

Alex Mueller
alex.mueller@umb.edu
(617) 287-6723

Department of English
Wheatley 6th floor
Office hours: M 10-noon, W 11-noon

ENGLISH 200: KING ARTHUR

Lecture: MW (W01-0004)

Discussion: F (Held in DIS 01D-04D rooms)

Teaching Assistants: Jerimiah Bergstrom, John Burns, Samantha Regan, Pamela Worth

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

Course Topic:

The chivalric conquests of King Arthur and his Round Table knights, the illicit trysts of Guinevere and Lancelot, and the black magic of Morgan le Fay that enraptured medieval audiences have once again attracted great interest through their reappearance in a variety of print and visual media, such as the *Merlin* television series, the *King Arthur* blockbuster film, and news of the posthumous publication of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Fall of Arthur*. Even the irrepressible success of Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* can be partly attributed to the widespread fascination with the quest for the Holy Grail and the "real" King Arthur. Claiming an origin in medieval historical records, the myth of Arthur gained prominence in French, German, and English romance and continues to flourish today in conspiracy theories, novels, and even comedic films such as *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. In this course, we will track the history and influence of the Arthurian tales by analyzing the representations of King Arthur and his chivalric associates, both knights and "damsels in distress," as they appear in literature. Combining interactive lectures with weekly discussion sections, this course invites students to engage with a variety of texts, ranging from European grail legends to American romances, and to contribute their own responses to this rapidly expanding literary corpus through argumentative writing and "fan fiction" blogging.

Course Skills:

Since the many representations of "England's greatest king" reflect the complexities and vagaries of the human condition, this class will explore how the Arthur legend contributes to our understanding of the humanities and literary production. We will not only explore the culturally varied history of King Arthur as it began in the romance cycles of the Middle Ages and how it grew internationally to become a symbol of spiritual enlightenment in the nineteenth and twentieth century literature and film, but also engage in the current debates about the legend's connection to secret societies, spirituality, and actual historical events. We will engage in topics such as the origin of the legend, representations of the Arthurian characters and themes in art, anthropological studies of the oral tradition, and even the theories of the grail's connection to historical groups such as the Knights Templar in order to obtain a better understanding of academic scholarship in the humanities, all the while practicing analytical skills that will continue to serve us throughout college and in your chosen career fields. Ultimately, we will explore the human fascination for the quest, learn the literary, cultural, transnational, and historical contexts that have shaped popular mythology, and gain the skills and knowledge necessary to develop

our own interpretations of highly charged cultural and religious symbols that emerge in all disciplines of the humanities.

In this course we will learn or enhance our understanding of:

- the social, political, and ethical issues and controversies that surround medieval and modern interpretations of the figure of King Arthur
- the way literature, film, and scholarship in the humanities enrich investigations into the nature of the human condition
- the human fascination for quests that lead to enlightenment, wealth, or sovereignty
- how poetry, prose, and film represent cultural and national symbols and express differing interpretations of legends
- literary, historical, cultural, and international contexts that have formed and perpetuated Arthurian legends
- print-based and digital research and writing processes

In addition, this course will focus on the following English department learning outcomes:

- Employing close reading to study literary elements
- Interpreting literary works with reference to their historical contexts
- Developing strong arguments using two or more texts.

Course Texts:

Lacy, Norris and James J. Wilhelm, eds., *The Romance of Arthur: An Anthology of Medieval Texts in Translation*. (Routledge)

Twain, Mark. *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. (Penguin)

II. COURSE GENERAL EDUCATION DESIGNATIONS

This course fulfills the **HUMANITIES (HU)** General Education requirement. It asks you to develop an informed appreciation of literature as an expression of human culture and an exploration of the human condition. We will explore how and why peoples have turned to imaginative writing to explore enduring humanistic questions (who are we? how do we interact? what is our purpose? what is our future? what is our past?).

This course also fulfills the **INTERNATIONAL DIVERSITY** General Education requirement. It asks you to explore how literature is generated by a diverse range of international cultures, expressing a diverse range of national and transnational opinions. This course grapples with issues of racial, gender, class and cultural diversity. It explores how different patterns of thought are expressed in literature and how the development of cultures, including the interactions among different social groups, is expressed in literature.

