

## EN 366

# THE ARTHURIAN TRADITION

Dr. Michael W. George 436 SH 362-6465 mgeorge@mail.millikin.edu	MW 3:00-4:15 Office Hours:
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**Warning:** Some of the material for this class could be deemed objectionable. Both I and the literature sometimes use colorful language. Additionally, there are strong situations in many of these works. If you are easily offended, I suggest that you drop this class now.

### Texts

Bradley, Marion Zimmer. *The Mists of Avalon*. Del Rey, 1982. ISBN 0345350499.

Chretien de Troyes. *Arthurian Romances*. Penguin Classics, 1991. ISBN 0140445218.

Malory, Sir Thomas. *Complete Works*. Ed. Eugene Vinaver. Oxford UP. ISBN 0192812173.

Alfred, Lord Tennyson. *Idylls of the King and a Selection of Poems*. Signet. ISBN 0451528751.

A plethora of texts on Blackboard

### Course Description

Who is that guy King Arthur? Why do we still talk about some 5<sup>th</sup>-century warlord from Wales? Can swallows really cooperate to carry coconuts? These are the questions that you will explore in this course on the Arthurian tradition. One of the most enduring images of the Middle Ages is the chivalric knight, the knight errant, a wandering warrior of noble blood saving damsels in distress and performing acts of heroism for his lady. When we think of chivalry, knights in shining armor, and the heroic ideal, we often think of King Arthur and his knights of the Round Table. The Arthurian tradition has a long history, going at least as far back as Geoffrey of Monmouth's twelfth-century *Historia Regum Britanniae* (*History of the Kings of England*), and Arthurian legend continues to be reworked and retold. In this course, you will examine the Arthurian tradition from a diachronic perspective—tracing the tradition through time. The first part of the course will cover medieval Arthurian tales. We will then look at more modern texts. In addition to readings, we will look at a number of films that have used the Arthurian tradition, including *Excalibur* and *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. As the term progresses, we will

discuss the possibility of a historical Arthur (about which there is much curiosity), and we will explore medieval European culture as it relates to the Arthurian tradition, including courtly love, chivalry, medieval warfare, the crusades (which will expose you to some of what was happening in the Middle East at the time), and how writers adapted the Arthurian tradition to fit with contemporary literary tastes. Although you'll get a firm grounding in medieval Arthurian literature, this course is not a medieval literature course. It is a course about a literary tradition, so you will read medieval, Renaissance, Victorian, and contemporary literature. You will learn a great deal about the medieval world, but you will also have a lot of fun with Arthur, Lancelot, Gawain, Guinevere, the Holy Grail, and the Knights who say "Ni!"

## Assignments and Grading

I will evaluate your mastery of this material in several ways:

Participation/Quizzes	10%
Reading/Research Journal	10%
Final Project	80%
Proposal	5%
Annotated Bibliography	10%
Methods Discussion	5%
Research Essay	60%

### Participation/Quizzes (10%)

In a course of this level, attendance and participation is essential, not just for your own learning but for your colleagues' learning. Participation means showing up to each class prepared to discuss the day's topic. You should have done the reading at least once (multiple readings of each item are ideal), have kept notes and questions in your journal, and be ready to contribute to a lively discussion for the day. Additionally, we will have regular quizzes on everything that we've covered—readings, theory, introductions (both my introductory lectures and the textual introductions). So coming to class prepared means knowing the material for that day and having studied the material from previous classes.

### Reading/Research Journal (10%)

As part of your reading, you need to keep a journal, where you will jot down your thoughts and questions about the readings, as well as notes on your own research and how material covered in class relates to your own research. You should have at least one journal entry for each reading assignment and one entry for each time that you work on your research project.

### Final Project (80%)

Most of your grade will come from a final research project. This is to be a conference- or article-length project on an Arthurian topic of your choice. The project is broken down into four parts: a project proposal, an annotated bibliography, discussion of methods, and the research essay itself. Additionally, you need to have entries in your journal reflecting upon your work on the research project, ideally one entry for each time you work on the project. This is a major project, and the

various stages of it are essential to success, so begin the project early (right now!) and continue to work on the various stages as the term progresses.

## **Course Policies**

### **Attendance and Punctuality**

Come to class and come to class on time. I will make every class meeting, and I will start class on time and end on time. I expect the same from you. I recognize that life sometimes pitches us a curveball, though, so make sure that you communicate with me, especially if I've indicated that you're not attending or not being punctual. Although I don't have an attendance policy for my upper level courses, do know that attendance does affect participation, and you can't make up missed quizzes. Additionally, you'll need to know much of what we go over in class—both for quizzes and for your research projects. So make it to class. In the event that you are unable to attend, contact one of your colleagues who was in class to see what we covered and to get the information that you need.

