

LSHS-376-01

**THE LEGENDS OF KING ARTHUR:
THE ONCE AND FUTURE KING**

Spring 2006 • 3 credits • W 6:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m. • Maguire 102

Professor John T. Sebastian • jtsebast@loyno.edu

Office hours TR 2:00-3:30 p.m. • W 3:00-4:30 p.m. • by appointment

This course surveys the origins and development of one of the richest and most enduring traditions in all of world literature: the legend of Arthur, *rex quondam, rexque futurus*, “the once and future king.” Primary focus will be on medieval historical and literary imaginings of Arthur, Guinevere, Lancelot, Merlin, Camelot, the Holy Grail, and the Round Table, but some attention will also be given to contemporary archaeological evidence, manuscripts and their illustrations, and music as well as to more recent literary and cinematic adaptations of the legends.

The course will operate as a seminar; students will therefore play as great a role—if not a greater one—in determining the direction of class discussion as the instructor. Several key themes that are likely to recur, however, include the transmission of the so-called “matter of Britain” throughout medieval European literature; competing codes of chivalric and courtly ethics; the quest as a metaphor for the search for identity; the conflict between secular and sacred ethics and desire; the shape of the legend as a function of genre (chronicle, romance, lai, prose text); the relationship between literature and material culture; and issues of sex and gender. The instructor will occasionally offer mini-lectures on relevant background materials, but only as an incitement to even wider-ranging discussion.

REQUIRED MATERIALS

All books are available through the campus bookstore. Should you choose to purchase your books from another vendor, be sure to purchase these translations/editions.

- Derek Pearsall, *Arthurian Romance: A Short Introduction*
- Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, trans. Thorpe (Penguin)
- Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, trans. Kibler (Penguin)
- Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, trans. Hatto (Penguin)
- Norris J. Lacy, ed., *The Lancelot-Grail Reader*
- *The Quest of the Holy Grail*, trans. Matarasso (Penguin)
- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, trans. Winny (Broadview)
- Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, ed. Shepherd (Norton)

Students are required to obtain the above-listed translations and editions for use in class, although those with the requisite competencies are encouraged to read around in the original languages as well. Additional readings will be made available through reserve as appropriate.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Participation (20%)

Since the class will operate as a seminar, and since a seminar can only function well if everyone in the room brings something to the table, active, thoughtful participation is an absolutely crucial component of the course and of the grade. Students are expected to contribute to the discussion each week. Regular attendance is, therefore, also critical to the success of the course. Students are expected to attend all class meetings except in case of illness or significant personal emergency. No student should expect to miss three or more classes and still pass the course.

2. Expert paper (20%)

Each student will take a turn as the class resident expert during the course of the term. The expert is responsible for writing a response of 5-7 pages on the primary reading for his or her assigned week. **The paper should be submitted to the instructor no later than noon on the Monday prior to the class meeting for which the student will serve as expert.** The instructor will then distribute the paper electronically to all members of the seminar, who should read the essay prior to class. The essay should be argumentative and analytical, not merely synoptic, and may take into account any ancillary readings assigned for that week or even texts assigned for previous sessions. Each student will summarize his or her position for no longer than five minutes in class. Taken with the response (see 3 below), the expert paper is intended to generate provocative topics for class discussion. Students may write on any pertinent topic that interests them; the bolded headings for each week indicate some potentially fruitful lines of inquiry, though these are intended only as suggestions. Depending on the size of the class, some weeks may feature two expert papers and two responses.

3. Response (10%)

Following the oral presentation of the expert each week, one student designated in advance as a respondent will offer a commentary on the essay under consideration. The respondent should plan to spend approximately ten minutes on his or her response. The response should not merely summarize the author's argument, nor should the respondent simply offer objections to arguments with whom he or she disagrees. Rather the respondent should offer alternative points of view, extensions or refinements of arguments presented in the essay, applications of the author's ideas to other parts of the reading or to other texts, new questions to consider, and so on. Provocative responses are encouraged, provided that they are also appropriately respectful. The respondent must also bring to class copies of a one-page précis of the points he or she intends to make for distribution to the other members of the seminar (including the instructor).

4. Final essay (50%)

All students will be required to write an original, research-based essay for the course. Undergraduates should submit an essay of approximately 12-15 pages; graduate students should aim for 20-25 pp. Any remotely Arthurian topic is likely to be approved, and students are welcome to write on medieval versions of the legends and especially on modern adaptations (novels, film, video games, and so on). The instructor will schedule a minimum of one required meeting with each student to discuss topics, resources, progress, etc.

Late policy: Since the expert papers and responses are keyed to specific class meetings and are intended to initiate the day's discussion, late work will *not* be accepted for this course.

SCHEDULE

(subject, and likely, to change)

All students should read the primary (i.e., medieval) text(s) for each class. Graduate students are expected to have read the additional criticism; undergraduates must read those articles and chapters that are marked with an asterisk (*) and should read the rest where possible, and in any case everyone should bring copies of all readings to class meetings for reference. Experts and responders, undergraduate and graduate, must complete all listed readings *at a minimum*. And, of course, everyone should read the expert paper(s) circulated at the beginning of the week. In general, texts are listed in the order in which they are most profitably read.

