

**View our trailer below!**

See the [full course description](#) below

Course questions? Concerns?

E-mail us!

Professor Catherine McKenna: [cmckenna@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:cmckenna@fas.harvard.edu)

Professor McKenna's Office Hours: Warren House 204, Wednesday 11-12 &  
3-4

(no office hours on Wednesday February 1)

TF : Lorena Alessandrini

Lorena's Office Hours:

- [Course Schedule](#)
- [Course Description](#)
- [Course Requirements](#)

## **Introduction**

### **[Weekly Assigned Reading](#)**

#### **Tuesday 1/24**

Why stories? Why medieval? Why Wales? And what is The Mabinogion?

The Celtic Twilight in mid-nineteenth-century Britain: Lady Charlotte Guest and The Mabinogion

#### **Thursday 1/26**

The First Branch of the Mabinogi: Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed

## **The First Branch of the Mabinogi, the White**

## **Book and the Red Book**

### **Weekly Assigned Reading**

**Tuesday 1/31**

The First Branch of the Mabinogi, continued

Ways of Thinking about The Mabinogion:  
Mythological Readings.

**Thursday 2/2**

The White Book of Rhydderch, the Red Book of  
Hergest, and the world of story in medieval Wales.

## **The Second Branch of the Mabinogi**

### **Weekly Assigned Reading**

**Tuesday 2/7**

The Second Branch of the Mabinogi

**Thursday 2/9**

The Second Branch of the Mabinogi, continued

Ways of Thinking about The Mabinogion: Post-  
Colonial Readings

## **The Third Branch of the Mabinogi**

### **Weekly Assigned Reading**

**Tuesday 2/14**

The Third Branch of the Mabinogi

**Thursday 2/16**

The Third Branch of the Mabinogi, continued

Ways of Thinking about The Mabinogion: Moral  
and Philosophical Readings

## **The Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi**

### **Weekly Assigned Reading**

**Tuesday 2/21**

The Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi

**Thursday 2/23**

The Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi, continued

Ways of Thinking about The Mabinogion:  
Gendered Readings

### **The Four Branches, and The Dream of the Emperor Maxen**

#### **Weekly Assigned Reading**

Tuesday 2/28

What is a mabinogi, anyway?

Thursday 3/2

The Dream of the Emperor Maxen

Ways of Thinking about The Mabinogion:  
Historical Readings

### **Kings: Lludd, Llefelys, Arthur**

#### **Weekly Assigned Reading**

Tuesday 3/7

Lludd and Llefelys

Thursday 3/9

The Arthur of the Welsh

### **The Lady of the Well**

#### **Weekly Assigned Reading**

Tuesday 3/21

The Lady of the Well

Thursday 3/23

The Lady of the Well, continued

### **Geraint Son of Erbin**

#### **Weekly Assigned Reading**

Tuesday 3/28

Geraint Son of Erbin

Thursday 3/30

Geraint Son of Erbin, continued

Ways of Thinking about The Mabinogion: Political  
Readings

## **Peredur Son of Efrog**

### **Weekly Assigned Reading**

Tuesday 4/4

Peredur Son of Efrog

Thursday 4/6

Peredur Son of Efrog, continued

Ways of Thinking about The Mabinogion:  
Manuscript culture and the malleable text

## **How Culhwch Won Olwen**

### **Weekly Assigned Reading**

Tuesday 4/11

How Culhwch Won Olwen

Thursday 4/13

How Culhwch Won Olwen, continued

Ways of Thinking about The Mabinogion: Orality  
and Literacy

## **Rhonabwy's Dream**

### **Week Twelve: Rhonabwy's Dream**

### **Weekly Assigned Reading**

Tuesday 4/18

Rhonabwy's Dream

Thursday 4/20

Rhonabwy's Dream, continued

Ways of Thinking about the Mabinogion: Tradition  
and Fiction

## **Mapping**

### **Weekly Assigned Reading**

Tuesday 4/25

Conclusions.

## **Course Description**

In *The Mabinogion: Stories from Medieval Wales*, we make a close study of the eleven medieval Welsh stories that have been known for the last 150 years or so as *The Mabinogion*. These texts, preserved in manuscripts of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, are shaped by many factors - the legendary history of the British people, archaic mythic traditions, the anxieties of the Welsh in the face of Norman and English conquest, the literature of Norman France, traditions of oral performance, and a quirky sense of humor, among others. The *Mabinogion* texts were written in Welsh, but we read them in English translation.

