

## TRISTAN & ISOLDE: THE MYTHOS OF THE CHRISTIAN OCCIDENT

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### ABSTRACT

As the title shows, these lines deal with the myth of Tristan and Isolde, the myth of the Christian Occident. On the basis of two works—*L'amour et l'Occident*, by Denis de Rougemont, who primarily considered the myth from the point of view of cultural history in its relationship to Catharism and to courtly love in the twelfth century,; and, *We: Understanding the Psychology of Romantic Love*, by Robert A. Johnson, which was an attempt to synthesize Christianity and the work of C.G. Jung—the content of the myth is presented using the libretto of Richard Wagner's opera, at the same time pointing out what Wagner omitted and changed in the medieval originals.

Tristan's search for his *anima* (in the Jungian sense), "the islands of consciousness" beyond the sea of unconsciousness, the love and death potion, and the process of individuation are also dealt with.

"Romantic love," as described by the myth, is a mistake according to Robert A. Johnson—in fact it is the Occidental mistake *par excellence*. The levels of the *anima* on the one hand and of ego-awareness on the other are confused in that an attempt is made to live out at the earthly level the *anima*, which is not of this world. In that case, it is only in death that this duality can be made a unity, one whole, a synthesis. Here a further investigation is made as to whether this is really so, and why. Finally, the question is asked whether "romantic love" occurs also by mistake in mysticism and in art, or whether it is due rather to the development of a higher level of consciousness that is required for passing through an essential initiation process and as a precondition for a work of art, if not perhaps part of the Royal Road ...

### Introduction

"When our life turns sterile we start to look for the anima,"<sup>1</sup> however, "Its gaze (that of the anima) is set on cosmic reckoning, not on human values."<sup>2</sup>

They, the lovers, have taken up the search for the anima. They now react to the vibrations of another world and find themselves on another level of existence.

"No, here is not the enchanted garden. Yet one day, dear lady friend, we will enter united the land of happiness, from which no one returns. High up into my beautiful house of glass; the sun fills it with its rays, the winds are unable to shake it. There I will bring my queen into my

chamber of glass, all covered with roses, all flooded with light in the morning when it is touched by the sun.”<sup>3</sup>

With those quotations, found in *Traumvorstellung Liebe—Der Irrtum des Abendlandes*, by Robert A. Johnson, we find ourselves directly in the heart of Tristan (and Isolde), the saga of love and death, of Eros and Thanatos, amidst the mythos of the Christian Occident. Another work also sees the mythos of the Occident in this myth, namely the Mythos of the Occident per se: *L’amour et l’occident* (“Love and the Occident”), by Denis de Rougemont. Both works serve as the base of this essay.

Both works emphasize the mystical background of the myth. However, they mainly aim at the Eros of which it sings, as an error, which characterized the Occident, which makes impossible the Agape, the love for humanity, or respectively, the love in marriage or the love between man and woman. Denis de Rougemont looks for the historic-cultural origins of the myth and connects it to the *amour courtois* of the troubadours, the *Minnesingers*, which in turn is the indirect result of Christianity on the one hand, while on the other hand, can be traced to a hidden resurgence of Catharism, a Gnostic, Manichaeic-related, dualistic doctrine, which negates the incarnation of Christ,<sup>4</sup> and which in the eleventh century had been declared heresy and eradicated in bloody persecution by the church.

My purpose is not to take issue with this, but to also mystically interpret the mythos of the Christian Occident and to point to the mighty path to enlightenment that it represents. This is the way to regeneration, to the third point of the triangle of the material plane with the point at the top. And may this third point be in the “beautiful house of glass,” outside the earthly, which “holds the souls captive,” outside the day that turns into night, far above in the unearthly light of the night.<sup>5</sup>

## **The Myth**

What is a myth?

It is a tale that originated in the distant past—in a time of magical ideas.<sup>6</sup> A myth, therefore, corresponds to very remote layers of the psyche—those layers where the archetypes dwell.<sup>7</sup> A myth has an archetypal character. It does not explain, it shows. It does not proceed logically, but magically.

The characters of the myth symbolically embody forces of nature or aspects of human existence. They are therefore impersonal.

