

Carleton University
Early Summer 2016
Department of English

ENGL 4115A/ 5610S : Culture and the Text I

Superhero Fiction

Tues, Thurs /11:35am – 2:25pm
Location: 115 PA

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Hours: By Appointment

Although costumed superheroes have been fixtures of comic books since the debut of Superman in 1938, the awarding of the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 2001 to Michael Chabon's *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* seemed to register a shift in the superhero's cultural status and domain—but did it? The main goals of this seminar will be to explore the history, contours, and concerns of superhero fiction. What are its principle generic features? When, how, and why did it emerge? What cultural work does it do? What is its relation to superhero comics? And why is it (suddenly?) so ubiquitous? With an eye to such questions, this seminar will proceed along two different but intersecting lines of inquiry. One of these will be to trace the emergence and transformation of the superhero in comic books, from the early twentieth century to the present day. The second will be to examine the points of connection and disjunction between the history of the superhero in comics and the appearance of superhero figures in other genres and media, particularly adventure fiction, romance, and the “literary” novel.

TEXTS (Available at the Campus Bookstore)*

Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim* (Norton)
Emmuska Orczy, *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (Modern Library)
Philip Wylie, *Gladiator* (Wildside)
Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, *Watchmen* (DC Comics)
Michael Chabon, *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* (Picador)
Samit Basu, *Turbulence* (Titan)

*Additional Texts are available electronically through Comixology.com and ARES (Electronic Reserves)

METHOD OF EVALUATION

40% Independent Project

Your final project for the class will be an 8-10 page conference paper OR a four-page superhero comic that you create supplemented with a 4-6 page essay OR a 6-8 page superhero story supplemented with a 2-4 page critical commentary. (The critical process sections of MA assignment should be 2 pages longer.) The main objective of this project is for you to explore some aspect of the course in relation to a superhero comic, film, or work of prose fiction, or a story or graphic narrative that you create. If you opt for a creative project, keep in mind that you are being evaluated on the success with which your creative piece and the accompanying prose essay engages some of the generic, critical, and/or theoretical issues that are the focus of the course. Your 500 words project proposal is due on Tuesday, May 24 in class. If you plan to write on a text from later in the term, you will have to read ahead to some degree in order to complete the project proposal on time. Late proposals will result in a 5% penalty on the final project grade; final projects submitted without proposals will receive a penalty of 10%. You may write on a primary text that we do not study in class, but if you do, you must provide the instructor with a copy of the text or it must be easily available. Every conference paper project must make reference to a minimum of 2 secondary sources from the syllabus and 4 additional sources (these may also be from the syllabus, but need not be). The nonfiction prose component of all Creative projects must make reference to at least 3 secondary sources from the syllabus. The project is due in class on Tues, June 7th, (anyone writing on Chabon or Basu will be granted an extension until Thurs, June 16). The Reading Journal and Crib Sheet assignments below are designed to get you thinking in the direction of a project.

30% Reading Journal (Class Preparation and Participation)

Your participation grade for the class will be determined by your attendance, involvement, and creation of a journal in which you record your thoughts about what you are reading on a class-by-class basis. You will be asked to submit the journal at the end of the term, on June 14 in class, but in the meantime, you are expected to bring it to class so that you can refer to what you have written by way of reflection on primary and secondary texts for that week. The journal is meant to be a place for making connections between primary and secondary readings, and for experimenting with ideas that interest you.

Prior to every class you should do the following:

- Select a passage (or a page or panel) from one primary text that you find interesting and note it in your journal (if it's a long passage or a page from a comic, you may want to photocopy it to refer back to later)
- Jot down some notes about why it caught your eye, what questions or issues it raised or allows you to explore, and be prepared to explain to the group why you selected it and lead a short discussion on it (not everyone will discuss their passage every week, but come prepared nonetheless)

- Read one article from the “Further Readings” section each class, select a quotation from it, write a short (150 word) response to it

30% Crib Sheets

The purpose of the crib sheets is to help your classmates (and yourself) to quickly digest the most important details and arguments of the critical sources that are listed each week as “Further Reading.” You will sign up to create 3 crib sheets over the course of the term. Each Crib Sheet must contain the following and should be emailed to me as a Word Document at least 30 minutes before the class in which it is due:

