

**ENGLISH 4560/5560**  
**THE CONTEMPORARY PERIOD IN AMERICAN LITERATURE: 1945-PRESENT**

Thematic Title: *Comics as Literature* (Fall 2012)

TTh 11:00-12:15 PM

Straz Hall 465

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Office Hours: MW 12:00-2:00 PM or by appointment

Beginning with Batman and Superman, passing through R. Crumb, Harvey Pekar, and *Maus*, and moving into the contemporary era of *Persopolis* and *Dykes to Watch Out For*, 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, 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 16<sup>th</sup> Street)

Scout McCloud, *Understanding Comics*

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*

Marjane Satrapi, *Persopolis*

Paul Karasik and David Mazzucchelli, *City of Glass: The Graphic Novel*

Gabriel Bá and Fábio Moon, *Daytripper*

Selected additional texts will be made available through ARES and D2L.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Attendance and Participation	25%
D2L Forum Posts	15%
First Paper (4-6 pages)	15%
Second Paper (4-6 pages)	20%
Final Paper (6-8 pages)	25%

Detailed descriptions of the three papers will be distributed in class well in advance of the due date.

## 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.

## FORMAT OF WRITTEN WORK

Written work must be typed in twelve-point font, double-spaced with one-inch margins, saved in a format Microsoft Word can open. I expect you to *edit* and *proofread* all written work, even D2L forum posts. Drafts that contain excessive typos or grammar mistakes may be returned to the author for correction before I offer comments.

Please give each piece of writing an original title, and include your name, assignment, and due date in a header on the first page. Insert page numbers if your work spans more than one page. All written work should be submitted via D2L's Dropbox by class time on the due date. **Late midterms will be penalized a full grade for each day that it is late; late finals will not be accepted at all.** Except in very unusual circumstances, work will not be accepted by email.

## ATTENDANCE AND CLASS PARTICIPATION

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. **Consequently, attendance in this class is 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 three absences over the course of the fall semester. **After that, your class participation will drop by a letter grade for each additional unexcused absence.** Upon the sixth unexcused absence, you will receive a WA (Withdrawn—Excessive Absences) for the semester.

**Merely being present in class 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.

### D2L FORUMS

This course will 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 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. **Each student is required to write a short forum post—one or two substantial paragraphs are fine—responding to either *Action Comics* #1 or the first two chapters of Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* by midnight the night before our next class meeting on Thursday, August 30.**

After that, students must write **four short posts** responding to **any four** of the remaining texts. **These posts must be completed by midnight before one of the class discussions devoted to that text.**

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.

Additional posts, and posts that respond substantively to other students' arguments, will be looked upon very favorably when I calculate your final grade.

### EMAIL

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

### LAPTOP POLICY

In-class use of laptops, Kindles, and iPads 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.

### **CONFERENCES**

In lieu of our scheduled class on September 25, **all students are required to meet with me in a short one-on-one conference at my office at least once during the semester** to discuss the course and your work within it. Please know I am very happy to meet with you individually to discuss either graded work or work-in-progress in excess of this requirement as many times as you like. Simply come to my weekly office hours, or see or email me to set up an appointment.

### **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>.

### **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>.

### **WRITING CENTER**

Students are strongly encouraged to make use of the Writing Center, located in Raynor Library Room 240, at any stage of the writing process. Please visit the Writing Center website at <http://www.marquette.edu/english/writingcenter/> to find out how to schedule an appointment and to access the studio's online resources.

### **FLEXIBILITY**

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

## ACADEMIC FREEDOM

We all enter this classroom with preexisting political, ethical, 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.

## 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
T	August 28	INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE A Brief Prehistory of Comics
Th	August 30	Scott McCloud, <i>Understanding Comics</i> , Chapters 1-2  <u>The Golden Age</u> <i>Action Comics</i> #1 (online)
T	September 4	Umberto Eco, “The Myth of Superman” (D2L)  <u>The Silver Age, Part 1</u> Excerpt from <i>Superboy</i> #1 (D2L)
Th	September 6	Scott McCloud, <i>Understanding Comics</i> , Chapter 3  <u>The Silver Age, Part 2: The Marvel Explosion</u> Excerpt from <i>Tales of Suspense</i> #39 and <i>Hulk</i> #1 (D2L)

T	September 11	<u>The Silver Age, Part 3: The Comics Code</u> excerpts from David Hadju's <i>The Ten-Cent Plague: The Great Comic-Book Scare and How It Changed America</i> (ARES) Will Brooker, excerpt from <i>Batman Unmasked</i> (ARES)  <i>Batman</i> TV Show (YouTube)
Th	September 13	<u>The Bronze Age of Comics</u> Scott McCloud, <i>Understanding Comics</i> , Chapter 4  excerpt from <i>Iron Man #128</i> (D2L) Spencer Ackerman, "Iron Man vs. the Imperialists" (online) <b>FIRST PAPER GUIDELINES DISTRIBUTED</b>
T	September 18	<u>The Dark Age of Comics</u> <i>Watchmen</i> #1-4
Th	September 20	<i>Watchmen</i> #4-8
T	September 25	NO CLASS
Th	September 27	<i>Watchmen</i> #9-12 Matthew Wolf-Meyer, "Utopias in the Superhero Comic, Subculture, and the Conservation of Difference" (ARES)
T	October 2	<i>All-Star Superman</i> (Part 1)
Th	October 4	<i>All-Star Superman</i> (Part 2)
T	<b>October 9</b>	Underground and Alternative Comics (D2L) <b>FIRST PAPER DUE</b> <b>SECOND PAPER GUIDELINES DISTRIBUTED</b>
Th	October 11	<i>Maus</i> , Part 1 (first half)
T	October 16	<i>Maus</i> , Part 1 (second half)
Th	October 18	FALL BREAK
T	October 23	<i>Maus</i> , Part 2 (first half)
Th	October 25	<i>Maus</i> , Part 2 (second half)
T	October 30	<i>Perspolis</i> 1 (all)
Th	November 1	<i>Perspolis</i> 2 (all)
T	November 6	<i>Fun Home</i> (first half)
Th	November 8	<i>Fun Home</i> (second half)
T	<b>November 13</b>	<i>Jimmy Corrigan, The Smartest Kid on Earth</i> (first third) <b>SECOND PAPER DUE</b> <b>FINAL PAPER GUIDELINES DISTRIBUTED</b>

Th	November 15	<i>Jimmy Corrigan, The Smartest Kid on Earth</i> (second third) LAST DAY TO WITHDRAW
T	November 20	<i>Jimmy Corrigan, The Smartest Kid on Earth</i> (final third)
Th	November 22	THANKSGIVING BREAK—NO CLASS
T	November 27	<i>City of Glass</i> (first half)
Th	November 29	<i>City of Glass</i> (second half)
T	December 4	<i>Daytripper</i> (first half)
Th	December 6	<i>Daytripper</i> (second half) Thierry Groenstein, “Why Are Comics Still in Search of Cultural Legitimization?” (ARES)
Th	<b>December 13</b>	<b>FINAL PAPER DUE BY 11 AM</b>

## 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)  
 Fred Van Lente and Ryan Dunlavey, *Comic Book Comics* (2008)  
 Grant Morrison *Supergods* (2011)

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/>