III. COURSE STRUCTURE

Course Assignments

1. Mid-term Essay Exam #1	15%
2. Mid-term Essay Exam #2	15%
3. Final Exam	25%
4. Blog Writing—due in Section	20%
5. Attendance, Quizzes, Discussion, & Activities	15%
6. English Department Assessment	10%

Course Wiki-site

The course syllabus, assignments, and selected readings will be posted on our course Wiki-site.

--Our course Wiki-site is: <http://engl200-f13-mueller.wikispaces.umb.edu/>

Course Lectures: Conceptual Thinking and Note-taking

Held on a MWF schedule, this course will meet in a lecture format twice a week and a discussion format once a week. The lecture will provide the conceptual foundation of the course: the major ideas, themes, analyses, questions, and generic, historical, and cultural information. The course is structured to encourage you to *take notes as you follow the lecture*. Lecture attendance and note-taking are essential to writing successful midterm and final exams.

Course Sections: Discussion and Writing

Class participation will take place in your discussion section. You *must* attend discussion class *prepared* to participate in class conversation by reading *all* of the assigned material due that week and completing the weekly *writing assignment* on the course blog “**The Roundtable**” (<http://roundtableknights.weebly.com>). In section, you will engage in open-ended discussion—here is your opportunity to express your opinions on the class readings, clarify and debate the ideas from lecture, and learn from your peers. There will be many discussion-starting exercises employed in section, including in-class writing, oral performances, and quizzes. *Your active participation is essential.*

IV. COURSE POLICIES

Lecture and Section Attendance:

Your attendance is crucial to your success as well as the success of the course as a whole. Attendance will be taken at both the lectures and the discussion sections by your TA. *If you have seven absences (more than two weeks of course time) by the Withdrawal Deadline you will be asked to drop the course. More than seven absences are grounds for failure of the course. Note that two tardies count as an absence.* If you plan to miss class, please discuss it in advance with your TA. If you have an unexpected absence, please send a courtesy email to your TA. If you miss class, you are responsible for finding out what you missed by asking a classmate.

At the end of the semester, **your final grade will be lowered based on attendance**; after four absences, every absence will lower your final grade by one half grade.

Lecture and Discussion Preparation:

You must bring the assigned readings to both lecture and discussion; the course will frequently ask you to open your book to find specific quotations. Often you will need to print out and read a text from the internet or the course wiki site; you must bring that print out to lecture and discussion.

Course Exams:

This class has three exams: two midterms and a final. The midterms will be held during class time in our lecture room; the final will be scheduled by the university and held during final exam week. No make-up exams will be scheduled; any necessary make-up procedures must be discussed and arranged with me on an individual basis.

Plagiarism:

Students are required to adhere to university policies on academic honesty and student conduct. It is the expressed policy of the University that every aspect of academic life—not only formal coursework situations, but all relationships and interactions connected to the educational process—shall be conducted in an absolutely honest manner. The University presupposes that any submission of work for academic credit indicates that the work is the student's own and is in compliance with University policies. In cases where academic dishonesty is discovered after completion of a course or degree program, sanctions may be imposed retroactively, up to and including revocation of the degree. Any student who reasonably believes another student has committed an act of academic dishonesty should inform the course instructor of the alleged violation. The current Code of Student Conduct, including information about academic dishonesty, is available at:
http://www.umb.edu/life_on_campus/policies/code/

Plagiarism is a serious offence and is strictly prohibited. Plagiarism is defined by UMass Boston's Code of Student Conduct. An act of academic dishonesty, plagiarism can include actions such as presenting another writer's work as your own work; copying passages from print or internet sources without proper citation; taking ideas off the internet, modifying them, and presenting them as your own; or submitting the same work for more than one course. *If you plagiarize, you can expect to fail the course.*

Disabilities:

If you have a disability and feel you will need accommodation in order to complete course requirements, please contact the Ross Center for Disability Services at 617-287-7430. Section 504 of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 offers guidelines for curriculum modifications and adaptations for students with documented disabilities. If applicable, students may obtain adaptation recommendations from the Ross Center for Disability Services, Campus Center UL211, (617-287-7430). The student must present these recommendations and discuss them with each professor within a reasonable period, preferably by the end of Drop/Add period.

