

Carleton University
Winter 2017
Department of English

ENGL 2100B: Topics in Popular Culture:
The World of Alternative Comics

Prerequisite(s): second-year standing
Precludes additional credit for ENGL 2101

Schedule: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 8:35am – 9:55am
Location: TBA
(please confirm on Carleton Central)

Instructor: Robert Hutton
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Office Hours: TBA

Since the mid-1950s, the public image of a comic book in North America has been a superhero comic aimed at children. This is still true today, with the enormous popularity of superhero movies and television shows. But there has been a long tradition of comics that deal with more adult topics in dramatically different forms. These comics, initially called “underground comix” and then later “alternative comics” and “graphic novels” have gone from the counterculture to the literary mainstream. In this course, we will focus on the history of North American alternative comics and read some of the most significant works in this movement.

No prior knowledge of comics is needed for this course. However, serious interpretive work is expected of all students. We will cover the essential moments in comics history as well as the artistic and narrative techniques that comics artists use to create meaning. This course will not cover superhero comics, comic strips, manga or European comics – we have enough on our plate as it is. My goal is to impart a greater understanding of the comics medium, its history and its great works. Alternative comics also provide larger lessons on the interpretation of visual culture and the dynamics of economy and prestige in popular culture.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Spiegelman, *Maus*.
Seth, *It's a Good Life if You Don't Weaken*.
Bechdel, *Fun Home*.
Burns, *Black Hole*.
Tamaki, *This One Summer*.

RECCOMENDED TEXTS:

Gabillet, *Of Comics and Men*.
McCloud, *Understanding Comics*.

GRADE BREAKDOWN

Attendance & Participation: 10%

Midterm Essay: 20%

Final Essay: 40%

Exam: 30%

Attendance: Half of this grade will be based on a straight percentage of classes attendance. The attendance sheet will go around 15 minutes into the lecture; if you are late beyond this point, you will be considered absent. Absences due to medical reasons will be marked as attendance with a doctor's note. The other half will be based off both the quality and quantity of contribution to in-class discussions. A portion of each class will be dedicated to group discussion, with each group expected to present conclusions to the class.

Midterm Essay: A 8-10 page essay on material covered in the first half of the course. Students may write on a subject of their choosing that has been approved by me, but pre-approved essay questions will also be provided. Essays will be graded on strength of argument, essay structure, appropriate style and originality. Secondary sources are encouraged but not required. Due on the class before winter break and will be returned on the week after the break.

Final Essay: A 12-15 page essay on material covered in the second half of the course. Students may write on a subject of their choosing that has been approved by me, but pre-approved essay questions will also be provided. This essay must use at least 2 properly cited secondary sources. The grade will be derived from the same criteria as the midterm essay as well as skillful integration of secondary sources.

Final Exam: Will take place during the April exam period. The exam will consist primarily of short answer and identification questions, with an exact format to be announced closer to the exam date.

PLAGIARISM

The University Senate defines plagiarism as “presenting, whether intentionally or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as one’s own.” This can include:

- reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else’s published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as one’s own without proper citation or reference to the original source;
- submitting an essay or other assignment written or conceived, in whole or in part, by someone else;
- using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, or paraphrased material, concepts, or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;

- using another's data or research findings;
- failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another's works and/or failing to use quotation marks;
- handing in "substantially the same piece of work for academic credit more than once without prior written permission of the course instructor in which the submission occurs."

Plagiarism is a serious offence that cannot be resolved directly by the course's instructor. The Associate Dean of the Faculty conducts a rigorous investigation, including an interview with the student, when an instructor suspects a piece of work has been plagiarized. Penalties are not trivial. They can include a final grade of "F" for the course.

REQUEST FOR ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request the processes are as follows:

Pregnancy obligation: write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details see the Student Guide.

Religious obligation: write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details see the Student Guide.

Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: The Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520-6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send me your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (if applicable). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with me to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. Please consult the PMC website for the deadline to request accommodations for the formally-scheduled exam (if applicable).

CONTENT WARNING

Alternative comics frequently pushed the boundaries of what was considered obscene or illicit. As such, several of the works studied in this course contain graphic and disturbing images of violence and sex as well as profane language. Students will be expected to be familiar with all course texts, but I also strive to be sensitive to students' psychological needs. Any students with concerns about potentially triggering material should speak with me.

COURSE OUTLINE

Jan. 5 – Class introduction

Jan. 10 – R. Crumb, selections from *Zap Comix*.

Jan. 12 – Justin Green, *Binky Brown and the Holy Virgin Mary*

Jan. 17 – Will Eisner, “A Contract with God”

Jan. 19 – Harvey Pekar, selections from *American Splendor*

Jan. 24 – Los Bros. Hernandez, selections from *Love & Rockets*.

Jan. 26 & Feb 31 – Art Spiegelman, *Maus*.

Feb. 2 – Essay-writing tutorial

Feb. 7 – Lynda Barry, selections from *Ernie Pook’s Comeex*

Feb. 9 – Phoebe Gloeckner, selection from *A Child’s Life and other Stories*.

Feb. 14 & 16 – Seth, *It’s a Good Life if You Don’t Weaken*

Mid-Term Essays Due Feb. 16.

Feb. 28 – Adrian Tomine, selection from *Optic Nerve*.

Mar. 2 – Joe Matt, selection from *Peepshow*

Mar. 7 – Joe Sacco, selection from *Palestine*.

Mar. 9 – Guy Delisle, selection from *Pyongyang*

Mar. 14 & 16 – Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home*

Mar. 21 & 23 – Charles Burns, *Black Hole*.

Mar. 28 - Webcomics

Mar. 30 & Apr. 4 – Mariko & Jillian Tan, *This One Summer*.

Apr. 6 – Course review

Final essays due April 6