- A bibliographic entry on the source at the top of the page
- A 500 word, single-spaced summary of the source’s main arguments that also defines any key or useful critical or technical terms or concepts that the source employs. Please note that these should be a genuine summary of the argument, not a disconnected listing of topics or points that the article addresses. For advice on how to summarize effectively, see:
<http://www.nelson.com/highered/common/english/Harbrace/sources.html>
- A 250-300 word reflection on how the source you are summarizing illuminates one (or more) of the primary texts from that week
- A discussion question for the class

Late Penalty: Late work will be penalized by 1/3 of a letter grade per day.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism means passing off someone else’s words or ideas as your own or submitting the same work in two different academic contexts (self-plagiarism). The consequences of plagiarism are severe and are issued by the Dean and the University Senate. In order to avoid plagiarism, you must correctly attribute the sources of the ideas you pick up from books, the internet, and other people. For additional information, consult the section on Instructional Offenses in the *Graduate Calendar*.

ACCOMMODATION

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

Pregnancy: Write your professor 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 visit Equity Services: <http://carleton.ca/equity/accommodation/>

Religious obligations: Write your professor 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 visit the Equity Services website:

<http://carleton.ca/equity/accommodation/>

Students with disabilities requiring academic accommodations in this course must register with the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) for a formal evaluation of disability-related needs. Documented disabilities could include but are not limited to mobility/physical impairments, specific Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/psychological disabilities, sensory disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and chronic medical conditions. Registered PMC students are required to contact the PMC, 613-520-6608, every term to ensure that their professors receive a *Letter of Accommodation*, no later than two weeks before the first assignment is due or the first in-class test/midterm requiring accommodations. If you only require accommodations for your formally scheduled exam(s) in this course, please submit your request for accommodations to PMC by the last official day to withdraw from classes in each term. For more details visit the PMC website:

<http://carleton.ca/pmc/students/accommodations/>

SCHEDULE OF READINGS

Tues, May 3

Heroes and Superheroes – Qualities, Questions, Methods

Primary Readings

Action Comics #1 (June 1938), <http://reading-room.net/Action1/Action1Cover.html>

Detective Comics #27 (DC Comics, May 1939), <http://reading-room.net/Detective27/Detective27Cover.html>

Action Comics #242 (DC Comics, July 1958),
<http://reading-room.net/Action242Brainiac/Action242-Cover.html>

Fantastic Four #1 (Marvel Comics, November 1961), <http://reading-room.net/FF1/FF1Cover.html>

The Incredible Hulk #1 (Marvel Comics, May 1962), <http://reading-room.net/Hulk1/Hulk1Cover.html>

Amazing Fantasy #15 (Marvel Comics, August 1962), <http://reading-room.net/AmazingFantasy15/AF15Cover.html>

Thurs, May 5

Superheroes and Genre

Primary Readings

Superman (1939-2011) #123 [Comixology]

Detective Comics (1937-2011) #400 [Comixology]

Amazing Spider-Man (1963-1998) #75 [Comixology]

Fantastic Four (1961-1998) #184 [Comixology]

Thor (1966-1996) #277 [Comixology]
Incredible Hulk (1962-1999) #136 [Comixology]
Incredible Hulk (1962-1999) #137 [Comixology]

Further Reading

Peter Coogan, *Superhero: The Secret Origin of a Genre* (Austin, TX: MonkeyBrain, 2006). Reserve Desk/Online.

Tues, May 10

Myth, Literature, and Genre

Primary Readings

Avengers (1963-1996) #60 [Comixology]
New Teen Titans (1980-1988) #38 [Comixology]
Amazing Spider-Man (1963-1998) #68 [Comixology]
Amazing Spider-Man (1963-1998) #69 [Comixology]
Daredevil (1964-1998) #253 [Comixology]
The Legion of Super-Heroes (1980-1984) #294 [Comixology]
Crisis on Infinite Earths #7 [Comixology]

Further Reading

Northrop Frye, from "Archetypal Criticism: Theory of Myths," *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 158-239. ARES.

