ENGL 240: SWORDS & SORCERY

MWF 12:00 -12:50 PM, CRG 107

INSTRUCTOR: DR. ARIELLE MCKEE

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STUDENT OFFICE HOURS:

DROP INS: MWF 10:50-11:50AM; TTH 10-11AM

WITH APPOINTMENT: IF DROP-IN OFFICE HOURS DO NOT FIT YOUR SCHEDULE, PLEASE CONTACT YOUR INSTRUCTOR (AT LEAST 24 HOURS IN ADVANCE) WITH 2-3 ALTERNATE MEETING TIMES

Catalog Description: ENGL 240: Survey of Topics in Literature. This course will survey a cultural topic through literature that focuses on a time period, theme, writer, or region. Prerequisite: ENGL 102. Fall and Spring. 3 credit hours.

Course Description: "Swords and Sorcery" refers to a subsection of the fantasy genre. These tales are all about action, with a (usually loner) warrior-hero besting monsters and other, oft supernatural, foes in dramatic battles. Typically, however, those feats are motivated by the hero's self-interest, rather than the good of others. So, it's *The Witcher*. In this course, we seek to complicate the sense of what a tale of swords and/or sorcery can be. We will examine the ideas, questions, types, and tropes in medieval narratives of one or both, and then extend those considerations to works of medievalism and fantasy, from Pre-Raphaelite art to novels like *Legendborn*. We will also explore portions of the Arthurian tradition, meet fairies, face down evil, and discuss how and why these works can embolden and empower. However, we will also consider the negative impacts and harmful appeals of elements of such stories, asking: "what do tales of swords and sorcery (defined broadly) give to their readers?" Among other works, we will consider a medieval werewolf tale, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Ready Player One*, and portions of Malory's *Morte Darthur*.

Though we will, by necessity, only dip our toes, fingers, elbows, and/or noses into the rich, varied, and wonderful works composed throughout the centuries we cover, I very much hope this will inspire an unfortunate literary habit that will plague you the remainder of your entire adult life. You have been warned. This first taste is free.

Our primary questions this semester will be:

- How do medieval narratives *and* more modern ideas about the Middle Ages shape works of medievalism and our present world?
- What can narratives—particularly those of swords and sorcery (defined broadly)—give their readers? Why do we find these sorts of tales appealing? What are their purpose(s)?
- What are the potential cultural and real-world effects of the works read and the ideas they promote? Are all tales of swords and sorcery the same? Do they all serve the same purpose(s)?
- With a hat tip to Tracy Deonn, who gets to be legendary? How might we tell better stories?

Content Warnings: many of the works we will read this semester contain moments of violence, descriptions of sexual assault, racist and ableist language, religious intolerance, and more. I will do my best to include content warnings (labeled "CW") in each week's Blackboard folder, but please feel free to check in if you ever have concerns, need to chat about your feelings on a reading, etc.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES (DEPARTMENTAL):

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

Student Learning Outcome	Fulfilled By
1. Identify literary terms, styles, and periods	Class meetings; midterm
2. Synthesize cultural and historical contexts	Readings; class meetings; synthesis project
3. Apply effective reading strategies to provide textual evidence	Class meetings; close reading assignment; note packets
4. Analyze literature, applying the criteria in objectives one and two	Class meetings; note packets; close reading assignment; synthesis project
5. Compare literary styles, periods, and terms	Synthesis project; midterm and/or final
6. Compose literary analyses	Close reading assignment
7. Connect and extend knowledge to the diverse range of human experiences as reflected in texts	Readings; class meetings; note packets; synthesis project

TEXTS AND SUPPLIES:

- REQUIRED: *Legendborn*, by Tracy Deonn, ISBN: 9781534441606
- REQUIRED: *Nimona*, by Noelle Stevenson, ISBN: 9780062278227
- REQUIRED: *Ready Player One*, by Ernest Cline, ISBN: 9780307887443
- RECOMMENDED: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Broadview), edited by James Winny, ISBN: 9780921149927
- Select readings available via Blackboard (Bb)
- A dual-layer face mask
- *Recommended: a [Habitica](#) or [Trello](#) Account*

