

Fall 2022, Department of English, Program in Comparative Literature  
Grad Half-Course

M.J. Toswell

Global Medievalisms

Comparative Literature 9692A  
English 9215A

Tuesdays 12:30-3:30 p.m.  
UC 4401

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Medievalism, the study of the reception and re-creation of the Middle Ages, became a formal subject of study about fifty years ago. For several decades the field was dominated by British and American scholars and critics interested in anglophone medievalism, with occasional forays into continental European responses to the historical period from 500-1500 (or perhaps 1600). Theoretical paradigms and methodological approaches developed out of this tradition, and worked best when focused on it. Moreover, this medievalism constructs the Middle Ages very specifically through a nineteenth-century lens, bringing to bear a kind of double lens on the

period through the initial discovery and editing of many texts by Romantic and Victorian aficionados of the period.

In recent years, however, the Middle Ages and medievalism have gone both global and popular. Australia and New Zealand are suddenly attracting serious analysis, and the medievalism of France and Germany and Italy – always present but somewhat muted in voice – has stepped forward as well. Hispanic and Hispanoamerican medievalism is, in the present moment, gathering serious momentum with conferences in Brazil and Argentina, serious studies of the medievalism of Jorge Luis Borges, and several recent analyses laying out the different parameters of medievalism in the global context. Consideration of the medieval in the modern world also now involves more profound thinking about architecture, structures such as universities and other public institutions, and intellectual history (including, for example, analysis of the origins of white supremacist movements).

The shift to popular medievalism has given rise to more effervescent engagements with the medieval in modern media including television and film, graphic novels and videogames. Thinking about the medieval has become untethered to the “real” medieval in ways that are both fascinating and disturbing. Fantasy literature, for example, profoundly works from a medievalist paradigm, yet rarely acknowledges the debt.

This course will introduce the principal concepts of medievalism, using the oft-cited *Ivanhoe* by Sir Walter Scott as a starting point before turning to several more recent texts such as Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Kazuo Ishiguro’s *The Buried Giant*, and Orhan Pamuk’s *My Name is Red*. The course will then turn to recent scholarship on global medievalism with consideration of Jorge Luis Borges and then of recent worldwide engagements with medievalism as a political tool. We will finish with more broad-based considerations of the medieval at work in the modern day.

**Note that this course is crosslisted in English and Comparative Literature; students in the two programs will have the same principal texts and the same system of evaluation; for individual assignments and presentations, they will be able to focus on different materials. I am comfortable reading literary texts in English, French, and Spanish (and Latin, though probably irrelevant here), and I can also read written work in those three languages. I am less comfortable in German and Scandinavian languages, so will probably insist on your writing in English should you wish to engage with texts from those languages. On other languages and literatures, we can talk.**

Note also that I do not do social media and I have no social media presence whatsoever. I answer emails within twenty-four hours, but I do not get into long email conversations. Those should be done in my office hours or after class (not before, please). On the other hand, I really like posting materials and information to the course website, so you should spend time each week on the OWL system. Some weeks (e.g. for our discussion of Borges), I will post poems and short stories to read, or articles that are particularly relevant to our discussion in that class. This is also where the layout of each class will appear, depending on your presentations and my thinking about how much material we can cover in a given class.

## **Required Texts:**

*Medieval Imagery in Today's Politics.* Daniel Wollenberg. The Past Imperfect series. ARC Humanities Press, 2018. Pbk. 978-1942401407

*Medievalism: Key Critical Terms.* ed. Elizabeth Emery and Richard Utz. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2014. pbk. 2017. 978 1 84384 455 6 pbk

*Ivanhoe.* Sir Walter Scott. Intro. Diana Gabaldon. Modern Library, 2001. pbk. 978-0679642237

*Brother Cadfael's Penance.* Ellis Peters. London: Headline, 1994. 978-0446404532

*The Buried Giant.* Kazuo Ishiguro. Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2016. pbk. 978-03458049414

*My Name is Red.* Orhan Pamuk. London: Vintage, 2002. pbk. 978-375706851

## **Course Evaluation:**

In eight different weeks of the course students will complete 10% of their work, either as a short presentation, short assignment, or sometimes as a long assignment. Students must complete at least two short presentations of fifteen minutes in length, and can choose to do as many as five. Similarly, they must complete at least three short written assignments of 650 words (due three days after the relevant class, to the OWL website) and can choose to do as many as six. Once a month an opportunity for a longer assignment of 1500 words (for students who cannot imagine writing shorter pieces) will also be available, but also for 10% of the grade. Participation will be 5%, and the short paper delivered at the mini-conference on December 6<sup>th</sup> at the end of the course will be 15% of the grade.

The individual student has maximum choice and control over when to complete work in the course. The course website has twelve options for submission of short assignments and three options for longer assignments, and presentations can be delivered in every class after the first one. Note that two evaluations must be complete in September, two more in October, and two more in November. The last two can be distributed as seems appropriate.

