

DRAFT SYLLABUS

3579G - Topics in Canadian Literature: Canadian Medievalism

M.J. Toswell

Mondays 11:30-1:30, Wednesdays 11:30-12:30

This course will explore a narrow topic within post-confederation Canadian literature. It may concentrate on a shorter historical span, a particular genre, or use some other principle of selection. 3 hours, 0.5 course

Canadian Medievalism

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 Clifton Kopp. The major contribution of Canadian 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, *Rings of Power* (New York: Roc, 1990).

Course Evaluation:

The final grade will be calculated as follows:

Short online responses to texts or class discussions

Best 5 @ 7%

35%

Class competition for “best example of Canadian medievalism” as worked out by the class and graded as worked out by the class

25%

Conference paper as delivered in class miniconference

25%