

## English 9178A: Canadian Medievalism

M.J. Toswell

Fall Term, Wednesdays 7-10 p.m.  
UC 4401

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Medievalism, the reception of the Middle Ages, is a relatively new field of scholarly endeavour, and even newer is analysis of medievalism as it functions in the literature of a particular nation. Australia is far in the lead, with several monographs and many articles specifying the particularly antipodean approach to the Middle Ages, and especially nowadays addressing how Peter Jackson makes the hobbit into a species indigenous to New Zealand. The study of Canadian medievalisms is a new one, but well worth our attention. One of the two inventors of Superman, a thoroughly medieval and chivalric hero, was Canadian. Several modern ventures in the field of real "reel" medievalism are Canadian: the joint Canadian-Icelandic production *Beowulf and Grendel* and more recently the Irish-Canadian television series *The Vikings*. There is also the strain of the academically trained individual engaging in a highly sophisticated way with the Middle Ages, notably the poets Earle Birney and Jeramy Dodds, the Icelandic immigrant literature of Western Canada (especially Manitoba), and the noted twentieth-century thinker, Robertson Davies. The course, then, will introduce the field of medievalism in general before looking at the roots of Canadian medievalism (in British and American nineteenth-century medievalisms by writers such as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Walt Whitman, Alfred Lord Tennyson, and T.S. Eliot). We will look at some other manifestations of Canadian medievalism: institutions, architecture, restaurants, stained glass, videogames, the role of the forest, and much more. We will then turn to the medievalist fantasy (which in Canada sometimes intersects with indigenous legend and myth), including works by such writers as Jack Whyte, Guy Gavriel Kay, Sean Stewart, and Charles de Lint. Finally, we will consider whether Canada's major contribution to modern medievalism lies in a recreation of the real Middle Ages or in a fantastic hybrid construction of the medieval with the modern.

### **Required Texts:**

Robertson Davies, *The Lyre of Orpheus* (Toronto: Penguin, 1988).

Jeramy Dodds, trans. *The Poetic Edda* (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2014).

Guy Gavriel Kay, *Tigana* (New York: Roc, 1990).

Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985).

*Medievalism: Key Critical Terms* ed. Elizabeth Emery and Richard Utz (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2014).

George Longmore, *The Charivari* (text copies to be arranged through Canadian Poetry Press).

*Vinland Sagas*, tr. Keneva Kunz, ed. Gísli Sigurðsson (London: Penguin, 2008).

We will also have an extensive quantity of material on OWL.

**Course Evaluation:**

The final grade will be calculated as follows:

Participation	10%
Presentation(s)	20%
Short online papers 1 @ 10%	10%
Short online papers 5 @ 12%	60%

**Short Online Papers:** Submitted on OWL, these will be 750-1000 word engagements with one of the texts or ideas treated in the previous week. Your contribution should raise an issue of medievalism. The option of submitting one of these papers is available to you in each week of the course, and you may do six or more than six, of which the best six will be counted. Please note that there are no late submissions, and that your submission in a given week must be on the topic from the previous week. Submissions will be available until Tuesday at midnight for the previous week's material.

You must submit one of these (worth 10%) by 24 September, and the rest on the following schedule, all at 12%: one by 8 October, two more by 12 November, and two by 10 December. You are welcome to submit more as and when you choose to improve your grades. 1 short online paper @ 10% by 24 September; 5 short online papers @ 12% = 60% as per the schedule.

**Participation:** Participation marks will be given for attendance to the full class, for engagement (that is, having read the materials in advance, prepared your thoughts carefully, and generally faced up to the exigencies of the course), for the quality of questions and answers in class, and for helpfulness with colleagues. In graduate courses such as this one, participation can be overwhelming the discussion and pontificating, which is not good participation and will not be rewarded, or it can be making one or two very useful points or helping someone else out if you understand a concept or an element of Canadian history better than they do. Find a way to make your participation matter in the classroom. 10%

**Presentation(s):** My basic principles for marking in-class presentations are: content as appropriate for the rest of the class, clarity of delivery, time-keeping, quality of ancillary materials. In short, these presentations are opportunities to teach your colleagues, and that will be the focus in the grading. That is, feel free to impress me if you want, but I will be grading you on how much you convey to your colleagues and how much they engage with your presentation. One presentation of thirty-five minutes @ 20%, or two presentations of fifteen minutes @ 10%

**Course Syllabus:**

Week 1: Introduction, heraldry, Gothic Revival architecture in Canada

Week 2: Medievalism, *Medievalism: Key Critical Terms*, heraldry

Week 3: Case Study: Newfoundland, *Vinland Sagas*, L'Anse aux Meadows

Week 4: Literary history in Canada, Earle Birney

Week 5: Nineteenth Century Medievalisms in Canada, Susanna Moodie, John Richardson, Julia Beckwith Hart, Stephen Leacock and others

Week 6: George Longmore, "The Charivari"

- Week 7: Robertson Davies, *The Lyre of Orpheus*  
 Week 8: Jeramy Dodds, *The Poetic Edda*  
 Week 9: Guy Gavriel Kay, *Tigana*  
 Week 10: Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*  
 Week 11: Modern Canadian medievalisms: film, cartoons, children's literature, fantasy literature, neomedievalism  
 Week 12: review, definitions, discussion

Note the OWL website has a lot of material for this course, including selections of poems by Earle Birney and Jeramy Dodds, the link to the publication of Longmore's "The Charivari," a link to material by Susanna Moodie, and a much ampler description of what will happen in each week of the course.

Here is some additional material required by SGPS. It may be useful to you.

#### 1. Statement on Academic Offences:

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following website:

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_grad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf)

#### 2. Graduate Course Health and Wellness

As part of a successful graduate student experience at Western, we encourage students to make their health and wellness a priority. Western provides several on campus health-related services to help you achieve optimum health and engage in healthy living while pursuing your graduate degree. For example, to support physical activity, all students, as part of their registration, receive membership in Western's Campus Recreation Centre. Numerous cultural events are offered throughout the year. For example, please check out the Faculty of Music web page <http://www.music.uwo.ca/>, and our own McIntosh Gallery <http://www.mcintoshgallery.ca/>. Information regarding health- and wellness-related services available to students may be found at <http://www.health.uwo.ca/>. Students seeking help regarding mental health concerns are advised to speak to someone they feel comfortable confiding in, such as their faculty supervisor, their program director (graduate chair), or other relevant administrators in their unit. Campus mental health resources may be found at

[http://www.health.uwo.ca/mental\\_health/resources.html](http://www.health.uwo.ca/mental_health/resources.html).

#### 3. Student Accessibility Services

Western is committed to achieving barrier-free accessibility for all its members, including graduate students. As part of this commitment, Western provides a variety of services devoted to promoting, advocating, and accommodating persons with disabilities in their respective graduate program.

Graduate students with disabilities (for example, chronic illnesses, mental health conditions, mobility impairments) are encouraged to register with Student Accessibility Services, a confidential service designed to support graduate and undergraduate students through their

academic program. With the appropriate documentation, the student will work with both SAS and their graduate programs (normally their Graduate Chair and/or Course instructor) to ensure that appropriate academic accommodations to program requirements are arranged. These accommodations include individual counselling, alternative formatted literature, accessible campus transportation, learning strategy instruction, writing exams and assistive technology instruction.

4. <https://www.uwo.ca/ownyourfuture/>