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# Legends of King Arthur

From the daring exploits of the knights of the Round Table to the passionate love of Lancelot and Guinevere, few things encompass the magic and adventure of the Middle Ages like the tales of King Arthur. Wielding the power of his sword Excalibur and the wisdom of his advisor Merlin, Arthur presides over a narrative kingdom of knights, quests, dragons, tournaments, maidens, wizards, castles, and fairies, whose interweaving stories make up one of the most capacious bodies of literature in world history. But Arthur is also a messianic figure, appearing in chronicles and histories, leading the people of Britain to freedom from tyranny, and promising to return when his country needs him the most.

Arthurian myth and legend is one of the most enduring literary traditions of Western Europe, and its characters and stories were as popular in the Middle Ages as they are today. Originating in early medieval Wales, the legends traveled through England to France and Germany and throughout the modern world. We will study the development of the Arthurian tradition in chronicles, poetry, romances, lais, and fabliaux, comparing variations across cultural and historical boundaries. Our materials will range from the earliest sightings of Arthur in medieval histories through the defining stories of Chrétien, Gottfried, and Malory to modern adaptations of the legend on stage and screen.

## Course Goals

## This course aims to provide students with three primary objectives:

* To survey the vast canon of medieval Arthurian literature from its earliest roots to its heyday in the romance tradition;
* To explore modern reflexes of the Arthurian tradition from around the world; and
* To think about relationships among history, culture, and literature, both past and present.

## Course Requirements

Work for this course will include: % of grade

* Attendance 10%
* Daily participation and in-class writing 20%
* Two papers 20%
* Midterm exam 20%
* Final exam 30%

**N.B.** Failure to complete any one of these major components will result in a failing grade for the semester.

## Required Texts

Texts are available for purchase from the Illini Union Bookstore, but you may purchase them from any retailer you choose (Amazon, Bookfinder, Alibris, etc.). Make sure that you have the correct edition/translation of each text; use the ISBN to make sure it’s the right one.

Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, trans. William W. Kibler (Penguin Classics, 1991)

ISBN 978-0140445213

Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, trans. A. T. Hatto (Penguin Classics, 1980)

ISBN 978-0140443615

Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*, trans. A. T. Hatto (Penguin Classics, 1960)

ISBN 978-0140440980

*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, trans. Simon Armitage (W. W. Norton, 2008)

ISBN 978-0393334159

Thomas Malory, *King Arthur and his Knights*, trans. Eugene Vinaver (Oxford UP, 1975)

ISBN 978-0195019056

Alfred Lord Tennyson, *Idylls of the King* (Penguin Classics, 1989)

ISBN 978-0140422535

T. H. White, *The Once and Future King* (Ace Books, 1987)

ISBN 978-0441627400

C. J. Cherryh, *Port Eternity* in *Alternate Realities* (DAW, 2000)

ISBN 978-0886779467

Additional readings will be available through the course Compass site.

**Policies and Procedures**

This course meets three times a week in a seminar format. Most class meetings will consist of discussion of the texts we are reading. In seminar discussions, each student is expected to participate fully. You are responsible for keeping up with the reading, formulating questions, ideas, and interpretations about these texts, and engaging in dynamic dialogue with your fellow students and with me during class time. In-class writing assignments, homework, and occasional quizzes will help keep you on track.

• **Attendance** Your participation in class is a very important part of the seminar format, and excessive absences will cause you to miss the discussions that exam questions and paper topics will draw from, as well as significantly lowering your participation grade. If you must miss a class for some reason, please notify me in advance, if possible, to make arrangements to turn in assignments. It is your responsibility to catch up on the material for any class you have missed, including announcements, handouts, quizzes, and homework assignments. All assignments and handouts will be available on the course website; be sure to check there if you're missing something.

