

Professor: Zdravko Planinc (planincz@mcmaster.ca)  
Office: UH B127, but it's not in use this term.  
Office hours: Through video-conferencing; please make arrangements by e-mail.  
TA: Rachel Matheson (mathesre@mcmaster.ca)

Course times: 7:00 pm – 9:50 pm (at the latest)  
Course form: The course will be offered through a combination of synchronous and asynchronous online methods. Students will be required to attend Zoom classes and use Avenue (A2L). Details will be discussed in the first class.

## 1. The Course

### *Description*

In this course we will discuss some of the most important accounts of love given in Western civilization – Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Plato's *Symposium*, and *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise* – as well as several recent compelling theatrical and literary works: Mitchell and Trask's *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, Charlie Kaufman's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, and George Saunders' "Jon." If there is enough time and interest, we will also consider students' favourite poems and songs.

### *Objectives and pedagogy, in a pandemic*

This is a liberal arts course. It is not intended to provide students with information or data and test their memories. A basis of contextualizing information will be established whenever necessary and assumed in our analyses and interpretations of the course materials. The primary pedagogical purpose of the course is to cultivate literacy in the traditional sense and, more ambitiously, to promote better insight, understanding, and moral judgment by encouraging students to reflect on intrinsically meaningful, challenging, or at least interesting books, articles, works of art, and products of the entertainment industry.

No one needs to take a university course to be persuaded that love is a good thing. Everyone already accepts that, don't they? But people do have profound disagreements about what love is and is not. A liberal arts course, at its best, is a forum in which such disagreements can be raised and clarified through discussion and reflection. In this course we'll discuss the nature of love with our authors – for reading is fundamentally a discussion with an author – and among ourselves; and the discussion we'll have among ourselves will take place without a formal distinction between "lecture" and the "tutorial" sections of the class. We'll decide how best to use the class time during our first meeting.

To use a term favoured by administrators, the "content" of this course is discussion – informed and mindful discussion in the shared circumstance of a classroom. The content is also the

engagement with the course texts and other materials; and the content might also be said to be the assignments. But the content of this course is most definitely *not* information or data that can be accessed, delivered, and reproduced in one way or another indifferently. If a course were nothing but the delivery of known information, there'd be no reason for a university; it would be sufficient for each of us to scroll through web searches and watch videos on our own.

The ongoing pandemic – among its many other, more catastrophic consequences – does present a challenge to liberal arts courses in compelling universities to go online. “Asynchronous content delivery” is not conducive to engaged discussion. In order to best preserve this course’s particular content, therefore, classes will be held through video-conferencing on the Zoom platform, supported through A2L and e-mail contact as necessary.

### *Required course texts and editions*

There are three books you’ll need to obtain or access:

Plato, *The Symposium*, in *The Dialogues of Plato* (Bantam Classic)

Abelard and Heloise, *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise* (Penguin Classics)

Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet* (Bantam Classic).

If at all possible, I’d recommend having print copies. All three are available as inexpensive paperbacks. The McMaster bookstore, better known as the Campus Store, will attempt to acquire print copies in sufficient numbers and is offering “free shipping across Canada with a minimum purchase of \$75 (combination of textbooks, supplies and clothing).” There are also many other online sites, both Canadian and American, from which you might purchase new and used copies of the texts. If one of them is more convenient, please ensure that you purchase the right editions: *The Dialogues of Plato* is a Bantam collection edited by Erich Segal (yes, the guy who wrote *Love Story*, a book we’re *not* reading); *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise* is a Penguin, translated by Betty Radice; and there are too many editions of *Romeo and Juliet* to count, but the David Bevington Bantam edition has the advantage of being a complete text with good notes.

Now, digital editions. I think it’s good practice to mark up a paperback while reading it, scribbling initial reactions and reflections in the margins, but if no paperbacks are available a digital book will have to do. All three course books are available on Kindle, both in Canada and the US (depending on your account). And as usual, digital editions are less expensive than the print editions, sometimes even free. Obtaining digital access to the texts through the McMaster Library might be problematic for several reasons, one of which is an arrangement the university has with HathiTrust that imposes cumbersome time and user restrictions.

