

Tristan and Isolde. Death
by Rogelio de Egusquiza



Lourdes Jiménez

**BILBOKO ARTE
EDERREN MUSEOA
MUSEO DE BELLAS
ARTES DE BILBAO**

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“Musical drama is the complement to a painting, it is a living image in which it fuses with the drama of the musical expression, aiming to achieve the truth that arises from intelligence and culture...”

Rogelio de Egusquiza¹

The painter Rogelio de Egusquiza y Barrena was born on 20 July 1845 in Santander. Despite leaving at a relatively early age for Paris, where he principally lived and worked between 1869 and 1914, he maintained lifelong connections with his native region. French critics of the day recognised and praised Egusquiza’s work: both his genre paintings, which he exhibited at the official Salons and at the Petit gallery in the 1870s and 1880s and which were close to the style of Fortuny; and his later output, which is so closely identified with the iconography of Richard Wagner, of whom he became one of the composer’s principal exponents, earning Egusquiza his greatest accolades.

Egusquiza and Tristan and Isolde: a personal association

Rogelio de Egusquiza’s interest in the opera *Tristan and Isolde* was manifested at an early date. The artist recorded his second meeting with Wagner, which took place in Venice in September 1880. Egusquiza wrote: “The Maestro entered the room and was the first to greet me, extending his hand and embracing me, then saying ‘Ah, voici l’Espagne’ [...]” He then recounted that Wagner briefly left the room then returned and, “for the second time he gave me his hand, asking me ‘Vous êtes toujours aussi épris de Tristan?’”² To judge from this account it would seem that this was not the first occasion on which Egusquiza had discussed the opera with Wagner. Furthermore, he had already observed that Wagner’s music had led him to Schopenhauer’s philosophy, and the two together to a change of direction in both his life and music. As a result, from the time Egusquiza began to work on the subject of this opera in a continuous manner in the 1890s it is evident that all his drawings, preparatory studies and prints revolve around the two key moments in the drama of Tristan. The first of these moments is the death of Isolde, which takes place at the end of the opera (Act III),

1 Rogelio de Egusquiza. “Über die Beleuchtung der Bühne” [On Stage lighting], *Bayreuther Blätter*, June 1885, pp. 183-186.

2 “Ah, here is Spain! (...) Are you still as enthusiastic about *Tristan*?”. Beruete y Moret 1918, p. 17.



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1. Rogelio de Egusquiza (Santander, 1845-Madrid, 1915)
Tristan and Isolde. Death, 1910
Oil on canvas, 160 x 240 cm
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
Inv. no. 00/9

as depicted in the present work, *Tristan and Isolde. Death*,³ of 1910 [fig. 1] in the collection of the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum, which is Egusquiza's finest painting and the one that marks the culmination and completion of his Wagnerian creations. The second focus comprises his depictions of the lovers in the night (Act II), culminating in the canvas *Tristan and Isolde. Life*, of 1912 [fig. 2].⁴

The Bayreuth Festivals

There is no direct information regarding the date when Egusquiza first attended a performance of *Tristan and Isolde*. It is most likely that he was present for its first Bayreuth performance at the festival in 1886, directed by Cosima Wagner. Eight performances were given at Bayreuth that year, all conducted by Felix Mottl. There were further performances at the festival in 1889, 1891 and 1892. It should be remembered that Egusquiza also had the good fortune to attend the first performance of *Parsifal*, the last opera composed by Wagner for his theatre, the Festspielhaus in Bayreuth, in 1882. After the composer's death Egusquiza continued to attend the Bayreuth festivals⁵ in the summers of 1883, 1886, 1888, 1889, 1891, 1892, 1894, 1896 and 1912,⁶ the latter year presumably being his last attendance three years before his death and coinciding with the presentation of his last painting in his "Tristan and Isolde" cycle. We can thus see how from an early date Egusquiza focused on Wagner's three principal works, with which he was familiar at first hand: *Der Ring des Nibelungen* [The Ring of the Nibelung], *Parsifal* and *Tristan and Isolde*.

Egusquiza was not the only artist to be interested in Wagner's work. Other artists attended performances in opera houses near to where they lived, such as Hans Makart in Munich, Wassily Kandinsky in Moscow (1888), Maurice Denis in Brussels (1892), Odilon Redon in London (1895) and Constantin Meunier and Henry van de Velde in Dresden (1897). The majority, however, went to Bayreuth. Among them were Fantin-Latour, who was present at the inauguration of the theatre and the first performance of the entire *Ring* cycle (1876); Rogelio de Egusquiza, who had previously travelled to Munich to see the composer's work (1882); Jacques-Émile Blanche (1882, 1887, 1888, 1889 and 1892); Fernand Khnopff (1887 and 1889); Mariano Fortuny and Ricardo de Madrazo (1891, 1892, 1896 and 1902; the latter also in 1889); Charles Garnier (1894); and Henry de Groux (1896).⁷ Other Spaniards included Aureliano de Beruete (1894, 1896 and 1897), Francesc Soler i Roviroso (1899), Oleguer Junyent (1901), Félix Urgellés (1901), and Josep María Sert (1899).⁸

However, it was not just artists, musicians, writers and intellectuals who attended the Bayreuth festivals. Also travelling from Spain, for example, were lawyers, architects, businessmen and tradespeople, all of whom were gripped by the Wagnerian fever. The theatre in Bayreuth compiled lists of visitors from different countries, known as the *Fremdenlisten*, which provide key information for assessing the extent of the

3 The painting was initially known in Spain as *Tristan and Iseult. Death*, as published in Aureliano de Beruete's monograph on Egusquiza published in 1918, which remained the reference text for subsequent art-historical studies. In French art history it is known by the title used for its presentation at the 1911 Salon, *La mort d'Isolde* [The death of Isolde], which is possibly the most appropriate for a study and understanding of the work. For the present text I have, however, opted to refer to it by its most widely known modern title, *Tristan and Isolde. Death*.