NOTE: *All required course texts are available at the Campus Store; however, most can be found even more affordably via sites like Amazon, Barnes & Noble, AbeBooks, & Better World Books (simply paste the ISBN number into the search bar and you should be taken straight to the edition specified here)*

EDUCATION AND CHALLENGING IDEAS

Education is awesome for a number of reasons, but one of the big ones is that it gives us a chance to wrestle with and determine what we value, what we believe, what we want to be and do, how we want to live with and treat others, and so forth. Education and ideas present us with opportunities to grow, and part of this gift, this offering, involves engaging with new and sometimes challenging ideas. In this class, there is never any requirement to make those ideas your own, rather, this is your chance to determine not only what you believe, but why you believe what you believe. (Can I say "believe" any more times? We'll see…)

We will encounter a lot of people's thoughts, writings, and values in this class—I don't agree with all of them and I don't expect you to—all I ask is that you take the idea, look at it from all sides; judge it on its own merits and its logical outcomes; write about how it tastes or smells, how it looks or makes you feel; evaluate it fairly and with all your capacities; and then, if it's not a nutritious food for you, set it aside. However, if you discover, to your surprise, that you are, metaphorically, a fan of, say, a Brussel sprout-y concept, then pop that idea into your shopping cart and see what it can fuel you to do, to say, and to create. (Ok, done butchering that metaphor.)

Ideas, words, and emotions are powerful—often as powerful as actions. They can scare us and embolden us, inspire us to loving compassion or to vicious destruction; in this course, we will not attack persons, but we can and should feel free to critique and even actively disagree with concepts, especially those that tear down, oppress, or seek to damage others.

I hope you'll join me on this fascinating journey to the idea-store and that, by the end of the semester, you will have enjoyed selecting the ingredients for your own, unique feast. (Apparently I wasn't done with the metaphor after all.)

PROFESSIONALISM & PARTICIPATION POLICIES

Because effective discussion is done in a community, it is imperative that your interactions in class (both in person and online) be conducted respectfully and that you participate fully in the course. **Disrespectful, belittling, or threatening speech or behavior will not be tolerated.** In addition, use of cell phones and other electronic devices should be appropriate to and for the classroom; **students who persist in using technology inappropriately or who do not contribute to class activities digitally or vocally will be considered mentally absent from class and marked accordingly**.

Because, in this class, we may discuss and research difficult and complex topics—including gender identity, racism, violence, and so on—**we need to have clear expectations about and agree to a shared set of rules for** maintaining a respectful and safe learning space.
The Rules: in class and in online discussion and activities, you are expected to

1. Honor your fellow students by keeping the conversation confidential;
2. Refrain from making personal attributions; speak to give knowledge. (Put another way, disagree with ideas; do not attack persons);
3. Speak from your own experience and unique perspective while listening to others share theirs (using language like: "I think ..." and "In my experience ..."); and
4. If you are struggling with your feelings, take a moment to sit with and consider your emotions (you might even free write about what you feel and why you think you feel it). Remember, it is ok to feel uncomfortable or upset, but it is also important to consider where that discomfort truly comes from. (**NOTE:** *you are **always** welcome to speak with your instructor about words or actions that feel harassing or discriminating towards yourself or others—see anti-harassment policy*).

ACCESSIBILITY STATEMENT

Everyone learns differently and I will do my best to engage as many learning styles as possible. It is important to me that course materials are equally accessible to all students. If you are having any trouble accessing or otherwise receiving course material, or if you need accommodations, please let me know as soon as possible. If at any point in the semester, you find yourself not fully able to access course space or material, you are welcome (but not required) to contact your Instructor to discuss your specific needs; I will do what I can to help and support you this semester.

All students are encouraged to take advantage of the excellent support resources listed below.