**Short presentation:** 2 @ 15 minutes. My grading of presentations is relatively simple. What interests me most is how you teach your colleagues. There is no particular need to impress me; I know most of this material. Your focus should be presenting the material of your presentation in a way that is lucid, helpful, comprehensible and straightforward to your colleagues. If you do not sufficiently understand your material, you will not present it well. If you do not spend enough time rehearsing and delivering your presentation (without over-rehearsing so that you sound like an automaton), then it will lack clarity and coherence, and you will constantly be exclaiming, "Oh, I meant to say this" or "What did I want to say next?" Take your topic, research it properly, figure out how much you can reasonably say about it in ten-twelve minutes, and do that. The last two minutes should be for questions or comments. Topics for these short presentations can be

aspects of the text we are reading, even simply close readings of chapters whether of the theoretical or the literary texts we are looking at, or later in the course texts (preferably very short or very well-known) concerning which you wish to demonstrate the fruits of your thinking in the first half of the course. Minimum 20%.

Note that if you adore giving presentations you can do as many as five over the term. That means five different classes, at least one in September, two in October, and no more than two in November.

**Short assignment:** 3 @ 650 words. Submitted on OWL, these will be 650-word engagements with the materials treated in that week; as long as you engage with the materials assigned or ideas and issues that emerged during the class discussions, what you write on can be your choice. Students handle these short assignments in many ways: some pick one idea and apply it to several different texts as the course develops; others like to wait for the class and see if something they find interesting is mentioned so that they can research and develop a clearer argument in the next few days; and others like to read the texts well in advance and think about possible topics. Still others simply choose the weeks in which they will have time available, and sit down right after class in that week to come up with something. The real issue is simply to finish the short assignment, and not to fuss about it too much. References do not form part of the word count, but if you decide to create many footnotes and put half again as much information there as in your text, that is not a good idea. Minimum 30%.

Note that you can use any referencing system you prefer, so long as you use the same system consistently in each paper. And note that you can do as many as six of these short assignments.

**Participation:** I expect students to arrive on time for class and to stay to the end. I do not award grades for that, but students who miss more than one class (for even a brilliantly good reason) can expect to see their participation grade drop precipitately. Participation for me means reading the course materials in advance of the class, and participating intelligently in the discussion, with care and generosity to others in the room. It is not constant comment or babble for the sake of saying something, but neither is it saying nothing ever and hoping that I won't notice. Good participation is an art, making sure that your comment flows from someone else's, has a shape and structure to it, makes its point succinctly and well, and ends with a flourish (no one ever manages this but we can hope). 5%

**Conference Paper:** This will be a written paper fifteen minutes in length. It can be a development from one of your short assignments or presentations, though it should be materially different from those previous submissions in the course. It will give you a preliminary sense of what a conference paper should be and how much you can actually say in a short public paper. You will have to provide me with a topic and abstract of 100 words five days before the conference, so that I can schedule sessions and organize the event. Otherwise, any ideas developing from the course are welcome in your final conference paper.

**Draft Course Outline:**

Sept 13 Introduction, Global Medievalism, Medievalism

Sept 20 Wollenberg

Sept 27 Utz and Emery; complicating medievalism in the modern era

Oct 4 *Ivanhoe*

Oct 11 *Brother Cadfael's Penance*

Oct 18 *The Buried Giant*

Oct 25 Comparison and Global Medievalism

Reading Week

Nov 8 Jorge Luis Borges

Nov 15 *My Name is Red*

Nov 22 National or Genre Medievalisms I

Nov 29 National or Genre Medievalisms II

Dec 6 Mini-conference in expanded class time



Additional required material in this course outline:

### **Statement on Academic Offences**

The statement: “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 Web site:

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

Additionally,

A) If written work will be assigned in the course and plagiarism-checking software might be used, the following statement to this effect must be included in the course outline:

“All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com ( <http://www.turnitin.com> ).”

### **Support Services**

The Web sites for Registrarial Services (<http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>), and the same for affiliated university colleges when appropriate, and any appropriate Student Support Services (including the services provided by the USC listed here: <http://westernusc.ca/services/>) and the Student Development Services, should be provided for easy access.

All course outlines should contain the following statement: “Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western

<http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.”

And just for repetition’s sake, to make sure this point is clear:

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

#### Plagiarism:

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence.

#### Plagiarism Checking:

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system.

Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com <http://www.turnitin.com>.

All instances of plagiarism will be reported to the Chair of Graduate Studies. Proven cases of plagiarism will result in a grade of zero for the assignment. Subsequent offences will result in failure for the course.

#### Support Services

Registrarial Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

Student Support Services <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login>

Services provided by the USC <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

Student Development Centre <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western:

<http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.