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History of the Book: Arthurian Books and the (Counter-) Reformation

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History of the Book: Arthurian Books and the (Counter-) Reformation

ENGL 4020/HONR 3900

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Developed/revised via NEH seminar research for use Spring 2023 at Augusta University

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For consideration, Day 1: Ridiculing, Revering, and Reforming Arthurian Books and Objects

“A Welshman from the neighbourhood of Caerleon was endowed with occult and prophetic gifts. Most notable among them was his ability to detect lies, whether written, spoken, or merely thought, a process facilitated by devils who indicated to him the offending person or passage (the man himself was illiterate). **When he was harassed beyond endurance by these unclean spirits, Saint John’s Gospel was placed on his lap, and then they all vanished immediately, flying away like so many birds. If the Gospels were afterwards removed and the *History of the Kings of Britain* by Geoffrey of Monmouth put there in its place, just to see what would happen, the demons would alight all over his body, and on the book, too, staying there longer than usual and being even more demanding.**”

-Gerald of Wales, *Journey through Wales* (1188)

“First ye may see [King Arthur’s] **sepulchre** in the monastery of Glastonbury; **and also in ‘Polychronicon,’** in the fifth book, the sixth chapter, and in the seventh book, the twenty-third chapter, where his **body was buried**, and after found and translated into the said monastery. Ye shall see also in the **history of Boccaccio, in his book ‘De casu principum,’** part of his noble acts and also of his fall. Also **Galfridus in his British book** recounteth his life, and in divers places of England many remembrances be yet of him, and shall remain perpetually, and also of his knights. First in the Abbey of Westminster at Saint Edward’s shrine remaineth the print of **his seal in red wax closed in beryl**, in which is written ‘Patricius Arthurus, Britanniae Galliae Germaniae Daciae Imperator.’ Item, in the castle of Dover ye may see **Gawain’s skull** and **Caradoc’s mantle**; at Winchester **the round table**; in other places **Lancelot’s sword**, and many other **things**. Then all these **things** considered, there can no man reasonably gainsay but here was a king of this land named Arthur; for in all places, Christian and heathen, he is reputed and taken for one of the nine worthy, and the first of the three Christian men.”

-William Caxton, Prologue to Thomas Malory’s *Morte Darthur* (1485)

“[Italian historian Polydore Vergil] handleth Arthures cause in deed, but by the way, he yet is so fainte harted, luke warme and so negligent that he makes me not onely to laugh, but also to be angry... Though Polidore hold his peace it is not needfull by and by for the whole world to be mute: And although Italy in times past so esteemed of Arthure, and yet still doth, when **bookes printed** both of his prowess, and victories (as I haue learned) are ready in the Italian tongue yea in that Spanish, and also in the French tongue: whereupon **also the English collection of Thomas Mailerius his trauaile**, is published abroad. The aduersarie I know will say, that **many lyes haue crept into those bookes**. Wherefore this is nothing else, but to Teach him which is fully taught. **As I conteme fables, so I reuerence and imbrace the truth of the history**: neyther will I suffer this to be taken away from mee at any time, but with losse of life. Unthankfull persons I vtterly eschew and I betake me vnto **those Rockes & monuments, the true witnesses of Arthures renoume and maiestie**.”

-John Leland, *Assertio inclytissimi Arturii Regis Britanniae* (1544) trans. Richard Robinson (1582)

“Behold here now almost 200 yeares before *Saint Augustine* came into England, **the vse of Reliques of Saincts, of praying to Martyrs, and honoring their sepulchers, the vse of Alleluia, the Religious obseruation of the Lent**, and such other points recorded to be in practise among the Christian Britans. **Is this protestant like, thinke yow?** or can these men be presumed to haue byn of our new Religion? But lett vs proceed to talke of some Britan teachers and pastors themselues. **Geffrey of Monmouth in his British Storie, much esteemed, and alleged by our aduersaries, writeth; that at a certaine feaste of Pentecost at Chester, about the yeare of Christ 522. (as Bale holdeth) K. Arthure being present, there was a great meeting of Princes, Lords, and Bishops for his coronation, and that of the three Archbishops of Britanie at that tyme,** (which were *London, Yorke, and Chester*) **Dubritius Archbishop of Chester** did the office of the Church that day, of whom he saith: *Hic Britannia Primas, & Apostolice Sedis Legatus, tantan religione clarebat, vt quemcunque languore grauatum, orationibus sanaret. This man being Primate of Britanie and Legate of the Sea Apostolique, was so famous for his religion and sanctitie, as he did heale anie sicke man by his prayers.”*

-Robert Parsons, *A treatise of three conuersions of England from paganism to Christian religion* (1603)

Description, Outcomes, and Assessment:

Description: This course will introduce students to the history of the printed book in early modern England 1485-1700, with special attention paid to identifying how the Reformation and Counter-Reformation influenced the rewriting, editing, republishing, and remediating of stories about King Arthur. As the passages on the opening page of this syllabus suggest, the books and objects surrounding the legend of King Arthur are constantly edited, updated, or simply “resurrected” in manuscript and print according to England’s changing religious and political contexts. To appreciate such changes in the legend and its readership, we will look at Arthurian literature alongside vernacular English Bibles, as well as polemical writings and liturgies indicating what English Protestant or Catholic readers tended to (or were urged to) value in their books and objects. Together, this set of texts raises several provocative questions: Which texts are essential reading for early modern English subjects? Should these texts be offered in the vernacular? How far can they be reformed and remain recognizable? Are books enough, or are objects also needed to validate and/or venerate a cultural icon? Do Protestants or Catholics take better care of their books and objects? Who writes the most compelling devotional literature? How does Arthurian literature participate in the same “national debates” as do Bibles and prayer books? In short, we will ask how King Arthur changes (or doesn’t!) under Reformation and Counter-Reformation pressures, ultimately investigating what can be “saved” and what must be discarded about a particular literary icon as its writers, publishers, and readers create new demand for its legend across centuries of religious and material change.

Though our readings and discussions will center upon and underline the importance of Arthurian and devotional texts’ material bodies to their cultural significance, the course will also provide students with a general book history skill set that will start them on the path to considering the importance of materiality in any era. I will anchor the course in a series of lectures and discussions highlighting the following: shifts from oral to written culture, from manuscript to print, and from print to digital media; theories of communication circuits and readers’ access to information; considerations of word vs. image; questions of piracy; the illusion of “fixity”; gatekeeping and the democratization of knowledge; the future of the codex; and other large concerns raised by the introduction of any new mode of reading. We will also look at the roles of authors, scribes, publishers, and readers in order to highlight the material book’s capacity to convey the author’s intentions, the publisher’s goals, and the reader’s power in the ultimate making of meaning. To demonstrate their facility with book history, students will complete a final project in which they trace a particular book’s recurrence in various material forms over time and note how one or more aspects of the corresponding culture both informs and is reflected by each particular recurrence.

Learning Outcomes: Students who complete assignments and participate in class will gain the following:

1. Familiarity with late medieval and early modern culture in England as it pertains to the content and material bodies of manuscripts and printed books published during this time
2. Knowledge of the terms and concepts associated with manuscripts, printed books, and digital media
3. Ability to critically assess the intersection between text and material “body” as it demonstrates and shapes the context in which a particular book is produced
4. Facility with analyzing “cultural icons” (e.g., Arthurian and devotional stories and books) as indicative of the cultural shifts related to the Reformation and Counter-Reformation.

Assessment: All undergraduate students will post at least five times to the discussion board, write a “shorter” (1300-word) essay, complete a research project (2700 words), and take a midterm and final exam. Finally, on the date for which they sign up, each student will be required to bring to class a book that has had an impact on them and speak briefly (5 minutes) to the class about it.

Grading will be determined by review of your performance as follows:

Breakdown:

Paper 1: 25%

Participation: 10%

Research project: 40% (includes proposal and conference abstract)

Final exam: 25 %

“Show and Tell”: -5% from final course grade if not completed

Discussion posts: -3% from final course grade for each not completed according to standards

Honors students:

Presentation: -10% final course grade if not completed according to standards

All assignments above apply to honors students. In addition, honors students will design a brief presentation (10 minutes) based on their final project and either present it in person or record and submit it electronically. I will reserve a day/time for these presentations. This assignment is OPTIONAL for students not taking this course as a Breaking Boundaries credit.

Honors seminar coursework compares and contrasts diverse cultural viewpoints and/or academic disciplinary approaches and information. Students will demonstrate such skills in the following way: Evaluation by HONR 3900H faculty of final student projects based on (a) multiculturalism and/or interdisciplinarity, (b) ability to synthesize such approaches, and (c) general knowledge of course material. Although this Student Learning Outcome also focuses on knowledge, communication, and professionalism, it requires submission of only one graded assignment that synthesizes the different cultural viewpoints and/or academic disciplines featured in the course. In this course the final project with presentation will be used to assess this SLO.

Required Books:

The Broadview Introduction to Book History, edited by Michelle Levy and Tom Mole

The Arthurian Handbook (2nd edition) by Norris Lacy

The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662 edited by Brian Cummings

The Oxford Handbook of the Bible in Early Modern England, c. 1530-1700, edited by Kevin Killeen et al.

Other reading assignments will be posted and available via D2L

Policies:*Attendance*

Attendance is required. Come to class on time, prepared to take part in the conversation. If you cannot come to class, it is your responsibility to communicate with me, to arrange to turn in written work, and to find out about subsequent assignments. I will not contact you when you are absent; you must contact me. I will not “recap” class for you over email, but I will let you know if there are any changes to the course schedule of which you should be aware. I do not distinguish between “excused” or “unexcused” absences, so there is no need to tell me why you were not in class. Missing more than 10% of classes for any reason may result in my withdrawing you from the course. In our class, 10% is equivalent to three absences. Keep in mind that any absence will lower your participation grade by 3%, and each absence in excess of three will also lower your final course grade by 3%. Please also note that being late to class, or leaving class early, will be penalized. Being late/leaving early twice is equal to one absence, so be certain to come to class on time and be prepared to begin on time. If you come to class late, you should see me at the end of class to make sure I noticed your arrival. Otherwise, you may remain marked “absent” for the day.

COVID CAVEAT: I will be flexible as needed with those of you who become ill or need to quarantine. Please don't come to class if you're unwell, and please don't disappear without letting me know what's going on. Get in touch with me and we will coordinate so that you can complete the coursework or obtain help in withdrawing from the course. The attendance policy is meant to ensure fairness across the class, but not to pressure you into coming to class while ill.

Keep in mind that you must withdraw by midterm (March 2) at 4:00pm in order to secure a “W” grade.

Participation

Your participation grade is one that reflects your dedication to the work of the course: by completing work on time, coming to class prepared to share ideas, and listening thoughtfully to your classmates' comments, you can earn an outstanding participation grade. Conversely, lateness, a failure to complete assignments on time or bring your course materials to class, and/or a lack of engagement in discussion and lecture will drastically lower your overall grade for the class. Side conversations, cell phone use, and other distracting behavior will severely impact your grade and may even result in your being asked to leave the classroom, in which case you will be counted absent for the day.

I realize that you may not get to raise your question or idea in every class. When participating, please respond to your classmates and gently redirect to your own ideas when/if relevant, but do not “respond” to a classmate with an unrelated thought. Don’t worry—if you come to class on time, prepared to discuss, you will find many ways to earn full participation credit.

Reading Assignments

The majority of the day-to-day assignments in this class are reading assignments. You should always come to class with *at least* one discussion question you would like to pose to the class, based on the readings assigned for that day. That way, our discussion will be sure to address not only my interests, but yours as well. I may call on you at any time, so be sure to have a discussion topic or question in mind. Bring your book, as well as any supplemental assignments for that day, to every class. You will need to print these supplemental assignments and bring them OR bring a laptop or tablet for use in class. Please do not access readings in class on a cell phone.

Discussion posts

You are required to post to the discussion board at least five times over the course of the semester. These posts should be at least 250 words in length and should raise an idea or question about one or more reading assignments for that particular week. Responding to a classmate’s post is absolutely fine—whatever you’re thinking about and/or reacting to, let’s hear it! You don’t need to write these in a formal tone or cite texts in MLA style. Just let the class know what you’re thinking about. For those who like a little more structure: introduce the text, zero in on a particular passage, explain what interests you about that passage, and tell us what questions or ideas have occurred to you in light of your closer look.

“Show and Tell”

Every student will be expected to bring (or otherwise display) a book that matters to them and talk for 5 minutes about why it does so. This can be any book (it need not correspond to the course themes), but each student should discuss the importance of their book’s material body as part of the presentation.

Quizzes

From time to time, I may administer reading quizzes (graded simply “pass/fail”) at the beginning of class. I will throw away two failing quizzes, but keep in mind that if we have a quiz and you are absent, that quiz will be counted as a failure. These quizzes will be reading checks only—they will not test comprehension of more nuanced aspects of the text. For those who read the text, the questions will be **very** easy. In other words, if you do the reading, you will almost certainly pass. If you do not, you will probably fail the quiz. Three failed quizzes will lower your overall course grade by 3%. Four failed quizzes, another 3%, etc.

Written Assignments

I expect you to know well ahead of time when work is due and turn it in accordingly. If you are absent, your work is still due. Late work will be accepted up to three days at a price of one full letter grade per day of lateness. The first “day” in charged immediately after the submission deadline.

All written assignments should be thoughtfully composed on a computer and uploaded to D2L. When writing an essay, give yourself enough time to prepare a draft and then set it aside before returning later to revise and edit. In other words, essays turned in for credit should not be first drafts. Grammatical mistakes and other clarity concerns will lower the grade of any paper.

Please follow MLA style guidelines, including a “Works Cited” page for every essay.

Technology in the classroom

Cell phones must be silenced and put away for the entire class. If I see you using your cell phone during class, I will silently mark you absent for the day. Unless you are distracting others or me, I will not interrupt class to “correct” you, so if you are using your phone, you should assume you have been marked absent.

Laptop and tablet use are permitted as long as you remain engaged in discussion. Those who abuse the privilege will be asked to refrain from laptop and tablet use.

Email

Email is usually the fastest way to reach me, and I will do my best to respond to you within 24 hours during weekdays. I am always happy to discuss your thoughts about the course material and/or your plans for writing assignments; however, I will not read drafts or respond at length to your ideas over email. To accomplish these goals, you should make an appointment with me.

Plagiarism:

Plagiarism will not be tolerated under any circumstances. Extreme cases, such as “borrowing” someone else’s essay or failing to cite large passages of information, will be grounds for failing the class. See the *Student Handbook* for additional information about plagiarism and academic honesty.

Students Requiring Accommodations

If you require an accommodation to assist you in this class, please contact the office of Testing and Disability Services to make the proper arrangements. This office can be reached by calling (706)-737-1469.

The Center for Writing Excellence

“The Augusta University Center for Writing Excellence is a safe space for writers of all majors and disciplines to discuss their writing, oral presentation, and multimedia projects. Our friendly staff offers support for writers at any stage in the writing process, including brainstorming, drafting, and revising. By offering free, one-on-one peer consultations, the writing center staff empowers writers to make well-informed decisions about their texts while helping them to develop an individualized writing process. Writers are encouraged to make appointments for writing projects in any discipline. Undergraduates, graduate students, faculty, and staff have access to our services.

In-person, live online chat, and written feedback online appointments are available to all AU community members. Appointments can be made online via our [scheduler](#). If all written feedback online slots are taken on the schedule, graduate students, faculty, and staff are also invited to submit assignments asynchronously for written feedback on our [Graduate Student Services page](#). Undergraduates are not able to use this portal, but must schedule on directly on the scheduler. The Center for Writing Excellence is located on the Summerville campus in Allgood Hall, rm. N204 and on the Health Sciences campus in Greenblatt Library rm. 2101. Contact us at writingcenter@augusta.edu or (706) 667-4722. Please check our [website](#) and [schedule](#) regularly for updates to hours of operation and services. We look forward to working with you.”

Accessing Early English Books Online:

Go to the Reese Library homepage, click on “databases” and select “Early English Books Online.”

A note on intellectual property:

Much of the course content has been developed through my personal research, which contributes to my current writing project. For this reason, I ask that you do not post any handouts or materials online without my permission. Many thanks in advance for your cooperation on this point.

Mutual respect:

The success of the course depends upon the free exchange of questions and ideas. It is our shared responsibility to sustain an atmosphere in which every person feels safe. I will tolerate neither bullying nor discrimination in this class.

COURSE SCHEDULE:**Week 1: Cultural Icons**Tuesday, January 10

Overview: Arthurian legends, the Bible, and the *Book of Common Prayer*

Thursday, January 12

READ: "Orality and Literacy" by Walter Ong

Week 2: Welsh Literature and Geoffrey of Monmouth's King ArthurTuesday, January 17

READ: "Materiality" in *The Broadview Introduction to Book History*

Thursday, January 19

READ: *Culhwch and Olwen*

READ: Excerpts from Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*

Week 3: King Arthur from Geoffrey to MaloryTuesday, January 24

READ: "Early Arthurian Literature" by Norris Lacy: 57-76 and 128-133 from the *Arthurian Handbook*

READ: Excerpts from the Stanzaic *Morte Arthur* and the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*

Thursday, January 26

READ: Excerpts from Thomas Malory, *Morte Darthur*

Week 4: Reading (and Revering?) Books Before and After PrintTuesday, January 31

READ: Excerpts from Richard de Bury's *Philobiblon*

READ: William Caxton's prologue to Malory's *Morte Darthur*

Thursday, February 2

READ: "The Unacknowledged Revolution" by Elizabeth L. Eisenstein

READ: "Introduction: The Book of Nature and the Nature of the Book" by Adrian Johns

Week 5: Arthurian Images in Print Before and After ReformationTuesday, February 7

READ: "Woodcuts in Early English Books: Sources and Circulation" by Martha Driver

READ: "Intermediality" in *The Broadview Introduction to Book History*

Thursday, February 9

READ: "Iconoclasm and Reform: The Survival of Late Medieval Images and the Printed Book" by Martha Driver

COMPARE: Arthurian woodcuts in Wynkyn de Worde, William Copland, and Thomas East editions of Malory

Week 6: The Historical Arthur in Translation

Tuesday, February 14

READ: “Proheme” and Arthurian excerpts in Ranulph Higden’s *Polychronicon* (Treveris/Wynkyn de Worde, 1495)

Thursday, February 16

READ: “Polydore Vergil and John Leland on King Arthur: The Battle of the Books” by James P. Carley

READ: Excerpts from Richard Robinson’s translation of John Leland’s *Assertio inclytissimi Arturii Regis Britanniae*

Week 7: Arthurian Instruction

Tuesday, February 21

READ: Excerpts from John Lydgate, *The Tragedies gathered by John Bochas*

READ: Excerpts from the *Mirror for Magistrates*—Thomas Blennerhasset’s and Richard Niccols’s editions

Thursday, February 23

READ: Edmund Spenser’s letter to Walter Raleigh

READ: Pages 137-138 and 152-155 in the *Arthurian Handbook*

Week 8: Spenser’s Arthur

Tuesday, February 28

READ: *The Faerie Queene*, Book I, Cantos vii, viii, and ix

Thursday, March 2

READ: *The Faerie Queene*: Book II, Cantos ix and x

Midterm: March 2

Week 9: The Vernacular Bible in Print: Great Bible, Geneva, Bishops’

Tuesday, March 7

READ: “Great Bible, Geneva Bible, and Bishops’ Bible” (My document: I will post on D2L)

READ: “‘A Day After Doomsday’: Cranmer and the Bible Translations of the 1530s” by Susan Wabuda

Thursday, March 9

READ: “Genevan Legacies: The Making of the English Geneva Bible” by Femke Molekamp

READ: “The Book Thus Put in Every Vulgar Hand: Marking the Bible” by William H. Sherman

Week 10: The Vernacular Bible in Print: King James, Douay-Rheims

Tuesday, March 14

READ: “The King James Bible in its Cultural Moment” by Helen Wilcox

READ: “The Noblest Composition In the Universe or Fit For the Flames? The Literary Style of the King James Bible” by Hannibal Hamlin

Thursday, March 16

READ: Comparable excerpts from Geneva, King James, and Douay-Rheims Bibles (My document: I will post on D2L)

Week 11: *The Book of Common Prayer*Tuesday, March 21

READ: The following selections from *The Book of Common Prayer*:

Cranmer's Preface: (pp. 4-6)
 Cranmer, "Of Ceremonies": (214-216)
 Communion—from 1549: (19-40)
 Appendix A—from 1552: (667)

Thursday, March 23

"Concerning the Service of the Church"—1662: (pp. 212-214)
 Communion—1662: (389-407). Note changes from earlier editions.
 READ: "An Uncommon Book of Common Prayer" by William H. Sherman

Week 12: Stuart and Restoration ArthurTuesday, March 28

READ: Jacob Bloome's preface to the William Stansby edition of Malory's *Morte Darthur*
 READ: Excerpt from Thomas Carew's *Coelum Britannicum*
 READ: "Textuality" in *The Broadview Introduction to Book History*

Thursday, March 30

READ: Excerpts from Martin Parker's *The Most Admirable Historie of That Most Renowned Christian Worthy Arthur King of the Britaines*

Week 13: SPRING BREAK: April 3-7**Week 14: Counter-Reformation Arthur**Tuesday, April 11

READ: Excerpt from "Domme Preachers"? Post-Reformation English Catholicism and the Culture of Print" by Alexandra Walsham
 READ: Excerpts from Robert Parsons's *A treatise of three conversions of England from paganism to Christian religion*
 READ: Excerpts from Matthew Sutcliffe's *The subuersion of Robert Parsons his confused and worthlesse worke, entituled, A treatise of three conuersions of England from paganisme to Christian religion*

Thursday, April 13

READ: Excerpt from Thomas Hughes, et al., *The Misfortunes of Arthur*
 READ: Excerpts from John Shirley's ("J.S.") *Great Britain's Glory*

Week 15: English "Common" ReadersTuesday, April 18

READ: "The English Common Reader: From Caxton to the eighteenth century" by Richard Atlick
 READ: Excerpts from William Perkins's "The foundation of Christian religion"

Thursday, April 20

READ: "Labourers and Voyagers: From the text to the reader" by Roger Chartier
 READ: Excerpts from *Cheap Print and Popular Piety* by Tessa Watt

Week 16: Remediation Recap

Tuesday, April 25

READ: “Remediating” in *The Broadview Introduction to Book History*

Thursday, April 27

READ: Excerpt from *Spenser’s Arthur* by David A. Summers

READ: 197-210; 214-216; 271-274 in the *Arthurian Handbook*

Week 17: The Future of Books: Relics or (Bio-)Archive?

Tuesday, May 2

REVIEW: Richard de Bury (from week 4)

READ: “Codex in Crisis” by Anthony Grafton

READ: “Do Proteins Hold the Key to the Past?” by Sam Knight

Class recap

Review for final exam