All the other course materials will either be posted on A2L or made available through links and such – no worries there. The movie version of Mitchell and Trask’s *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* is accessible through the Library’s streaming service; and the text of the musical – which is significantly different – is a Library e-book. Charlie Kaufman’s *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* is accessible through the Library as well. Zadie Smith’s “Meet Justin Bieber!” from her *Feel Free*, will be a PDF on A2L. And George Saunders’s story, “Jon,” is available here: [www.newyorker.com/magazine/2003/01/27/jon](http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2003/01/27/jon)

*Course requirements and evaluation (details below)*

Participation (over the term)	10%
Response papers (2 x 15%)	30%
Essay	30%
Final take-home assignment	30%

*Class schedule*

1. Jan. 11 Introduction to the course; *Romeo and Juliet* (introduction)
2. Jan. 18 *Romeo and Juliet* (continued)
3. Jan. 25 *Romeo and Juliet* (conclusion)
4. Feb. 1 *Symposium* (introduction)
5. Feb. 8 *Symposium* (continued)
- = Feb. 15 Reading week; no class
6. Feb. 22 *Symposium* (conclusion)
7. Mar. 1 *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (John Cameron Mitchell, Stephen Trask)
8. Mar. 8 Zadie Smith, "Meet Justin Bieber!"
9. Mar. 15 Abelard's *Historia calamitatum* (selections)
10. Mar. 22 Heloise and Abelard, "The Personal Letters" (numbers 2-5)
11. Mar. 29 *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Charlie Kaufman, Michel Gondry)
12. Apr. 5 George Saunders, "Jon," *The New Yorker* (27 Jan. 2003)

## **2. The Assignments**

*Participation (10%)*

This should be self-explanatory. Participation presumes attendance, for instance. The details will be discussed in class.

*Optional class presentation*

For a few brave souls, the participation requirement can be satisfied quickly with a presentation. With the prior approval of the prof, of course, a student can volunteer to play a favourite song or recite a favourite poem during class, give an interpretation (no more than 5 minutes of lecturing), and lead a short class discussion afterwards. Only one such presentation per week will be possible, but at any time in the term. And instruction on how to use the Zoom platform will be provided, if requested.

*General requirements for all written work*

Use only the course materials for your assignments. In other words, don't consult any secondary sources or reference works – and don't even think of searching the internet. It's simply not necessary. All your written work should be your own considered thoughts expressed in your own well-chosen words, based on your own reading of the course texts and your participation in,

or awareness of class discussions; and any textual references made in your work should be to the course materials alone. Any evidence of anything else will be penalized. As well, your written work must be proof-read the old-fashioned way for spelling and grammatical errors and clarity of style: relying on spelling and grammar functions of your software will not be enough.

*Response papers (2 x 15% = 30%)*

Students are required to write two short response papers, each of which deals with a specific part of a given week's assigned reading and takes into consideration the lecture on, and discussion of the text. Each response paper will be two or three typed pages, approximately 750 words, of prose in standard essay format (double-spacing, normal margins, 12-point font).

The topic for the first response paper is an analysis of the presentation of love in any important scene in *Romeo and Juliet*. It can be submitted anytime before January 31.

The topic for the second response paper is an analysis of either (1) Mitchell and Trask's *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* or (2) Zadie Smith's "Meet Justin Bieber!" – as long as the chosen text is *not* also being discussed in a student's essay. The due date for responses to *Hedwig* is March 7; the due date for responses to "Meet Justin Bieber!" is March 14.

*The essay (30%): topic, optional outline and meeting, final form*

Students have the choice of writing their essay on either (1) a comparison of the understandings of *eros* (love) presented in any two eulogies in the *Symposium* or (2) a comparison of the presentation of *eros* (love) in any eulogy of the *Symposium* with some aspect of the understanding of love given in either (a) Mitchell and Trask's *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* or (b) Zadie Smith's "Meet Justin Bieber!" Each student is required to decide on a specific topic, to formulate an argument, and to demonstrate it with appropriate textual exegesis, presenting everything as elegantly as possible.