• **Reading** Readings for each class are listed on the syllabus and should be completed **before** you come to class that day. You may also want to keep a notebook handy to jot down your ideas as you’re reading; this will be very helpful when it comes time to write a paper. Always make sure to bring your books with you to class, so that you can follow along and note key passages that might appear on an exam someday.

• **Conduct** The classroom is a community, and you will be expected to comport yourself with respect and civility toward your fellow students and your instructors. Uncivil behavior will not be tolerated; inflammatory or abusive comments in class or on discussion boards, disruptive behavior in the lecture hall or discussion section, or any other form of misconduct will result in dismissal from the classroom and can result in a failing grade for the semester. Please be considerate of those around you; turn off cell phones, put away newspapers, laptops, and tablets before class begins, and refrain from conversing while others are speaking. Arrive at class on time, and please do not begin packing up to leave until the bell has rung.

• **Participation** A seminar class means that our time is spent in discussion, not in lecture. I will occasionally deliver some material in lecture format, but for the most part the class will depend on everyone to contribute questions, reflections, thoughts, and comments on the material we’re reading. That means that you should be prepared to speak and to respond to your classmates every time we meet. Participation is graded on the following scale: A = participates almost always; C = participates occasionally; F = participates rarely or never. If you have questions or concerns about your participation, please come talk to me.

• **Assignments** All work must be turned in on time. Late homework assignments will not be accepted. Late papers will be accepted but will lose 1/3 letter grade for each day they are late; for example, an A paper will be an A- after one day, a B+ after two days, and so on. This includes weekends. All written work should be typed, double-spaced, with standard 1" margins and 12-point font. Papers must be submitted to the course Compass site by 5:00 PM on the day they are due.

• **Plagiarism** Academic integrity is a serious concern in literature classes and can often happen unintentionally if writers are not scrupulously careful about acknowledging sources they may have consulted during the course of preparing and writing a paper. The University’s policy on Academic Integrity is defined by Article 1, Part 4 of the UIUC *Student Code*, which can be viewed at <http://admin.illinois.edu/policy/code/article1_part4_1-401.html>. Ignorance of this policy does not constitute a defense. **Plagiarism, or cheating of any kind, will not be tolerated in this course, and confirmed cases will result in a failing grade for the term.**

• **Communication** I am always available to meet with you; simply contact me to schedule an appointment. You can reach me by phone during the day and by email throughout the day and in the evenings; I will respond to email and phone messages within 24 hours (48 hours on weekends). Please contact me right away if you are having trouble with class material, have questions about an assignment, or encounter circumstances that might adversely affect your participation in class, such as illness, family emergency, etc. The longer you wait, the less I can do to help you.

• **Compass site** Keeping track of homework assignments, handouts, and due dates can get complicated. Copies of all documents I hand out in class will be posted to the Compass site for this course; login at https://compass2g.illinois.edu/. You can also check the Compass site for updates about assignments, links to online resources, deadlines, and other useful information.

**Course Calendar**

This is a tentative schedule for readings and assignments over the course of the term. We will try to follow it as closely as possible, but it is subject to change and will be updated as necessary.

Readings marked with an asterisk (\*) are available on Compass.