### **Academic Honesty**

I expect that what you turn in is your own work. All instructors expect that. Not submitting your own work or using forbidden sources is considered academic dishonesty (plagiarism or cheating), and it is a serious offense. There are a number of reasons why we consider academic dishonesty a serious problem. Most important for me is that all of the assignments have a purpose, an educational goal. Quizzes and examinations allow me to see how successfully I've presented information and how well you have learned it. They are opportunities for you to show what you have learned and for me to see what I need to do better. Research assignments are an opportunity for you to develop your critical thinking skills and to discover interesting things about the course topic and about your own abilities. Researching and writing is a cumulative process, beginning way back when you started writing papers and continuing throughout your life. One of my main goals in assigning research projects is to help you to develop independent critical thinking and research skills, skills that you will use the rest of your life. Undermining the examination and research process through academic dishonesty may get you a grade; however, it will cheat you of a valuable educational process that you will use in the future. For these reasons and a variety of others, Millikin has a strict policy on academic dishonesty, one that I follow to the letter. Plagiarists and cheaters can expect to fail the assignment and the course. Additionally, the Registrar will open an academic dishonesty file on the cheater. Another incident of academic dishonesty will result in the cheater's dismissal from the university. So be very careful to do your own work and to follow the source guidelines set forth in the assignment sheets carefully.

### **Class Discussions**

We will touch upon some hot issues during class discussion. Our conversations on these issues is an opportunity for you to think deeply about the issue and to experiment with and modify your ideas on the issue based upon remarks from your colleagues. In most instances, we won't agree on the issues that we discuss. That's ok. In fact, that's natural. But we do need to disagree agreeably. So make sure that you're civil and respectful when making comments. Our classroom

is a safe environment to talk about these issues, so maintain that safe environment. Discuss what people are saying without attacking them personally. Declaring that someone is "full of shit" isn't productive. Declaring that you disagree with someone's idea and saying why is.

## **Class Disruptions**

Don't disrupt class. If you find yourself late, come in quietly and take the first available seat without disturbing us. Also, make sure that your cell phone is turned off before you come to class. I have a habit of answering people's cell phones when they ring in class, and that can be embarrassing, since I tend to do so creatively.

## **Communication**

Talk to people about the class. My classes operate on communication, and if you're uncommunicative, you won't get the most out of the class. If you're having problems, talk to someone—either me or a colleague. If you're unhappy with what's going on, air your grievance. When I'm on campus and in my office, the door's open, and that means you're welcome. If I'm not on campus, email me; I'll get back to you as soon as I get the email, and I check about a dozen times a day. We'll be reading a lot of difficult material, and if you find yourself having problems keeping up, talk to people and get help. If you don't understand something, ask. Similarly, if you really like something, tell people.

## **Written Assignments**

Writing is typically the focus of all English classes because writing is the best way to express what you're thinking about the course topic. Writing is really a wonderful process, since the more you write, the more you learn, and the more you learn, the more you have to write. But remember that writing is a form of communication. The goal of all course writing is to communicate something to your reader(s). This means that you need to be precise in your writing. Craft your written assignments carefully. Follow the writing process guidelines that you have learned carefully, drafting and revising carefully, and then edit very carefully. Polish your writing carefully. Make sure that each sentence says exactly what you want it to say, and that means paying special attention to things like sentence structure and word choice, but also omitting the nasty grammatical problems that may slip by. Again, I'm available for consultation on your written work, and the Writing Center can offer an extra set of eyes. Likewise, use your colleagues in the class as editors. The more eyes you have looking at your writing, the better you will communicate.

All written assignments for this class (except your journal) must strictly conform to MLA style, including the first-page layout, placement of page numbers, margins, and documentation style and format. Consult *The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition (LB2369 .G53, Ready Reference). You may also consult an up-to-date composition handbook like Diana Hacker's *Bedford Handbook*. Most of these have updated information on MLA style. An electronic version of the handbook should be available in all of the public computer labs (Mueller, Tabor, Blackburn), so you can use these, as well. I will **not** read work that does not conform to MLA style, so make sure that your work does.

## Reading Texts

Reading texts professionally—in other words as literary scholars—is very different from reading texts for pleasure. Although you will probably be entertained and get pleasure from some of the texts that we read, that's not the primary purpose of a literature class. The primary purpose of class readings is to look closely at the texts from a variety of viewpoints. I'm a geek. I get pleasure from that. Some people don't. However, that's the purpose of the readings in this course. So to get the most from your readings, I suggest that you do the following:

- **Use theory.** Study the introductions to various literary theories so that you know the basic concepts and can apply them to the texts and in class discussion.
- **Read often.** One reading of a particular text or passage can give you some good information. Multiple readings can give you an amazing amount of insight. Read each assignment more than once.
- **Take notes.** Write down things that you think are important for the Arthurian tradition and your research project. Just as important, write down questions that you have about passages in the text. **Actually write your notes in your journal or on paper.** Highlighters are great. However, the act of writing will help you to retain information, and heavily highlighted texts aren't as easily sold to used bookstores as unmarked texts.
- **Compare.** Compare/contrast what you're reading with what you've already read. Remember, we're looking at the Arthurian tradition diachronically. That means that we're comparing/contrasting how particular characters and events are represented. This also means thinking historically. Think about the early chronicles and romances as you read a particular text.
- **Minimize distractions.** The more distractions while you're reading, the less you'll retain. Find a comfortable, quiet place to read. Reading with a significant other in the room is, as Monty Python would say, "right out." Find a setting where you can devote your full concentration to the task at hand—reading Arthurian texts. You'll retain more, and you'll be able to take better notes.
- **Read as a researcher.** As you read, maintain a dual personality of sorts. The first one is reading and retaining for class. The second one is as a researcher, compiling information for a research project. As you read, make sure that you take notes relating to your research project in your journal.