The finished essay will be 8 pages (not counting title page and any apparatus), standard essay format (double-spacing, normal margins, 12-point font), or approximately 2,400 words (at 300 words per page). Given the variety of possible essay topics, students should observe a rule of thumb for determining a due date: No later than three weeks after the last class discussion of a selected text. Students writing on "Meet Justin Bieber!" in their essay, for instance, would have final due date of March 28.

As part of the process of working up the essay, a student may submit a brief outline specifying the particular topic and the ways it will be addressed and arrange to discuss the outline with the TA. An outline should be one or two typed pages, approximately 600 words, of prose; no point-form outlines, please. Neither the outline nor the meeting will be graded.

*Final take-home assignment (30%)*

I'm sure we're all relieved, and for many reasons, that there won't be a Registrar-scheduled sit-down final exam in this course. There will, however, be a final "take-home" assignment, to be

completed at some convenient time shortly after the end of classes. The format, content, procedures, and timing of the test will be decided before the final class, with student suggestions welcome.

Some things about it can be safely inferred now, though: it will certainly cover the *Letters* of Abelard and Heloise, Kaufman's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, and Saunders' "Jon;" and attendance and participation throughout the course will be assumed. And one aspect of it is non-negotiable: there will be no multiple-choice questions – students will be required to write answers in prose.

### *Assignment policies*

Assignments will be submitted either on A2L or as email attachments; announcements about the most appropriate means will be made in class and posted on A2L. Assignments will be graded using McMaster's scale: <https://registrar.mcmaster.ca/exams-grades/grades/#tab-3> Late assignments will be penalized one grading scale increment a day, and weekends will count as two days. Late penalties will be applied if assignments are submitted after deadlines without prior notification and submission of appropriate documentation.

### **3. The Word**

Written work will be marked on grammar, clarity of writing, organization and presentation as well as on the quality of its content and analysis. Students who wish to improve their writing skills might visit McMaster's "Student Success Centre" to ask about its "Academic Support" services. There are no shortcuts, however. The best way to learn to write well is to write a great deal, and more importantly, to read a great deal – "indiscriminately and all the time with [your] eyes hanging out" (Dylan Thomas).

### *Words and power*

In everything they write, students should follow five fundamental rules recommended by George Orwell in "Politics and the English Language:"

1. Never use a long word where a short one will do.
2. If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.
3. Never use the passive where you can use the active.
4. Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
5. Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.

### *41 other rules for writing good stuff*

1. Always check your spelling.
2. Proof-read to see if you any words out.
3. Verbs has to agree with their subjects.
4. Verb tense, today and always, was important.

5. Prepositions are terms one should not end sentences with.
6. Steer clear of incorrect forms of verbs that have snuck in the language.
7. The right way to use "is" is, is that it shouldn't be used this way.
8. Muster the courage to boldly refuse to incorrectly split an infinitive.
9. Don't use contractions in formal writing.
10. Use the apostrophe in its proper place and omit it when its not needed.
11. Verb's and simple plural's don't require them.
12. Don't use no double negatives.
13. The adverb usually follows the verb.
14. Statements, like, aren't similes or guesses?
15. Write all adverbial forms correct.
16. Place pronouns as close as possible, especially in long sentences, as of ten words or more, to their antecedents.
17. Everyone should be careful to use a singular pronoun with singular nouns in their writing.
18. Avoid run-on sentences they are hard to read.
19. No sentence fragments.
20. And don't start a sentence with a conjunction.
21. If you write well and I write well, how is it that you and me don't? If this is a lesson to you, and to me as well, then why isn't it a lesson to you and I?
22. Don't overuse exclamation marks!!!
23. "It is best not to use too many 'quotation 'marks,'" he said.
24. Avoid commas, that are not necessary, and un-necessary hyphens, too.
25. Use the semicolon properly, always use it where it is appropriate; and never where it isn't.
26. Writing carefully, dangling participles must be avoided.
27. Don't string too many prepositional phrases together unless you are one of those walking through the valley of the shadow of death.
28. If you reread your work, you will find on rereading that a great deal of repetition and redundancy can be avoided by rereading and editing.
29. Never, ever use repetitive redundancies.
30. A writer must not shift your point of view in mid-sentence.
31. It's really unfair, but things such as human beings, which are animate, get to begin their subordinate clauses differently than other things such as rocks, who are not.
32. Eschew dialect, irregardless.
33. Also, avoid awkward and affected alliteration.
34. Of course, it is incumbent upon everyone to avoid archaisms.
35. Always pick on the correct idiom.
36. Take the bull by the hand and say no to mixed metaphors.
37. Avoid trendy elocutions that sound flaky.
38. From the dawn of time, we have been commanded not to utter sweeping generalizations.
39. Resist hyperbole, even if you have to remind yourself a thousand times.
40. Last but not least, avoid clichés like the plague.
41. First, lists are not arguments; and thirdly, they are often numbered inconsistently.
42. Great green dragons might exist, but green great dragons certainly don't because the mysterious rule about adjectival order in English is opinion-size-age-shape-colour-origin-material-purpose before the noun. If you don't believe me, check out my lovely little old rectangular green French silver whittling knife.

