

Summer 2019

**ENGLISH 4717/5717**

Thematic Title: *21<sup>st</sup> Century Comics*

MTWTh 9:45 AM – 11:20 AM

Johnston Hall 436

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Office Hours: before and after class, or by appointment

This course surveys the history, reception, and artistic form of comics and graphic narrative, with particular focus on comics published in the last twenty years. How have comics shifted from their origins as a predominantly American, predominantly male fixation on the superhero towards an increasingly popular international art movement crossing gender, class, and ethnic lines? What are comics today, in 2019, and who are they for—and why, as Thierry Groensteen has pointedly asked, are comics still in search of cultural legitimization? As in previous instances of the course, we will consider science fictional and superheroic comics alongside high literary novels and confessional autobiographies to gain a full understanding of the medium and its possibilities.

**LEARNING GOALS**

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Identify and understand various formal characteristics of comic art;
- Apply techniques of literary analysis to comics and graphic novels;
- Demonstrate understanding of the cultural and historical contexts in which various comics and graphic novels have been written;
- Use literary study to develop skills for careful reading and clear writing;
- Read and discuss comics on the levels of both form and content.

**REQUIRED TEXTS** (available at the Book Marq on 16<sup>th</sup> Street)

Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics*

Warren Ellis and John Cassady, *Planetary*, Books One and Two

Mark Millar and Dave Johnson, *Superman: Red Son*

G. Willow Wilson, Jacob Wyatt, Adrian Alphona, *Ms. Marvel*, volumes one and two

Ben Passmore, “Your Black Friend”

Marjane Satrapi, *The Complete Persepolis*

David Mazzuchelli, *Asterios Polyp*

Gabriel Ba and Fabio Moon, *Daytripper*

An earlier version of this syllabus listed Robert Kirkman’s *The Walking Dead*, but this book is no longer required.

Selected additional texts will be made available through ARES and D2L, as well as during class.

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

Attendance and Participation	25%
D2L Forum Posts	25%
Midterm	25%
Final	25%

Graduate students will be responsible for separate set of assignments, which will be distributed separately as an appendix.

## **GRADING**

Grades will follow the following rubric:

\* To earn a **C**, you must clearly restate the meaning or project of a text in your own terms. A C essay may volunteer an original argument, but will likely lack evidence or analysis of its sources. C essays are clearly written, though they might display some grammatical weakness.

\* To earn a **B**, you must begin to raise important questions about the text under consideration and to use those questions to drive your own interpretive agenda. A B essay typically advances an original argument and provides solid analysis of the text(s) under consideration. B essays are clear, concise, and free of grammatical errors.

\* To earn an **A**, you must construct an essay that does more than simply comment on the work of others; you must forward, counter, or transform what they have to say. An A essay advances an original argument that builds toward a climax and makes a persuasive case for its own significance. A essays are clearly written, and often eloquent.

\* A **D** means that you have not written in clear prose or that you seem to have deeply misunderstood the text. An **F** means that you did not fully or seriously engage the assignment.

\* **A-**, **B+**, **B-**, **C+**, and **C-** grades fall squarely in the gaps between the above categories.

## **UNGRADED ASSIGNMENTS**

Your D2L posts and discussion inauguration will be graded on an extra-credit / pass / low-pass / fail basis:

- Fulfilling all the requirements of the assignment will earn you full credit;
- Failing to do so will earn you half-credit (at best) or no credit (at worst);
- Going beyond the terms of the assignment in an especially ambitious or creative way can earn you extra credit.

## **QUIZZES**

I do not like to give reading quizzes; I think they infantilize the college-level scholar. However, this is by necessity a very reading-intensive class; if it seems to me that people are not keeping up with the reading, pop quizzes may become necessary despite my philosophical objections. You have been warned.

## FORMAT OF WRITTEN WORK

Your take-home exams should all be typed in twelve-point font, double-spaced with one-inch margins, saved in a format Microsoft Word can open. Your filename should contain *your name* in it, for example, yourlastname-midterm.docx.

I expect you to *edit* and *proofread* all written work, even D2L posts and D2L comments. Drafts that contain excessive typos or grammar mistakes may be returned to the author for correction before I offer comments.

## EXAM SUBMISSION

Your exams should be submitted via D2L's Dropbox by the time listed on the syllabus. **Late midterms will be penalized a full grade for each day that it is late; due to university policy late final exams will not be accepted at all.** Except in very unusual circumstances, work will not be accepted by email.

