

English 325AD (2020)
Contesting Camelot: Arthurian Literature and Medievalism

Dr. Jes Battis (he/they)
 T/R: 11:30-12:45
 Classroom: CB 417
 Office: AH366 (Office Hours—T 1:00-2:00, W 2:00-3:00)

Course Description

Why do we keep returning to Arthurian mythology? The sword in the stone, the grail, the questing beast, Merlin the magician, Morgan the enchantress—how are these myths adapted over time? We'll survey a variety of medieval Arthurian stories, as well as medievalist adaptations, to trace the global incarnations of this medieval myth. We'll also discuss how these ever-changing myths, and the Middle Ages in general, have been used to defend racism, white supremacy, and violent nationalism. We'll focus on characters both marginal and central: Morgan and her sly sorcery; Merlin as a child-wizard; knights like Palamedes and Moriaen, who are also people of color; trans and nonbinary knights; and magic itself as a force that makes reading these stories both wild and ambivalent. In addition to formative work by Malory, Monmouth, and Marie de France, we'll read two adaptations: T.H. White's *Sword in the Stone*, and McCarthy and Capetta's *Once and Future*. Along the way, we'll engage with a number of languages: Latin, Old English, Welsh, Anglo-Norman, and Hebrew, among others.

Course Texts

Malory, Thomas. *Selections from Le Morte Darthur*. Broadview, 2014.
 McCarthy, Cori and Amy Capetta. *Once and Future*. Patterson, 2019.
 White, T.H. *The Sword in the Stone*. HarperCollins, 2008.

Course Schedule

UR = reading posted on UR Courses Page

Tuesday, Jan 7: Introductions; Class Goals

Thursday: Jan 9: "The Wanderer" (UR); Mary Rambaran-Olm, "Rejecting Anglo-Saxon Studies" (UR)

Tuesday, Jan 14: Malory, "Marriage of King Uther" (pp.31-43)

Thursday, Jan 16: "Culhwch and Olwen" (from *The Mabinogion*); UR

Tuesday, Jan 21: Marie de France, "Lanval" (UR)

Thursday, Jan 23: Excerpt from *King Artus* (UR); Excerpt from *Tristan* (Palamedes); UR

Tuesday, Jan 28: Malory, “A Noble Tale of Launcelot du Lake” (pp.44-78)
Amy S. Kaufman, “Malory and Gender” (UR)

Thursday, Jan 30: **Extended Office Hours—No Class**

Tuesday, Feb 4: *Prose Lancelot* (Guinevere); Chaucer, “Wife of Bath’s Tale” (UR)
Submit Short Paper to UR Courses

Thursday, Feb 6: Monmouth, *Life of Merlin* (UR); Knight’s *Merlin: Knowledge and Power* (UR)

Tuesday, Feb 11: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (L1-490); UR
Heng, “Feminine Knots in *Gawain*” (UR)

Thursday, Feb 13: *Gawain* continued (L925-1125; L1600-45; L2190-2530)

Tuesday, Feb 18: **Winter Break**

Thursday, Feb 20: **Winter Break**

Tuesday, Feb 25: *Prose Lancelot* (Morgan + Galehaut) [UR]; Larrington, *Arthur’s Enchantresses*

Thursday, Feb 27: Excerpt from *Moriaen* (UR); Maghan Keita, “Saracens and Black Knights” (UR)

Tuesday, March 3: T.H. White, *Sword in the Stone*
Submit Research Essay Proposal to UR Courses

Thursday, March 5: *Sword in the Stone* Continued

Tuesday, March 10: Malory, “Noble Tale of the Sankgreal” (pp.110-160)

Thursday, March 12: Excerpt from *Silence* (UR); Excerpt from *Prose Merlin* (Sir Grisandolus); UR

Tuesday, March 17: “Malory, “Tale of Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere” (pp.161-245)

Thursday, March 19: McCarthy, *Once and Future*

Tuesday, March 24: *Once and Future* Continued

Thursday, March 26: **Extended Office Hours—No Class**
Submit Research Paper to UR Courses