Incompletes:

Incompletes are rarely offered, as they are reserved for students who are unable to complete a small portion of the course at the end of the term due to an extreme circumstance such as illness. Incompletes are not allowed to replace a significant amount of coursework or absences. If you are awarded an Incomplete, you must sign a contract with your instructor outlining the work to be done and work due dates. Although an INC automatically turns into an F after a year, your Incomplete work will typically be due before the year's end. The university's official Incomplete policy is located at:

http://www.umb.edu/registrar/academic_policies/incomplete_policy

V. COURSE SYLLABUS—MEETINGS and ASSIGNMENTS

*All readings are from **The Romance of Arthur**, unless otherwise noted*

[Please note: Course schedule is subject to change based upon the discretion of the instructor]

Week 1 The Modern Arthur

Wed (9/4): General introduction to the course; Contemporary interest in Arthurian legend
 Fri (9/6): [English Department Assessment, Part 1]

Week 2 The Early Arthur

Mon (9/9): “Arthur in the Latin Chronicles”
 Wed (9/11): “Arthur in the Early Welsh Tradition”
 Fri (9/13): *Culhwch and Olwen*

Week 3 The Historical Arthur

Mon (9/16): “Arthur in Geoffrey of Monmouth”
 Wed (9/18): Wace, *Roman de Brut*; Layamon, *Brut*
 Fri (9/20): Discussion Section: Blog Entry #1 Due

Week 4 The Romantic Arthur

Mon (9/23): Chrétien de Troyes, *Lancelot*
 Wed (9/25): Eric Rohmer’s film, *Perceval Le Gallois*
 Fri (9/27): Discussion Section: Blog Entry #2 Due

Week 5 The Holy Arthur

Mon (9/30): Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*
 Wed (10/2): *The Quest for the Holy Grail*
 Fri (10/4): **MID-TERM EXAM #1**

Week 6 The Magical Arthur

Mon (10/7): *The Saga of the Mantle*
 Wed (10/9): Marie de France, *Lanval*
 Fri (10/11): Discussion Section: Blog Entry #3 Due

Week 7 The Other Arthurs: Tristan and Isolde

Mon (10/14): Columbus Day (NO CLASS)
 Wed (10/16): Bérout, *The Romance of Tristan*; Thomas of Britain, *Tristan*
 Fri (10/18): Discussion Section: Blog Entry #4 Due

Week 8 The Other Arthurs: Merlin

Mon (10/21): *The Prose Merlin*
 Wed (10/23): *The Suite du Merlin*
 Fri (10/25): Discussion Section: Blog Entry #5 Due

Week 9 The Other Arthurs: Gawain

- Mon (10/28): *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Part I and II)
 Wed (10/30): *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Part III and IV)
 Fri (11/1): Discussion Section: Blog Entry #6 Due

Week 10 The Chaucerian Arthur

- Mon (11/4): Chaucer, *The Wife of Bath's Prologue* (wiki)
 Wed (11/6): Chaucer, *The Wife of Bath's Tale* (wiki)
 Fri (11/8): **MID-TERM EXAM #2**

Week 11 The Violent Arthur

- Mon (11/11): Veteran's Day (NO CLASS)
 Wed (11/13): *The Alliterative Morte Arthure*
 Fri (11/15): Discussion Section: Blog Entry #7 Due [English Department Assessment, Part 2]

Week 12 The Dead Arthur

- Mon (11/18): Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur* (Part I)
 Wed (11/20): Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur* (Part II)
 Fri (11/22): Discussion Section: Blog Entry #8 Due

Week 13 The Resurrected Arthur

- Mon (11/25): Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *Idylls of the King* (wiki)
 Wed (11/27): John Boorman's film, *Excalibur*
 Fri (11/29): Thanksgiving (NO CLASS)

Week 14 The American Arthur

- Mon (12/2): Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (Chapters 1-25)
 Wed (12/4): Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (Chapters 26-44)
 Fri (12/6): Discussion Section: Blog Entry #9 Due