4 I have already written about these works by Egusquiza in Jiménez 2005 and Jiménez 2007, illustrated on p. 33.

5 The French musicologist Albert Lavignac included Egusquiza in the list of visitors to the Bayreuth festivals among the numerous French artists, musicians and intellectuals who set out every summer to enjoy Wagner's works in situ. See Lavignac (1900) 1980. For more detailed information on the performances, works and programming of the different years, see Mack 2000.

6 Confirmed by Suárez García 2013-2014, p. 326.

7 See the approximate list published in Junod 2013.

8 For further information, Jiménez 2013a.



2. Rogelio de Egusquiza (Santander, 1845-Madrid, 1915)
Tristan and Isolde. Life, 1912
Oil on canvas, 227 x 162 cm
MAS | Museo de Arte Moderno y Contemporáneo de Santander y Cantabria
Inv. no. 1035

composer's reception in Spain and for determining the number of visitors from that country.⁹ Between 1876 and 1914 the festival was attended by visitors from Barcelona, Girona, Madrid, Salamanca, Toledo, San Sebastián and other locations in Guipúzcoa, Bilbao, Pamplona, Zaragoza, Seville, Granada, Almería, Málaga, Cadiz, Tenerife and Palma de Mallorca, among others. The festival received around 17 visitors from Bilbao, notably Hilario Lund, who was the Swedish and Norwegian consul in the city and who attended the first performance of *Parsifal* in 1882, and the successful society portraitist Juan de Barroeta, who saw *Parsifal* and *Tristan and Isolde* on 1 and 13 August 1891. Other prominent visitors from Spain included the architect Severino de Achúcarro in 1888 and 1891, and the painter Luis Rochelt, member of a well-known family of tradespeople and industrialists, who attended in 1891 and 1896.

From the 1880s onwards, Egusquiza was increasingly steeped in the work of Wagner. His first works associated with Wagnerian iconography¹⁰ were his portraits of the composer: a grisaille drawing of 1881 and an etching of 1883, followed a year later by a drawing on *Amfortas*, published in a special edition of the *Bayreuther Blätter*, and an article on stage lighting which also appeared in that publication,¹¹ in which he offered some observations that are fundamental for understanding the use of light in his drawings, etchings and paintings. During those years Egusquiza also collaborated with the *Revue Wagnérienne*, contributing illustrations on Wagnerian themes, as did Fantin-Latour, Jacques-Émile Blanche and Odilon Redon. The February 1887 issue advertised the display and sale of the first plaster bust of the composer, executed by Egusquiza. The *Revue* also published various articles on *Tristan and Isolde*, including an important one on its world premiere in Munich in 1865, in addition to a first-hand account of its first performance at Bayreuth in 1886¹² and a text on Celtic legends, among others.

By the early 1890s Egusquiza was thus familiar with *Tristan and Isolde* and its drama of love and death. In 1892 he participated in the first of the Rose + Croix Salons, an initiative promoted by his friend Joséphin Péladan. Egusquiza exhibited five works, two of them still relating to genre themes (*Titania* and *Floramine*) and three on fully Wagnerian subjects, including a portrait of the composer (an etching; number 57 in the catalogue),¹³ *Amfortas* (number 56) and *Siegmond et Siéglinde* [sic] (number 53). The latter work, now in a private collection [fig. 3],¹⁴ has always been identified as depicting the incestuous brother and sister in *Die Walküre*, as its title in the catalogue indicates. The present author, however, has undertaken a more detailed study of that drawing, focusing on the male figure's clothes and the use of light, while also bearing in mind Péladan's comments on it of some years later: "Ses Tristans sont d'une splendeur de vertige indicible, et je ne puis mieux dire de lui, qu'en le manifestant l'écho de Wagner comme artiste, le reflex de Delacroix comme peintre."¹⁵ As a result, it can be said that this is a first version of the artist's painting *Tristan and Isolde. Life*, of which he produced a much more synthetic etching in 1896 [fig. 4].

9 This valuable study was undertaken by Professor José Ignacio Suárez García of the Universidad de Oviedo (Suárez García 2013-2014).

10 Jiménez 2013b.

11 Egusquiza 1885. See Jiménez 2004.

12 Jullien 1886.

13 *Salon de la Rose-Croix*, 1892, p. 25 (Egusquiza).

14 My attention was drawn to it by the French collector Lucile Audouy who sent me images of the drawing and the front cover of the catalogue of the *Salon de la Rose-Croix* of 1892 in which it was exhibited. In 2005 it was offered for sale at Sotheby's in London with an estimate of 1,000 to 1,500 pounds and was sold for 3,360 pounds. <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2005/19th-century-british-and-continental-pictures-w05703/lot.273.html> [consulted: 8 July 2016].

15 "His Tristans are of an inexpressibly vertiginous splendour, and I can say no better of him than that, as an artist, he is the echo of Wagner, and as a painter, the reflection of Delacroix." Joséphin Péladan. *Le Salon de 1891*, p. 32. Quoted in Paris 1983, p. 133.