Tuesday, March 31: Dorothy Kim, “Teaching Medieval Studies in the Time of White Supremacy” (UR)

Thursday, April 2: Exam Prep

Tuesday, April 7: Exam Prep + Evaluations

Assignments/Grading

Short Paper: 25%

Research Paper Proposal: 5%

Research Paper: 35%

Final Exam: 35%

Assignment Descriptions

All assignments must be submitted electronically to UR Courses by the due date

Short Paper (25%)

Your first essay will be 5 pages [double-spaced] + a bibliography formatted according to current MLA Style [8th edition]: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>

Formatting

The essay will include a title page [separate] with your name, the date, the course name/number, your student number, and a title that reflects your discussion, e.g.:

The Significance of Transformative Magic in Malory’s *Morte Darthur*

or

Guinevere vs. Lanval: Sexuality in Marie de France’s *Lanval*

Your title should suggest a specific argument and let the reader know which text you’ll be concentrating on--it should not be generic, e.g., Love in Arthurian Legends

Include page numbers as a header/footer. **Be sure to include your name and the assignment title in your filename.**

Argument

You will develop a discussion about one of the course texts, with reference to quoted material, including **at least 2 scholarly sources** which strengthen your own ideas. You should focus on one of the texts that we address in the **first half of class**.

A solid argument focuses on **quoted material** from the primary text [Arthurian], and then brings in scholarly sources which expand upon/clarify your own ideas about the topic.

Example: “In this essay, I’ll argue that the birth of Arthur, in Malory’s *Morte Darthur*, is tied to the creation of England as a nation. I’ll show how Merlin’s prophecy and magic give England a supernatural origin, which has been co-opted by white supremacists who argue for the existence of an ‘Anglo-Saxon’ nation. In addition to quoted material from Malory, I’ll also draw upon scholarship by _____ and _____ to show that _____”

Your discussion **must** contain a mixture of: 1) quoted material from your primary source with discussion; 2) quoted material from your secondary sources with discussion; 3) transitional or signalling material meant to convey the significance of your argument [e.g., this next section lays out my perspective on _____ and is important because _____]; 4) introductory and concluding paragraphs which present your topic and then arrive at a final point about what’s been said in your discussion--your conclusion is the *so what* of your argument.

Scholarly Sources

These could include the following:

- 1) peer-reviewed articles on Arthurian literature and/or the Middle Ages [such as the articles that I’ve posted to UR Courses]
- 2) essays in edited volumes that focus on Arthurian literature and/or the Middle Ages
- 3) scholarly monographs [critical nonfiction books by a single author] that focus on Arthurian literature and/or the Middle Ages

If you decide to compare Arthurian literature to a popular source (e.g., *Game of Thrones*, a video game, a film), you’ll still need to provide **2 additional scholarly sources**. At the same time, you’ll be expected to **draw quoted material from your popular source as well**.

Potential Essay Prompts

- 1) Compare one of Malory’s Arthurian stories to an earlier/lesser-known text (e.g., “The Wanderer”; “Culhwch and Olwen”) in order to point out significant connections/differences.
- 2) Discuss the significance of women in one (or more) Arthurian text.
- 3) Discuss the role of magic in one (or more) Arthurian text—how does it structure the action within the story?
- 4) Choose a character and discuss their role in 2 different Arthurian texts—how are they similar, and how do they change, within these texts?

5) What do Arthurian stories mean to you? Choose 1 or 2 examples and discuss your personal connection to the Arthurian myth cycle (including scholarly sources).

You're of course welcome to generate your own topic, though be sure to let me know what you'd like to write on before you submit the essay to UR Courses.

Research Paper Proposal (5%)

This proposal will outline your final project, including your central argument, scholarship that you'll include, quoted material from your primary source, and a proposed bibliography.

2 pages + biblio. Your research paper should include at least 4 scholarly sources.

Things to include:

- research question
- what I will discuss in my essay
- what is my point?
- include your primary source
- a quotation from your primary source
- include secondary sources that aid your discussion
- you can include your opinions + your identity so long as it relates to argument
- avoid observation ("text is interesting")
- argument makes a point about the text

The feedback that I offer on your proposal should help to structure your research paper. You don't have to incorporate all of my suggestions, but there should be evidence that you've integrated some of this feedback. I may ask you to revise and resubmit your proposal, in order to clarify the argument or strengthen the structure of the proposed essay. **Being asked to revise isn't a bad thing—it simply gives you the chance to clarify your ideas.**

Research Paper (35%)

Your research paper should be **around 8 pages** and include **at least 4 scholarly sources**. You can expand upon a topic that you explored in your short paper, or pursue a new topic. While the short paper does include some scholarly support, your research paper should engage even more closely with your scholarly sources, in order to place your own discussion within a critical conversation around your chosen text. Generally, what separates a short paper from a research paper isn't simply the length, but the way in which you weave scholarly support into your discussion. This essay should describe what contribution your own ideas make to the field of Arthurian Studies, while also situating those ideas within existing criticism (e.g., here's what critics are saying; here's what I'm saying; here's how these discussions connect/differ).

Your opening paragraphs should introduce both your primary and secondary-scholarly texts. Mention why you chose these scholars, and how you'll address their work. Say where these texts come from (e.g., Geraldine Heng's article, "Feminine Knots," will inform my discussion of Morgan la Fey in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. She argues _____, and I'll add that

_____”). You should also identify the time period that you’ll be discussing. If you want to talk about Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Life of Merlin*, for instance, identify this as a **12th century text**, and focus your discussion on how the 12th century influences the Arthurian myths that emerge from its particular historical context. Think about what language the text was originally composed in, where it was composed, and what was going on at the time. The Middle Ages stretch roughly from 400-1500 CE, so avoid phrases like **medieval times**. Be specific, as you would when talking about a current decade.

As with your short paper, you should include signalling phrases which remind the reader where your discussion is going, and why it’s important:

“In the previous paragraph I discussed _____, and now I’ll move on to _____”

“This point is important to my overall argument because _____”

“What makes this quotation significant is _____”

“I’ve argued throughout that _____, and what gives this discussion broader social significance is _____”

“This discussion is particularly important to me because _____”

Your citations should follow current MLA guidelines. **Always provide quoted, cited material from your primary and secondary-scholarly sources.** You may paraphrase once or twice, but the majority of your primary/secondary support should be **directly quoted**. Include page numbers and line numbers, when available. Avoid longer “block” quotations (e.g., more than 4-5 lines), unless you intend to focus on them in detail. What works best is to include short quotations, which you’ve integrated into your discussion (e.g., “In her piece on medievalism and white supremacy in *Time* magazine, Dorothy Kim urges medievalists to ‘resist the medieval narratives that activate violent hate’ and ‘create counter-narratives’ (Kim, “Real Viking History,” April 2019). I’ll draw upon Kim’s work to discuss _____”).

Your conclusion should make a firm point about the topic, and explain your own perspective on the discussion. Avoid saying that the topic is simply interesting, that the scholars make “many points,” or that the texts are “open to interpretation.” Be as specific as possible in describing what your essay **does** as a discussion, and why the discussion is important to Arthurian Studies. You may use “I” and discuss your personal reflections on the material, so long as you connect your own ideas/experiences with both primary and secondary-scholarly material.

Class Conduct and Other Matters

We’ll be running this classroom as a safe space. This means that, while you may feel challenged at times, you should never feel *unsafe*—if you do, please let me know. Students are welcome (though certainly not required) to share their pronouns or other elements of their identity, and we should all work to respect people’s preferred modes of address. This is a process. We’ll make mistakes sometimes, and that’s OK. I’ll make note of any material that might be triggering—

since this is medieval literature, much of the material will delve into matters of gender, misogyny, homo/trans-phobia, and issues of consent.

Email

I'm happy to answer email queries, but do remember that emails pile up, and I may take a few days to get back to you. If you sent me an email but haven't heard back in 2 days, feel free to send a polite reminder. Most of these conversations actually work better in-person (see the section on office hours), though I understand that accessibility concerns may keep you from campus. **I do not respond to email on Saturday or Sunday—unless it's urgent.** I also don't usually respond after 6pm on weekdays, though I will check just in case.

Office Hours

When I first started college, I was confused about how office hours worked. It felt like I was bothering my professors by stopping by to ask them questions. Precisely the opposite is true—we *want* you to stop by during these scheduled times. This is the best way for me to get to know you, chat about your work, and see how you're doing. These conversations tend to be most useful when I know that you're coming by (i.e., give me a shout beforehand and let me know approximately what time you'll stop by). If the scheduled office hours don't work, let me know and we can find a different time to meet.

Inclusive Citation

A balanced bibliography should contain scholars of all sorts. Are you citing women? Are you citing people of color? Are you citing people who identify as LGBTQ+? Are you citing disabled people? Are you citing adjunct/sessional scholars whose jobs are precarious? Are you citing grad students? Run through these questions as you put together your bibliography. Do some digging on the scholars that you've cited and learn about them. Consider, especially, whether the writers you've chosen have direct experience with your topic.

Accessibility

A classroom can be an intense space, and we'll make every effort to ensure that the physical space of the classroom is accessible. If any issues occur to you regarding the layout of the class, do let me know. There is no "correct" way to exist in a classroom. You don't need to be extensively taking notes, making eye contact, or responding to discussion at all times (though you should be engaged—and there are many ways to demonstrate that). You should do whatever you need to in order to facilitate learning. If you need to draw or use a tool or play with something, go ahead. If you need to get up and move, please do. If you feel overwhelmed by a sensory element of the classroom (i.e., lights, sounds, smells), let me know and I'll see what I can do. If you need to leave for a brief period, that's fine too—just do it quietly.

Note-Taking

Laptops are fine, but don't try to write down everything that's happening in class discussion, using full sentences. Instead, focus on what's significant, and use abbreviated headings that are linked by their significance:

- 1) Merlin in Arthurian myth
 - a) appears in Monmouth and Malory (12thc/15thc)
 - b) has different roles in different texts
 - i) magic disrupts chivalry

Here, we begin with a broad topic (Merlin)

We move to sub-points (texts, roles of character)

We end with an argument-point (magic and chivalry)

Support and Accessibility

I use “support” instead of “accommodation” because the latter sounds like a favour, and it's likely that what you're asking for is an equal playing field rather than an accommodation. This is handled first through the Office for Student Accessibility, and then through the Arts Accessibility Office, who will process paperwork. If you have an accessibility contract, I will receive it in the first week of class—we can go over it together, or I can simply sign it and return it to the appropriate office. If you **don't** have a contract but think you might need support, let me know and I can help you to work with Student Accessibility to get you the support that you need.

Neurodiversity

I'm on the spectrum, and I also have some hidden disabilities. If you'd like to talk about strategies for dealing with anxiety/sensitivity, as well as ways to address issues of processing/executive function (i.e., scheduling tasks and following instructions), feel free to chat with me! I can recommend reading as well. One thing I ask is that you don't approach me with significant questions either *immediately* before class starts or *immediately* after it ends—instead, you can swing by my office 10 minutes before/after.

Extensions

You may request an extension **a minimum of 48 hours** from the assignment due date. Extensions should be requested in writing (i.e., through email). We will then work out an alternate due date. It's your responsibility to check in with me, while working on the assignment, to ensure that you're going to make the alternate due date. If you end up needing more time than we'd originally negotiated, you need to notify me beforehand. I will try to be as flexible as possible, so long as you keep in contact. If you do not hand in the assignment by the agreed-upon alternate due date, you may receive a failing grade on the assignment.

Self-Care

You are more important than your degree or program. Sometimes we act like we're just mind-energy flitting about, but we have bodies, and bodies need care. Many of us have disabled

bodies/minds that we push to the limit every day, and the rigors of a busy semester can often be too much to take. Here are some strategies for self-care.

1. You do **not** need to read everything on the syllabus, in its entirety. Read enough so that you're prepared to discuss the central themes of the course. Read what you're most interested in, so that you'll be able to compose good work on the subject. Read what you can, but don't push yourself to absorb all of it.
2. Bring snacks to class and stay hydrated. Don't drink too much coffee. Get as much sleep as you can. If you're experiencing food insecurity, let me know and I'll see what I can do. If you need to take a mental/physical health day, let me know in advance (if you can). If you need to leave class early, that's fine too, as long as you tell me (I don't need a reason).
3. An essay doesn't need to be **flawless**. It doesn't need to be **exhaustive** in its content. An essay just needs to contain a specific discussion that leads the reader to a point, along with curated material from your primary and secondary sources. If you're having trouble getting started, begin with a question (i.e., "Why is [weird thing] happening in this text?") and keep returning to that question. Remember that a conclusion doesn't have to tie up every facet of your discussion—it just needs to remind the reader why the discussion is important. If you're having trouble finding sources, ask me. **Use interlibrary loans**. This system is amazing—you can order virtually any book in Canada/North America. And it's **free**. You can access it through the QuickFind page on the library, or through the WorldCat database.
4. Find quiet spaces on campus to recharge. I love the Campion Library—it's quiet and soothing, with comfortable chairs. The periodical floor of the Archer Library is also quiet and people rarely frequent the space.

Safe Spaces

The UR Pride Centre for Sexuality and Gender Diversity and the Women's Centre are both located on the 2nd floor of Riddell. These are safe spaces where you can hang out (UR Pride also has an excellent library). My office (AH 366) is also a safe space—if you're feeling a bit overwhelmed and just need to chill out or talk, come by. If you need to talk to a counsellor, you can visit Counselling Services in Room 252 of Riddell.

Avoiding Plagiarism

* Plagiarism is defined as the failure to properly credit ideas which are not your own, but which inform your discussion. This can be as simple as unconsciously duplicating the organization and style of an article that you've read, or as complex as paraphrasing the work of an author without clearly citing that his or her ideas do not belong to you. When in doubt, provide a citation, which the instructor will then be able to look up. The MLA style manual contains a thorough section on how to avoid plagiarism, which you should familiarize yourself with. It is relatively easy to detect work that has been improperly lifted from another source, and if this appears to be the case, your essay will immediately be submitted to the Dean of Students for evaluation. A charge of plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the assignment, and—if the infraction is serious

enough—a failing grade for the course. **Excessive para-phrasing, and reproducing details from Wikipedia without citing the article, constitutes plagiarism.**

Grading Chart

	80%+	70%-79%	60%-69%	50%-59%	0%-49%
Clarity	Paragraph structure and word choice are precise and thoughtful. Demonstrates grammatical expertise, with no (or very few) mistakes.	Grammatical expertise, with few errors. Paragraphs are orderly, and some ingenuity evident in overall expression.	Grammatical errors present which distract from argument. Style is perhaps a bit mechanical. Some lack of interesting discussion.	Significant number of grammatical errors. Random arrangement of paragraphs. Discussion is basic and lacks creativity.	Grammatical and stylistic problems completely obscure the essays argument.
Argument	Thesis statement is clear. Argument is thoughtful and creative. Discussion flows coherently, and reaches a proper conclusion. Includes phrases to guide the reader towards main points.	Thesis statement is clear. Argument is well-structured, if sometimes a bit obvious, and reaches a proper conclusion. Some lack of signalling phrases.	Thesis statement is too broad. Argument is unclear at times, or falls into observation. Lack of proper conclusion.	Thesis statement is unclear and perhaps disconnected from the text. Argument difficult to follow, and/or relies heavily on opinions and generalizations.	Thesis statement and argument do not seem to be present. Discussion lacks a logical structure. No attempt has been made to closely analyze the text.
Sources	Essay draws upon a wide variety of sources, which clarify and support its argument. Sources are properly attributed, and have been skillfully integrated within the essay's discussion.	Essay draws upon sufficient amount of sources, which pertain to its argument. Some minor problems with arrangement or attribution of sources.	Essay draws upon some sources which generally support its argument. Not all sources have been properly integrated within discussion.	Essay includes scant sources, which do not always support its specific argument. Sources are 'dropped' into discussion without being integrated.	Essay includes too-few or no sources at all. The sources present are not well-integrated, or there may be serious problems with attribution.