

**Carleton University  
Department of English  
Winter 2010**

**ENGL4208: STUDIES IN MEDIEVAL LITERATURE  
Topic: King Arthur**

**Time: TBA  
Location: TBA**

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**Course Description:**

Arthur, Guinevere, Lancelot, Gawain—the names of these medieval characters live on today in a variety of films, novels, and games. But what were their literary origins? This course introduces students to the Arthurian literature circulating in Britain between 1100 and 1500. We will study the central texts of the medieval Arthurian tradition in England, and examine the ways in which this varied and disparate tradition was taken up by different writers. We will read both chronicles and romances about Arthur, and explore the ways in which these genres use the same characters, plots, and motifs to explore a wide range of issues. Specifically, we will consider the different ways in which Arthurian texts envision kingship, queenship, and knighthood. We will also examine the literary models of love and loyalty provided in various texts, as well as the ideals of masculinity and femininity promulgated therein. We will strive to set these literary texts and models in their historical contexts, and consider how medieval Arthurian texts spoke to central issues of their day and why they still speak to audiences today.

**Course Objectives:**

Students in this course will:

- Read a variety of medieval Arthurian texts
- Develop an appreciation and understanding of the Middle English language as well as a facility with reading and quoting it
- Explore how medieval Arthurian texts engage the issues of gender, violence, history, polity, and religion

- Develop a historical and historicized understanding of the depictions of ideal masculinity, femininity, love, and vassalage in late medieval England
- Become familiar with current critical discussion about medieval Arthurian texts
- Consider what constitutes the medieval Arthurian Tradition, and what explains its enduring appeal

**Tentative Reading List:**

French, Latin, and Welsh texts will be read in modern English translation. All other texts will be read in Middle English. Assistance with reading Middle English will be provided as needed.

- Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Historia Regum Britanniae/History of the Kings of Britain* (Broadview)
- Chrétien de Troyes, *Lancelot ( Le Chevalier de la charette)* and *Yvain (Le Chevalier au lion)* (Penguin)
- Selections from Wace, *Le Roman de Brut* and Layamon, *Brut* (Exeter)
- Selections from *The Mabinogion* (Penguin)
- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Everyman)
- *Stanzaic Morte Arthure* (TEAMS)
- *Alliterative Morte Arthure* (TEAMS)
- Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur* (Norton Critical Edition)
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**\*Texts will be available at Octopus Books, 116 Third Avenue, just off Bank Street (233-2589) / [www.octopusbooks.ca](http://www.octopusbooks.ca)**

Materials will also be placed on Reserve at the Library to assist with your article summary assignment as well as with research for your seminar and paper.

**Tentative Evaluation Format:**

Short article summary 5%  
*A 5-minute oral summary of an article that relates to our reading for the day. Articles may be chosen from a list provided or from your own research, in which case you must submit a copy of the article to me one week before your summary presentation.*

Seminar Presentation 25%  
*A 30-minute presentation consisting of a 20-minute oral presentation of research and ideas about a topic associated with our reading for the day, followed by a 10-minute class discussion, which you will lead. A one-page outline with references should be distributed to the class at the presentation. Please make sure to discuss your seminar with me at least 1*

*week before your presentation so that I may organize the class so as to avoid overlap.*

**Term Paper**

**35%**

*A paper of 10-15 pages (double-spaced) is due at the last class meeting. MLA format is required for your essay, as is secondary research. I strongly encourage you to come and discuss your ideas and essay outlines with me during my office hours.*

**Journal of Reading Responses**

**25%**

*A journal of responses to 8 of the primary readings covered in this class. Each response should be 1 page long and written in sentences and paragraphs, and should discuss the text's presentation of 1 or 2 issues of interest to you.*

**Attendance and Participation**

**10%**

*Because this is a seminar, much of the discussion will be shaped and initiated by you, the students. I expect you to come to all classes with 1-3 questions or passages earmarked for discussion, and to participate in lively and civil discussion. I also expect you to engage with other students' seminar presentations. A hand-out of more specific expectations will be distributed at the first class.*