

Sample Cover Letter for a Humanities Faculty Position

Date

Dr. Name, Chair
Department of English
The University of Z
City, Province, Postal Code, Canada

Dear Professor Name and Members of the Search Committee:

I am writing to apply for the tenure-track assistant professorship in Renaissance Drama that you advertised in the MLA Job Information List. I am currently at the University of X, where I hold one of the English Department's two Postdoctoral Fellowships. I received my Ph.D. from X in August of this year after completing my dissertation, *Romancing the Globe: Romance, English Expansion, and the Early Modern Stage*, under the direction of Professors Name, Name, and Name.

Romance has been given a long and complex history in English literature, but not as a dramatic genre. In *Romancing the Globe*, I trace this bias to the co-opting of the term "romance" in nineteenth-century studies of Shakespeare: first by Coleridge to distinguish Shakespeare's works from those bound by classical scriptures, and later by Edward Dowden to designate the fourth and last generic division of Shakespeare's canon – the "romances" (for Dowden, *Pericles*, *The Tempest*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Winter's Tale*). Critics and editors to this day rely on Dowden's "romance" as a classification of Shakespeare's "late plays," and thus sustain the notion that romance is dominantly a Shakespearean genre, one issuing (to use Dowden's titular phrase) from "Shakespeare's Mind and Art." Rather, I argue, these plays belong to a dramatic kind that is not only pre-Coleridgean, but pre-Shakespearean. The "stage romance," as I have called it, is a genre that dates back to the earliest years of the commercial theater in sixteenth-century London. Building on the work of earlier bibliographers, I have identified more than forty plays from the period, many now lost, that adapted popular prose romances, pseudo-histories, and other fantastical tales to the stage. Yet due to the narrow application of the term "romance" in dramatic criticism, the generic kinship of these plays has gone unremarked.

In my account, the genre of stage romance develops as a response to England's broadening horizons in this period of expanding overseas commerce and exploration. Plays such as the anonymous *Clyomon and Clamydes* and Thomas Dekker's *Old Fortunatus* bear witness to the stage's attempt to translate the geographic and temporal leaps of narrative romance into the circumscribed space of the stage. At the same time, the influx of romance into English drama challenged the foundations of traditional dramatic theory and form, evinced by Sidney's influential *Defense of Poesy*, where he targets the "gross absurdities" of plays that violate the unities of time and place. To demonstrate the emergence of "romance" out of a global history of specific formal elements: the representation of time and space in *The Tempest*, the dramatization of narrative in *Old Fortunatus*, the use of a Chorus in *Henry V* and *Pericles*, and the transfer of romance from commercial stage to court entertainment in Milton's *Comus*. Drawing on materials from early modern cartography, literary theory, historiography, travel writing, and racial theory, these chapters relate the transformations in dramatic form to the social and historical issues raised by England's expansion into new territories.

My research involves me in the vibrant current debates about the impact of overseas expansion on early modern culture. The first chapter of my dissertation, “‘Affric of the one side, Asia of the Other’: Sidney’s Unities and the Staging of Romances,” has been accepted in a collection, edited by Valerie Wayne and Mary Ellen Lamb, *Staging Early Modern Romance: Prose Fiction, Dramatic Romance, and Shakespeare*. I am currently at work revising my dissertation toward publication, a process that will allow me to explore more fully a range of issues that were incipient in the thesis: the interplay of history and romance in the period, the geography of the eastern Mediterranean in romance, and the migration of stage romance to other genres in the seventeenth century. Furthermore, I have recently discovered two little-known stage romances in manuscript, *Tom a Lincoln* and *The Fairy Knight*, which will be integrated into the book. I have various early modern books overseas: from a copy of Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments* that Sir Francis Drake carried with him during his circumnavigation to seventeenth-century performances of *Hamlet* and *Richard II* aboard an English ship on the coast of Sierra Leone.

In my experience as a graduate instructor, I taught a broad range of courses, from dramatic representations of race to travel and adventure writing. In one course, *Shakespeare: Yesterday and Today*, I emphasized the status of the period as both “early” and “modern,” a world at once strange to us and enticingly contemporary. My students explored this paradox in units that paired modern adaptations and appropriations of Shakespeare’s plays with a broader historical study of the period’s social, theatrical, and print culture. My efforts as a teacher were recognized in 2003, when I was one of nine graduate student instructors in the College of Arts and Sciences to receive the Dean’s Award for Distinguished Teaching.

As a postdoctoral fellow in the University of X’s English Department, I have developed a series of courses that grow out of my interests in romance, drama, travel narrative, and the literature of empire in early modern England. I am currently teaching a survey course, *New Worlds and Lost Worlds of the Renaissance*, that works to complicate traditional conceptions of the “Renaissance” through readings of texts ranging from Shakespeare’s *Richard III* and *Titus Andronicus* to More’s *Utopia* and Amerigo Vespucci’s New World epistles. These readings prompt classroom discussions and writing assignments in which students evaluate traditional formulations of the historical period (the Renaissance, the Age of Discovery, the Reformation, the Late Medieval), as we explore the competing (and sometimes contradictory) social and historical energies that spurred cultural production. In an upper-level seminar I will teach this spring, *Imagined Empires, 1492-1800*, we will study texts that present overseas conquest and empire as an imaginary enterprise. Course readings will include romances, travel narratives, utopias, novels and plays that, in many cases, deal only peripherally with Europe’s expansion abroad. In the seminar, we will work to explore how these “imagined empires” are connected to the period’s broadening of geographic space.

I have enclosed my *curriculum vitae* and book prospectus. Thank you for your consideration. I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

Oliver Candidate