

SAMPLE PLANS OF STUDY

Sample 1

I propose to undertake an examination of how Canadian children's literature both promotes and reflects society's perceptions about childhood. I will focus my study on Canadian children's literature written between 1850 and 1950, with particular emphasis on works by Catharine Parr Traill, Ralph Connor, Ernest Thompson Seton, and L.M. Montgomery, all of which emphasize the connection between nature and morality. Traill's *Canadian Crusoes*, Connor's *The Sky Pilot in No Man's Land*, Seton's large collection of stories, and Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* series establish a model of didactic children's literature, commonly using nature as a metaphor. Part of my study will focus on a comparison of these Eurocentric readings of the natural world in moral terms with traditional narratives from Ojibway and Cree communities. Many of these oral narratives were being anthologized as children's literature.

The publishers of children's literature must rely upon the design and presentation of the physical book to effectively convey the essence of the narrative. Childhood is a time of both natural and imposed education, where lessons truly come from sources of delight. Book designers are aware of this connection and exploit it, while authors have varying levels of involvement, ranging from Seton's composition of both text and illustrations, to almost no control of the presentation. However, in each case, the design and production of the physical books convey moral messages to prospective purchasers and readers, and enhance the process of reading. Successive editions of canonical texts in Canadian children's literature utilize a combination of visual image and narrative, conveying the morality of the time, leaving a reader with messages both implicit and overtly stated.

In order to examine the relationship between the production of the texts, and the pervasive themes of nature and morality in Canadian children's literature, I will approach texts with an awareness both of their historical context, and the history of the book in Canada. A focus on print culture will allow me to explore how the production of the physical book as an object or artifact reflects and influences social attitudes towards childhood. I will be considering the books as material object, as well as narrative construction. I will be making use of excellent collection of children's literature in the Toronto Public Library, including the Osborne Collection and the Lillian H. Smith Collection.

The ideal program in which to pursue this project is Trent University's MA in English Literature, where emphasis is placed on the history and significance of the public text. This program will offer me the opportunity to delve into the history of the book, as well as the relationship between texts and publics. Consequently, I will be prepared to evaluate the publication and presentation of children's literature in Canada between 1850-1950. I have requested to work with Dr. Margaret Steffler, and she has agreed to be my thesis supervisor. From a feminist, psychological and print culture perspective, early Canadian children's literature is an extremely fertile but neglected area. Very little research has been done on the influence of Indigenous narrative on mainstream children's literature, a relationship that deserves attention and scholarship.

Sample 2

Because of the recent emphasis placed on the War on Terror and homeland security in contemporary society, issues surrounding oppressed individuals and groups in literature need to be further examined with a more penetrating focus on terror and public security. Because literature critiques current culture and society, its examination offers a unique jumping point into heated human rights issues and social trends that exist in current politics, opening new channels for communal reflection and discussion. As an undergraduate at Wilfrid Laurier in English Literature, I have had an excellent opportunity to build my university experiences around courses which gave me the theoretical tools I would need to successfully study literature and human rights at the Master's level.

The program at Trent is my first choice because of its promise to combine literature and culture through all course work. The importance of creating a public for a text and vice versa produces an interesting dynamic when it comes to the examination of human rights activism and abuses. Though I do not know who I would like my supervisor to be, I have a fairly clear sense of what I would like to look at in terms of my thesis project. I would like to consider examining the role of contemporary 'pop' fictions in society with a focus on dystopic fictions to decisively show how these valuable works teach their readership about terror, security and other human rights issues. I am especially interested in studying the relationship between the private act of reading or viewing a text and public discourse on human rights violation and response. I think this dystopia's impact on contemporary culture through popular works such as *V for Vendetta* and *Children of Men* continue to grow as these works become runaways at the box-office. By reviewing dystopic works and their treatment of issues reach new audiences, I will examine the opportunity these texts present to build a deeper understanding of the ethnic and cultural significance of human rights violations on particular oppressed groups.

I am also excited to interact with professors across discipline as well as community leaders that will offer a great sense of what it is like to use the skills gained through an English MA in an employment setting. Upon graduation from this program, I hope to become employed in publishing, either in the field of editing or marketing or continue on to a PhD. This program offers important contacts in the business world, as well as an opportunity to continue on to further graduate studies.

Sample 3

In recent years, textual scholarship has focussed less on the text itself as a reflection of the author's intention and more on the process by which the text is edited and published. This process, in which the author plays little or no role, greatly affects the ways in which texts are received and understood by the reading public. I am interested in studying the editing process and how it shapes the reader's understanding of literary works. This year, I produced a critical edition of Bernard Shaw's *Widowers' Houses*, including the introduction, annotations, and appendices, in one of my course and the experience has persuaded me to pursue this type of work further.

I want to explore the ways in which an editor shapes a text and makes it available for public, and especially student, consumption. The introduction, annotations and analysis of specific texts construct the framework through which the student will perceive them. Thus the information the editor chooses to include or perhaps more importantly, to exclude, becomes a necessary point of study. How does the editor choose which aspects of a work are worth clarifying and how does this shape the reader's interpretation of the text? And it is not only the textual editing of the book which functions as a filter through which the text passes prior to contact with the reader. The same is true of the other aspects of textual production such as layout and marketing. All these practices become a seminal influence that requires critical analysis.

How this process has changed over time also seems worthy of some investigation. Recent editors of classic texts may choose to focus on different issues than their predecessors; how does this affect how the same works have been interpreted by new generations of readers? Is the author's intention lost in this process? Is it possible for an editor to balance the writer's intent with critical analysis and create a simultaneously authentic and educational experience for the reader? I want to explore the authority of the texts and the ways in which the book publishing process in general, and editors in particular, subtly influence critical approaches to the text.

Professor Leonard Conolly has agreed to supervise me, working as an intern on the Broadview Press literary editions. These editions, which are created with the undergraduate student in mind, seem like a worthy starting point for an examination of the production of critical versions of established texts. Because they are present in a scholarly seeing, the editions bear an almost absolute authority for the students who read them. Thus the editor, as a filter between the author and his/her audience, has the monumental task of creating as 'authentic' a text as possible. But is

this task even viable? Through such enquiry, I hope to gain a better understanding of contemporary editing practices and familiarize myself with print culture criticism, in a manner sufficient for further graduate studies in this discipline.