

# ARTHURIANA PEDAGOGY

## **Comparative Literature 506, Tests and Quizzes in Medieval Arthurian Literature** **Norris J. Lacy**

This course will study Arthurian works that prominently feature tests and quests. We will examine the extent to which these two activities can be distinguished from each other and will study the functions and conventions of each; in particular we will consider the way those conventions take shape and eventually, in some literatures, become "fossilized" into ordeal, ritual, or material for parody.

We will concentrate on medieval literature, and we will of course give considerable attention to the greatest quest of them all: the quest for the Holy Grail. We will trace that quest (by Galahad, Perceval, and others) through texts in Welsh, French, German, and English. The final component of the course will be a brief look at some modern Arthurian interpretations, from Wagner to Eliot to John Boorman's *Excalibur*.

In addition to the texts themselves, we will consider research tools (reference sources, electronic texts, manuscript facsimiles, etc.) for undertaking research on medieval Arthurian literature. Students interested in learning to read manuscripts may do a manuscript exercise. Further, we will take account of applicable theoretical approaches (from myth criticism to deconstruction, feminist theory, and notions of the postmodern) and of the work of particular critics who have made major recent contributions to the study of medieval Arthurian literature.

Texts to be read will include several of Chrétien de Troyes's romances, the French *Quest for the Holy Grail*, Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and Malory's *Quest of the Grail* (and other selections of his work). Other texts to be considered more briefly (though read in whole or in part) include the Welsh *Peredur*, the Middle Dutch *Walewein*, and the Italian *La Tavola ritonda*. All texts will be available in English translation, though students are encouraged to read in the original according to their language abilities.

Students will be expected to complete an original and polished paper, in the format of a journal article, related to the subject of the course; they will be encouraged to concentrate on one or more of the lesser-known texts, such as the post-classical German works, the French "epigonal" (post-Chrétien) romances, Middle Dutch or Scandinavian compositions, etc., though students in history, art history, and other fields may fashion a paper topic related to their field; e.g., and art historian might study manuscript illustration of a specific text.

Students will also make a preliminary oral presentation on their research and will submit a preliminary bibliography. The course grade will be based on the oral presentation (10%), the bibliography (5%), the paper (35%), and regular preparation and participation in the class (50%).

For further information, e-mail me at [NJL2@psu.edu](mailto:NJL2@psu.edu) or see him in 326 S. Burrowes.

Week I	Introduction; <i>Spoils of Annwn</i> ; Geoffrey of Monmouth; <i>Peredur</i>
Week II	Chrétien de Troyes, <i>Erec</i> , pp. 67- ; <i>Yvain</i> , pp. 295-306, 326-52
Week III	Chrétien, <i>Lancelot</i> ; <i>Perceval</i>
Week IV	Chrétien, <i>Perceval</i>
Week V	<i>The Quest for the Holy Grail (La Queste del saint Graal)</i>
Week VI	<i>The Quest for the Holy Grail</i> ; Wolfram von Eschenbach, <i>Parzival</i>
Week VII	Wolfram, <i>Parzival</i>
Week VIII	Wagner, <i>Parsifal</i> ; Syberberg, <i>Parsifal</i> (film)
Week IX	No class: spring break
Week X	French Gawain Romances, excerpts; the Dutch <i>Walewein</i>
Week XI	Arthurian chastity tests; <i>La tavola ritonda</i> (selection)
Week XII	<i>Sir Gawain and the Green Knight</i>
Week XIII	Malory, selections
Week XIV	Malory, selections
Week XV	Tennyson, T.S. Eliot
Week XVI	Arthurian quests in film: Boorman's <i>Excalibur</i> ; conclusion