

From Excalibur to Andúril: wielding magic swords

Start date 12 October 2019**End date**

13 October 2019

Venue Madingley Hall
Madingley
Cambridge
CB23 8AQ**Tutors** Dr John Lennard &
Magnus Sigurdsson
Hardradi**Course code** 1920NRX007**Director of ISP and LL**

Sarah Ormrod

**For further information on this
course, please contact the Lifelong
Learning team**Zara Kuckelhaus, Fleur Kerrecoe
shortcourses@ice.cam.ac.uk or 01223 764637**To book**See: www.ice.cam.ac.uk or telephone 01223 746262

Tutor biography

John Lennard is an Associate Member and Director of Studies in English at Hughes Hall, Cambridge, and a Panel Tutor for ICE. He was formerly a Fellow of Trinity Hall, Cambridge, and Professor of British and American Literature at the University of the West Indies–Mona, in Jamaica. He has published on practical criticism, punctuation history, Shakespeare, Faulkner, Paul Scott, Nabokov, Tolkien, and widely on genre fiction.

Two practical sessions will also be taught by Magnus Sigurdsson Hardradi, Master Armourer and swordsmith, who makes and owns magical blades ...

Course programme

Saturday

Please plan to arrive between 13.00 and 15.00. Please note you can check in to your room from 14.00. You can meet other course members in the Terrace bar where tea and coffee are available.

15:00 **Session 1: What's in a Sword?**

16:15 Tea

16:45 **Session 2: Excalibur in Malory and T. H. White**

18:30 Dinner

20:00 Session 3: Narsil, Andúril, and Other Blades of Middle-earth

21:30 Terrace bar open for informal discussion

Sunday

07:30 Breakfast

09:30 **Session 4: Practical 1: Forgework**

10:45 Coffee

11:15 **Session 5: Practical 2: Wielding Long Sharp Things Safely**

12:30 Free

13.00 Lunch

14.00 **Session 6: Deconstructing Magical Swords : Pullman and Bujold**

15.15 Course ends

Course syllabus

Aims:

To understand the historical reasons for the very high cost and fetishisation of swords;
To trace in outline the magical sword from Excalibur to Andúril;
To explore recent fantasy deconstructions of the magical sword.

Content:

The course begins with a practical question: What's in a sword? The answers include not only iron, steel, and the materials of the hilt and pommel, but a considerable anterior industry providing raw iron, complex tools, and huge quantities of charcoal: good swords were and are as costly as luxury cars, and much of the fetishisation of them as inherited and violently practical objects initially arises from how advanced a technological work a good sword is.

In the second and third sessions, we will look at the emergence and tale of Excalibur, and the lore that accretes around it, in Malory and, rather differently, T. H. White. That in turn was one source that informs Tolkien's major blade in *The Lord of the Rings*, Narsil, reforged as Andúril; we will also consider other magical blades in Middle-earth, including Sting and the blade of Westernesse that Merry uses so tellingly on the Witch-King of Angmar.

The fourth and fifth sessions are practical ones with Magnus Sigurdsson Hardradi, using a portable forge, so students can see what is truly involved in hammering red-hot metal into the desired shape ; and, using replica weapons, discover **carefully** why balance of both body and sword matters, back-scabbards are not a good idea, and some swords have very particular shapes.

- **The forge session at least will necessarily be outside, rain or shine, so please dress appropriately.**
- **Health and safety considerations will be paramount, but sensible behaviour is required: even practice blades can do damage if people are careless.**
- **Photographs may be taken *only* with explicit permission.**

The final session will consider some more recent variations on and deconstructions of the topos, Philip Pullman's 'Subtle Knife', largely a narrative convenience, and Lois McMaster Bujold's *The Sharing Knife*, a far more radical challenge to the mystique of the magical sword.

Presentation of the course:

Each literary session will have 35–40 minutes of formal instruction, with Powerpoint images, followed by open discussion.

The practical sessions will be organised as necessary for health and safety, but students will be allowed as much hands-on experience as is practicable. Please note that the timing of these session may necessarily vary from the formal schedule.

As a result of the course, within the constraints of the time available, students should be able to:

Understand the historical value and fetishisation of swords;
Analyse connections between underlying fact and narrative fantasies about swords;
Understand more fully Tolkien's uses of magical swords; and
Read contemporary versions of magical swords with far more insight into the trope and its reality.

Reading and resources list

Listed below are texts that might be of interest should you wish to supplement your learning on the course. Any essential reading is marked with an asterisk *

Author	Title	Publisher and date
Sir Thomas Malory	<i>Le Morte Darthur: The Winchester Manuscript</i>	Oxford World's Classics 1998
T. H. White	<i>The Sword in the Stone</i>	Collins 1938
Philip Pullman	<i>The Subtle Knife</i>	Scholastic 1997
Lois McMaster Bujold	<i>The Sharing Knife: Beguilement</i>	Eos 2006
	<i>The Sharing Knife: Legacy</i>	Eos 2007
	<i>The Sharing Knife: Passage</i>	Eos 2008
	<i>The Sharing Knife: Horizon</i>	Eos 2009

None are essential reading, but students familiar with the literary material will get more from the course. All books listed are available in digital editions.

Additional information

Venue

Details of how to find Madingley Hall can be found on our website:
<http://www.ice.cam.ac.uk/who-we-are/how-to-find-the-institute>

Refreshments

Tea and coffee, lunch and dinner will be provided as outlined in the timetable. If you have any specific dietary requirements or allergies and have not already advised us, please inform our Admissions Team on ice.admissions@ice.cam.ac.uk or +44 (0)1223 746262.

Note Students of the Institute of Continuing Education are entitled to 20% discount on books published by Cambridge University Press (CUP) which are purchased at the Press bookshop, 1 Trinity Street, Cambridge (Mon-Sat 9am – 5:30pm, Sun 11am – 5pm). A letter or email confirming acceptance on to a current Institute course should be taken as evidence of enrolment.

Information correct as of: 10 September 2019