

LIT 151S.01 (Summer 2009)
MTuTh 5:00-7:05 PM
Location: Languages 207

Instructor: Gerry Canavan
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Office Hours: by appointment

Comics as Literature

Beginning with Batman and Superman, passing through R. Crumb, Harvey Pekar, and *Maus*, and moving into the contemporary era of *Persepolis* and *Dykes to Watch Out For*, this course will survey the history and reception of graphic narrative as the genre moves from a predominantly American, predominantly male fixation on the superhero towards an increasingly popular international art movement that crosses gender, class and ethnic lines. Likely texts will include Siegel and Shuster's *Superman*, Bob Kane's *Batman*, Stan Lee's *Iron Man*, Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, Harvey Pekar's *American Splendor*, Chris Ware's *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth*, Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*, Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*, Osamu Tezuka's *Buddha*, and Alan Moore's *Watchmen*, as well as selected excerpts and Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics*.

Course Objectives

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 Regulator Bookshop on Ninth Street)

Scout McCloud, *Understanding Comics* (978-0060976255)

Alan Moore, *Watchmen* (978-0930289232)

Art Spiegelman, *Maus* I and II (978-0679406419)

Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis* 1 and 2 (978-0375714832)

Joe Sacco, *Palestine* (978-1560974321)

Osamu Tezuka, *Buddha* 1 (978-1932234565)

Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home* (978-0618871711)

Posy Simmonds, *Gemma Bovary* (978-0375423390)

Chris Ware, *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth* (978-0224063975)

Selected articles and comics will also be distributed via Blackboard and on the class CD.

Course Requirements

daily brief responses, due by 3 PM on Monday, Tuesdays, and Thursdays

two five-minute in-class presentations

one take-home midterm

one 8-10 page final paper on a topic approved in advance

class participation

Grading

20% Midterm

30% Final Paper

20% Presentations

30% Class Participation, Blackboard Responses, and Attendance

Attendance

Class discussion is an essential component of this seminar. It is important that you come to class every day having read the required material and prepared to discuss it.

Attendance in this class is mandatory. You should plan on attending every class. **You are allowed two unexcused absences over the course of the semester. After that, your class participation will drop by a third for each additional unexcused absence.** Upon the fifth unexcused absence, you will receive a failing grade for the course.

Please talk to me (in advance if possible) if you find you will need to miss class.

Blackboard

This course will make use of the Blackboard site at <http://blackboard.duke.edu>. In addition to being a place where you can find electronic copies of the syllabus and other course handouts, Blackboard also features an online forum where we can continue our discussion after class is over.

The Blackboard discussion forums are an excellent place for people who may feel inhibited by regular 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 should write a short post—a paragraph is fine—about one of the current discussion topics in the forum by 3 PM before every class.** (Additional posts will be looked upon favorably when I calculate your final grade.)

Email

Students in this class are required to check their Duke email account at least once a day, in case there are any last-minute announcements or disruptions.

Laptop Policy

Because of the length and formal characteristics of some of the material we will discuss, printing out the comics will not always be realistic. In-class use of laptops will be allowed and encouraged when such works are under discussion. However, students must refrain from other computer uses, including email, instant messaging, Facebook, and so on. I reserve the right to ban individual laptops if this becomes a problem.

Honor Code

Students are expected to abide by the terms of the student code of academic conduct, available in your undergraduate bulletin or online at <http://www.integrity.duke.edu>. 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.**

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.

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 our use of them for educational purposes is governed by the principle of fair use. (For more information, see <http://library.duke.edu/about/depts/scholcomm/copyright-and-fair-use.pdf>.)

I will distribute CDs in class containing .PDF images of some of the comics to be discussed; **students will be required to return these CDs to me before a final grade can be issued.** In the meantime students should keep in mind that their use of these comics is for educational purposes only.

Preliminary Schedule

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

W May 13	FIRST DAY OF CLASS Introduction A Brief Prehistory of Comics Selected Strips, 1812-1940 (CD)
Th May 14	Scott McCloud, <i>Understanding Comics</i>, Chapters 1-3 Richard Reynolds, <i>Super Heroes</i> , Chapter 1 (Blackboard) Jim Henley, “Gaudy Nights” (online) <u>The Golden Age of Comics</u> <i>Action Comics</i> #1 (CD) and selections from <i>Superman</i> (CD) <i>Detective Comics</i> #27 (CD) excerpt from <i>Captain America</i> #1 (CD) excerpt from <i>Whiz Comics</i> #2 (CD) Selections from <i>Wonder Woman</i> (CD)
M May 18	Scott McCloud, <i>Understanding Comics</i>, Chapters 4-6 Umberto Eco, “The Myth of Superman” (Blackboard) <u>The Silver Age, Day 1</u> Romance Comics (selections) (CD) <i>(continues on next page)</i>

