

A pledge committing them to murder.
And now they took counsel together.
Since they could find naught that said
That such a death was merited,
Nor any reason could they give,
They now agreed to let her live.
Thus they lodged her high in a tree,
Lest wolves roamed the vicinity,
And might seize her, ere they returned;
And then towards the court they turned

They told Iseult they'd killed the girl,
Showing all the pity in the world.
'So tell me, now, what did she say?'
Cried Iseult, and they did relay
Brangwen's words from end to end,
Just as the girl had asked of them.
'And did she say no more to you?'
'No madam.' 'Oh, what have you two
Perpetrated, I'll hang you high!'
'God in Heaven!' the pair did cry,
'Why speak you, in such a manner,
Lady Iseult, now we must wonder
Why you begged us, and strictly
Charged us, and most insistently,
To slay her, as indeed we have.'
'Begged you! What's that you say?
I commended her to you this day,
So that you could lead her where
She could cull herbs for my care.
Restore her now, or lose your lives,
I'll see that neither one survives,
Accursed murderous vipers, both,
You'll hang, for I am nothing loth,
Or I'll see you burned at the stake!'
'Lady,' they cried, 'for Heaven's sake;
Your mind and heart are neither

Just nor honest, your tongue spoke other!
But let the girl, instead, be found;
We shall return her safe and sound.'
'No lies now!' cried Iseult, in tears,
'Is Brangwen dead? Allay my fears.'
'She lives yet, our wondrous queen.'
Then bring her to me, and I mean
To grant you all I promised you.'
'Tis done, my lady!' cried the two.

Iseult retained one of them there,
As her hostage in this affair,
While the other rode without delay
To where they'd left Brangwen that day,
And then brought her to her mistress.
Delivered from her own distress,
Iseult took her in her embrace,
Kissed her mouth, and kissed her face,
Once and then a thousand times more,
For of her faithfulness she was sure.
The squires earned twenty marks of gold,
That, of all this matter, naught be told.

Tristan and Iseult's clandestine love

NOW that Queen Iseult had found
Brangwen's loyalty to be sound,
And thus confirmed her quality,
Tested, and proved, her constancy,
As in a crucible she'd refined her,
And, at the last, pure gold did find her,
She and Brangwen were so aligned,
So devoted in heart and mind,
That never again would suspicion
Lead to any such rift between them.
Naught could keep the two apart,
So close were they in mind and heart.

Brangwen enjoyed her place at court,
While the court praised her; in short,
She was on good terms with them all,
And bore ill will to none at all,
Neither outwardly, nor inwardly;
Counselled the royal pair, equally;
And naught took place, in Chamber,
Without her full knowledge either.
Assiduous in the service
Of Iseult, she saw to every wish
Of hers, concerning her Tristan.

And they, the woman and the man,
Conducted themselves so discreetly,
They quelled suspicion completely.
To their concerns, speech, or deeds,
None paid attention, for, indeed,
None doubted their pure intent.
They were as happy and content,
As a pair of lovers should be,
Who can choose when and where to see
Each other, so that *amie* and *amis*,
Were in pursuit of love constantly.
So, many a time then, each day,
Tender glances were put in play,
Amongst the crowd, quite openly,
Where no other might truly see,
Yet one may catch another's eye,
And so communicate thereby,
Regarding some assignation,
And thus create a conversation
Between lovers, concerning love;
And so their true affection prove.
They behaved so night and day,
With impunity, and their display
Was ever free and open; sitting,
Or walking, or simply standing.

In their conversations in public
Their speech was often cryptic,
Language wrought cunningly ever,
With words that were more than clever
And one might see Love's handiwork
In words, like flecks of gold that lurk
In silken stuff, and shimmer there.
And yet no one showed any care,
Or thought their words other than
Appropriate, or their deeds aught
Than might by courtly friends be wrought,
Bound by the kinship existing
Between Tristan and Mark, the king;
Through this they hid all their deceit,
Through this they sought to lie and cheat,
Through this Love, with beguiling art,
Fooled the senses and the heart
Of many a person who knew naught
Of the love that each in each sought,
To them pure, good, and unselfish.
Their every thought, their every wish,
Was as if the pair were one, and so
Twas yes and yes, and no and no;
While yes and no, and no and yes,
In truth they never did express.
No discord troubled him or her,
Being each to each as they were.

So it was that these two lovers
Passed the time sweetly together,
Now doing this, now doing that,
Happy at times, and then full sad,
As is the way of Love and lovers,
For Love brings pain and pleasure,
To lovers' hearts, woe and distress,
As well as joy and happiness.
Tristan and Iseult knew such pain

Whene'er the two could not attain
A meeting, and so proved to be,
Full of joy, and yet melancholy.
And then it might be, on a day
Their anger flared, although I say
No malice was involved there;
And if any choose to declare
That there is no room for anger
Between true lover and lover,
Then that to me would but prove
That they have never been in love.
For that is ever a sign of Love,
And with it she doth lovers move,
And doth set their passion afire,
And so, with anger, stirs desire.
For though anger pains them deeply,
Affection reconciles them, wholly,
Such that their love is soon renewed,
While a deeper friendship is pursued.

Why ever this anger is so stirred,
And then quenched with scarce a word,
And quite without the aid of others
You all must know, being lovers.
For such, who are oft in company,
Are prone to imagine, foolishly,
That another is loved more than they,
And they will create a great affray
Out of a trifle, yet, soon will cease,
Forget it all, and make sweet peace.
And that is just the way it is,
And we should applaud them in this,
For love grows deeper in this way,
And fresh and new, and doth display
A fine rekindled loyalty.
Love doth age and cool we see,
And dies if it feels not the fire;

When anger is all spent, desire
Rarely doth grow green again,
But lovers, feeling anger's pain,
Find loyalty, ever fresh and new,
Doth both peace and love renew;
Anger refines past faithfulness,
As fire doth gold, by its excess.

So Tristan and Iseult did follow
Love's course in joy and sorrow.
Joy and sorrow came and went
As their days of love they spent.
Joy I mean without heart's sorrow,
For true heart's pain they did not know,
Nor such disaster that doth dart
Its glance into the very heart.
They spoke indeed not a word
Of their affairs, so naught was heard
Of what they hid, or its hiding,
And long, of it, none had tidings.
They were bold and confident,
Free and happy in their intent.
Iseult the queen did now command
Affection throughout all the land,
And all the folk spoke of Tristan;
His name was heard, on every hand,
As a lord admired wondrously,
By all who lived in that country.

The incident with Gandin, the Irish Lord

TRISTAN was spirited and lively,
Spending his time on military
Matters, or at some tournament,
Or passing his free time intent
On falconry, the chase, or other
Rural sports as occasion offered.

At that time a ship dropped anchor,
In Cornwall, at King Mark's harbour.
A lord who'd sailed out of the north,
Gandin by name, then came forth,
An Irish knight, courteous, wealthy,
Handsome, famed for his bravery,
So fine a knight throughout Ireland
His deeds were known to many a man.
He came thus, splendidly dressed,
His chivalry there well expressed,
And to the castle gates did prance,
Yet bearing neither shield nor lance.
Slung at his back was a rote; a lyre,
Small, but with gold and gems afire,
And beautifully worked and strung,
There fine and elegant it hung.
Dismounting, he entered the court,
And then Mark and Iseult he sought,
And greeted them both, courteously.
Now he had been, variously,
Iseult's knight, and her admirer,
And had oft times won her favour,
And so, for her sake, from Ireland,
He had come to this Cornish land.
'Dieu ûs sál, messire Gandîn!'
The courteous queen greeted him,
'God guard you, where'er you ride.'
'Merci, bêle Iseult!' Gandin replied,
'Fair is she, and fairer than gold,
To Gandin's eyes that her behold!'
Iseult told the king, in a whisper,
Who he was and had been to her.
Mark's puzzlement was entire,
As to why this lord wore a lyre,
And indeed all men did wonder,
And mused on the fact together.
Nonetheless Mark was content

To honour Gandin, fully intent
On maintaining his own good name,
Though Iseult had desired the same,
Requesting he be made welcome
As a knight of her native kingdom.
Mark was delighted so to do,
Seating Gandin beside him too,
And asking a host of questions
About the people of his nation,
Its ladies and their courtly ways.

Dinner was served, without delay,
Their hands they washed to begin,
And when the water reached Gandin,
They begged him to doff the lyre,
But such was not Gandin's desire,
Though he was asked repeatedly,
And the king and queen graciously
Ignored the matter, though many thought
It discourteous and, smiling, sought
To mock him, perchance raise his ire.
Nonetheless, the Knight of the Lyre,
The Lord with a Burden at his Back,
Was indifferent to that scornful pack.
He had his place at King Mark's board,
Ate and drank, and the lords ignored.
Now, when the boards had been removed,
Gandin rose and, as was approved,
Took his seat with the company,
And they of his presence made free
Regaling him with the court news.
Then Mark asked if it might amuse
Him if he were so kind as to play;
If the lyre was his instrument, say.
'Sire,' now answered the Irish lord,
'If I do, what shall be my reward?'
'My lord, what mean you by that same?'

If anything of mine you'd claim
Then that shall be at your service.
I shall grant you whate'er you wish,
So let us hear what you can do.'
'So be it!' answered the Irish knight,
And then he played, to their delight.
Then the king bade him play again,
While inwardly Gandin was fain
To smile at his own powers of deceit,
Seeing his scheme was near complete:
'The reward my efforts doth inspire,
For that, indeed, I shall play the lyre.'
And then he played it twice as well.

Once he had ended, and silence fell,
Gandin stood there before the king,
The rote was from his hand hanging.
'Sire, recall what you promised me!'
'I shall, sir, and most willingly.
How may I now reward the lyre?'
'Iseult,' he answered, 'is my desire.'
'My lord, whate'er you ask of me,
Is yours, but that shall never be.'
'Truly, Sire, I seek naught at all
Except Iseult, or great or small.'
'Truly, my lord, that cannot be.'
'Then you keep not your word to me?
If you are proved an oath-breaker,
Who scorns Truth and forsakes her,
You should not rule o'er any land.
The laws of kingship are to hand,
Have them read, if you fail to find
What I claim there, that doth bind
All kings, my claim I'll then forgo.
Or if you still would say me no,
I will defend my cause gainst you,
Or any your court names, risk too

My life in combat, unless I gain
That which I, at the first, did name.
Let you, Sire, or whoe'er it be,
Ride thus into the ring with me,
And I, at the appointed time,
Will prove Iseult the Fair is mine.'

Mark glanced one way and the other,
Asking of that man, or another,
If he would dare to face this knight.
But not one seemed eager to fight,
And place his life in the balance,
Or face Gandin, in this instance.
Nor did King Mark himself relish
Single combat, to the finish,
For Iseult the Fair, with so skilled
An enemy, brave and strong-willed.
No one came forth to fight the man.

Now it so chanced that Lord Tristan
Had been out hunting in the forest.
And was riding back, with the rest
Of his followers, to the court,
When the news to him was brought
That Iseult was yielded to Gandin;
And it proved true, so had she been.
Gandin had led the fair woman,
Despite her tears of deep emotion,
From the court to the harbour,
Where his vessel lay at anchor,
And where his pavilion graced
The scene, rich and nobly placed.
He and the queen sat there inside,
Waiting upon the rising tide
Ere the ship could leave the strand,
For its prow rested on the sand.

When Tristan has reached the court,
And then further news had sought
About this matter of the lyre,
He took his harp and did enquire
As to where Gandin was, and then
He hastened on his way again,
Rode to the shore, in a wild rush,
And tethered his horse to a bush,
And hung his sword there as well,
So that none there might foretell
Violent deeds, and so he came
To the pavilion, and in that same,
He found Iseult, weeping, desolate,
And the baron, seated there in state,
Who, attempting to stem her tears
Held her in his arms, it appears
All in vain, till she saw Tristan,
Clasping the harp tight in his hand.
Gandin, from where he was sitting,
Rose, and gave Tristan greeting:
'Dê te saut, bêâs harpiers!'
'Merci, gentil scheveliers;
My Lord,' Tristan replied, 'I come
In haste, hearing that you are from
The realm of Ireland. Sire, understand,
That I am also of Ireland,
Take me with you to that fair land,
And prove an honourable man!'

The Irish lord replied: 'My friend,
Upon my word you may depend;
I shall; but sit you down and play;
If you can but her sorrow allay,
My lady here, then you may claim
The best garment this tent contains.'
'Agreed, my lord,' Tristan replied,
'Unless sweet music by her's denied,

I think she will find much relief
In my playing, and end her grief.’
He then set about his business,
Struck up a lay of such sweetness
That it sank deep within her heart,
Her mind so taken by his art,
That no more her tears she sought,
Her lover was her every thought.

As he ended, they saw the tide
Float the ship; it lay there beside
The water’s edge and Gandin’s men
Called to him from the deck again:
‘Sire, sire, you must come aboard,
If that Tristan, the Cornish lord,
Arrives while you are still ashore,
He will bring us trouble and more.
For he the people can command,
And he is famous, in all this land,
For his fearlessness, and bravery,
Thus he may harm you readily.’
Now this roused Gandin to anger,
‘God damn me, if mere danger
Such as that sends me on board!’
He shouted: ‘Come, strike up a chord
My friend, and then give us the Lay
Of Dido, for right well you play,
Such that I love to hear you sing.
Now for my lady play this thing,
And you shall sail home with me;
The finest garment you can see,
As I promised, you shall possess,
Of all I have here the very best.’
My lord,’ said Tristan, ‘it shall be so.’

The minstrel raised his harp, and lo,
He plucked all its strings so sweetly

Gandin was, nigh on utterly,
Absorbed in this minstrel's playing,
And yet could not help noticing
That Iseult too was much taken
With the music, and musician.
When the lay had reached its end,
Gandin the queen his arm did lend,
And to the gangplank made his way,
Where twixt ship and shore it lay,
Intending to lead her thus aboard,
But the water's depth did not afford
Them passage, for the tide rose high,
And none could embark, thereby,
Unless he had a long-legged steed.
'What now? We are thwarted indeed,'
He cried, 'how can my lady board?'
'Sire,' said the minstrel, 'you assured
Me that I might return with you,
So I'll take my possessions too,
And leave naught here in Cornwall.
I have a fine steed, strong and tall,
And I shall take your lady, here,
To the gangway, and see her clear,
So that the sea will not touch her!'
'Go then, dear minstrel,' said the other,
'Fetch your mount then choose the best
Garment, as promised; be my guest.'

Tristan brought the steed, with no lack
Of haste, slung the harp at his back,
And said: 'Now, my fair Irish lord,
This lovely lady your hand afford;
Pass her to me, the steed will paddle;
With her, before me, on the saddle.'
'No, no, minstrel,' declared Gandin,
I shall myself to the vessel win;
Touch not the lady, I will ride.'

‘Nonsense my lord,’ Iseult cried,
‘Tis foolishness, for, rest assured,
Delay, and we’ll ne’er get aboard;
So, let this minstrel have me now.’
Gandin to circumstance did bow,
And handed her up: ‘Now, my friend,
Upon your care she doth depend,
Bear her cautiously, but swiftly,
And you shall have that gift from me.’
Once he had Iseult on his steed,
Tristan showed himself swift indeed,
Trotting a good few paces away;
Seeing which, Gandin shouted: ‘Hey!
Where are you going now, you fool?’
‘No, no,’ cried Tristan: ‘you’re the fool,
My dear Gandin, come, grasp the briar;
What you stole from Mark with the lyre,
With the harp, I steal back again!
The trickster’s tricked, I but maintain,
For Tristan followed after you,
Discovered you, and has caught you.
Rich are the garments you bestow,
My good friend; I’d have you know,
I claim the best that was in your tent.’

Tristan rode on his way, content,
While Gandin he was mortified,
Saddened, damaged in his pride;
His sudden defeat, and the shame,
Was such as to tarnish his name,
And he sailed home, o’er the sea,
Regretting his loss most bitterly.
As for our two lovers, why they,
Tristan and Iseult, were well away,
Riding towards the castle towers.
Whether resting among the flowers
On their way, they found happiness,

I shall leave for others to guess:
For my part, I make no surmise,
Tis pure conjecture, in my eyes.

Tristan brought Iseult back again
To Mark, his uncle, and told him plain,
'Sire,' said he, 'before Christ above,
Why, here is the queen, whom you love;
It is great folly to deal so lightly
With her, and you do not rightly
To lose her for the sake of a lyre,
Or a harp; mockery you desire?
Whoe'er has known a loyal queen,
Bartered for a lyre's tune, I mean?
Let no man cheat you so readily;
And guard my lady more carefully!'

The suspicions of Marjodoc, the King's Steward

NOW at court, the praise and honour
Tristan won, seemed greater than ever,
And he was famed throughout the land,
For skill and wit, while, hand in hand,
He and the queen cheered each other,
Joyful that they could be together;
And, whene'er they could so contrive,
They helped each other to feel alive.

Now Tristan owned to a companion,
The king's vassal, a noble baron,
The Steward, Marjodoc his name;
Yet Tristan's close friend he became,
Simply on account of the queen,
Whom he loved distantly, I deem,
Held for his lady a secret longing,
As men will without her knowing.
Tristan and this High-Steward shared

Lodgings, and right well they fared,
Enjoying each other's company,
For Tristan knew many a story,
And so twas the Steward's delight
To recline with him of a night,
And join him in conversation.

Now one night it did so happen
When he and Tristan had spoken,
Of many matters, long and deep,
That the High-Steward fell asleep;
Whereupon Tristan, silently,
Sought out his lover's company,
Yet brought many a heart-ache too
Upon himself and the queen, anew.
Though he thought he went unseen
Upon his way to see the queen,
And commanded the situation,
His steps were dogged by Ill-Fortune,
For she had loosed her baying pack,
Set snares, and followed at his back,
While trouble and woe lay ahead,
On that path he ought to dread,
Yet the very path by which he
Would hasten to Iseult joyfully.
It had chanced to snow that night,
And the moon was clear and bright,
Yet Tristan gave never a thought
To his chances of being caught,
And no more so on this occasion,
Hastening to their assignation.
When he came into the chamber,
Brangwen placed a chessboard over
Against the lantern, to darken all,
And I know not how it did befall,
But she then failed to lock the door
But simply fell asleep once more.

Meanwhile the Steward had a dream,
And, in his slumber, it did seem
A dread and fearsome wild boar
Came from the forest to the door
Of the castle, entered the court,
Whetting its tusks, as it sought
To charge all the courtiers there,
While not a single knight did dare
To face it, though they ran about
Seeking to drive the creature out.
Ignoring their vain endeavours,
The boar reached the king's quarters,
Snarling and raging, broke the door,
Tossed the empty bed on the floor,
Fouled the clean linen with its foam,
And then about the place did roam,
Watched by many of Mark's men,
Who did but gaze, and gaze again.

When Marjodoc awoke, the dream
Lodged deep in his heart did seem,
And so to Tristan he called out,
Meaning to tell him all about
His vision, yet gained no reply.
He called again, but naught thereby
Was won; Tristan was not abed,
And Marjodoc guessed, instead,
That Tristan had some secret tryst,
Though he knew naught, I insist,
About his affair with the queen;
He was simply annoyed, I mean,
That, close friends as they both were,
He'd not been told, but must infer.

Marjodoc rose at once and dressed,
Full quietly he the door addressed,

Looked abroad, saw Tristan's trail,
And forth into the night did sail,
Following it through an orchard,
Lit by the moon; he went forward,
Crossing the snow-covered grass,
Where Tristan earlier had passed,
Until he reached a chamber-door.
There he stopped, feeling unsure,
Troubled at finding the door ajar,
Wondering who did thus unbar
Their door at night, and musing,
Seeing so suspicious a thing,
On where Lord Tristan might be,
Whether for good or ill; had he,
A tryst with some lady-in-waiting?
The thought was still circulating
In his mind, when it gave way
To yet another for, sad to say,
He feared it might be with the queen.
Now his thoughts wavered between
Those two sources of suspicion.
Calmly considering his position,
He felt brave enough to enter
And stole into the dim chamber,
No trace of moonlight on the floor,
And then, the lantern was obscured
By the chessboard Brangwen set,
Though the light was burning yet.
Pressing his hand against the wall,
Though he could barely see at all,
He nonetheless went straight ahead,
Until he came close to a bed,
And heard two voices speak together,
And what was done, one with another.
Now he knew, and was torn apart,
Knowledge pained him to the heart,
Since upon Iseult his affection

Rested; the lady of his election.
Now his feelings turned to anger,
Hatred and anger, and thereafter
Anger and hatred, in succession,
Moved at first by the one passion,
And then consumed by the other.
He took some moments to recover,
Unsure what action he should take,
Fearful of making some mistake.
Hatred, anger prompted him there
To reveal the nature of their affair,
And yet his wariness of Tristan
Knowing he was a forceful man,
Curbed all thought of doing so.
He turned, and set himself to go,
And returned, slowly, to his bed,
With many a sad thought in his head.

Tristan too returned, and retired
To bed, as quietly as he desired,
And though Marjodoc had heard,
The steward uttered never a word,
A thing unusual, for the pair
Ever held conversation there.
Now, given this strange omission,
Tristan guessed he harboured suspicion,
And kept a tight rein on his speech,
Thinking his secret yet out of reach.
Yet twas too late, the steward knew,
What he wished hid, was all on view.

Marjodoc tells the king of a rumour

THE envious Marjodoc took the king
Aside, and told him about this thing,
That a rumour, grown out of hand,
Had sprung up concerning Tristan

And Queen Iseult, of little merit,
Which yet did the realm no credit,
And that the king should note it well,
And indeed he might take counsel;
Since it affected, all this matter,
Both his marriage and his honour.
Yet he refrained from saying he
Knew of its truth, with certainty.
Mark, an innocent, yet the best,
Ever more generous than the rest,
Was shocked, for he could not accept,
That any man should e'er suspect
The lodestar of his happiness,
Of the slightest unfaithfulness.
Yet now he nursed a suspicion,
With all the pain and attrition
Such jealousies do bring alway.
And he was on watch every day,
Lest he might reveal some proof.
He assessed them, and yet in truth,
Could not detect a single thing
That he could as evidence bring;
For Tristan had told Iseult now
Of the steward, warning her how
They must beware both he and she.

Yet Mark observed them carefully,
And sought to test them every way.
One night, as Mark beside her lay,
And the talk there went to and fro,
He set a snare, and caught her so.
'My lady, now give me counsel
What say you of what I now tell?
For I mean to go on pilgrimage,
And be away, perchance an age.
To whom should I entrust your care
While I am wandering everywhere?'

‘God’s blessing!’ replied the queen,
‘Why then tis Tristan you must mean,
Why ask? For in whose care would I
Be safer? And then, beneath his eye,
Both land and folk may rest secure,
What indeed would you have more?
Your nephew is manly and wise,
And none will take him by surprise.’

Mark begins to mistrust Iseult

KING Mark troubled by her answer,
Now looked suspiciously upon her.
And from then on Tristan, and she,
Were watched, and observed closely.
He sought the steward on this matter,
‘Indeed, Sire,’ replied the latter,
‘You find yourself that it is so;
For she herself cannot but show
The passion she has for Tristan,
Nor should you suffer the man
To walk beside her, any longer,
If you love both wife and honour.
Mark was troubled even more,
The suspicions he had before,
Added to the doubts he now
Was brought to hear and allow,
Tormented the king endlessly,
Though Tristan went scot-free,
For despite the steward’s call,
Mark possessed no proof at all.

Iseult meanwhile, in deep delusion,
Was joyous; though twas mere illusion,
All this pilgrimage he’d claimed;
And thus to Brangwen she named
All Mark’s intent, and how the king

Had asked who'd care for everything,
And to whom he should entrust her.
'My lady, tell me on your honour,
Whom, truthfully, did you suggest?'
Iseult told her, with all the rest
Of their conversation. 'Why say so?'
Cried Brangwen, 'twas foolish; oh
It was a snare, and you are ta'en,
And the steward laid it, tis plain.
They tested you in this manner,
And you must beware in future.
If he speaks thus, on another day,
Here my lady's what you must say.
Reply like this...' Brangwen told her,
How his questions she might counter.

Mark, meanwhile was doubly sad,
Tormented by the doubts he had,
Doubts he could not fail to harbour.
Suspecting his dear Iseult's manner,
And troubled too about Tristan,
Finding naught ill about the man,
Neither deceit, nor treachery,
No sign of faithlessness saw he.
His joy Iseult, his friend Tristan,
The pair he had on either hand,
Troubled him in heart and mind,
He doubted her, and then did find
He doubted him, so both did doubt.
This double challenge, bout by bout,
He wrestled with, and did endure,
As many a man has done before.
When he wished to take his pleasure
With Iseult, an equal measure
Of suspicion denied his wish;
Yet seeking to dispense with this,
And find the truth of the matter,

This was denied him, and as ever,
Doubt and fear returned; once more,
All was as troubled as before.

Gottfried muses on jealousy and suspicion

WHAT hurts love more than suspicion?
What deals the lover's heart its frisson
More dreadfully than fear and doubt?
For gripped by them he reels about.
Though having clearly seen or heard
Some misdeed, some treacherous word,
From which he wrests the truth at last,
Yet, in a trice the moment's passed,
Till something else spurs his doubt,
And he must turn and turn, about.
All the world may be stricken so,
And yet tis most unwise; we know
Tis mad to hedge love with suspicion,
For none finds ease in that position.
And yet tis worse to realise
Truth, and halt doubt and surmise;
For he who gains the facts, to find
That the doubts that filled his mind
Were justified, wins heartbreak more
Dreadful than all that went before.
The twin evils that he possessed
Are now as welcome as the blest.
Could he but know that pair again,
He'd embrace their grief and pain,
As long as truth again lay hid.

So evil does, as evil e'er did,
Till something worse the mind doth fill,
And works a greater evil still,
And all things that were bad seem good.
Though doubt nips pleasure in the bud,

Its presence proves not so irksome
That we would deny it welcome,
If truth is our alternative.
Tis so, and love must learn to live
In doubt; love must give rise to doubt,
And spread suspicion all about.
As long as Love has doubt within,
There's still a new life to begin,
But if she knows the truth, at last,
All hope of remedy is past.
And then Love has this failing,
Which doth ever set her flailing,
Namely that when all goes well
She is fickle and, as all will tell,
Wavers, and will not hold tight,
And yet when doubt looms in sight,
She will seize it, and ne'er let go.
She's ready its company to know,
And eager in pursuing it,
More intent on the woe in it,
Than ever she was on the pleasure
She might have enjoyed at leisure.

Iseult dissembles

NOW Mark did the trait exhibit,
Persisting in that foolish habit.
Day and night it was his mission,
To banish doubt and suspicion,
By finding truth on the morrow,
And so achieving mortal sorrow.
Upon this his thoughts were bent,
Until it seemed his sole intent.

And so it came about one night,
That Mark had Iseult in his sights;
A snare that he and Marjodoc

Had planned, to set her in the dock,
And by a subterfuge achieve
Proof that she laboured to deceive.
But their plotting went all astray;
For Brangwen had, that very day,
Reminded her of her instructions,
And so the queen, at her direction,
Caught her husband in the snare
That he had set to catch her there
And contribute to her downfall.
Yet Brangwen's counsel answered all.
Cunning was countered by cunning,
The hare twas set the hound running.
The king clasped her to his heart,
And kissed her eyes, with sly art,
And then her mouth he did enfold:
'Lovely woman,' he said, 'I hold
Naught so dear now as I hold you
And that I must soon part from you
Robs me of my reason, no less,
Heaven above us be my witness!'

The queen, well-prepared, with art
Met his artfulness; from her heart,
She heaved a sigh, and cried: 'Alas!
I thought this jest of yours was past,
But now I see twas truly meant.'
And further sighs she did vent,
And fell to weeping, and did lament
So piteously, that he proved content,
In his innocence, to quench all doubt,
Fearing she'd weep her poor heart out.
Yet women show no greater guile
Than when their tears flow in style,
For I have it from their own lips.
The eyes glisten, the fair head dips;
They can weep for no good reason

And do it as they please, and often.

Iseult wept uncontrollably.
Mark asked, in his credulity:
'Lovely woman, why do you cry?
What's the matter? Come, tell me, why?'
'Well may I weep,' Iseult replied,
'Since all comfort I am denied;
A woman in a strange country,
With but the one life granted me,
And the little wit that I possess,
Both of them devoted, no less,
To you and your love for me,
Such that I am longer free
To think of aught but you alone,
For there is none so dear, I own,
Yet you are not as fond of me,
As you say, or pretend, to be.
And now you think to slip away,
Leaving me languishing all day,
Here, alone, in this foreign land;
And I have come to understand
That I mean little enough to you,
And never shall my heart pursue
Happiness, for you like me not.'

'How so, my fair one? Tis your lot;
Yet you have charge of all my land,
With its people at your command,
And they are as much yours as mine.
Let you their orders thus assign;
Whate'er you ask it shall be done,
And he who is to me as a son,
My nephew, the noble Tristan,
Will be your most faithful man,
And care for you as he knows how.
He is wise and prudent, I do avow,

And he'll take care of you no less
Than I would; seek your happiness;
See to your pleasure and honour.
He has my trust, and earns it ever,
Loves you as well as he does me,
And for us both will stand surety.'
'Lord Tristan?' cried Iseult the Fair,
'I'd sooner Death had me in care,
And I were buried, than consent
That I to his keeping now be lent!
The cunning flatterer, at my side,
Ever seeks, and tis not denied,
To speak of his great esteem for me.
God knows with what sincerity
He does so, and I know it too,
For Morholt, my uncle, he slew,
And so he fears me, as he ought;
And thereby he has ever thought
To beguile me, and to flatter,
Seeking friendship in that manner,
Hoping to gain favour with me,
By his falseness, and his trickery.
But all that he does, he does in vain,
From such labour he shall not gain.
And God knows tis for you alone
For your sake, more than for my own,
That I show friendship to the man,
Else, from my sight, that fellow ban!
Since I must see and hear him still,
I show affection against my will,
Thus, I admit, I have often shown
That lord attention, yet I own
Twas to avoid reproach, with lies
Upon my lips, and uncaring eyes.
Women like not their husband's friends,
They say, and it has served my ends,
To grant him many an idle glance,

Or meaningless speech, perchance,
That he'd swear came from the heart.
Sire, be not deceived by such art.
Your nephew, this Lord Tristan
Shall not act as my guardian,
For so much as a day if you
Would be good to me and true;
For you yourself must undertake,
For my and for your own sake,
To care for me on your journey
And have me in your company.
Where'er you'd go, so would I,
Unless you would that wish deny,
Or death robs me of that pleasure.'

So Iseult dealt him a measure
Of guilefulness, most cleverly,
And tricked him with her trickery,
For to disarm all his suspicion,
And quench his ire was her mission;
And he'd have sworn all was true.
Mark the waverer was set anew
Upon the right path, for his wife
Knew how to end doubt and strife.
All that she said and all she did
Was well, her secret too well-hid.
To the steward, the king told all
She'd said, or all he could recall,
Her statement to him, all complete,
Showing she was without deceit.
This annoyed the steward greatly,
And troubled his poor heart deeply,
Yet he advised Mark of a sure
Way he might test Iseult once more.

That night when Mark lay beside
The queen and they in talk allied,

He once again deployed his snare,
And drew her towards ruin there.
'Listen,' he said, 'my fairest queen,
We must bow to destiny, I deem;
You must show me how a woman
May guard a realm as doth a man.
My lady, I must travel abroad,
While my friends do you afford
Protection, my kinfolk, my men,
And all who are beholden, then
Must grant you service and honour,
If they would seek your favour.
If any knight or lady irks you,
Whom you'd not have about you
Then banish them; you need not see
Aught that annoys you, certainly,
Whether tis property or person,
Remove both at your discretion.
Nor shall I regard with favour
Any that doth you displeasure.
Be happy, and live thus as you will,
For you do have my blessing still.
And since you so dislike Tristan,
I will at once dismiss the man
From court, since, conveniently,
He needs must be in Parmenie,
To see to all his business there,
Tis his and his country's affair.'

'Thank you, my lord,' Iseult replied,
'Your words are both kind and wise.
Since you view with displeasure
Aught that would in some measure
Vex me, tis right that I consent
To whate'er aids you in your intent,
And counsel you, morn and eve,
In all that honour may conceive.

Now see, lord, what you must do.
I would advise that your nephew
Be not banished from your court,
For fear of what might be thought;
Folk would soon spread the rumour
Here at court, and then wherever,
That it was I, not you, who saw
A way to settle that old score
Of his having slain my uncle,
A matter that yet doth rankle.
Such talk would much dishonour me
Nor honour for you would there be.
I would not have you scorn a friend
Nor a favourite of yours offend.

And then consider this, as well,
If you are gone, who, come tell,
Shall now guard either country?
They will not rest as peacefully
In a woman's hands, perchance.
Whoe'er their aims would advance
And yet rule justly, with honour,
Needs great wit to wield great power,
And bravery; and there's no man
Except, that is, my Lord Tristan
Among the barons who will do.
Apart from my Lord Tristan, and you,
None could indeed such deeds demand
As need respect, where men command.
And if war comes, a dire mischance
He would prepare for in advance,
Then we might fail of victory;
Malicious folk would then be free
To taunt you with the name Tristan,
Question your choice, out of hand,
"Had Tristan been here," they'd say,
"We'd not have failed thus, today."

And they would lay the blame on me,
For his voyage and their injury.
Sire, twould be better to refrain.
Reflect on this matter once again.
Either let me accompany you,
Or grant Lord Tristan his fair due,
And let him take charge of your lands.
Whate'er my feelings; as it stands,
I would rather have Tristan here,
Than some other, and live in fear.'

