

Undergraduate Special Topics course offerings 2021-2022

4th year Special Topics

ENGL 4010FDE Seminar I: *English and Scottish Popular Ballads and their Afterlife* – Doug H – Zoom

Note: cross-listed with ENGL 5411 FDE – Zoom

Francis James Child's 1860 collection, *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, brought together 305 different ballads and their variants, almost all from the "long Renaissance" of the 14th through 18th centuries. Coming as it did at the birth of English Studies as an academic discipline, the ballads became a mainstay of curricula in English Departments nearly everywhere. Elizabeth Waterson, writing of the English curriculum at Montreal's McGill University in 1939, explains: "The Legend at McGill is that if you want to pass freshman English, you need to know the Ballads, Burns, and the Bible" (*Rapt in Plaid: Canadian Literature and Scottish Tradition* 4). While this requirement was dropped nearly everywhere over time, the ballads have had a lasting and living influence in popular culture to this day in British and North American old-time and folk music, blues, country, bluegrass, Newfoundland trad, the Folk Revival of the 1960's and the Transnational Roots Revival of the 2010's. We will read a selection of ballads with an eye for recurring motifs, patterns, and themes including fatalism, gender-based violence, transgression and punishment, exile and longing, and others. We will balance this by listening to more recent performances of the ballads, both in the important collection performed by Ewan McColl in the Smithsonian Folkways recordings and in other renditions by artists as various as the Carter Family, Bill Monroe, Doc Watson, Jean Ritchie, Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Fairport Convention, Simon and Garfunkel, Led Zeppelin, Roseanne Cash, Fleet Foxes, Anais Mitchell, and others.

ENGL 4010 WA – Honours Seminar: *Travel Writing* - Dr. A Guttman – on campus

Travel is often thought of as a modern phenomenon, but from the odyssey, to the walkabout, journeys are, and have long been, an integral part of our cultural imaginations. What does it mean to encounter unfamiliar people and locations? How are identities shaped in relationship to place and displacement? This course will examine the cultural dynamics of narrating travel and consider the many guises that travels take (vacation, adventure, exile, immigration, colonization, education, to name a few) and interrogate the nature of the many subject positions – such as tourist, refugee, student, aid worker – that the traveller may occupy. The texts have been selected to incorporate a range of geographical, generic and disciplinary focuses, with an emphasis on non-Western perspectives and locations.

ENGL 4010 WB – Honours Seminar: *The Movie Musical* – Dr. D Hannah – on campus

This course will engage in analysis of the movie musical with particular emphasis on approaches through theories of narrative, genre, and gender and sexuality.

ENGL 4013 FA – Special Topics in Medieval and Early Modern Literatures:

Shakespeare and Plague - Dr. R Warburton – Zoom

Note: English 4013 counts toward fulfillment of the Area 1 requirement.

Outbreaks of plague occurred throughout Shakespeare's life and affected his writings and working life in complex ways. He was born in the middle of an outbreak in Stratford upon Avon, he was a young actor during the London outbreak of 1592-94, and was an established theatre owner during the series of outbreaks from 1603-11. During plague outbreaks, the theatres were closed for long periods of time and Shakespeare took to writing some of his best-known plays, such as *King Lear* (1606). But what did he actually write *about* plague? (That question is not as easy to answer as we might hope.) What did his contemporaries write about plague? Might our current experience of Covid change how we read Shakespeare? Can early modern writings about plague and quarantine help us understand our current pandemic?

We will consider whether looking back on how Shakespeare and his contemporaries made sense of an illness for which there was no known cure can help us make sense of our current pandemic moment. Cultural critics and activists have found historical frameworks helpful in other pandemic moments. In the early days of the AIDS epidemic, for example, several scholars compared the early AIDS panic with early modern understandings of disease for political and cultural context (Sander Gilman). In our current pandemic moment, numerous AIDS activists see echoes of AIDS panic the moralizing responses to Covid. This course, then, will pursue several lines of inquiry relating to the representations of plague, HIV/AIDS, and Covid-19 as they relate to Shakespeare's writings and early modern understandings of disease.

