Winter 2019

English 108A (001): The Superhero
AL 211: Tuesday & Thursday, 10:00-11:20am
Instructor: Jesse Hutchison
Office: HH369: 12:00-12:50, 2:30-3:30, Tuesday & Thursday
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About this course:
Holy superhero analysis, Batman! In this course, we will look at a variety of ways that
the superhero has appeared in literature over the years. We will begin by reading stories
about Gilgamesh and Heracles to consider how these early heroic figures influenced the
creation of the 20th century American superhero. Throughout the rest of the course, we
will concentrate on three superheroes, specifically the DC triumvirate of Superman,
Batman, and Wonder Woman. We will examine the different ways that these three
figures have appeared over the years from their very first appearances in the late 1930s
and early 1940s all the way up to today’s versions. The course, then, looks at how events
such as WWII, the Cold War, 60s activism, Reaganomics, and 9/11 impacted the way
that artists and writers crafted superheroes and told their stories. We will consider the
superhero as a social construction that typically embodies (and sometimes questions) the
dominant social values and beliefs of their place and time. Along with the early epic
poems, the course will look at individual comic book issues, a graphic novel, television
episodes, and a film. The course also focuses on how to develop, research, and write an
English essay with an argument that is more powerful than a locomotive.

Expectations:
We will be discussing these texts in significant detail. My central expectation is that you
come to class fully prepared. Being fully prepared means that you have read the required
texts, you have given them some thought, and you have arrived in class with something
relevant to say about them, or with a question in mind. To participate fully, you must
bring your books to class with you. Please be on time, and plan to attend every class.

Course Texts Available in Bookstore:
Course Kit
The Epic of Gilgamesh
The Dark Knight Returns, Frank Miller

Course Texts Available on Comixology:
Detective Comics (1937-2011) #27
Superman (1939-2011) #1
All-Star Comics #8
Wonder Woman (1942-1986) #3
Wonder Woman (1942-1986) #179
Batman (1940-2011) #153
All Star Superman #1
All-Star Batman and Robin, the Boy Wonder #2
Assignments and Evaluation:
Attendance/Participation: 15%
Essay #1 (3-4 pages): 15% due February 7
Outside Superhero Assignment (600 words): 10% due February 28
Essay Outline: 5% due March 21
Final Essay (6-7 pages): 30% due April 4
Final Exam: 25%

Essay #1 (15%): For this essay, you will be asked to write a critical analysis of The Epic of Gilgamesh. Some topics to consider may be the hero’s journey, Gilgamesh’s status as a precursor to the superhero, the representation of women in the text, or an evaluation of Gilgamesh as a hero. These are just suggestions and you may also choose your own topics. Papers should be typed and double-spaced using 12 pt Times New Roman font. You are to write argumentative, thesis-driven essays. Use proper MLA citation methods. Please consult the most recent edition of the MLA handbook for details. Due February 7

Outside Superhero Assignment (10%): For this proposal, you are asked to examine a comic book, tv show, film, or book (choose only one) that constructs a superhero character beyond the ones we are looking at in this class. For this assignment, you will want to describe this superhero and the particular text that they come from; however, what is more important is your analysis. You will want to create an argument that can be made about this particular text, examine how it works as a cultural product, and consider how it might fit into an academic course on superheroes. The assignment should be typed and double-spaced using 12 pt. Times New Roman font. Use proper MLA citation methods. Please consult the most recent edition of the MLA handbook for details. Due February 28

Essay Outline (5%): Write a proposal for the final essay in which you provide the thesis statement as well as the main points of your essay. The thesis should be written as a complete sentence or sentences but the main points should be written in point form. Aim for a full page of points, the more detailed the better. The purpose of this assignment is to have you thinking about your essays in advance with the understanding that your final paper is subject to change and always a work in progress. Due March 21

Final Essay: For this essay, you will be asked to write a critical analysis of two of the texts that we looked at during the term. You may compare two texts dealing with the same superhero or you may compare two texts featuring two different superheroes. You are not to write on The Epic of Gilgamesh for this essay. Some topics to consider are how the texts reflect the context in which they are written, how the texts reinforce and/or challenge the status quo, how the reflect feminist points of view, and how they reflect conventional conceptions of masculinity. As in the previous essay, these are only suggestions and you may also choose your own topics. For this essay, you are asked to do some research and incorporate at least two peer-reviewed secondary sources. Papers should be typed and double-spaced using 12 pt Times New Roman font. You are to write argumentative, thesis-driven essays. Use proper MLA citation methods. Please consult the most recent edition of the MLA handbook for details. Due April 4
Final Exam:
The final exam will be 2.5 hours and it will be scheduled during the formal exam period (April 10 to April 27). A full description of the exam format will be discussed later in the term. It will be cumulative; this means that it will cover all material from the course. Please keep in mind that travel plans are not acceptable grounds for an alternative final examination time.

