

The course introduces students to three of the best and most popular modern adaptations of the King Arthur legend. This material is well suited to the goals of the Foundational Studies Program, and Literary Studies. Assignments and activities provide students with varied modalities for demonstrating their achievement. Bolded text and footnotes in the annotated syllabus provide detailed information. This narrative explains specific aspects of the novels that are most relevant to the goals.

Aesthetic responsiveness and interpretive ability. Though they all use multiple modes of irony and incorporate elements of fantasy (transformation and time travel) the assigned novels (and their movie adaptations) belong to different genres and so elicit different responses and interpretive moves: *Once and Future King* is part comic coming-of-age-story told through fable, and part tragedy of adult experience. *Mists of Avalon* is a complexly plotted multi-generational saga grounded in Celtic myth. *Connecticut Yankee* is a bitter satire (though in the movie version transformed to musical comedy).

Connect writings to their literary, cultural, and historical contexts. Written in different eras, the novels explore issues and events of their time in the guise of another historical context, the Middle Ages. The multiple contexts of the same story make a rich subject for teaching, not only enhancing students' knowledge of the contexts, but also showing them how to read contextually and the importance of context for understanding literary works (and by extension, other documents and artifacts).

Analyze issues to answer questions about human experience, systems, and environment. All three treatments of the Arthur story raise questions about religious repression (framed as the rise of Roman Catholicism), advantages of various forms of government (democratic and absolutist), justified violence (here the "code" of chivalry, developments in military technology), class distinctions (such as serfs, vassals, nobles), kinds of education, gender equality (*Mists* explicitly, others implicitly), and the limits of free will. All relate common experiences: love, friendship, loss, jealousy, family conflict, growing up, growing older.

Reflect on themselves as products of, participants in traditions of literature and ideas. Students see their place in the tradition of Arthurian story as consumers of popular culture, whether Dungeons and Dragons, Monty Python, etc., and as heirs to the Western construction of romantic love epitomized in Lancelot and Guinevere. Throughout the course, students are challenged to place their current and local experience in a larger cultural and historical context.

Other goals. The novels raise issues of effective **citizenship** and stewardship, particularly the conflict of public good and responsibility with private, personal desires. Their plots are constructed around crises where characters make difficult **ethical** choices, or act in ways that raise ethical dilemmas for other characters and for readers responding to them—including adultery, and more extreme acts like patricide and incest. **Information literacy:** Because Arthur's story is a living legend, it's a ripe subject for culty, New Age, Da Vinci Code type stuff, a topic I introduce with each novel as we view web sites and as I provide historical background. Students always ask about what the Middle Ages were "really" like, so I guide them to differentiate fact from misinformation from fiction.

Syllabus
Fall 2009

English 338: Literature and Life—the Legend of King Arthur
T-R 12:30-1:45, Stalker Hall 301

I. Contact Information

Professor: Harriet Hudson
Office: Stalker 200
Office hours: T-R 11:30-12:15 and by appointment

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II. Required Texts

Marion Zimmer Bradley. *The Mists of Avalon*. Del Ray Books, Ballantine: New York, 1982.

Mark Twain. *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. Signet Classics, Penguin: New York, 2004

T.H. White. *The Once and Future King*. Ace: New York, 1996.

III. Course Description

The story of King Arthur is one of the European Middle Ages' great contributions to world literature and culture. Like the plays of Shakespeare or the art of Michelangelo, it continues to speak to people of all times and places. It contains a great tragic love story—always a good subject (Lancelot and Guinevere)—and a tragic friendship (Lancelot and Arthur). But these more private relationships assume significance because the characters are public people—kings and queens and nobles. One of the most enduring features of the Arthurian legend is the Round Table, a symbol of the civic ideals of knighthood and the way Arthur governs his realm. **The fall of the Round Table and the civilization that Arthur has built at Camelot raises questions about loyalty, love, friendship, marriage, raising children, public and private responsibility, leadership, what constitutes a good government, when war is justified, what it means to be civilized, the relationship of church and state, determinism (fate) and free will, and many more issues that concern us today.**