From her words, the king was sure
That her whole heart turned the more
On Tristan's honour than the realm;
Thus he veered, and bent the helm
Towards his doubts and fears again;
Thus was he filled with ire and pain;
While Iseult once more told Brangwen
All that had passed, the how and when,
Without forgetting a single word,
While Brangwen thought her quite absurd,
For answering in the way she had;
To champion Tristan was quite mad.
Then lectured her in the like way,
As to how to act, and what to say.

That night, when the queen was abed,
She embraced Mark, kissed his head,
And pressed him to her tender breast,
Before she set about her quest,
With a subtle question, and answer:
'Sire,' she said, 'if you loved me ever,
Say, have you settled on that plan
Of sending home my Lord Tristan?
Could she be sure, now, your dear wife
Would thank you, for all of her life.
My lord, my trust in you is great,

As it should be, yet it seems my fate
Is to doubt, I fear tis some test;
Yet if all is as you did suggest,
And you will banish from my eyes
All that annoys me, and I despise,
I shall know that you love me true,
And yes, I might have asked it too,
I should have done so long ago,
But I was cautious of doing so,
For I know what will come to me,
If I am long at Tristan's mercy.
Reflect Sire, should he not depart,
(Here's no ill-feeling on my part)
And then while you are far away
Command the kingdom, day by day,
And some accident befall you there,
For such things happen everywhere,
He would seize my title and lands,
For such would I suffer at his hands.
Think of the risk, as a friend should,
And rid me of this Tristan for good.
You would be acting wisely then;
So send Lord Tristan home again,
Or let him journey with you, and let
Your steward Marjodoc be set
To care for me while you are gone.
Or if you would let me go upon
Your pilgrimage with you, then I
Would leave the land to be governed by
Whoe'er you wish; if I might do so,
Though who that is I do not know.
But you must do as you would wish
With your lands and with me, in this,
That is my wish and my intent.'
She continued her blandishments
Till he had quite forgot his doubts,
And what the matter was all about,

His jealousy, and his suspicions,
Regarding her aims and affections.
He thought the queen quite innocent
Of any misdeed, or ill-intent,
And judged the steward Marjodoc
Naught but a liar, and run amok;
Though indeed the steward had been
Right truthful as concerned the queen.

PART IX: Iseult's Ordeal

Melot the dwarf conspires

WHEN the steward found that his plan
Had come to naught, he then began
To seek another way, and thought
Of a dwarf there, amongst the court,
Melot le Petit, of Aquitaine,
Who read the stars, so men did claim.
Naught of this fellow will I relay,
Apart from what my source doth say;
And all that the true tale doth teach,
Is he was skilled, sharp, quick of speech.
He was of the king's complement
With access to the queen's apartment.
Marjodoc now conspired with him,
And told Melot that, once within
The queen's chamber, he should spy
On Tristan and Iseult, whereby,
If Melot could find hard evidence,
Of their love, and their grave offence,
He would earn reward, and honour
From their lord, King Mark, forever.

Melot spent many an hour so,
Weaving his web there, to and fro,
Setting his traps, so as to snare

The words and glances offered there.
He did so morning, noon, and night,
And soon upon their love did light,
For they behaved so tenderly,
Towards each other, he could see
The evidence, all which did prove
That both of them were deep in love,
And told Mark he had discovered
That they were indeed true lovers.
The three of them then took stock,
Melot, King Mark, and Marjodoc,
And, by agreement, forged a plan,
The gist of it was that Lord Tristan
Should hence be barred from the court,
So that the truth might now be sought
More readily; this was begun,
And as they planned it, so twas done.

Tristan is barred from court

THE king, for the sake of his honour,
Barred his nephew from wherever
The ladies gathered, since the court
Was full of vile rumours, in short,
Which must be countered promptly,
That might cause both he and she,
Iseult and the king, much distress.
Tristan obeyed the king's request,
And thus he avoided every place
Where the ladies might see his face,
About the palace or their chambers.
This much surprised the courtiers,
Who missed him from their company;
Ill words they uttered frequently;
His ears were full, as was his mind,
Of things both painful and unkind.

Now he and Iseult spent their days
In grief, and suffered in dual ways;
They were afflicted by double pain;
Pain at the king's doubts and, again,
Pain that they had no time together.
Heart and vigour both were ever
On the wane, from hour to hour,
They both paled, their faces dour,
He for the girl, she for the man,
Tristan for Iseult, Iseult Tristan.
Both were in pain, and in distress.
No wonder to me, I must confess,
That their pain was felt in common,
While they suffered distress as one,
For both were of one heart and mind;
All of good and ill, they did find,
All their life now, all their death,
Was measured by a single breath;
What troubled one or the other,
Troubled both of them together;
When aught brought the one relief
The other knew it, tis my belief.
For good and ill they were as one.
And then, when all is said and done,
Naught in their faces could deny
The love that dwelt in either's eye.

Mark could see at once the sign
Of this separation by design,
How the parting gave them pain,
All of their suffering and strain,
And that they longed to be together
Whene'er they could, and wherever.
So he gave them opportunity,
Bidding his huntsmen be ready,
With the hounds, to hunt the forest.
And then informed all of the rest,

That he would hunt for twenty days,
And all those skilled in rural ways,
Or who desired to hunt at leisure,
Should attend upon his pleasure.
Then he took leave of the queen,
Told her in his absence to glean
As much pleasure as she could.
Then he told the dwarf he should
Spread his nets and snares about,
And seek to catch the lovers out,
And promised him a fine reward.
Mark, himself, o'er the greensward,
Led forth the hunt in his honour;

His hunting friend Tristan however,
Remained behind, said he was ill;
Yet he would go a-hunting still,
In his own manner, even though
Iseult and he were buried so
In their own sorrow, yet seeking
Some chance means of meeting,
So that they might be together.
Yet no plan had come to either.

Brangwen gives her counsel

NOW Brangwen went to see Tristan,
For she was aware that the man
Was heavy-hearted as her lady;
And thus she shared his misery.
'Ah, noble lady,' he said, 'tell me,
For all these ills what cure have I?
How shall poor Iseult now, and I
Evade our ruin? I see no way
That we might live another day.'

'What counsel can I give to you?'

Said their friend, both good and true.
'Ill was the day that we were born.
God have mercy, for thus is torn
All joy and honour from us three,
And never now shall we win free.
Alas Iseult! Alas Tristan!
That ever I saw you, dear man,
And proved the source of all your pain!
I see no way that we might gain
A means by which you two might meet;
Or naught that would not court defeat.
I know, as surely as I will die,
That you will take great harm hereby,
If you are made to suffer here,
This endless separation; I fear,
Naught better can I now advise
Than that you labour in this wise,
While you are parted from us two.
When the chance is offered you,
Cut a branch from an olive tree,
Split it lengthwise, and by and by
Mark every sliver with an 'I',
On one side, on the other a 'T'
For your first-names; now hark to me,
Go to the orchard where the stream
Running there, the trees between,
Flows down to the ladies' quarters.
Throw a sliver into its waters,
And let it float on past the door
Where Iseult and I evermore
Bewail each day our misery.
When the splinter we thus see
We shall know that you are there,
Beside the stream, waiting there;
Keep watch for my lady and me,
In the shade of that olive tree;
Your lady will come to meet you,

And I too will come to greet you,
If such is a possibility,
And if you yourself agree.
Whatever of this brief life yet
Remains to me, do not forget
I devote my life to both of you,
And my counsel is good and true.
If with a thousand hours or more
Of mine, I could your joy ensure
For but one, then I would sell
The rest of all my days as well,
Rather than let you suffer grief.'

'Thank you fair one, that's my belief.
You are so honourable and true,'
Said Tristan, 'that none more than you
Ere showed at heart such loyalty,
And honour; so it seems to me.
If fortune e'er on me should smile,
You'd see that, in but a brief while,
I would bring you joy and honour.
Though my present state is dire,
If I knew how I might employ
My days so as to bring you joy,
I too would consume my days
The sooner, to earn your praise!'
And then, he clasped her tightly,
'Most loyal and blessed, lady!'
Kissing her eyes, and her face,
Many a time, in close embrace,
'Fair one,' said he, 'thus seek to do
As a friend does, both good and true,
Let me, and that poor weeper there,
Be held in your most loving care;
May blessed Iseult, and this knight,
Be in your thoughts; see us aright.'
'I shall do so, most willingly.

Yet I must leave, sir, and swiftly,
Do now all that I've asked you to;
And let not sorrow overcome you.'
'May the Lord protect your honour,
And your lovely self, forever!'
Brangwen bowed her head in tears,
Leaving him to his doubts and fears.

The trysts in Mark's absence

SAD Tristan cut those olive-slivers,
And then cast one upon the waters,
As Brangwen, his fair counsellor,
Had told him, and Iseult went forth,
Beside the stream, her love to see
Neath the shade of the olive tree,
Eight times in all, day after day,
For none did see, or go their way.
But then one night it came about,
When Tristan was but setting out
Upon his way, Melot, that evil
Instrument, spawned by the Devil,
By some mischance, saw the knight
And, slyly keeping him in sight,
Watched as Tristan approached the tree,
To linger there, suspiciously,
Till a lady soon neared the place,
Whom Tristan took in his embrace.
Melot knew not who she might be.

Melot seeks to entrap Tristan

NEXT day, Melot went forth to see
Tristan, with every ill-intention,
And sought to gain his attention
By feigning to act as messenger,
Despatched from lover to lover,

His evil heart filled with guile:
‘My lord, indeed an anxious while
I have endured in coming here.
You are beset, it would appear,
By watchers and by prying eyes.
Risking all, despite such spies,
And out of pity for the queen,
Fair Iseult, who indeed has been
Greatly concerned for you, she
Finding none other but poor me
To employ, I’ve come to you,
And with much difficulty too,
To bear you her heartfelt greeting,
For she seeks an urgent meeting,
I know not where, you will know
It is where last night you did go,
At the very same time and place,
Where you oft meet face to face,
Perchance to warn you; she may.
You will believe me when I say
No more than your unhappiness
Brings me here, and her sadness
For it; and now my Lord Tristan
I must be gone, yet tis my plan
To tell her whate’er you conceive,
If, my lord, you’ll grant me leave.
Yet if they heard of this at court,
A harsh payment would be sought,
For tis said indeed, and believed,
Whate’er was done and conceived
Between you two, is down to me.
Before God, I do swear, sincerely,
I know not how this thing began.’
‘Do you dream, friend?’ said Tristan,
‘What sad nonsense have you brought?
What folly do they believe at court?
What have I, and my lady, done?’

A curse upon you now; begone!
For you may be assured of this,
No matter what the rumour is,
Nor what's thought of the matter,
If twere not my sense of honour
Protects you, you'd not reappear
To tell them of your dreaming here!'

The assignation by the stream

Now, to King Mark, Melot did race,
Who was hunting the forest chase,
And told his lord how all did seem,
And of the tryst beside the stream.
'Sire, ride there, with me, this night,
Truth will be there, and in plain sight;
For, of this, I can now assure you,
Howe'er they manage it, those two,
This very night, they will be there,
And you may view the whole affair.'

With Melot now, the king returned.
To witness all the pain he'd earned.
They entered the orchard, that eve,
Yet no hiding-place could achieve;
But, beside the stream, there stood
The olive-tree, and there they could
Conceal themselves; wide its spread,
Not tall, though branching overhead.
Into the olive-tree they did climb,
And sat there, silent, for a time.

As night drew on, Tristan set out,
Assuming none were thereabout,
And once arrived in the garden,
He took a sliver, marked for them,
And set it floating on the water,

So that he might tell his lover,
The sad Iseult, he was waiting;
Then he made a hasty crossing
Of the stream, to the olive tree,
Which stood, in darkness, quietly,
Yet cast its shade into the night,
For the moon was full and bright;
And there he stood, in its shadow,
Musing sadly on his sorrow.
And then he chanced to see below,
On the grass, the double shadow
Of Mark and Melot, in the tree.
Now in the moonlight he could see
Their shapes, he was full of fear,
Knowing he was in danger here.
'Dear Lord,' he thought, 'now preserve
Myself and Iseult whom I serve!
If she should fail to see the snare
Those two shadows witness there,
She will come straight to the tree,
And then, Dear Lord, where will we be?
God, of your goodness, watch and care
For us two, and protect her there.
Guide her steps, warn her somehow,
Of the trap that would catch us now,
Lest she should utter, or do, aught,
That might engender evil thought.
Lord, have mercy on her and me,
And this night, grant us your pity!
Our honour, our lives, I commend
To you, on whom we both depend!'

Now the queen, and their dear friend,
The noble, and discreet, Brangwen,
Went to where the stream did flow
Through the garden of their sorrow,
To where they would wait together,

When there was no sign of danger,
For some new signal from Tristan.
They would walk there hand in hand,
Lamenting thus, and sorrowing,
And oft of love's sadness speaking.
And soon Brangwen saw a sliver,
Bobbing gently, on the water,
And called out to her mistress.
Iseult seized it, and did address
It, finding a 'T' carved and an 'I',
'Tristan', 'Iseult', she read thereby.
Swiftly grasping her mantle, she
Covered her head, most carefully,
And then stole softly o'er the grass;
Among the flowers she did pass,
To the olive tree, by the stream;
Yet when she saw him he did seem
Rooted in place, not as before;
For once he'd seen her, and was sure,
He would ever come to meet her,
When they had sight of each other.

Now fair Iseult wondered greatly,
And her heart was troubled deeply.
She bowed her head, and on she went,
Puzzling as to what all this meant,
Towards the lone tree, full of fear,
And, as she silently drew near,
Saw three men's shadows on the ground,
Though only one was to be found.
From this, and Tristan's attitude,
The nature of the trap she knew:
'Ah', she thought, 'assassins then!
Who sent them here, these evil men?
Who sets an ambush for us two?
Surely the king is present too,
Hidden somewhere about the place.

We are betrayed; beware disgrace!
Help us, escape now, honourably,
Dear Lord; save Tristan, and save me!’
And then she thought: ‘Is he aware,
My Tristan, of these men, this snare,
Or not? And yet it seemed he did
Certainly know that men lay hid,
As his odd behaviour had shown.

Tristan’s and Iseult’s words hold hidden meaning

SHE kept afar, and, in courtly tone,
Said: ‘Lord Tristan, I am aggrieved,
That you thus hope to be received
At such an hour, in such a place,
Where none can even see your face;
Counting thus on my indulgence,
Or worse still, on my innocence.
Respect, for your uncle and for me,
Might seek a better way, indeed,
The path of loyalty and honour,
Rather than demand a favour,
With such a show of secrecy?
Now tell me why you sought for me?
I stand here now, yet full of fear,
Tis Brangwen made me so appear,
To learn of what is troubling you;
For it was she who pressed me to,
After she spoke with you today,
Twas foolish of me to give way.
She is listening to this, nearby,
And howe’er quiet it is, yet I,
Would rather lose a finger now,
From my right hand, I do avow,
Such is my fear of evil talk,
Than any learn that here I walk
And meet with you, and speak with you;

For wicked tales to such are due.
The things they say of you and me,
Claiming that they know that we
Are lovers and our hearts entwined
In some unlawful way! I find
The court is ever filled with lies.
But God himself to that is wise,
He knows my feelings towards you.
And I'll speak one word further, too:
God be my witness, when I say,
Let not my sins be washed away
If my loyalty prove any less certain
Than the feelings I might mention
That I still hold in respect of you.
For I have loved no man, tis true,
But he who took my maidenhead;
And to me all others are as dead.
I swear tis wrong, my Lord Tristan
That King Mark, so honest a man,
Should harbour such wild suspicions
Concerning you, and your intentions,
The more so since he knows how I
Feel towards you, as you know why.
God knows, all those who malign me,
Are foolish, for such cannot see
What is truly here, in my heart.
I have shown you, with some art,
My esteem, granted you praise,
Oh, in a hundred thousand ways,
Worked on you my hidden plan,
Out of my love for the one man
Whom I must love, and I did so
Without deceit, as God doth know.
Whether it be squire or knight,
Tis to my credit, and tis right,
That I should honour all men here
Close to King Mark, or held dear.

And yet folk hold that against me.
No hate do I bear you, certainly,
Because of the court's evil tales;
But now, my lord, tell me what ails
You thus, for I wish to depart,
I cannot linger, speak your part.'

'Noble lady,' came Tristan's answer,
'I doubt not that you would ever
Speak thus, and prove honourable
Toward me, if twere possible,
But deceitful folk do such prevent,
By questioning your fair intent,
And mine, and rob us of favour
With your gracious royal master,
And yet through no fault of our own,
As by God in Heaven is known.
Think now, blessed and noble queen,
On how blameless I have been,
Towards you, and towards him,
And of the grace I find in him;
And let not your thoughts be blind,
But hold that clearly in your mind,
And ask him, of his courtesy,
To hide the doubt and enmity
He innocently bears me; seek
That he, at least for one more week,
May show me his forbearance,
And that you both may advance
Your grace to me in this matter,
As though I were yet in favour,
While I prepare to leave this land.
Otherwise, you must understand,
We shall all lose honour thereby,
My lord the king, and you, and I;
For if you behave towards me
As you have done, some enemy

Will say: "There's truth in that affair!
For see he's gone, and who knows where?
He flees the court, my Lord Tristan,
Whom the king perchance doth ban."

'My Lord Tristan,' Iseult replied,
'Better that I lay down and died,
Than ask my lord to do a thing
Concerning you or your leaving.
You know he has proved unkind
Towards me, time out of mind,
On your account, and if he knew
That I was here alone with you
This night, then his displeasure
Would be such that I would never
Know respect or kindness again.
And whether he will show me them
Once more, I know not, and yet I
Can but wonder how and why
My lord came by his suspicion,
And if one made it their mission
To rouse it; I have never known
You to beguile me, I must own,
Nor, indeed, have I ever been
Dishonest towards you, I ween.
And I know not what has brought
On us such ill repute, unsought,
So that our state is vile and ill,
And may the Lord recall it still,
And so amend that state ere long,
And so set right whate'er is wrong.

And now, sir, grant me leave to go,
I must depart; do you also.
All your trouble and affliction,
God knows, I feel, tis no fiction.
I might claim you gave me cause

To hate you, yet of that no more,
I will but say that I regret
That tis through me you suffer yet;
I must forgive your every offence.
On the day you leave our presence,
May God, preserve you, my lord,
And the Queen of Heaven afford
You her protection! As to this
Request you made of me, I wish
I could help you; if I but thought
I might assist in what you sought,
I would then act and counsel you,
In any way, such that I might do;
If only I did not fear it would
Be easily misunderstood.
Yet no matter what comes of it,
Or what trouble I gain from it,
I will defend you most sincerely
From any charge of disloyalty,
Towards me or my lord the king.
Whatever benefit it may bring,
I'll aid your cause, as best I can.'

'Thank you, my lady, said Tristan,
'And tell me of the king's reply
To what you seek; if tis that I
Must go, perchance, and nevermore
See you again, seek a foreign shore,
Then Heaven bless you noble queen!
For, God knows, ne'er has there been
So fine and so true a lady,
Borne nobly on o'er land or sea.
To God I commend you: body
Soul, life, and honour, my lady!'

Mark regrets his suspicions

AT these words, they did both depart,
The queen with sadness in her heart,
Sighing in pain, and sorrowing,
Murmuring her love and longing,
As Tristan went his tearful way.
Mark too, who in the tree did lay,
Was saddened at having doubted
His wife and nephew, and shouted
Curses, aloud, once they had gone,
From the olive bough he sat upon;
And in his heart too he condemned
Those who had led him to this end.
The wretched Melot he roundly
Castigated, and this not only
For his deceit, but, upon his life,
The fellow had slandered his wife!
Thus they, on descending the tree,
Returned to the chase, dejectedly,
But for differing reasons, because
Melot grieved, as he rode his horse,
Over the reason for his rejection,
A wrongful charge of deception,
While Mark regretted the suspicion
That had led to his foolish action,
And caused his wife such trouble,
And his nephew, and then double
Annoyance to himself, and led
To rumour, and shameful words said
Both in the country and at court.

The next day Mark swiftly sought
His return, while the hunt remained,
And once at court, having regained
His composure, he saw the queen:
'Madame,' he said, 'how have you been?
How spent your time with me away?'
'In needless sorrow, indeed, each day,

And yet to ease it, I would aspire
To tune the harp, and play the lyre.’
‘Needless sorrow?’ was Mark’s reply,
‘What sorrow did you feel, and why?’
Iseult smiled, and then did answer,
‘Howe’er it occurred, it did occur,
And doth recur now, and every day,
For tis my nature, and woman’s way,
To grieve and sorrow for no reason;
Thus we cleanse our hearts and brighten
Our eyes; and tis from naught, often,
That this great sadness has arisen,
And to naught it doth swift return.’
She went on, in this pleasant turn.

Now Mark was intent on listening,
Trying hard to grasp her meaning.
‘Tell me, my lady, have you heard aught,
Or is there anything said at court,
Regarding how Tristan doth seem?
For when I rode away the theme
Was that he suffered, in great pain.’
‘Sire, tis the truth, that very same,’
The queen replied, though she did mean
The pains of love in him were seen,
That love caused all his suffering.
‘What know you of this?’ asked the king.
‘I only know what I surmise,
And by use of Brangwen’s eyes,
For she said, some little while ago,
Some illness had taken him so.
She saw him too, but yesterday,
And he requests that I would say
A word to you, for, in God’s name,
He begs you not to sanction blame;
Judge not so harshly, is his plea,
And temper your severity,

For the remainder of this week,
Since his departure he doth seek,
And he requests that with honour,
He might go abroad, to suffer.'
And she gave the rest of his plea,
As he'd asked of her previously,
Beside the stream, which Mark had heard
And their conversation, word for word.

'Cursed forever be that vile creature,'
Cried the king, 'who raised a measure
Of doubt within, for I feel remorse
That ever suspicion took its course,
For I have learned of his innocence,
But a while ago, from men of sense.
And now dear queen, let you decide
The matter, by that I will abide,
What pleases you, it shall be done.
Take myself, and this foster son,
And do you make peace between us.'
'And I shall not! Tis injurious;
For should I settle this today,
You, tomorrow, are like to say
That you doubt him still, as before.'
'No, no, my lady, nevermore
Will I such opinions harbour,
Things most harmful to his honour,
Nor shall I trouble you, my queen,
If his friend you'd choose to seem,
For he indeed is my friend now.'
And then he sealed it with a vow.

Then he summoned Lord Tristan,
And in friendship clasped his hand,
And all suspicion was laid aside,
Doubts quelled, Tristan pacified.
Iseult was placed in Tristan's care,

With all due ceremony, and there
Protected, counselled every way,
She and her household, each day,
Were ordered as he commanded.
Tristan and Iseult had been handed
Their old life and, in full measure,
Found their joy and took their pleasure,
Such that, though all had gone amiss,
They once more lived a life of bliss,
Howe'er briefly it might endure
Ere Mark felt displeasure once more.

Tristan warns Iseult against the steward and the dwarf

I say this now, out loud, that no
Nettle can ever sting one so
Fiercely as a vicious neighbour,
Nor is there aught brings such danger
As doth a devious housemate.
Him I call false; one who doth prate
Of friendship, yet is a foe at heart.
Such friendship proves a thing apart,
For he has honey on his tongue,
But foul venom if you are stung!
With poisonous envy he doth swell,
And poisons his friend's life as well,
With whate'er he doth see or hear,
For naught is safe from such, I fear.
Yet if someone should lay a snare
Quite openly for his foe, tis fair.
In doing so, yet not covertly,
He doth scant harm to his enemy.
But if false friendship he doth dare,
Well then, I say, one must beware.

Take Marjodoc and Melot now.
With Tristan they did smile and bow,

They were full often at his side,
With a friendship their hearts belied,
Offering to keep him company,
Though, inwardly, his enemy,
Plying but cunning and deceit.
Yet Tristan, whene'er they did meet,
Was wary, and warned Iseult too.
'Queen of my heart, now must you
Be careful what you do or say!
We are at risk, in every way.
Two poisonous vipers, in doves' guise
Beguile us, yet with watchful eyes;
Be aware of that pair, dear queen!
For when one's housemates are seen
With a dove's face, yet viper's tail,
Then cross oneself, ere the sky hail,
And say a prayer gainst sudden death!
So, Fair Iseult, my life, my breath,
Guard against Marjodoc the cur;
Watch lest Melot the snake doth stir!'

Tw'as what they were and no mistake;
The one a cur, the other a snake,
Ever seeking to trap the lovers,
A cur and snake bound together,
Whate'er they did, where'er they went.
Morning and night tw'as their intent
To ply Mark with lies and slander,
Till the king would start to waver
And allow his love to weaken;
Till the lovers roused his suspicion,
And he sought, with some new test,
To expose their mutual interest.

King Mark and Melot set another trap

ONE day, by his false counsellors led,

Mark had himself, and Iseult, bled,
And Tristan too; the latter pair
Suspecting naught, all unaware
Of the trap being set for them.
So, in the royal chamber then,
All the king's closest company,
Lay there, relaxing pleasantly.

The eve of the following day,
Once the courtiers were away,
And Mark to his bed did fare,
There were but five others there,
In the great bed-chamber; Tristan,
Iseult, Brangwen, Melot, as planned,
With one young lady-in-waiting,
While the candlesticks were sitting,
Behind some hanging tapestries,
To dim their light; so as to please.
When the Matins bell did sound,
Mark swiftly dressed; he was bound
For Mass. Melot then, cautiously,
He summoned to his company;
And now that Mark had left his bed,
Melot took some flour, and spread
It all about upon the floor.
If any stepped there, twould ensure
Their footprints would be plain to see.
They left for church then, silently,
Where their prayers of devotion,
Were tainted by less pure emotion.

Now Brangwen, even at that hour
Awake, saw Melot spread the flour,
And went, noiselessly, to Tristan,
And warned him of the evil plan;
Then went again to her own bed.
The trap, thus laid, discomforted

Tristan; his longing there, within,
For the woman to whom he'd win,
Was great, but how to achieve her?
He acted as tis said a lover,
Must, for desire is ever blind,
And love is ne'er by fear confined,
When it is true, and in earnest.

Blood on the sheets

'ALAS, now what is for the best,
Dear Lord, how to defeat this snare?
The stakes are high in this affair.'
He stood up on his bed to see
How he might gain his love scot-free.
Twas light enough to see the flour,
But then to leap across, his powers
Weakened so by the blood-letting!
And yet there could be no walking!
He was forced to choose the better
Of the two; stood, his feet together,
And launched himself at the target.
Twas far beyond his strength as yet,
Though Tristan made a brave attempt.
Onto the royal bed he went,
But lost the wager, his vein burst
And thus it brought about the worst,
No end of trouble for him there;
Blood soiled the linen everywhere.
As is its nature, blood will stain,
It dyed the sheets and counterpane;
And though he lay with her not long,
Twas long enough to see him wrong.
Of royal silks and gold brocade,
Linen, bed; a fine mess he made.
Then he leapt back the way he'd come,
And lay there till light filled the room,

His mind full of disturbing thoughts.

Now Mark returned and quickly sought
For footprints on the sprinkled floor.
He gazed, yet not a trace he saw,
Yet when he looked upon the bed,
He found blood all about, instead,
And more blood; it gave him pain:
'How now, my queen?' 'Twas but my vein,
That opened, it has barely ceased,'
She answered. Then, pretending ease,
The king he turned towards Tristan:
'Come, come my lord, rise up young man!'
And throwing back the coverlet,
He found more blood there, and still wet.
Not another word did Mark say,
But left Tristan there where he lay.

Accusation

ALL this weighed upon Mark's mind,
He mused like a man who doth find
The day that's dawned is an ill day.
Indeed he'd chased, upon the way,
The deadly sorrow he had sought,
The anguish he had well-nigh caught,
Yet he'd not exposed their secret;
For he had no more proof, as yet,
Than could be seen from the blood.
His doubts were again at the flood,
Yet the truth was obscured again,
The evidence was not yet plain.
He was yoked to that suspicion
He'd renounced, this his position:
That having found the chamber floor
Untrodden, all floured as before,
He had thought his nephew free

Of rampant criminality;
Yet finding the queen blood-stained,
And their bed, his mind was claimed
Once again by gloomy musing,
As with all who yield to wavering.
Midst this confusion he knew not
What to credit, or this or that,
What he wished could not conceive,
Nor who it was he should believe.
He'd found the blood, but no trace
Before the bed, or about the place,
At head or foot, or on either side;
The truth was proffered then denied.
By truth and falsehood confounded,
By confusing thoughts surrounded,
He saw the claims made by either,
And yet was convinced by neither.
He could not prove their ill-intent,
Nor could he prove them innocent,
A waverer, now filled with grief,
Caught twixt belief and unbelief.

King Mark in his confusion then,
Burdened with doubt, once again,
Considered how he might go about
Throwing off this weight of doubt,
Ending those suspicions the court
Had regarding his wife, or sought
To level against her and Tristan.
He summoned his nobles, every man,
On whose wise counsel he relied,
And by whose judgement he'd abide,
Telling them he knew the rumour,
A threat to marriage and honour.
While doubting the accusation,
He said, that troubled the nation,
He'd not grant the queen his favour,

Nor would be intimate with her,
Till she had proven, and publicly,
Her innocence and her loyalty
To himself; he sought their counsel,
On how his doubts they might quell,
As to the claims of her wrong-doing,
In a manner that might prove fitting
With regard to his rank and honour;
A judgement, one way or the other.

The trial held in London

HIS friends and his kin together
Advised him that he should gather
A Council, and should then demand
That it meet in London, in England,
And to the Church submit the case,
The learned clergy, and in that place
Resolve the matter by God's laws.
The Council that would try the cause,
And hear the case on either side,
Was summoned, after Whitsuntide,
Before the month of May was out.
Clergy and laity, gathered about
The king, with his queen, Iseult, near;
Both were burdened by grief and fear,
Iseult was there, in fear for her life,
And honour, he grieved lest his wife
Might harm his name, and happiness;
Thus they came, in fear and sadness.

Once King Mark had taken his seat
And the preparations were complete,
He told the barons of the anger
Caused him by this dreadful slander;
And, for God's sake, on their honour,
Bade them exact justice upon her;

If they could do so, find some way
Whereby he might, that very day,
Resolve the matter altogether,
In one direction, or the other;
And many a man in speech replied,
Some well, some ill, on either side.

Then the Bishop of the Thames arose,
A learned man the king oft chose,
Grey-haired, commanding, to advise;
Though he was old, he was full wise.
Leaning now on his staff, he said:
‘My lord King, being here, I’m led
To give my advice, if you approve,
For you have summoned us to prove
This case, being in need of counsel,
And I being one of your great nobles,
And of an age to speak my mind,
Will speak about all this, as I find;
And for himself so speak each man.
My lady Iseult and Lord Tristan,
Have met with grave accusation,
Yet not with proof, mere suspicion.
How shall you meet evil with evil,
Given that the balance is level,
Sentence your nephew and your wife
To forfeit both their honour and life,
When they have not been discovered
In any wrong, nor may be so ever?
Someone speaks thus about Tristan,
Yet where’s the proof against the man?
Someone gainst Iseult spreads rumour,
Without evidence, upon my honour!
Yet since the court doth trial afford,
You must deny her bed and board,
Till she can muster her defence,
And prove to you her innocence,

And to the realm, which hears report
And murmurs of it, as doth the court.
For, alas, tis as true as ever,
True or false, folk love a rumour.
Whate'er it be, whether false or true,
Whoe'er is slandered, me or you;
It rouses everyone's worst nature.
Howe'er that be, in this sad matter
You are angered, the court appalled.
So this is my counsel: that you call
The queen, since she is so accused,
And fair trial should not be refused,
So that your charge may here be brought,
And she reply as doth please the court.'

The king answered: 'My lord, I shall.
What you have said proves acceptable.'
She took her seat before the Council,
And, when all the chamber was still,
The Bishop of the Thames, grey and wise,
His own fair counsel did realise.
He rose and said: 'My noble Queen,
Lady Iseult, if ought should seem
To give offence, forgive; the King
Commands me now, as in everything;
I swear before God, if there is aught
That doth come now before this court
That impinges on your honour,
Or harms your good name further,
I bring it to light, reluctantly.
I would be spared this, most truly!
Most blessed and most noble queen,
Your lord and master here doth deem
It right to lodge an accusation,
Publicly. Whence this imputation
Of misconduct doth now arise,
Neither he nor I can surmise,

But in the court, throughout the land,
There's talk of you and Lord Tristan.
If God wills it so, my lady,
You shall of all such fault go free,
Yet the king's doubts were stirred,
Because of all the court has heard.
My lord finds naught but good in you.
The suspicion that now falls on you,
Arises from the court, sans proof,
And he, that all might find the truth,
Indicts you, so that lord and kin,
Might view the case, and thus begin
Perchance to counteract this slander.
And now I think it would be better
Were you to speak, not I, and bring
Your own thoughts to this gathering.'

The Queen's defence

ISEULT, that most clear-witted queen,
Rose now, so that she might be seen,
And said, clearly: 'My lord the king,
Bishop, lords, now know this thing:
If I am summoned to answer
Aught to do with my lord's honour,
Or my own, then answer I will,
Now as ever; then hear me still,
All you here gathered; well I know
That rumours have gone to and fro,
Concerning me and my behaviour,
This year, at court and wherever.
But there is none who is so blest
As not to suffer with all the rest,
Man's dislike, false accusation,
Attacks upon their reputation;
So tis no great surprise to me,
If none grants me immunity.

I am bound to be so accused,
If none from that is e'er excused;
For I am come to a foreign land
And have but few kin near at hand.
Scant few here will stand by me,
Sorrowing for my sorrow; I see
Rich or poor, you would believe
Whatever slander men conceive.
If I but knew a means to clear
My name, find some remedy here
That would act in my defence,
And prove to you my innocence,
And uphold my lord's honour too,
Then that, willingly, would I do.
What then, my lords, do you advise?
Whatever trial you may devise,
That I, right gladly, will undergo,
If your doubts may be scotched so,
And so maintain my lord's honour,
And my own good name recover.'