Grading Rubric

**A** - The paper contains a clear, original, thought provoking, and argumentative thesis statement. The argument is persuasive and argued with coherency. Use of primary and secondary sources is exemplary. Quotations are well chosen and are smoothly integrated into the essay and sharply analyzed. There is a strong flow from paragraph to paragraph as well as from sentence to sentence. “A” papers are structured well, with solid introductions, body paragraphs, topic sentences, and conclusions. All paragraphs range from 100-250 words in length. The essay remains on-topic throughout. The writing style is formal and professional. The words chosen are appropriate for the context and the writing is free from grammatical errors. Formatting details are free of errors.

**B** - The paper contains a clear and argumentative thesis statement which is argued with coherency and consistency throughout the paper. Good analysis of primary and secondary sources. Quotations are well chosen and are usually well integrated into the essay but they may occasionally be summarized rather than analyzed. There is a flow from paragraph to paragraph as well as from sentence to sentence. “B” papers are structured well, with solid introductions, body paragraphs, topic sentences, and conclusions. The essay remains on-topic for the most part but contains some tangents. The writing in the essay is clear though there are some awkward word choices and some grammatical errors throughout. The body paragraphs make good points but are occasionally too long or too short. Formatting details are mostly free of errors.

**C** – The paper contains a thesis but it is somewhat descriptive or speculative or, perhaps, somewhat unclear or awkwardly worded. There is a discussion of the primary and secondary texts but it does not always serve to reinforce an argument. The essay will occasionally veer off-topic, being about something other than the primary text. In a paper that requires research, the secondary source may be used a bit awkwardly or superficially. There is a structure at work in the paper but the essay occasionally becomes unstructured. There may be an imbalance of focus on one text over another. Paragraphs might be of good length or they might be all too long or too short. The writing style has multiple stylistic and grammatical errors leading to an occasional lack in clarity. Formatting is good but contains some errors.

**D** – The paper lacks a clear and coherent thesis statement. The discussion of the primary and secondary sources is superficial or entirely descriptive. The vast majority of the paper is off-topic, being about something other than the primary text. The secondary source is used without clear understanding of the text and the context from which the quotation comes. There are frequent structural problems throughout. There is little flow in the paper
as it contains mostly awkward transitions. Grammatical and stylistic errors contribute to a lack in clarity. The formatting contains multiple errors.

**F** – The paper lacks a thesis statement. The discussion of the primary and secondary sources is superficial or entirely descriptive. The vast majority of the paper is off-topic, being about something other than the primary text. It is possible that neither the primary nor the secondary text is quoted. There is a lack of structure to the paper and grammatical and stylistic errors render the paper largely unclear. The writing style may be unprofessional. The formatting either contains multiple errors or is absent entirely.

**Participation Rubric**

**A** – Your comments in class display an engagement with both the material as well as your other classmates. The comments are insightful and thought provoking. Attendance is excellent.

**B** – Your comments display an engagement with the material and with the course’s overall themes. While your comments are very good they are not necessarily always contributing to an overall conversation. Attendance is strong.

**C** – Your level of participation varies from class to class. Here, you might have an excellent attendance record without participating in the conversation. Conversely, you might participate here and there and have several absences.

**D** – You might have a good attendance record (marked with several absences) without participating in the conversation. You might make rare occasional comments but have missed a good number of classes.

**F** – You have missed a great number of classes and/or your participation in class is disruptive and/or inappropriate.

**Course policies:**

**Missed classes and assignments**
With the exception of the exam, all assignments are to be handed in on LEARN by 11:59pm on the day the assignment is due. Microsoft Word documents are preferred over PDF and Pages. Marks will be returned on Learn. The penalty for a late assignment is 2% per day, including weekend days. This will be incurred in all cases except certified emergencies. Papers more than ten days late will not be accepted, and a mark of zero will be given for the assignments.

A doctor’s note is required to avoid a late penalty, and it should document serious illness on and for the period directly preceding the due date for assignments, or on the scheduled dates of exams.
In cases of personal matters such as mental health concerns, I am very sympathetic but I am also unable to properly evaluate these cases. If you need an extension on work for such issues, it is crucial to go to AccessAbility and have them evaluate your case. They can then contact me if they believe you require alternate accommodations for assignments. At that point, I am always happy to help the student in any way that I can. Please see more information below for AccessAbility as well as for counselling services. If you miss a class for unavoidable circumstances, please connect with a classmate to discuss the material that was covered during your absence.

**Appointments and email:**

I am always happy to meet with students to discuss course matters, including difficulties with the material or upcoming assignments. Please feel free to make an appointment to meet with me, or send me an email.

If you send me an email, please wait 24 hours before sending me a reminder. I may not be able to respond right away, or I may be looking into the matter on your behalf, but I will get back to you as soon as possible. If you have not received a response after 24 hours, or 48 hours on a weekend, please email me again. Please note that mail from some external email servers, such as Hotmail or Yahoo, may be bounced by the university server.