Your other written work (which will primarily take the form of discussion forum comments) will be posted on the D2L forums (see below). These mini-papers will have **flexible due dates** driven by your own interests and responses. **It is thus your responsibility to make sure you are properly keeping up with this portion of the course.**

## TECHNOLOGY IS TERRIBLE: PLAN AHEAD!

The Internet goes down. Files become corrupted. Computers crash. These are predictable facts of twenty-first century life, not emergencies. For this course, for all your courses, for the rest of your career and your life in this world you need to develop work habits and strategies that take into account the basic, inescapable unreliability of computers. Start your assignments well in advance of the due date; save them often; save backup copies of essential documents, including copies off-site using a service like Carbonite, Dropbox, or Google Drive.

## ATTENDANCE AND CLASS PARTICIPATION

Class discussion is an essential component of this seminar; class discussion, not lecture, will be the primary means by which we will investigate these texts together. It is therefore crucial that you come to class every day having read the required material and prepared to discuss it.

**Consequently, attendance in this class is absolutely mandatory.** You should plan on attending every class. Please talk to me (in advance if possible) if you ever find you will need to miss a class meeting.

The course adheres to Marquette University's attendance policy, which can be found on the Internet at <http://bulletin.marquette.edu/undergrad/academicregulations/#attendance>.

You are allowed **two absences** over the course of the summer semester. **After that, your class participation will drop by a letter grade for each additional absence.** Upon the fifth absence, you will receive a WA (Withdrawn—Excessive Absences) for the semester.

**Merely being present is insufficient to earn an "A" for class participation.** Each student is expected to *participate in* and *contribute to* our discussions. Just being in the room is not enough.

## **DISCUSSION INAUGURATOR**

Each member of the class will have one day in which they are expected to inaugurate our discussion by articulating a detailed, five-to-ten-minute response to the day's reading. The requirements for this are necessarily very loose, as each day of the course will have a very different type of text to be discussed; in general, however, the discussion inaugurator will be asked to (1) articulate a thoughtful and critical response to some aspect of the material and (2) direct our collective attention to one or two problems in, questions about, or particularly important moments from the reading for that day. A signup sheet will be distributed in class.

## **D2L FORUMS**

This course will also make extensive use of the D2L forums at <http://d2l.mu.edu>. In addition to being a place where you can find electronic copies of the syllabus and other course handouts, D2L also features an online forum where you can express your response to the material before class begins and where we can continue our discussions after class is over.

The D2L discussion forums are an excellent place for people who may feel inhibited by in-class discussion to share their opinions with the class. I will be reading the discussion forum regularly and I recommend you do the same. You may choose either to begin a discussion thread on a new topic or to respond to a post composed by one of your classmates.

Before class this Thursday, every student is required to take the following actions:

- \* **upload a picture of their face to their D2L profile;**
- \* **write a short, 200-400-word response to any of the works from the first week of the syllabus.**

After that, students must write **at least four more substantive (200-400-word) posts (approximately one per week with one week off)** responding to **any four texts** across the remainder of the course. (Note: you can earn extra credit for up to two additional posts.) These posts should be completed either by 9 AM before one of the class discussions devoted to that text or by 9 AM before the following class. At least half of the posts should be completed before the midterm.

## **EMAIL**

Students in this class are required to check their official Marquette email account—whatever account D2L sends its emails to—at least once the afternoon before a scheduled class meeting, in case there are any last-minute announcements or disruptions.

I endeavor to respond to all emails within 24 hours, usually much less—but please do not send me urgent emails regarding your assignments on the night they are due and expect an immediate reply.

## **LAPTOP POLICY**

In-class use of laptops, Kindles, iPads, etc. is permitted for access to electronic versions of our texts and for notetaking. However, students *must* refrain from non-class-related computer use, including email, instant messaging, Facebook, Twitter, and the like. I reserve the right to ban

individual technological devices if this becomes a problem. No use of cell phones will be permitted during class time; please turn off your ringers and put them out of sight.

### **FLEXIBILITY**

If it will benefit the class, changes may be made to the above.

### **ACCOMODATIONS**

Students with disabilities who believe they may require accommodations in this course should contact me early in the semester so your learning needs can be appropriately met.