SUPPORT RESOURCES

University Writing Center: Tucker 237 ~ https://gardner-webb.edu/resources/academic-support/writing-center/. The Writing Center is a resource for all students, regardless of major or level of study. Writing Center consultants are fellow students who have a solid grasp of the English language and enjoy assisting others. They will help you with developing and revising your ideas as well as polishing your final draft. Walk-Ins are welcome; however, students should make an appointment ahead of time to ensure a spot. Students can customize their appointment by choosing a date, time, and consultant while logged into My Webb (Student Tab, Academic Services, Student Services, Writing Center Appointment Scheduler). Visit the Writing Center website each semester for important information, such as its hours of operation. Contact consultants at writingcenter@gardner-webb.edu, come to Tucker, or call (704) 406-4393.

The Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL): https://owl.purdue.edu/. The Purdue OWL contains resources on source citation and formatting, writing style and genres, grammar and mechanics, and much more. It is free and available to all.

Peer Tutoring: This academic support service, provided through the Student Success Division, provides course-specific tutoring to contribute to the tutors and tutees personal development and academic success. Almost all general education courses are available for tutoring and some major courses. Peer Tutoring provides undergraduate students with the opportunity to schedule an individual tutoring appointment with a peer tutor who has previously excelled in the requested course. Peer tutoring generates no additional fees for the student. See the Peer Tutoring website for more information: https://gardner-webb.edu/resources/academic-support/peer-tutoring/.

Noel Center for Disability Resources: If your learning or participation in this class might be affected in any way by a disability recognized under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), you will need to do the following: (1) register with the Noel Program for the Disabled at Gardner-Webb University—(704) 406-4270; and (2) educate me about your disability so that I can work with you and the Noel Center to arrange necessary accommodations. It is important that you take both of these steps no later than the first week of the semester. See the Noel Center's website for more information: https://gardner-webb.edu/resources/academic-support/noel-center/.

Technology Services: Suttle Hall ~ https://gardner-webb.edu/resources/technology-resources/. Technology Services works collaboratively with students, faculty, staff, and alumni to provide network security, academic and administrative computing support, email services, software licensing and management, and technology training. Please let technology Services know if you are experiencing any problems with our wireless network. Visit the website or call (704)-406-4647.

Bulldog Cares Program: Bulldog Cares provides students with basic necessities to help them succeed inside and outside the classroom, such as emergency housing, toiletries, professional clothing, food assistance, educational resources, book loan services, electronics for laptops, medical help, and

more. Select services are given to students who meet specific criteria and all requests are confidential. Students who wish to inquire about Bulldog Cares support can email bulldogcares@gardner-webb.edu.

University Health Services: https://gardner-webb.edu/resources/wellness-center/university-health-services/. The University partners with Atrium Health to provide comprehensive high-quality healthcare for traditional undergraduate and on-campus residential students. With a variety of services – we have you covered. The Student Health Clinic offers office and virtual hours and is located at 148 Memorial Dr. Shelby, NC 28152, phone: (980) 487-2390.

Counseling Services: Tucker Student Center ~ https://gardner-webb.edu/resources/counseling-center/. The Gardner-Webb University Counseling Center provides academic, emotional, social, and vocational support as well as mental health consultation to students in a face-to-face setting on the Boiling Springs campus.

Cleveland County Support Services

- **COVID-19 Community Relief Fund:** https://www.clevelandcounty.com/main/news_detail_T12_R187.php
- **United Way of Cleveland County Agencies & Resources:** https://uwclevco.org/agencies/
- **NC Works Community Resource Assistance Guide** (includes information regarding resources and aid related to childcare, clothing, food, medical and mental health support, and more): https://www.ncworks.gov/admin/gsipub/htmlarea/uploads/CRAG/Cleveland_County.pdf
- **Cleveland County Department of Social Services:** https://www.clevelandcounty.com/main/departments/dss_contact_us.php
- **The Abuse Prevention Council** (Cleveland County's rape crisis center and provides safe shelter, court advocacy, counseling, a 24-hour Crisis Hotline, and more): https://www.abusepreventioncouncil.org/
- **Cleveland County Food Programs & Pantries:** https://livehealthyclevelandcounty.com/cc-food-programs-food-pantries/
- **Mental Health Association of Cleveland County** (includes information on crises services, a COVID Mental Health Hub, finding a therapist, and free hotlines): https://www.clevelandcountymha.org/
- **Veterans Services (Cleveland County):** https://www.clevelandcounty.com/main/departments/veterans_services.php
- **Legal Aid NC:** https://www.legalaidnc.org/