A myth is a collective dream. As in the individual dream, where the dreamer as well as others may appear, the mythical characters may be one thing, or something else. Tristan, for instance, is his ego as well as his soul. Isolde, Tristan’s anima,<sup>8</sup> meaning Tristan’s soul, is also the feminine or even more so, the subconscious. Morolt, too, the invincible knight of Ireland, represents the feminine, albeit a different, threatening aspect of the feminine, when it is ignored or rejected.<sup>9</sup>

It is said that this myth had come from the north, across the sea to the land of the Celts, Cornwall, Ireland, and Brittany. Only as late as the twelfth century—in the time of the troubadours, the German *Minnesaenger*, that is to say, courtly love—did it appear in written form. Among the authors were, in the twelfth century Bérout, Thomas (an English monk), Robert (a Norwegian monk), and then Gottfried von Strasbourg in the thirteenth century. However, only fragments of these versions exist, which in the nineteenth century, were reconstructed into a whole by the scholar Joseph Bédier.<sup>10</sup> The last version is that of Richard Wagner's libretto for his Opera, *Tristan und Isolde*. In writing the libretto, Wagner mostly relied on the versified novel, *Tristan*, by Gottfried von Strasbourg.<sup>11</sup>

### **Richard Wagner's Version**

Richard Wagner, because he dramatized the story mostly through his music, simplified the essence of the old versions to the extreme, while he, for the sake of the drama, left out key aspects of the myth, which nonetheless are very important from the standpoint of mystical significance. Since the content of the Wagner opera is sufficiently familiar today, I will not refer to it in reporting the contents of the myth. However, in the end I will touch on the most important Wagnerian omissions.

In Wagner's version, the story begins as Tristan takes the Irish Princess, Isolde, across the sea to Tintagel and his uncle, King Marke of Cornwall. There, King Marke lives amongst his purely masculine court of knights. We will see that the ship sailing the sea is present as a conveyance throughout this story. Tristan is at the helm with his confidant, Kurvenal. Isolde sends her maid, Brangaene, to Tristan.<sup>12</sup> He should come to her. Tristan replies with the significant lines, which are those of the leading ego:

*Should I at this hour  
abandon the helm,  
how would I safely point the keel  
towards King Marke's land?*<sup>13</sup>

Kurvenal, lying at the feet of his master while playing the harp, has only derision for Brangaene's visit. When Isolde hears of this, she knows what she has to do: kill Tristan and die herself.

She relates to Brangaene the history of the story, which we learn of in this way. In a duel Tristan had killed the hitherto invincible Morolt, the knight of Ireland, and Isolde's betrothed in the opera. Every four years Morolt had been used by the Irish king to bring in three hundred young men and three hundred young maidens, none over fifteen of age, to be used as slaves. Tristan sent the head of the vanquished Morolt to Ireland. However, neither he nor the court of King Marke had been aware that a splinter of Tristan's sword had remained in Morolt's head.

Tristan himself had been wounded in the duel by a poisoned spear point. The following events are highly symbolic. No one at the patriarchal court of King Marke at Tintagel knew how to treat the wound. Tristan had them take him out to sea and, in a little boat without a rudder, he was at the mercy of the waves for seven nights and seven days, accompanied only by his harp. Fate had

him drift to Ireland. Only Isolde, because of her knowledge of all herbs, was able to heal him. Because of having killed Morolt, Tristan called himself “Tantris,” to hide his identity. Once he felt strong enough again, Tristan returned to Tintagel. King Marke was looking for a bride. The barons were jealous of Tristan and urged the king to beget an heir to the throne in order to prevent Tristan from becoming king.

Tristan praises the blond Isolde beyond measure. To prove his loyalty he himself travels to Ireland to woo Isolde for his uncle and lord. It is only then that Isolde notices the notch in Tristan’s sword.<sup>14</sup> She fetches the splinter from Morolt’s head and sees that it fits the notch exactly. This is again a very symbolic detail. Isolde recognizes Tristan. In Wagner’s version, as he sleeps, she raises her sword to kill him. But at this moment he awakens, looks at her, and she drops the sword.

While still on the ship, Isolde didn’t know that Tristan was marked by fate. His father, King Riwalin of Lohnois, died shortly before his birth in a fight with the brutal Duke Morgan, and his mother, Blanchefleur, sister of King Marke, died shortly after she gave birth to him. Tristan was born in mourning, hence his name, which is derived from *triste*, meaning sad. This circumstance is of great significance for a psychoanalytical—but also for a mystical—interpretation of the saga. “Coincidence” had it that, after the death of his parents, having been kidnapped by Norwegian pirates, he landed at the court of his uncle, King Marke, at Tintagel.

So the musical drama by Richard Wagner takes off where Tristan takes Isolde as bride to King Marke. After Brangaene has told Isolde about the result of her visit to Tristan, Isolde asks her confidante to fetch from the cabinet the vessel with the deadly potion that her mother, the sorcerer queen of Ireland, had given her to take on her way along with a love potion. Aghast at Isolde’s intent, Brangaene exchanges the deadly drink for the love potion.