I am of course more than happy to work with you to make sure you are successful in this course and to make this course most accessible for you. However, without documentation, I am limited in what I am able to do. Therefore, in order for me to help you most effectively, I need you to be proactive in contacting Marquette University's Office of Disability Services (located on the fifth floor of the 707 Building). ODS can be reached by phone at (414) 288-1645 or by email at [ods@marquette.edu](mailto:ods@marquette.edu).

### **ACADEMIC DISHONESTY**

Students are expected to abide by the academic honesty policy outlined in your undergraduate bulletin. I urge you all to examine this material and consult me with any questions you may have about plagiarism or academic integrity *before* it becomes an issue.

Ignorance of what constitutes plagiarism is not an acceptable excuse for plagiarism. **Academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated and will result in a failing grade for the course.** No exceptions or special dispensations will be made.

Marquette students now sign an Honor Pledge, which states:

- *I recognize the importance of personal integrity in all aspects of life and work.*
- *I commit myself to truthfulness, honor, and responsibility, by which I earn the respect of others.*
- *I support the development of good character, and commit myself to uphold the highest standards of academic integrity as an important aspect of personal integrity.*
- *My commitment obliges me to conduct myself according to the Marquette University Honor Code.*

Full details of Marquette's academic integrity policy are available on the Internet at <http://www.marquette.edu/provost/academic-integrity.php>.

On a personal level, I (like everyone) hate being lied to. Please, do not feel you need to concoct elaborate stories. Simply be honest with me about whatever is going on and we will work it out.

### **ACADEMIC FREEDOM**

We all enter this classroom with preexisting political, ethical, philosophical, and intellectual commitments. You are all required to engage the material—but you are absolutely *not* required to agree either with any of the writers we will discuss, or with me, in whole or in part.

## RESPECT

This classroom is a community. It is crucial that we treat each other with the appropriate level of courtesy and respect. No one should be made to feel unwelcome here. Failure to treat other students with the respect they deserve will **severely** impact your class participation grade.

## KEEP THE LINES OF COMMUNICATION OPEN!

I want this class to be a meaningful and valuable experience for you, both in its own terms and in service of the development of your larger college experience. If you have any ideas, suggestions, or concerns about the way things are going, my door is always open.

## SOME THOUGHTS ON THE UNUSUAL NATURE OF SUMMER SCHOOL

College courses that take place during the summer session are, by their nature, quite different from classes that take place during the fall or spring semesters. That situation is compounded, in our case, by the fact that ours is a class that meets daily for ninety minutes at a stretch.

I have endeavored as best I can to schedule the course so that the readings will not be onerous. (I have also attempted to select material that I hope will be interesting and engaging, so that it never *feels* onerous.) I have also—as a pedagogical experiment—eliminated long papers in this class in favor of extended D2L forum posts, daily in-class presentations, and two take-home examinations. In doing all this I am trying to be realistic about what is possible for us to achieve together within a six-week summer course, and to develop the richest intellectual experience possible within those constraints.

Despite all of the above, however, I must stress that this course is still *serious business*: it is meant to be the equivalent of a fall or spring fifteen-week course. The fact that the course has been paced for summer should *not* be mistaken for an excuse for you to blow this class off or fail to take it seriously. I hope, instead, that you will embrace the unique opportunity this course's unusual pacing offers for close consideration of the texts under discussion and intense scholarly engagement with your peers. What will make this class both most fun and most useful to you as emerging scholars is a collective commitment to diving into this experience and getting the most that we can get out of it, together.

## JUST A FEW WORDS ABOUT COPYRIGHT

This course will be making use of digital excerpts of selected comic works. In nearly all cases, these works are protected under copyright, and consequently our use of them for educational purposes is governed by the principle of fair use. (For more information on this, please see [http://www.marquette.edu/library/copyright/fair\\_use.shtml](http://www.marquette.edu/library/copyright/fair_use.shtml).) You should not distribute any copyright-protected material to anyone outside this class.

## PRELIMINARY SCHEDULE

*Any changes to this schedule will be announced in class as they become necessary.*

Students should come to class prepared to discuss the listed texts or chapters.