'My lady, the queen,' said the king,
'I am content, tis the very thing
That is needed; for your suggestion
Is just; and twill grant satisfaction.
I shall swear you, step forward, so,
And bind yourself to undergo,
On a given day, trial by ordeal,
Laying hold of the red-hot steel'
The queen agreed, and she swore
That in six weeks' time, no more,
She would submit to it, indeed,
At Caerleon, as the court decreed.
Then the council was dismissed,
And the king and barons left the lists.

Iseult's ruse: Tristan the pilgrim

ISEULT, left alone with her fears
And sorrows, found there naught but tears;
Sorrow and fear brought little peace,
She feared for her good name, nor ceased
To fret, her sorrow ill-concealed,
Lest the hidden truth be revealed.
Harassed now, between the two,
She felt she knew not what to do,
So she confided them to Christ,
The Merciful, whose aid sufficed;
For she, with fasting and prayer,
Placing herself in his good care,
Commending to him her distress,
Thought of a true untruthfulness,
Which relied on God's courtesy.
To Tristan she wrote, speedily,
Asking him to be on the strand
At Caerleon, where she must land,
Right early on the given day,
And whate'er she ordered then, obey.
This was done, and Lord Tristan,
In pilgrim's robes, did to the strand
Repair and, with face marked and stained,
In body and dress, a poor man feigned.

Now, ere Mark and Iseult landed,
The Queen saw him, and commanded
That when the ship came near the shore,
She'd prefer it if that pilgrim bore
Her to land, if he had the strength,
Not some profane knight; so, at length,
In God's name, they asked him to bear
Her from the ship to the landing there;
A score of them called to Tristan:
'Come to my lady, holy man,

And carry her gently to the shore!’
He did as they asked, and so once more
Held his lady in his strong hands.
He carried her safely to the land,
But Iseult whispered that once there
He was to stumble, and take care
To fall, with her, on the hard ground,
And whate’er happened, make no sound.
As she commanded, so twas done,
When dry land he had stepped upon,
The pilgrim stumbled, as if by chance,
And landed, a strange circumstance,
Such that he rested in her embrace.
They lay but briefly in that place,
For a crowd of attendants ran
With sticks and staves to beat the man.
‘No, no, away!’ Iseult now cried,
‘Twas pure mischance, and beside,
The pilgrim is weak and infirm,
Twas not his fault, I do confirm.’
They began to praise and honour
Queen Iseult, and to commend her,
For not punishing the poor man.
Iseult said, smiling: ‘Tis more than
A thing of wonder, I must deem,
If e’en a pilgrim must now seem
To lie with me; think you not?’
Further praise of her these words brought,
For her virtue and courtesy,
And she was extolled by many.
King Mark had seen the incident,
And heard also the queen’s comment,
And the various things said then.
‘Now I know not what will happen,’
Cried Iseult, ‘for you all can see
That I can no longer, truthfully,
Hold that no other man ever

Embraced me, or that I never
Held any but Mark in my lap.’
There was much amusement at that;
Of the pilgrim’s boldness they made
A jest, as they the queen conveyed
On to Caerleon, where they found
Barons, priests, knights did abound,
And a great crowd of common folk.
Yet there was no time to now joke,
For the bishops and clergy there,
Read the Mass to bless this affair,
And then went about their office;
While the steel in the fire did hiss.

The pious Queen had, ere that day,
Given her gold and silver away,
Her gems, her dresses, her palfreys,
So that her God she might please,
So that He might her sins ignore
And her lost honour now restore.
Now to the church she had come,
Showed, at the Mass, her devotion,
A humble reverence did display,
Wearing a woollen robe that lay
Over the hair-shirt next her skin,
While her robe it fell to within
A hand’s breadth of her ankles, lo
Its sleeves rolled up to the elbow;
Her arms, her feet they were bare.
Now, many a heart and eye there,
Absorbed the sight, and felt pity;
Her aspect quelled all enmity,
The coarse garment she did wear;
And now she was about to swear
On the reliquary they’d brought.
For she was adjured to report
Her sins to God and all mankind.

She had life and honour resigned,
To God indeed, and His mercy,
Yielding herself to Him, utterly,
As she stretched forth her hand to take
Her oath upon the relic, and make
True declaration, with fearful heart,
As well it might be, and that heart
And hand render up to God's grace,
That he might aid her in that place.

Ordeal and acquittal

NOW there were a fair number there
So hostile they would have her swear
In a manner aimed at her downfall.
Marjodoc, the steward, full of gall,
Had sought her ruin in many ways;
Yet there were others who did praise
Her courteously and showed favour,
And sought to maintain her honour,
And thus they argued to and fro
That the oath be worded just so,
One wishing her well, another ill,
As folk do in such matters still.
'My lord the King,' said the Queen,
'This oath must satisfy you, I ween,
Whatever these other folk may say.
So judge now, for yourself, I pray,
Whether, in all that I say and do,
I yield an oath that satisfies you.
These folk do too much counsel dare.
Hear the oath that I mean to swear:
That no man has known my body
Or lain in my arms, or beside me,
But yourself ever, except, I say,
The man who did that same today,
Whom you saw with your own eyes,

That pilgrim fate took by surprise.
So help me God, and all the Saints,
To answer here all your complaints,
And bring about a fortunate end
To my ordeal, and truth defend!
Now if that be not fitting, Sire,
Then I'll amend it as you desire.'

'Madam, as far as I can see,
Said the king, 'tis as it should be.
But take the hot steel in your hand
And let the oath you've sworn stand,
And God aid you in your ordeal!'
'Amen,' cried Iseult, took the steel
And carried it, and was not burned.
Thus to the world it was confirmed
That Christ the Lord, the virtuous,
Conforms to us in our dealings thus,
Clings to us, like a windblown sleeve,
Though we may labour to deceive,
Closely, as ever a sleeve should do.
He serves thus every heart in true
And honest acts and false the same,
Whether in earnest, or a game;
And thus He is as one doth will!
And this was shown in Iseult still,
For she was saved by her deception,
The oath loosed in God's direction,
Such that her honour was redeemed,
She by Mark loved and esteemed,
Once more, and praised and lauded,
And in that land respect afforded.
Whenever the king saw that aught
Captured her heart, then it was sought,
He brought to her gifts and honour,
His heart and mind fixed upon her.
And all without a sign of doubt.

The fire of his suspicion was out.

PART X: Banishment

Petitcreiu, the faery lapdog

ONCE Iseult's lover, Lord Tristan,
Had carried her carefully to land,
At Caerleon and, as she'd sought,
Aided the deception she wrought,
From England he then set his sails,
And went to Duke Gilan in Wales,
A young bachelor, rich and free,
Who greeted Lord Tristan warmly,
For he had heard the tales before
Of Tristan's exploits and, more,
Was eager to show him honour,
Grant him ease, and win his favour.
Whate'er then might please Tristan
Gilan would offer, seek, or plan.
Yet despite all that Gilan sought,
Tristan was ever lost in thought,
Brooding over his adverse fate.

One eve, as they sat drinking late,
Tristan musing there, in sorrow,
Gilan, noting his sighs of woe,
Asked that they bring his heart's delight,
His lapdog, a most wondrous sight,
Petitcreiu, out of Avalon;
No sooner said than it was done.
The servant brought in a coverlet,
A broad spread of purple velvet,
Rich and rare, and laid it over
The table there, and on the cover
Set the lapdog, a faery creature
So I've heard, sent as a favour

From that faery land of Avalon,
As a sign of love and affection,
By a goddess, and so curiously
Was it conceived, its qualities
Of magic power and colouring,
No tongue its mystery could sing,
No mortal mind its beauties hold.
A wondrous sight twas to behold;
Its colour was of such a blend,
That none could say, end to end,
What hue the creature was, for lo,
Its breast was whiter than the snow,
Its loins greener than the clover,
One flank pure scarlet, but redder,
The other yellower than saffron;
Its underside, twas all of one
Shade, somewhat resembling azure;
While its back was all a mixture,
Hues so subtly put together,
None showed more than any other;
Nor green, nor red, nor white nor black,
Nor yellow nor blue the lapdog's back,
And yet a trace of all was there,
Twas a kind of rich, purple affair;
Yet view its coat against the grain,
And you'd be hard put to explain
The nature of that wondrous work
Of Avalon, its every quirk
Of colouring so various
As to confuse the curious,
Seeming colourless, after all.
From the lapdog's neck did fall
A chain of gold on which there hung
A bell so sweet and clear, when rung,
That when some movement now began
To stir it, sorrowful Tristan,
All at once, was free of sadness,

All the suffering and distress
His love for Fair Iseult had brought;
For any that its music sought
And knew its sweetness, banished care,
And all their pain was ended there.

This sound he sat and listened to,
This wonder of wonders did view,
Noting the lapdog and its bell,
Observing every aspect well,
The lapdog and its wondrous coat,
The bell's sweet ringing, every note;
Each of them seemed marvellous.
Yet the lapdog more wondrous
Than the sweet sound of the bell,
That banished sadness as it fell
Upon his ear, for as he thought
About the lapdog's coat and sought
Its hue, he found, to his surprise,
Despite his gazing with clear eyes,
That he could not distinguish one,
However long he looked thereon.
And so he reached out carefully,
And as he stroked it, cautiously,
It seemed as if twere finest silk,
Soft and smooth, or of that ilk.
The lapdog barked not, nor howled,
Nor, when handled, bit or growled,
And neither ate nor drank at all,
So claims the tale, as I recall.

When the lapdog was removed,
But transient the magic proved,
For Tristan was as sad or more
Than ever he had been before.
Yet he gave his thought to how
By art or artifice, he might now

Gain Petitcreiu for the Queen,
His love, and render her serene,
Ease all her longing, and yet he
No means of doing so could see,
Either by asking or by cunning,
Since he knew not for anything
Would Gilan such a gift forsake,
Except his own life was at stake.
Yearning weighed on Tristan's heart,
Yet he made concealment an art,
And showed no sign of his longing,
Although he still desired the thing.

Tristan fights Urgan the giant

NOW, according to the true tale
Of Tristan's exploits in Wales,
A giant dwelt near that land,
An arrogant bully of a man,
Urgan *li vilus* was his name;
By a river, there, he laid claim
To all the wide land of Wales,
Its mountain-slopes, hills and vales,
And Gilan paid him tribute, so
As to spare his country woe.
And now it was announced at court
That Urgan had arrived and sought
His due, in cattle, sheep and swine,
And drove off all he was assigned.
Gilan then told his friend Tristan
The tale of how it all began,
And how the tribute had, by force,
Been imposed, without recourse.
'Tell me, my lord,' said Tristan,
'If I could rid you of this man,
And so free you of the burden,
For all the days you are given,

What will you grant me in return?’

‘Truly, sir,’ said Gilan, you’d earn
Aught you wish of what I possess.’

‘If you will promise me no less,’
Said Tristan, ‘I’ll slay this Urgan,
Employing whate’er means I can,
And swiftly, and so end this strife
Completely, or forfeit my life.’

‘Truly, dear sir, you shall have aught
You seek; ask, and it shall be brought.’
So saying, the honest lord, Gilan
Sealed it, with a clasp of the hand.
Tristan then called for his armour,
And his steed, and sought wherever
That devil’s spawn Urgan must pass
To reach home with his herd, at last.

Tristan then did soon command
The fresh trail of this giant Urgan,
That led into the forest waste,
Which this giant’s dwelling faced;
There, by a bridge, the herd crossed,
To Gilan’s and his nation’s cost.
The giant and his plunder were there,
But Tristan, grasping the affair,
Barred the herd from the bridgehead,
While, sensing the trouble up ahead,
The giant Urgan did soon advance,
Holding a long pole, like a lance,
Of polished steel lifted on high.
Finding an armed knight, halted by
The bridgehead he asked, scornfully:
‘My friend on the horse, come tell me
Your name and why you bar the way?
Let my herd across; if you stay,
I swear, you’ll pay, and with your life.

Surrender now, and cease your strife!’

The knight on horseback thus replied:
‘Tristan’s my name, friend, I’ll abide,
For I fear you not, nor your pole.
Off with you! As the herd you stole
Goes no further, you have my word!’
‘Ah, Lord Tristan, of you I’ve heard!
You fought with Morolt of Ireland;
You started a quarrel, out of hand,
And then you slew him, from mere pride!
A different man, now, you’ve defied
Than that Gandin whom you beguiled
With the lyre, and then stole a child,
The lovely Iseult, fair beauty’s flower,
Though he would fight for her, that hour!
Urgan *li vilus* is my name,
All these river-banks I claim,
So now be off with you, I say!’

And with these words he straightway
Measured an arc with his long pole,
Grasping it with both hands, his goal
To swing it forcefully at Tristan,
Aiming the blow so it would land
Across his foe and cause his death.
Urgan drew in a mighty breath;
Tristan swerved, yet, well-nigh true,
The blow sliced Tristan’s horse in two,
Near the hindquarters, while Urgan
Roared with laughter: ‘Lord Tristan,
So help you God, don’t ride away!
Be not hasty, a moment, stay,
So I might beg on bended knee
To be allowed now, most humbly,
To drive my herd, and quietly pass!’

Tristan had landed on the grass;
His mount was dead but, with his lance,
Upon Urgan he did advance
Wounding the giant in one eye,
Who ran to where his pole did lie,
Suffering from that bitter blow;
But as the vile giant stooped low,
Tristan, hurling his lance aside,
Grasped his sword, the blade applied,
And sliced the right hand full away
As it sought to grasp the pole; it lay
All bloody on the ground, away
Leapt Tristan, Urgan now at bay
But not for long, then struck again,
At the thigh, causing Urgan pain.
The injured giant with his left hand
Grasped the pole and chased Tristan
From the field, and through the trees,
Though Tristan could still run at ease,
While, with the twists and turns, Urgan
Lost so much blood that he began
To fear his strength would ebb away,
He therefore left the knight to stray,
Quit the cattle, picked up his hand,
And soon returned to his own land,

Now Tristan, left there, with the herd
In the waste, with himself conferred,
Concerned that Urgan was yet alive.
He sat on the grass, then did strive
To think (for he had naught in truth
To show for his deed but living proof
In the form of the herd, so all his toil
Might be in vain) whether to seek Gilan,
And claim his prize, or pursue Urgan;
For Gilan might not honour his oath
Given the terms agreed by both.

He chose to chase after Urgan,
And at a steady pace he ran
Along the trail the giant had left
For, being of his right hand bereft,
Urgan had stained the trampled grass
Bright crimson, where'er he did pass.

When to the giant's castle he came,
Tristan searched, and called his name,
Here there and everywhere, but found
No giant and heard no living sound;
For, as the tale tells, the wounded man,
Had set on a table his severed hand,
And gone from the hill to seek to treat
His bloody arm, with herbs cut neat
From the earth, having power to heal
The wound, for he knew how to seal
Hand to arm, and if he'd run fast
And joined the two, ere life was past,
He would have managed well, thereby,
Gained a hand though he lost an eye.
But that, indeed, was not to be,
For Tristan had come there swiftly,
And seen the hand and, finding none
To claim it, left as he had come.

Urgan returned and, to his woe,
Found the hand was gone, and so,
In sorrow and anger, hurling down
The medicinal herbs he'd found,
He turned again, to pursue Tristan,
And hence over the bridge they ran.
Tristan, aware he was being chased,
Under a tree the hand now placed,
A fallen trunk, filled now with fear,
As the monster once more drew near,
For it was plain, despite one eye,

He'd fight and one of them must die.

Tristan slays the giant

HE turned to the bridge, at his rear,
And drove at Urgan with his spear,
Thrusting so hard the spear snapped.
He'd no sooner met this mishap,
Than Urgan beset him with his pole,
And would scarce have left him whole
Even had he been made of bronze,
If its arc had not proved too long.
Twas only Urgan's longing to close
With him that saved him from the foe,
For the giant approached too near;
His blow slipped by, to Tristan's rear.
And now before the fellow withdrew,
Tristan performed a feint anew,
And pierced him in the other eye;
That he was blind none could deny!
The blind man, furious, lashed out,
While Tristan let him flail about,
Striking wildly with his left hand,
As Tristan took to cover, at hand.
It came about that, in the end,
Urgan's desperate blows did send
Him close to the bridgehead where
Tristan ran forward, then did dare
To grasp Urgan with all his might;
And swiftly then did end the fight,
Pitched him into the gorge, and so
Shattered him on the rocks below.

Tristan obtains the lapdog, Petitcreiu

FULL proud of his victory, Tristan,
Went and seized the severed hand,

And striding back, he found Gilan,
Now on his way to meet Tristan,
Deeply regretting that the knight
Had sought so dangerous a fight;
Thinking that he might nobly strive,
And yet not come from it alive.
Tristan, on foot, he now did see,
And thus addressed him joyfully:
'*Â, bién venjanz, gentil Tristan!*
Oh, well met indeed, dear man;
How went it, and are you well?'
So Tristan straight began to tell
All his tale of good fortune, and
Showed Gilan the severed hand,
And spoke of the sudden ending,
Just as he'd performed the thing.
Gilan was overjoyed; they went
Back to the bridge, their intent
To view the corpse, and to witness
The proof there of Tristan's success.
And it was all as Tristan had said;
All marvelled at the mighty dead.
They turned for home and happily
Drove the herd to their own country.
Throughout Wales there was great joy,
Words of high praise they did employ
In speaking of that valorous man
Twas: 'Honour and glory to Tristan!
And never was any man, I deem,
Ever held in higher esteem.

Now when Lord Tristan and Gilan
Were home, and the victorious man
Was led to speak of his happy fate,
The wonder-worker soon did state
His wishes, and on that very day
Addressing the Duke, he did say:

‘My Lord Duke, now may I recall
The pledge that was made and all
That you agreed, and promised me.’
‘My lord, you may do so, willingly,
What might there be that you require?’
‘Petitcreiu then, is my desire.’
‘Gilan said: ‘Yet there’s better here.’
Tristan said: ‘Well, then let me hear.’
‘This, the best of my suggestions,
Talk one half of my possessions,
A dowry for my lovely sister!’
‘My lord Gilan, yet remember
The pledge you gave me; I’ll not take
Aught else for the whole world’s sake;
Urgan *li vilus* I found, and slew,
All to gain this Petitcreiu.’

‘If that be so, my Lord Tristan,
And you will take nor wife nor land,
I must give you what we agreed,
And grant the thing that you most need,
Nor will I cheat you, nor deceive,
Though I am loth, as you’ll believe!’
He had them bring the lapdog there,
And said: ‘My lord, I here declare,
Upon my oath, in hopes of bliss,
Naught have I owned, or cherish,
Apart from my life and honour
In truth, that I would not rather
Give to you than Petitcreiu.
Take him now, he belongs to you,
Though he is gold without alloy,
And God grant he bring you joy,
For you do steal my heart’s delight,
And, from my eyes, the fairest sight.’

Tristan sends the lapdog to Iseult

ONCE Tristan had him for his own,
He would have set the wealth of Rome
And all the Empire's lands and seas,
At naught, the lapdog so did please.
No happier could he ever be,
Except in Iseult's company.
And so a Welsh minstrel he found,
A man of wit, learned and sound,
And he shared with him his plan,
Whereby, if he would be his man,
Tristan might ease the Queen's pain,
And thus might bring her joy again.
He hid Petitcreiu entire
Within the body of a lyre,
This Welshman's 'rote', and a letter
He penned too, in which he told her
Where and how he won the creature,
For love of her, to bring her pleasure.
The faithful minstrel set out that day,
As requested, and found his way
To Mark's castle at Tintagel.
Reaching the place, safe and well,
He soon was speaking to Brangwen;
Gave her the lapdog, there and then,
With Tristan's letter; straight away
Both these to Iseult, she did convey.

This wonder of wonders, did she
Now examine, most carefully,
The lapdog, I mean, and its bell,
Rewarding the minstrel, as well,
With ten marks of purest gold,
Penning a letter, in which she told
Tristan that Mark would favour
His return, and with due honour,

And that he must come urgently,
And without fail, for now had she
Resolved all; Mark was forgiven!

Tristan returns to Cornwall

TRISTAN did as he was bidden,
Reaching Cornwall without delay
And there the king, the court, I say,
The folk, held him in high esteem
As before, or so it would seem,
Or even more highly, although
Marjodoc's welcome was not so
Heartfelt as the others' maybe,
Nor Melot's; each his enemy.
Whate'er the honour that those two
Showed Tristan, yet I say to you,
In it all there was little honour.
Tell me, all of you, in this matter,
Where but a semblance is shown
Is that honour as honour's known?
Nay and Yea, I myself declare,
For Nay and Yea have both a share;
Nay for the enemy that deceives,
Yea for him who honour receives;
The answer lies in both the pair,
For Yea and Nay are present there.
What more to say in this matter?
This is honour without honour.

Iseult told her lord and master
The lapdog was from her mother,
A gift from Ireland's wise queen,
And that she, young Iseult I mean,
Was to request a kennel of gold
Set all about with gems, to hold
The little creature, as might seem

A work conceived of in a dream.
Twas wrought; inside they spread
Brocade with a pillow for his head.
Thus the lapdog was in her sight,
Where'er she was, both day and night,
Whether abroad, or privately,
Where'er she might happen to be.
Walking, riding, they'd carry him,
Or place him where she could see him,
Not for any ease it gave her,
The tale tells us it was rather
That she might fuel her longing
And so keep love's fires burning
For her dear, beloved Tristan,
Who, from love, devised this plan.

She had no ease from the creature,
Nor sought solace in its nature,
For as soon as the loving queen
Received the lapdog, that morrow;
Heard the bell; forgot her sorrow;
The first thought she had was how
Sad her dear friend must be now,
So sorely burdened by his woe,
Her friend Tristan, who loved her so:
'Ah, faithless woman; can I be glad
When, through love of me, he is sad,
He who has, for my sake, no less,
Surrendered life and happiness
To sorrow? How can I rejoice
Without my lover, I whose voice
Is to him both sorrow and joy?
And how can I laughter employ,
When his poor heart can find no ease
Unless my heart doth share that ease?
He has no life apart from mine,
And yet of that can give no sign.

Should I be joyful and smiling,
Without him, while he is pining?
May God deny their joy to one,
If the other must do with none!
And seizing the little dog again,
She broke the bell from the chain
Round its neck, and from that hour
The bell lost all its magic power,
For its sound was never the same;
And they say that never that same
Did ease the sorrows of the heart,
Though one listened long to its art.
And yet to Iseult that meant naught,
It was not happiness she sought.
This constant and faithful lover
Had all her life and joy rendered,
All, to love's sadness, and Tristan,
All, to love's longing, and the man.

The lovers again fall under suspicion

TRISTAN and Iseult had even so
Overcome both peril and woe,
And were happy again at court
That to both its favour brought,
According them greater esteem.
On good terms they now did seem
As good as ever with Mark their lord.
Yet their feelings went not abroad;
When they could not be together,
The wish to be so was, as ever,
Sufficient for them; such we see
In those who, of necessity,
Comfort themselves by staying true.
Hope and expectation, ever new,
Of our winning the heart's desire
Keeps longing alive, and the fire

Of our vigour; true faithfulness
Is there; our instincts of the best
When, in our love and affection
For the lover, of our election,
Though we cannot have the deed
That would thus assuage our need,
We may forego the deed, in this,
Replacing the deed with the wish.
Where the wish is good and true,
Though the deed we cannot do,
With that same true wish can we
Still the longing and so win free.
For true companions and friends
Should wish not, for selfish ends,
A thing that fate denies, for know
They do but wish what brings them woe.
To wish for what you cannot win,
That game the wise should not begin;
When you can win then wish away.
That is the game the wise should play,
The one that is not fraught with woe.
When Tristan and Iseult longed so,
Then they would let the moment go
It if gave no opportunity,
Content with the wish, mutually
Shared, which stole, never weary,
Between them, tender and loving;
That mutual wish, that longing,
To them seemed ever good and sweet.
Now in their love both were discreet,
Hiding it from both court and king,
As much as they could such a thing,
Blind passion, none would condone,
That would not leave the pair alone.

Yet the seed of doubt is of a kind
So cursed, that its roots, we find,

Grow where'er the seed we scatter;
So strong and fecund, of a nature
That even when deprived of fuel,
Doubt dies not, stubborn as a mule.
Suspicion, seeded, soon began
To twine round Iseult and Tristan.
And here was a supply of moisture,
Gestures, glances, all that's tender,
Where Love was often evident;
Thus to the saying weight is leant,
That howe'er one doth maintain
One's defence, the eye doth strain
Toward the heart, while the finger
Seeks the pain, and there doth linger.
The eyes, the lodestars of the heart,
Seek it, when lovers are apart;
The fingers ever reach again
Towards a place that brings us pain.
So was it always with this pair.
However great their fears, there,
They lacked the strength to refrain
From stirring every doubt again;
With many a look, roused suspicion,
Over and over, and thus full often.
For that friend of the heart, the eye,
Would turn towards the heart, as I
Have said, alas; fingers would stray,
Towards the pain, then slide away.
So oft did hearts and eyes connect
Through glances, covert or direct,
That they oft failed to disengage
Ere Mark, who watched at every stage,
Had found in them the balm of Love.
He ever sought their bond to prove.
He read the truth in her bright eyes,
Merely a glance roused his surmise,
A glance so sweet, tender, longing,

Piercing the heart with its yearning,
That he was filled with hatred, envy
And pure rage, submerging every
Doubt and suspicion neath his ire,
Stealing sense and reason entire.
Twas death indeed to his reason
That Iseult should love anyone
But he, for the king valued naught
Above Iseult; none else he sought;
And then, for all his shows of anger,
His beloved wife was dearer
To him than life; and yet, howe'er
Dear she might be, the whole affair,
With its burden of hurt and pain,
Maddened him so, that once again
His love was lost, and left but rage,
He past all caring, at this stage,
Whether his doubts were false or true.

The lovers are banished

IN his blind woe, he bade the two
Stand before him, in that place,
All his household there to face,
And, addressing Iseult openly
Such that all could hear and see,
Said: 'Lady Iseult of Ireland,
It is well known in all this land,
How you have courted suspicion,
Doubt regarding your position
As regards my nephew, Tristan.
Many times have I set in hand
Tests and trials of every kind,
To discover if from your mind
You might yet dismiss this folly;
And yet you will not, as I see.
Not such a fool as not to know

From you and he behaving so,
Both covertly and openly,
That your heart is lost to me,
I see instead your eyes and heart
Are fixed on him, near or apart.
For you show him a kinder face
Than ever you did me, in his place,
From which I see he is nearer
To you than I am, and dearer.
Whate'er the watch I set on you,
Howe'er I wish that you were true,
Or him, the thing is all in vain;
No end may such watching gain,
No matter the lengths to which I go.
I've separated your two selves so
Far, and so often, I still wonder,
That your hearts I cannot sunder;
Thwarted your tender glances too,
Yet you still seem as one, not two.
I have indulged you both too long.
Now it must end! Tis ever wrong
To bear such pain and grief as you
In this affair, have brought me to.
I will no longer suffer shame.
And yet I shall not seek to claim
Revenge for this, as is my right,
No, no such thing have I in sight.
My nephew Tristan, Iseult my wife,
I make no claim on either life;
I have affection for you both
Though to confess it I am loth.
Since I see that the pair of you,
Love despite me, and hold true,
Truer than either holds to me,
Why then, together you must be,
As you please, and forgo all fear
That I shall trouble or interfere

With you, or yet with your affairs.
Take you each other by the hand
And leave my court and this land.
If I am to be wronged so by you,
I must see you not, nor hear you.
The fellowship between us three,
Shall not endure, of a surety;
The two of you, bound together,
Shall go one way, and I another.
Whate'er it takes me to be free,
There's baseness in such company.
And I mean now to end the thing.
Tis evil indeed for any king
To be in a company of three
Where such is present. Go from me
Both, and with God's protection
Live and love, exchange affection
As you please; yet on this depend,
Our fellowship is at an end.'

Thus it happened, as Mark had said,
With little concern and scant regret,
Tristan and Iseult bowed to their lord,
The like to them all they did afford,
Then took each other by the hand,
To make their way from out that land.
Yet they asked Brangwen to remain,
Till she should hear from them again,
Keep well, and pass her time at court,
Until her presence might be sought.
And then from Iseult's store of gold,
Tristan took twenty marks all told,
So Iseult and he might provide
Food, and whatever else beside,
For their succour. He took also
Harp, horn, sword and hunting-bow,
And chose a hound from out the pack,

To run with him, and guard his back,
Lithe and handsome, named Hiudan;
Commending his friends, every man,
To God, and to Rual who once more
Must grant them a home, as before,
All except Curvenal, that is,
Whom he retained, and gave him his
Harp to carry, but the hunting-bow,
He took himself, and the horn also;
And then, the dog went with him too,
Hiudan, not Petitcreiu.
So the three of them rode from court.

Relief, the faithful Brangwen sought,
In tears, grieving there, all alone,
For this sad time, the saddest known,
A dreadful parting from those dear,
Abandoning her to doubt and fear,
Pained her within so, twas a wonder
Grief failed to tear her heart asunder.
They too, her dear friends, felt sorrow,
But both were seeking a tomorrow,
Wherein she might a union bring
Yet, twixt themselves and the king.
To remain was thus her station,
Aiming at reconciliation.

The Cave of Lovers

Nursing then their sorrowfulness,
The three made for the wilderness.
O'er forest tracks, and heathland ways,
They rode for nigh on two whole days,
For Tristan knew of a cavern there
In the savage cliffs, a mountain lair,
On which one season he had chanced
When the chase was well-advanced;

A cavern hewn in the mountainside,
In a heathen age; giants did abide
Within, ere Corynaeus' day;
And there the giants sought love-play.
Since they required their privacy,
Finding this cave, they secretly
Secured the place with a bronze door;
This inscription to Love it bore:
'*La fossiur' a la gent amant,*'
Which is to say: 'The Lovers' Haunt',
Or, better still: 'The Cave of Lovers;
A place, a name, fit for these others.
As the tale tells, the cave was round,
High, wide, smooth; from the ground
It rose evenly, as white as snow;
Above, to a keyed dome it did flow;
At the keystone, where the sides met,
Wrought in gold, a crown was set,
Adorned with precious ornament;
Below, lay a marble pavement
Smooth and, shining, green as grass,
Its surface bright as polished glass;
A bed, at the centre, drew the eye,
Cut from crystal, broad and high,
Engraved with letters that stated,
That this fair bed was dedicated
To the Love Goddess; and high
On the walls were holes, whereby
The light entered and, here and there,
Shone brightly on this whole affair.
Now, where one went in and out,
Was the bronze door, I spoke about.
Outside, above the door, there stood
Three lone lime-trees, while a wood
Stretched away downhill, its shade
Darkening the slopes; and a glade,
Set apart, through which a stream,

Over the level ground, did gleam;
Fresh, and pure, its waters did run
Bright as the clear light of the sun.
Over that too three lindens leaned,
Sweetly, and nobly, they screened
Its waters from the sun and rain.
Bright flowers lit the counterpane
Of green grass and, o'er the glade,
Vied with each other as they made
An effort to outshine each other,
Glittering beside their neighbour.
And then in season there was heard
The sweet voice of many a bird;
That music, ringing in the air,
Lovelier than it seemed elsewhere;
And eye and ear did there alight
On fair sustenance, and delight,
Sustenance for the roving eye,
Delight for the ear, pure, on high.
There, through sunlight and shadow,
A soft and gentle breeze did blow.
A full day's journey from this cave
There was naught to gaze at, save
Rocks and boulders, no heathland,
Mere wilderness, on every hand.
No trails towards this place did run,
Which one might follow, not a one;
Yet was the ground, you understand,
Not such as to deter Tristan
And his lover from halting there,
Or resting in that mountain lair.

Once they had reached safe refuge,
They carried out a subterfuge,
Sending Curvenal to the court,
To where'er they might be sought,
To say that, in pain and sorrow,

Tristant and Iseult, full of woe,
Had now returned to Ireland,
To state, openly, in that land
Their honesty and innocence.
Then he must take up residence
At court as Brangwen directed,
Who, when they were suspected,
Had proved faithful to them both,
And sworn her loyalty on oath,
And assure her, their dear friend,
Of their love; while he must send
News to them of any rumour
As to Mark's intent, and whether
He plotted aught against the pair;
And, if he could, return from there,
Once every twenty days, or so,
And, bearing them in mind, also,
Offer at once such thoughts as rose
As to how they might now oppose
Such machinations of the king.
So Curvenal did that very thing,
While Tristan and Iseult sought
Sanctuary in their wild court.

Many will be filled with wonder,
And curious as to how the lovers
Iseult the Fair, and her Tristan,
Fed themselves in this bare land.
I'll assuage their curiosity,
The fed themselves mutually,
On looks and glances, as before.
The harvest that their eyes bore,
Sustained them, they ate naught
But what love and passion brought.
This tender loving company
Cared naught for nourishment, you see,
For hidden in their hearts they bore

The best of fruits, without a flaw,
Priceless, and ever fresh and new,
That heart's devotion, pure and true,
That love, as sweet as any balm,
Which mind and senses both doth charm,
For such was that food, I maintain,
Which heart and spirit doth sustain,
They took no thought for nourishment,
Other than that which brings content
To the body, delights the eyes,
And from the heart sees longing rise.
In this they found sufficiency;
They dined on love, truth, and beauty.
Love yoked them to her age-old plough,
And pace by pace, did them allow
Love's rich harvest; to that gave birth
Which wins the heart heaven on earth.