Land is in sight. King Marke with his barons are already waiting for Isolde on the shore. Isolde lets Tristan know that she will not go ashore before he has come to her. He comes. She pretends to want to have a drink of atonement with him and hands him the cup with the deadly drink, or so she believes. It is, of course, the love potion. After Tristan has emptied half the cup, she drinks the other half. Thereupon the two fall into each others arms and become oblivious to the world. Brangaene reminds them of the mortal danger, but Tristan answers: “Come then, oh death!”

But Melot, an evil baron, succeeds in delivering to the king the evidence of adultery and breach of trust. Now Tristan, after having been wounded once more in a duel with Melot, has to leave the country. He reaches Brittany, and the castle of his birth, by ship.

In the third act, Tristan, severely wounded, awakes and waits for Isolde. He keeps asking Kurvenal, whether the ship is in sight. Finally she comes, but he dies at the instant she appears. Then, in this highly dramatic scene, a second ship appears. King Marke, who has been informed by Brangaene of the love potion and therefore of the innocence of the lovers, has come to forgive them and to unite them. But, transformed in the consciousness of her love, Isolde dies next to Tristan.

## **What Wagner Omitted and Altered from the Original Material**

As mentioned earlier, Richard Wagner simplified the original text of the story for his musical drama, and some of it he altered. Thus he makes two drinks out of the love and death potion, which does not make sense because, as Tristan says, with their love, he and Isolde, have also drunk death.<sup>15</sup> As Wagner has made two potions of the one, he empowers Brangaene with the power of the goddess of fate, which, in the medieval texts she is not. There the two were simply thirsty; in absence of Brangaene, a young maid is looking for something drinkable and finds a vessel with cool wine, which, in reality, is the love and death potion. “Tell her,” Tristan says to Kaherdin, his friend, “she must come because we have drunk death together. She needs to think of the oath.”

Wagner totally ignores the three years that the lovers spend in the forest of Morois. But this episode is of significance because it shows how the love and death potion takes three years to be effective. In the old versions, Isolde, the queen, returns to King Marke after those three years and Tristan seeks to go out to prove himself as a knight, which was common in those days. So, they return to the world after three years.<sup>16</sup>

Tristan even marries—not Isolde the blond, but another Isolde, Isolde the white-handed. This circumstance, which Wagner omits, is of enormous significance because the two Isoldes symbolize Eros and Agape, the divine and the worldly love, the soul and mortal human as they exist in this world. However, Tristan neither touches his wife on their wedding night, nor at any time later, because he has sworn never to love another than his Isolde the blond, his anima, his soul.

### **“The Island of Consciousness”**

Before we come to the central statement of the myth, the love and death drink, it is necessary to explain the geography of the psyche with its islands of consciousness.

Tristan was born at Lohnois in Brittany. His parents die after his birth. Riwalin and Brancheleur, the two poles of one duality, cease to exist as a duality as they bring a child into the world. This child, Tristan, is placed into the world of the finite in a state of bereavement.<sup>17</sup> Lohnois represents the, as yet undifferentiated, world of the child, who does not perceive a difference between self and world. From old versions we learn that Norse pirates abducted him out to sea. As a result of a storm he gains freedom and lands on the Cornish coast, where fisher folk take him to King Marke.

Tintagel—masculine and patriarchal—symbolizes the ego-consciousness.<sup>18</sup> The sword, the army camp, the eternal fighting, the brutal Duke Morgan—all this is part of it. When Tristan is wounded by Morolt—which represents the masculine aspect of the feminine, which, when ignored, avenges itself by means of the masculine, as when the ego ignores the soul, the subconscious—no one could heal him at Tintagel.

Then Tristan does the only right thing. He leaves terra firma, seeks the sea in a boat without a rudder, with only his harp—the instrument of the feminine, the lyrical—and sets himself adrift in

the waves. He lands on unknown shores in Ireland, the isle of the feminine. In those days Ireland was the unknown, the Island of Utopia. Later this non-location of Utopia (ουτοπος = non-place), this *terrae incognitae*, would be relegated to the white areas of maps. Today we have to look for utopia in the universe, in the future, in parallel worlds, or in our inner self with its countless levels of consciousness. Tristan symbolically weighs anchor, hoists the sails, and goes to sea in search for his soul. Like travelers in all utopian novels, he becomes shipwrecked. Here the potion stands for the shipwreck, for the paradigm, or the change of levels within the consciousness, respectively. Tristan leaves the familiar fields of the ego and seeks the unknown.

## The Potion

The potion, the *vin herbé*, the herbal wine, partially consisting of wine and herbs and partially of magic spells, is “at the same time natural and supernatural.”<sup>19</sup> The potion signifies that the ego as the “conscious” part of the psyche, meaning as the active instrument of God, sinks from the material level into the waters of the soul, into sub-consciousness. The ego is thus submerged.

