

Carleton University
Winter 2025 Preliminary Course Outline
Department of English

ENGL 3200A: Topics in Medieval Literature
Topic: King Arthur

Prerequisites: third-year standing or permission of the department
Preclusions: None

Professor: Dr. S. B. Calkin
Email: siobhain.calkin@carleton.ca

***** This is a preliminary syllabus only—texts and assignments are subject to change. A complete version will be available closer to the start of the term. *****



From *Lancelot du lac*, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Rawl. Q. b. 6,
reproduced for educational purposes from ArtStor

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 CE. We will study the central texts of the medieval Arthurian tradition in Britain and examine the ways in which different writers took up this varied and disparate tradition. 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, violence, 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(s) and why they still speak to audiences today.

Learning Outcomes:

Students in this course will:

- Read a variety of medieval Arthurian texts
- Explore how these texts engage issues of gender, violence, history, polity, and religion
- Develop a historical and historicized understanding of the depictions of masculinity, femininity, love, kingship, queenship, knighthood, and vassalage in late medieval Britain
- Consider what constitutes the Arthurian Tradition, and what explains its enduring appeal
- Develop an appreciation and understanding of the Middle English language as well as a facility with reading and quoting it
- Develop the research skills required to position medieval literature in relation to some of its secondary scholarship
- Hone their ability to read complex material closely and carefully and deploy evidence from it effectively and accurately

Texts:

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

- Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*. Trans. and ed. Michael A. Faletra. Peterborough: Broadview, 2008. ISBN: 9781551116396 / 1551116391
- Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*. Trans. and ed. William W. Kibler. London: Penguin, 1991. ISBN: 9780140445213
- Marie de France, *Lanval* (available in both the Norton and Broadview Anthologies often used for ENGL 2301; if you do not have either of those, then this reading is available **online** in a translation by Judith Shoaf at <http://people.clas.ufl.edu/jshoaf/files/lanval.pdf>)
- *King Arthur's Death: The Middle English Stanzaic Morte Arthur and Alliterative Morte Arthure*. Ed. Larry D. Benson. Rev. Edward E. Foster. TEAMS Middle English Text Series. Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications Western Michigan University, 1994. Also available **online** at <https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/benson-and-foster-king-arthurs-death>. Please note, however, that the two Arthur texts in this book are rather long and so it will be easier on your eyes to read them offline in a hard copy. ISBN 1-879288-38-9
- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Ed. Paul Battles. Peterborough: Broadview, 2012. ISBN: 9781554810192 / 1554810191
- Sir Thomas Malory. *Le Morte Darthur*. Ed. Stephen H. A. Shepherd. New York: Norton, 2004. ISBN: 978-0-393-97464-5

The required readings will be available from the Carleton University Bookstore.

Evaluation:

Attendance and Participation **10%**

(An outline of my expectations for attendance and participation will be distributed in the first week of class)

Other Arthurs **10%**

(On your chosen day, you are expected to speak to us in class for 5 minutes about an Arthurian text or website NOT on our assigned readings (these may include primary texts from any period or medium, popular or scholarly websites, games, video games, movies, paintings, or scholarly articles you have read about an Arthurian text we study). Give us a very brief overview of your chosen resource and identify 1-2 points of connection, comparison and/or contrast with the medieval Arthurian texts we are studying. Assignments will be assessed on timely completion of specified tasks, clarity of communication, and effectiveness of organization/presentation.)

Mid-Term Examination (In-person; in-class) **20%**

(short answer questions, passage identification and analysis, and essay question; will be scheduled during class time)

Paper:

Annotated Bibliography and Draft Thesis Statement **5%**

Final Paper **25%**

(A paper of 8-10 pages, double-spaced, on one or more of the medieval texts studied in class; MLA or Chicago format and secondary research are required. Possible topics and a detailed outline of my expectations will be posted to Brightspace, and I encourage you to discuss your ideas and essay outlines with me.)

Final Examination (In-person; during Official Examination Period) **30%**

(cumulative; short answer and/or short translation passage, in-depth passage identification and analysis, essay questions; will be scheduled during Formal Examination Period)