Nor were they troubled, certainly,
By the wilderness, sans company,
In which they found themselves; for who
Must needst be there except those two?
An even number, one plus one;
Why needst be joined by anyone?
And had there been a third, why then
The number were but odd again,
And such a thing must encumber
Them with its uneven number.
It was, that company of two,
So fine a dual company too,
That never did good King Arthur
Hold a feast that brought greater
Delight or pleasure, anywhere,
Among his rich palaces there;
Nor any such, on earth, in heaven,
For which this pair would have given
E'en a single glass bead to win,

That cave did hold such wealth within.

All that was dreamt or conceived,
All thoughts of paradise achieved,
Were there with them, nor did they
Wish life better, in any way,
Except as regards their honour.
What could add to the measure?
They had their court, all that doth bless,
All that brings lovers happiness;
Their servants the green linden trees,
Bright sunlight, and shade to please,
Grass, flowers, water flowing by,
Blossom and leaves to soothe the eye;
The songs of the birds their choir,
The blackbird and thrush, and higher,
Among the leaves, the nightingale,
That did their listening ears regale,
The siskin and the calendar-lark,
Vied, in that fair and pleasant park,
To see who might serve them best.
These attendants, with all the rest,
Served ears and eyes, every sense;
Their high feast was one immense
Feast of Love, for she who sought
For them the highest joy, brought
Before them both, as she was able,
All King Arthur's Round Table
And all its company, each day,
A thousand times, in fine display.
What better food could they require
For mind and body, and never tire?
For Man was there beside Woman,
Woman was there, beside her Man.
Why seek? They had all that they ought,
And had attained what they had sought.

Now some there are who will say,
(Telling wild tales, as is their way)
Though I reject it, that other food
Is needed for such to be pursued.
But of that I am not so sure;
I say theirs was enough and more;
For if any here know of a better,
Let them speak and to the letter;
There was a time when I too led
Such a life and such was my bread.

The meaning of the Cave's features

NOW let it not try your patience,
Rather, grant me your indulgence
While I speak of the Cave's features
And the meaning of its structures,
Thus carved from the living stone,
For meaning's here, as will be shown.
As I said, twas high, wide, and round;
Smooth and even, from the ground,
Its walls did rise, as white as snow,
Where, all about, its circle did go.
Its roundness is Love's Simplicity
For here's no cunning or treachery;
Its width doth signify Love's Power,
Its great extent her boundless dower;
Its height denotes Love's Aspiration,
That mounts on high, in pure elation,
For naught daunts Love, while it will
Climb to where the Crown clings still
To the keystone; tis Virtue's Crown,
All set with precious gems around,
Gold filigree, with rare stones inlaid,
Adorned with praise; so richly made
That we, by baser longing bound,
Whose spirits flutter near the ground,

And find no rest, nor rise above,
Must gaze at this rare work of Love,
Wrought by the Virtues who abide
In glory in the clouds; there hide,
But send their light to us below,
That we might gaze and wonder so.
It is from this the mind takes wing,
And, flying upward, praise doth bring,
Soaring to where the Virtues reign.

The walls were white, I say again,
And smooth, and even; Integrity
Owns such features, and qualities,
And her bright constant whiteness
Must ne'er be tainted, nor confess
To vales therein, ridges thereon,
Neath the sharp gaze of Suspicion.
The grass-green marble, solid, firm,
Is Constancy, since, I affirm,
Its hue and smoothness signify
The constancy that meets the eye
In the fresh ever-springing grass;
The bright hardness of clear glass.
Next, the bed of crystalline Love,
That in the centre stands, doth prove,
With its dedication to her name,
The artist who had carved the same,
And cut the crystal for her ease,
And her observance all to please,
Divined her essential nature:
Love should such crystal feature,
Translucent, and without a flaw.

Within, and securing the door,
There ran two bars, bronze as before,
And a catch too on the inside,
A catch most cunningly contrived,

As Tristan, indeed, had found.
This catch to a lever was bound,
Working the inside from the outer,
Moving the bars hither and thither.
Nor lock nor key could any spy,
And I'll tell you the reason why;
A lock and key applied to a door,
I mean on the outside, as before,
To bind and seal, or set it free,
Signifies naught but Treachery.
For if any enter at Love's door,
Without permission, tis no more
Than Force or perchance Deceit,
Not Love whose entry is discreet.
Love's gateway's there to ensure
It bars the way, none pass the door,
Unless through love; it is wrought,
Of bronze so no tool can do aught
To harm it by force, or treachery,
By cunning, or through trickery,
Violence, falsehood, or artifice;
And the two bars are set like this:
These seals of love, on either side,
Towards each other smoothly glide,
One cedar, and one ivory.
Now hear their meaning from me,
Wisdom is the cedar's meaning,
Love's perfect Understanding,
While the other bar, of ivory,
Means Chastity and Purity.
With these chaste bars, these two seals,
Love guards her cave, and conceals
Herself from Force and from Deceit.

The lever, rendering this complete,
That works the catch, is made of tin,
The catch is gold that sits within.

No other metals would do better
Considering their inner nature,
For tin means firm Intent no less,
While gold's the mark of Success;
So tin and gold do here belong.
A man can show his firm and strong
Intent, in many an affair,
Can shorten or lengthen there
His involvement, flex or free
It, this way and that, readily,
As easily as one works tin,
And cause it no harm therein.
But if with a true will he sets
His mind on Love, this lever yet
Of tin, this humble slender thing,
To golden Success it will bring
Him: and Love's sweet venture.

In the cavern, high overhead,
Three holes were set; that trio fed
Light below, in secret, neatly,
Illuminating all, discreetly.
Kindness was the first, you see
The second meant Humility,
The third Breeding, and thereby
These three brought, from the sky,
The sweet light, the radiant gleam,
Of Honour, the dearest and best,
Of bright things with which we're blessed,
And smiled and lit, at a venture,
This cave of earthly adventure.

And there's meaning in this, also;
That the fissure, concealed so
In the tangled solitude about,
Shows that Love will never tout
Herself and her concerns among

The streets or fields; she doth belong
To the wilds, where the path that leads
To her sanctuary, the heart concedes,
Proves difficult, and oft hard going,
For mountain slopes there hem it in,
With many a twist and turn, the trail
Doth us poor sufferers assail,
Turning hither and thither past
The cliffs and boulders at the last,
That if with care we fail to strive,
We scarcely shall come back alive.
But whoe'er is so blessed as to
Journey amongst that solitude,
Will find his labour is well spent,
For he will find his heart's content;
Whate'er the ear doth gratify,
Whate'er gives pleasure to the eye,
The wilderness doth there contain;
Such that the traveller would fain
View it, and hate to be elsewhere.

I know it well, I too was there,
And I have sought there to pursue
The wildfowl, the wild deer too,
The doe, the hind, o'er the stream
Where the wooded waters gleam,
And yet have spent my time in vain,
And ne'er have seen the quarry again.
All my labours and my intent
Failed of success; in the event,
I found the lever, saw the latch,
In that cave I did even catch
Myself nearing the crystal bed;
I danced there and back, tis said,
Many a time, but found no rest.
That floor has oft felt my steps;
Howe'er hard it may seem to be,

I've pounded it so vigorously,
That were it not of so green a hue,
Greenness being its chief virtue,
By means of which it doth restore
Itself, for ever and evermore,
You could trace my every move,
The veritable spoor of love.
I've fed my eyes on that bright wall,
Endlessly, the crown above all,
On the dome, the keystone there
Shining with that jewelled affair,
And well-nigh worn out my sight
Gazing there on its gold, so bright
And glittering with Excellence,
Dazzling the mind, and sense.
Those holes that do the light display,
Pierced my heart with every ray,
For I have known that cavern there,
Since my eleventh year, yet ne'er
Have I set foot on Cornish land.

How Tristan and Iseult spent their time

THAT true company, of Tristan
And Iseult, now took their pleasure,
Sought diversion, at their leisure,
In the pleasant woods and glades,
In the wild, its lights and shades,
And always at each other's side.
At dawn through the dew they'd glide,
As it cooled the flowers and grass.
Twas their amusement so to pass,
Talking as they went to and fro,
Listening closely, as they did go,
To the sweet song of the birds.
Then they would turn at a word,
To where the clear fountain played,

Savouring its music through the glade,
As the sweet stream took its course.
Where it entered they would perforce
Sit and rest, list to its murmuring,
And watch the gentle waters flowing,
A joy of which they could ne'er tire.

But as the bright sun rose higher,
And the heat it gave grew stronger,
They would withdraw, and neath their
Linden tree, breathe the cool air,
For there they might seek the breeze.
Without, within, it granted ease
Rejoicing both the heart and eye
With its leaves, for sweet thereby
Seemed the cool air and the shade;
From its shadow, through the glade
Moved the breeze, so soft and fresh.
Their couch, the grass, they did possess,
Full of flowers, the brightest carpet
Ever a linden tree had yet.

And there sat our constant lovers,
And told such tales to each other
As spoke of those, in days of old,
That love destroyed; for they told,
(And pondered, and there debated,
Grieved and wept for those so fated)
Of Thracian Phyllis, of Canace,
Who that mischance, assuredly,
Had met with, in the name of love;
How Byblis, for her brother's love,
Died broken-hearted; how Dido,
Queen of Tyre and Sidon, did so,
Choosing her tragic fate, as one
Betrayed by longing and by passion.
Such tales they dwelt on, now and then.

When they tired, they sought their den,
And busied hands and tongues in turn,
With the endless joy they could earn
From sounding the harp and singing;
Sad and sweet the songs of yearning.
They performed such amorous lays,
While varying them in endless ways
As suited them and brought delight,
With love and joy, as well they might.
For whoever plucked the harp-string,
Twas for the other one to sing,
With sweet longing and tenderness,
The accompaniment, and so bless
Their refuge, for both harp and tongue
In harmony, merging sounds as one,
Filled that sanctuary so sweetly,
As to show, there, how completely
Fitting proved the dedication,
Carved in so apt a location,
To sweet Love, of her true haunt:
'La fossiur' a la gent amant.'

All that others ventured to tell,
In ancient tales, of what befell
In regard to the cavern there,
Could be witnessed in this pair.
Only now had Love its mistress
Truly set about her business.
Whate'er sport had gone before
In this cavern it never saw
Aught that did ever match their play;
Never was such in any day
So surely or so purely done,
As when these two joyed as one.
They whiled away the hours of Love,
In ways no others might improve;

In aught to which they did aspire
Bound only by the heart's desire.

There was plenty to do each day,
Into the wilds they would stray,
Riding to the chase, out hunting
Wildfowl or swiftly pursuing
Some quarry with their crossbow,
Whene'er the fancy took them so,
Coursing the red deer with their hound
Hiudan, who as yet they found
Could not run without giving tongue,
Though Tristan soon trained him to run,
Through woods and fields on the scent
Of stag or hind, as on they went,
Or on the heels of other quarry,
Without a sound; thus they spent many
A day at the sport, not for the kill,
But solely the pleasure that doth fill
The heart and so doth ease the mind;
For hound and crossbow they did find
As well I know, worked for pleasure
As much as for the table's measure,
Grant us delight and recreation.
All they did, all their occupation,
Was at all times for their pleasure;
Thus they chose to seek their leisure.

PART XI: Separation

King Mark comes upon the lovers' retreat

NOW King Mark had suffered great woe,
Mourning his wife and honour so,
And each succeeding day did find
A greater burden to his mind;
Thus he neglected wealth and fame.

It happened at this very same
Time that he rode forth to the chase,
Hunting through the woodland waste,
More to ease his sorrowful thought,
Than in hopes of discovering aught.
When the hunt to the forest came,
The huntsmen called their hounds by name,
And sent them to start a herd of deer,
From which a strange stag ran clear,
Maned like a horse, tall, strong, pure white,
With fresh horns scarcely yet in sight,
As though he'd shed but recently.
The whole pack chased him furiously,
Vying to catch him, until night,
When the scent was lost outright,
For the stag had fled whence he came,
Over towards that very same
Cave that hid the lovers inside;
The stag fled thence to save his hide.

Now Mark was struck with sore dismay,
And the huntsmen, in disarray,
More so, on losing this creature,
Given its mane, and strange nature;
For all were annoyed at its flight,
But gathered the hounds for the night,
And then camped there, in need of rest.
The hunting horns, in the deep forest,
Tristan and Iseult had heard all day,
And the hounds, as they went away;
And thought that it must be the king.
To their hearts great fear did it bring,
Lest their presence aught should betray.

Next morning, at the break of day,
The master-huntsman rose, and told
The rest to wait, for the trail was cold,

But to follow when the sun appeared;
Then he leashed a hound and steered
The dog to where the scent was lost,
For it could track well; they crossed
The savage country, rocks and stones,
Wasteland, grass-land, barren zones,
Where the stag had made its flight,
As it had travelled through the night;
Hard on its trail, till they came nigh,
As the sun rose higher in the sky,
The stream that ran through Tristan's glade.

Now, Iseult and Tristan had strayed
That way, at dawn, and hand in hand,
Made their way, as they had planned,
Through dew, to the flowering meadow,
Close to where the clear stream did flow.
Calendar-lark and nightingale,
Blending their notes, did regale
The ears of their fellow creatures,
Tristan and Iseult, those lovers.
And all the wild woodland birds
Greeted them, in as many words,
Singing out their fair matins,
In what is their own sweet Latin.
Many a songbird trilled welcome,
As o'er the mead they did come,
Singing a song to bring them joy.
Sweet variations they did employ,
Those sweet tongues, in endless song,
Delighting them as they went along;
Tenor, descant, song, and refrain.
Once at the cold clear stream again,
It leapt to greet them with its beauty,
Murmuring with yet greater beauty,
As it flowed with gentle whispers,
To welcome and receive the lovers.

They were greeted by linden-trees,
From which there blew a scented breeze,
Soothing them, both outside and in,
All the senses, without, within.
Blossoming trees and meadow bright,
The flowers, the green grass, all alight
With beauty smiled a welcome there.
And the dew too gave tender greeting
Cooling their feet, and so completing
Its gift of solace, easing the heart.

Now when the dawn had played its part,
They slipped back into their cavern,
And pondered on their situation;
For they feared, and they were right,
That somehow those huntsmen might,
In following up the hounds, appear,
Seeking the quarry, and riding near.
Against discovery, my lord Tristan,
Conceived of the following plan:
Both to the bed did now return,
And, well apart, lay down in turn,
As men might lie, you understand,
Not like a woman and a man.
They lay there, body by body,
As if estranged; each solitary.
And Tristan set his sword on view,
Carefully placed, between the two.
He lay on this side, she lay there,
Quite separate were that loving pair;
They lay asunder, one and one,
And feigned to sleep, two yet one.

The huntsman I spoke of, but now,
Who had reached the stream, I vow,
On seeing the tracks o'er the dew,
Thought the stag that he did pursue

Had passed where Iseult and Tristan
Had gone before it, hand in hand.
He dismounted, and followed apace,
On their fresh trail, till face to face,
With the fissure, and its bronze door.
Since twas barred, he could no more
Than circle around, and as he did go
About it, he spied, a high window.
Through this, cautiously, he peered;
Lo, there, Love's retinue appeared,
A man, and a fair woman below,
And he wondered to see them so;
For as to her he thought no other
Was born more fair, to any mother,
None as perfect as she seemed there.
Not for long did he cling, and stare,
For, catching sight of a naked sword,
He clambered down to the greensward,
Thinking, of this most strange affair,
That enchantment lay upon all there.
Then, fearfully, he sought his hound,
And rode back to familiar ground.

Now King Mark was well in advance
Of the hunt, and thus, by chance,
Found the trail, and met the man.
'Oh, my lord, quite close at hand,
A wonder I have seen,' he cried.
'Of what nature?' the king replied.
'A lovers' fair, enchanted space.'
And how then did you find the place?
'Why, as the white stag I did chase.'
'And it lies here in this wild waste?'
'Yes, sire.' 'And are there people there?'
'Yes, sire, a man, and a goddess fair.
On one bed, they do lie asleep,
And both are lost in slumber deep.

The man is as any other man,
She, I'd say, is more than human,
For she is lovelier than a fay;
And tis not possible, I'd say,
That aught more lovely e'er had birth,
As flesh and blood, upon this earth.
Though I know not the reason why,
A naked sword twixt them doth lie,
A fine blade, bright and gleaming.'
'Then, lead me there!' cried the king.

The master-huntsman led him then,
Back, by the rough track, to the den.
They both dismounted and, as before,
The huntsman approached the bronze door.
Mark followed, and then, obstructed,
Circled the cliff face, as instructed,
Climbed the rock up to the narrow
Summit of the cave; at the window,
Gazing, to his joy and sorrow,
He saw the pair, slumbering below,
Set well apart on the crystal bed,
All just as the huntsman had said,
With the naked sword set between.

He knew them both, as soon as seen;
And a cold tremor seized his heart,
Joyful that they lay there apart,
Sorrowful at his own suspicion;
Sorrow and joy then his position,
Thinking them thus proved innocent,
Yet pained by his suspicious intent.
'Merciful Lord, what may this mean,
If aught here has passed between
These to, as I've long suspected,
Why apart, as if rejected?
A woman should cling to her man,

And lie there close at his left hand;
Why do these lovers lie there thus?'
This with himself he did discuss:
'So, is there aught in this, or not?
Is guilt or innocence their lot?'
Yet doubt gripped his thoughts again:
'Guilty?' he asked. 'Yes, surely!' then
'Guilty?' he asked. 'Why, surely, no!

He tossed these doubts to and fro,
Till the poor indecisive man
Knew no more than when he began,
Uncertain as to their love, or no.
Then Love the Reconciler did show
Her face, she came to him direct,
Twas painted to wondrous effect;
No longer white, it did beguile
Him, with the gold of Denial,
Ever her most benign disguise;
'No!' the word, gleaming, flies
Straight to the king's troubled heart,
While the painful 'Yes!' by her art,
Is hid from him, and Suspicion,
Fleeing with Doubt, is swiftly gone.
Love's gilding, golden Innocence,
Draws his eyes, and mind, and sense,
With the power of her enchantment
To where, still seeming innocent,
Lies the Eastertide of all his joys.
His eyes, gazing, he now employs
On Iseult, she his heart's delight,
Who ne'er has seemed so sweet a sight.

Heaven knows what exertions brought
The colour to her cheeks and caught
His eye; the tale dwells not thereon;
But the radiance toward him shone,

With the sweet freshness of a rose,
Where red and white softly glows;
Her lips he could not but admire,
Like red-hot embers in the fire.
Yet her exertions I might recall,
For Iseult, as I'll remind you all,
Had gone to the meadow that morn,
Walking midst the dews of dawn,
Perchance that had raised her colour.
A shaft of sunlight now did linger
On those cheeks, and on those lips,
As the light through some curtain slips;
A double beauty there shone bright,
Twin brilliancies blent their light;
Heaven's sun, and then this other,
Had mingled their rays together,
To spread this high-feast of delight,
In Iseult's honour; fair the sight.
Her mouth, her face, her skin, her hue,
Were so sweet, and alluring too,
That Mark was dipped in the fire;
He longed to kiss her; his desire
Love fuelled, setting him ablaze;
Love lit pure beauty neath his gaze,
Drew his mind towards that form,
And stirred within him passion's storm.
His eyes were alight with ardour,
His gaze dwelt upon her further;
Her throat, her breast, an arm, her hand,
All that her robe disclosed, he scanned;
A clover-wreath in her hair she wore,
And never had she seemed before
So alluring to her watching lord;
No lovelier did this world afford.
Seeing the sunlight shining down
Upon her face, Mark gave a frown.
Fearing harm to her complexion,

He plucked a plentiful collection
Of grass, and flowers, and leaves to block
The narrow opening through the rock.
Commending her to God, he blessed
The woman's beauty, then, distressed,
Quite moved to tears, he turned to go;
Re-joined his hounds, a man in sorrow;
Broke off the chase; and told his men
To lead the pack to the court again.
This he did with the clear intent
Of throwing others off the scent,
So up above no man might creep
And view the lovers in their sleep.
He'd scarce departed when Tristan
And Iseult woke there and began
To look about, and found the sun
Shone through two windows, yet one
Was blocked, and thus gave no light.
They rose together, climbed outright
The outer cavern wall, and found
Leaves, flowers and grass, all bound
Tight, and crammed into the window,
And on the ground, above, below,
Saw human footprints, freshly there,
Alarming, and troubling, the pair.
Mark, or his huntsmen they guessed,
Had been there; they were fearful lest
They had been observed, although,
They had scant proof that it was so;
But hoped and trusted that whoe'er
Had seen them, found them lying there,
Set well apart from one another,
Asleep, and each far from the other.

Mark called his council and kinsmen,
From country and court, to meet again,
So he might seek their best advice,

Telling them all, more than twice,
How he had discovered the pair,
As I told you, but to declare
That he refused now to believe
That they'd intended to deceive.
The councillors realised his intent,
That in his mind he was content,
To restore both Iseult and Tristan
To their roles, and such was his plan;
And they, of course, being most wise,
Heard his wishes, without surprise,
And then advised him, in accord
With those same wishes, that this lord,
Tristan, his nephew, and his own wife,
Should now take up their former life,
And, with naught to mar their honour,
Close his ears to wanton slander.

Mark allows Tristan and Iseult to return to court

AT once they appointed Curvenal,
As messenger, one who knew all
Regarding Tristan and the Queen,
To act now as the go-between,
Express the king's love and respect
Towards the pair, and then request
That they return now, and forgo
All thoughts of ill, by doing so.

So Curvenal sped on his way,
With Mark's request, without delay,
Expressed to them the king's love,
And wish, which they did approve;
They were glad at heart moreover,
For the sake of God and honour,
More than aught else; and, that day,
They returned, by the same way,

To the honour they'd known before.
And yet these two could nevermore
Appear close and familiar, nor
Was there such opportunity for
Their love-trysts as there had been.
Mark and his court granted them
Honour, and yet never again
Were they as open or as free.
While, to preserve propriety,
Mark, the doubter, did command
And implore Iseult and Tristan
To behave with proper modesty,
Refrain from shows of intimacy,
Ardent glances and tender looks,
Conversations in hidden nooks,
All that such are accustomed to,
All that this pair had used to do.
All this brought the lovers pain.

Yet Mark seemed content again.
In Iseult he had his true desire,
In possession, though not entire;
Neither her love nor affection,
Had he garnered by his action,
None of the blessings of this life,
God grants, except that his wife
Was nonetheless his Queen in name,
By virtue of his title and claim.
And Mark accepted his lot, I fear,
Treating her as if she were dear.

Here was a case of that blindness,
Unfeeling, and foolish to excess,
Of which the saying doth declare,
Whilst telling all folk to beware,
That: 'Love's blindness blinds within,
And blinds without; both out and in'.

One's eyes Love doth surely blind,
Yet Love doth also blind the mind,
Such that neither can plainly see,
What both do know of a certainty.
And so with Mark, at every breath
He knew his fate, as sure as death;
And saw that Iseult loved the man,
Drowned in longing for her Tristan,
Heart and soul; yet wished not to know.

And who is to blame for living so?
Like Mark and Iseult, without honour?
To lay all the blame upon her
And accuse her of deception,
Trust me, is but misperception.
Neither she nor my lord Tristan,
Had conceived of any such plan;
Mark saw it with his own eyes,
Knew the thing, without disguise,
That Iseult loved him not at all,
Yet he loved her, in spite of all.
'Why?' you ask, 'for what reason
Did he treat her in this fashion?'
Yet he but did as many today.
Desire and longing have their way,
And stubbornly consent to suffer
What fate brings, and so forever.

Gottfried: on the blindness of Love

HOW many a King Mark we see
And many an Iseult, equally,
Who are, in truth, just as blind
Or more so, in both eyes and mind!
Far from none; more a multitude,
So blind they take the attitude
Of not wishing to see or know

What their two eyes do plainly show,
And think it but mere illusion.
Who's to blame for such delusion?
Who dare single the women out?
If the men can see all they're about,
They're innocent of hidden crimes.
If the fault is obvious, at all times,
Tis desire obstructs men's vision,
And longing conjures the illusion
That so obscures clear-seeing eyes.
So why should we express surprise?
Whate'er may be said of blindness,
Naught achieves such thoroughness
As the blindness of our longing.
For we'd wish not to hear the thing,
Yet the proverb states most truly:
'Ever danger where there's beauty.'
Blind was Mark, without, within,
In mind and eyes, as he had been;
Such was Iseult's beauty, in truth,
She in the flower of her youth;
For he could find no fault in her
And thought the very best of her,
And, to be brief, he so aspired
To be with her, and her desired,
That he ignored the grievous wrong
He'd suffered at her hands so long.

Yet how hard for lovers to part
From what lies hidden in the heart!
How we forever long to do
What our hearts would wish us to!
The eye seeks what gives us pleasure;
Hearts and eyes range, at their leisure,
Along the paths that bring them joy.
And he that would such sport annoy,
Makes lovers but desire it more.

The need seems greater than before
And the more times you deny them
The more you commend it to them,
And thus the closer they will cling.
To Tristan and Iseult, it did bring
Much pain and suffering, once they,
Watched and obstructed every day,
Were hedged about by prohibition,
Tormented by their false position,
Beguiled more readily than before;
Their need for one another more
Anguished, urgent, than it had been.
Hateful surveillance now did seem
A mountain of lead on their hearts,
Surveillance, with its devilish arts,
Love's foe, drove them to distraction;
Iseult, above all, pained by inaction.
The loss of Tristan was death to her.
The more that her lord and master
Did, to deny all chance of meeting,
The greater her desire to see him,
The more on him her thoughts did dwell.

Gottfried: on the virtues of a good woman

OF Surveillance, as wise folk tell:
'Those that watch, raise briar and thorn',
Of Surveillance, those chains are born
That chafe and gall praise and honour,
And many a woman thus dishonour,
Who, if plain justice were her lot,
Had kept the honour she had got.
But when injustice proves her fate,
Her love of honour doth then abate,
And, therefore, with regard to her,
Surveillance spoils the character.
When said and done, close-guarding

Is all in vain, once she is straying.
A virtuous woman needs no guard,
She guards herself; yet if she's barred
From what she wishes, she will hate
The man who seeks thus to dictate.
For he is bent on her destruction,
Mind and body, with every action,
So thoroughly, she'll not conform
Without some wicked briar or thorn
Clinging to her ever after.
For, having struck root, thereafter,
The bramble's harder to destroy,
Whate'er the means that you employ,
If found in fertile soil, not barren.

Well do I know, if tis his pattern
To hurt that willing heart so long
That ill-treatment sends it wrong,
Spoils all its fruitfulness, why then
Twill yield fruit more bitter again
Than if it was wrong at the start.
Tis true, I've read it; tis wiser art,
To grant a woman her self-respect.
All surveillance he should reject
That's counter to her own intent,
Yet grant her counsel; be content
To offer kindness and tenderness;
And let that prove his sole excess.
Guard her in that way, for be sure
No other watch proves more secure.
Whether she be wayward or good,
Let him yet treat her as he should.
For if a man wrongs a woman,
And treats her ill once too often,
Then she may start to think about
All that he'd rather live without.
Every true man, who's anyone,

Or who would yet be counted one,
Should trust himself and his wife,
And she will shun the wanton life.
No man, however much he tries,
Ever wins love from angry eyes;
That's the way to extinguish love.
Close surveillance will ever prove,
An evil rousing deadly passion,
That leads to utter degradation.

I think that the wise should abstain
From prohibitions that are the bane
Of any woman, and disrespect her.
Women do many things, in error,
Merely because they are forbidden,
That would from their eyes be hidden,
If they were not; for, every thorn
And barb, God knows, is inborn.
Women, in this way, I believe,
Are but daughters of mother Eve,
Who broke the primal prohibition.
For the Lord God gave us freedom,
To savour the wealth of paradise,
The flowers, fruits, grass, before our eyes,
Except one fruit, on pain of death,
That he forbade, yet, in a breath,
She'd plucked the same from that tree,
Fig, apple, or pear, as it may be,
Ignored God's warning, to her cost,
And so herself, and God, she lost.
The priests claim that it was the fig,
Yet she'd not have done as she did,
Had it not been forbidden her.
She proved true to our own nature
That ever seeks what is forbidden.
And yet, as all must in truth agree,
Eve might have ignored that tree,

For she, when all is said and done,
Had every kind to pluck fruit from,
Yet she desired that, for her succour,
And so she lost the fruits of honour.

Thus are they all daughters of Eve,
Formed in her image, as I believe.
Ah, if the Eves that now are found,
In this, our age, could but be bound
Only to do as they were bidden,
Rather than long for what's forbidden,
Losing themselves and God, thereby!
Yet since they're heirs to it, say I,
And nature indeed placed it there,
All honour and praise in this affair
To the woman who nonetheless abstains.
For when a woman true virtue claims,
Despite the frailties of her nature,
Keeps intact her name and honour,
And herself, she is a woman
Equal, in mind, to any man.
Therefore men should show her honour,
And a right true verdict offer
On all she does, and esteem her.
When she overrides her nature,
And adopts the heart of a man,
Then tis as if the fir began
To ooze honey, the hemlock yield
Sweet balm, the nettle of the field
From its root to send up the rose.

What more perfect could we suppose
Than a woman, honour at her side,
Who wars with the body, out of pride,
For the sake of body and honour?
She must neither of them favour,
But do justice to both that pair,

So that for each she shows her care.
She is not worthy if she denies
Honour, or doth the body despise,
If she may yet uphold them both.
Let her not deny either on oath;
Let her, instead, sustain the two,
Granting joy and sorrow their due,
Howe'er she may achieve the thing.
God knows, a woman may bring
About an advance in worth only
By great labour; so let her be
Temperate, and let her restrain
Her instincts; and her acts maintain,
And herself, with moderation so.
For moderation is such, we know,
As to bring fresh honour to her,
Advancing both herself and honour.

Of all the things one brings to mind
On which the sun did ever shine,
None is so blessed as the woman,
Who to the powers of moderation
Has entrusted her life and body,
And doth respect herself wholly.
And as long as she respects herself,
It follows then that everyone else,
Must so respect her, while if she
Becomes her own worst enemy,
Who shall love her? If she will treat
Herself with contempt, indiscreet
Before all folk, then what honour
Or affection should one grant her?
To quell desire at the first urge,
Only to let Love's title merge
With that of mere blind activity?
Tis not Love, but her enemy,
Licentiousness, devoid of honour;

On Woman's name it brings dishonour,
It is but lust in Love's fair clothes,
For, as the honest saying goes,
'She who would love all and any,
Finds herself unloved by many.'
Let her who would be loved by all,
First love herself then show to all
The path love went; if fair that be,
Then all shall love, in sympathy.

Folk should love and praise a woman,
Who seeks to find favour with them,
By caring for her womanhood.
We should garland her, tis good
That we seek out her company,
Add, in her presence, to our glory.
And on whom she doth bestow
Her love and person, he will know
That he was born most fortunate.
And destined for his present state
Of bliss, for in his heart likewise
Is found the living paradise.
No fear is his of barbed power,
When he reaches for the flower;
Or that the thorn, as we suppose,
Might pierce, as he culls the rose.
There are no barbs or sharp thorns there;
No angry thistle deals sad care,
Rose-like Conciliation now,
Barbs, thorns, thistles, I avow,
Has levelled; in that paradise,
All that grows delights the eyes,
All that doth bud, or show green;
All that flourishes there, I mean,
Is due to a woman's virtue.
There is naught else there on view,
But true love, and true devotion,

And that honourable emotion,
That doth take the earthly prize.

Ah, in so sweet a paradise,
So full of joy, and so vernal,
As if springtime were eternal,
The man, who is so blessed by fate,
With his heart's desire shall mate,
And view what delights his sight.
How would he share less delight
Than did Iseult and her Tristan?
If he'd but take my word that man
Need never envy Tristan's life.
For whoe'er shall take for his wife
A virtuous woman, who to him
Renders her honour, and to him
Devotes her person, he will see
How she will then love him truly,
And tenderly, and clear away
From his path the thorns each day,
All of the sorrow and the strain.
She will free him from heart's pain;
No better did Iseult free Tristan;
And I'd say this to every man,
That I believe if one now sought,
Whether in country or at court;
Some living Iseult one might find
To ease the body, and the mind.

Mark finds Tristan and Iseult entwined together

NOW to Surveillance we return.
The watch so set, as you did learn,
On Iseult, and on Lord Tristan,
Troubled the woman and the man;
Such pain the prohibition brought,
That, more than ever, they gave thought

To how they might see each other;
And, in the end, they were together;
Yet from it rose fresh woe and pain,
For mortal suffering was their gain.

Tw'as full noon, and hotly the sun
Shone as their honour was undone.
Twin suns shone, into the queen's
Heart and soul, for one was seen
In the heavens, the other was Love.
Longing, and that fierce light above,
Vied in oppressing her, till she
Thought to counter her misery,
Thought of the plan she'd soon repent.
Into the orchard Iseult went,
To probe its possibilities,
Seeking shadows, and privacy,
A place ensuring deep seclusion.
And on finding a quiet position,
She ordered that a bed be made,
Rich and fine, in its pleasant shade;
Quilts, linen, silk, and gold brocade,
Adorned that couch in the cool glade.
Once it was made, and all away,
In only her shift, there Iseult lay.
Only Brangwen must now remain,

And then she sent to Tristan again,
Saying that he must come to her,
So that he might with her confer.
As Adam did once, so now Tristan,
Taking the fruit, as his Eve planned;
Together with her, he ate death.
He came, and Brangwen, in a breath,
Vanished, to sit among the women,
Anxious and fearful at his coming.
She asked the chamberlain to close

The doors, and bar whom she chose.
The doors were shut, and Brangwen
Dwelt, once she'd sat down again,
On the whole affair in her mind,
Sorrowing that her lady was blind
To all the watchers, and the spies.