We should recall these admirably concise classical verses which Racine puts into the mouth of Phedre, in which “the agitation of the spirit takes her outside of herself” when she sees Hippolytus, her son-in-law for the first time:

“I saw him, I blushed, I paled at the sight,  
Trouble arose my fearful soul,  
My eyes could not see, I could not speak,  
I felt my whole body in transition and burning...”

(Racine)<sup>20</sup>

Heaven opens and falls down into the world. Because of the intrusion of the transcendent into the immanent, the numinous into the human, life gains a purpose. The passage from Yang (Tintagel) to Yin (Ireland) happens in a fraction of a second.

The sterility of life within the bounds of the ego-island comes to an end. No longer are masculine pastimes the order of the day, but the affairs of the soul. The soul is symbolic of the female principle. The religious ecstasy, the otherworldly intensity of the Eros, also called romantic love, makes life worth living. It is the striving for purpose, for completeness, for unity with God—a religion.

But the potion has yet another meaning, one which is typical for the Christian Occident. I will return to this subject later. This going beyond the ego-consciousness, this submerging into the waves of the subconscious, happens in the Occident through the idealizing projection of the anima, or the animus, unto another human being. The divine, without substance on this plane, still chaotic, in the Occident has to take shape, has to manifest itself so we may experience it.

But the home of Eros is the infinity of the un-manifested, the space-less, the eternal. This is the reason why we humans of the Occident, who are caught in the duality of our existence, find this form of love so unspeakably painful. This is the pain, experienced by all mortals experience who

seek, in this way, to draw the world of the Divine down to the physical life with its finite boundaries.

When we are in love—and this only happens in the Occident, as Denis Rougement has shown,<sup>21</sup>—it is as if we were in a magical chamber of mirrors. The mirrors are like the projections of our self. They reflect our own image ad infinitum and nothing else. In this infinity, and thus in this eternity, we are no longer of this world, though still caught in our earthly existence.

*When two mirrors look at one another,  
then Satan plays his favorite trick  
and opens here in his way  
The perspective into the infinite.*

—Walter Benjamin<sup>22</sup>

This “tortured reflection of the divine kingdom” in romantic love, which holds one captive acts like a drug, creates happiness, makes one drunk with a happiness that is not of this world and therefore unbearable. This is why Tristan, after the three years in the forest, feeds his passion by repeated journeys to Isolde, and Isolde on her part, keeps this cosmic, intensive drama alive, which makes possible her admission into the enchanted garden.

*My suffering is different from everything;  
Because it is comfort and joy to me;  
My suffering is what I wish for,  
And my pain is my sanity!  
I cannot understand why I complain,  
For my suffering comes to me because I desire it.  
It is my own wish that turns into my suffering  
I get so much joy from this wish,  
That I suffer quite comfortably,  
And so much gladness from my pain,  
That I am sick with joy.*

—Chrétien de Troyes<sup>23</sup>

### **The Occident and the Process of Individuation**

We will now briefly look at why this projection of the anima/animus could only happen in the Occident. Denis de Rougement shows how Eastern religions, which teach becoming one with the Divine through asceticism, meditation, and other exercises as the highest goal, do not know romantic love. Where God or the highest principle is good and the world, as in the dualistic religions (Manichaeism, Gnosticism, Catharism), is bad, there can be neither Eros nor Agape because our human neighbors, as part of the world, cannot be worth our attention. In Christianity, however, God is incarnated in Jesus, becomes human, becomes creation, which—since divine—is worthy of love.<sup>24</sup> Because of the death of the “Old Being” on the cross<sup>25</sup> (meaning *death* according to the idea of God in the Old Testament) and the resurrection on the

third day (the number three: a cycle, the first closed spiral of the never-ending journey of the soul to God), are humans saved, even down here, with everything that exists. With the God of the New Testament, humans become the smiths of their own destiny. But Zen has recognized this as well. Here we find: “This is the earth—it is the way.”<sup>26</sup> Love of our neighbors on the one hand, and Eros and Dionysian ecstasy on the other, now are possible.<sup>27</sup> These are the two Isolde, Isolde of the Earth, white handed; and Isolde of heaven, the blond.

The death of Christ on the cross, for the Occident, means the salvation of humanity and of creation, i.e., their liberation. God has become human. Human beings become masters of their fate. No longer does the transcendent God have primacy but is now the immanent God, with humanity as God’s substitute, as the “transformer” of God on this level. No longer is the goal to become one with the deity, but rather the discursive way through working in this world. Thus, Christianity represents the basis for a long human adventure, the process of individuation, the end of which is not knowable.

