ENGL 108A The Superhero
University of Waterloo
Fall 2015

Course Dates: Monday and Wednesday, 2:30 – 3:50
Location: QNC 1507

Instructor: Sarah Gibbons
Office: PAS 1064

Office Hours:
Mondays: 4:00 to 5:00; Wednesdays: 1:00 – 2:00; by appointment

Email: sgibbons@uwaterloo.ca

Course Description:

This course is a critical examination of the hero figure in literature, beginning with epic poetry and concluding with contemporary comic book superheroes. Throughout the course, we will learn about the historical and cultural context surrounding the emergence and development of a selection of heroes. We will look at how each text on our syllabus represents or explores tensions surrounding: the relationship between the individual and society; concepts of justice, moral action, and ethical responsibility; the power struggle between heroes and villains; national borders, community membership, and cross-cultural understandings; and social investments in particular forms of identity and images of embodiment.

In this course, you will have the opportunity to develop and strengthen your skills in close reading, academic writing, critical thinking, and researching in the field of English. We will focus on topics in comics studies, including the relationship between image and text in graphic narrative, and the development, adaptation and subversion of canonical characters and stories.

Our course is divided into three movements:

Origin Stories
In this section of the course, we will explore the origins of the superhero figure from the ancient period to the early twentieth century.

Greatest Tales
After reviewing historical precursors, we will look at the development of well-known comic book heroes and familiarize ourselves with the graphic narrative form.

Secret Identities
After acquainting ourselves with canonical heroes, we will further discuss identity and embodiment by looking at representations of gender, disability, race, and sexuality in superhero stories. We will conclude the course by discussing how writers and readers are reimagining established stories and characters, and using superhero tropes and themes in different genres.
Accessibility and Accommodations:

In our class environment, we will be mindful of the reality that everyone learns differently. If you have any concerns about accessing course content, participating in class discussions, or accommodating your learning style, please let me know. You can also arrange for formal accommodations with AccessAbility Services by registering at the beginning of each academic term. Their office is located in room 1401 of Needles Hall. (Phone: 519-888-4567 ext. 35082; Web: http://uwaterloo.ca/disability-services; Email: access@uwaterloo.ca)

Required Texts:

University of Waterloo Bookstore


Comixology

Create an account with the website Comixology to purchase and download these digital comics:

Moulton Marston, William. Wonder Woman:
  1. All-Star Comics No. 8
  2. Sensation Comics No. 1
  3. Sensation Comics No. 2-3
  4. Sensation Comics No. 4-5
  5. Sensation Comics No. 6-7
  6. Sensation Comics No. 8-9
  7. Wonder Woman #1
Fraction, Matt and David Aja. *Hawkeye:*
  1. Hawkeye #19

**Recommended Texts:**

*University of Waterloo Bookstore*


**Course Evaluation:**

Participation 10%

Character Analysis Assignment 10%

Midterm Essay 20%

Close Reading Assignment 25%

Final Essay 35%

**Participation**

Throughout the semester, you will contribute to the development of this course by participating during class lectures. Your participation grade is based on your attendance, your contributions to in-class discussions, your responses to students on the online discussion board, and your participation in small group activities. Please make sure to complete the assigned readings before each lecture and come prepared to talk. If you have concerns about participating in class discussions, please let me know.

**Character Analysis Assignment**

With reference to the prompts included on your instruction handout, write a 750 to 800 word discussion post on the representation of a hero or a villain from your assigned text. You will post your analysis on the course LEARN site. The date that you post the assignment will correspond to a given week of the course. Please email me by **Friday, September 23** to schedule your character analysis assignment. In your email, note your top three date and topic preferences from the list included with the instruction handout. I will take into account your preferences when I create the schedule.
Your character analysis is due before we discuss your chosen topic in class. For example, if you are writing about Superman: Red Son for Assignment One, your post will be due at 5:00 p.m on Friday, October 16 because we begin discussing Superman on Monday, October 19. This will give your classmates time to think about the questions that you introduce in your discussion before coming to class. Please see the corresponding instruction handout for the list of deadlines.

Over the course of the semester, you must respond to at least two of the character analysis assignments posted by your peers with a question or comment. You must post at least one response before Monday, November 2. You must post your second response before Monday, November 30. Your participation on the discussion board will affect your participation mark.

Please see the separate instruction handout for further details on this assignment. The instruction handout indicates the possible topics and dates.

**Midterm Essay**

The midterm essay will be a critical analysis of one of the literary texts covered in the Origin Stories unit of the course based on one of the given essay topic prompts. This essay is due at the beginning of class on Wednesday, October 7.

Please see the separate instruction handout for further details on this assignment.

**Close Reading Assignment**

The close reading assignment will be a detailed analysis of the relationship between image and text in two to four pages of one of the comic books examined in the Greatest Tales unit of the course. This assignment is due at the beginning of class on Monday, November 9.

Please see the separate instruction handout for further details on this assignment.

**Final Essay**

The final essay assignment will be a critical analysis of one of the texts covered in the Secret Identities unit of the course either on its own or as compared to one of the texts that we have studied earlier in the term. For this essay, you will need to consult and cite at least three academic sources.

I encourage you to develop the ideas that you introduce in one of the three earlier writing assignments (the character analysis assignment, the midterm essay, and/or the close reading assignment) so that you can use the feedback that you receive from me and from your peers to strengthen your critical arguments. Throughout the semester, we will set aside time in class for you to discuss your essays with your peers. The final essay will be due at the beginning of class on Wednesday, November 25.

Please see the separate instruction handout for further details on this assignment.
Submission Guidelines

Your midterm essay, your close reading assignment, and your final essay essay must be submitted in hard copy at the beginning of class on the dates indicated on the reading schedule. You must obtain special permission to submit an assignment by email.