3. Rogelio de Egusquiza (Santander, 1845-Madrid, 1915)
Siegmund and Sieglinde, 1892
 Red chalk, crayon and charcoal on paper, 59 x 46 cm
 Private collection



4. Rogelio de Egusquiza (Santander, 1845-Madrid, 1915)
Tristan and Isolde: Life, 1896
 Etching, 47.5 x 36 cm
 Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid. Fine Arts Section, inv. no. 14.718

In order to arrive at this conclusion, I focused on the hero's clothing in the drawing. He wears clothes typical of a medieval knight: a short, metal-trimmed skirt, bare, very muscular legs (denoting a warrior and hero) and sandals tied at the mid-calf. Around his head he wears a Celtic style band that terminates in a spiral. In contrast, the figure of Siegmund in Act I of *Die Walküre*, which includes the scene of the embrace between the two siblings, has a rougher appearance, dressed almost entirely in wild animal skins, which is different to the present figure, here identified as Tristan.

Egusquiza was fully versed in the libretto of *Tristan and Isolde*, constantly playing passages from it on the piano. As such he avoided a superficial reading of the work that focused on the happiness of the couple in the love duet in Act II, in contrast to numerous contemporary artists who swathed their interpretations in pseudo-medieval trappings and trumpery. Egusquiza was familiar with the pessimistic philosophy of Schopenhauer that permeates *Tristan and Isolde*, but he also appreciated how the composer redirected it towards an interpretation revolving around desire, the renunciation of the lovers' happiness and surrender to a desire that has become a liberating force.¹⁶ This is the opera's true leitmotiv from its first to last bars: liberation from life, from social constraints, from day, night and individual ego, which Egusquiza conveyed in his two canvases on this subject and which are visual transcriptions of Wagner's opera.

¹⁶ For a more detailed analysis of this interpretation, see Gavilán 2013.

With the turn of the century Egusquiza began to exhibit his new series¹⁷ on *Parsifal*,¹⁸ *The Ring* and *Tristan* at the official French Salons. His etchings brought him not only the universal approval of critics but also of the members of the jury of the Universal Exhibition of 1900, where he was awarded the silver medal,¹⁹ although not as an exhibitor in the Spanish section. It would not be until 1907 that he exhibited finished works on canvas at the Salon National des Beaux-Arts with titles such as “... *au Rheingold moins idéal de M. Egusquiza*...”²⁰ In 1909, again in his role as critic, Péladan welcomed the reappearance of Egusquiza and his works at the Salon de la Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts, in which he seems to have previously exhibited part of the *Parsifal* series, while also referring to *Tristan and Isolde*: “Avec joie, on retrouve M. Roger de Egusquiza, le peintre qui a su vraiment s’inspirer de Wagner, dont les *Filles du Rhin*, le *Tristan et Yseult* illustrent dignement ces partitions sublimes. Il offre à notre admiration *Titirel* le fondateur de la milice du Graal. Il fallait rendre le pieux héros, l’homme d’oraison mêlé à l’homme d’action, le chevalier mystique et il a heureusement combiné dans un costume héroïque un type de soldat et de moine. M. de Egusquiza est un styliste, et quand il touche aux grands mythes, il le fait avec piété et maîtrise. La belle chose que la conviction unie à la probité! [...]”²¹

Péladan once again publicly supported Egusquiza’s work, as he had done some years earlier when the two met at the Bayreuth festival and when Péladan declared that in the future he would judge Egusquiza as a Wagnerian painter: “R. de Egusquiza ne saurait être jugé par sa *Floramine* et son *Intérieur Louis XV*; il prépare dans le secret une œuvre splendide. Son grand maître désolé, - je ne m’exprime pas plus, à dessein - est le plus beau Christ que ce siècle m’ait donné à admirer. Seul, R. de Egusquiza a compris comment Wagner et ses leitmotivs pouvaient compléter l’art passionné de Delacroix: c’est un des rares personnages avec qui ma rencontre dans une admiration commune ait été harmonieuse dès l’abord. Il idolâtre Wagner et je l’adore; et malgré qu’il sera mécontent du peu que j’ai dit, je veux l’avoir annoncé, et ce sera un mérite le jour où il dévoilera le fruit étonnant de son labeur mystérieux. Son œuvre de grand peintre s’est décidée à Bayreuth comme mon œuvre de tragédiste.”²²

17 Egusquiza exhibited his Wagnerian series from 1907 onwards at the *Salon de la Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts*: Salon of 1907, “Alberich et les filles de Rhin (d’après Richard Wagner)” [Alberich and the daughters of the Rhine (after Richard Wagner)], cat. 430; Salon of 1908, “Kundry”, cat. 396; Salon of 1909, “Le Graal (Par ses hautes vertus chevaleresques le héros Titirel reçoit le Graal et la lance sacrée. Pour garder le précieux dépôt, il construit le château du Montsalvat et fonde l’ordre des chevaliers du Graal-Parsifal) (Panneau faisant partie d’un ensemble de quatre tableaux)” [The Grail (For his high chivalrous virtues, the hero Titirel receives the Grail and the sacred Lance. In order to keep this precious legacy, he builds the castle of Montsalvat and founds the order of the knights of the Grail-Parsifal) (Panel that is part of a group of four paintings)], cat. 410; Salon of 1910, “Parsifal”, cat. 438; Salon of 1911, “Mort d’Isolde” [The death of Isolde], cat. 480; Salon of 1912, “Tristan et Isolde” [Tristan and Isolde], cat. 486. Information taken from Ferrer 2008, pp. 650-654.

18 In September 1880, during Egusquiza’s second meeting with Wagner, the latter showed him the musical score of *Parsifal*. Placing it in his hands, he said: “Vous verrez quand vous aurez entendu plusieurs représentations, cela vous plaira de plus en plus... c’est de mon style...” [You will see, when you have heard various performances, you will like it increasingly [...] it is in my style.] In Beruete y Moret 1918, p. 19. This proved to be the case as it would be Egusquiza’s preferred and most recurring Wagnerian subject, which he worked on for many years.