C. G. Jung still called this process of individuation “self-discovery.” This self-discovery is also a process of becoming conscious. Seen culturally and historically, only in the Occident could this process of individuation come about and reach a point that may be observed nowhere else, resulting in: the Renaissance, with its realistic representation of persons instead of—as seen previously, or as in other cultures—the stereotypical representation of a god, a concept, an ideal, or the ornamental as in Islam; the humanism that emphasizes humanity instead of only the grace of God<sup>28</sup>; the Reformation; the Enlightenment; the declaration of human rights, which, amongst other things finds its reflection in our Western judicial system and our social systems; in our democratic thinking and our love of freedom. Also, the achievements of the mind in the sciences, technologies, and in art would be impossible without a high degree of individuality and freedom.

### **Suffering and Enlightenment as a Way to Initiation**

Tristan starts his journey as his conscious self (see above: “Should I at this hour/ abandon the helm/ how would I safely point the keel/ towards King Marke’s land?”) in search of his anima. This presupposes a differentiation, the building of a self, which is symbolized in the Occident through death on the cross and the resurrection. Where there is as yet no differentiation, there can be, through the self as acting agent, no integration of the various isles of consciousness. Reintegration requires the prerequisite of disintegration. Jung once cited a medieval alchemist, who said, “Only what has been rent asunder may really be united.” (*Solve et coagula.*) Disintegration: meaning differentiation, meaning separating and consciously uniting to a new whole, again and again and always on a higher plane. The path leads from the *prima materia* to the philosopher’s stone. At the end of the path is found the re-conquered unity.

The myth was authored in the twelfth century, in a time when courtly love, the “Minne,” that religiously profound, passionately ascetic adoration of the knight for his lady, was in full bloom. Tristan is “the firstborn of our time.”<sup>29</sup> Woman, as an opposite, was discovered at that time, even though as a projection of the anima, as an ideal and not as the worldly woman of flesh and blood. This type of love characterizes the occident yet today, even in its sentimental, watered-down form.

Psychology calls “inflation” the calling in of the anima to earthly matters: “When we place our soul in worldly situations, it will lead us into the infinite anyway. It will draw us into the impersonal and the super-personal.” How could it do differently? It is not from this world. It knows only the world of the archetypes deep in the subconscious, where God dwells. When we drink the love potion, we become the impersonal actors of the cosmic, universal drama. We lose our individuality, which is only an attribute of this material plane.

In romantic love we play the ancient roles of the collective unconscious, where there is no place for the worldly, personal, active love of our human companions. Therefore Tristan and Isolde do not love each other: “Il ne m’aime, ne je lui”<sup>30</sup> (“I don’t love him he does not love me”), Isolde tells the hermit Ogrin in the forest of Morois. And in a few words Ogrin summarizes the situation: “Amors par force vos demeine,”<sup>31</sup> (“Love impulsively carries you away”), after he has learned of the love potion, i.e., of the innocence of the “lovers,” who must love each other, who cannot help it and yet, do not love each other. It is the “Minne,” the potion.

With the love potion they have drunk death and suffering, and with the suffering the enlightenment. Suffering and enlightenment are intimately connected to one another; they are the fundamental elements of an initiation. The phoenix of myth goes through the purifying fire to be born again. Fire purifies and causes a change of substance. This transmutation is the aim of Eros. In the eyes of the world, Eros is intoxication and delusion. We are overcome by a shuddering when the numinous unexpectedly and impetuously storms into our dimension. But, as Goethe puts it, “The shudder is the best part of us.”<sup>32</sup> And, “The highest of riches we gain through a delusion, which, indeed comes to us through a gift of God,” says Plato in *Phaedrus*.<sup>33</sup> To shut ourselves out from this experience, this delusion, would mean to deny ourselves involvement because the shudder and the delusion level the way to enlightenment. “Die and become!”<sup>34</sup> we hear, once more, from Goethe.

### **Duality, in Death, Becomes Unity**

The statement that the myth of Tristan and Isolde presents is that the Eros of the Occident may rise only in death. Humanity, in the Christian-Occidental cultural circle, is driven by a dark yearning for death, which represents the total Utopia, the absolute, *terra incognita*. Eros, seen in this light, becomes destructive passion, but also represents a powerful enlightenment.

Consciousness reflects itself and further reflects its thinking subject, the object of enlightenment. This process presupposes a duality, which strives for unity. This is what Hegel named *synthesis* in his dialectic. However, in romantic love “two mirrors face each other and open the view into the infinite.” They miss their goal, as their goal is not of this world for them. But they find unity, as did Rivalin and Blanche fleur before—but on a different plane—when they brought into this world Tristan, the child of sadness.