Late assignments will receive a penalty of 2% per day, up to a maximum of ten days. After ten days, assignments will not be accepted. If you are unable to submit your assignment on time due to extenuating circumstances, please contact me before the due date so that we can make alternative arrangements.

Course Schedule

Origin Stories

Week One

Monday, September 14
Welcome to The Superhero!

Wednesday, September 16
Ancient Heroism
Read: The Epic of Gilgamesh, pages 61-96 (Prologue - Chapter 3)

Week Two

Monday, September 21
Gilgamesh
Read: The Epic of Gilgamesh, pages 97-119 (Chapter 4 – Chapter 7)
Recommended Reading: Beowulf

Wednesday, September 23
Visit from the Writing Centre; Heroism and the Adventure Novel
Read: The Scarlet Pimpernel, pages 1-148 (Chapter 1 – Chapter 18)

Week Three

Monday, September 28
The Scarlet Pimpernel; Essay Writing (Part One: Literature)
Read: The Scarlet Pimpernel, pages 149-269 (Chapter 19 – Chapter 31)

Wednesday, September 30
Guest Lecture on the Semiotics of Comics
Read: Understanding Comics, pages 2-94
**Week Four**

Monday, October 5  
Understanding Comics; Essay Writing (Part Two: Comics)  
Read: *Understanding Comics*, pages 95-193

**Greatest Tales**

Wednesday, October 7  **Midterm Essay Due**  
The Early History of Superhero Comics  
**Read:** All-Star Comics No. 8; Sensation Comics No. 1-5

**Week Five**

Monday, October 12  **Thanksgiving – No class**

Wednesday, October 14  
Wonder Woman/Diana Prince  
**Read:** All-Star Comics No. 6-9; Wonder Woman #1

**Week Six**

Monday, October 19  
Superheroes and the Nation  
**Read:** *Superman: Red Son*, “Red Son Rising”

Wednesday, October 21  
Superman/Clark Kent  
**Read:** *Superman: Red Son*, “Red Son Ascendant”; “Red Son Setting”

**Week Seven**

Monday, October 26  
Research Methods; Close Reading Assignment Workshop

Wednesday, October 28  
Batman/Bruce Wayne  
**Recommended Reading:** *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*

**Week Eight**

Monday, November 2  
Superheroes and Postmodernism  
**Read:** *Watchmen*, Chapters 1-5
Wednesday, November 4
Watchmen
**Read:** *Watchmen*, Chapters 6-12

*Secret Identities*

**Week Nine**

Monday, November 9 **Close Reading Assignment Due**
Superheroes and Identity
**Read:** *X-Men: God Loves, Man Kills*, Pages 1-93

Wednesday, November 11
X-Men
**Read:** *X-Men: God Loves, Man Kills*, Pages 94-167

**Week Ten**

Monday, November 16
**Guest Lecture on Subversive Superhero Fan Fiction and Fan Communities**

Wednesday, November 18
Superheroes, Autobiography, and Embodiment
**Read:** *El Deaf O; Hawkeye* #19

**Week Eleven**

Monday, November 23
Contemporary Superheroes
**Read:** *Ms. Marvel*, Issues 1 and 2

Wednesday, November 25
Ms. Marvel/Kamala Khan
**Read:** *Ms. Marvel*, Issues 3, 4, and 5 **Final Essay Due**

**Final Essay Due**

**Week Twelve**

Monday, November 30
Super Abilities and Disabilities
**Watch:** Scenes from the television series *Daredevil* (in class)

Wednesday, December 2
Course Conclusion
Academic Integrity

In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo community are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. See the UWaterloo Academic Integrity webpage (https://uwaterloo.ca/academic-integrity/) and the Arts Academic Integrity webpage (https://uwaterloo.ca/arts/current-undergraduates/student-support/ethical-behaviour) for more information.

Discipline

A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for his/her actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about “rules” for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course professor, academic advisor, or the Undergraduate Associate Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under Policy 71 – Student Discipline. For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to Policy 71 - Student Discipline. For typical penalties check Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties (https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat-general-counsel/policies-procedures-guidelines/guidelines/guidelines-assessment-penalties).

Grievance

A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4 (https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat-general-counsel/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-70). When in doubt please be certain to contact the department’s administrative assistant who will provide further assistance.

Appeals

A decision made or penalty imposed under Policy 70, Student Petitions and Grievance (other than a petition) or Policy 71, Student Discipline may be appealed if there is a ground. A student who believes he/she has a ground for an appeal should refer to Policy 72, Student Appeals (https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat-general-counsel/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-72). http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy70.html.”

The Writing Centre

The Writing Centre works across all faculties to help students clarify their ideas, develop their voices, and write in the style appropriate to their disciplines. Writing Centre staff offer one-on-one support in planning assignments and presentations, using and documenting research, organizing and structuring papers, and revising for clarity and coherence.
You can make multiple appointments throughout the term, or drop in at the Library for quick questions or feedback. To book a 50-minute appointment and to see drop-in hours, visit www.uwaterloo.ca/writing-centre. Group appointments for team-based projects, presentations, and papers are also available.

Please note that writing specialists guide you to see your work as readers would. They can teach you revising skills and strategies, but will not proof-read or edit for you. Please bring hard copies of your assignment instructions and any notes or drafts to your appointment.

Suggested Resources

Journals:

Image Text: Interdisciplinary Comic Studies

International Journal of Comic

Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics

Studies in Comics

Books:


Websites:

Canadian Society for the Study of Comics: http://comics-scholars.com/

The Comics Journal: http://www.tcj.com/

Women in Refrigerators: http://lby3.com/wir/