Tristan and Isolde Sharing the Potion, J.W. Waterhouse, 1916

TRISTAN AND ISEULT

Please read the translation by Hilaire Belloc.

You can find an online copy here free of charge:

You can purchase a printed version here:

You can get a free Kindle version here:

*Note: contemporary cinematic versions of this story are **not** true to the text. I strongly suggest that you **not** watch a film as part of this assignment, as it will only provide an erroneous and misleading lens through which to interpret the story.

Introduction

Many sources state that the story of Tristan and Iseult is of Celtic origin. The oldest known French version of the story was composed around around the middle of the 12th century by Thomas d'Angleterre as a poem and later modified by Beroul. By the way, why would a Celtic legend be composed in French in England by a guy whose last name is French but means "from England"? I'll leave that to you to figure out, but it has something to do with William the Conqueror!

There are various spellings of both "Tristan" and "Iseult" -- due in part to the translation of the story into multiple languages during the Medieval period, and due in part to the absence of standardized spelling during the same era. So, you may see Tristram for Tristan, or Isolde for Iseult. Likewise, there are different versions of the story. The one we are reading comes from the Anglo-Norman tradition, and differs from the Germanic tradition. Hilaire Belloc, an early 20th c. man of letters, translated the version we are reading from Beroul's text (if you are reading the book online from the source I have provided above).

The story is set in the mythical time of Arthur, deep in the Anglo-Saxon period when what we now call the British Isles were ruled by various and sometimes warring kings. Arthur makes a cameo appearance in our story, while Tristan sometimes shows up in tellings of the Arthurian legend.

When you read this story, you will be reading along with centuries of other readers and lovers of this tale. *Tristan and Iseult* was, around the time of Dante (1265-1321), the most widely owned book in Europe. Imagine that -- a book written in French in England during the mid-1100's was the most widely owned book on the continent almost 100 years later! Who reads anything 100 years old nowadays unless a teacher requires it?

Dante refers to this story in the *Inferno*. Christopher Marlowe, a contemporary with Shakespeare, wrote a play based on the story, though it is no longer extant. In the 19th c., Wagner composed an opera based on the German tradition of the story. The romance has inspired many visual works of art as well, including the 1916 painting by J.W. Waterhouse above.

The story, then, has a long and rich history in which you now get to participate.

SUGGESTED READING: *Ywain and Gawain*. This is a wonderful Middle English Arthurian tale, complete with all of the marvels you expect from a Medieval story!

You can find *Ywain and Gawain* here:
http://www.sfsu.edu/%7Emedieval/romances/ywain_gawain_rev.html#_edn9
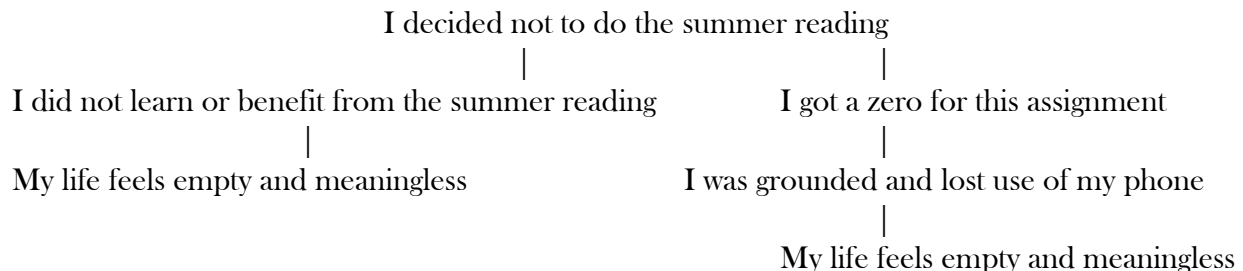
Assessment

1. You will all be responsible for taking a quiz at the beginning of the school year that reflects your reading and comprehension of the story.

2. In addition to the quiz at the beginning of the year, you also have a choice between two projects based on this reading.

3. All students will be required to present their posters to the class at the beginning of the year.

Feel free to contact me if you have questions: rustyroberson@mcademy.com

Project Options

Option #1: A Consequence Tree Poster

Create a "consequence tree" on poster board which shows the complex web of consequences and situations that flow from Tristan and Iseult's inability to overcome the power of the potion. A "consequence tree" is similar to a family tree, but depicts actions and consequences rather than family relations. Below is a simple sample consequence tree so that you have a general idea of what to do. The point is to show the far-reaching and unintended consequences of an unwise or ill-fated decision.

I decided not to do the summer reading
| |
I did not learn or benefit from the summer reading   I got a zero for this assignment
| |
My life feels empty and meaningless   I was grounded and lost use of my phone
|
My life feels empty and meaningless

This is a silly example, but you get the idea. The web of consequences for Tristan and Iseult is obviously more complex and interesting!

