



One day, one novel: Little Women

Start date 27 June 2020

End date 28 June 2020

Venue Virtual Classroom

Tutor Dr Jillian Caddell

Course code 192NDR012

Director of ISP and LL

Sarah Ormrod

For further information on this course, please contact the Lifelong Learning team

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To book

See: www.ice.cam.ac.uk or telephone 01223 746262

Tutor biography

Dr Jillian Caddell is an experienced UK-based researcher, teacher, and writer. She is currently a lecturer in 19th-century American literature at the English faculty of the University of Kent. In 2015, Jillian received her Ph.D. in English at Cornell University, where her dissertation received the Guilford Prize for Highest Achievement in English Prose. She specializes in American literature of the long 19th century, with a focus on issues of geography, genre, race, and gender. In her interdisciplinary research and teaching, Jillian is interested in understanding the relationships between literature, history, and place.

Course programme

Saturday 27 June

- 09:30 am Session 1: Little Women and the Making of Modern Childhood
- 11:30 am Session 2: Pilgrim's Progress: Religion, Transcendentalism and Alcott

Sunday 28 June

- 9:30 am Session 3: Hospital Sketches: *Little Women* and the Civil War
- 11:30 am Session 4: Adapting Girlhood: *Little Women* at 150

Course syllabus

Aims:

The aim of this course is to familiarise students with important contexts and themes for interpreting *Little Women*, one of the most influential American novels of the nineteenth century. The course will prepare students to understand key historical contexts informing the novel, such as Transcendentalism, the American Civil War, and shifting conceptions of childhood. It will also introduce literary concepts including sentimentalism, domestic fiction, and adaptation as ways of approaching the text.

Content:

We will begin with a discussion of *Little Women's* place in nineteenth-century American literature, exploring the novel's relationship to popular genres including the sentimental novel and the domestic novel. We will also spend time understanding the historical development of childhood. *Little Women* charts a moment of transition in the idea of what children are, and it particularly theorises the role of the girl in society.

The course will then move forward to think about different themes present in the novel, including religion, war and authorship. We will situate the novel's religious views within the Alcott family's relationship with Transcendentalism and nineteenth-century religious revivalism. The novel can also be considered an immediate reaction to the American Civil War, in which Alcott served as a nurse. The war provides an important context for understanding the role of Mr March within his family and the shift in gender roles that took place across the nineteenth century.

The course concludes with a broad look at *Little Women's* popularity today, surveying its many film and television adaptations (including the most recent film by Greta Gerwig) and an Indian web series. These adaptations allow us to ask how *Little Women* continues to entertain, challenge and affect us today.

Presentation of the course:

The course will be presented via a combination of lecture and class discussion.

As a result of the course, within the constraints of the time available, students should be able to:

1. Understand the historical context(s) in which this text was produced;
2. Appreciate the continuities and distinctions in the thematic content of this work;
3. Understand the relationship between form and content in literary texts;
4. Articulate a critical analysis that includes close reading of texts.

Reading and resources list

Listed below are texts that might be of interest should you wish to supplement your learning on the course. Any essential reading is marked with an asterisk *

Author	Title	Publisher and date
*Alcott, Louisa May	<i>Little Women</i>	Norton, 2014
Alcott, Louisa May	<i>Hospital Sketches</i>	Any edition
Elbert, Monika M.	<i>Enterprising Youth: Social Values and Acculturation in Nineteenth-Century American Children's Literature.</i>	Routledge, 2008.
Harris, Susan K.	<i>Nineteenth-Century American Women's Novels: An Interpretive Strategy.</i>	Cambridge UP, 1992.
Rioux, Anne Boyd	<i>Meg Jo Beth Amy: The Story of Little Women and Why it Still Matters</i>	Norton, 2018.

Additional information

What you will need

The course is open to anyone, however it is taught via a virtual classroom. You will be able to see, hear and interact with your classmates and the tutor. In order to participate you will need to have a laptop, computer, tablet or other device equipped with a camera (webcam), speakers and a microphone.

Full instructions and support on the use of the software will be given on request.

Venue

This course takes place online using the teleconferencing software ZOOM.

If you have any queries about the software or accessing the course, please email the Lifelong Learning team: shortcourses@ice.cam.ac.uk.

Note Students of the Institute of Continuing Education are entitled to 20% discount on books published by Cambridge University Press (CUP) which are purchased at the Press bookshop, 1 Trinity Street, Cambridge (Mon-Sat 9am – 5:30pm, Sun 11am – 5pm). A letter or email confirming acceptance on to a current Institute course should be taken as evidence of enrolment.

Information correct as of: 15 June 2020