## 5. The Law

### *Departmental policy*

Staff in the office of the Department of Religious Studies will not receive papers and other assignments. Students must submit their assignments directly to their TA or the professor.

### *University policies*

#### *1. Academic integrity statement*

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behavior in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behavior can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, located at [www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity](http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity). The following are only three forms of academic dishonesty: (1) plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which credit has been obtained; (2) improper collaboration in group work; (3) copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

#### *2. Authenticity / plagiarism detection*

*Some courses* might use a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. For courses using such software, students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via an online learning platform (e.g. A2L, etc.) using plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty.

Students who do not wish their work to be submitted through the plagiarism detection software must inform the Instructor before the assignment is due. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to the plagiarism detection software. *All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld* (e.g., on-line search, other software). For more details about McMaster’s use of Turnitin.com please go to: [www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity](http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity).

#### *3. Courses with an on-line element*

*Some courses* might use on-line elements (e.g., e-mail, A2L, LearnLink, web pages, capa, Moodle, ThinkingCap, etc.). Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of a

course using these elements, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation might become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in a course that uses on-line elements will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

#### *4. Online proctoring*

*Some courses* might use online proctoring software for tests and exams. This software may require students to turn on their video camera, present identification, monitor and record their computer activities, and/or lock/restrict their browser or other applications/software during tests or exams. This software may be required to be installed before the test/exam begins.

#### *5. Conduct expectations*

As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience, and the responsibility to demonstrate, respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning and working communities. These expectations are described in the *Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities* (the “Code”). All students share the responsibility of maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, *whether in person or online*.

It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in University activities. Student disruptions or behaviours that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g., the use of A2L, WebEx or Zoom for delivery), will be taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students’ access to these platforms.

#### *6. Academic accommodation of students with disabilities*

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) at 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or [sas@mcmaster.ca](mailto:sas@mcmaster.ca) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. For further information, consult McMaster University’s *Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities* policy.

#### *7. Requests for relief for missed academic term work*

The McMaster Student Absence Form (MSAF): In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the Academic Regulation in the Undergraduate Calendar “Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work.”

#### *8. Academic accommodation for religious, indigenous or spiritual observances (RISO)*

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the RISO policy. Students should submit their request to their Faculty Office *normally within 10 working days* of the beginning of term in



which they anticipate a need for accommodation *or* to the Registrar's Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

#### *9. Copyright and recording*

Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor include copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work, *including lectures by University instructors.*

The recording of lectures, tutorials, or other methods of instruction may occur during a course. Recording may be done either by the instructor for the purpose of authorized distribution or by a student for the purpose of personal study. Students should be aware that their voice and/or image may be recorded by others during the class. Please speak with the instructor if this is a concern for you.

#### *10. Extreme circumstances*

The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, A2L and/or McMaster email.

#### *And a final course policy*

If you've gone through the entire syllabus carefully, you might not be best pleased to read that this syllabus is subject to change at any time, with due notice given to in-course students. All changes will be announced and discussed in class and posted on A2L.