DATE	READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS
M	5/20 Introduction to the Course <i>Action Comics</i> #1 (in class)
T	5/21 Scott McCloud, <i>Understanding Comics</i> , chapters 1-4

W	5/22	The Silver Age <i>Superboy</i> #1 [D2L] Umberto Eco, “The Myth of Superman” [D2L] <i>Fantastic Four</i> #1, <i>Tales of Suspense</i> #39, <i>X-Men</i> #1, and <i>Hulk</i> #1 [D2L]
Th	5/23	The Bronze Age and the Dark Age <i>The Amazing Spider-Man</i> #121 and <i>Iron Man</i> #128 [D2L] Saul Braun, “Shazam! Here Comes Captain Relevant” [D2L] Spencer Ackerman, “Iron Man vs. the Imperialists” [D2L] <i>Watchmen</i> (film clips) (in class) <i>Batman v. Superman</i> , The Marvel Cinematic Universe, etc. (in class)
<b>M</b>	<b>5/27</b>	<b>MEMORIAL DAY—NO CLASS</b>
T	5/28	Warren Ellis and John Cassady, <i>Planetary</i> , Book One (first half)
W	5/29	Warren Ellis and John Cassady, <i>Planetary</i> , Book One (second half)
Th	5/30	Warren Ellis and John Cassady, <i>Planetary</i> , Book Two (whole book)
M	6/3	Mark Millar and Dave Johnson, <i>Superman: Red Son</i> (first third)
T	6/4	Mark Millar and Dave Johnson, <i>Superman: Red Son</i> (whole book)
W	6/5	G. Woodrow Wilson and Adrian Alphona, <i>Ms. Marvel</i> , vol. 1
Th	6/6	G. Woodrow Wilson, Jacob Wyatt, and Adrian Alphona, <i>Ms. Marvel</i> , vol. 2
<b>Sat</b>	<b>6/8</b>	<b>TAKE-HOME MIDTERM EXAMS DUE BY 5 PM</b>
M	6/10	Chris Ware, <i>Jimmy Corrigan, the Smartest Kid on Earth</i> (first half)
T	6/11	Chris Ware, <i>Jimmy Corrigan, the Smartest Kid on Earth</i> (second half)
W	6/12	Chris Ware, <i>Building Stories</i> (workshop)
Th	6/13	Chris Ware, <i>Building Stories</i> (discussion)
M	6/17	Ben Passmore, “Your Black Friend” Marjane Satrapi, <i>Persepolis</i> 1 (first half)
T	6/18	Marjane Satrapi, <i>Persepolis</i> 1 (second half)
W	6/19	Marjane Satrapi, <i>Persepolis</i> 2 (whole book)
Th	6/20	David Mazzucchelli, <i>Asterios Polyp</i> (first third)
M	6/24	David Mazzucchelli, <i>Asterios Polyp</i> (second third)
T	6/25	David Mazzucchelli, <i>Asterios Polyp</i> (whole book)
W	6/26	Gabriel Ba and Fabio Moon, <i>Daytripper</i> (first half)
Th	6/27	Gabriel Ba and Fabio Moon, <i>Daytripper</i> (second half) Thierry Groensteen, “Why Are Comics Still in Search of Cultural Legitimization?”
<b>Sat</b>	<b>6/22</b>	<b>TAKE-HOME FINAL EXAMS DUE BY 5 PM</b>

### **FOLLOW FAME: FRIENDS AND ALUMNI/AE OF MARQUETTE ENGLISH!**

*On Facebook (page):* [www.facebook.com/marquettefame](http://www.facebook.com/marquettefame)

*On Facebook (group):* [www.facebook.com/groups/496438583889194](http://www.facebook.com/groups/496438583889194)

(search for “Undergraduate English at Marquette”)

*On Twitter:* @MarquetteFAME

I will also be inviting you to events in the pop culture and pizza series I run periodically during the fall and spring semesters. I hope you can attend!

## FURTHER READING

There is simply not enough time in the term to read everything we might want to read about comics, much less all the comics themselves. Students interested in exploring these topics further might consider some of the following critical texts in addition to those read or discussed in class:

- Will Eisner, *Comics and Sequential Art* (1985)  
Richard Reynolds, *Super Heroes: A Modern Mythology* (1992)  
Roger Sabin, *Comics, Comix, and Graphic Novels* (1996)  
Ian Gordon, *Comic Strips and Consumer Culture, 1890-1945* (1998)  
Anne Magnussen and Hans-Christen Christiansen, *Comics & Culture* (2000)  
Matthew McAllister, Edward Sewell, and Ian Gordon, *Comics and Ideology* (2001)  
Bradford W. Wright, *Comic Book Nation* (2001)  
Will Brooker, *Batman Unmasked* (2001)  
Scott Bukatman, *Matters of Gravity* (2003) and *The Poetics of Slumberland* (2012)  
Lily Robinson, *Wonder Women: Feminisms and Superheroes* (2004)  
Douglas Wolk, *Reading Comics* (2007)  
Hillary Chute, "Comics as Literature" (2008) and *Graphic Women* (2010)  
Matthew J. Costello, *Secret Identity Crisis: Comic Books and the Unmasking of Cold War America* (2009)  
Fred Van Lente and Ryan Dunlavey, *Comic Book Comics* (2008)  
Grant Morrison *Supergods* (2011)  
Dan Hassler-Forrest, *Capitalist Superheroes: Caped Crusaders in the Neoliberal Age* (2012)  
Nick Sousanis, *Unflattening* (2015)  
Ramzi Fawaz, *The New Mutants: Superheroes and the Radical Imagination* (2015)  
Bramlett, Frank, Roy Cook and Aaron Meskin (eds.), *Routledge Companion to Comics* (2016)  
Chris Foss, Jonathan W. Gray, and Zach Whalen (eds.), *Disability in Comic Books and Graphic Narratives* (2016)  
A. David Lewis and Martin Lund (eds.), *Muslim Superheroes: Comics, Islam, and Representation* (2017)  
Stephen E. Tabachnick (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Graphic Novel* (2017)  
Kate Polak, *Ethics in the Gutter: Empathy and Historical Fiction in Comics* (2017)  
Aaron Kashtan, *Between Pen and Pixel: Comics, Materiality, and the Book of the Future* (2018)  
Marc Singer, *Breaking the Frame: Populism and Prestige in Comics* (2019)

Students are also invited to support their local comic shop, Collector's Edge Comics, with convenient locations all across the city: <http://www.collectorsedgecomics.com>.



Summer 2019  
**ENGLISH 5717—GRAD SUPPLEMENT**

I do not believe it would be realistic for you to produce a graduate-level seminar paper in six weeks alongside the regular reading schedule of the course. As such, I will ask you instead to produce a number of smaller assignments that link the themes of the course to your professionalization as an academic. These assignments are organized around three primary goals:

1. developing significant knowledge of literary trends in comics and graphic narrative of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries;
2. developing your skills as a critic and interpreter of such texts;
3. developing your skills for teaching literature, particularly comics, in the undergraduate classroom.

I will therefore ask you to produce the following over the course of the semester:

1. Two “thinkpiece” length articles (approximately 1000-2000 words) on a comics-related topic of your choosing, one devoted to each “half” of the course, appropriate to the model of digital publication employed at such outlets as *Slate*, *Salon*, *The New Inquiry*, *Jacobin*, *The Los Angeles Review of Books*, etc. (due at midterms and finals);
2. A book review (approximately 1000-2000 words) on a recently published critical text somehow regarding comics and comics scholarship, appropriate for publication in an academic journal (due anytime by Aug. 13)—see the “Further Reading” list for suggestions of the sort of book I mean;
3. A sample syllabi for a course appropriate for the teaching portfolio of an entry-level scholar, preferably with *some* comics content (due at finals);
4. Two “discussion inauguration” days (variable dates);
5. One day where you will actually lead the class as primary instructor (variable dates);
6. Five short D2L posts (variable dates).

My hope is that we will also be able to find an hour or so on two Fridays (one at the middle and one at the end of the semester) in which we can discuss the class together as a group.

You will not be responsible for the midterm or the final.

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In terms of class discussion, it can sometimes be difficult to balance the needs of graduate students with the needs of undergraduates in a blended class like this. My approach has typically been to encourage the graduate students in a course to allow the undergraduates to *begin* a discussion, and to then slowly introduce their higher-order responses as the conversation gels.

The reason for this is that otherwise undergraduates very quickly learn to rely on the graduate students to answer every question and dominate the conversation.

What has typically worked best has been for the graduate students to take up a dual role as both students and my “co-pedagogues,” occupying both positions simultaneously.

Depending on the group, a great dynamic may materialize instantly, almost by itself, or it may require constant attention and adjustment. I hope you can be flexible and work with me as I try to serve both populations in the room.