There are many versions of the Arthurian story. **The greatest English version was written by Thomas Malory in the fifteenth century, as the Middle Ages came to a tumultuous close. Most later treatments of the legend are based on his *Morte D'Arthur (The Death of Arthur)*.** We will begin by reading brief selections from this lengthy work that deal with Arthur's birth and claim to the throne, and his death and the destruction of the Round Table. Then, starting with the version closest to Malory's retelling, we will read **T.H. White's *The Once and Future King*. This was first published in 1938 as the rise of Fascism and the onset of World War II threatened the values of western civilization that Arthur's legend exemplifies.** Next we will read **Marion Zimmer Bradley's *Mists of Avalon*, published in 1982. This presents the story from the perspective of the legend's female characters and the culture of the Celts that gave birth to the Arthurian legend in the 6th century. It reflects the feminism and multi-culturalism of the late 20th century.** Last we will read **Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, published 1889, where the Arthurian setting is a vehicle for exploring such 19th century American concerns as slavery, democracy, the industrial revolution, and the nature of progress.** Through

these different treatments of the legend we will examine the **enduring questions it raises about, modern authors' uses of historical legend to explore the issues confronting their own times, and the insights their different treatments of it provide into our own lives, public and private.**

IV. Learning Objectives

This course fulfills a Foundational Studies requirement for a course in Literary Studies. It is designed to meet the following goals and objectives which are included here to help you better understand what I expect you to learn from the class.

Program Goals: The Foundational Studies program is designed so that ISU graduates can analyze problems, think critically and creatively, integrate a variety of approaches to gain knowledge, recognize the ethical, social, and cultural implications of issues, and communicate professionally, persuasively and effectively.

Program Objectives—Students will:

- Locate, critically read, and evaluate information to solve problems;
- Critically evaluate the ideas of others;
- Apply knowledge and skills within and across the fundamental ways of knowing (natural sciences, social and behavioral sciences, arts and humanities, mathematics and history);
- Demonstrate an appreciation of human expression through literature and fine and performing arts;
- Demonstrate the skills for effective citizenship and stewardship;
- Demonstrate an understanding of diverse cultures within and across societies;
- Demonstrate the skills to place their current and local experience in a global, cultural, and historical context;
- Demonstrate an understanding of the ethical implications of decisions and actions
- Apply principles of physical and emotional health to wellness;
- Express themselves effectively, professionally, and persuasively both orally and in writing.

Literary Studies Goals—Students will:

- Demonstrate aesthetic responsiveness and interpretive ability.
- Connect writings to their literary, cultural, and historical contexts.
- Employ literature to analyze issues and answer questions relating to human experience, systems, and the physical environment.
- Reflect on themselves as products of and participants in traditions of literature and ideas.

Course Goals (This is in addition to the others; it's my goal for you in this course)

- Students will know the history, plot, and main characters of the Arthurian legend

V. Class Policies

You are expected to attend class, prepare by keeping up with reading assignments, participate in class discussions, and hand in assignments on time.

Attendance: I take attendance regularly. If you miss more than 3 classes I may lower your final grade by a letter for each additional absence. If you know you will

have to be absent, if possible, let me know in advance and bring verification (doctor's slip, letter from coach or professor).

Courtesy: Turn off cell phones in class.

Use your laptop only as directed by the instructor.

Do not sleep, read newspapers, magazines, or materials for other courses.

Arrive on time and remain in the room until class is dismissed.

Assignments: No make-up quizzes will be given. Make up exams are at my discretion, and require prior arrangement. Written work must be turned on the announced date. I will not accept late papers.

Academic Honesty: I can not give you credit for work that is not your own. Plagiarism and other forms of cheating will not be tolerated. Depending of the nature of the assignment and the seriousness of the offense, penalties range from no credit given for the assignment, to a failing grade in the course, to suspension or expulsion as determined by Student Judicial Programs. Consult your copy of The Code of Student Conduct for more information about the University's policy on academic integrity.

University Policies: The University has policies regarding academic freedom, students with disabilities and other matters. These apply to this class and may be found on the Gen Ed web page at: [UniversityStandards](#)

www.indstate.edu/gened/docs/Foundational%20Studies/Info%20on%20Sycamore%20Standard%20and%20ADA%20and%20Laptops%20and%20Academic%20Freedom.pdf.

VI. Assignments and Grading

- Midterm 20%
- Final 20% – this will cover material from the second half of the semester only. These exams will **test your reading through objective questions and your critical thinking and writing through essays.**
- Reading quizzes 20%– generally these will be given weekly. Their purpose is to help you keep up with the **reading** and to let us both know if you are **getting the important points.**
- 2 Essays 15% each – minimum 4 pages. ¹ You'll write essays on two of the three assigned books. You can develop your own topic, but it will need to **analyze some aspect of the work in terms of its cultural or historical context, its treatment of social issues, or common human experiences.**
- Participation in class discussion 10 % – I'll give you questions to guide your reading and form a basis for our class discussions. ² I'll also assign you days to pick passages from the assigned reading and explain their importance in class.

¹ **Developmental writing:** Students submit one-paragraph proposals of paper topics for my approval, and I require drafts of papers before I will accept final versions. This allows for feedback, encourages timeliness and academic integrity, and doesn't take that much more total time for grading.