While she was brooding, in this guise,
The chamberlain there, at the door,
Stepped outside; a moment more
And the king himself, in he came,
And asked for the queen by name
In a most commanding manner.
Her young ladies answered together:
'Sire, she is sleeping!' Not a word
Said Brangwen, suddenly stirred
From thought, by his appearance.
Her heart, it sank in an instant,
Her head bowed, her hands were trembling;
The king asked: 'Where is she sleeping?'
They motioned him towards the orchard,
So King Mark at once stepped forward,
And went to encounter his heart's care.
He found his wife and nephew there,
Entwined together, in close embrace,
Mouth on mouth, face turned to face.
All that the covers did now reveal,
All that the sheets did not conceal,
Hand and arm, shoulder and breast,
Each to each was so closely pressed
Had they been, clasped in that hold,
A work cast whole in bronze or gold,
None had wrought more seamlessly.
Tristan and Iseult slept peacefully,
Entwined in that same position,
After I know not what exertion.

The king, seeing his sorrow plain,
Felt with full force his heart's pain.
He no longer wavered, his doubt,
All his suspicion, was driven out,
For he no longer guessed; he knew.
All he'd suspected now proved true.
Yet proof was not, in my opinion,
Better for him than mere suspicion;
Banishing doubt had, in a breath,
Consigned the man to living death.
In silence, now, the king went in,
Summoned his councillors and kin,
And told them he knew, for a fact,
The pair had been caught in the act,
Tristan and the Queen, and that they,
His friends, were to make their way
To the place, and take note of all;
For he would on the council call
To give judgement, by his command,
According to the law of the land.

The lovers' parting

NOW Mark was scarce from the bedside,
When Tristan woke; the king he spied:
'Ah, Brangwen, what is't you've done!
Dear God, Brangwen, we are undone;
This sleep of ours will prove our death.
Iseult, my heart's queen, in a breath
You must know we are betrayed.'
'How so, my lord?' 'The king has made
To venture here, stood by the bed,
And saw us; I his features read,
And know, as surely as I must die,
He'll bring witnesses, by and by,
And means to have our lives, lady.
I must from here, and right swiftly.

My sweet Iseult, ah, my dear heart,
It seems fated that we must part,
In such a manner, I think, that we
May lose our opportunity
Of happiness, and yet, remember
The perfect love we shared ever,
And see it doth endure forever;
Forget me not, forget me never;
Keep me thus in your heart; whate'er
Befalls my own you'll yet dwell there.
Iseult shall dwell in Tristan's heart!
Dear mistress mine, though we must part,
Let not your strong affection fade.
Though time and distance cast their shade,
Do not forget me! Now, kiss me,
Bêl Iseult, dûz amie,
Fair Iseult, sweet; come kiss me, so,
And grant me your kind leave to go!

Iseult stepped back a pace and sighed,
'My lord,' with sadness, she replied,
'Our hearts and minds have belonged
To each other, for oh so long
A time, have been so truly bound,
So closely knit, so tightly wound,
They can scarcely know as yet
The meaning of the word 'forget'.
Whether we are near, or far apart,
There is no life within my heart,
Nor aught living, save this Tristan,
My life and being. Ah, my dear man,
It is long since I surrendered
My life to you, my body rendered.
See that no living woman may
Come between us in any way
So naught prevents our affection
Remaining fresh, this perfection

We have wrought these many days.
Take this, my ring, guard it always,
A sign of loyalty and love;
And if aught should ever move
Your heart to love aught but me,
Let it remind you, secretly,
Of all my heart is now feeling.
And remember this, our parting,
How it hurts both heart and life.
Remember then the pain and strife
I have endured, and for your sake,
And then, with every breath you take,
Let none, for on this I depend,
Be dearer to you than your friend,
Iseult, and thus for some other
Neglect me not, we two have ever,
Companions in joy and sorrow,
Lived so, that come the morrow,
The memory of it will remain,
Till death the two of us shall claim.
My lord, there is no need, I know,
For me to thus exhort you so.
If Iseult and Tristan were one,
One heart, one faith, then what's done
Will yet endure, forever true.
But one thing I request of you,
Where'er in this world you may go,
Take care, my life, for you must know,
If I'm bereft of you, then I,
Who am your life, must also die.
I'll guard myself, your life, with care
Not for my sake, but yours, aware
That your life is yet one with mine.
We are one life, one flesh; incline
Your thoughts to me, your life,
Your Iseult, in this world of strife.
Let me, my life in you, soon see,

And may you soon see yours in me.
The life we share lies in your hands.
Come kiss me; you and I, Tristan
And Iseult, now joined forever;
Here is a bond that none can sever.
Let this kiss be the seal, the sign,
That I am yours and you are mine,
Steadfast, till death shall take our hand;
But one Iseult and one Tristan.'

Once these words had sealed it so,
Tristan departed, in pain and woe;
While his other self, Iseult there,
Was left in anguish and despair;
Both on parting filled with more
Pain than they'd ever felt before.

Meanwhile the king had returned,
To reap the sorrow he had earned,
With all his councillors, together;
They'd arrived too late however.
They found Iseult, alone in bed,
Lost in thought. Not a word was said,
For the king had thereby revealed
None but Iseult, naught lay concealed;
But then, later, the councillors
Said to the king: 'Sire, this course
Of action is wrong, without reason,
To bring so false a charge of treason,
Against your wife and your honour.
You decry your honour, your wife,
And above all yourself! What life
Is this, where you seek to injure
Your happiness, your trust in her?
She is the talk of court and land,
Yet there's no proof we understand;
There is naught against her honour.

Why then load all this upon her?
The Queen has proved false? Why say you
Such a thing when she proves true?
My lord, desist; have done with this,
For God's sake and your own bliss.'
So they turned him from his intent;
With their counsel he proved content;
Permitting his anger to die away,
No vengeance did he take that day.

Tristan wins martial fame abroad

NOW Tristan to his quarters went,
Gathered his folk, with this intent,
Of boarding the first ship he found,
And, swiftly covering the ground,
Made for the harbour, and set sail
For Normandy, so runs the tale.
And yet he did not rest there long,
For the urge in his heart was strong
To find a life that could provide
Some relief from the woe inside.
Strange! He fled toil and suffering,
And yet pursued those very things,
Suffering and toil; fled Mark and death,
To counter perils, that, in a breath
Were death to his heart, since they brought
Absence from Iseult, whom he sought.
Why flee from death, why haste away,
To seek out death, in another way?
Why escape from Cornwall and woe,
Yet, night and day, bear a burden so?
Save his life for a woman's sake,
Yet a life condemned to heart-ache?
Naught brought death to life and body,
But his best life, Iseult, his lady.
Thus was he left, twixt death and death,

Yet thought, if he but gave his breath
To martial exploit, this agony
Might be relieved, and he win free.

Rumour came of war in the land
Of Germany, and reached Tristan,
Who made for Champagne, and thence
To Germany where, in their defence,
He served the Crown and Sceptre so
Immeasurably that none did know
Of any knight who might aspire
In all the Holy Roman Empire,
To such deeds of arms, or fame.
Success and fortune he did attain,
In the wars, and perilous ventures.
I'll not relate all his adventures
As the, books give them, yet the tale
Might endlessly your ears regale.
To the wind I'll loose those leaves,
Cautious of fables none believes,
For, in handling this true story,
I have burden enough to carry.

Iseult's lament

FAIR Iseult, Tristan's death and life,
His living death, and yet his life,
Lived on, in torment and in pain.
Yet her heart broke not, her bane,
On watching Tristan's ship depart,
Because he lived; and in her heart
Knowing that Tristan was alive
Gave her the strength to survive.
Without him she could neither
Live nor die, careless of either.
Death and life had naught to give,
Yet she could neither die nor live.

The light of her eyes was in eclipse.
Her tongue silent behind her lips,
Oft, when needed, naught she said;
They were neither alive nor dead,
For they had lost their rightful use,
Through her sorrow; of the disuse
Of their powers she was unaware.
Watching the sail vanishing there,
And seeing her heart's love depart,
She said to herself, in her heart:

‘Alas, alas, my lord Tristan,
How my heart clings to the man!
My eyes follow you, as you flee,
Swift as an arrow, gone from me!
Why do you haste away so fast,
When I do know that, first and last,
If you flee Iseult, tis life you flee,
For all your life resides with me?
You can live no longer, tis true,
Without me, than I without you.
Our lives and spirits are so bound
Together now, so tightly wound,
My life you bear now o’er the sea,
And yet you leave your life with me.
No two lives, I say, were ever
So intermingled with each other.
We are each other’s life and death,
Since neither one can draw a breath,
Or cease to do so, if their friend
Gives not consent; thus, in the end,
Poor Iseult is not quite alive,
Nor yet quite dead; both are denied.

Now Sir Tristan, now, my lord,
Since you must be, although aboard
That ship, one life, one soul, with me,

You must teach me now, you see,
How to survive, firstly for you,
Then for myself. Come now, so do!
What? Silence now? Yet we have need
Of all the wisest counsel, indeed.
Foolish Iseult, what's this I say?
Tristan's speech sails on its way,
With my spirit, for Iseult's life,
And Iseult's soul, must face the strife
Of sea and storm, abandoned now
To what the wind and waves allow.
How shall I find myself once more?
Where shall I search, on sea or shore?
I am here, and yet I am there,
And yet am neither here nor there.
Oh, who was ever so torn apart?
Or ever so bewildered at heart?
On the waves there, I must stand,
And yet I am here, on dry land.
Now must I sit here, at Mark's side,
And yet with Tristan's vessel ride!
Life and death fight a bitter war
Within me; poisoned, as before,
If I but could, I would gladly die,
Yet he who's my life doth deny
Me that ease, nor can I live well
Neither for him, nor for myself,
Since without him I must endure.
Now he is leaving me once more,
And yet he knows, when all is said,
That without him my heart is dead.

God knows, I need not tell him so,
For, he and I, we share one woe,
Nor do I suffer this pain alone,
His sorrow proves as great, I own,
Greater perchance e'en than mine;

More, yet, doth he grieve and pine;
His going weighs upon my heart,
Yet heavier on his, as now we part.
If I grieve that he's not at my side,
It grieves him more that wind and tide
Bear him away; if for him I mourn
He mourns for me; yet cannot mourn
With such good reason as now I do,
I have reason, and mourn him too;
Tis my right to grieve and lament,
For my life rests on his consent,
Yet Tristan's death depends on me,
Such that he has no right to grieve.
Tis good that he sails away to save
Both life and honour; if he stayed,
Then he would not survive for long.
So I must live without him. Wrong
Though it seems, better he's absent
Than here, with danger ever-present.
For God knows, whoe'er doth seek
Their own advantage, week on week,
At a friend's expense shows scant love.
Howe'er great my hurt should prove,
I would wish to be Tristan's friend
And thus not bring about his end.
If he meets with true happiness
What matter if I live in distress?
Gladly will I constrain myself,
In every way, to forgo myself
And him, so he may live for both;
And this would I declare on oath.'

Tristan returns to Parmenie

WHEN Tristan had been in Germany
Six months, he longed for Parmenie,
For he'd conceived a great desire

To know how events did conspire,
For or against Iseult, his lady.
He chose then to leave Germany,
And travelled back by the same
Road to Normandy, and came,
By way of there, to Parmenie,
And Rual's sons for, though he thought
To find Rual, and his counsel sought,
He, and Floraete, his wife were dead,
Yet their sons greeted him instead,
With a welcome both kind and true;
For they kissed his hands, his feet too,
His eyes and mouth, once and again.
'My lord,' they said, 'God doth deign
To send us, in you, father and mother.
Most good and faithful lord, forever,
Rule here; take back all that is yours,
And ours; upon a prosperous course,
With you here, acting as our father,
He who was e'er your true retainer,
We too shall gladly prove the same.
Tis true that your friend, our mother,
Is dead, and that dear man, our father.
And yet, in bringing you here anew,
God satisfies our needs through you.'

Tristan, already sorrowing,
Found fresh sadness in this greeting,
Deep sighs of anguish he now gave,
And asked to see his 'parents' grave.
He stood in sorrow there, weeping
Then he made this speech, in mourning:
'May the Lord God hear my word:
If e'er it may be, as I have heard
Since childhood, that true loyalty
And honour may be buried deep,
In the earth, they lie buried here.

Yet if these two with God appear
In company, as all folk do say,
Rual and Floraete are this day
With God, who did grant them honour,
And ever clothed them in splendour
In this world; now they are crowned,
Where God's children are thus crowned!
Rual's sons, of their sincerity,
Placed all their land, and property,
And themselves, in Tristan's hand,
Ready to serve at his command,
With true devotion, willingly;
Eager to prove their loyalty,
At all times, in Tristan's service.
Whate'er he stated as his wish
They did, if it were in their power,
And accompanied him each hour,
When visiting some loyal knight,
And his fair lady, ever in sight
At tournaments, and at the chase,
Whate'er the sport, where'er the place.

PART XII: Iseult of the White Hands

Tristan wins martial honour at Arundel

THERE was a duchy, next the sea,
Called Arundel, twixt Brittany
And England, its duke old and grey,
Yet brave and courtly. The tales say
That his neighbours had occupied
His land and his forces had defied.
At sea, and throughout the country,
He'd sought to curb this enemy,
Yet with scant means so to do.
He had a son, a daughter too,
Flawless, in body and mind,

Perfect among humankind.
The son was a perfect knight,
Experienced in many a fight,
Who gave himself to chivalry,
And had, with many a victory,
Won honour amongst his peers,
Throughout nigh-on three years.
His sister was most beautiful,
Unwed, and known to the people
As Iseult of the White Hands,
Iseult, that is, *als blansche mains*.
The son was Kaedin *li frains*,
Breaker of Lances, and their father
Duke Jovelin, Karsie their mother.

When Tristan heard, in Parmenie,
Of the warfare in that fair country
Of Arundel, he thought, once more,
To ease his woes as he had before,
So went forth to fight in Arundel,
And, landing, made for their castle
Of Karke, where, as he knew,
Lay the Duke, whom he would view.
The lord and his men greeted Tristan
As one does a most welcome man
Of warlike worth, for he was known
The story says, as one who'd shown
His prowess throughout all the isles,
Against which the wide Ocean piles,
And pleased they were at his coming.
The Duke knew of his skill and learning,
Accepting his advice and counsel,
Placing him in command as well
Of both his forces and his honour,
And granting Tristan all his favour.

Now the Duke's fair son, Kaedin,

Had soon become attached to him,
And thought of everything he could
That might do Tristan great good,
Redound to his credit, and so all
He owned to, was at Tristan's call,
While these two now vied together
To serve and thus outdo each other.
They swore to be dear friends for life,
And to stay loyal midst the strife,
And kept that oath, friend to friend,
As true companions, to the end.
Tristan, who was the stranger there,
Took Kaedin with him to confer
With Jovelin, and questioned how
Their enemies were ordered now,
And from which quarter came the first
Incursion, and from whence the worst.
Once he knew their dispositions,
All the foe's secure positions,
Tristan, with his friend Kaedin,
Planted a small force within
A strong castle the Duke possessed,
Which they thought might serve them best,
For in the enemy's path it lay.
Their strength was not so great that they
Might give battle in open country,
Though they harried the enemy
Threatening some camp or village,
Harming the foe, by fire and pillage,
Attacking by night, most stealthily.
Thus Tristan sent to Parmenie,
To his dear retainers, while he fought,
Telling Rual's sons that he sought
Aid in battle, as ne'er before,
And asking that they now assure
Him of their great worth and honour,
By adding to his present power.

Five hundred splendid knights they brought,
As fine as any that might be sought,
Fully armed, with much-needed stores.
Once Tristan heard how his new cause
Was to be bolstered, he rode outright
To meet the force and then, by night,
Escort their company through that land,
All secretly, you must understand,
Only those of his army knowing,
That helped in this undertaking.
Then at Karke he left half the men,
Commanding them to bar it again,
Ignore those who offered battle,
But to occupy the place, until
They knew that he and Kaedin,
Had called for a battle to begin,
When they must swiftly take the field,
And, once the enemy were revealed,
Attack, and chance their fortune there.
With the rest he did then repair
To his chosen castle and, by night,
Concealed this fresh force out of sight
Within its walls, ordering the men
To avoid showing themselves again,
Like those at Karke, night or morn.

Tristan set out to choose, by dawn
A force of but a hundred men,
The rest to stay behind; he then
Asked Kaedin to tell each knight,
Remaining, to prepare to fight
If he were pursued to the wall;
And then, whatever might befall,
Join those of Karke, and bring them aid;
Then led his men on an armed raid.
He entered enemy country,
Plundering, burning openly,

Attacking every settlement
And every stronghold as he went.
Before nightfall the news had sped,
Throughout, that Kaedin had led
A bold incursion into their land,
Striking swiftly on every hand,
Rousing their leaders and advisors,
These being, Rugier of Doleise,
Alongside Nautenis of Hante,
And also Rigolin of Nantes,
To gather their forces by night,
And ready the ranks for a fight.
Thus, before noon, on the next day,
The massed knights were on their way,
Headed for Karke, four hundred men,
Preparing to lay it siege again,
As they had often done before.
But Tristan and Kaedin now bore
Down on them, and, despite the foe
Thinking themselves secure and no
Attacker likely to come near,
Their enemies did soon appear,
Driving at them from every side,
Eager to see their lances tried.

As soon as the four hundred found
Their enemies close, and all around,
They swiftly turned about to fight;
Bright lance flew at lance outright,
Steed against steed, then man on man
They clashed, struggling hand to hand.
Here raged Tristan and Kaedin,
There Rugier and Rigolin,
And whate'er a fighting man desired,
To whate'er his sword or lance aspired,
He found it there. The war cries rose.
'*Karke and Arundel!*' from those,

From these, '*Schevelier Hante,*
Doleise, e Nantes!'

Those in the castle, seeing the fight,
Now galloped forth, a welcome sight,
To strike the enemy on the flanks,
And, pressing deep into their ranks,
Drove them here and there, each knight
Engaged in a most bitter fight.
They raged through the enemy then,
Like fierce wolves in a sheep's pen.
Tristan and Kaedin drove harder,
Heading for the leaders' banner.
Soon Rugier, and Rigolin,
And Nautenis were gathered in;
And indeed there were not a few
Lost to them, from their retinue.
Kaedin and my lord Tristan,
Now ending it as they began,
Struck, felled, or captured the foe,
Dealing death, wounds, and woe.
When those few who resisted saw
That they could fight on no more,
They saved themselves, as best they might
By some ruse, or by sudden flight;
Flight, capture, death; twas all one
To their foe, with their battle won.

With scant resistance on that side,
And the prisoners lodged inside
The stronghold, Tristan and Kaedin
Reeled their remaining forces in,
And returned to the enemy lands.
All of these fell into their hands;
Goods, and towns, and fortresses,
Were forfeit, and, once possessed,
The spoils back to Karke were sent.

Now they'd achieved their intent,
Taken vengeance, and occupied
The whole land, newly pacified,
Tristan sent all his countrymen
Back to Parmenie, once again
Thanking them for all their aid,
And the courage they'd displayed,
And for the honour, to excess,
They'd granted him, with this success.
Wise Tristan then gave good counsel
That the noble captives in the castle
Once returned to Jovelin's favour,
Should accept from him whichever
Of their fiefdoms he might choose,
And be pardoned, whate'er their views.
This they welcomed, and so swore,
On oath, that they would feud no more,
Nor seek redress, in enmity;
After which oath they all went free.

Tristan admires Iseult of the White Hands

FOLLOWING his campaign, Tristan,
Who had pacified the enemy land,
Praised and honoured at the castle
Of Karke and throughout Arundel,
Was acclaimed at the court as well,
And all men heeded his commands.
Now, Iseult of the White Hands,
Kaedin's sister, the fairest prize
Of that duchy, noble and wise,
Had so conquered the folk there,
That she was lauded everywhere,
So that none could speak of aught
But the reputation she had wrought.
When Tristan gazed at her beauty,
It added to his melancholy;

His old heartache was renewed,
As woeful memories he pursued
Of that bright sun of Ireland,
Iseult the Fair; and so Tristan
Grew despondent at the name,
Both women sharing the same,
Such that the people in that place,
Could read his heart's pain in his face.
And yet that pain he held most dear;
He clasped it to him, kept it near;
He found it sweet, he found it good.
It eased him, be it understood,
Because he liked to see her there,
Because his longing for the Fair
Iseult comforted him far more
Than any ease known heretofore.
'Iseult' was his joy and sorrow.
Yes, truly 'Iseult' dealt him woe,
Yet the distraction brought him ease.
More deeply this Iseult did please
The more that 'Iseult' broke his heart,
That name that yet tore him apart.

'How many times,' he would say
To himself, 'am I sent astray
By that name, *â dê benîe*,
God bless us now, it troubles me.
It confuses both mind and sense,
Proves true and false, and my defence:
"Iseult" laughs and plays in my ear,
Yet I know not where she is, I fear;
My eyes, that gaze on Iseult, she
They see not; Iseult's far from me,
Yet nevertheless is by my side.
I am anxious lest this doth betide
My succumbing a second time,
As if fair Cornwall has, meantime,

Turned itself into Arundel,
And Karke is now fair Tintagel,
And Iseult, Iseult has become.
For whene'er I hear anyone
Call this girl by the name Iseult
I seem to think I've found Iseult;
Yet I'm far from the truth in this.
How strange all this business is!
I have long wished Iseult to see,
And now I find her near to me;
And yet am not a whit closer,
Howe'er near I may suppose her.
I see not Iseult with this eye,
And yet I see her, with a sigh.
Iseult indeed I now have found,
But not the Fair, to whom I'm bound,
The one who grants such tender pain.
It is Iseult who stirs, again,
All these sad thoughts, Arundel's maid,
Yet not Iseult the Fair, arrayed
In light, alas, whom I see not.
And yet my eyes have ever sought
Whate'er is marked by her name;
And thus I must cherish that same,
And the sweet sound upon my ear
That doth ever delight me here.'

Tristan oft pondered in this guise,
Whene'er he chose to turn his eyes
Upon Iseult of the White Hands,
His tender hurt, *als blansche mains*.
She stoked the fire of his passion
From the embers, in this fashion,
The fire that smouldered in his heart,
Night and day, while they were apart.
He shunned war, and the tournament,
His heart and mind were solely bent

On love, and this distracting passion;
Yet he sought it in strange fashion,
For he had fixed all his intent,
On a forced love of this innocent,
This maid, Iseult of the White Hands,
Yielding himself to love's demands
Despite himself, and wildly hoping
Through her to assuage his longing.
Towards her he made soft advances,
Often despatching tender glances,
Such that she realised his affection;
She too had thoughts in that direction;
He had given her reason to ponder,
Her heart had turned to him ever
For she'd heard him spoken of,
With high regard, often enough.
And when his eyes did, now and then,
Rest on her, then her eyes again
Would look on him most tenderly.
Such that he sought despondency
To banish, and found many a way
Of meeting, whate'er the time of day,
As opportunity arose.

Tristan labours to curb his affection

TWAS not long, I would suppose,
Ere Kaedin saw Tristan's plan,
Taking the measure of the man,
And the glances both exchanged,
And further meetings he arranged,
Thinking if she won Tristan's heart,
He might wed her, and not depart,
Thus meeting Kaedin's desire.
He told his sister she might aspire,
To engage Tristan in conversation,
As he suggested, yet forego action

Without his knowing, or her seeking
Her father's advice and his consent.
Iseult the Maid was quite content
To do what suited her own wish.
And so encouraged Tristan in this,
Doubly favouring him withal,
With conversation, glances, all
Those things that snare a lover's mind,
And rouse love in the heart, we find,
At every time, in every place,
Till his desire kindled apace,
Such that her name fell on his ears,
Soothingly, and calmed his fears,
And 'Iseult', he now saw and heard
More gladly than he had; the word
Distressed him less than he wished.
Iseult the Maid conspired in this,
She was ever pleased to greet him,
And felt a deep affection for him.
She filled his thoughts, as he did hers,
With all the blessings that confers.
Pledging love and companionship,
They sought to meet in friendship,
Whene'er it was fitting so to do.

One day when Tristan made review
Of his old woes, seated at leisure,
And his fate, with little pleasure,
His heart prompted him to recall
His many sufferings, and then all
The sorrows that Iseult the Fair,
His other life, was forced to bear,
She the queen who ruled his love,
For his sake, yet did ever prove
Loyal and true through every trial.
He saw that he but sought denial;
It pierced the depths of his heart,

That he had granted there a part
Of that heart to any other
Than Iseult the Fair, his lover,
And another's love now sought,
Or e'er harboured such a thought.
'Ah, traitor, what is this you do?'
He asked himself, and then, anew,
In woe, 'I know as sure as death,
Iseult the Fair, at every breath
Thinks of me; amidst the strife,
She, who is all my heart and life,
Loves and treasures naught but me,
Yet I treat her most cruelly;
For I, bereft of all reason,
Committing the basest treason,
Grant my love to a life not hers.
I know not why such madness stirs.
Disloyal man, what work you here!
For twin Iseults you now hold dear,
And you love both, and yet vile man,
That other self loves but Tristan.
That other longs for no Tristan
But you, and seeks no other man,
While a second Iseult you desire.
Ah, Tristan, senseless in the mire,
Lost Tristan; away blind madness!
Rid yourself of all that's monstrous!'

Iseult of the White Hands falls in love with Tristan

WITH this he quelled love's unreason,
His passion for Iseult the Maiden
He now curbed, yet, nonetheless,
He showed such signs of tenderness,
She thought she saw love in his face,
True love, but such was not the case,
And things took their rightful course.

Iseult had robbed Iseult, perforce,
 Of her Tristan, through his longing,
 Yet now all his thoughts were turning,
 Once more, to his firstborn love;
 The old woes his heart did move.
 Yet he was courteous as ever,
 And seeing that the maid's fever
 Grew, he tried hard to distract her;
 Thus, he sang and played to her,
 He told her tales, wrote and read,
 And whiled away the hours instead
 By keeping her good company,
 Singing and playing skilfully.
 Tristan composed many a lay,
 On each stringed instrument would play
 A wealth of pleasant music, set
 Such treasures as are well-loved yet.
 And it was then he did invent,
 The girl's distraction his intent,
 The noble lay now called 'Tristan'
 One which is known in every land,
 And will be thought a thing of worth,
 As long as songs are sung on Earth.
 It often would fall out that he,
 (When they were all in company,
 Iseult the Maid, he, Kaedin,
 Karise, and her duke Jovelin,
 And all the lords and ladies)
 Singing his chansons, sweetly,
 Rondels, and courtly airs, again,
 Ended ever with this refrain:
'Iseult ma drûe, Iseult m'amie
En vûs ma mort, en vûs ma vie:
 Iseult my love, Iseult my breath,
 In you my life, in you my death!
 And since he ever sang it so,
 They thought the words did ever flow

For their Iseult, and were pleased
To think so when the music ceased;
None more than his friend Kaedin,
Who led him out, and led him in,
And seated him beside his sister,
Who was happy beside him ever.
In greeting him, I might mention
She gave him her full attention,
Her every thought, and her bright eyes,
Were upon him; twas no surprise
The tender thing that people name
Maidenhood forsook modesty
Or shame, as she, quite openly,
And often, laid her hands in his,
Delighting Kaedin in this.
But whate'er Kaedin believed,
For her own pleasure twas conceived.

She made herself so alluring
To the man, by smiling, laughing,
Questioning him, and chattering,
Teasing him, and flattering,
The sweet girl stirred the flames again,
She roused the longing, and its pain,
Such that in his need to love her,
His firm resolve began to waver.
He was unsure whether he wished
This lovely maid, Iseult, were his
Or not, twas all a mystery:
'Can I want her, as she wants me?'
He asked himself: 'I think I may,
And then think not, another day.'
While Constancy cried: 'No Tristan,
Think of Iseult the Fair, and stand
By the pledge you made to your true
Iseult, who ne'er swerved from you.'
From such thoughts, he would move

To mourning for Fair Iseult's love,
She his heart's queen, such that he
Doing himself a discourtesy,
With altered looks and manner, pined
Where'er he was; and the maid did find,
Whene'er he joined her in her walk,
Whene'er he met with her to talk,
He fell into a reverie,
And sighed beside her, endlessly.
The signs of his hidden sorrow,
So plain to see, night and morrow,
Led the whole court to declare
That his suffering and despair
Was all due to Iseult the Maid.
Twas the truth they conveyed.
'Iseult' was the source no less
Of his desire than his distress,
'Iseult' his fate, so they conceived,
Yet not the one that they believed;
Twas not her, of the white hands, there,
The true source was Iseult the Fair,
For it was she who cast the spell,
And not this maid of Arundel.
But they all thought the thing was so,
And then Iseult the Maid, also,
Was misled by him completely,
For not for a moment was she
Free of her longing for Tristan,
Greater than the ache of the man
For his Iseult, and so these two
Passed the hours, in woes anew,
In which the other had no part.

They were filled with woe at heart,
Longing and grief on either side,
Yet naught in them did coincide;
Love and affection went unshared.

For Tristan and the maid, impaired
By facing in opposite directions,
Kept not step in their affections.
The source of suffering for Tristan,
Was the other Iseult, while no man
Other than Tristan she desired,
By him alone the maid was fired,
She of the white hands; no thought
Had she but for the man; she sought
Tristan with heart and mind; no less
Indeed was his sorrow her distress.
Whene'er she saw his face grow pale,
And when his sadness did prevail,
And when he sighed most tenderly,
She sighed to keep him company,
And looked on him most tenderly,
And of friendship bore his sorrow,
Though her woe was not his woe.
His sad moods hurt her so badly,
That he was troubled far more deeply
On her account, than on his own.
The kindness with which he was met
Could not but fill him with regret;
He pitied her that she loved so,
And yet in vain she did bestow
Her heart on him all uselessly;
Yet he forever showed courtesy,
Seeking to divert and free her,
From her sorrow, as he ever
Wished, with fair conversation,
And charming tales on occasion;
But she was far too deep in love,
And the more he tried to prove
His friendship, the more the fire,
From hour to hour, of her desire
Burned higher, till Love did conquer,
She granting him such a number

Of gestures, words, and glances, all
So sweet and tender, he must fall
Again into indecision,
Those doubts as to his position,
Such that his heart was, as before,
Like a vessel, adrift once more,
On the ocean of uncertainty.
And small wonder, it seems to me,
For, God knows, when beauty lies
Smiling forever, before one's eyes,
It blinds them and, with subtle art,
Binds the senses, mind, and heart.

True lovers all, you now may see
From this tale, that the misery
Of sorrow for an absent love,
Now afar, may yet well prove
Easier to bear than that provoked
By love close friendship has invoked.
Truly, I think, one may endure
Love at a distance, longing for
That love afar, than this nearby,
While seeking this love to deny;
And may forgo that absent love,
More easily than this remove.
Tristan in this tangle was caught,
His absent love he ever sought,
And suffered deeper anguish for
One whom he neither heard nor saw,
While denying she who was near,
Who did full oft to him appear.
Iseult of Ireland he longed for
The bright, the fair, and so the more
He fled from her of the white hands,
The maid of Karke and all its lands.
He denied himself the nearer,
Suffered anguish for the farther,

And so was cheated of them both.
 Longed, and yet to long was loth
 For Iseult and Iseult, those twain;
 Fled one, sought the other again;
 While the girl, Iseult the Maid,
 Who this willing tribute paid
 Of faith and longing, willingly,
 Of love, and true integrity,
 Desired the man who denied her,
 Pursued the man who yet fled her.
 His was the fault; she was deceived,
 Mistaken in all that she believed.
 Tristan, with that double deceit
 Of eyes and tongue, so complete
 That she thought that with her art
 She had won his mind and heart,
 Had lied to her, yet of all he did
 The final deed, in which he hid
 His great duplicity that made
 Her love him, was that he played
 The tune he ever liked to sing,
 That sweet and that tender thing:
'Iseult ma drûe, Iseult m'amie
En vûs ma mort, en vûs ma vie:
 Iseult my love, Iseult my breath,
 In you my life, in you my death!
 It lured her in his direction,
 This it was stirred her affection.
 She made those words all her own,
 Devoted to that man, alone,
 Who fled from her, her love denied,
 Until at Love's fourth, final stride,
 She caught her lover as he fled,
 And drew him back to her instead,
 Such that he favoured her again,
 And yet brooded, fraught with pain,
 Fearful, anxious, night and day,

On life, himself, and longing's sway.
'My God,' he mused, 'how tis that I
Am gone astray at love's least sigh?
And yet that love that so afflicts me,
Stealing mind and sense completely,
If that which to my woe gave birth,
Is e'er to be lightened on this earth,
It must be through another love.
I have read, and many do prove
That one attachment will at length
Dissipate another's strength.
The current of the Rhine, its flow,
Is powerful, and yet even so
If channelled through lesser streams,
Its waters can be drawn, it seems,
So that it slackens in its course,
Flowing then with lesser force.
So the mighty Rhine may yet
Be turned to some slight rivulet.
Again there is no fire so great,
One cannot seek to dissipate
Its burning by reducing it
To separate fires barely lit.
So with a lover; he, likewise,
Can treat love in similar guise,
For he can draw his passion so,
To lesser channels turn the flow,
Share out the fuel that fires his heart,
Until its flames are split apart,
Such that it does him little harm,
And causes him but scant alarm.
And I may now the like achieve,
If I divide love, I believe,
And share it among more than one,
And then the thing is swiftly done;
If I direct my thoughts to more
Than the one love I knew before,

I might thereby become a man
Devoid of woe, carefree Tristan.'