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| **Week** | **Date** | **In class** | **Homework** |
| **Unit 1: Historical Arthur** | | | |
| **Week 1** | 8/28/17 | Introduction: | Wikipedia, “Roman Britain: History” and “Medieval England: Political History” |
| 8/30/17 | A short history of Roman and early medieval Britain | \*Gildas, *De Excidio*  \**Annales Cambriae*  *\**Nennius, *Historia Brittonum* |
| 9/1/17 | Arthur in the historical sources | \*Geoffrey of Monmouth, *History of the Kings of Britain* |
| **Week 2** | 9/6/17 | History vs. legend | \*Marie de France, *Lanval* |
| **Unit 2: Continental Arthur** | | |
| 9/8/17 | *Lanval* | Chrétien de Troyes, *The Knight of the Cart* |
| **Week 3** | 9/11/17 | *The Knight of the Cart* | *The Knight of the Cart* |
| 9/13/17 | *The Knight of the Cart* | *The Knight of the Cart* |
| 9/15/17 | *The Knight of the Cart* | *The Knight with the Lion* |
| **Week 4** | 9/18/18 | *The Knight with the Lion* | *The Knight with the Lion* |
| 9/20/17 | *The Knight with the Lion* | *The Story of the Grail* |
| 9/22/17 | *The Story of the Grail* | *The Story of the Grail* |
| **Week 5** | 9/25/17 | *The Story of the Grail*  **Paper #1 due** | Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival* |
| 9/27/17 | *Parzival* | *Parzival* |
| 9/29/17 | *Parzival* | *Parzival* |
| **Week 6** | 10/2/17 | *Parzival* | *Parzival* |
| 10/4/17 | *Parzival* | Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan* |
| 10/6/17 | *Tristan* | *Tristan* |
| **Week 7** | 10/9/17 | *Tristan* | *Tristan* |
| 10/11/17 | *Tristan* |  |
| 10/13/17 | **Midterm Exam** | **\****Culhwch and Olwen* |
| **Unit 3: Insular Arthur** | | | |
| **Week 8** | 10/16/17 | *Culhwch and Olwen* | *\*The Spoils of Annwn* |
| 10/18/17 | *The Spoils of Annwn* | *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* |
| 10/20/17 | *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* | *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* |
| **Week 9** | 10/23/17 | *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* | *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* |
| 10/25/17 | *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* | *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* |
| 10/27/17 | *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* | Malory, “Merlin,” “Balin,” “Pelleas and Ettard” |
| **Week 10** | 10/30/17 | Malory, “Merlin,” “Balin,” “Pelleas and Ettard” | “Knight of the Cart,” “Lancelot and Elaine,” “Holy Grail” |
| 11/1/17 | “Knight of the Cart,” “Lancelot and Elaine,” “Holy Grail” | “Poisoned Apple,” “Fair Maid of Astolat,” “Death of Arthur” |
| 11/3/17 | “Poisoned Apple,” “Fair Maid of Astolat,” “Death of Arthur” | Tennyson, “The Coming of Arthur,” “Balin and Balan,” “Merlin and Vivienne” |

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| **Unit 4: Modern Arthur** | | | |
| **Week 11** | 11/6/17 | **Paper #2 due**  “The Coming of Arthur,” “Balin and Balan,” “Merlin and Vivienne” | “Lancelot and Elaine,” “Holy Grail,” “Pelleas and Ettarre” |
| 11/8/17 | “Lancelot and Elaine,” “Holy Grail,” “Pelleas and Ettarre” | “The Last Tournament,” “Guinevere,” “The Passing of Arthur,” “To the Queen” |
| 11/10/17 | “The Last Tournament,” “Guinevere,” “The Passing of Arthur,” “To the Queen” | *The Sword in the Stone* |
| **Week 12** | 11/13/17 | *The Sword in the Stone* | *The Sword in the Stone* |
| 11/15/17 | *The Sword in the Stone* | *The Sword in the Stone* |
| 11/17/17 | *The Sword in the Stone* | *The Queen of Air and Darkness* |
| **Thanksgiving Break** | | | |
| **Week 13** | 11/27/17 | *The Queen of Air and Darkness* | *The Ill-Made Knight* |
| 11/29/17 | *The Ill-Made Knight* | *The Ill-Made Knight* |
| 12/1/17 | *The Ill-Made Knight* | *The Candle in the Wind* |
| **Week 14** | 12/4/17 | *The Candle in the Wind* | *Port Eternity* |
| 12/6/17 | *Port Eternity* | *Port Eternity* |
| 12/8/17 | *Port Eternity* |  |
| **Week 15** | 12/11/17 | *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* |  |
| 12/13/17 | *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* |  |
| **Final Exam** | W 12/20/17 | 8:00-11:00 AM |  |