Email should be reserved for relatively simple communication matters, such as brief questions or to make an appointment. If your query will require a longer conversation as in, for example, the discussion of a grade or an assignment, please make an appointment to meet with me in person. In general, I will not give out marks over email.

**Academic Integrity**

*Academic Integrity:* In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. See the UWaterloo Academic Integrity webpage 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. Check the Office of Academic Integrity for more information. 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.

*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. 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 Grievances (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**.

**Accommodation for Students with Disabilities**

**Note for students with disabilities:** The AccessAbility Services office, located on the first floor of the Needles Hall extension (1401), collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the AS office at the beginning of each academic term.

**Mental Health Support**

All of us need a support system. The faculty and staff in Arts encourage students to seek out mental health support if they are needed.

**On Campus**

- Counselling Services: counselling.services@uwaterloo.ca / 519-888-4567 ext. 32655
- **MATES:** one-to-one peer support program offered by Federation of Students (FEDS) and Counselling Services
- Health Services Emergency service: located across the creek from Student Life Centre

**Off campus, 24/7**

- **Good2Talk:** Free confidential help line for post-secondary students. Phone: 1-866-925-5454
- Grand River Hospital: Emergency care for mental health crisis. Phone: 519-749-4300 ext. 6880
- **Here 24/7:** Mental Health and Crisis Service Team. Phone: 1-844-437-3247
- **OK2BME:** set of support services for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning teens in Waterloo. Phone: 519-884-0000 extension 213

**Territorial Acknowledgement**

We acknowledge that we are living and working on the traditional territory of the Attawandaron (also known as Neutral), Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee peoples. The University of Waterloo is situated on the Haldimand Tract, the land promised to the Six Nations that includes ten kilometres on each side of the Grand River.

**Academic freedom at the University of Waterloo**

Policy 33, Ethical Behaviour states, as one of its general principles (Section 1), “The University supports academic freedom for all members of the University community. Academic freedom carries with it the duty to use that freedom in a manner consistent with the scholarly obligation to base teaching and research on an honest and ethical quest for knowledge. In the context of this policy, 'academic freedom' refers to academic activities, including teaching and scholarship, as is articulated in the principles set out in
the Memorandum of Agreement between the FAUW and the University of Waterloo, 1998 (Article 6). The academic environment which fosters free debate may from time to time include the presentation or discussion of unpopular opinions or controversial material. Such material shall be dealt with as openly, respectfully and sensitively as possible.” This definition is repeated in Policies 70 and 71, and in the Memorandum of Agreement, Section 6.

**Schedule:**

January 8: Introduction
January 10: “Comic Books to Blockbusters: The Rise of the Superhero,” Brian Robb from *A Brief History of Superheroes* (located on GoogleBooks)
January 15: *The Epic of Gilgamesh*
January 17: *The Epic of Gilgamesh*
January 22: screening: *Wonder Woman*
January 24: screening: *Wonder Woman*
January 29: Essay Workshop
January 31: “The Little Heracles,” “The Nemean Lion,” Theocritus (in course kit)
February 5: Detective Comics (1937-2011) #27 (original 1939 version only), Superman (1939-2011) #1 (both located on Comixology),
February 7: Superman (1939-2011) #1 (located on Comixology), **Essay #1 Due**
February 12: “Meet the Squiffles,” “Case of the Costume Clad Killers”
February 14: “Introducing Wonder Woman” from All-Star Comics #8 (located on Comixology)
February 26: Wonder Woman (1942-1986) #3 (first three comics only) (located on Comixology)
February 28: “The Lady and the Lion” (in course kit), **Outside Superhero Assignment Due**
March 5: Batman (1940-2011) #153, Wonder Woman (1942-1986) #179 (both located on Comixology),
March 7: Screening: Batman TV series and discussion
March 12: Batman TV series discussion and essay workshop on secondary sources
March 14: “Must There Be a Superman?” (in course kit)
March 19: *The Dark Knight Returns*
March 21: *The Dark Knight Returns*, **Essay Proposal Due**
March 26: All Star Superman #1, All-Star Batman and Robin, the Boy Wonder #2
March 28: Wonder Woman movie discussion
April 2: Course Wrap-Up
April 4: Exam Review, **Essay #2 due**

**How to read comics on Comixology:**

1. Go to the Comixology website, http://www.comixology.com
2. Register for an account (username, email address and a password for now). Click on Register on the right hand side, under the Log In button.
3. Search for comics under the titles given on page 1 of syllabus
4. Click on the Free or Buy boxes to add these issues to your cart.
5. When ready to check out, go to the Cart icon on the top right and follow the instructions.

**Important - credit card is required - do not separate the numbers.
**Important - students must have updated Flash Player on their computers.

To read the comics:
Go to comixology.com and log in. Click on My Comics on the top bar, and you should find the issues you purchased there, available to be read online. (Unfortunately, they can only be read online, not downloaded.)