Week 15 The Comedic Arthur

- Mon (12/9): Terry Jones' film, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*
 Wed (12/11): Exam Review
 Fri (12/13): Discussion Section: Blog Entry #10 Due

FINAL EXAM (During Exam Week: Date TBA)**VI. COURSE BIBLIOGRAPHY****General Sources:**

- The New Arthurian Encyclopedia*. Ed. Norris Lacy et al. New York: Garland, 1991.
 Lacy, Norris J. and Geoffrey Ashe. *The Arthurian Handbook*. New York: Garland, 1988.
 Lupack, Alan. *The Oxford Guide to Arthurian Literature and Legend*. Oxford: Oxford University

Press, 2005.

Medieval Arthurian Literature: A Guide to Recent Research. Ed. Norris J. Lacy. New York: Garland Publishing, 1996.

A History of Arthurian Scholarship. Ed. Norris J. Lacy. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2006.

Ruck, E. H. *An Index of Themes and Motifs in Twelfth-Century French Arthurian Poetry*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1991.

Studies of Particular Authors and Genres:

Aronstein, Susan. *An Introduction to British Arthurian Narrative*. New Perspectives on Medieval Literature: Authors and Traditions. University Press of Florida, 2012.

The Arthur of the English: The Arthurian Legend in Medieval English Life and Literature. Ed. W. R. Barron. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999.

The Arthur of the Welsh: The Arthurian Legend in Medieval Welsh Literature. Ed. Rachel Bromwich, A. O. H. Jarman and Brynley F. Roberts. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991.

Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages: A Collaborative History. Ed. Roger Sherman Loomis. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959.

The Arthurian Revival: Essays on Form, Tradition, and Transformation. Ed. Debra N. Mancoff. New York: Garland, 1992.

Bowers, John M. *An Introduction to the Gawain Poet*. New Perspectives on Medieval Literature. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012.

Brinkley, Roberta Florence. *Arthurian Legend in the Seventeenth Century*. 1932; rpt. New York: Octagon Books, 1970.

Echard, Siân. *Arthurian Narrative in Latin*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Farina, William. *Chrétien de Troyes and the Dawn of Arthurian Romance*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2010.

King Arthur in the Medieval Low Countries. Ed. Geert H. M. Claassens and David F. Johnson. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2000.

King Arthur Through the Ages. 2 vols. Ed. Valerie M. Lagorio and Mildred Leake Day. New York: Garland Publishing, 1990.

Loomis, Roger Sherman. *The Development of Arthurian Romance*. London: Hutchinson University Library, 1963.

Lupack, Alan, and Barbara Tapa Lupack. *King Arthur in America*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1999.

Marie de France: A Critical Companion. *Gallica* 24. Ed. Sharon Kinoshita and Peggy McCracken. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2012.

The Medieval Python: The Purposive and Provocative Work of Terry Jones. Ed. R.F. Yeager and Toshiyuki Takamiya. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Merriman, James Douglas. *The Flower of Kings: A Study of the Arthurian Legend in England Between 1485 and 1835*. Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1973.

Millican, Charles Bowie. *Spenser and the Table Round: A Study in the Contemporaneous Background for Spenser's Use of the Arthurian Legend*. 1932; rpt. New York: Octagon Books, 1967.

Popular Arthurian Traditions. Ed. Sally K. Slocum. Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1992.

Mueller, Alex. *Translating Troy: Provincial Politics in Alliterative Romance*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2013.

Simpson, Roger. *Camelot Regained: The Arthurian Revival and Tennyson 1800-1849*. Cambridge: D.

S. Brewer, 1990.

Starr, Nathan Comfort. *King Arthur Today: The Arthurian Legend in English and American Literature 1901-1953*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1954.

Summers, David A. *Spenser's Arthur: The British Arthurian Tradition and the Faerie Queene*. Lanham: University Press of America, 1997.

Thompson, Raymond H. *The Return from Avalon: A Study of the Arthurian Legend in Modern Fiction*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985.

Tolhurst, Fiona. *Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Feminist Origins of Arthurian Legend*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.