## Have Fun

Finally, have fun with this class. Yes, it's an academic class. Yes, it may be required for your major. And yes, you're going to get a grade for it. But that doesn't mean that we can't have fun this term. Literature, remember, is a form of entertainment. So be entertained, and have fun reading, studying, and talking about Arthur.

# TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

**Note:** In addition to reading the texts listed, you should also read and study any introductions included. When you read, study the text.

<b>Week</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Due</b>
<b>1</b> <b>1/21</b>	Course Intro/ Modern Arthuriana <i>Mists of Avalon</i> Introduction	Complete In-Class Survey
<b>2</b> <b>1-26</b>	Postmodern Theory: Uses and applications to modern and medieval culture and texts	Read Feminism, Postcolonialism from Blackboard
<b>1-28</b>		Read <i>Mists</i> : Acknowledgments, Prologue (ix-xi), Book 1 (3-231)
<b>3</b> <b>2-2</b>		Read <i>Mists</i> : Book 2 (235-449) Read Psychological Criticism from Blackboard
<b>2-4</b>		<b>Project Proposal Due</b> Read Deconstruction from Blackboard
<b>4</b> <b>2-9</b>		Read <i>Mists</i> : Book 3 (453-651)
<b>2-11</b>		
<b>5</b> <b>2-16</b>		Read <i>Mists</i> : Book 4 & Epilogue (655-end)
<b>2-18</b>	Chronicles	Read Nennius Read <i>Annales Cambriae</i> Read <i>Life of St. Goetznovius</i> Read Geoffrey: <i>History of the Kings of Britain</i> Read William of Malmesbury <b>All on Blackboard</b>
<b>6</b> <b>2-23</b>	Chronicles  Last day to withdraw and receive a W	Read Geoffrey: <i>Life of Merlin</i> Read Gerald of Wales on the Finding of King Arthur's Tomb Read Margam Abbey Chronicle Read <i>Kilhwch and Olwen</i> Read <i>Owain</i> Read <i>The Dream Of Rhonabwy</i> Read <i>Triads of the Island of Britain</i> <b>All on Blackboard</b>

<b>2-25</b>	Pseudo-Chronicles	Read Wace Read Layamon Read Auerbach's <i>Mimesis</i> , Chapter 6 Read Ashe's "Origins of the Arthurian Legend." <b>All on Blackboard</b>  <b>Annotated Bibliography Due</b>
<b>7</b> <b>3-1</b>	High Medieval Texts	Read Chretien de Troyes Introduction (1-22) and <i>The Knight of the Cart</i> (207-294)
<b>3-1</b>		Read Chretien de Troyes <i>The Knight with the Lion</i> (295-380)
<b>8</b> <b>3-8</b>		Read Chretien <i>The Story of the Grail</i> (381-494)
<b>3-10</b>	Late Middle Ages	Read Malory King Arthur: Merlin (1-37); Arthur and Accolon (81-93)  <b>Methods Discussion Due</b>
<b>9</b> <b>3-15</b>		Read Malory Tale of the Sankgreal: The Departure, the Miracles (513-40); The Miracle of Galahad (600-608)
<b>3-17</b>		Read Malory Book of Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere (609-670)
<b>10</b> <b>3-22</b> <b>&amp; 24</b>	<b>Spring Break</b>	
<b>11</b> <b>3-29</b>		Read Malory Most Piteous Tale of the Morte Arthur (671-726)
<b>3-31</b>	Modern Literature	Read Tennyson, Introduction (vii-xvi), Dedication (3-4), and "Coming of Arthur" (5-19), "Merlin and Vivian" (126-52)
<b>12</b> <b>4-5</b>		Read Tennyson "Lancelot and Elaine" (152-90), "The Holy Grail" (190-214), "The Last Tournament" (232-52)
<b>4-7</b>		Tennyson "Guinevere" (253-71), "Passing of Arthur" (272-86)
<b>13</b> <b>4-12</b>	<b>Easter Break</b>	

<b>4-14</b>	View <i>Excalibur</i>	
<b>14</b> <b>4-19</b>	View <i>Excalibur</i>	
<b>4-21</b>	Discuss <i>Excalibur</i>	
<b>15</b> <b>4-26</b>	View <i>Monty Python and the Holy Grail</i>	
<b>4-28</b>	View <i>Monty Python and the Holy Grail</i>	
<b>16</b> <b>5-3</b>	Discuss <i>Monty Python and the Holy Grail</i>	
<b>5-5</b>		
<b>17</b> <b>5-10</b>	Wrap-up	<b>Research Essay Due</b>
<b>5-12</b>	Finals	