Tristan reproaches Iseult the Fair

'SO now I should attempt the thing.
For if good fortune it might bring,
It seems high time that I began
To execute just such a plan.
The love and loyalty I harbour,
For my lady, has no power
To help me, yet I waste my life
For her, and win naught from the strife
To support this life I'm living.
I endure an endless longing,
Yet a dearth of expectation.
Too long, too great a separation
Is all the life, Iseult, we share.
Ah sweet Iseult, Iseult the Fair,
Things are not now as once they were,
When you and I did suffer, there,
One love, one ill, one weal, one woe,
Alas, such is no longer so.
For pain I know, you happiness;
My thought are filled to excess
With longing for you, while yours
I think take now a different course;
The pleasures I forgo for you,
Alas, alas, you now pursue,
As it doth please you, and not me,
All as you wish, in his company;
You have a king for your master.
You are at home, and are forever
Inseparable companions now,
While I, alone, recall our vow,
In exile, in a strange country.
I shall have naught, it seems to me,

From you that might bring me ease.
And yet my heart finds no release.
Why of myself have you robbed me,
When you long so little for me,
Yet, in that, fare so well, I ween?
Ah, Iseult, my fair sweet queen,
With how many a heartache my
Life, without you, now passes by!
While you care so little for me
That not one messenger do I see,
Sent to search for me, any day.
A messenger? What's this I say?
Where should she send, and how enquire?
I am driven, further, and higher,
On the winds of uncertainty;
How should a messenger find me?
I know not how. If a man sought here,
I'd in some other place appear;
If he sought there, then here I'd be.
How shall any that seek find me?
How find me, then? Why, here today;
For countries never soar away,
And I am here in this fair land;
So seek you here to find Tristan;
Yes, let a man cover this ground,
Search hard enough I will be found.
For who would seek a traveller,
Has no fixed goal set him or her,
But they must seek, for good or ill,
Until their task they shall fulfil.
My lady, on whom my life depends,
Ought to have searched to the ends
Of Cornwall, and England, covertly,
Normandy, France, and Parmenie,
Long ago, or where'er her friend
Was said to be, and, in the end,
She would have found me if she cared.

But she for whom my heart I bared,
Dearer to me than soul or body,
Cares but little it seems for me.
All other women for her sake
I forgo, yet must her forsake,
Since I cannot ask of her now
That which would of joy allow,
And so in this world grant to me
Happiness, love, and sovereignty.'

(Sadly, Gottfried's unfinished text ends here. The following four parts are translations of Thomas of England's Anglo-French 'Tristan', which served as Gottfried's main source. Use of the historic present tense has been replaced by the simple past tense, throughout, for consistency with Gottfried's version.)

PART XIII: Thomas: Tristan's Marriage

Tristan debates Iseult the Fair's constancy

TRISTAN's heart was ever changing,
While his mind was ever musing
On how to quench longing's fire,
With no means to gain his desire.
Thus did he think: 'Iseult, dear friend,
Our lives move to a different end,
Now our love doth only serve
To deceive me; do I deserve,
To lose both joy and delight,
While you possess them day and night?
I live my life in misery,
Yours is delightful amity.
I do nothing but long for you,
While whate'er you choose to do,
Whate'er of love, and of delight,
You may do both day and night.
Thought of your body brings me pain,

While the king his wish doth gain.
He takes his delight and pleasure;
What was mine is his to treasure.

I must yield what I cannot own,
For I know she enjoys her own,
Forgets me, seeks her enjoyment,
While my sad heart, in discontent,
For Iseult, alone, scorns all others,
And she knows the pain it suffers,
All the anguish that doth befall;
Yet brings me no comfort at all;
For this other now longs for me,
One for whom I feel great pity;
And were I not so loved by her,
I could more willingly suffer.
Unless Iseult the Fair doth please,
Out of weariness I shall cease,
For, if I cannot have her love,
What I can have I must approve,
As he ought, that can do no other,
And as I shall, by taking another.
What is the use of waiting ever,
Denying all one's joy forever?
Why seek a love from which no good
Doth now emerge, nor ever could?
I have suffered such grief and pain
For Iseult's love, time and again,
I may surely cease from it now?
I'll win no profit there, I vow.
For she has forgot me wholly,
Her heart is changed completely.

Ah, God, dear Father, Heavenly King,
How does it happen, such a thing?
How could she have altered so?
Since yet the fires of friendship glow

How can she let true love expire?
I cannot quench my true desire.
I know that were she to depart,
My heart would know it from her heart.
She did naught for good or ill,
That moved not my heart and will.
Through my own heart I did feel
That her heart bound me, so to heal
And comfort me whene'er it could.
And if I cannot have my good,
I have no right on that account
To alter, and to scorn the fount
Of love, and leave her for a stranger.
For we are bound to one another,
Our bodies so wounded by desire
That we can ne'er forgo the fire.
And as to what Iseult could do,
She lacks the means, wishing to,
And I must bear her no ill-will
For she desires our friendship still;
And if she fails to work my wish,
I know not the depth of anguish
She must feel. Iseult, your intent
Were good if fate would but relent.
How, indeed, could she change? No, I
Must not to my love admit a lie.
For, I know, if change moved in her,
Then in my own heart it must stir.

Lie or no, I feel our parting still,
And yet my heart doth ever fill
With the feeling that she loves not,
And that our love's by her forgot.
For if she loved me in her heart,
She would ease me though apart.
"She, of what?" "Of my pain and woe."
"Where, my friend, will she find you though?"

“Here, where I am.” “Yet she knows not
In what place you are.” “Does she not?”
Yet if, indeed, she sought for me,
Why, to what end? For my misery?
She dare not, because of her lord,
For though the wish she might afford
A hearing, she’ll not disobey him.
Let her love then and cleave to him.

I do not ask that she recalls me!
I blame her not if she forgets me,
She ought not to pine for me now.
Her great beauty should not allow
Such indulgence, tis not in nature
That she should long for another,
When the king obeys her pleasure.
She should love him at her leisure,
So much so that I am forgot,
For her delight now I am not,
And seek her joy in her master
And cease thus to recall her lover.
How should my desire mean more
To her than her joy in her lord?
Let her do as nature doth desire,
Since she seeks not her true sire.
Let what she has sufficient prove,
Since she must now forgo her love.
So let her take what she may hold,
And then to that her wishes mould.
In the act, and then the kisses,
One may find the joy one misses.
And she may be so pleased withal,
This love of mine she’ll ne’er recall.
And if she should not, why; what then?
Tell me why I should care again.
I think delight may her heart move,
Despite the absence of true love.

Tristan decides to wed Iseult of the White Hands

AND yet how could she find delight,
Without her true love and, despite
Love, cherish her lord and master,
And forget this long-loved other?
How should a man now learn to hate
What he has loved so well of late?
How can he bear anger toward
One whose love is his reward?
He must not hate his former love,
Though from her sphere he may remove;
He may withdraw, and so depart,
If he has lost that distant heart.
He must not love or hate reveal
Without good cause; or so I feel.
If he sees the good, then the ill,
He should cherish the good still,
And ne'er should ill for ill render,
But let the one balance the other;
Not show the good excess goodwill,
Not hate too much for what was ill.
Love the noble and fear the base,
For the one grant the other grace.
And yet, finding baseness, resist
The wish to do the base service.
Because Iseult the Fair loved me,
And gave me joy, most willingly,
Then I should not feel hate for her
Because of aught that might occur.
Yet seeing she has forgot our love,
From my mind I must her remove.
I ought not now to hate her more,
Nor yet should love her as before.
But I should now seek my retreat,
As she has done, and so complete

The thing, and see if I might find
A pleasure for the heart and mind
That needs not love, joy to afford,
As she doth find now with her lord.
How shall I find it, in this life,
Except I take to me a wife?
Iseult the Fair would be in error,
Were she not wed to another;
Indeed it is her lawful spouse
Who divides our sorry house.
She has no right now to retreat,
She should his true advances meet,
Howe'er she feels, yet I ought not
To act myself as she does not,
Except to see how it may be,
Such a life, and wed, equally,
To find if such union could make
Me forget her, who doth forsake
All memory of me. I will wed
The maid, but not from hatred
Of the other, whom I now wish
To love or leave, in doing this,
And so to learn from this thing
How my Iseult can love the king.'

Yet Tristan was in anguish still,
Concerning this new act of will,
Afflicted by this seeming treason,
For which he found no good reason,
Except the sole desire to know
If he might find pleasure or no,
Without love and, through pleasure,
Thus forget Iseult, his treasure;
Thinking that she did that same
With her lord, all free from blame.
Thus he wished to take a wife,
So that Iseult the Fair, his 'life',

Could blame him not for pleasure
Sought for without lawful measure,
That must then impair his honour.
Iseult the Maid he did favour,
For 'Iseult', and for her beauty;
Though the beauty alone, had she
Not borne the like name, had never
Won him, nor would he have ever
Wed her if she'd lacked the beauty,
That gave her such sweet sovereignty;
It was that pair of things in fact,
That brought him to embrace the act
Of marrying the girl, to find
The state of Iseult's heart and mind,
The queen that is; and, without love,
The pleasures of such marriage prove.
He wished to know, by marrying,
How Iseult fared beside the king
And then to see what pleasure,
He might know with this other.
Thus Tristan, it seems, sought vengeance,
For his suffering at a distance,
Such vengeance though as would bless
His life with twice that sore distress.
For he would free himself from woe,
And yet drown himself in sorrow.
He thought thus to have his pleasure,
Since he was denied his treasure.
The name, the beauty of the queen
He'd noted of this girl, and seen,
Yet he'd not have sought to marry
Her, for her name or her beauty,
If not for his Iseult the Fair,
Whose very name the girl did bear.
For if she'd not been named Iseult,
Would fate have sought a like result?
And if she'd lacked Iseult's beauty,

Would Tristan have sought her, truly?
Yet for the beauty, and the name,
Tristan now sought that very same;
He felt the longing and the wish
To have the girl to prove all this.

Thomas: on human changeability

HEAR now of this most wondrous thing,
How people are forever changing,
Nor can they stay in but one place!
By nature, they about must face,
And as they're bound to their ill ways,
Must change the good for ill always.
They are so used to what is bad,
They think the contrary is mad;
Accustomed to depravity,
They know naught of nobility,
While so intent on villainy's lot,
That all courtesy is forgot;
Devoted so to wickedness,
All their lives, they but regress,
Nor can retreat from evil when
Tis a habit ingrained in them.
Some are accustomed thus to ill,
Others of good have had their fill;
All their lives are seen to be
An endless search for novelty,
Abandoning the good they own
To pursue some ill they're shown.
This thirst for novelty gone mad,
Makes them exchange the good for bad
And the good they could achieve
For evil's pleasures they all leave.
Each one forsakes the better so
As to possess another's woe.
They think their own is much the worse,

Some other has escaped the curse.
If their own good were not theirs,
They'd be content with their affairs,
But in their hearts find discontent
With everything that fate has lent.
If they had not what they possess
They would desire it, they confess,
But hope to find something better,
So cannot love their chain and fetter.
Novelty cheats a man in this,
If he wants not all that is his,
But yet desires what he has not,
And for a worse forsakes his lot.
And yet one should forsake the bad,
Abandoning the worse one had
For the better, and act wisely,
And leave off this endless folly.
Tis not through novelty a man
Ends far better than he began
Or doth escape from evil plight.
But many a heart finds delight
In strange things and hopes to find
What's lost in the familiar grind.
Thus our thoughts are variable,
All our wishes prove unstable,
For we would try what we do lack,
And pay for it all on the way back.
Women too, would forgo all this
That they have, for what they miss,
And try to win, before they tire
Their deepest longing and desire.
I know not what more can be said,
Yet men and women, on this head,
Have too great a love of novelty,
Seek naught but variability,
Of aim, wish, desire, intention,
Against all sense and reason.

This one seeks to advance in love,
And yet doth his unfitness prove,
Another would cast love aside,
Yet but doubles the pain inside;
A third his vengeance doth pursue
Yet into sorrow he stumbles too.
While a fourth thinks to be free,
Yet burdens himself eternally.

Tristan's dilemma

TRISTAN thought to forsake Iseult,
And quench heart's love as a result.
By taking this other as his wife,
He hoped thus to escape his 'life';
Yet were it not for that first love
This had lacked the power to move
His heart; yet Iseult he had loved,
And thus by Iseult he was moved.
Because the first no longer beckoned,
So his desire was for the second,
Yet if he could have had the queen,
He'd not have loved the Maid, I ween.
So, it seems to me; I must state,
That it was neither love nor hate;
For if true love this thing had been
He would not thus have scorned the queen
To love the girl; nor was hate there,
Since twas because of his affair
With the queen, he loved the maid;
And wedding her he thus betrayed
No hatred, since love bore the thing.
Had he owned a cause for hating
Iseult the Fair, within his heart,
Tristan would then have kept apart
From the girl, not taken a wife
Because of his love for his 'life';

But had he been a faithful lover,
He would not have wed this other.
Yet twas the fact, one must confess,
That love had dealt him such distress,
He wished to work against his love,
To free himself, and so remove
The sorrow; yet in doing so,
He fell but deeper into woe.

It happens to many a person though.
Stricken by love, anguish, sorrow,
By great pain, when all's contrary
They take such actions to win free,
Or seek revenge in some manner,
From which acts they only suffer.
We oft do, with rational intent,
That which adds to our discontent.
I have seen many a fool do thus.
Unable to have what pleases us,
Or win whate'er we love the best,
We do things, out of our distress,
Using whate'er lies in our power,
That afflict us, and doubles our
Pain, and, in seeking to be free,
We're but trapped more certainly.
In such acts of vengeance, I find
Love and hatred fill the mind,
Neither love nor hatred purely,
But love mixed with hatred, strangely,
And hatred strangely mixed with love,
He whom a wish for love doth move
To do what he does not wish to do,
Desiring not what he doth pursue,
Does what he does despite that love;
And this is what Tristan did prove,
In acting against his deepest wish.
Suffering from one Iseult in this,

He'd save himself through the other;
And having kissed and embraced her,
And asked her parents for her hand,
The marriage was swiftly planned,
He to take her; they to bestow.

Tristan weds Iseult of the White Hands

THE day was named, the time also.
Tristan and his friends were here,
The Duke and all his folk drew near,
All was ready, the words were said,
Iseult of the White Hands was wed,
With all the service, Mass, and fees,
Discharged as Holy Church decrees.
They feasted, amid joy and laughter,
And amused themselves thereafter
With jousting, striking the quintain,
Hurling javelins, and then again
Wrestling, fencing, with each other,
Everything that gave them pleasure,
And seemed appropriate for the day,
Such games as e'er the worldly play.

The day was filled with true delight;
Their bed stood ready for the night.
Now they brought the maiden there,
While Tristan did himself prepare.
His tunic was removed, twas tight
About the wrists and, as the knight
Freed himself, it dragged the ring
From his finger; twas that same ring
Iseult had pledged in the orchard,
On that day when they had parted,
For she had yielded him the ring.

Tristan looked, and saw the thing,

And entered on a train of thought;
Yet thinking fresh anguish brought,
His doubts and fears returned anew,
Such that he knew not what to do.
Now he might readily do his will,
His mind would not the act fulfil,
For he thought so deeply indeed
He now repented of his deed;
The marriage seemed an ill affair;
Seeing the ring recalled the Fair
Iseult; he in his heart withdrew,
While all his sorrows did renew.
He recalled the pledge he'd made,
In the orchard, and now betrayed,
When they both were forced to part,
And sighed, deeply, from the heart.

Tristan broods on his dilemma

'HOW shall I do this thing?' he thought,
Tis contrary to all I've sought,
Yet I must bed my lawful wife,
For I am bound to her for life,
And I must not desert her now.
Twas my foolish heart, I avow,
Has rendered me so changeable.
When I asked her parents, all
Her kith and kin, for her hand,
Did I that folly yet understand,
And the betrayal it must prove,
Or think of Iseult my true love?
I must to bed; it grieves me so;
To the church I did gladly go,
I did wed her in the sight of all,
And she is mine whate'er befall!
Now a folly I must commit,
For I cannot retreat from it

Without great sin, and working ill,
Yet cannot do with her as I will,
Without an act of faithlessness
A betrayal of my oath, no less;
To that Iseult I swore loyalty,
So tis wrong for this to win me;
Yet my debt is great to this other,
I cannot keep faith with another;
Cannot betray that hope of bliss,
And yet may not abandon this.
If I take pleasure in another,
I break faith with my true lover,
Yet if from this Iseult I go,
I work sin, wrong, and evil so.
For now I may neither leave her
Nor yet take advantage of her,
Lying abed with her this night,
For my own pleasure and delight.
I have such feelings for the queen,
That I must not this girl demean,
And yet am so bound to the maid
That all due honour must be paid;
For I must not betray my 'life'
Nor yet abandon thus my wife.
I cannot now depart from her,
And yet I cannot sleep with her.
I keep covenant with this maid,
And break the covenant I made,
Or keep faith with Iseult the Fair,
And not with the wife who lies there.
Thus this girl I must not betray,
Nor fail the other in any way.
I know not which one to deceive,
Since I must cheat one, I believe,
Trick one, or betray the other,
Or play false to both together.
Yet this girl's now so close to me,

Iseult the Fair's betrayed already;
While I love the queen so deeply,
This girl is deceived, completely,
And now I, too, am so betrayed!
Ill are the choices I have made.
Each Iseult suffers now through me,
And, through both, I suffer equally.
Both have granted me their love,
And yet disloyal to both I prove.
I've broken my oath to the queen,
Yet cannot keep my oath, I ween,
To this girl for whom I broke it.
Towards one, I may yet keep it.
Since I have deceived the former,
I must keep faith with the latter;
For I cannot now go my way,
And yet must not Iseult betray.

I know not what to do in this.
Every road leads to anguish,
Since I cannot betray my 'life',
Nor worse, abandon my own wife.
Whether I take her maidenhead
Or not, I'm bound to share her bed.
Vengeance on Iseult I have brought,
Yet am betrayed by what I sought.
For I wished vengeance on the fair,
Thus self-betrayal I must bear.
To harm her, I harmed myself too,
And know not what I should do.
If I should sleep with my wife,
Then I would offend my 'life',
Yet if I refuse to lie with her
Then reproach I'll duly suffer,
And resentment and her anger,
While her father and her mother,
All will hate me and despise me,

Before God, a sinner I'll be.
I fear sin, for honour I care;
What if I were to lie with her,
And yet refuse to play my part
In what I hate within my heart,
And am reluctant to perform?
To work the act must breed a storm,
For she will know by my sad state
That with another lies my fate.
She's not so foolish, I am sure,
As not to know that I am more
Desirous of another, would lie
Where greater love doth joy supply.
If she were robbed of her delight,
She'd not wish me in her sight.
Hatred would be her right, in fact,
If I renounced the natural act,
With which marriage should commence.

Hatred is bred by abstinence.
Just as love may come of doing,
So hatred comes from abstaining.
If I refrain thus from the deed,
Then sorrow I shall reap indeed;
My nobility and prowess
All would turn to naught but baseness.
What by courage I once did prove,
Now will desert me through this love;
That affection she shows to me,
Abstinence would now deny me;
All my service will go for naught,
By an act with baseness fraught.
She has coveted me in thought,
Without the act of love I sought,
But if she fails of her desire,
She then will hate my lack of fire.
For that is what binds together,

The beloved and her lover.

And so I will not do the deed,
For my intent is to succeed
In drawing her from this love.
Indeed her hatred I would prove,
For I desire her hatred more.
And I have earned it I am sure.
For I have sinned against my 'life'.
Why did I wish for in a wife?
Why all this longing and desire?
Whence the yearning to aspire
To this girl, and then to wed her,
Despite the faith I owe my lover,
Iseult the Fair, whom I deceive
Even more, in that I conceive
A closer union with this child?
By my words, I'd be reconciled
With my intent, I seek a reason
Or an excuse, or more than one,
For breaking faith with my 'life',
In seeking now to bed my wife.
Lacking love, tis justification
I must seek for such an action.
As long as Iseult the Fair's alive,
I must not deceive and thrive;
How base a traitor I would be
To seek such love, what villainy!
Yet I'm so deep in this, I know,
That all my life I'll suffer woe.
And for the wrong I have done her,
I'll insist on justice for her,
And bear penance, with its hurts,
According to my just deserts.
And now this bed I shall measure,
And yet abstain from all pleasure.
Surely no greater torment

Could e'er flow from such intent,
Nor pain afflict more frequently,
Nor greater anguish come to me,
Whether twixt us be love or hate;
For I sought pleasure, as I state,
And it will hurt me to refrain,
While if I seek not joy again,
How shall I endure this bed?
Whether I hate or love instead,
Great suffering shall I endure,
And thus, in woe, feel woe the more.
But since my love I now betray,
I must do penance in this way,
That when Iseult learns of my plight
She may, indeed, forgive outright.'

Tristan lay down; Iseult the Maid
Took Tristan in her arms, and made
To kiss his mouth, and then his face,
Treating him tenderly, with grace.
She pressed him to her breast, and sighed,
Till he desired, what he denied.
And yet to have his desire in this
Or not, both worked against his wish.
Nature now sought to run its course,
While reason yet stayed true, perforce,
To his Iseult; love of the queen
Quelled desire for the girl, I mean.
True longing robbed him of desire,
For Nature failed to rouse the fire,
Powerless, since love and reason
Constrained his bodily passion;
His feelings for Iseult the Fair,
Drowned Nature, and thus conquered there
The loveless urge within his mind,
The lust that ever burrows blind.
His will to do the deed was there,

But love his passion did impair.
He knew her charms, saw her beauty,
Willed desire, and loathed his duty
To Fair Iseult, but for that queen
Fair consummation there had been;
Yet he denied this his consent,
To his yearning he did assent.
He was in torment once again,
Deep anguish, wild confusion, pain.
How to be faithful to his 'life'
How to act now towards his wife,
Behind what pretext could he hide?
And so he turned from side to side,
Ashamed, and fled from his desire;
Scorning his pleasure entire,
Fled from it in the dark of night,
So as to shun the heart's delight.

Tristan fails to consummate the marriage

THEN Tristan said: 'My sweet friend,
All your kindness to me now lend,
For there's a thing I must confess,
But keep it hid of your kindness,
So none know of it for, I vow,
I've ne'er spoken of it till now.
I have a wound in my right side
That with me doth ever abide,
Tonight it deals me pain and woe,
The marriage feast has tired me so;
It has spread throughout my body,
And keeps me in such agony,
And is now so near my heart,
I dare not play a husband's part,
Or give myself to true pleasure,
Till it abates in some measure.
I must not exert myself now

Or I shall swoon, for I avow
I've swooned thus three times before,
And then lain ill three days or more.
Be not vexed if we leave the matter,
We'll have time enough hereafter,
When you and I both wish the same.'
Iseult the Maid replied, 'No blame
Is yours, and this ill you suffer,
Pains me more than any other
In this world; while I can forgo,
And shall, what you spoke of so.'

PART XIV: Thomas: Sorrows

Iseult the Fair yearns for Tristan

ISEULT the Fair sighed in her chamber,
Longing for Tristan her lover,
With no thought but for the man,
Her heart still yearning for Tristan.
She had indeed no other wish,
Nor other love, nor hope, than this.
All her desire was lodged in him,
And yet she'd had no news of him.
She knew not if he were alive,
Was dead, indeed, or yet did thrive,
If so, in what land he might be,
While not knowing spelt misery.

Though he was now in Brittany,
She thought in Spain he might yet be,
Where he'd despatched a giant, who
Was Orgillos the Great's nephew,
Orgillos who from Africa came,
To seek out, and to kill or maim
Kings and princes, of every land.
Orgillos had great strength of hand,

Brave and bold he fought with all,
Before him many a man did fall.
He took the beard from each face,
And set each beard in its own place
In a cloak he wove that was strong,
And very large in size, and long.
Now he had heard of King Arthur,
To whom all the world showed honour,
And was steadfast, of such mettle,
That he'd never lost a battle,
For he had fought with many a man,
And conquered all, you understand.
When the giant learnt of the king,
He sent, as to a friend, saying
That he had a cloak, all woven
Of the beards of princes, cloven
In close combat, barons, kings,
Of other lands, not underlings.
Some he'd also slain in battle,
But it lacked collar and tassels.
Such the garment he had made,
With its beards of kings displayed,
Except it lacked the fringe, and so
Since Arthur was, as he did know,
The greatest in land and honour,
He requested that he sever
His beard too, so runs the story,
And send it to him, in his glory,
For he would grant him the honour
Of setting his above the others;
As he was the greatest sovereign,
It was right that he should reign
Above the others on his cloak,
That nest of beards of which he spoke.
He'd crown the cloak for his sake,
Collar and tassels he would make.
And if Arthur refused his plea,

He'd do, as was customary,
Wager the cloak against his beard,
And take the fight to him, he feared,
And the one who should conquer
Would have both, to keep forever.

When Arthur heard the message he
Was sore grieved at heart, and angry.
He sent the giant his reply,
That he would sooner fight and die
Than yield his beard out of fear,
Like a coward. When he did hear,
The giant I mean, that this mad king
Had answered so, he came seeking
Combat, and reaching the frontier,
All set for battle he did appear.
And so the two met in the fight,
To win both beard and cloak outright,
Furiously they fought together,
In anger, flailing at each other.
Hard the battle, and great the strife,
For each was fighting for his life,
Thus, all day; but on the morrow,
Arthur proved his boasting hollow,
And had from him cloak and head,
For now the giant was slain instead,
Overcome by skill and valour,
Adding to King Arthur's honour.

Tis good that I your ears regale
With this addition to my tale,
Since it was this giant's nephew,
Who came seeking a beard too;
That of the king, the giant would gain,
Whom Tristan served while in Spain,
Before he went to Brittany.
This second giant had asked, you see,

For his beard, but the king said no.
The king lacked a champion though,
Nor friend nor kinsman would defend
It, none on whom he could depend.
The king was troubled and he spoke
Sadly of this before his folk.
Tristan, out of love for him, then
Took up the challenge, and again
A giant fell in bitter conflict,
And yet fierce blows he did inflict;
Tristan with many a wound bled,
Though the giant himself lay dead.

Of that dire battle he had fought,
Queen Iseult the Fair heard naught,
For it is rumour's way to speak
Ill, but naught of the good we seek,
Envy will hide a man's good deed,
But soon doth news of evil breed.
That is why the wise man says
To his son, in the ancient phrase:
'Better live lacking company,
Than accompanied by envy;
Unaccompanied day and night,
Than unloved, all met with spite.'
An envious 'friend' the good will hide,
Yet speak the ill that doth betide;
He'll conceal the virtuous deed,
Yet the damaging tale will breed.
Better to lack all companions,
Than gain a false and evil one.
Enough companions had Tristan
That held little love for the man.
Plenty of folk, who loved him not,
About King Mark, such was his lot,
Hid from Iseult the good they heard,
Spread their evil with every word.

Good news they had no wish to hear,
While Queen Iseult, in love and fear,
Longed for such; yet, full of envy,
They spoke of all she hated deeply.

The arrival of Count Cariado

ONE day, sitting in her chamber,
She wrought a lay about a lover:
Of how Lord Gurun fell in love,
And yet his love his death did prove,
Slain for the love of that lady
Whom Lord Gurun loved supremely;
And how her lord, unknown to her,
Served her the heart of her lover,
And how she ate, and all her woe
When she learned she had done so.
Iseult played sweetly, every chord,
Voice and instrument in accord.
Her touch was good, the lay her own,
Sweet was the voice, and soft the tone.

And now, there entered Cariado,
A noble Count, right rich also,
With fine castles and fertile land,
Who'd come to court, as he had planned,
To sue for the queen's love, while she,
Iseult the Fair, deemed it mere folly.
He'd sued for love, you understand,
Since Lord Tristan had left that land,
And now the Queen's chamber sought;
Yet Cariado had ne'er won aught
Of her heart, not as much of love
As would earn that man a glove,
Either by gift, or by promise;
Naught at all did he accomplish,
Though he had dwelt long time at court,

And stayed yet, while her love he sought.

Cariado brings news of Tristan's marriage

CARIADO was a courteous knight,
Proud and haughty, though in a fight
Little deserving of any praise,
Nor famed in fair chivalry's ways.
Yet he was handsome, spoke well,
Gallant, witty, could cast a spell,
And finding Iseult as she did play
And sing, he said, in a mocking way:
'Now when one hears the owl, lady,
It speaks of a man's death plainly,
For the song it sings tells of death.
And your singing doth, in a breath,
As the owl doth, speak but of strife,
And that some man has lost his life.'
'And you speak truly,' Iseult replied,
'For death indeed the song implied,
And one who sings what must dismay
Another, the owl's part doth play.
Death you should fear, if tis true
You fear my singing as you do,
Yet owl enough are you that sing,
Because of the news that you bring.
For I believe that you have never
Brought news that delighted ever,
Nor did you ever meet with me,
Unless bad news kept company.
For tis ever the same with you,
Like that fool by the fireside who
Never rose from his hearth at all,
But to anger some man in the hall.
You never leave your seat likewise
Except with ill news to surprise,
Yet never stir yourself to tell

Of anything that augurs well.
No news will e'er be heard of you
Such that your friends shall accrue
Honour, nor other men feel woe;
For still, tomorrow and tomorrow,
Of others' deeds you'll ever speak,
And yet your own we'll ever seek.'
'You seem angry,' was his reply,
'Yet I know not the reason why.
A fool is he such words dismay;
Since I'm a screech-owl, you say,
Let be the matter of my death,
I bring you ill news, in a breath,
Concerning Tristan your lover;
My lady, he is lost forever;
In another land he has wed,
You may take another instead,
For he disdains your true amour,
And he has married with honour,
The Duke of Brittany's daughter.'
Iseult gave him a subtle answer:
'Ever the screech-owl you have been
In speaking ill of Tristan, I deem!
God aid me not, if I am not
The screech-owl that cries your lot!
You cry ill news through the wood,
Well, today, I cry you naught good.
You will never win love from me,
Nor find favour, eternally;
Neither you, fine sir, nor your love,
Shall I, in this life of mine, approve.
If I received your love, then I
Would have a poor bargain thereby.
For, a thousand times, I'd rather
Lose his love than be your lover.
You bring ill news, and yet I swear
That you will gain no profit there.'

Her anger now waxed still greater,
As Cariado could see, and rather
Than cause more distress, or berate
His beloved, with the queen irate,
He chose to leave the room, while she
Gave full vent to her misery.
For, at heart, she felt sore distress,
While angered by his news no less.

Tristan's jealousy

(Meanwhile Tristan had created a hall of statues, including those of Iseult the Fair, and Brangwen. Wed to a wife for whom he showed no love, he would go there to embrace the statue of Iseult the Fair, his distant love.)

ALL the delights of Iseult's love,
All their travails, that ill did prove,
All the torments that did befall,
Through her statue, he would recall.
When Tristan was happy he would kiss
Her image, and revive his bliss,
But, vented his ire, when angered,
Because some ill dream lingered,
Some thought that clouded his eyes,
And mind. Or he, deceived by lies
In his heart thought she'd forgot her
Love, and found some other lover,
Could not help but love that other,
Who, perchance, might love her better.
This thought filled his mind with doubt,
And doubt drove all his courage out.
He thought her affections might flow
Towards that handsome Cariado,
Who was about her night and day,
And served and flattered her alway.
Oft, about him, upbraiding her.
He feared that, failing of her lover,

She might accept whate'er was there,
And if of her love she did despair,
She would seek the thing elsewhere.

Now, pondering this whole affair,
And maddened by a vain desire,
He loathed her statue, in his ire,
Scorning to see, or speak to her,
But to Brangwen's, he did utter
These words: 'Lovely one, I complain
Of Iseult the Fair, my love, again,
Of her change, and the treachery,
That the Queen shows towards me.'
He told the statue what he thought,
Then withdrew a little, and caught
The expression on Iseult's face
For the features there did trace,
Her look when the two had parted,
When the gold ring she had started
To hand to him; and remembered,
The pledge he then had rendered.
At this he wept, and begged her mercy,
For his thoughts, mere idle folly,
Knowing he has been deceived
By jealousy in anger conceived.
For this he made the work of art,
To tell it what was in his heart,
His fair thoughts, his mad errors,
All the pain and joy of lovers,
Knowing none to whom he might
Speak of his sorrow and delight.

Thus Tristan behaved in his love,
Oft went there, and oft did remove,
Oft, as I said, showed a fair face,
Yet as oft an ill one, in its place.
It was Love that made him that way,

Twas Love that sent his heart astray.
If he'd loved her not above all others,
He'd not have feared other lovers.
He was possessed by suspicion,
Because above her he loved none.
If he had loved another lover,
He'd not have been jealous of her,
Yet he was jealous of her ever,
Because he feared he might lose her.
He'd not have feared to lose her though,
If Love had not oppressed him so;
For a man cares naught if a thing
Fares well or ill that means nothing
To him at all; how should he fear
What in his mind doth ne'er appear?

The sorrows of the four lovers

STRANGE was the love among those four,
All filled with pain, and with dolour;
Each lived in sorrow, day and night,
And none had there the least delight.
First Mark the king, who dreaded lest
Iseult was queen of faithlessness,
And loved not him but some other;
He, despite himself, did suffer.
And well he might, thus torn apart,
Riven with anguish in his heart,
Since none but her did he desire,
Who yet withdrew from him, her sire.
Of her body he might win pleasure,
But of contentment small measure,
For another man did own her heart.
This enraged him; they drew apart;
All for this Tristan was her love;
Never-ending, his grief did prove.

After the king, Iseult felt she
Had what she wished not, certainly,
And yet for her part could not win
All that she longed for; not the king.
The king had but the one suffering,
But to the queen double did cling,
Double the pain, seeking Tristan,
And yet wedded to this other man,
Whom she could neither love nor leave,
Neither depart, nor joy conceive;
Had the body, loved not the heart;
So the one torment wove its art,
While the second was her longing
For Tristan, thwarted by the king
So they could not meet together,
While she desired no other lover.
She was convinced the skies above
Looked on no other he could love;
Tristan desired her, and she him.
Her torment? She could ne'er have him.