*In the pounding swells,  
in the sounding din,  
in the wafting mist  
of the world’s breath  
to sink, to drown*

*unconscious—highest bliss!*<sup>35</sup>

Those are the last words of Isolde in the musical drama, when she lies down and dies next to the body of Tristan.

### **Final Thoughts: Mysticism and Art**

Why did the lovers have to die? Robert A. Johnson talks about the error of the Occident—the error that leads to death. And this error lies in the desire of Isolde, the blond, Tristan’s anima, to love in this earthly world. The influence of the Cathars may be sensed here. “For the Cathars, salvation was only possible through physical death, when one left this body and rose up to meet the woman on high.”<sup>36</sup> (Author’s note: they worshiped a female savior, a being of light.) And, “The teachings and ideals of the Cathars appeared again”, i.e., in a worldly form, in the cult of courtly love. In romantic love, the levels get mixed up. The divine is brought down in order to be lived on this level in another human being, in which the self is mirrored.

In this mix-up of levels lies the difference between romantic love and the love of God in the Christian mysticism of a Teresa of Avila or a John of the Cross, or in the Occidental mysticism per se, which talks to God in the passionate language of courtly love. But mysticism in the Occident loves God in Christ, “the highest Western symbol of the synthesis of the two natures” (author’s note: the divine and the human part of Eros and the Agape, all in one).<sup>37</sup> She loves him on the level of the super-conscious or of that of the self.<sup>38</sup> Because God in Divine perfection is seen as proleptical, meaning in existence before everything, which is zero. The zero sits on top of the holy triangle of the material level; it is the beginning, the end, and the purpose. But in creation, God must be realized through us. Starting at zero, the path leads to one (subconscious), from one to two (consciousness and self-consciousness), and back again to zero, which now becomes three (super-consciousness). God, through Divine creation and Jesus, becomes the Holy Spirit: “Ex domino nascimur. In Jesus morimur. Per spiritum sanctum reviviscimus,” which are the words that bring the *Fama Fraternitatis* to its close.<sup>39</sup>

The error of romantic love is that it wants to experience God—which it seeks in the sub-conscious—on the level of the self-conscious, the earthly. Then we have the two mirrors that open the view into the infinite. It can never lead to the goal of wholeness. It is a diabolic circle. Romantic love can only find fulfillment in death.

There are, however, people who consciously take the road of romantic love, the way of delusion in the eyes of the world. Because of their creative drive, they go through the purifying fire. They are the artists. They experience their anima not in the earthly life with a man or a woman of flesh and blood, but in their dreams and their work. The work of art is their symbolic death. The art is for them the third point of the triangle, the sacred, the synthesis. They need not really die through the romantic love. They have “this die and become,” and are “no obscure hosts on this dark earth.”

The question that we finally would like to ask is whether not only the artists really know romantic love. Mystics have spoken their language to God. Poets have sung of it, and Richard

Wagner could not have created his brilliant musical drama without his desperate “love” for Mathilde Wesendonck.

In the teachings of the Rosicrucians we read of what Dionysius the Areopagite has written: “God is transcendent if one sees God with the eyes of the world. But God is imminent if one sees God with the eyes of the soul” (in *Theologia Mystica*<sup>40</sup>). The artist who, like the mystics, has reached a higher level of consciousness, meaning he or she is further along on the way to reintegration, to the self, does not need to fetch the anima to experience it in self-consciousness, because he or she is no longer there. They are in a far-off place, beyond the ego-island, suffused by the anima, by an already sublimated anima. For them God is immanent. They behold God with the eyes of the soul. Thus the romantic love in art could rather be compared with mysticism than with the love of the myth. Tristan, the first modern person of the Occident, was not an artist; he saw God—or his anima—with the eyes of the world, and wanted to lower the Divine into this world to experience it here.

As opposed to the artist or the mystic, Tristan did not build the necessary canals to stop the impetuous flow of the unconscious when he looked therein for the anima. This is the reason why he is submerged. His ego is under water, submerged. The duality represented by Tristan and Isolde can only become reunited through death.

In both cases, however, in the myth as in art or mysticism, romantic love means a path to initiation, which leads through suffering and enlightenment.

### **Citation:**

*Sparing no effort or time,  
Fascinated, you venture out flying,  
And searching for the fire of the heavens,  
Butterfly, you are burning your wings.*

*“And as long as you do not understand  
This: “Die and become!”  
You are but an obscure guest  
On this dark earth.*

—Goethe, “Blessed Longing, East-West Divan,” translated by Caroline Slater, S.R.C.

