

Medieval Literature at McGill

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The Department of English at McGill University has recently lost two of its medievalists, one to early retirement and one to another institution (a decision made largely for personal reasons), and for several years has had no specialist in medieval drama. The Department now has only two full-time medievalists, with the result that its offerings in medieval literature have fallen off somewhat. A few years ago, the Department also made the effort to change all its courses to 3-credits. The 6-credit introductory course in Old English thereby fell away, as did student interest. However, we have managed to keep an Old English course going at the upper level, and a new, 300-level, 3-credit Introduction to Old English is being offered next year, in the hopes of being able to offer both the introductory course in Old English and the upper-level course as a follow-up. The Department over the past few years has maintained its offerings in Chaucer, as well as in other medieval topics (gender, religion, folklore, Arthurian tradition, and literary theory); this year we were able to put on Chaucer at both the undergraduate and graduate level, an Old English undergraduate course, and two upper-level undergraduate courses in Middle English literature (on allegory and on romance). We have approval to advertise for a position in Late Medieval/Early Renaissance, which we hope we will be able to fill next year. The Department now has a very strong Renaissance studies component (especially in Shakespeare), and we are hoping to boost our medieval offerings by creating a bridge with the Renaissance.

Other departments, such as History, French, German and Italian Studies, still have strong medieval offerings. Although student interest is not as great as for, say, modernist literature, the students who take the medieval courses show a keen interest and a few even carry this interest into graduate studies. We will continue to offer both undergraduate and graduate courses in medieval literature, both early and late, as we consider this historical component necessary to our curriculum.

Beyond the field of literature, I can speak only in generalities: Nancy Partner and Faith Wallis teach the medieval courses in history, Faith specialising in medieval science and medicine. Music used to have a lively bunch, but nowadays we are kept so busy within our own spheres that we seldom have time to meet colleagues in other departments and faculties. There also used to be an informal group called the McGill Medievalists, which has not met in several years.