We will begin with Susan Sontag's *Illness as Metaphor*, which students are encouraged to read before the first seminar meeting. This will provide us with a framework for thinking about how illnesses, in addition to being medical and scientific problems to be "solved", also become sites of cultural, political, and moralizing discourse. We will also read Sontag's *AIDS as Metaphor* later in the course when we examine the intersections between early modern understandings of disease and 1980s HIV/AIDS writings with how we are making sense of Covid-19.

ENGL 4014 WAO Special Topics in British Literature - *William Blake, Poet and Painter* – Dr. A den Otter – on campus

Note: English 4014 counts toward fulfillment of the Area 2 requirement.

Although William Blake may be most well-known for his *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, they form only a small portion of his intriguing artistic and poetic creations. How do Blake's paintings illuminate or complicate his poems and how do his poems extend or interrogate his paintings? How does Blake seek to open the doors of perception? Besides examining selections from Blake's *Songs*, this course will explore a variety of Blake's illustrated texts in terms of visual communication, historical context, and rhetorical appeals for social justice, looking particularly at texts such as *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, *An Island in the Moon*, and *Milton*.

ENGL 4015 FAO Honours Seminar in Global and Minority Literatures: African-American Women Writers – Dr. S Olutola – Zoom

Note: English 4015 counts toward fulfillment of the Area 3 requirement.

African-American Women Writers: This course will cover African-American women's writing from the 19th to the 21st century. Students will read novels and poems in relation to the political climate in which they were written. The course will also include theoretical journal articles, also written by African-American Women Writers, to help students analyze the socio-political complexities of the texts they will read.

3rd year Special Topics courses

ENGL 3051 FDE / WOME 3810 FDE – Special Topics in 18th and 19th Century Literature: 18th Century Women Writers – Dr. A den Otter - Zoom

Note: English 3051 counts toward fulfillment of the Area 2 requirement.

This course is a study of selected British women who wrote and published from 1700 to 1800. Whereas only a few upper-class women wrote and even fewer published their works at the beginning of the century, by the end many women from all classes wrote extensively, some of them even earning a living by the pen. Some of these women promote moral respectability, while others express energetic critiques of patriarchy or perceptive suggestions for familial and global equality and freedom. Noting the variances in women's experiences, we will be examining selected contributions to various poetic and prose genres, exploring shifts from satire to sensibility, classicism to domesticity, and elevated verse to gothic romance.

ENGL 3050 FDE: Special Topics in Medieval and Early Modern Literature: *Legends of King Arthur* – Dr. K Walton – online

Note: English 3050 counts toward fulfillment of the Area 1 requirement.

The legends of King Arthur and his knights permeate across literary history. From their origins in the medieval period, to their reimagining in the Victorian period, to their popular adaptations today, these adventurous tales have always appealed to readers. This course introduces students to the establishment and development of this long-standing narrative. Our focus is on Arthur's origins in the history of England, and we will look at some of the best and most evocative examples of the Arthurian legend produced in the Middle Ages. Characters familiar to many readers today – Arthur, Guinevere, Lancelot, and Merlin – take various and diverse masks across the Middle Ages; they not only engage in the adventures and affairs for which they are most famous but also reflect on the politics and priorities of the time and even on the human condition more generally. While our focus is on medieval examples of Arthurian literature, we will also consider how the Arthurian legend has been adapted recently. We will look at some of the many contemporary books, graphic novels, television shows, and films that feature the narrative and reflect on how and why this medieval story continues to appeal to audiences today.

ENGL 3911 WAO – Special Topics in Women's Writing: *Contemp. Short Fiction in Canada* – Dr. C Lousley – on campus

A deep dive into some of the fabulous short fiction written in Canada/Turtle Island in the post-1967 period. We will examine formal structure and varying approaches to tone, voice, and representational mode, including realist, gothic, postmodern, hyperrealist, and surreal fictions. Studied writers will include Lisa Moore, Eden Robinson, Heather O'Neill, Alistair MacLeod, André Alexis, Hiromi Goto, Madeleine Thien, and Alice Munro.