	<p><i>Showcase #4</i> (CD) <i>Flash #123: "The Flash of Two Worlds"</i> (CD) <i>Brave and the Bold #28</i> (CD)</p> <p><u>The Marvel Explosion</u> excerpt from <i>Amazing Fantasy #15</i> (CD) excerpt from <i>Tales of Suspense #39</i> (CD) <i>Fantastic Four #1</i> (CD) <i>Hulk #1</i> (CD)</p>
T May 19	<p>Scott McCloud, <i>Understanding Comics, Chapters 7-9</i> Ole Frahm, "Weird Signs: Comics as Parody"</p> <p><u>The Silver Age of Comics, Day 2 "The Comics Code"</u> David Hadju, <i>The Ten-Cent Plague: The Great Comic-Book Scare and How It Changed America</i> (excerpts) (Blackboard) Amy Kiste Nyberg, <i>Seal of Approval</i> (excerpts) (Blackboard)</p> <p>Horror Comics (selections) (CD) <i>Amazing Spider-Man #96</i> (CD)</p> <p><i>Batman</i> (TV) (YouTube clips)</p>
Th May 21	<p><u>The Bronze Age of Comics</u></p> <p><i>Green Lantern #76</i> (CD) <i>The Amazing Spider-Man #121</i> (CD) <i>Iron Man #128</i> (CD)</p> <p>Spencer Ackerman, "Iron Man Versus the Imperialists" (online) Ariel Dorfman, <i>How to Read Donald Duck</i> (excerpts) (Blackboard)</p>
M May 25	MEMORIAL DAY (NO CLASS)
T May 26	<p>Alan Moore, <i>Watchmen</i></p> <p><u>The Dark Age of Comics</u> <i>Batman #428</i> (CD) <i>Superman #75</i> (CD) <i>The Authority #1</i> (CD) Gail Simone, <i>Women in Refrigerators</i> (web site)</p>
Th May 28	<p>Grant Morrison, <i>All-Star Superman</i> (excerpts) (CD) Contemporary Superhero Comics (Presentation #1)</p> <p>Scott Bukatman, "Boys in Hoods" (Blackboard) Marc Singer, "'Black Skins' and White Masks: Comic Books and the Secret of Race" (Blackboard) <u>Superheroes and Film</u> (clips) MIDTERM ASSIGNED</p>

M June 1	MIDTERM DUE <u>Underground Comix</u> Harvey Pekar, <i>American Splendor</i> (selections) (CD) Kim Deitch, selections (CD) R. Crumb, selections (CD) Trina Robbins, <i>It Ain't Me, Babe</i> (CD)
T June 2	Art Spiegelman, <i>Maus I</i>
Th June 4	Art Spiegelman, <i>Maus II</i> <u>Alternative Comics</u> from Gilbert and Jaime Hernandez, <i>Love and Rockets</i> (CD) Roberta Gregory, <i>Naughty Bits</i> #16 (CD) Dave Sim, <i>Cerebus</i> #20 (CD)
M June 8	Marjane Satrapi, <i>Persepolis</i> Joe Sacco, <i>Palestine</i>
T June 9	Alison Bechdel, <i>Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic</i> Alison Bechdel, <i>Dykes to Watch Out For</i> (online archives)
Th June 11	Osamu Tezuka, <i>Buddha 1</i> <u>Comics, Manga, and Anime</u>
M June 15	Posy Simmonds, <i>Gemma Bovary</i> Final Paper Workshop
T June 16	Chris Ware, <i>Jimmy Corrigan, The Smartest Kid on Earth</i>
Th June 18	<u>Fan Culture</u> Harvey Pekar, "Comic-Con Comics" (CD) from Bill Schelly and Roy Thomas (eds.), <i>Alter-Ego</i> (CD) Sample Letters Pages (CD) Morris E. Franklin, "Coming Out in Comic Books" (Blackboard) (Zack Smith visit)
M June 22	LAST DAY OF CLASS Thierry Groensteen, "Why Are Comics Still in Search of Cultural Legitimization?" (Blackboard) Web Comics Presentations (Presentation #2) Closing Thoughts Optional Conferences
Th June 25	PAPER #2 DUE BY 12:00 NOON BY EMAIL OR BLACKBOARD DIGITAL DROPBOX

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)

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)

Lily Robinson, *Wonder Women: Feminisms and Superheroes* (2004)

Douglas Wolk, *Reading Comics* (2007)

Fred Van Lente and Ryan Dunlavey, *Comic Book Comics* (2008)

Duke University is lucky to house the Edwin and Terry Murray Collection of Pulp Culture, a collection of over 55,000 comic books. Details on the collection, including inventory, location, and hours, can be found here:

<http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/rbmscl/murraycomics/inv/>

Students are also invited to support their local comic shop, Ultimate Comics, conveniently located on Ninth Street.

<http://www.ultimatecomicsonline.com>