or any other operatic form; instead, the omission of that form resulted quite spontaneously from the nature of the material.

Richard Wagner, *Drei Operndichtungen nebst einer Mittheilung an seine Freunde* (Leipzig, 1852), 143–52. Trans. P. W.

The following program note on the Prelude to *Tristan und Isolde* was first published among Wagner's posthumous writings. It was written about 1860.

An old, primeval love poem, imperishably reborn in ever-new forms and repeated in the poetry of all the languages of medieval Europe, tells us of Tristan and Isolde. For his king the trusty vassal had wooed a maid he dared not tell himself he loved, Isolde; as his master's bride she followed him, powerless to do otherwise than to follow the suitor. The goddess of love, jealous of her suppressed rights, avenged herself: the love potion intended by the prudent mother for the partners in this marriage contracted (as was then the custom) for purely political reasons, the goddess foists on the youthful pair by means of an imaginative oversight; suddenly aflame, they must confess they belong only to each other. No end, now, to the yearning, the desire, the bliss, the suffering of love: world, power, fame, splendor, honor, knighthood, loyalty, friendship—all scattered like an empty dream; one thing alone still living: yearning, yearning, unquenchable, ever-regenerated longing—languishing, thirsting; the only redemption—death, extinction, eternal sleep!

The musician who chose this theme as introduction to his love drama, feeling himself in the presence of the essential, boundless element of music, could have only one concern: how to limit himself, since the theme is inexhaustible. And so he let the insatiable longing well up one time only, but in a long-drawn-out progression, from timid avowal, gentlest attraction, through hesitant sighs, hopes and fears, laments and wishes, joys and torments, up to the mightiest compulsion, the most powerful effort to discover a breach, opening for the heart the way to the sea of endless rapturous love. In vain! Its power spent, the heart sinks back to pine of its desire—unfulfilled desire, since

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***Tristan und Isolde:* The End of Act I.** "The curtains are thrown wide apart; the whole ship is crowded with knights and sailors who joyfully wave signals to the shore, which is now seen close at hand, crowned with a castle. Tristan and Isolde remain lost in contemplation of each other, without noticing what is going on about them." Contemporary illustration, on the occasion of the first performance. (*Illustrirte Zeitung*, Vol. XLV [1865].)

fulfillment only sows the seed of fresh desire; till to the faltering eye, in utmost exhaustion, there dawns a glimmer of the most rapturous fulfillment: it is the rapture of dying, of being no more, of ultimate release into that wondrous realm from which we stray the furthest when we strive to penetrate it by the most impetuous force. Shall we call it death? Or is it not night's wonder-world, out of which, as the saga tells us, an ivy and a vine sprang up in locked embrace over Tristan's and Isolde's grave?

Richard Wagner, *Nachgelassene Schriften und Dichtungen* (Leipzig, 1895), 163–64. Trans. P. W.