19 As Carlos Reyero has noted, at the Universal Exhibition of 1900 there were various conspicuous absences in the Spanish section, including artists such as Ignacio Zuloaga, Anglada Camarasa, Joaquim Mir, Isidre Nonell, Pablo Uranga, Darío de Regoyos and Egusquiza, among others: “[...] missing are names such as that of Egusquiza, an unequivocal sign of his foreign leanings, distanced from Spanish artistic culture.” In Reyero 1999, p. 25.

20 “[...] In Mr Egusquiza’s less idealised *Rheingold*”, “Les Salons de 1907”, *La Revue de l’Art Ancien et Moderne*, Paris, vol. 21, January 1907, p. 365.

21 “[...] With great pleasure we once again encounter Mr Rogelio de Egusquiza, the painter who has been truly able to find inspiration from Wagner and whose works *The Daughters of the Rhine* and *Tristan and Isolde* worthily illustrate such sublime scores. He offers for our admiration *Titirel*, the founder of the militia of the Grail. Here he had to depict the pious hero, the man of prayer fused with the man of action and with the mystical knight, and the artist has happily combined a soldier and a monk in hero’s dress. Mr Egusquiza is a stylist and when he turns to the great myths, he does so with conviction and probity!” Péladan. “Au Salon de la Société Nationale”, *L’Instantané (Supplément illustré de la Revue Hebdomadaire)*, Paris, 8 May 1909, p. 272.

22 “R. de Egusquiza should not be judged from his *Floramina* and his *Louis XV Interior*; he is secretly preparing a splendid work. His great, desolate master – I will say no more, intentionally – is the most beautiful Christ that the present century has offered for my admiration. Only R. de Egusquiza has understood how Wagner and his leitmotivs can complete Delacroix’s passionate art: he is for me one of the few individuals whose admiration has always harmoniously coincided with my own. He idolises Wagner and I adore him; and while he will not be happy with the few words I have said, I would like to be the one to have first declared it, and this will be considered a merit on the day he unveils the surprising results of his mysterious undertaking. His work as a great painter was decided at Bayreuth, as was mine as a playwright [...]” Péladan 1890, pp. 29-30.

Rogelio de Egusquiza, *Tristan and Isolde. Death*, 1910, Bilbao Fine Arts Museum

Death from love is a recurring topos in western culture, from the story of Dante's Paolo and Francesca in the *Divina Commedia* to the tragic lovers in Shakespeare's plays such as *Romeo and Juliet*, or its multiple consequences in fin-de-siècle literature, where it reflects the influence of the Wagnerian *Liebestod* [love-death]. This is the case with the impossible meeting of *Pelléas et Melisande* in Debussy's opera based on Maurice Maeterlinck's play, or in *Axël* by Villiers de L'Isle-Adam, in which the lovers' negation of life and death is derived from Wagner. Mention should also be made of Gabriele D'Annunzio and his *Triumph of Death*, in which he also made use of the suffering Wagnerian Eros of love and death. The cultural concept of the "love-death" became more overt in the Romantic consciousness, which identified with the individual's resistance to reality.²³ It is within the context of this tragic concept of existence that this literary and cultural phenomenon should be located in the modern era. With the *Liebestod*, the couple's tragic, illicit and adulterous love seeks its own destruction and the dissolution of the corporeal self, as Isolde sings: "In dem wogenden Schwall / In dem tönenden Schall / In des Welt-Atems / Wehenden All, / Ertrinken [...]"²⁴

By choosing two themes from *Tristan and Isolde* in his paintings *Tristan and Isolde. Life* and *Tristan and Isolde. Death*, it is interesting to see how Egusquiza used the presence of the day as an important dramatic element. Given the way in which Wagner constructed the action and the music of this opera through the opposition of day and night, it is evident that the lovers reject the day as it represents the world of social conventions, rationalism and consciousness, and as such impedes their amorous encounters. This is expressed in the long love duet in Act II: "the day deceitfully illuminates us [...]" and "opposes us with its deceitful hopes", as Tristan replies to Isolde. The day is also described as "astute", "evil", "threatening", "mendacious" and "inclined to envy", while the night, transformed into a metaphor of death and the subconscious, becomes the place of encounter and a new paradise: "O sink hernieder, Nacht der Liebe [...]" [Oh, fall here, night of love, make me forget that I live; take me to your breast, free me from the world!].

Egusquiza goes still further. With his remarkably subtle and exquisite style and as an artist so familiar with Wagner's dramatic text, in *Tristan and Isolde. Death* he is able to offer an ideal visual transcription of the passage from day to death and of the annihilation of the lovers on earth. The artistic ideal is achieved through death and Egusquiza identifies with the character of Tristan in his desire to achieve liberation, peace, eternal communion with his ideal, namely Wagner's music, which was appropriated by many other Symbolist artists in their rejection of a dehumanised world in crisis from which they longed to flee forever. The death of the artist is thus a metaphor: the only possible route to avoid the art system and the capitalist exploitation of art, and the only way to escape contemporary reality and society: "Isolde: 'But will the day not awaken Tristan?' / Tristan: 'Let day give way to death!' / Isolde: 'Day and night, will their blows not strike our love equally?'" (Act II).

