

English 2018.03 (Winter)

Arthur

M. Furrow MWF 11:35-12:25

Who was the “real” King Arthur? This class concentrates on the first seven hundred years of Arthurian story as it was known in Britain, from Nennius to Sir Thomas Malory’s *Morte Darthur* at the end of the medieval period. A war leader, a king, an emperor; supported by Christ, by magic, by his knights; wise and valiant, aggressive and foolhardy, cuckolded and laughable, he went from being the British leader who heroically resisted the invading Anglo-Saxons to being the chivalric hero whom English kings wanted to be. Stories of him are so different and so often told that he is the ideal figure about whom to ask these questions: in medieval culture, what makes for an authoritative version of a story? Did medieval readers understand there to be a difference between the truth of fiction and the truth of history? Do today’s researchers understand that same difference? And did medieval readers split their sympathy along gender lines, with men admiring the heroic Arthur and women identifying with the queenly, but adulterous, Guinevere, and doting upon Sir Lancelot du Lac?

The class will have a lecture/discussion format. Evaluation will be by two short quizzes during the term, a final examination, reading responses, and one or two short research papers. Readings will mostly be in modern translation (from medieval Welsh, medieval French, medieval Latin, and medieval English), but we will finish the term with some readings in the relatively simple late Middle English of Sir Thomas Malory’s *Morte Darthur*, the text that more than any other determines how English readers remember King Arthur and his Round Table. And we will begin the term with something completely different: King Arthur seen through the twentieth-century Marxist-inflected and utterly irreverent eyes of Monty Python’s Flying Circus.

This class is open to anyone who has a Writing Requirement credit in any subject.

Texts to be announced.