

# Games of Thrones: Medieval Literature and Popular Culture

“The Past is never dead. It’s not even past.”  
—William Faulkner

**Instructor: Jessica Hines**  
**English 290S-01**  
**Summer Session I 2016**

Office Hours: by appointment  
Email: [jessica.hines@duke.edu](mailto:jessica.hines@duke.edu)

**MTuTh 12:30-2:35**  
**Location Allen 317**

## Course Texts

The Gawain Poet, *Gawain and the Green Knight*  
C.S. Lewis, *The Horse and His Boy*  
Supplementary documents provided by the instructor  
All films for the course will be on reserve at Lily library

## About the Course

From George R.R. Martin’s titillating *Game of Thrones* to the mythical world of C.S. Lewis’ *The Chronicles of Narnia*, popular culture imagines and re-imagines the medieval. Why? What imaginative possibilities does the medieval world hold for contemporary authors and their readers? In order to better understand why fantasies of the Middle Ages have become increasingly popular in recent years, we’ll read medieval texts alongside contemporary poetry, novels, and critical theory. One of the goals for this course will be to consider what popular re-imaginings and perceptions of the Middle Ages suggest about the political and ethical commitments of our own time period.

Prerequisites: This course serves as an introduction to medieval studies and literary studies; students need not have a background in medieval or literary studies.

## Goals and Objectives

By the end of term, students will be able to:

- identify key political and social discourses that inform representations of the medieval in contemporary culture
- apply critical methodologies from gender studies, critical race theory, and cultural studies to the interpretation of poems, films, and novels
- analyze the political and social valences of language and narrative
- argue original points of view based on research and evidence in writing and in-class discussion

## Assignments

**Formal Analysis:** Students will choose one written text from the syllabus (i.e., sorry, no Game of Thrones episodes!) and write a **2-3 page** formal analysis paying attention to how the medium – the written form – impacts the argument of the piece. The point here is to pay attention not just to *what* the author is saying but to *how* s/he says it through his/her choice and arrangement of words, images, rhetorical patterns, similarities, and contradictions. **The Formal Analysis is due to me via email before class on the day of discussion.** Each student may revise their Formal Analysis once for a higher grade if they choose (note that a higher grade is not guaranteed).

**Critical Article Summary:** There will be one “Critical Summary” of a theoretical text due throughout this course. Students can select which article they prefer to write a critical summary for from those texts marked on the syllabus by an asterisk. Critical summaries are intended to give students the time and space to work through the summarization of a complex theoretical argument so that they have a more detailed understanding of the author’s claim, style, aims, and concerns. Each summary should be **2-3 pages**. Each student may revise their critical summary once for a higher grade if they choose (note that a higher grade is not guaranteed). **The critical summary is due to me via email before class on the day of discussion.**

**Keywords:** Throughout the semester we’ll be talking about the ways particular words (such as medieval, oriental, chivalrous, etc.) do social and political work. Students will identify and choose one keyword (either from our texts or class discussion) and analyze the cultural significance of that word paying attention to its etymology, its usage over time (has the meaning changed from its original use?), and any confusions or variations surrounding its meaning. Keyword analyses should be **2 pages** and will be due to me via Sakai by **11:59 pm on June 3.**

**Critical Essay:** Students will produce one **5-7 page** argumentative essay. Students will conference with me toward the end of the semester to develop an original thesis about any of the material from the course. I will provide more explicit guidelines toward the end of the semester. Essays will be due to me via Sakai no later than **11:59 pm on June 30.**

**Participation (20%), Formal Analysis (20%), Keywords (15%), Critical Article Summary (20%), Critical Essay (25%)**

## Policies

**Participation:** This course is structured as a seminar; therefore, your attendance and participation are crucial to both you and your classmates. You should come to every class having completed all of the reading, ready to engage with each other, and with all of the required class materials with you (i.e., be sure you have the texts we’ll be discussing with you as well as any work you plan to turn in). Arriving more than **15 minutes late or unprepared to participate qualifies as an absence.** Repeated tardy arrivals (more than 3) will be counted as an absence.

You are expected to attend every class meeting, but, even with the best of intentions, you may not be able to do so. In such cases, send me a short, explanatory e-mail prior to the class session. It will be

your responsibility to catch up, including getting notes and class materials from a classmate. You will be granted **a maximum of two absences** for the course – **STINF absences count as part of this maximum**. Each further absence will result in the **lowering of your final course grade by one letter grade**. Please note that **more than 4 absences will result in failure of the course**.

**Technology:** Unless I direct you to do so, I ask that you not access electronic devices during class. Please also make sure that your phone is off or on airplane mode and that your laptop, iPad, netbook, etc. is put away. Students engaging in such distractions will be warned once. Any disruptions after that point (in that class or in following sessions) will be considered absent.

**Integrity:** Duke's code of Academic Integrity prohibits plagiarism of any kind, be this accidental or intentional. If I suspect a student of plagiarism, I'm required to report it to the academic dean and consequences are severe. Please talk to me or to anyone at the Writing Studio if you are at all unsure of what plagiarism is.

**Grades:** Letter grades map approximately onto the following scale, which I will use in calculating your final grade for the course:

A+ (97–100), A (94–96), A- (90–93)  
B+ (87–89), B (84–86), B- (80–83)  
C+ (77–79), C (74–76), C- (70–73)  
D+ (67–69), D (64–66), D- (60–63)  
F (0–59)

Unless I have approved a deadline extension *in advance*, **late submissions will be lowered by a letter grade per 24-hour period**. Late penalties begin immediately.

### **Additional Resources and Support**

**The Writing Studio:** One-on-one writing tutoring is available at the Writing Studio. Staffed by trained writing tutors, the Studio offers undergraduates free help with any aspect of their writing, from brainstorming and researching to drafting, revising, and polishing a final paper. To schedule an appointment, students should go to <http://twp.duke.edu/writing-studio> .

**The Peer Tutoring Program** is also available and provides peer tutors for a number of courses: For more information, see [http://duke.edu/arc/peer\\_tutoring/index.php](http://duke.edu/arc/peer_tutoring/index.php) .

**The Academic Resource Center:** The ARC provides academic support and programming for all Duke undergraduates. Their services include one-on-one consultations and peer tutoring, and they work alongside the Student Disability Access Office to serve students with diagnosed learning disabilities. Their programs include opportunities for students to study together in structured groups ("learning communities"), as well as workshops offered throughout the semester. Further information and resources are available on their website. <http://duke.edu/arc/index.php>

**MLA resources:** Your essays should be in MLA format, including proper citations. We'll discuss in class some of the basics of MLA citation, but, for those unfamiliar, you can consult Purdue's OWL site. It contains comprehensive information covering most aspects of academic writing including MLA formatting and citations (<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>). It's also a helpful resource if you ever have any grammar questions.

## Course Schedule

### Unit 1: Medieval Myths and Nation Building

- May 19      **Read:** (in class) Raymond Williams, *Keywords*, “Introduction”  
**Discuss:** what is a keyword; the political and historical valences of “medieval”  
**Engage:** review syllabus; introduce keywords assignment
- May 23      **Read:** Geoffrey of Monmouth, *History of the Kings of Britain* pp. 2-22  
\*Benedict Anderson, “Introduction” & “The Origins of National Consciousness” in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, pp. 1-7 & 37-46.  
**Discuss:** concept of “Imagined Communities”; the relationship between histories and nation-building  
**Engage:** in-class free-writing
- May 24      **Watch and Read:** Game of Thrones, Ep. 1  
*History of the Kings of Britain*, pp. 149-70  
**Discuss:** How do Monmouth and Game of Thrones construct origin stories? Why do these stories matter?  
**Engage:** reflect on the political work of “origin” stories
- May 26      **Watch and Read:** GoT, ep. 2  
\*Frantz Fanon, “On National Culture,” from *The Wretched of the Earth*, 36-45  
**Discuss:** What is a “national culture”? How does this culture come into being? What is/is not “medieval” about GoT’s culture?  
**Engage:** Students should be thinking of what “keyword” they will analyze.
- May 30      Memorial Day: No class**
- May 31      **Read:** Sir Thomas Malory, *Morte d’Arthur*, 9-49  
**Discuss:** the history of Arthuriana; why was the myth of Arthur so important? what was/is distinct about Arthur as a national symbol?  
**Engage:** consider and bring in an example of another Arthurian legend (contemporary or medieval); how does it compare to Monmouth or Malory?
- June 2      **Watch:** GoT, ep. 6  
**Read:** Malory, *Morte d’Arthur*, 871-896  
**Discuss:** what is the role of battle/combat in these narratives? what virtues are exemplified in the different battles we analyze? how does the treatment of death compare in GoT and Malory?  
**Engage:** keywords analysis due tomorrow! students should have at least a partial draft.

**Keyword Analysis Due by June 3 at 11:59 p.m.**

## Unit 2: Medieval Crusades

- June 6      **Read:** *Richard Coer de Lyon*, pp. 149-192  
\*Thomas Hahn, “The Difference the Middle Ages Makes: Color and Race before the Modern World,” *JMEMS* pp. 1-37  
**Discuss:** changing conceptions of race from the Medieval to the Present  
**Engage:** introduce Wikipedia group editing assignment
- June 7      **Read:** *Richard Coer de Lyon*, pp. 192-229  
**Discuss:** what is a crusade? what is the relationship between race, nation, and religion depicted in *Richard*?  
**Engage:** reflect on contemporary representations of crusades and their connection to medieval history
- June 9      **Read:** C.S. Lewis, *The Horse and His Boy*, pp. 1-69  
**Discuss:** What is “medieval” about Lewis’ depiction of Calormen? How does this resonate with Hahn’s article? with *Richard*?  
**Engage:** wikipedia workshop
- June 13     **Read:** *The Horse and His Boy*, pp. 69-162  
\*Edward Said, “Orientalism,” pp. 132-148  
**Discuss:** concept of “Orientalism”  
**Engage:** Students should begin thinking about final essays.
- June 14     **Read and Watch:** *The Horse and His Boy*, pp. 163-241  
*Game of Thrones*, ep. 9  
**Discuss:** How do Lewis and *Game of Thrones* change/transform some of the themes around race and crusading we’ve seen in Medieval culture? How do they reflect contemporary racial and/or religious tensions?  
**Engage:** Group Review of Wikipedia editing

## Unit 3: Medieval Sex Ed

- June 16     **Read:** *Gavain and the Green Knight*, 21-97  
**Discuss:** What makes a knight “chivalrous”? How does this Arthurian court compare to Malory or Monmouth?  
**Engage:** reflect on the role of women and sexuality in medieval literature and medieval fantasies
- June 20     **Read:** *Gavain and the Green Knight*, 97-155  
\*Eve Sedgwick, *Between Men*,” pp. 1-5, 21-27  
**Discuss:** concepts of the homosocial and erotic triangles  
**Engage:** reflect on contemporary representations of friendship
- June 21     **Read:** *Gavain and the Green Knight*, 155-189  
**Discuss:** what critiques of chivalry does the text offer? how does gender fit into this critique?  
**Engage:** construct our own “chivalric” pentangle in class

June 23      **Read:** \*Marcus Bull, *Thinking Medieval*, pp. 7-41  
**Discuss:** representing the Middle Ages visually  
**Engage:** Class trip to the Nasher museum; we'll have discussion and lunch at the Nasher. Students should also be close to finishing a final draft of their paper. I'll be available for conferencing through June 29.

June 27      **Watch:** *Braveheart*  
**Discuss:** myths about medieval sexual practices; how do sex and gender participate in the nation building we discussed at the start of the semester?  
**Engage:** Students should have completed substantial work on their final essay.

**Final Essay Due June 30 by 11:59 p.m.**

Asterisks (\*) mark texts students can write a critical article summary about.