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Spring 2011 Courses  

ENG 4606/Topics in Med Lit: Arthurian Legend—Film and Text  
Seq. M (MTh 11:45-2:40)  

In “Dreaming the Middle Ages,” Umberto Eco speculates about our engagement with the Middle Ages and the many ways in which we have created, constructed, invented, distorted, imagined, suppressed, revised, projected, recreated, misread, and misunderstood the medieval period—a span of a thousand years, from around 500 to 1500 (or sometimes measured from the fall of Rome to the Goths in 410 to the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453). To what degree can we recover the past with any certainty or accuracy? If we believe that the past is recoverable, then how can we represent it in words and images and sound with any certainty or accuracy? Or, if we believe that the past is not recoverable (lost to us; an endless source of nostalgia, a locus of loss and mourning), that what does it mean to attempt to represent it, and how do we judge such representations? Arthurian legend is an excellent site for exploring these and other such questions, because the story of Arthur is told and retold—adapted—not only throughout the European Middle Ages, but after, from the “end” of the Middle Ages to this very moment, in text, painting, the plastic arts, and music.

Film adaptations of Arthurian legend are as old as the medium of film itself. In this course, we’ll consider several that will allow us to cross genres (animated feature, musical, drama, comedy, period/costume drama, modernization) and provenance (American, British, French, German). We’ll read a selection of medieval Arthurian texts in order to get a sense of the material (vast and varied) that filmmakers have adapted. We’ll explore the impact that the medium of film has had on the legend, and how film adaptations of the story of Arthur have breached the boundaries between high culture and low culture.

All films will be screened on Thursdays in class. Attendance is required, even if you’ve seen the film. You will be asked to keep a log of your impressions and reactions, especially with respect to how this or that given scene was framed and filmed. Other requirements (which may be adjusted, depending on class size): one brief, informal analysis of a scene and two short research papers (in that you explicitly engage in a dialogue with others who have written about film and film theory).

ENG 4710/Jr/Sr Seminar: The Contemporary British Novel  
Seq. B (MW 2:50-4:30)  

We will read a selection of novels published within the past twenty-five years by writers living in Great Britain and by writers who live in the former colonies of Britain. My phrasing is intended to draw attention to literal location and geography, for in order to read the contemporary “British” novel, we must examine what it means to be British as opposed to other sorts of
identities, performances, and essences. Our focus is twofold: the particular cultural context which produced these novels—a context constructed by gender, race, and, especially, class; and the literary-critical understanding of these novels as examples of the “modern,” the “postmodern” (better, “poststructuralist”) and the “postcolonial.” We’ll read approximately a novel a week, from among such authors as Aravind Adiga, Pat Barker, John Banville, A.S. Byatt, Keri Hulme, Hilary Mantel, Martin Amis, Ian McEwan, Michael Ondaatje, Salman Rushdie, Zadie Smith, and Graham Swift. We will also take up how reading for pleasure (ludic reading) and reading for the academy (i.e., for the classroom and for formal study and publication) intersect, cross, and enrich each other. Requirements: formal in-class responses to five of the assigned novels plus two short research papers.