² These questions focus on important themes in the works and are directly related to the four **Literary Studies** goals. These themes will be topics of essay questions on the exams and of papers. They are listed in the annotations to the Class Schedule and Reading Assignments. The discussions and passage presentations encourage effective oral communication, and courteous but critical evaluation of 'classmates', authors' and the instructor's ideas.

These activities will **enhance your reading and communication skills, as well as help you develop ideas for your papers.**

Class Schedule and Reading Assignments

1. Aug. 26 Introduction
2. Sept. 1 History of the Arthurian Legend, Selections from *Le Morte D' Arthur*³
Sept. 3 *Once and Future King*: Book I, The Sword in the Stone⁴
3. Sept. 8 The Sword in the Stone
Sept. 10 *Once and Future King*: Book II, The Queen of Air and Darkness
4. Sept. 15 The Queen of Air and Darkness
Sept. 17 *Once and Future King*: Book III, The Ill-Made Knight
5. Sept. 22 The Ill-Made Knight
Sept. 24 *Once and Future King*: Book IV, The Candle in the Wind
6. Sept. 29 The Candle in the Wind
Oct. 1 Movies (*Once and Future King*, *Camelot*)⁵
7. Oct. 6 Conclusion *Once and Future King*, Review
Once and Future King essay due
Oct. 8 Midterm

³ Introduction to Arthurian legend and history, and to Celtic culture and myth (Oct. 13) incorporate websites for pictures of places and artifacts, also some attention to distinguishing sound information and credible websites from less reliable ones.

⁴ Discussion topics for *Once and Future King* include: education and nurture; ethical and appropriate uses of authority, including law and military might; systems of government and social organization (fascism, socialism, monarchy, democracy); ethnic (tribal) identity; gender roles; treatment of animals; love, friendship, marriage; public responsibility versus personal preference; tragic plot structure. Students are asked to consider both what the work has to say about these themes, and how what is said relates to their own experiences.

⁵ Viewings of selected scenes from movies based on all three novels give students a chance to see further adaptations of the Arthurian legend, and to consider the implications of genre and medium in presenting the story. “The Sword in the Stone” is a Disney animation. “Camelot” and “Connecticut Yankee” are musicals from 1940s and 1960’s; “Mists of Avalon” is a historical fantasy drama. Discussion focuses on adaptation and aesthetic response.

8. Oct. 13 Avalon and Glastonbury: Arthur's Celtic roots
Oct. 15 *Mists of Avalon*: Book I, Mistress of Magic⁶
9. Oct. 20 Mistress of Magic
Oct. 22 *Mists of Avalon*: Book II, The High Queen
10. Oct. 27 The High Queen
Oct. 29 *Mists of Avalon*: Book III, The King Stag
11. Nov. 3 The King Stag
Nov. 5 *Mists of Avalon*: Book IV, The Prisoner in the Oak
12. Nov. 10 The Prisoner in the Oak
Nov. 12 Conclusion *Mists of Avalon*, *Movie* (*Mists of Avalon*)
Mists of Avalon essay due
13. Nov. 17 American Gothic: History and culture of the late 19th century⁷
Nov. 19 *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* chapt. 1-15⁸
14. Nov. 24 *Connecticut Yankee* chapt. 16-26
15. Dec. 1 *Connecticut Yankee* chapt. 27-38
Dec. 3 *Connecticut Yankee* chapt. 39- end
16. Dec. 8 Movie (*Connecticut Yankee*)
Dec. 10 Conclusions and Review

Final Exam: Tuesday Dec. 15, 1:00

Connecticut Yankee essay due by Thursday, Dec. 17

⁶ Discussion topics for *Mists of Avalon* include: gender roles (matriarchy, patriarchy); religion (Christians versus Druids), the individual, and the state; public responsibility versus personal preference; cultural conflict; ethical use of knowledge; fate (determinism) and free will; magic and science; archetypal patterns of myths and ritual. Students are asked to consider both what the work has to say about these themes, and how what is said relates to their own experiences.

⁷ Introduction to *Connecticut Yankee* includes information and images from websites to familiarize students with Gothic Revival style popular in late 19th century, also Twain's references to contemporary events, technology, and people (J.P. Morgan, Industrial Revolution).

⁸ Discussion topics for *Connecticut Yankee* include: nature of "progress"; impact of the industrial revolution; ethical uses of technology, including warfare; forms of government (democracy, monarchy); individualism; justice and legal authority; positive and negative views of human nature; class systems (slavery, hereditary aristocracy, meritocracy); education; forms and functions of satire. Students are asked to consider both what the work has to say about these themes, and how what is said relates to their own experiences