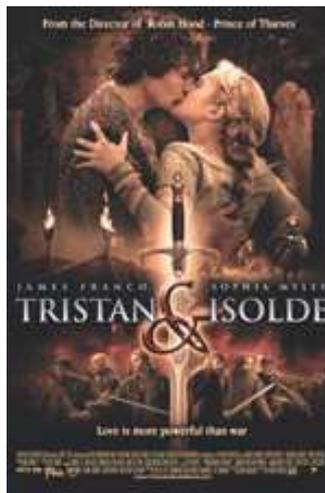# Tristan & Isolde

Director: Kevin Reynolds
Genre: Action, Drama, Romance
Runtime: 120 minutes
Year: 2006
Cast: James Franco, Sophia Myles, Rufus Sewell, David O'Hara, Henry Cavill, JB Blanc, Jamie King, Leo Gregory, Richard Dillane, Wolfgang Müller, Barbora Kodetová

Synopsis

From executive producer Ridley Scott comes a sweeping tale of love and loss, myth and fate, based on the timeless Celtic myth of star-crossed passion.

First separated by countries at war, and now by loyalty to king and country, Tristan (James Franco) and Isolde (Sofia Myles) must suppress their emotions for the sake of peace and the future of England. But the more they deny their passion, the more fiercely it burns. Despite their efforts to stay apart, Tristan and Isolde are driven inexorably together, risking everything for one last moment in each other's arms.

Review

Let's remind us again of the original medieval legend of Tristan and Isolde. Tristan was an orphan, brought up under the wings of Lord Marke of Cornwall. Later, Tristan became the most important knight of the entire kingdom. When Marke asked his protégé to accompany his future bride from Ireland to her new homeland, they both by accident drank a love-potion, which Isolde's mother made for her daughter and Lord Marke, in order to secure their indissoluble love. Now, however, Tristan and Isolde love each other passionately, though it is an impossible love between a loyal knight and his queen.

Presently, sworn loyalty is an out of date concept, it is certainly not something the public gets excited about. So how do you portray the conflict of loyalty between two lovers, who cannot be united because they consider the classical medieval values of loyalty and love both to be vital? "Tristan + Isolde" by Kevin Reynolds (director of the successful "Robin Hood: Prince of the Thieves") proves that this is an unattainable goal. Especially since the story has to do it without the supernatural love-potion; notwithstanding the beautiful pictures and the good acting, the Tristan and Isolde-legend has now an entirely different plot.

Instead of the love-potion, a rather trivial element is used to let Tristan and Isolde fall in love with each other: the Irish Isolde saves Tristan's life when he, mortally wounded, is washed ashore, and their love blooms, while she is hiding him from her father. Some while later, when Tristan returns to Ireland in order to win Donnchadh's daughter for Lord Marke, too late he finds out that she is actually his beloved Isolde. They try to suppress their feelings, but love cannot be forced.

By altering the original plot in this way, the romance looses its sting, particularly when the essential character of Lord Marke falls into the background. Though the adjustment saves the idea of a legitimate extra-marital affair, questions arise. Where is Tristan's despair for his treason? Where is Isolde's pride as a queen? Eventually, Tristan chooses for his honour as a knight and Isolde's character is reduced to nothing more than an adolescent crybaby who only wants to see the passion. Even in our time, worldly considerations are more important; the tragedy is gone. Thus, when even the joint death does not happen, after which originally the branches entangle on the graves of both lovers (through which Lord Marke is convinced of the disposition of their noble love; the moral of the original myth), we have to let go of the legend. So that is what we do, no matter how hard it is. The medieval setting in "Tristan & Isolde" is stunning and there are some pretty unromantic but spectacular battles to be fought. Breathtaking views of the Irish coasts enrich the film, and so do the attractive actors, who are good at making love. "Tristan & Isolde" is an entertaining action film with a romantic character, a convincing female lead and a Tristan with Richard Gere features. It has to be said, the overall picture is appealing. The bitter force of the origin, however, is missing.

Original Dutch   review by Jan-Kees Verschuure, English translation by Tessa.

With special thanks to: