

HUMS 634: Medieval Myths and Legends of the British Isles

M, W- 6:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m..

Room: Fisk 115

Instructor: Will Eggers
Office: 285 Court Street 211
Office Hours: M, W 5:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.
(Or by Appointment)
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Required Texts:

The Romance of Arthur. Garland edition.

Robin Hood. TEAMS edition.

Joan of Arc.

In addition, I will be giving you a variety of handouts over the term.

Reasons to Love this course:

One, Arthur. Two, Robin Hood. Three, Joan of Arc.

These figures continue to play an active role in the modern American imagination, even though our culture seems to hold few similarities to the England of the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries. Looking at the original tales, their potential historical roots, and the cultures that produced them will enrich your experience with these stories.

Looking at modern versions of these figures allows us to bring more clearly into focus the values that we have inherited from the stories, as well as the values we have imported into them. This will give us the opportunity to explore our own responses to and affection for the gallant king, the virtuous outlaw, the heroic warrior woman, and the shape-shifting princess. In addition to these familiar tales, we will explore other, less familiar tales such as the Irish “Exile of the Sons of Uisliu” and the Icelandic “Hrafinkel’s Saga” in order to highlight the importance of legend, myth, and the fine line that separates them.

Ideas to Explore in this course

Do not feel limited by any thematic suggestions I may have for this course. The richness of this material and the depth to which these tales have embedded themselves in our collective psyche may well inspire responses that surprise you. Clearly, an important theme in the class will be an exploration about attitudes toward the past. How does nostalgia inform our responses to these and other tales? How do we define ourselves in relation to this past – do we seek to embrace it or “other” it? Do these ideals echo deep-seated psychological needs or are they cultural constructions serving other purposes?

Looking closely at these works will remind us that that every speech-act teaches values, directly or indirectly. Literature, because of its rich emotional and intellectual qualities, does a particularly good job of reinforcing or changing readers’ values without seeming to do so. Even works whose authors had no specific agenda in mind convey values. When reading, keep in mind the idea that the “truth” is an elastic social construct. Every written document attempts to define

or re-define this truth. By observing how these tales argue for a “truth,” we will learn how they are attempting to change the world by changing the way a reader sees the world.

Assessment:

Read every assigned text in detail.

Discussion. Be prepared to discuss each text. I ask every one of you to come to each class with two questions you would like answered. Perhaps it is a moment that confuses or interests you, or one that you think is key to the piece. These should be typed and handed in at the start of class.

Annotated Bibliography (5+ articles).

Oral Presentation on a modern “medieval” myth.

Two 7+ page papers.

One 15+ page research paper.

Grades:

Total	<u>100</u>
15+ page research essay	40
7+ page essay	15
7+ page essay	15
Annotated Bibliography	10
Oral Presentation of a modern “medieval” myth	10
Class Discussion	10

Office Hours:

I urge each of you to take advantage of the opportunity to introduce yourself to me, to ask any questions you may have, to discuss future or current assignments, or to seek private instruction on specific problems with which you might be wrestling. There is a too often unrecognized but undeniable correlation between students who tend to use office hours and students who tend to be successful in college. I also encourage professional communication through email.

Plagiarism:

In an academic environment, we want original voices and ideas, not parrots. It goes without saying that you are responsible for citing any words or ideas that you borrow. The honor code covers this issue, so I won’t go into detail here. There will be plenty of opportunities to explore ideas and revise your work over the course of the term.

Readings (schedule subject to change)

6/28 Intro
History, Language, MSS, Myth and legend, impressions

ROBIN HOOD

6/30 Robin Hood in the Chronicles
Robin Hood and the Monk
Robin Hood and the Potter
The Gest of Robin Hood

7/5 *Robin Hood and Little John* _____
Robin Hood and Maid Marian _____
Anthony Munday play - *The Downfall of Robert, Earle of Huntington*

HISTORIES

7/7 *Exile of the Sons of Uisliu*
Hrafinkel's Saga
Thrymskvitha
Dream of the Rood

ARTHUR

7/12 *Arthur in the Latin Chronicles* _____
Arthur in the Early Welsh Tradition _____
Culhwch and Olwen
Arthur in Geoffrey of Monmouth
Wace: Roman de Brut (The Birth and Rise of Arthur)

7/12 **ESSAY #1 DUE (7 pages)**

7/14 *Layamon's Brut (The Death of Arthur)* _____
Alliterative Morte Arthur _____
Malory's Le Morte Darthur (The Death of Arthur)

MERLIN

7/19 *Prose Merlin and Suite du Merlin (Episode/s)* _____
Wace: Roman de Brut (Merlin Episodes) _____

LOATHELY LADY

7/21 *The Marriage of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell* _____
The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale _____
(Selection from General Prologue as well)

7/26 **ESSAY #2 DUE (7 pages)**

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight _____

WOMEN WARRIORS

7/28 *Judith* _____
Beowulf (selections) _____
Eleanor _____
Joan of Arc

8/3 **ESSAY #3 DUE (15 pages)**