Egusquiza conceived the idea of executing this large-format canvas at the time when he first began to make use of Wagnerian themes, in the early 1890s when he was already associated with the activities of the Rose + Croix artists and was still friends with Péladan. His preparatory studies in chalk, now in the collection of

23 Rosa Sala Rose. "Wagner, Alemania y el *Liebestod*", in the programme for *Tristan and Isolde*, Gran Teatre del Liceu, 2009-2010 season, January-February 2010, p. 44.

24 "In the torrent of waves, / in the thundering noise, / in the wafting flow of the world's breath / drown, / be engulfed, / unconscious, / supreme delight". Richard Wagner. *Tristan and Isolde*, Act III.

the Museo del Prado, date from 1893. The initial studies of Isolde depict her as nude and Egusquiza tried out different positions for the legs and arms, using red chalk and charcoal with touches of shiny wax crayons, revealing the influence of some of the Symbolist figures by the French artist Alexandre Séon²⁵ who had also exhibited at the Rose + Croix salons. There are also references to depictions of the dead, although without the characteristic rigidity of images of that type. The artist achieves particular softness in Isolde's body, in which a sinuous line used for the outlines, emphasised with touches of white pastel, seems to accompany the continuous rhythm of the music. As Javier Barón has aptly noted, the artist may have been inspired by the endless movement of the waves, which is translated into music in the final notes of the Isolde's *Liebestod*, imitating the swell of the sea with increasing presence and intensity before ending in calm and in absolute silence. Egusquiza's approach can be compared to the depictions of female figures accompanied by waves frequently encountered in the early period of 19th-century French academic painting, from Alexandre Cabanel to Paul Baudry, which survived into early 20th-century Symbolism. One example of the latter is the three-part painting of women emerging from the depths of the sea which the Catalan painter Josep Maria Xiró exhibited at the Salon des Indépendants in Paris in the second decade of the 20th century.²⁶ In addition to these female images, Egusquiza also had first-hand knowledge of two paintings that included depictions of corpses, namely *Adam and Eve's Lament before the Body of Abel*²⁷ by his master Bonnat, and the celebrated and prize-winning *The two Commanders* by José Casado del Alisal (1866, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, on deposit with the Palacio del Senado). Egusquiza made use of the latter for the position of Isolde's gently inclining right arm.

Nonetheless, in compositional terms the most similar work encountered to date is a painting by the Portuguese artist João Marques de Silva Oliveira entitled *Cephalus and Procris* (1879)²⁸, in the collection of the Museu Nacional de Soares dos Reis (Oporto, Portugal). The two canvasses reveal various common elements, including the landscape and the nude female figure, suggesting that Egusquiza could have been inspired by it. Procris's body is notably similar in formal and compositional terms to the dead Isolde whom the artist would depict years later in his preparatory drawings and final oil. Oliveira depicts the woman's pallid body, half naked and abandoned in death, with a pronounced undulating line running through its form. The soft nudity and luminosity irradiated by this female figure, which contrast with the darkness of Cephalus's male body, are comparable to Egusquiza's approach in the final version of *Tristan and Isolde*. Similarly, Oliveira's treatment of the background, which is innovatively simplified in order not to detract from the two principal figures, also reveals considerable parallels with the synthetic approach to the landscape setting that Egusquiza adopted for his depiction of the final scene of Wagner's opera.

Egusquiza continued to execute studies for the painting in 1899, including a drawing for the now complete figure of Tristan, depicted with the artist's own features. He produced others in red chalk for both figures'

25 Javier Barón. "El Parsifal de Wagner interpretado por Rogelio de Egusquiza", lecture given at the Museo del Prado, 26 February 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=66BwIRd_dNI

26 Jiménez 2016.

27 Javier Barón, op. cit.

28 This is one of Oliveira's best-known works from his period as a grant student in Paris. The subject, previously depicted by artists such as Veronese, Rubens, Fragonard, Watteau and Boucher, is taken from Book VII of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. While out hunting, Cephalus, King of Thessalia, accidentally mortally wounds his wife Procris with an arrow. Oliveira embarked on his composition in Paris in mid-1878 as a final demonstration piece for his study grant and following his return to Portugal in 1879 exhibited the work in Lisbon in 1880 and 1881, also showing it in the latter year at the General Fine Arts Exhibition in Madrid. My most sincere thanks to Francesc Fontbona for drawing my attention to this work, which reveals so many parallels with Egusquiza's and which opens up a hitherto unexplored line of interpretation and analysis.



5. Rogelio de Egusquiza (Santander, 1845-Madrid, 1915)
Tristan and Isolde. Death (study), 1901
 Chalk on paper, 42 x 58 cm
 Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid. Fine Arts Section, inv. no. 314.B.3643

arms, all now in the Fine Arts section of the Biblioteca Nacional (Madrid).²⁹ By this date he had defined the bodies, to which he gave definitive form in a beautiful drawing of 1901 [fig. 5] in which Isolde's body lies on that of the dead Tristan in the manner of the waves referred to above. Isolde has the sinuosity evident in her song and final transfiguration, as she dies on Tristan's body at the end of the opera: "In the torrent of the waves, in the thundering noise, in the undulating flow of the world's breath, [...] to drown, to sink [...], unconscious [...], supreme joy." Egusquiza did not complete the painting until 1910 and undoubtedly worked on it alongside his "Parsifal" series, which included works entitled *Parsifal*, *Kundry*, etc., and which he also presented during this period in the official Fine Arts salons.