- | | |
|------------|---|
| January 18 | <p><i>Rex quondam, rexque futurus: Arthur's post-medieval future</i>
Course Introduction</p> |
| January 25 | <p>The “historical” Arthur: Britain, ca. 500 A.D.; the Welsh and Latin background; the 12th-century rebirth of the legend</p> <p>Pearsall, chapter 1</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;"> <p>Geoffrey of Monmouth, <i>The History of the Kings of Britain</i>, pp. 51-106, 144-169, 186-261</p> </div> <p>Geoffrey Ashe, “The Origins of the Arthurian Legend,” <i>Arthuriana</i> 5.3 (1995): 1-24</p> |
| February 1 | <p>Romancing the legend: romance as genre; courtly love; adultery; music; contemporary critical approaches to the Arthurian canon</p> <p>Pearsall, chapter 2</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;"> <p>Andreas Capellanus, <i>On Love</i> II.8</p> <p>Chrétien de Troyes, <i>The Knight of the Cart (Lancelot)</i></p> </div> <p>*Vern L. Bullough, “Medieval Concepts of Adultery,” <i>Arthuriana</i> 7.4 (1997): 5-15</p> <p>Robert S. Sturges, “Chrétien’s <i>Knight of the Cart</i> and Critical Theory,” <i>Arthuriana</i> 6.2 (1996): 1-10</p> |
| February 8 | <p>The knight sallies forth: quest and identity; jousting and tournaments; feuding</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;"> <p>Chrétien de Troyes, <i>The Knight with the Lion (Yvain)</i></p> </div> <p>Fredric L. Cheyette and Howell Chickering, “Love, Anger, and Peace: Social Practice and Poetic Play in the Ending of <i>Yvain</i>,” <i>Speculum</i> 80.1 (2005): 75-117</p> |

February 15 **Mysterious beginnings: Christian and non-Christian grails; the Celtic context
Chrétien's successors**

Chrétien de Troyes, *The Story of the Grail (Perceval)* including the appendix on the continuations, pp. 495-499

*Joseph J. Duggan, *The Romances of Chrétien de Troyes* (Yale, 2001), pp. 183-196, 211-212, 238-270

February 22 **Chrétien's legacy: the education of Wolfram and his hero; western views of medieval Islam; Wolfram's relationship to Chrétien**

Pearsall, chapter 3

Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, chapters 1-8 (esp. 1-6)

Arthur Groos, *Romancing the Grail: Genre, Science, and Quest in Wolfram's Parzival* (Cornell UP, 1995), pp. 95-118 ("Dialogic Transpositions: The Grail Hero Wins a Wife")

March 1 **Sacred and secular: chivalric ethics and the religious quest; medieval science**

Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, chapters 9-16 (esp. 9 and 15-16)

*Arthur Groos, *Romancing the Grail*, pp. 144-169 ("The Enchanted Body: Treating the Fisher King")

March 8 **No class**

March 15 **From verse to prose: history, theology, and literature; interlace; narratology; the hero's youth; gender**

The Lancelot-Grail Reader, pp. 94-304

*Gretchen Mieszkowski, "The Prose *Lancelot's* Galehot, Malory's Lavin, and the Queering of Late Medieval Literature," *Arthuriana* 5.1 (1995): 21-51 **OR** (your choice)
E. Jane Burns, "Ladies Don't Wear *Braies*: Underwear and Outerwear in the French *Prose Lancelot*, in *The Lancelot-Grail Cycle: Text and Transformations*, ed. William W. Kibler (University of Texas Press, 1994), pp. 152-174

March 22 **Sacred vs. secular: Cistercians; the failure of chivalry; allegory and medieval hermeneutics; post-structuralism and semiotics**

The Quest of the Holy Grail, pp. 31-134

E. Jane Burns, "Feigned Allegory: Intertextuality in the *Queste del Saint Graal*," *Romance Quarterly* 29.4 (1982): 347-363

Laurence N. De Looze, "A Story of Interpretations: The *Queste del Saint Graal* as Metaliterature," in *The Grail: A Casebook*, ed. Dhira B. Mahoney, pp. 237-259

March 29 **Quest's end: sexual purity and pollution; Monty Python; manuscript illuminations**

The Quest of the Holy Grail, pp. 134-284

*Alison Stones, "Seeing the Grail: Prolegomena to a Study of Grail Imagery in Arthurian Manuscripts," in *The Grail: A Casebook*, ed. Dhira B. Mahoney (Garland, 2000), pp. 301-366 (don't be put off by the length: there are lots of images!)

April 5 **On British soil: England's alliterative revival; topography and archaeology; feudal service vs. love service; monsters and the monstrous**

Pearsall, chapter 4

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

*Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages*, (Minnesota, 1999), pp. 142-183 (chapter 6, "Exorbitance")

April 12 **War and utopia: the Wars of the Roses; Malory's idealization of the past; femininity and magic**

Pearsall, chapter 5

Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*

"Fro the Maryage of Kyng Uther unto Kyng Arthure that Regned aftir Hym and Ded Many Batayles," pp. 1-112

Geraldine Heng, "Enchanted Ground: The Feminine Subtext in Malory," pp. 835-849 (in Malory)

April 19 **Rewriting a tradition: Malory's sources; Malory's style; the Winchester manuscript; Caxton**

William Caxton, Prologue and Epilogue to the 1485 Edition, pp. 814-819 (in Malory)

Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*

"The Noble Tale of the Sankgreal," pp. 496-587

Carol Meale, "Manuscripts, Readers, and Patrons in Fifteenth-Century England: Sir Thomas Malory and Arthurian Romance," pp.865-882 (in Malory)

April 26

**Decline, fall, and rebirth: the collapse of Camelot and the end of chivalry;
Malory's source; the afterlife of Arthur**

Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*

“The Tale of Sir Launcelot and Quene Gwenyvere,” pp. 588-645

“The Dethe of Arthur,” pp. 646-698

*Paul Strohm, “Mellyagant’s Primal Scene,” pp. 894-905 (in Malory)

Pearsall, chapters 6-7 (optional)

**FINAL ESSAY DUE
WEDNESDAY, MAY 10, BY 3:00 P.M.**