

Summer 2016

ENGLISH 4717/5717

Thematic Title: *Comics as Literature*

MTWTh 3:05-4:35 PM

Cudahy Hall 108

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Office Hours: before and after class, or by appointment

Beginning with Batman and Superman, passing through R. Crumb, Harvey Pekar, and *Maus*, and moving into the contemporary era of *Fun Home* and *Jimmy Corrigan*, this course will survey the history and reception of comics and graphic narrative since 1945. We will explore the history of the comics form from its origins to the present moment, watching as the medium shifts from a predominantly American, predominantly male fixation on the superhero towards an increasingly popular international art movement crossing gender, class, and ethnic lines. In addition to studying comics as literary scholars, along the way we will also consider alternative modes of comics reception, including the great comic book panic of the 1950s, the underground “hippie” counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s, and Internet fandom today.

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 16th Street)

Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, *Watchmen*

Grant Morrison and Frank Quitely, *All-Star Superman*, Vols. 1 and 2

Art Spiegelman, *Maus* I and II

Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home*

Chris Ware, *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth*

Richard McGuire, *Here*

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.

* **AB, BC, and CD** grades fall squarely in the gaps between the above categories.

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 Eco, Hajdu, Brooker, or any of the comics listed on the syllabus.**

After that, students must write **at least four 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 noon before one of the class discussions devoted to that text or by the noon 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 will require accommodations in this course should contact me early in the semester so your learning needs can be appropriately met. Per university

policy, you are required to provide documentation of your disability to the Office of Disability Services.

If you are unsure of what you need to do to qualify for services, you can begin by visiting the Office of Disability Services in Marquette Hall, Lower Level, Room 05, or by visiting their website at <http://www.marquette.edu/disability-services.index.shtml>.

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.

Full details of Marquette's academic integrity policy are available on the Internet at <http://bulletin.marquette.edu/undergrad/academicregulations/#academichonestypolicy>.

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** negatively impact your class participation grade.

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.) 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
T	July 5	<u>Introduction to the Course</u> A Brief Prehistory of Comics <u>The Golden Age</u> <i>Action Comics</i> #1 (in-class)
W	July 6	<u>The Silver Age, Part One</u> excerpt from <i>Superboy</i> #1 Umberto Eco, "The Myth of Superman" <u>The Silver Age, Part Two: The Marvel Explosion</u> <i>Fantastic Four</i> #1, <i>Tales of Suspense</i> #39, <i>X-Men</i> #1, and <i>Hulk</i> #1
Th	July 7	<u>The Silver Age, Part Two</u> excerpts from David Hadju's <i>The Ten-Cent Plague: The Great Comic Book Scare and How It Changed America</i> Will Brooker, excerpt from <i>Batman Unmasked</i> <i>Batman</i> TV Show (YouTube)
M	July 11	<u>The Bronze Age, Part One</u> excerpts from <i>The Amazing Spider-Man</i> #121 and <i>Iron Man</i> #128 Saul Braun, "Shazam! Here Comes Captain Relevant" Spencer Ackerman, "Iron Man vs. the Imperialists"

T	July 12	<u>The Dark Age</u> Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, <i>Watchmen</i> #1-3
W	July 13	Moore and Gibbons, <i>Watchmen</i> #4-6
Th	July 14	Moore and Gibbons, <i>Watchmen</i> #7-9
M	July 18	Moore and Gibbons, <i>Watchmen</i> #10-12
T	July 19	<i>Watchmen</i> (dir. Zack Snyder, 2009) (<i>optional: Man of Steel, Batman v. Superman, Avengers 2: Age of Ultron, Captain America: Civil War, etc.</i>) Matthew Wolf-Meyer, "Utopias in the Superhero Comic, Subculture, and the Conservation of Difference"
W	July 20	Grant Morrison and Frank Quitely, <i>All-Star Superman</i> (first half)
Th	July 21	Morrison and Quietely, <i>All-Star Superman</i> (second half)
S	July 23	TAKE-HOME MIDTERM DUE BY 5 PM
M	July 25	Art Spiegelman, <i>Maus I</i> (first half)
T	July 26	Spiegelman, <i>Maus I</i> (second half)
W	July 27	Spiegelman, <i>Maus II</i> (first half)
Th	July 28	Spiegelman, <i>Maus II</i> (second half)
M	Aug 1	Alison Bechdel, <i>Fun Home</i> (first half)
T	Aug 2	Bechdel, <i>Fun Home</i> (second half)
W	Aug 3	Chris Ware, <i>Jimmy Corrigan, the Smartest Kid on Earth</i> (first half)
Th	Aug 4	Ware, <i>Jimmy Corrigan, the Smartest Kid on Earth</i> (second half)
M	Aug 8	Chris Ware, <i>Building Stories</i> (workshop)
T	Aug 9	Ware, <i>Building Stories</i> (discussion)
W	Aug 10	Richard McGuire, <i>Here</i> (workshop)
Th	Aug 11	McGuire, <i>Here</i> (discussion) Thierry Groensteen, "Why Are Comics Still in Search of Cultural Legitimization?"
S	Aug 13	TAKE-HOME FINAL EXAMS DUE BY 5 PM

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)
Ramzi Fawaz, *The New Mutants: Superheroes and the Radical Imagination* (2015)

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 2016
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 20th and 21st 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 2000 words) on a critical text regarding comics and comics scholarship, appropriate for publication in an academic journal (due anytime by Aug. 13)—see the “Further Reading” list for suggestions;
3. A sample syllabi for a course appropriate for the teaching portfolio of an entry-level scholar, directed at the freshman or sophomore-level undergrad, preferably with *some* comics content (due at midterm);
4. A sample syllabi for a course appropriate for the teaching portfolio of an entry-level scholar, directed at the upper-division undergraduate level, again preferably with some comics content if possible (due at finals);
5. Two “discussion inauguration” days (variable dates);
6. Five D2L posts (variable dates).

My hope is that we will 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 two syllabuses together as a group.

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

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.