Then, Lord Tristan felt double woe
And double pain, from loving so.
To the other Iseult he was wed,
Yet longed not for the marriage bed,
Nor could abandon her, on whim,
For she'd no wish to part from him;
Whate'er he wished, he was bound,
To cleave to her; when she was wound
In his arms, it brought him scant joy,
All but her name seemed mere alloy.
He was saddened by what he'd got,
Sadder still for what he had not,
His beloved, that fair, sweet queen,
Who was his life and death, I mean.
And so it seemed double the pain
Lord Tristan suffered, for a name.

Because of his love and its demands,
Woe to Iseult of the White Hands!
Howe'er it was with Iseult the Fair,
This Iseult knew not joy but care;
She had no pleasure of her sire,
Nor for another man felt desire;
For she desired the man she had,
Yet little delight of him she had.
She was the opposite of the king,
Since Mark could ask everything
Of Iseult his queen, and yet no art
Would serve to win him her heart,
Whereas this other Iseult had naught
Of Tristan, yet her love she brought;
She longed to have of him delight,
Yet had naught of him day or night,
She wished to try his fond embrace
Further, to kiss his handsome face,
But Tristan would not allow it,
And she cared not to demand it.

Nor would I care to say, in this,
Which of the four felt most anguish;
And that, indeed, I cannot know,
Since I have never felt such woe.
I'll put the matter, again, to you.
Let lovers pass their judgement true:
From love, who the most did gain,
Or, without, felt the greatest pain?
Mark possessed Iseult's body,
And thus took his pleasure freely,
Yet he was vexed, deep in his heart,
That she loved Tristan, though apart,
Since he loved no one more than her.
Iseult was the king's to do whatever
He pleased with her body, and so

The queen was often filled with woe,
Because of the pain this did bring,
Since she had no love for the king.
She suffered him for he was her sire,
Yet only Tristan did she desire,
Her love, who, on the other hand,
Had wed a wife in a foreign land.
She feared that he chased the new,
Yet hoped her lover was yet true.
Tristan desired Iseult the Fair,
Alone, and he was well aware
Mark possessed her body entire
Yet had no joy, except in desire.
Tristan had a wife, whom in bed
He loved not, though they were wed,
And yet did naught against his heart.
Iseult of the White Fingers, apart
From Tristan, sought naught on earth;
His body she had, but not its worth
In love; she had her handsome sire,
Yet lacked what she did most desire.
Let whoe'er knows the answer say:
Which of these four lovers, I pray,
Had the best of love's bargain so,
And which one felt the greatest woe?

The bold water

LOVELY Iseult of the White Hands
Still virgin, slept with Lord Tristan.
They lay there in one bed together,
Of their joy or pain I know neither,
But as a spouse there he did never
A thing to grant her any pleasure.
I know not if she thought of pleasure,
Or if she loved that life, or whether
She hated it, but I can say

Had it troubled her in any way
She'd not have hidden it, as she did,
From her friends, and kept it hid.

Now it so happened in this land,
That Kaedin and my lord Tristan,
Rode forth, with neighbourly intent,
To a feast, for entertainment.
Lord Tristan took Iseult with him,
And on her right rode Kaedin,
Leading her horse by the rein,
While they spoke, as they were fain
To do of such festive amusement.
Now, on talk they were so intent,
That they let their horses wander
As they wished, hither and yonder,
Till Kaedin's mount crossed indeed
Her path, and clashed with her steed.
Iseult spurred her mount, and it reared,
And, as she struck again, and steered
The creature, she parted her thighs,
As she steadied herself in surprise.
Her palfrey ran on; in doing so
It slipped on the wet ground below,
And being newly shod sank deep
Into the mud as it sought to leap.
As it plunged in the hollow there,
A plume of water leapt in the air,
And splashed cold against her thighs
As she parted them so as to rise
And strike hard with her spurs again.
Iseult, shocked, still grasped the rein,
Let out a brief cry, but said naught,
Yet laughter to her heart it brought,
So great, though she'd been in mourning,
She could scarce have kept from smiling.

Kaedin saw her laugh, and thought,
Though indeed she'd uttered naught,
That she had heard him say a thing
Foolish, shameful, or demeaning;
For he was diffident, though true,
And good, and ever gallant too.
He feared what might follow after
On hearing his sister's laughter,
And that he must bear the blame,
So he questioned her on this same:
'Iseult, you laughed with laughter deep,
Yet I know not why you should keep
This to yourself; unless I know
The truth I shall mistrust you so.
You can try to deceive me now,
But if I learn of it later, I vow,
No loyalty or love hereafter
Shall you have of me, dear sister!'
Iseult on hearing his strong intent,
Knew it would cause true discontent
If she refused, so she replied:
'I laughed at a thought deep inside,
After what happened, for I recalled
How my mount it leapt and stalled,
And the water it splashed my thigh
Higher than ever a hand came nigh,
Higher than ever Tristan sought.
My brother, this was all my thought.'

(Kaedin was troubled by the dishonour to their family that her admission revealed, and reproached Tristan for it. Tristan revealed his love for, and loyalty towards, Iseult the Fair, and how even Brangwen, her lady-in-waiting outshone Kaedin's sister in beauty. Kaedin demanded proof of that. Tristan showed Kaedin the Hall of Statues, and promised that he should have the living Brangwen for his own. They set out for England together.)

Tristan and Kaedin in England

STRAIGHT to England they journeyed then,
To see Iseult, and seek Brangwen,
Kaedin wishing to find her there,
Tristan to view Iseult the Fair.

Now why draw out each element,
Or speak what is irrelevant?
I'll give the outcome and the sum.
Tristan and Kaedin had come,
After journeying through England
To a city, in that fair land,
Where King Mark was to spend the night.
Since the king was not yet in sight,
Tristan, knowing the road, set out
With Kaedin, to search about.
On and on they rode, to view
The land, and seek his retinue,
And when the king had ridden by,
The queen's company met their eye.
They dismounted beside the way,
While the squires were told to stay,
And climbed into a large oak-tree,
From which the road they might see.
There her passage they could view,
Unseen by all her retinue.
Came the footmen, and the boys,
Came hounds and bitches, midst their noise
The kennel-lads, the messengers,
The grooms, and the harbingers,
The scullions and sumpters too,
All the vast and motley crew,
The huntsmen astride their hunters,
And the palfreys, and the chargers,
Led by the reins, in the right hand,
While falcons on the left did stand.

Great was the crowd upon that road.
And great the splendour it did bode.
Kaedin gazed at these wonders,
Amazed by the wealth and numbers,
But saw not Iseult or Brangwen,
The queen or the lovely maiden.
But then the laundresses appeared,
And the outer chambermaids neared,
Who managed the lesser chambers,
Moved and made the beds, moreover,
Sewed the clothes, and did folks' hair,
And aught else that was their affair.
Then Kaedin cried: 'Now I see her!'
'No,' said Tristan, 'they're no other
Than her mere outer chambermaids.'
The chamberlain his passage made,
And then a dense throng of knights,
And young gentlemen came in sight,
All noble, brave, fair as angels,
Singing sweet airs and pastourelles.
And a host of ladies then they saw,
Daughters of princes, and of lords,
Come from many a distant land
All riding together, hand in hand,
Singing delightful tunes also,
And their lovers then did follow,
The well-bred, and the valiant;
Of love and loving, they did chant.
'Now,' Kaedin cried, 'now I see her!'
Thinking he viewed Tristan's lover,
'The one in front must be the queen,
Yet no Brangwen as yet I've seen!'

(Kaedin later identified the pair correctly, and testified to the queen's beauty and that of Brangwen. Tristan and Kaedin then penetrated the palace in disguise. Tristan slept with Iseult, secretly, while the virgin Brangwen, persuaded by Iseult, after some prevarication, took Kaedin as

her lover. Cariado and his allies learnt of her indiscretion, however, though Tristan and Kaedin escaped unrecognised. Cariado returned and confronted Brangwen for having slept with a cowardly man who had simply fled when challenged.)

Part XV: Thomas: Brangwen's Revenge

Brangwen reproaches Queen Iseult

BRANGWEN was full of grief and anger,
Insulted, she stayed no longer,
But to Iseult the queen, she ran,
Whose thoughts were full of her Tristan.
'Lady,' cried Brangwen, 'I am dead!
Ill the day when our lives were wed,
Ill met you, and your friend Tristan!
For you I renounced my own land,
And now thanks to your foolish heart,
I have lost my maidenhead; your art
It was to make me love you so;
You promised me great honour though,
You and that perjurer Tristan,
May God grant him in this ill land
Ill luck, and for ever and a day!
Twas he who first shamed me, I say.
Recall how you sent me to the wood,
Those men had killed me where I stood;
Twas not of your generosity
That those villains showed me mercy;
My enemies there did me more good,
Than your friendship ever could.
A foolish wretch and wrong was I
To trust you thereafter; why did I
Ever do so, when you told me, oh
So readily, you sought my death?
Why did I not seek your last breath,
Seeing you sought mine, casually?

And yet I forgave you, lovingly,
But now the wrong's again revived,
By this deception you contrived,
Regarding Kaedin, cursed be
You and all your nobility,
If such is my reward! You honour
Thus my love and my endeavour?
Kaedin sought aid and company
To work his sad debauchery.
Iseult led him on so to do,
To draw me into folly too.
You, my lady, wrought my shame
To carry on your evil game,
You have brought on me dishonour,
Ruined our friendship forever.
Lord, how you sought to praise him,
Merely so that I might love him!
There never was a man of his like,
Noble, distinguished and warlike!
The knight you made him out to be!
The best in all the world, was he,
Now he is the greatest coward
That ever bore a shield or sword.
May he be shamed and ruined so,
For having run from Cariado!
None there is from here to Rome
So cowardly; gone scurrying home.
So tell me now Iseult, my queen,
Since when were you a go-between?
Where did you learn the bawd's trade,
Praising a man before a maid,
And thus betraying a luckless girl?
The biggest coward in all the world
And you have helped him shame me,
I who have been wooed by many,
And kept myself safe from them all.
Thus, to a coward, I must fall!

Tw'as you enticed me so to do.
I shall have my revenge on you.
And on your fond lover Tristan.
For I'll defy you, and that man.
And I shall seek your ill the same,
For all the vileness of my shame.'

Iseult, on hearing such enmity,
This fine display of disloyalty
From one whom she had trusted most,
Who ought of her honour to boast,
(So great seemed Brangwen's pleasure
In speaking in that vile measure)
Felt such anguish in her heart,
At her anger, it tore her apart.
She in turn was gripped by ire,
A dual torment it did inspire,
She knew not how she should reply,
Nor how to defend herself thereby.
She sighed and said: 'Ah, woe is me!
Now I have lived too long, I see.
Naught but ill of this foreign land
Have I had, oh, accursed Tristan!
Tis through you that I suffer so!
You brought me to this place of woe,
Where I remain in torment ever,
And may ease my suffering never.
Through you it seems I am at war
With my lord, and all on this shore,
Whether publicly or privately.
And yet what matters that to me?
I have endured, and should endure,
If Brangwen angered me no more,
For she would oppose me; her hate
Confounds me, it waxes so great.
She used to sustain me in joy.
Tristan she would your name employ

To shame me. Ill that day did prove
When I came to enjoy your love,
Such hatred and anger now I find!
You have taken me from my kind,
My kith and kin, robbed me anew
Of all esteem in this country too.
Twill seem to you a small thing then,
To steal from me my own Brangwen,
And all of the comfort that I knew;
For there was never a girl so true.
Between yourself and Kaedin,
You by cunning her heart did win.
You will take her to your own lands,
To serve Iseult of the White Hands;
For knowing her loyalty you sought
Her for Iseult; twas in your thought.
You acted disloyally, you must see,
When you stole her who nurtures me.
Brangwen, remember my father,
And the request from my mother;
What shall I do if, in the end,
You too leave me without a friend
In this strange land. How shall I live?
For Brangwen, unless you forgive
None will comfort me. Why need you
Hate me so, you need no excuse,
I you should wish to desert me now
And go dwell elsewhere, for I avow
Leave to go I'll grant, willingly,
If with Kaedin you would be.
Tis Tristan would have you do so,
God confound him; tis he, I know!

Brangwen and Iseult quarrel

BRANGWEN listened to what she said,
And uttered all that was in her head.

'You have a wicked heart,' she cried,
To say such things in anger and pride,
Things I have never even thought.
Blame not Tristan, tis you who ought
To bear the shame who so use the man,
Whene'er you choose, such is your plan.
If you, my lady, wished me no ill,
You would not be using him still.
You would make him answerable too,
For the act of sin that's dear to you.
I know if there was no Tristan,
You'd seek love from a lesser man.
Of his love for you I'll not complain,
But, my lady, it gives me pain,
That you have made use of me thus,
And your weight of shame load on us.
Shame indeed, if I should allow it!
Guard yourself, if you feel the hit,
For my revenge I mean to wreak.
If tis my marriage you would seek
Why not give me to some brave knight,
And not a coward who will not fight,
As you by your trickery have done?

'Have mercy, friend!' the other one
Cried, 'I have never done you ill.
Not through malice, or evil will,
Was all this affair brought about,
My loyalty to you ne'er doubt.
There's no betrayal of you here,
God save me, my conscience is clear.
For Kaedin is a noble knight,
A rich duke, worthy in a fight.
Think not that he fled from fear
On finding Cariado was near.
That is but said from envy now,
For he fled him not, I do avow.

If you hear a lie some fool begat,
Then hate not Kaedin for that,
Nor my lover Tristan, nor me.
Brangwen I swear this, faithfully,
Whate'er comes of this affair,
Whate'er the burden I must bear,
The whole court would love, I know,
To learn that you and I quarrel so.
If you bear hatred towards me,
Who then will ever honour me?
How may I ever be honoured,
If by you I am dishonoured?
One can ne'er be worse betrayed
Than by those near, whom one has weighed.
When one who's close knows all one's mind,
They may betray us, if hate they find.
Thus you, who know my all, Brangwen,
Can shame me, if tis your intent;
Yet twould be a reproach to you,
Who counsel me, if you so do,
Revealing my secrets to the king.
Moreover twas for you this thing;
There should be no ill between us.
Our anger here amounts to naught,
To shame you I have never sought.
Twas done for your good and honour.
Forgive, and forget your rancour.
How will it raise your standing,
If I'm dishonoured with the king?
My dishonour will certainly
Not further yours, it seems to me.
If I am shamed by you, confess
You'll be loved and prized the less.
For some will praise you, it is true,
But simply to cast blame on you.
For you will be the more despised,
By noble folk and, be advised,

You will have lost my love, and then
My lord's favour, and then again,
Whate'er in me he might deplore,
Don't think he'll not hate you the more.
His love for me is still so great
None could change his love to hate.
None could come between us so
That he from me would ever go.
He may hold my deeds against me,
But in no manner could he hate me;
Of my folly he may disapprove
But he will ne'er forgo his love;
May loathe my actions in his heart,
But that will ne'er drive us apart.
None who have ever wished me ill
Have won themselves the king's goodwill;
Rather he bears ill will to those
Who tell him what he hates the most.
How do you serve the king if you
Speak ill of me? In what way too
Do you achieve revenge for him
By shaming me and harming him?
Why should you wish to betray me?
What would you tell him about me?
That Tristan came and spoke to me?
What harm then did the king receive?
What good will you have done the king
By angering him with such a thing?
I know not what he's lost by it.'

Brangwen answered: 'He forbade it,
Speech with Tristan, and love also;
You gave your word, a year ago.
You have but ignored your oath,
That and his prohibition both.
As soon as it was in your power,
You became a perjurer that hour,

You broke your oath and your word,
Wretched Iseult, and ne'er demurred.
So accustomed to sin are you,
You cannot abjure it, but must do
Whate'er you will, yet had you not
Done so since childhood, you'd not
Act so; if you found no delight
In sin, you'd not clasp it so tight.
What a filly learns on being broken
Stays with her, more than a token;
And what a girl learns when young
Will stay with her, if she's not stung
By timely rebuke; forever, I'd say,
If she's allowed to have her way.
When young you made it your intent,
Thus to it your mind is ever bent.
Had the desire not proved so strong
You'd not have practised it so long.
If the king had chastised you for it,
You would not have so indulged it.
But since he let you have your way
You've pursued it to this very day.
Yet he has indulged you the more,
Because he was never quite sure;
Now I shall tell him all that's true,
And let him do as he will with you!
You have pursued this love so far
Your honour you've forgot, and are
So deep in folly that, though a wife,
You'll ne'er forsake it in this life.
As soon as ever the king knew,
He should by rights have punished you.
He has suffered this for so long
All folk think him shamed and wrong.
He should punish you in some way
That marks you forever and a day.
Great joy would it give your enemies.

You should be blamed eternally,
For betraying your lineage,
Your friends, your lord; at your age
If you'd loved honour in the least
Your wickedness must have ceased.
I know on what you were relying,
The indulgent nature of the king.
Who lets you do just as you wish,
Because he loves, you'll not desist
From shaming him; he will suffer
For love of you, the loss of honour.
If he loved you a great deal less
He would bring you such distress!
I'll not cease, Iseult, from saying
You do ill, dishonour you bring
Upon yourself; the king loves you
But you treat him as one would do
Who loved him not, but rather
Worked always to his dishonour.'

Iseult, on being so abused,
Speaking in anger, thus accused
Brangwen: 'You judge me too harshly.
Cursed be your opinion of me!
You rail like an ill-bred hussy
With your claims of disloyalty.
If I am perjured, if I am shamed,
If I have done aught you named,
Broken my word, done aught ill,
You gave me such counsel still.
We would ne'er have been intent
On folly without your consent,
But with your consent, tis true,
You taught me what I ought to do.
The great deceptions, and great woes,
The doubts, the fears and the sorrows,
And the love that we maintained,

Whate'er we did, you are to blame.
First you deceived me, then Tristan,
Then the king, twas all your plan,
For the king had known long ago
Of all this matter, was that not so.
Through the lies that you have told
You have penned us in folly's fold.
By your plans, and your deception,
You hid from him all our passion.
So you are more to blame than I,
Since I was here beneath your eye
And yet you bring disgrace on me.
So you would tell the king of me,
For the wrongs I did in your care!
But fire and flame consume me there,
Should I bear witness, if my distress
At your deceit, I failed to confess.
And if the king his vengeance take
Let you go the first to the stake!
For you've deserved to suffer so.
And yet I cry you mercy though,
Let not our secret be concealed,
Forgive the anger I've revealed.'

Brangwen cried: 'And I shall not!
Let his swift justice be your lot.
I shall go straight to see the king,
And tell his majesty everything.
We shall hear who is right or wrong,
And all shall be as it must, ere long!

Brangwen seeks audience with the king

FILLED with fury, in her anger,
Brangwen went to speak her pleasure
To the king: 'Sire, list to me,
All I say is true as true can be.'

In private she spoke thus to the king,
For she had planned for everything:
She said: 'But list a little to me,
I owe you my faith and loyalty;
All my trust and fond affection,
Is granted your honour and person;
So what I know I must not hide
As concerns what doth betide
Your honour; and had I known
Of it before, you too had known.
Of Iseult I say that she is more
Sinful than e'er she was before,
She is less now than she has been,
And if you do not guard your queen
She will be careless of her body.
As yet she has not stooped to folly,
Though she only awaits the chance.
If your past suspicions, perchance,
Were vain, yet I suffer at heart
From doubt and dread while, for her part,
There's naught she will not do, my sire,
If she can but win to her desire;
Which is why I must counsel you,
To keep her acts better in view.
For have you never heard it said:
"Folly comes of an empty bed,"
Or "Opportunity makes the thief,"
Or "An empty house leads to grief"?
And you have been long in error,
While I myself have doubted ever;
Night and day, the truth I've sought
But all my watching went for naught.
For both of us have been deceived,
When error or doubt we conceived,
She has tricked us more than twice
Without throwing she shook the dice.
Let us trick her when she doth throw,

And performs what she has in mind,
Such that she shall not have her way,
As long as she seeks to betray.
For if she is restrained the while
I believe she'll be reconciled
To the fact; Mark, tis only right,
Dishonour's upon you, day and night,
If you allow her every wish,
And let her lover seek his bliss.
I know full well, in saying this,
Many folk would think me foolish,
Forever you'll bear me ill-will.
Yet I must tell you the truth still,
Whate'er the face you put on it,
I know why you retreat from it.
You have not the courage to show
To my lady, how much you know.
Your Majesty, I have said enough;
The rest you've thought often enough.'

The king listened to what she said,
Wondered greatly at where it led,
Amazed at how she spoke of doubt
And honour, yet he'd heard her out,
As she'd known he would, while he
Was yet dissembling, as she could see.
Then was he anxious for the truth,
Imagining, though lacking, in truth,
Evidence, that Tristan sought anew
The royal haunts, as he used to do.
Then he swore to her faithfully
That he'd say naught of it openly.

Brangwen tells the king that Cariado is the queen's lover

THEN Brangwen said, with cunning:
'In speaking truth, as I am doing,

Sire, I'll hide not the love affair
And intrigues of Iseult the Fair,
We have both been much deceived
By the error that we've conceived,
In thinking that she loved Tristan
She has the love of another man
Count Cariado is ever about her,
Working at your own dishonour.
He has wooed with such persistence,
She must yield to his insistence;
He doth serve her so, and flatter,
She will take him as her lover.
But I'll say this, in truth, that he
Goes no further with her, than me.
I dare say if he were at leisure
He might gain all his pleasure,
For he is handsome, a cunning knight,
And with her morning, noon, and night,
Serves her, flatters, begs for mercy,
No wonder if she wrought a folly,
And with so well-endowed a man.
Sire, tis as if it were your plan
To let her meet with him so oft,
And thus to raise him so aloft;
All concerned still about Tristan,
While she prefers this other man.
Tristan too was cheated by her;
In England, to seek your favour,
And your pardon, he came here,
And yet, as soon as he did appear,
Iseult had an ambush set for him,
Intent, it seems, on slaying him.
She sent Cariado and, indeed,
He chased after him, full speed.
And who knows what else he did?
For Iseult, then, these men lay hid,
And surely she'd not have proved

So fierce against a man she loved?
If Tristan, in truth, lies dead
A man so brave and so well-bred,
It is a sin; and your nephew too!
Where will you find such friends anew?’

On hearing of this news, the king
Felt his troubled heart quake within,
For he saw naught that he could do;
Most unwilling to converse anew,
Since it was naught he might amend.
He answered Brangwen so: ‘Dear friend,
Make this your concern, hereafter,
For I’ll not dabble in the matter,
Though Cariado shall keep from here.
Queen Iseult must be yours, I fear.
Let her take counsel with no lord,
Unless your presence they’ll afford.
I now entrust her to your care,
The burden of it you must bear.’

Kaedin departs, Tristan remains in England

NOW Iseult was in Brangwen’s power,
And subject to her, hour by hour;
She did and said naught privately,
Unless dear Brangwen made three.
Tristan took measures to depart,
With Kaedin; both sad at heart.
Iseult remained in much distress,
And Brangwen too was grieved no less;
While King Mark’s error, on his part,
Ne’er ceased to trouble him at heart.
Cariado, suffering from his love,
Of Iseult a sorry lover did prove,
Unable to think of a single thing
To make her yield him anything.

Nor to the king might he complain;
Though Tristan now had thought again,
Deciding it was base to flee,
Knowing not how the queen might be,
Or what Brangwen might be doing.
Commending Kaedin to God's keeping,
He turned, rode back the entire way,
Swearing he'd not be happy a day
Unless he knew how matters stood
For ill, if not, perchance, for good.

Tristan disguises himself as a leper so as to approach Iseult

TRISTAN was much troubled by love.
His own fine clothes he did remove,
And dressed himself in sorry habit,
In wretched rags, a leper's outfit,
So that neither woman nor man
Might perceive that he was Tristan.
Herbs he distilled for his deceit,
So the disguise might be complete,
The potion made his face to swell,
So that a leper's it seemed, as well,
And so contorted his hands and feet
That anyone he chanced to meet
Would think him a leper indeed,
A man diseased, poor and in need.
He took a mazer, a cup of wood,
That the queen, be it understood,
Had given him the very first year
That he loved her; he'd kept it near;
And in it he placed a boxwood ball
And so made a rattle there withal,
Such as lepers bear, and the door
Of the royal court he came before,
Longing to know how things went there.
He flourished his rattle in the air,

Begged ceaselessly, but for his part
Heard naught there to delight his heart.

One day the king kept festival,
As the story doth here recall,
And went with many another
To high service in the minster.
He went forth from the palace door,
With the queen, whom Tristan saw,
And cried out as if alms he sought;
Though that twas he she knew not.
He shook his rattle, played the leper,
Calling out, full loudly, to her;
Begging Iseult, by God's great love,
That she in pity might alms approve.
The sergeants made jest of the man,
And, as she went by, thrust Tristan
To and fro, then out of the way,
Making sure that he could not stray;
One threatened, another struck hard;
Yet he pursued them, yard by yard,
Begging for alms as he went along,
All undeterred, amidst the throng;
Proving an annoyance, indeed,
Though they knew naught of his need,
He followed them into the chapel;
Calling aloud, waving his rattle.

Brangwen thwarts Tristan's intent

ISEULT, quite irritated by him,
As if in anger, stared at him
In wonder, and sought to know
Why the man did follow her so,
And gazing saw the bowl of wood
That held his rattle, and understood:
She realised that here stood Tristan,

Beneath the leper, knew the man,
Knew his form, and his features,
Those of the noblest of creatures.
Iseult blushed, her colour rising,
She went in great fear of the king,
Drew from her finger her gold ring,
But knew not how to hand it him,
Sought to throw it into his bowl,
Yet, ere she could achieve her goal,
Brangwen perceived it in her hand,
And looking closely knew Tristan.
Aware of his cunning, she cried
That none but a fool had e'er tried
To trouble nobles in this manner;
Called those fools too, about her,
Who had let him among the sound,
Where no leper should e'er be found.
Iseult she called a hypocrite:
'Whence comes now this saintly fit,
Giving your gold ring to the poor?
You would give a leper your ring?
Lady, you shall do no such thing!
Be ne'er so ready to give away
That which you'll regret next day.
If you grant him it, there's no doubt,
You'll be sorry ere this day's out.'
Then she told the sergeants there
To put an end to the whole affair,
And so they thrust him out the door,
And Tristan dared beg there no more.

Iseult brings about their reconciliation with Brangwen

NOW Tristan was convinced Brangwen
Was filled with hatred for both of them,
And he knew not what he should do.
He felt anguish, through and through.

For Brangwen had brought him to shame.
Long did he weep then, and complain
Of all those thoughts that did approve
His following the path of love,
Where he had found but pain and woe,
Danger and fear, exile also,
Such that he could do naught but weep.
Now, in the courtyard stood a keep,
A ruined part of the old fort there,
And Tristan hid below the stair,
He bewailed his effort, and care,
And his sad life so hard to bear.
He was weakened by weariness,
By much fasting and wakefulness.
Overcome by travails, and despair,
Thus he languished beneath the stair.
His life he hated, he longed for death,
He scarce could recover his breath.
And Iseult too was sad of thought,
In a wretched snare she was caught;
Seeing what she loved most depart,
In such a state and grieved at heart.
Neither did she know what to do.
Often she wept, sighed, cursed too:
Evil the day, and evil the hour,
Lingering yet in a world so dour.

After the service in the minster,
All to the palace then did gather,
To feast, and to find amusement,
Spending the day in enjoyment,
But there Iseult found no delight.
Now it chanced that, ere the night,
The porter in his lodge felt cold,
Seated there, being somewhat old.
He asked his wife to fetch some wood,
For the fire and, saying she would

Yet not wishing to bear it far,
To where, below the stair, a spar
Of kindling, and dry timber lay,
She did quickly make her way.
As into the darkness she crept,
She came on Tristan as he slept.
She felt his hairy leper's coat,
A stifled cry leapt to her throat,
Knowing not what this might be,
Thinking a devil had made entry.
Then, her heart all full of dread,
Off to tell her husband she sped.
He went off to the ruined keep
With a lighted candle, there asleep
He found Tristan, and coming near
Still wondering what it was, in fear,
Saw twas human, on looking twice,
And finding he was colder than ice,
Asked who he was, what he did there,
And why he slept beneath the stair.
Tristan granted him the essence,
The true reason for his presence,
For this old porter he did treasure,
And he loved him in equal measure.
No matter the risk, nor his labour,
He led him to the lodge, and after
Made him a bed to lie upon,
And then for food and drink was gone.
Next to Iseult a message he bore,
Gave it Brangwen as once before;
Yet in naught it said could Tristan
Reconcile Brangwen to the man.

Yet Iseult called Brangwen to her,
'Fair lady, have mercy on a lover!
Go, I beg you, speak with Tristan,
And ease his sorrow, as you can,

For he is dying of pain and woe,
And then you used to love him so.
Noble friend, go comfort him now!
For he wants none but you, I vow,
Tell him at least why you, of late,
Like him not; love turned to hate.’
‘You speak idly’, was her reply,
‘He’ll not be eased by such as I.
I, rather than health, in a breath,
Would wish the man not health but death.
None shall shame me ever again
For aiding you in your foolish game.
I should not have hid your sin,
Nor shall I now, again begin.
It has been said of us, vilely,
That you have won all this through me,
And that I, at various times,
By clever tricks concealed your crimes.
Tis said of all who serve a traitor
Tis labour lost, sooner or later.
For I served you as best I could,
And now must suffer ill for good.
If you had regard for nobility,
Service you’d have rendered me
And granted me a better reward
Than to betray me with that lord!’
‘Enough, cried Iseult, now let be!
You should not so reproach me,
With all the words I did utter;
Sorry am I, I spoke in anger,
I beg that you will pardon me,
And then go to Tristan, for he,
Will ne’er be happy till he’s had,
Speech with you to make him glad.’
Iseult cried mercy, her did implore,
Promised much, and flattered more,
Till Brangwen went to find Tristan,

And in his lodgings found the man,
Ill, and weak, in grievous case,
Feeble in body, pale of face,
Gaunt in look, and sallow of hue.
Brangwen of his pain soon knew,
She heard each sad and tender sigh,
As he begged her to tell him why,
By God's love, she hated him so,
For, in truth, it might ease his woe.
He soon gave her his assurance,
Her view of Kaedin was nonsense,
For Kaedin would come to court,
And set Cariado's lies at naught.
So Brangwen took him at his word,
And, reconciled, they both conferred
With the queen in a marble chamber,
Where they comforted one another,
In sweet accord, revealed their love,
And did their true friendship prove.
Tristan of Iseult had his delight;
When the greater part of the night
Had passed, he made leave to depart.
At dawn, for his own land did start,
Boarded ship, and set out from shore
With the breeze, to return once more,
To fair Iseult of Brittany,
Who mourned his presence, for she
Held a love for him true and deep,
Yet woe from that love she did reap,
Much sorrow, and much unhappiness,
His absence caused her such distress.
That he loved the other Iseult so
Was yet the reason for all her woe.

Tristan departs for Brittany, Iseult the Fair grieves

TRISTAN was gone, Iseult remained,

While of his absence she complained,
Who had left her in great distress.
How he did fare she could but guess.
Because of the great ills he'd suffered,
By her in private speech discovered,
Because of the pain he'd endured,
Through their love and sweet accord,
Because of the anguish and the care,
Now in this penance she would share.
For having seen him languishing,
Now she would share his sorrowing;
And just as she'd shared with Tristan
The love, now with the grieving man
She wished to share the weight of woe.
Much she did, for his sake, I know,
That ill accorded with her beauty,
And left her at longing's mercy.
She who was now a faithful friend
Of those sad thoughts that sighs portend,
Now quenched many a sweet desire,
Many a flame from love's fierce fire,
(A truer lady ne'er was seen)
With harsh leather, worn unseen,
Night and day, against her bare flesh,
And in that hard armour did dress,
Except when she lay beside her sire,
So none were aware of her attire.
And a solemn oath she did swear:
Till she knew how Tristan did fare
She would never remove the thing.
And she dealt herself much suffering
Through all that she did for their love;
Many the torments she did prove,
For this Tristan did undergo,
Much pain, and wretchedness and woe.
She found a fiddle-player to use,
And sent him to Tristan with news

Of all the manner of her existence,
And Tristan was, at her insistence,
To tell her all that was in his heart,
By such means, while they were apart.

Tristan and Kaedin again visit their loves in England

WHEN Tristan heard about the queen
Whom he loved deeply, he was seen
To grow quite sad and melancholy.
Indeed, he could not now be happy,
Till he had seen what she did wear
Against her naked flesh, set there,
Till he returned to her country.
With Kaedin he spoke, and he
And his companion made their way
To England once more, on a day,
To venture and seek fortune there,
At the jousts, and such like affairs.
They went disguised as penitents,
Their faces stained, hid their intent,
Dressing so none might know them,
And reached the king's court again,
Where they had private intercourse
With their true loves, in due course.

A great crowd attended the court
That King Mark held, where they sought
To amuse themselves after the feast,
With fencing, wrestling, and at these,
Tristan truly proved the master;
And exercised themselves thereafter,
In sports such as the Welsh Leap,
And one they called the Waveleis;
And jousted, and hurled the spear,
Reeds and javelins, once more here
Tristan was thought to be the best,

While Kaedin was above the rest,
Outshining the others by his skill.

The two companions escape to Brittany

NOW Tristan was recognised still,
By one of his friends who lent them
A pair of fine horses, and none finer,
For this fellow feared their capture,
Ere day was done; and in danger
Indeed they were, and thereafter,
They slew two lords upon that field,
And one, who had refused to yield,
Was Cariado, whom Kaedin
Killed because he'd slandered him,
In claiming Kaedin had fled,
When they'd but left, Kaedin said,
After their last visit, unseen.
He fulfilled the pledge that had been
Given when Tristan had again
Been reconciled with fair Brangwen.
After this, Tristan and Kaedin
Did take to flight to save their skins.