When you complete this course, you will

- know where and what Wales is, and why it's not "a part of England"
- have a better understanding of some of the intellectual tools that we use to understand stories and the people who wrote them and enjoyed them
- have a better sense of what "medieval" is-- how medieval culture is in some ways tremendously different from our own ways and assumptions, and in others very similar
- amaze your friends with your pronunciation of Welsh names!
- have an intimate knowledge of eleven strange and wonderful stories written in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

The course requires no previous background in Celtic studies, and has been completed successfully by concentrators in Computer Science, Anthropology, Applied Math, Economics, Molecular and Cellular Biology, Philosophy, Psychology, Sociology, Neurobiology, Government, Human Evolutionary Biology, Folklore and Mythology, History, English, History and Literature, and the Classics, among other fields.

The *Mabinogion* texts in translation fit tidily into a book of fewer than 300 pages, including introduction and notes. Thus, we have the luxury of reading intensively, and of turning our attention from time to time to other, related Welsh materials, and to texts from other traditions as appropriate, as well as to the literary theory and the critical discussions that help us to understand the *Mabinogion* and everything else we read.

## **Course Instructors**

Professor Catherine McKenna

Office Hours: Wednesdays, 11:00 a.m. -12:00 noon  
Eastern Time

Wednesdays, 5:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.  
Eastern Time

in person: Warren House 204

access via Zoom by request

Email: [cmckenna@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:cmckenna@fas.harvard.edu)

Teaching Fellow

Office Hours:

### **Lectures and Sections**

Plenary sessions of the course will be held  
Tuesdays & Thursdays, from 10:30 - 11:45 a.m.  
EST (EDT after March 12).

Students are expected to attend class regularly,  
both plenary sessions and sections, to have done  
the reading required for the day (which is never  
onerous) as well as any written work assigned,  
and to participate in the discussion. Plenary  
sessions will include lecture segments, discussion,  
and group work.

### **Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

Students needing academic adjustments or  
accommodations because of a documented  
disability must present their Faculty Letter from  
the Accessible Education Office and speak with  
the professor by the end of the second week of the  
term. Failure to do so may result in our inability to  
respond in a timely manner. All discussions will  
remain confidential, although faculty are invited  
by AEO to contact the office to discuss  
appropriate implementation. Please do not  
hesitate to reach out to discuss how we can help  
support you and facilitate maximum learning.

### **Books**

There is one required text for the course; all other materials will be posted on the course website. We work with *The Mabinogion*, translated by Sioned Davies, a volume in the Oxford World's Classics series, published by Oxford University Press in 2007.

This book may be ordered through the Harvard Coop and is readily available from on line suppliers. It is also available online (and downloadable as PDFs) in ProQuest EBook Central, accessible through the Library Reserves page of this website.

Please do not choose another translation instead -- not the Penguin Mabinogion translated by Jeffrey Gantz, nor the Everyman's Library translation by Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones, nor any other version.

### **Prepared Attendance and Participation (19%)**

Students are expected to attend class regularly, both lecture sessions and sections, to have done the reading required for the day (which is never onerous), and to participate in the discussion.

### **Perusal Annotations (15%)**

Provide thoughtful, informed comments on selected course readings. Three points each for five assignments.

### **The Manuscript Exercise: Visit the Text in its Natural Habitat (10%)**

We'll spend some time learning how medieval books were made and learning something about the handwriting (paleography) in the two manuscripts in which the Mabinogion tales are preserved. This will culminate with each of you seeing whether you can transcribe a line of this writing. It's good fun, and we learn a lot. We'll compare notes and see what passage we have transcribed in early March.

**DUE February 28**

### **Mapping the Mabinogi: Visit the Stories in Their Natural Habitats (20%)**

We will all participate in building a [StoryMap](#) of the Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi, and making a virtual visit to Wales. We will identify the locations of place names that occur in one of the stories of the Mabinogion and plot them on a map of Wales, gathering images and historical information about the place. We'll complete our StoryMap in early April.

**DUE April 17th**

### **A Mabinogion Character: Become a Mabinogion Fanfiction Author (16%)**

Each student will be assigned a character who appears in one of the eleven tales of the Mabinogion. With the help of librarians and your instructors, you will research that figure in order to become familiar not only with the role they play in the Mabinogion, but with their place in the larger world of Welsh legendary tradition. You will write your own story (of at least 800 words) featuring that character (and others from Welsh tradition, if you choose). Once all are complete, we'll share the stories on the course website.

**DUE May 3rd (end of Reading Period)**

### **Take Home Final Examination (20%)**

This examination, posted on April 26 and due on May 12, will ask you to write two essays of three or four substantial paragraphs each. For each of these essays, you will have a choice of prompts to respond to.