Tristan and Isolde. Death is a superb painting that can undoubtedly be considered the finest of Egusquiza's Wagnerian works. Here the artist achieved a remarkable and very subtle type of beauty in which he masterfully translated the last bars of the *Liebtestod*. Wagner indicated the following in his annotations to the libretto: "Isolde falls gently, as if transfigured, supported by Brangäne, onto Tristan's body. Profound emotion and astonishment among those present. Marke blesses the bodies." Egusquiza clearly achieves a perfect translation of the music into a pictorial representation, condensing the opera's last scene and stripping it of additional figures.³⁰

A careful reading of the libretto reveals two important moments when Isolde falls onto Tristan's body. The first is when she arrives in Kareol to find her dying lover, who expires saying her name, to which she replies: "Ah! It is I, it is I, sweet friend! Rise up once more, hear my call! Isolde calls, Isolde came, to die faithfully

29 Carmena de la Cruz 1993.

30 Present in Act III are King Marke, Brangäne, Isolde and the dead bodies of Melot, Kurwenal and Tristan.

with Tristan! Have you still no words for me? Just one hour! Stay awake for just one hour! So many fearful days did she longingly keep awake, in order to pass just one more hour with you [...]" (Act III, scene 2). After these words, Wagner's annotation reads: "she falls senseless on the corpse." However, it is more likely that Egusquiza had in mind the end of the opera at the moment when Isolde also dies as she lies on Tristan's body.

Egusquiza's synthetic approach to the scene is particularly notable and he refines Wagner's stage directions to the maximum,³¹ locating the dead lovers in a setting in which the sea in the background creates the horizon, while the beach acts as a dividing line between the land and the sea, which is more visible at the right side of the composition with its breaking waves. The artist omitted all the other figures who are present in the opera's final scene. Also essential to the symbolic interpretation of the lovers' death is the lighting, to the degree that it transforms the painting into a study based on Egusquiza's extensive investigation into light, here applied in a secure, confident manner in order to achieve its maximum expression. The entire scene is enveloped in an atmosphere of total calm, with a dusk light that is reflected on the bodies after they have been liberated by death and their departure from the real world, a world filled with suffering and sorrow for them. Egusquiza bears in mind that Isolde represents day, given that she arrives in Karoel during the day and is able to see Tristan before he dies. Dusk falls with his death, a faint evening light that appears on the stage and which concludes with Isolde's song of love and her death. This light illuminates their bodies, imbuing the entire composition with enormous melancholy. It emerges from the left and illuminates the foreground with the lovers' heads more brightly then darkens with the tonal graduation that moves across the canvas from left to right.

Earth tones predominate in the composition, from the scrubby undergrowth on which the bodies lie to the horizon line which blends into the sea. Egusquiza made use of rapid, imprecise brushstrokes to define the wild grass, among which are some flowers,³² as is habitual in his works. In this case they are yellow daisies which symbolise the sun (associated with Isolde) and hence the day. In contrast, the irises at the lower left next to Tristan's body may symbolise his heroic virtues. On the strip of ground at the right is a small cluster of poppies (three larger flowers and a pentimento in the line of the sea), for which Egusquiza used broad, heavily impastoed brushstrokes with a mixture of blues, greens and reds. The presence of these flowers clearly symbolises everlasting death and the passionate, irrational love of Tristan and Isolde with its devastating consequences.

The definition of the figures is notably academic and reveals a perfect mastery of the depiction of the human body, the poses and the anatomy, which is more visible in the figure of Isolde and in the faces of the two lovers. The material of the clothes is more sketchily defined, as is the substance of the ground and the lightly suggested flowers. Egusquiza's interpretation of the sweet serenity of death is both notably elegant and delicately harmonious, evident not only in the idealised faces but also in the subtle fall of Isolde's arm onto Tristan's body, her hand touching his. In general this is an extremely painterly work full of textures and different effects of transparency, including Isolde's dress with its incredibly light, gauzy material that emphasise the beauty of her semi-nude body. Such effects of transparency are achieved by dragging the pigment and using very little binder in order to allow the canvas to show through in some places, including the sky.

31 "Tristan's castle in Brittany. The park of a castle. On one side, the high walls of the fortress; on the other, a modest fortified wall interrupted by a watchtower; backstage, the door of the castle. The place is situated on a high cliff; the broad sea extending to the horizon can be seen through the open spaces. Overall, the setting gives the impression of abandon, neglect, ruined in parts and overgrown."

32 With thanks to Professor Enrique Salvo Tierra of the department of plant biology, Science Faculty, Universidad de Málaga, for identifying these plants, and also by extension to Enrique Viguera for his assistance in his e-mail of 3 May 2016.



6. Jean Delville (Leuven, Belgium, 1867-Forest, Brussels, 1953)
Tristan et Isolde, 1887
Crayon on paper, 44.3 x 75.4 cm
Musées royaux de Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels

Horizontally, the image is divided into three, clearly differentiated zones (sea, sky and land). The pinkish tones of dusk prevail in the sky, with some very lightly painted and some almost unfinished ones. The sea occupies the central zone, divided into two parts in which there is a progression of the light: a more painterly, dark area on the right with a rough, threatening sea, in which the prevailing tones are shades of blue and green; and another, lighter area to the left with a predominance of greens and yellows applied with short, sketchy brushstrokes. The composition is completed at the bottom in the terrestrial zone where the two bodies lie. There is no inscription, signature or stamp on the reverse of the painting.

Iconographically, Egusquiza identifies the two figures through their clothing of the period. Tristan wears a red, cloak-like garment that covers him to his feet and leather sandals. Isolde wears a white gauzy dress that reveals her bare shoulders and breast and which is tied around her with a long belt that falls down under her right arm onto the ground and terminates in a small, decorative metal element which acts as a counterweight. Egusquiza painted her body using short, rapid strokes of cross-hatching, achieving a perfect synthesis between the glazes used for the muslin dress and the body suggested through the transparent areas.

