

Medieval Arthurian Traditions

Spring 2013

Organiser: Dr Karen Smyth (office: Arts 2.31; email: k.smyth@uea.ac.uk)

Teaching: seminar on Thursday 1pm – 4pm.

Course description:

Who has not heard of Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table? Yet why, of all medieval traditions, is this legend the most pervasive medievalism of modern culture? We will explore how in order to understand Cornwall's page turning historical thriller *Excalibur* or Monty Python's *Holy Grail* comedy for instance, we need to travel back to the Middle Ages. Beginning with the 12th century Celtic roots through many twists and turns to its final medieval flourishing in the 15th century in a work by Malory, which all modern versions are today based upon. In so doing the translation from heroic to romance cultures will be the focus. A variety of English Arthurian texts will be read alongside the folkloric Welsh *Mabinogion* collection, Geoffrey of Monmouth's influential Latin work and French romance texts in translation. Variations in form will also be addressed as the source base of the medieval Arthurian legend is diverse, encompassing chronicle, ballad, verse and prose. Students will examine the genres and voices of prophecy, pseudo-historical discourse, pseudo-exegesis and courtly romance. The various national responses to ideas of myth, legend and histories of British imperialism, the cultural significance of differences in the representations of women in the various texts, as well as questions regarding individuality and selfhood that arise in literature produced in a volatile period of religious and social uncertainty and dissent will be explored.

This course will enable those students who have encountered *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* to enhance their awareness of the wider traditions within which this Arthurian text belongs, but is also suitable for students who are embarking upon their first encounters with medieval literature.

Seminar schedule: (may be subject to amendment)

- Wk 1: Approaches and Techniques (note - some preliminary module dossier reading to be completed before seminar one).
- Wk 2: The Celtic 'folklore' tradition: *The Mabinogion*.
- Wk 3: Arthur and Merlin in Geoffrey of Monmouth's chronicle *Historia regum Britanniae*.
- Wk 4: Romance: Chrétien de Troyes versus Marie de France.
- Wk 5: Versions of Gawain: the good, bad and the ugly.
- Wk 6: Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*. Arthurian Beginnings.
- Wk 7: READING WEEK
- Wk 8: Malory: Lancelot and his fellowship.
- Wk 9: Malory: Guinevere and the other Women.
- Wk 10: Malory: Endings.
- Wk 11: Note – film screening (Wednesday afternoon, time tbc) of Monty Python Seminar on Thursday: Medievalism: Bernard Cornwall, *Excalibur* and Monty Python's *Holy Grail*.

Wk 12: Individual Project Tutorials (note these will take place after week 11 seminar, rather than waiting until after the Easter break)

Assessment:

1) **Project:** one essay, worth 100% of the marks for this module.

Due in week 13 (after Easter break in the spring assessment period).

Word length:

5000 words for 30 credit version

3,500 words for 20 credit version

This will be thematically based, requiring you to support your argument with close readings from the text(s) and situating / negotiating your voice in relation to wider secondary reading. You will be required to draw material together from different parts of the course.

There will be an opportunity for formative work and individual project tutorials.

Required Reading:

- Vinaver, ed. *Malory, Works*. 3rd ed. revised by P.J.C. Field. Oxford, 1990. You will need to purchase a copy (earlier editions are fine), for week 6.
- Bernard Cornwall, *Excalibur*. You will need to purchase in advance of week 11.
- Module dossier. This is needed from day one, in the first seminar.

REQUIRED READING FOR WEEK ONE:

As indicated in the dossier. Dossiers will be available for collection at the end of the first semester.

Preparatory Reading:

There has been an abundance of critical material on the Arthurian traditions, some of which is below. More directed reading material will be suggested for each of the main areas of the course, but as a starter it will help if you can read some of the following:

W. R. J. Barron, ed., *The Arthur of the English: The Arthurian Legend in Medieval English Life and Literature*

Christopher Baswell and William Sharp, eds, *The Passing of Arthur: New Essays in Arthurian Tradition*

Gillian Beer, *The Romance*

Martin Biddle, ed., *King Arthur's Round Table*

Mary Flowers Braswell and John Bugge, eds, *The Arthurian Tradition: Essays in Convergence*

Rachel Bromwich, A. O. H. Jarman, Brynley F. Roberts, eds, *The Arthur of the Welsh: The Arthurian Legend in Medieval Welsh Literature*

E. K. Chambers, *Arthur of Britain*

Ronan Coghlan, *The Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Arthurian Legends*

Laurie A. Finke and Martin B. Shichtman, *King Arthur and the Myth of History*

D. H. Green, *Irony in the Medieval Romance*
Claire Hamilton, *Arthurian Tradition: A Beginner's Guide*
Nick Higham, *King Arthur: Myth-Making and History*
Stephen Jaeger, *Ennobling Love*
Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*
M. Keen, *Chivalry*
Edward Kennedy, ed., *King Arthur: A Casebook*
Stephen Knight, 'The Social Function of the Middle English Romances', in Aers, ed., *Medieval Literature: Criticism, Ideology, and History*
—, *Arthurian Literature and Society*
Roberta Krueger, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*
Norris Lacy, ed., *The Arthurian Encyclopedia*
Roger Sherman Loomis, *Development of Arthurian Romance*
Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm Maddox, eds, *Literary Aspects of Courtly Culture*
Richard Moll, *Before Malory: Reading Arthur in Later Medieval England*
Nicholas Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry*
Derek Pearsall, *Arthurian Romance: A Short Introduction*
John Stevens, *Medieval Romance*
Michelle R. Warren, *Excalibur and the Borders of Britain, 1100-1300*
Bonnie Wheeler, ed., *Arthurian Studies in Honour of P. J. C. Field*