ASSIGNMENTS:

CLOSE READING ASSIGNMENT - 20%

*During the semester, you will select an intentionally short passage from **two (2)** different course texts, conduct a close reading of that passage, and create and submit an infographic explaining that close reading. Students will sign up for their text the second week of classes, and essays will be due on the final date that that text is discussed. (See assignment sheet for more details.)*

It is your responsibility to keep up with your close reading assignment due dates. Please make a note and put a reminder for yourself in your planner, phone, or email calendar.

WEEKLY "PACKETS" - 20%

Most weeks, you will complete the assigned reading, taking notes as you read. At the end of the week, you will submit at least one set of notes for one day's readings (for that week) as well as a short response to the week's wrap-up prompt. (Responses and notes can be multimedia, written, or drawn, as long as they show engagement with the text and class topics!) These two parts will form a packet

*of materials that will be **due at the end of each week (Saturdays by 8 AM, Eastern) for a completion grade**. (See assignment sheet for more details and a selection of note-taking strategies.)*

SYNTHESIS PROJECT - 20%

Choose from one of several prompts and create a project that shows understanding of course material and connects and extends that knowledge to some element of the diverse range of human experiences. Prompts might include creating a children's book celebrating the adventures of a much-needed or underrepresented hero or retelling a course text from a new perspective. (See assignment sheet for more details.) ***Target Deadline: 8am, December 2nd (via Bb)***

English Department Grading Scale

Undergraduate Chromatic Grading Scale

4.00 A+ 99-100
4.00 A   96-98
3.67 A- 94-95
3.33 B+ 92-93
3.00 B   88-91
2.67 B- 86-87
2.33 C+ 84-85
2.00 C   80-83
1.67 C- 78-79
1.33 D+ 76-77
1.00 D   72-75
0.67 D- 70-71
0.00 F 69>

TAKE-HOME MIDTERM - 20%

For your midterm, you will be asked to choose from one of the prompts listed on Bb. Each prompt is intended to enable you to demonstrate a knowledge of course terms, places, literary devices, characters, and/or events. Your midterm will also include a reflection discussing your choices and process when responding to the prompt selected. (See Midterm Exam sheet for more details.) ***Your midterm exam target deadline is 8am, October 16th (via Bb)***

TAKE-HOME FINAL - 20%

For your final, you will be asked to choose from one of the prompts listed on Bb. Some prompts may overlap with those from the midterm; you may choose the same prompt twice, but, in order to receive credit, the texts, terms, literary devices, etc. represented in and by your work for the final must differ from those used for your midterm. (See Final Exam sheet for more details.) ***Your final must be submitted by 2pm Wed, December 8th***

COURSE SCHEDULE

	Class Topics & Activities	Readings/Homework Due
Week 1 **Aug. 18 & 20** **Introductions**	Introduction to Course + Medieval Stereotypes	
	Geoffrey of Monmouth, *De Gestis Britonum* (aka *Historia Regum Britanniae*/ *The History of the Kings of Britain*)	Book VIII, Ch. XV – Book X, Ch. III (Bb)
**Week 2	Animals** **Aug. 23, 25, 27**	Marie de France, *Bisclavret*	*Bisclavret* (Bb)
	Chrétien de Troyes, *Yvain, The Knight with the Lion* (part 1)	Yvain, lines 1 – 3340 (Bb)
	Chrétien de Troyes, *Yvain, The Knight with the Lion* (part 2)	Yvain, lines 3341 – End (Bb)
**Week 3	Fairies** **Aug. 30** **Sept. 1, 3**	*The First Branch of the Mabinogi*	"The First Branch of the Mabinogi" (Bb)
	Marie de France, *Yonec*	*Yonec* (Bb)
	Sir Orfeo (ME)	*Sir Orfeo* (Bb)