It is highly likely that Egusquiza took as his model Jean Delville's beautiful, enigmatic drawing *Tristan and Isolde* of 1887 [fig. 6], which is perhaps more modern in conception and has a more intense and complex type of overhead light. According to recent studies, Delville was not depicting Wagner's two lovers but rather the final scene of the novel *Axel* (1890) by Villiers de L'Isle-Adam, in which the female figure holds the chalice with the deadly poison³³ that corresponds to the love-death philtre taken by Tristan and Isolde (Act II).

³³ See Flanell 2000.



7. Adrià Gual (Barcelona, 1872-Sant Pere de Ribes, Barcelona, 1943)
Love-death or The Meeting of the Souls, 1904
 Oil on canvas, 38.5 x 50 cm
 Biblioteca de Catalunya, Barcelona, Graphic art department, inv. no. 10934F-02 / TOP: XIII M 1-8



8. Jean Delville
 (Leuven, Belgium, 1867-Forest, Brussels, 1953)
The Love of the Souls, 1900
 Tempera and oil on panel, 268 x 150 cm
 Musée d'Ixelles, Brussels. Donated by Mme Sigart, 1942
 Inv. no. 1942

Inspired by the concept of the Wagnerian *Liebestod*, at the end of the century other artists depicted this theme, both before and around the same time as Egusquiza. Notable among them is Adrià Gual who in 1904 executed a series of ceiling panels for the music room of the Associació Wagneriana de Barcelona, depicting subjects from *Parsifal* and *Tristan and Isolde*.³⁴ The final panel on the latter opera, entitled *Love-death or Meeting of the Souls* [fig. 7], focuses on the end of Act III and offers a visual evocation of the *Liebestod*. Gual interprets the reunion of the lovers' souls in the night through a nocturnal scene with two parallel but separate paths, using a markedly artificial perspective. The souls embark on their paths under the shade of some solitary cypress trees, symbols of eternity and the transition from the earth to the sky, in order to reach the beyond and the unknown universe where they can love each other for all eternity. Gual deploys long brushstrokes with little emphasis on line, producing a scene of highly expressive synthesis with a predominance of blue and violet tones. He was notably able to convey a dream-like atmosphere, which envelops this new and convincing interpretation of the couple's impossible desire to live out their real love on earth, for which reason death alone will be its refuge.

This reading is very different to Egusquiza's, who codified a new iconography for the end of the opera, creating an almost abstract atmosphere that perfectly connects with the spiritual dimension of the union of the souls. Within the context of European Symbolism, two artists also aimed to express this union through the deaths of Paolo and Francesca, based on Canto V of Dante's *Divina Commedia*: Gaetano Previati (1901) and Umberto Boccioni (1908-09), who made use of figuration rather than the syntheist Symbolism employed by Gual. The same is true of a painting by the above-mentioned Delville, entitled *The Love of the Souls* of 1900 [fig. 8].

³⁴ Barcelona 2013 and Jiménez 2013b.

Critical reception of the painting and its presentation at the Salon of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts in Paris (1911)

Tristan and Isolde. Death was first exhibited at the Salon of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts in Paris in 1911 where the French press singled out its uniqueness and beauty within the context of the rest of the artist's Wagnerian work: "La Mort d'Isolde, de M. de Egusquiza, très belle œuvre dans la série wagnérienne de cet artiste."³⁵ In his review of the Salon of that year, Péladan, a close friend and energetic champion of Egusquiza's work, referred to Wagnerian painting, esteeming Egusquiza's efforts over those of the Germans, which were more direct examples of this iconography: "Sur le corps de Tristan inanimé, Yseult morte d'amour est couchée; ainsi M. de Egusquiza continue son vœu pictural à la gloire de Wagner, vœu qui compte déjà tant d'exvoto d'une si belle piété. J'ignore ce que l'incomparable tragique de la musique a su inspirer à ses compatriotes, en dehors des ridicules costumes du professeur Thoma et de l'estimable série d'Echter sur l'anneau du Nibelung. Delacroix eût certainement illustré l'œuvre Bayreuthine, et de quelle façon! M. de Egusquiza, par la constance de son culte, réjouit tous les fanatiques du tout puissant Maître."³⁶ A year later comments on Egusquiza's work was still being referred to in the French press, for example in *Le Ménestrel*: "[...] M. Egusquiza a traité la *Mort d'Yseult* avec sa fougue habituelle, qui d'ailleurs, avouons-le, remplace insuffisamment le commentaire musical."³⁷

Following the painting's presentation in Paris in 1911, an article that referred to it was published in Spain that same year.³⁸ However, it was not seen again in public until the monographic exhibition on Egusquiza held in Santander in 1995,³⁹ after which it was exhibited in Madrid in 1997⁴⁰ and was subsequently included in the major exhibition on Wagner and the arts held in Geneva in 2005.⁴¹ It was one of the most widely publicised works in the latter exhibition, becoming known to an international public as a result.⁴² Two years later the Museo de Bellas Artes de Asturias organised an exhibition on Egusquiza's two *Tristan and Isolde* paintings,⁴³ after which the painting was included in the exhibition organised by the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum,⁴⁴ which had acquired it in 2000 from the Fernández de Luz Belda collection in Madrid.⁴⁵

35 "The Death of Isolde, by Mr Egusquiza, a very beautiful work within this artist's Wagnerian series." "Le Vernissage du Salon de la Société nationale", *Le Gaulois*, 16 April 1911.