    B. Illustrate your poster with appropriate illustrations or artwork.

Rubric for Consequence Tree

A
Completed project as assigned. Included all or at least most of the consequences of Tristan and Iseult's consumption of the potion. The project demonstrates a strong understanding of the plot and the nature of ethical consequences as portrayed in the text. The poster is easy to read and nicely illuminated.

B
Completed project as assigned. Included most – but was missing a few -- of the consequences of Tristan and Iseult's consumption of the potion. With perhaps a minor exception or so, the project demonstrates a solid understanding of the plot and the nature of ethical consequences as portrayed in the text. The poster is easy to read and nicely illuminated.

C
Either did not complete project as assigned or submitted it in a clearly rushed and hasty manner. Demonstrated, too, is a limited understanding of the consequences of Tristan and Iseult's consumption of the potion. The poster does not demonstrate a solid understanding of the plot and the nature of ethical consequences as portrayed in the text, though certain themes and important points are mentioned. The poster is somewhat easy to read and nicely illuminated.

D
Submitted assignment, but project is incomplete (includes only some of the consequences of Tristan and Iseult's action), displays a weak understanding of the plot and the nature of ethical consequences as portrayed in the text. The poster is difficult to read or is not illuminated. Poster contains distracting spelling or grammatical errors.

F
Assignment not submitted or project is so incomplete or poorly done that it falls short of any point value, or project content indicates that student did not adequately read or understand the text.

OPTION #2: MENTAL MAP

1. Construct a poster-size map of the locations in the story. Trace the sequence of movements and major events of Tristan and Iseult as depicted in the story. Create a legend or key in which you identify what takes place at each location.

   *Some creative reconstruction will be required, but you should make every attempt to correctly map the known historical locations within the story. The exact locations and distance between, say, the fictional Tintagel and Wood of Morois can be left up to your creative judgment.

   *The location of Lyonesse, the homeland of Tristan, is unknown. It was also in Lyonesse that King Arthur had his final battle with Mordred. According to legend, Lyonesse sunk into the sea. You can place it off the coast of Cornwall near where the English Channel meets the Atlantic.

   For your mental map poster, explore the associations and assumptions the story reveals about **as many of** the major locations in the story as you can: the sea, Ireland, forest, kingdom, castle, hermitage, chantry, wasteland, ship, etc. Examples of questions to explore are: is the location a safe place? What sorts of people, creatures, events occur in this place? What, if anything, is the boundary between this location and others? What rules of conduct or laws are associated with this location? When and why do the rules change? It is not enough to list just what the associations are, but explore why. For example, if a location is seen as a place of mystery and monsters, why? The point is to expose and explore the connotations and associations various locations in the story evoke.
   Provide textual evidence to support your mental map.

Rubric for Mental Map

A
Completed poster as assigned. Map includes all or at least most of the locations referenced in the story. Map correctly and clearly represents the major movements of Tristan and Iseult in the story while also explaining why the locations and movements were important to the overarching theme(s) of the book. The poster is aesthetically pleasing and easy to read. It is evident that the student read the text carefully and completed the project thoughtfully.

B
Completed poster as assigned. Mental map includes many of the locations referenced in the story. The poster is mostly accurate and clear in its representation of the major movements of Tristan and Iseult. With solid though perhaps incomplete clarity, the poster also explains why the locations and movements were important to the overarching theme(s) of the book. The poster is aesthetically pleasing and easy to read. It is evident that the student read the text carefully and completed the project thoughtfully even if he or she overlooked or downplayed a few aspects of the story.

C

Completed poster as assigned, though some of the instructions were not followed. Mental map includes several of the locations referenced in the story, though it is missing locations, as well. The poster is at times accurate and clear in its representation of the major movements of Tristan and Iseult, but contains several instances of inaccuracy or lack of clarity. The poster does not explain or only explains a bit about why the locations and movements were important to the overarching theme(s) of the book. The poster is aesthetically pleasing and clear at times but seemed rushed and unclear at other times. It is evident that the student read the text, but it is not clear whether the student understood the story fully and/or took the time or energy to create a fully clear and beautiful mental map poster.

D

Submitted assignment, but map is incomplete (includes only some of the locations), difficult to read, or aesthetically inferior. Poster only partially satisfies the content requirements, contains distracting spelling and/or grammar errors. It is not evident that the student read the text carefully or completed the project thoughtfully.

F

Assignment not submitted or project is so incomplete or poorly done that it falls short of any point value, or project content indicates that student did not adequately read or understand the text.