### **Notes:**

1. C.G.Jung, cited by Robert A.Johnson in: *Traumvorstellung Liebe – Der Irrtum des Abendlandes* (“L’illusion d’amour ou l’erreur de l’Occident”), p.104. For „anima“ v. note 8
2. C.G.Jung, op.cit., p.204

3. Robert A. Johnson, op.cit., p.112. Cf. Denis de Rougemont : “The house of glass ... is, in Druid mythology, the vessel of death which goes beyond the clouds to the Celestial Circle of Gwynfyd,” p.276
4. Cf. <http://www.zenit.org/german/vizualizza.phtml?sid=87698> : “For Gnosticism – a mixture of Platonic dualism and far-eastern teachings wrapped in the Bible – the material world is an illusion, the work of the God of the Old Testament, an evil God, or at least a minor God; Christ did not die on the Cross, because he never had a human body, or more often, only an appearance of one, since such a body would be unworthy of Divinity (Docetism).”
5. Cf. Richard Wagner, *Tristan & Isolde*, the play of Day and Night, of Life and Death in Act II.
6. Cf. Hugo M. Enomiya Lassalle, *Am Morgen einer besseren Welt – Der Mensch im Durchbruch zu einem neuen Bewußtsein (In the Morning of a Better World – Humanity at the Dawn of a New Age of Consciousness)*. See also Jean Gebser, *Ursprung und Gegenwart* which I have translated as *The Origins of Modern Times*.
7. Cf. <http://www.cgjung.net/oeuvres/dialectique.htm> . See again the dictionary *Petit Robert*, « Archétype »: “With Jung, a original symbol having to do with the Collective Unconscious.”
8. Cf. [http://cgjung.net/alchimie/femmecg\\_jung/la\\_femme\\_chez\\_cgjung.pdf](http://cgjung.net/alchimie/femmecg_jung/la_femme_chez_cgjung.pdf) : “With Jung, ‘anima’ is understood as the feminine psychic part which dwells within men, while ‘animus’ designates the masculine psychic part which lives within women.
9. Cf. <http://daojia.free.fr/philo/tao/tao3.html> : “In all of Chinese philosophy, the principle of yin and yang is without doubt the most familiar to the Western spirit. As one aspect, it is part of the two forces of Nature, that is, the principle of duality which impregnates with entire world of manifestations. The other aspect is understood as Cosmic Order, since it operates under the dictates of the Tao. The graphic representation of the principle of yin-yang shows the two great forces of the Universe – dark-light, negative-positive, male-female – in equality and perfect equilibrium. One can distinguish a black point in the white portion, and a white point in the black portion. This is not by chance. Quite the contrary, it is a vital detail of the symbolism which reminds us that every masculine element necessarily includes a feminine principle, and that every feminine element necessarily includes a masculine principle.”
10. Joseph Bédier, *Le roman de Tristan et Iseult*, 1900
11. “The action of Tristan enters the Grail cycle and the Arthurian Legends, so that Gottfried of Strasbourg reveals this to us in his great Romance in Verse, *Tristan* (13th century). Wagner was familiar with this text from the lower Middle Ages thus through the contemporary adaptations of August von Platen, Karl Ritter the Elder, and Julius Mosen.” Cf. : [http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tristan\\_und\\_Isolde\\_\(Oper\)](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tristan_und_Isolde_(Oper))
12. Certain French texts call one of the Ladies following Isolde “Brangien” just as they use “Gouvenal” for Kurwenal, Tristan’s confidant, who would have had his training as a Knight after the death of Rivalen and Blanchefleur, his parents.

13. Richard Wagner, *Tristan et Isolde*, Opera in Three Acts, Act I, Scene II.

14. Cf. Card 6 of the Tarot, “the Lovers,” with the Hebrew letter Zaïn, which indicates a Sword. The sword is that which stabs, slices, divides and cuts. The symbolism of the sword is polyvalent. In this sense, the blow of Tristan’s sword to the head of Morolt (Morolt = Ireland = the unconscious = the feminine polarity) symbolizes the penetration of the male principle (Tintagel, the Conscious and Objective Ego) into the feminine principle; and jointly, Tristan’s wound from the poisoned blade of Morolt in single combat represents the penetration of the masculine by the feminine. However, this reciprocal penetration of one principle by the other, by one phase of consciousness by the other, is symbolized in the Legend by the instant that Tristan and Isolde are taken with one another. With Wagner, this moment is not that in which they drink the philter on the boat, as it is in the Medieval fragments, Béroul, Thomas, Brother Robert, et al., but rather when they see one another for the very first time in the Irish Court.

15. Robert A. Johnson, op.cit., p.191. Cf. Joseph Bédier, *Le roman de Tristan et Iseut*, chap. XIX, *Death*: “May it remind him of the draft which we drank together on the Sea: Ah! It is our Death that we drank!”