36 "Isolde, dead from love, lies on top of Tristan's lifeless body; thus Mr Egusquiza continues with his pictorial vow to the glory of Wagner, a vow already expressed in so many ex votos of extremely beautiful piety. I am not familiar with the results of the influence of the incomparable tragedian on his compatriots, aside from Professor's Thoma's ridiculous costumes and Echter's admirable series on the *Ring of the Nibelung*. Delacroix would undoubtedly have illustrated the creations of Bayreuth and in what a way! Due to the fidelity of his worship, Mr Egusquiza delights all the fanatical admirers of the all-powerful Master." Péladan. "Michel-Ange et le Salon de la Société Nationale", *L'Instantané (La Revue Hebdomadaire)*, 2 May 1911, p. 121. The mention of Thoma refers to Hans Thoma, who designed the costumes for *The Ring of the Nibelung*, commissioned and directed by Cosima Wagner for the 1896 Bayreuth Festival.

37 "[...] Mr Egusquiza has depicted the *Death of Isolde* with his usual ardour, which, however, it has to be said, is an insufficient substitute for the musical commentary." "La Musique et le Théâtre aux Salons du Grand Palais (Troisième article)", *Le Ménestrel*, 6 May 1912.

38 "París. Los Salones de 1911. *La Muerte de Isolda*, cuadro de R. de Egusquiza, Salón de la Sociedad Nacional de Bellas Artes", *La Ilustración Artística*, year 1911, no. 1540, Barcelona, 3 July 1911, p. 437.

39 *Rogelio de Egusquiza (1845-1915)*, Museo de Bellas Artes de Santander, Fundación Marcelino Botín, 27 October to 17 December 1995.

40 Madrid 1997b, pp. 92-93.

41 Geneva 2005. The text on the painting is by the present author, pp.168-169.

42 It was used as the exhibition's principal promotional image, on the front page of the leaflet and for posters and postcards.

43 Oviedo 2007, with texts by Lourdes Jiménez, pp. 34-35.

44 Bilbao 2008, with a text by Javier Novo González, pp. 338-340. The exhibition subsequently travelled to Salamanca (2006), Valencia (2006-2007) and Seville (2007).

45 Alcalá Subastas, 10 November 2000, p. 80, ill. on p. 81.

Conclusions

From the time of his first contact with the work of Wagner in 1876, Egusquiza acquired a new way of understanding art, basing himself from this point onwards on the detailed study of musical drama, a new operatic format which Wagner's revolutionary work disseminated throughout Europe from the 1850s. Egusquiza's new approach also derived from his direct knowledge of the composer, from his own opinions on staging and particularly from his attendance at the Festspielhaus in Bayreuth, an iconic model of the theatre of the future. From these and other starting points that have been discussed in the present text, Egusquiza became—more than any other Spanish artist—the Wagnerian painter par excellence, the model for the young Mariano Fortuny and for Madrazo and a reference point in Paris at the time, where he was compared to leading artists who deployed this iconography, such as Henri Fantin-Latour.

After World War I this type of Symbolist painting with its Wagnerian evocations was largely forgotten, firstly due to the death of most of the artists, including Egusquiza, and secondly because the avant-garde movements were gaining ground in a Paris that soon forgot the artistic coteries of the late 19th century. Among his friends Egusquiza had the good fortune to include the Beruetes, and it was Aureliano de Beruete y Moret (art historian, critic and director of the Museo del Prado) who, on the request of the artist's family, wrote a first-hand account of Egusquiza's career, in particular his meetings with Wagner and the impact they had on his life and work.⁴⁶ Some years would then pass before his name was rediscovered, always in the French press and in relation to the pictorial musicalism of the fin-de-siècle artists, among whom Fantin-Latour and Egusquiza occupied leading positions.⁴⁷ In contrast, the interest paid to the latter's work in the Spanish press was scant, with just a synthetic article by Silvio Lago (José Francés)⁴⁸ published in 1919 in the wake of the publication of Beruete's monograph on Egusquiza.

It was not until the late 1960s that Juan Antonio Gaya Nuño included Egusquiza in his extensive survey of Spanish 19th-century painting, criticising the artist's choice of subject matter: "[...] As if Painting hadn't suffered enough fin-de-siècle afflictions – historical old tat, social critique, ridiculous schmaltz and an excess of altar boys – a new bacillus awaited it, that of Wagnerian painting. The Santander painter Rogelio de Egusquiza (1845-1915) made himself the principal culprit, producing paintings in sinister tones, full of Parsifals and Valkyries, in front of which the viewer wondered whether to laugh or be aghast."⁴⁹ Fortunately, subsequent generations of art historians have broadened their horizons when analysing and rediscovering Spanish artists, defending the figure of Rogelio de Egusquiza and that particular late *modernista* Symbolism in both general studies⁵⁰ and specific ones on the artist such as Sonia Blanco Grassa's.⁵¹ As a result, Egusquiza is essentially recognised today as a painter of Wagnerian themes and there is no doubt that among them, his most iconic and popular work—*Tristan and Isolde. Death* in the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum—is also the finest.

46 An idea of the critical reception of Egusquiza's work in Paris can be obtained from the review of Beruete's monograph on the painter, published in "Bibliographie", *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, January 1921, p. 390.

47 Raymond Bouyer. "La Musique inspiratrice d'un peintre. Pour le centenaire de Fantin-Latour (14 janvier 1936)", *Le Ménestrel*, 10 January 1936, pp. 9-11.

48 Silvio Lago. "Una obra notable. Rogelio de Egusquiza", *La Esfera*, no. 267, Madrid, 8 February 1919, p. 375.

49 Gaya Nuño 1966. With thanks to Dr Francesc Fontbona for all his assistance with bibliographical consultation.

50 Fontbona 1981.

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