The two companions spurred away
Towards the shore, with scant delay,
With Cornishmen in close pursuit;
Yet they escaped the men, en route.
Together, Tristan and Kaedin,
Reached the forest, and plunged in,
Found a trail, and wandered the waste,
Until their foes gave up the chase.
They then went straight to Brittany,
Well-avenged, and pleased so to be.

Part XVI: Thomas: The Poisoned Spear

Thomas: on the erroneous variants to the tale

THIS tale is told in many ways,
My lords, but only one I praise,
Which I shall keep to in my verse,
While others may the rest rehearse.
I would not wish so to digress;
Here the matter varies to excess.
Among those used to narration,
They yield many a variation,
In telling the tale of Tristan;
Such I've heard from many a man.
I know enough of how tis told,
And what the writings do unfold,
But judging by what I have heard,
They fail to follow Breri's word,
Who knew all the tales, the doings
Of all the counts, and all the kings,
That had ever lived in Britain.
And, add to that, many again
Of us, are unwilling to agree
To the dwarf's role in the story,
Whose wife, they claim, Kaedin loved;
For, in the version thus approved,
The dwarf it seems wounds Tristan,
Poisons him, by his cunning plan,
After Kaedin is maimed, no less,
While, on account of his distress,
Tristan sends Curvenal, his man,
To bring Queen Iseult from England.
Now, Thomas declines to assent
To this, indeed tis his intent
The error in that claim to show.
For Curvenal was famed also;

Familiar throughout that region,
Known by all folk in that kingdom
As a go-between in the affair,
A messenger to Iseult there.
King Mark, moreover, hated him,
And had his people watch for him,
So how could Curvenal have sought
To offer his services at court
To the king, the lords, and sergeants,
As one of these foreign merchants,
Without their knowing, instantly,
Who he was, in that wise country?
How could he make such an assay,
And therefore bring Iseult away?
Such folk have strayed from the tale,
Far from the truth they set their sail;
Yet if they will not grant the fact,
I seek not that they should retract;
Let them go their way, and I mine.
My tale will prove it, line by line!

Tristan the Dwarf

TRISTAN and Kaedin, happily,
Returned once more to Brittany,
And so amused themselves, ere long,
With their friends and folk, among
The forest wastes, about the chase;
Or at tourneys assumed their place.
They won great praise and renown
Beyond all others who were found
In that land, for their chivalry,
And honour; and when they were free
Of such things, the hall they'd view,
There gaze upon a face they knew,
Admire their loves in statue form,
And so keep their affections warm.

By day they thus could win delight
Against the torments of the night.

One day they went forth to the chase,
But, in a while, they slackened pace;
Their company had ridden ahead,
Leaving them there, as on they sped.
Across La Blanche Lande they crept,
The shore upon their right they kept,
And there a knight they saw proceed
Towards them, on a piebald steed
At pace, and rich arms he did bear.
And held a shield of gold and vair;
Of the same colours was his lance,
His pennant and his cognizance.
He came galloping down the track,
His shield placed ready for attack,
He was big and broad, a fine sight,
And altogether a splendid knight.
Tristan and Kaedin sat patiently,
Both wondering who he might be.
Arriving, courteously he bowed,
As Tristan his presence avowed,
Asking him where, in such haste,
He was riding across that waste.
'Sir,' he said, 'my time is precious,
For tis Tristan the Amorous
I seek, where is he to be found?
Towards his castle I am bound.'
'What do you want with the man?
And who are you?' replied Tristan,
'His castle we could lead you to,
But Tristan it is whom you view,
For Tristan is indeed my name.
What do you wish then of that same?'
'Fair news is this!' the knight did cry,
'They call me Tristan the Dwarf, and I

Am of the Marches of Brittany;
I dwell by Biscay, the Spanish Sea.
A castle I own, but my mistress
Whom I love as my life, no less,
I've lost; in misadventure's course,
She was taken from me by force;
For, the night before last, from there,
Estult l'Orgillius of Castel Fier,
Carried her to his home with ease,
To do with her whate'er he please.
I bear such grief for it in my heart,
That I am well-nigh torn apart,
By misery, woe, anguish true,
Knowing not what I should do.
I have no comfort without her,
Yet love's absence I must suffer,
That of my joy and my delight,
The value of my life but slight.
I've heard it said, my lord Tristan,
Who loses what he loves, that man
Cares little for what may remain.
And I indeed ne'er knew such pain,
And that is why I sought for you;
As a knight both brave and true,
You are known and, feared on sight,
Are altogether the finest knight,
The noblest, truest on whom to call;
He who's loved most deeply of all.
So I beg, sire, of your mercy,
And of your generosity,
Accompany me, in this affair,
And help regain my lover there;
For I will offer allegiance then
And true homage if aid you'll lend.'

'Indeed, I will aid you all I can,
My friend, but now,' said Tristan,

‘We must return; at break of day,
Then will we start upon the way.’
Finding that Tristan would malingering,
‘I’faith, my friend,’ he cried, in anger,
You are never that famous man!
For I know, if you were Tristan,
You would feel the woe I suffer;
And Tristan loved so deeply ever
That he knows all a lover’s ills.
He would lend me all his skills
If he were to hear of my woe;
He would not subject me so
To the pain and anguish of delay.
Whoe’er you are, fair friend, I say
You have ne’er loved; if you knew
What true affection is, then you
Would have pity on my sorrow,
And not delay until the morrow.
He that ne’er knew love knows not
Sorrow either; dull is his lot.
Thus you, my friend, who love none,
Must feel scant pity for anyone.
Were you able to grieve with me,
Then you would keep me company.
God be with you! For I shall go
And seek Tristan and tell him so.
Only he now can comfort me.
Drowned as I am in misery!
Dear God, why then can I not die,
Having lost that for which I sigh?
I would rather that I was dead;
No solace shall I gain, instead,
No comfort or joy in my heart,
Since with my mistress did depart
The one alone whom I, above
All others in this world, do love.’

Tristan slays Estult l'Orgillius and his brothers

THUS did Tristan the Dwarf lament;
To take his leave he sought assent,
But now our Tristan's aid was won:
'Right noble sir, enough; have done!
For you have spoken rightly, and I
Must go with you,' was his reply,
'Since I am Tristan the Amorous;
I go willingly; your cause is just,
Let me send for lance and armour,
That I may fight with due honour.'

He sent for his arms and o'er the land
He rode beside that Dwarf Tristan,
For they went to lie in ambush there
For Estult l'Orgillius of Castel Fier.
They journeyed till his hold they found,
And by a wood they went to ground.
Estult was proud and, in a fight,
Called on his brothers, each a knight;
Six, and every one a warrior,
Though he surpassed them all in valour.
Two were returning from a tourney;
The two Tristans cut short the journey,
For, lying in wait beside the wood,
They struck as fiercely as they could.
The two brothers were swiftly slain,
Yet the cry was raised o'er the plain,
As far as the castle where Estult lay;
And he soon mounted a brave display,
Attacking the Tristans furiously,
Who, both well versed in chivalry,
Each a brave and valiant knight
Resisted him with all their might.

Tristan is wounded by the poisoned spear

IN this battle four more were slain,
But Tristan the Dwarf did gain
Naught but death, and our Tristan
Was wounded, where he did stand,
By a spear-thrust through the thigh,
And of its poison was like to die.
It was envenomed, yet, in anger,
He slew Estult, the seventh brother;
All were dead, so Dwarf Tristan,
The other a sorely disabled man.

Tristan's wound seems incurable

TRISTAN, with great labour, returned,
Because of the pain that he had earned;
He yet reached home, in much distress,
Where his wound they did address,
He sent for doctors to aid his ill
Many were found, and yet were still
Unable to rid him of the poison,
For none knew of this rare venom,
All were deceived by its power;
No poultice would serve the hour,
And draw it forth; oft they pounded
Roots enough but were confounded;
They culled herbs, and made potions,
But failed in their several missions,
For Tristan only seemed the worse.
The venom spread now, like a curse,
Over his body which did swell,
Inside and out, as black as hell
Was his skin; and he so lost strength
His bones showed, until, at length,
He knew that he must die unless
Fair succour his life might bless,

For none there could cure him, say I,
And therefore he seemed bound to die.
No help had cured his malady,
Yet if Iseult had known that he
Had this foul wound, then, at his side,
By her, foul death had been defied.
And yet he could not go where she
Now dwelt across the raging sea;
Moreover he now feared that land,
Where he had foes on every hand;
Nor could Iseult the Fair come there.
Of her healing touch he did despair,
Thus he suffered great woe at heart,
Great anguish where he lay apart,
Of his languor, and his great ill,
And the stench of his wound, for still
His pain worsened; he railed at fate,
The poison's evil would not abate.

Kaedin is sent to Iseult the Fair

NOW, Tristan sent for Kaedin,
And they talked privately within
His chamber, for he loved the man,
As Kaedin loved Lord Tristan.
He had the room in which he lay
Cleared of folk, for none might stay,
While they took counsel together,
Speaking thus one with the other.
But Iseult of the White Hands she
Wondered what his plan might be,
Whether the world he'd forsake,
Himself a monk or canon make.
She was greatly troubled withal,
And listened by the outer wall,
The far wall, opposite his bed,
So as to hear all that was said,

Requesting that a friend stand guard,
While she waited, listening hard.
And Tristan, straining not to fall,
Leaned his arm against that wall,
As Kaedin sat down beside him,
The pair grieving and lamenting,
That all their fine good fellowship,
Their mutual love and friendship,
Would be ended ere too long.
To their hearts did pain belong,
The anguish, pity, and the woe;
Each saddened for the other so.
They wept, and they felt great dolour
That this bond they soon must sever,
Which had proved so strong and true,
For none might forge the thing anew.

Tristan spoke to Kaedin: 'Friend,
Upon your love I now depend,
For I am in a foreign land,
And have no kith or kin to hand.
Scant happiness have I found here,
Except the joy when you are near.
Now were I in my own country,
I could seek the one to cure me;
But since no comfort here have I,
It seems, dear friend, I can but die.
My life is done, for none, you see,
Can offer any remedy,
Except Queen Iseult, for in this
She alone might own the wish
To cure me, and possess the means;
Both wish and power are the queen's.
If she but knew of my state here!
Yet how could she, and so appear?
If I found any who would take
A message to her, for my sake,

She would grant me aid indeed,
Once she had knowledge of my need.
My trust in her is such, I know
That she would strive to aid me so,
And bring me help in my distress,
For, know, our love doth ne'er grow less!
I cannot aid myself, tis true,
Tis why, my friend, I turn to you:
Generous in your friendship be,
And do this service now for me!
Bear me this message, for the sake
Of our companionship; I make
Much of the pledge given by you,
When Iseult gave Brangwen to you!
And I will give you my pledge now,
That if this thing you will allow,
Then I will be your liege man true,
Above all others I'll love you.'

Kaedin, viewing Tristan's tears,
Knowing his anguish and his fears,
Was moved at heart, and tenderly
Replied in kind, and lovingly:
'Dear companion, weep not,' he said,
'For I will go there in your stead.
To cure you, my friend, I'd ever
Run the risk of mortal danger.
Be at ease; by the loyalty
I owe to you, no fault in me,
No act of mine, no mere distress
No hardship will mean that less
Than my all is employed in this;
I'll journey to achieve your wish.
Tell me the message I must take;
Then swift preparation I'll make.'

Tristan replied: 'My thanks to you!

Listen, now, to what you must do.
With you, you must take this ring,
It is our token; be swift, take wing,
Sail to that land, aim for the court,
Say that you come there from the port,
A merchant, who fine silks doth bring;
And then be sure she sees the ring;
For, once it meets her eye, then she
Will seek some pretext, urgently,
To meet with you whene'er she can.
Greet her, as one come from Tristan;
Wish her good health from me, and say
That, lacking her, I've none this day;
I send such hopes for her well-being
That none remain for my relieving;
I wish her health in hopes of healing,
Good health rests there in my greeting,
Without her, none shall rest with me.
No thought of life have I, no ease,
No healing now, except she please
To bring them. If she brings not aid,
If on my lips no comfort's laid,
Then my health will with her remain,
And I shall die of grief and pain.
End thus, in saying I must die,
Unless she ease me, by and by.
Make clear to her all my anguish;
All the ills by which I languish;
The need for her to comfort me.
Ask that she bring to memory
All the pleasure, the sweet delight
We once enjoyed, day and night,
All the sorrows, and all the woe,
Yet the sweetness and joy also
Of our great love, so fine and true;
And how I was healed, made anew,
Once before, and how we chanced

To drink the potion that advanced
Our love, in which our death lay hid;
Nor shall be free from what we did;
It was given us in such an hour
As to leave us in death's power.
Let her recall what I must suffer
And have suffered in loving her;
For her I've lost my kith and kin,
Banished by my uncle, the king,
Dismissed in shame, and exiled
To far lands and, unreconciled,
There endured great trouble and pain,
And life and worth could scarce maintain.
But naught could sever our great love,
Grief, pain, anguish, too weak did prove.
Those who sought the most to part us,
Least succeeded, none could part us,
Space twixt our bodies might approve,
But could not thus destroy our love.
Let her remember the pledge, I say,
She made me swear to, on that day,
In the garden, where we parted,
Ere I was banished, and departed,
And where she granted me the ring.
I pledged that though in some other
Land I'd never love another.
Nor have I loved another, ever,
For I cannot love your sister,
Not her, nor anyone, I mean,
As long as I yet love the queen.
I have so loved Iseult the Fair,
Your Iseult's still a virgin there.
Oh, bid the queen, of loyalty,
In this my need, to come to me;
If she e'er loved me show it now!
Whate'er she has done, I avow,
Will profit me little indeed,

If she aids me not in my need
Nor will counter this great sorrow,
By bringing life to my morrow.
What is her love worth to me,
If she fails, in my misery?
What good her affection, indeed,
If absent in my hour of need?
Scant is its value, in a breath,
If she'll not aid me against death.
What benefit is love's fair wealth,
If she will not renew my health?'

Tristan's instructions regarding the white and black sails

'KAEDIN, what more could I ask
Of you than this most urgent task?
Do your utmost, and greet Brangwen,
Warmly, tell her my ills, and then
That, failing God's aid, I must die,
And stir her pity for me, thereby.
I cannot live long in this state,
Of pain and distress that is my fate.
Seek, my friend, to accomplish this,
Your swift return is then my wish;
Except you soon are here again
You will not see me; that is plain.
Forty days I grant, or I am dead.
If you succeed in all I've said,
And Iseult the Fair sails with you,
Take care none knows of it too;
Conceal this love from your sister,
So she hears naught of the matter;
Pretend the queen is a doctor sent
To heal my wound: such the intent.
Carry a black sail, show a white,
On your journey anent my plight,
And if on Iseult you can prevail

To come to me, let the white sail
Show still, when you return to me;
If not, the black sail let it be!
I have no more to add, dear friend;
You to God, I do now commend,
And may He keep you safe and sound!’
Then Tristan’s tears did so abound,
That at his cries, laments and sighs,
Kaedin sorrowed and wept likewise.
Kissing Tristan, he took his leave,
Leaving Lord Tristan there to grieve.
With the first fair wind, he set sail.
Weighing anchor, at his prompt hail
They raised the yard and set a course
Before the breeze, its gentle force,
Driving them swiftly o’er the deep,
Cleaving the waves at every leap.
His vessel bore a handsome crew;
It carried rare dyed silk stuffs too,
Wine from Poitou, plate from Tours,
Hawks from Spain, among its stores,
Thus might he disguise his errand,
And so before Queen Iseult stand,
Whom Tristan longed for so deeply.
Kaedin crossed the ocean safely,
In twenty days he spied the island,
The looked-for coast of fair England,
Where for the king’s court he might ask;
And seek Iseult the Fair: his task.

Right fearsome is Woman’s anger,
Men must guard against the danger;
Where a woman loves the deepest,
There she’ll take her vengeance soonest.
As swiftly as her love is granted,
Just as swiftly, comes her hatred.
That hatred once aroused is worse

Than the love she showed at first.
She knows how her love to temper,
But not her hatred, nor her anger.
Yet I know not to sour the wine,
Her temper's no concern of mine.
Recall: Iseult of the White Hands,
Nigh Tristan's chamber wall did stand,
And listened to what Tristan said,
And every word rang in her head.
Thus of their love she was aware,
Filled now with anger and despair
That she'd thought Tristan her lover,
While his thoughts were of another;
And now it could be clearly seen,
Why she had won no joy of him.
She showed no sign that she had heard,
Yet she remembered every word,
And should the right moment come,
Would wreak vengeance on the one,
In all this world, she loved the most.
Once his door she might approach,
Iseult the Maid entered his room,
And, though her rage did her consume,
Concealed her ire, tended his need,
And showed him a fair face, indeed,
As a lady should show her lover;
Spoke to him sweetly moreover,
Kissed, embraced him, every action
Bent on showing him affection,
Yet in her anger, plotting now
When she might be avenged, and how,
And, often mentioning Kaedin,
Asked when his passage he might win,
And so with the doctor might appear
To heal Tristan whom she held dear;
Yet she asks not out of kindness,
In her heart brews wickedness,

That which she'll do, if she but can,
For rage seeks vengeance on the man.

Kaedin reaches England

NOW Kaedin had sailed the sea,
Nor ceased from his voyage till he
Had come into that other land
Where he before Iseult might stand.
He'd found the Thames estuary,
And then sailed up-river swiftly,
Until, outside the harbour wall,
His crewmen let the anchor fall.
Then up to London, in his boat,
He went; beneath the bridge did float;
And landing did his wares display,
Spread out his silks, in fine array.
To noble London had he come,
No city finer in Christendom,
Of higher worth, or more renown;
Wealthy the folk in London town,
All fond of honour and largesse,
Bearing themselves with fair address.
And London is England's mainstay,
No need to look beyond its sway.
By London Wall the Thames doth flow,
And merchandise doth come and go,
From where'er Christian men do sail,
To where'er such trade doth prevail,
For the folk there are ambitious.
Now, Kaedin, once landed thus,
With silk, and wine, and hawks
From Spain, at which no man balks,
Took a great goshawk on his fist,
Cloth dyed purple as amethyst,
And a goblet, most finely made,
Fairly wrought, chased and inlaid,

And presented them to King Mark,
And then courteously made remark,
That he'd come seeking benefit,
To trade his goods, all at a profit,
And asked the king for protection,
Lest he be charged without reason,
Or suffer any hurt through this,
From some chamberlain or sheriff;
And the king granted his request,
Greeting him openly, as his guest.

Kaedin delivers Tristan's message

KAEDIN to the Queen would go
With the wares he had on show,
And then a brooch of purest gold,
For her, in his hand, he did hold;
No finer in the world was there;
He gifted it to Iseult the Fair,
Saying: 'The gold in this is pure.'
No finer had Iseult viewed before;
But then the ring from his finger,
Tristan's, he set beside the other,
Saying: 'Your Majesty, tis richer
Than the ring's gold is, in colour,
Yet nonetheless the ring seems fair.'
Now, the Queen, viewing it there,
Knew Tristan had sent Kaedin,
And Iseult's heart quaked within;
She changed colour, she heaved a sigh,
Dreading the news he brought thereby.
She asked aloud if he'd sell the ring,
Then what price he'd take for the thing,
Or if he'd other wares to offer,
All this so none might discover
Her intent; then drew him aside,
So that he might in her confide,

And so evade the watchers there.
Once alone with Iseult the Fair,
Kaedin said: 'Hark, my lady,
To what I say; oh, listen closely.
For Lord Tristan greets you through me,
As a lover doth greet his lady,
Offering his service, as a man
Ought to the one, in whose fair hand
There lies his life and lies his death;
He is your liegeman, in a breath,
And sends me to you in his need.
He says to you, through me, indeed,
That to counter death's grim force
He finds himself with no recourse
Except yourself, nor health at all,
Nor life, and must upon you call.
A spear whose tip was envenomed,
Struck him, and the wound is poisoned,
And no physicians could we find
Who'd seen a sickness of this kind.
Although they all have sought a cure,
His frame proves weaker than before.
He languishes, he lives in pain,
The stench is evil, I say, again,
He will not live without your aid,
His plea to you I have conveyed.
He begs you, by that loyalty
That you owe to him, dear lady,
To let naught in this world deter
You from hastening to your lover,
For never was there greater need,
And so you must not fail to heed
His call; he asks you to remember,
All that you've endured together,
The love, the pain, the woe, in truth!
He now despairs of life and youth.
He suffered banishment for you,

Was, more than once, exiled anew,
Losing the favour of the king.
Think of the nature of the ring:
Of the covenant that was made,
Between you, in the orchard glade,
When you kissed him, declaring,
Love lay there, within this thing.
And so he cries to you, through me,
To aid him, lady, in your mercy!
For, unless you help him now,
He'll find no cure; I here avow,
Without you he can ne'er recover;
Come! Or you will lose your lover.
These are his true words, as spoken,
And he sends the ring in token;
Keep what on you he doth bestow.'

Iseult and Brangwen set sail with Kaedin for Brittany

AS Iseult the Fair listened, woe,
Pain and anguish filled her heart,
Never, since they were torn apart,
Had she known a greater sorrow.
Deeply she mused, sigh did follow
Sigh, as she longed for her lover,
He whom she might yet recover,
Yet knew not how that might be.
With Brangwen she shared the story,
Telling her of the poisoned spear,
The wound it brought, and then the fear
That he must die; how he did suffer,
How, by Kaedin, he'd sent for her,
Or else his wound would ne'er be healed.
All his torment she thus revealed,
All the tale of how it befell,
Then asked Brangwen for counsel.
And now there began a sighing,

A sad, and a plaintive crying,
Sorrow for all his woe and grief,
Pitying his pain, that lacked relief.
Nonetheless, they had soon agreed
They must go to him in his need,
And having discussed it further,
Decided to resolve the matter,
Given the state Tristan was in,
By sailing back with Kaedin,
To bring their aid in time of need.

By evening this was all agreed,
They readied all that they required,
And when the other folk retired,
They left there, in the dark of night,
Most secretly, none else in sight,
And, by a postern in the wall,
Down to the Thames from the hall
They went, at the full of the tide;
A boat was ready, the Queen did ride
The wave, as with the ebb they rowed.
Swift they went, as the river flowed,
A mighty effort they made, and came
To his vessel, and boarded the same.
The yard was hoisted, and they set sail,
Gone while the wind did yet prevail.
They sailed then from that foreign land,
They reached the coastline of Wissant,
And then Boulogne and Le Tréport;
Twas a most happy breeze they caught,
And then, the vessel was swift indeed.
Past Normandy they ran, with speed;
With their passage they were content
The wind still favouring their intent.

Tristan waits and longs for Iseult the Fair

TRISTAN, abed and languishing,
Could win no ease from anything,
For medicine proved of no avail;
Naught they tried did there prevail.
He longed for his love to be there,
Desiring naught but Iseult the Fair.
Without her, he found scant relief;
For her he yet lived, his fond belief.
There in his bed he lay, in woe,
Hoping that she would come and, lo,
Her aid would heal his malady;
No cure without her could he see.
Each day he sent men to the shore
Lest the ship's advent was in store,
No other wish was in his heart.
Then he had a bed set there apart,
And had himself borne down to it,
So that he might behold their ship,
What way it made, and with what sail?
No other thought in him did prevail,
But their voyage, and Iseult the Fair;
His mind, will, his desire, was there.
Whate'er the world held was naught,
Except to him the Queen it brought.
Yet oft they bore him back again,
For fear it prompted, with the pain,
That she had not kept faith, that she
Would ne'er grant him her company;
Twas best to gain news from another,
Than find the vessel sailed without her.
Ho longed to watch there for the sail,
Yet dared not so, lest all had failed.
Naught was in his heart but anguish,
To see her now his only wish.
He lamented to Iseult the Maid;
Not of what rendered him afraid,
But only of absent Kaedin,

And of the cure that he might win;
And yet he feared the long delay
Spoke ill of Kaedin's assay.

The storm

NOW, hear of a sad circumstance,
A grave and pitiful mischance,
To grieve the heart of every lover.
Came there greater sorrow never
Of such love, and of such longing.
For as Tristan lay there, waiting,
And Iseult nearing, close at hand,
So eager now to reach the land,
As almost to forget her woes,
A wind from out the south arose,
And struck the yard with full force,
Checking the vessel in its course.
To luff, the crew dragged at the sail,
Against the wind could not prevail,
For the gale now gained in strength,
And roused the swell, until, at length,
The waves rose up, all dark the sky,
The sea grew black as, from on high,
The rain and sleet fell, dense as smoke,
The bowlines and the shrouds all broke;
They lowered the yardarm and did ride
The wind and waves, borne by the tide.
They had set the ships' boat on the sea,
On nearing the shores of Brittany,
And yet neglected it, by mischance;
Over it now the waves did dance,
Smashed to pieces thus and lost;
While the ship was tempest-tossed,
So great the storm now had grown,
To and fro the crew were thrown;
The best of sailors now met defeat,

For not a man could keep his feet.
All on board wept and lamented,
Grief, and woe, and sorrow vented,
Such fear had they; full loud they cried.
'Our Lord above,' Fair Iseult sighed,
'He wishes not that I reach land,
Nor live to see my love, Tristan;
He'd have me drown in sorrow too!
Tristan, if I'd but met with you,
And spoken to you, I'd not mind
That death was here; if death I find,
Love, when you hear that I am dead,
I know you'll ne'er be comforted.
Your sorrow then would prove so great,
You would suffer so at my fate,
That you would ne'er again be well.
Nor could I counter what befell;
If God had wished it I'd have come,
And sought to heal you, for, in sum,
My only sorrow must be your woe,
Lacking all help and comfort so.
And I am grieved; if I should die,
You will be robbed of aid thereby.
My own death matters not to me,
If God so wills, then it must be,
Yet when you learn that I have passed,
I know that you must breathe your last.
Of such a nature our love doth prove,
I feel no ill but through you, my love.
Except through me, you cannot die,
Except through you, no more can I.
If I am drowned so must you be,
Thus have you come to visit me;
For on dry land you could not be so.
I see your death, and thus I know,
Foreseeing death, I soon must die.
Dear friend, I fail; I'd hoped to lie

In your arms, in the tomb with you,
But now I must lie so far from you.
And yet it still might happen so,
If I drown here, you must also,
Some sea-creature might swallow us,
And forge one sepulchre for us,
For perchance it might be caught
If any such mighty quarry sought,
Who our bodies might recognise,
And so inter them; in such wise,
Honouring our love. It cannot be!
Ah, if God wished it, it might be!
O'er the wave, what seek you here?
I know not why you thus appear!
For here I am, and here shall die,
Drown here without you, yet I sigh,
For tis sweet comfort, in a breath,
That you'll know naught of my death.
None, after this, shall hear of me,
What could tell of it, but the sea?
After me, you will yet be living,
Still attendant on my coming;
Please God that you may yet be healed,
That some fair cure may be revealed,
For I long for that, and you alive,
More than that I myself survive;
More than my rescue from the sea,
I seek your own recovery,
So true the love I hold for you!
And yet I pray that yours is true,
For, indeed, if you should recover
After my death, I fear, my lover,
Lest you find comfort with another;
And thus forget me, my dear lover,
When I am dead, my own Tristan.
I fear Iseult of the White Hands,
My friend, though no clear reason

Have I, indeed, to fear her person.
And if you should die before I do,
Then I'll not live long after you.
I know not what the future brings,
But you I desire above all things;
And God grant we may be together,
So I might heal you, love, as ever,
Or we two of one sorrow die,
And so beside you yet I'll lie!'

Surviving the storm, they raise the white sail

WHILE the skies brought no relief,
Iseult gave way to woe and grief;
And the gale blew a full five days,
Bringing chill rain and hail always.
Then the wind fell, and all was fair.
They hoisted a white sail with care,
And made good speed o'er the sea
Till they found the coast of Brittany.
When Kaedin those shores did spy,
He ordered the sail raised on high,
So that whene'er they came in sight,
All could see if twas black or white.
He'd show it, bright against the sky,
For the last day of the term was nigh
Lord Tristan had assigned when they
Toward England had made their way.

The ship is becalmed

AS they sailed steadily on their course,
A warm breeze blew, but spent its force,
And then the wind dropped completely;
All smooth and still now was the sea.
The ship moved not, this way nor that,
Upon that surface, so calm and flat;

And they had lost the one ship's boat,
And so in great distress did float,
Seeing the shore so close at hand,
But with no way to reach the land.
Back and forth, they drifted there,
To and fro, as the swell did bear.
They advanced not upon their way,
But, troubled, must endure delay.
Iseult was now distressed the more;
She saw the land that she longed for,
Yet could not reach it, must abide;
Of her longing, she well-nigh died.
Those in the ship wished for land,
But saw dead calm on every hand.
Iseult, endlessly, railed at fate.
Those ashore could do naught but wait,
For those folk saw not the ship as yet
From where they were, and so Tristan
Remained a wretched woeful man;
Oft he lamented, oft he sighed,
Hoping that Iseult reached his side;
He tossed and turned, tears flowing,
And well-nigh died of his longing.

Iseult of the White Hands deceives Tristan

IN his anguish, in his affliction,
Iseult his wife appeared; treason
She thought on and cruel deceit:
'My love,' she said, 'I see the fleet!
Kaedin comes now o'er the sea;
They make small headway certainly,
But nonetheless I've seen them true,
Enough to know he returns to you.
God grant now that he bears good news,
To comfort you!' Such was her ruse.
Now Tristan raised himself in bed,

And to Iseult, his wife, he said:
‘Fair friend, do you know for truth
It is his ship? Say now, in sooth,
What colour of sail does it show?
She answered: ‘It is his, I know,
And the sail that it bears is black!
Tis raised on high for wind they lack.’

The death of Tristan

AT this Tristan was plunged in grief,
None e’er grieved so, tis my belief;
Then he turned his face to the wall.
‘God save Iseult, and I,’ he did call;
‘Since you come not to me, my love,
Then of love for you, I must remove;
For I can cling to life no longer;
I die for you, Iseult, sweet lover.
You show no pity that I suffer,
And yet you will grieve hereafter;
It comforts me, my love, that you,
In pity, my sad death shall rue.’
‘Iseult, my love!’ three times he cried;
And at the fourth cry, thus, he died.
And all his knights and company,
Though all that house, wept bitterly,
The cries full loud, great the lament.
Then the knights and sergeants went
To bear him from his bed, and they,
Upon a cloth of samite, did lay
His body, and covered it withal,
With a long and broad striped pall.

Iseult reaches land to find Tristan dead

AND now the wind rose, out at sea,
And struck the white sail forcefully,

And so it brought the ship to land.
Iseult descended to the strand,
Hearing the tolling of the bells
From the minster and its chapels
And the mourning in the streets,
Asking the news of all she meets;
Who was it they bewailed so sore,
Who were these bells tolling for?
And an old man cried: 'Fair lady
As the Lord above shall save me,
Of sorrow now we own full more
Than any folk e'er knew before.
Tristan, that noble soul, is dead:
Comfort he brought us; us he fed,
Generous to the needy, his hand
Ever an aid to the wretched man.
He died, but now, in his own bed,
All of a poisoned wound, they said.
Never did such mischance befall
This realm, that e'er I can recall.'
On hearing this, tis my belief,
Queen Iseult was struck dumb with grief,
So much so, she ran through the street,
Without her cloak; none ran so fleet,
Up to the palace thus, ran the queen,
Nor had the Bretons ever seen
A woman of so great a beauty.
All wondered, throughout the city,
Whence she came, who she might be?
Iseult went to where she might see
Tristan's body, and then she prayed,
Turned to the east; farewell she bade:
'Tristan, my love, I see you dead,
There is no reason why I, instead,
Live on; as you died for my love,
So I now die of grief, my love,
Grief that I could not come in time,

To heal you, no reason or rhyme
Is there in this, naught to console
Me now or ever, or ease my soul,
In naught now may I find delight,
Nor joy, nor pleasure: my sweet knight.
Cursed be the storm that brought delay,
So I might come not till this day!
If I had come, in time, to you,
I would have brought you life, anew,
And spoken tenderly of our love,
That between us so sweet did prove.
I would have then bewailed our fate,
Our joy, our rapture, the woe of late,
The pain and sorrow of our love;
I would have kissed you so, my love,
Recalled it all, embraced you here,
And if I had failed to cure you, dear,
We would yet be with one another,
For we would thus have died together!’

The death of Iseult

‘YET since I have come, all too late,
Fearful of what might be your fate,
And find you dead, then thus will I
Drink now of that same cup, and die!
You have laid down your life for me,
Then I shall a true lover be,
For now, in turn, I die for you.’
She took him in her arms, anew,
And, lying full length, kissed his face,
And mouth, as, in a tight embrace,
She held him strained to her closely,
Lips to lips, body to body;
And thus she rendered up her spirit;
Such was the death Iseult did merit,
Of grief for her love, her love beside,

Thus she ended, at Tristan's side.
Tristan died of longing, that day,
Iseult, that time did her betray.
Tristan died of his love, no less,
Iseult of pity, and tenderness.

Thomas bids his farewell

THOMAS thus the tale did tell.
To all lovers he bids farewell,
The pensive, and the amorous,
The longing, and the envious,
The happy ones, and the reverse;
And all who hear or read this verse.
If I've not pleased with my dower,
Yet I have done all in my power
To tell the tale, and spoken true,
As I did promise, at first, to do.
The tale I've told, and for all time,
And have recounted it in rhyme,
As a model and to beautify
The story; and please, by and by,
All lovers, who, within my art,
May find what they then take to heart.
So let it comfort their condition,
Countering wrong, and alteration,
Countering pain, and woe, and cares,
Countering all Love's nets and snares!

The End of the Tale of Tristan