16. The action of the philtre is limited to three years, which correspond to recent studies on “limerence”: “Limerence, as posited by psychologist Dorothy Tennov, is an attempt at a scientific study into the nature of romantic love. The meaning of the word, which was coined by Tennov in 1977, is an involuntary cognitive and emotional state in which a person feels an intense romantic desire for another person, the limerent object.” From <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limerence>). Tennov found that the principle difference between the state of “being in love” and “loving” is that limerence is accompanied by reciprocity, and that love does not require this. The work of Cynthia Hazan demonstrates that this state lasts between 18 and 30 months and that it is due to a release of dopamine, of phenylethylamine (PEA) and oxytocin. Tennov disputes the results of Hazan and considers that the limerence can last a whole life. See: <http://www.babylon.com/definition/Limerence/French>.

17. Cf. The Myth of the Fall from an Earthly Paradise, Genesis 2:4b – 2 :26 . Cf. the “derelection” of Heidegger in *Being and Time* : the character of a being thrown into the world

18. “It is important to understand that the Ego is indispensable ... it is up to the Ego to return to the task of integrating the different levels of consciousness in the interior of the immense universe of the Psyche.” See Robert A. Johnson, op.cit. p. 51

19. Cf. Robert A. Johnson, op.cit., p.74

20. Jean Racine, Complete Works (French Edition), p.250, vers 273 - 276

21. Cf. the works cited by Denis de Rougemont et Robert A. Johnson. Cf. Jochen Köhler : “The concept of love does not exist in China. The verb ‘to love’ in China only applies to filial affection. The husband does not ‘love’ his wife.” Jochen Köhler traces the evolution of the concept of love through the centuries in his work, *Von Eros und Agape zur Normalfamilie – Eine*

*kleine Kulturgeschichte der Liebe* (Das neue Funkkolleg, « Liebe » (2), 4 Nov.2004), citing Rougemont.

22. Walter Benjamin, *Le livre des passages*, written originally in French Ed. du Cerf, 1989, Paris.

23. Chrétien de Troyes, cited by Denis de Rougemont, op.cit., p.30

24. Cf. Françoise Saint-Onge, *Occident et Chrétienté*, Flash de l'Union des Français de l'étranger, UFE, 12,2004. This article stems from the work of German political writer, Heiner Geißler S.J.: *Was würde Jesus heute sagen – Die politische Botschaft des Evangeliums* (*What Would Jesus Say today : the Political Message of the Gospels*. Cf. [http://www.satt.org/gesellschaft/03\\_10\\_wort-und-tat.html](http://www.satt.org/gesellschaft/03_10_wort-und-tat.html)

25. Cf. the Epistles of St. Paul: Romans 6:6 “Knowing that the old person was crucified with Him...” and Ephesians 4:22: “...you have been taught, that in regard to your former life, you have put off the old person...”

26. Robert A.Johnson, op.cit., p.183

27. Denis de Rougemont, op.cit. pp. 56 sqq. Livre II, *Les origines religieuses du mythe*, chap IV : *Orient et Occident*.

28. Hanno Kersting, in his doctoral thesis, *Utopie & Eschatologie im 19.Jahrhundert* (*Utopia and Eschatology in the 19<sup>th</sup> century*) opposes “ontonomy” with the autonomy of subjectivity, that is, the only gift of Promethian Hubris to humanity.

29. “Tristan is the Firstborn of our Age,” Robert A. Johnson, op.cit., p. 33

30. Cited by Denis de Rougemont, op.cit. p.31 Cf. Bérroul, *Le roman de Tristan*, vers 1413

31. Cited by Denis de Rougemont, op.cit. p.31 Cf. Bérroul, *Le roman de Tristan*, vers 2296

32. Goethe, *Faust II*, The Dark Gallery

33. Plato, *Phedrus*, Pléiade II, p.31.

34. Goethe, *Selige Sehnsucht* (*West-östlicher Diwan* (*Blessed Longing -- East West Divan*)). Cf. <http://chansmac.ifrance.com/docs/meursetdev.html>: “Jean Clairbois has developed his personal Masonic interpretation of this poem in an article which appeared in the Review *Le Symbolism* (390), in 1969.”

35. Richard Wagner, *Tristan et Isolde*, Act III, scene III

36. Robert A. Johnson, op.cit., p.96

37. Ibid. p.182

38. <http://www.rosecroix.org/Documents/ontologie.pdf> : The Higher Consciousness in Rosicrucian Ontology which is reminiscent of Jung's "Self," has nothing to do with the Superego of Freud, which comes from interjections of parental and societal commands.

39. Roland Edighoffer, *Les Rose-Croix*, p.12

<sup>40</sup>. Florian Roth, *Dionysius Aeropagita – Wie über Gott reden ?* Vortrag, Münchner Volkshochschule, 5.12.2005

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