Week 4 | Globalities Sept. 6, 8, 10	LABOR DAY – NO CLASS	
	Emaré (ME)	*Emare* (Bb)
	Selections from *The Arabian Nights*	Selections on Bb
Week 5 | Globalities Sept. 13, 15, 17	*The King of Tars* (part 1, ME)	*The King of Tars, lines 1 – 717* (Bb)
	The King of Tars (part 2, ME)	*The King of Tars, lines 718 – End* (Bb)
	Midterm Intro & Work Day	
Week 6 | Grails Sept. 20, 22, 24	*Peredur son of Efrog*	*Peredur son of Efrog* (Bb)
	Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival* (sels.)	*Parzival* (sels.) (Bb)
	Jay-Z and Indiana Jones	
Week 7 | Gawains Sept. 27, 29 Oct. 1	"The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle" (ME)	"The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle" (Bb)
	Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Wife of Bath's Tale" (ME)	"The Wife of Bath's Prologue" & "Tale" (Bb)
	"Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle" (ME)	"Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle" (Bb)
Week 8 | Gawains Oct. 4, 6, 8	*SGGK*	SGGK, fitts 1 & 2
	SGGK	SGGK, fitt 3
	SGGK	SGGK, fitt 4
Week 9 | Apocalyptic Camelots Oct. 11, 13, 15	*The Green Knight*	Tracy Deonn, "Every King Arthur Retelling is Fanfic About Who Gets to Be Legendary" (Bb)
	Sir Thomas Malory, "The Tale of Sir Launcelot and Quene Gwenyvere," *Le Morte Darthur* (ME)	"The Eighteenth Book" & "The Nineteenth Book," *Le Morte Darthur* (Bb)
	Sir Thomas Malory, "The Deth of Arthur," *Le Morte Darthur* (ME) ***Midterm Target Deadline 8am, Oct. 16th***	"The Twentieth Book" & "The Twenty-First Book," *Le Morte Darthur* (Bb)
Week 10 | Intro to Medievalism Oct. 18, 20, 22	FALL BREAK – NO CLASS	
	Pre-Raphaelites and Medievalism	
	"Daechwita" and Medievalism	Videos on Bb
Week 11 | Quests, Gaming, & Grails Oct. 25, 27, 29	Games and Medievalism **Introduce Synthesis Project**	Patrick Butler, "The Fire Fades: Vulnerable Knights in *Dark Souls*" (Bb)
	Ready Player One	RPO, ch.s 1-9
	Ready Player One	RPO, ch.s 10-16
	Ready Player One	RPO, ch.s 17-22

Week 12 | Quests, Gaming, & Grails Nov. 1, 3, 5	*Ready Player One*	*RPO*, ch.s 23-31
	Ready Player One	*RPO*, ch.s 32-END
Week 13 | Who Gets to Be Legendary? Nov. 8, 10, 12	*Nimona*	*Nimona* (all)
	Knights & Racism	***Synthesis Project Proposal Due***
	Legendborn - activity (online)	*Legendborn*, ch.s 1-15
Week 14 | Who Gets to Be Legendary? Nov. 15, 17, 19	*Legendborn*	*Legendborn*, ch.s 16-25
	Legendborn	*Legendborn*, ch.s 26-35
	Legendborn	*Legendborn*, ch.s 36-42
Week 15 Nov. 22, 24, 26	Instructor Conferences (via Zoom)	
	THANKSGIVING BREAK – NO CLASS	
	THANKSGIVING BREAK – NO CLASS	
Week 16 | Wrap-ups Nov. 29 Dec. 1, 3	*Legendborn*	*Legendborn*, ch.s 43-END & Author's Note
	Synthesis Project Work Day	**Synthesis Project Target Deadline 8am, Dec. 2nd**
	Synthesis Project Exhibition Day	
Finals Week	***Your Final Exams are due by 2pm Wednesday, December 8th (via Bb)***	

Abbreviations
Bb = Blackboard
RPO = Ready Player One
SGGK = Sir Gawain and the Green Knight
ME = This text is written in Middle English (give yourself lots of time & see Bb for additional tips!)