John G. Cawelti, "The Study of Literary Formulas" and "Notes Towards a Typology of Literary Formulas," *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 5-36, 37-50. ARES.

Roger B. Rollin, "The Epic Hero and Pop Culture," *College English* 31.5 (February 1970), 431-49. ARES.

Scott Bukatman, "A Song of the Urban Superhero," *The Superhero Reader*, ed. Charles Hatfield, Jeet Heer, and Kent Worcester (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi), 2013. 170-98. ARES.

Thurs, May 12

Reading the Superhero

Primary Readings

Captain America (1968-1996) #143 [comiXology]
Captain America (1968-1996) #144 [comiXology]
Wonder Woman (1942-1986) #6 [Comixology]
Marvel Graphic Novel #5: X-Men: God Loves, Man Kills [comiXology]

Uncanny X-Men (1963-2011) #201 [Comixology]
Wonder Woman (1942-1986) #212 [Comixology]
Wonder Woman (1942-1986) #216 [Comixology]
Ms. Marvel (1977-1979) #1 [Comixology]
Ms. Marvel (2014-2015) #1 [Comixology]
Ms. Marvel (2014-2015) #2 [Comixology]

Joel Schumacher (dir.), *Batman & Robin* (Warner Bros., 1997). Film.

Further Reading

Marco Arnaudo, "Epic and Neobaroque," *The Myth of the Superhero* trans., Jamie Richards (Baltimore: John's Hopkin's University Press, 2013), 117-55. ARES.

Jason Dittmer, *Captain America and the Nationalist Superhero* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013), 1-23. ARES.

Clare Pitkethly, "Recruiting an Amazon: The Collision of Old World and New World Identity in *Wonder Woman*," in *The Contemporary Comic Book Superhero*, ed. Angela Ndalians (New York: Routledge, 2009), 164-183. ARES.

Ben Saunders, "Wonder Woman: Bondage and Liberation," *Do The Gods Wear Capes: Spirituality, Fantasy, and Superheroes* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), 36-71. ARES.

Scott Bukatman, "X-Bodies: The Torment of the Mutant Superhero," *Matters of Gravity: Special Effects and Supermen in the 20th Century* (Durham: Duke University Press), 2003. 48-78. ARES.

Andy Medhurst, "Batman, Deviance, and Camp," in *The Many Lives of the Batman: Critical Approaches to a Superhero and His Media*, eds., Roberta E. Pearson and William Uricchio (New York: Routledge, 1991), 149-63. ARES.

Tues, May 17

Modernism and Heroism

Primary Reading

Lord Jim (Chapters 1-20; pp. 5-131)

Further Reading

Albert J. Guerard, "Lord Jim" (*Lord Jim*, Norton Critical Edition, 397-423)

Michael Geaney, "Lord Jim and Embarrassment," *Lord Jim: Centennial Essays*, eds. Allan H. Simmons and J. H. Stape (New York: Rodopi, 2003), 1-14. ARES.

Thurs, May 19

Modernism and Heroism (cont'd)

Primary Reading

Lord Jim (Chapter 21-45; pp. 132-251)

Further Reading

Fredric Jameson, "Romance and Reification in *Lord Jim*" (*Lord Jim*, Norton Critical Edition 430-39)

Marianne De Koven, "The Destructive Element: *Lord Jim*" (*Lord Jim*, Norton Critical Edition 473-92)

Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan, "The Failure of Myth: *Lord Jim*" (*Lord Jim*, Norton Critical Edition 493-504)

Tues, May 24 – Independent Project Proposal due in class today

Modernity's Supermen

Primary Readings

Philip Wylie, *Gladiator*

Superman (1939-2011) #1 [Comixology]

Superman (1939-2011) # 123 [Comixology]

Superman (1939-2011) #306 [Comixology]

Superman (1939-2011) #423 [Comixology]

Further Reading

Umberto Eco, "The Myth of Superman," *Diacritics* 2.1 (1972): 14-22. ARES.

Alex Boney, "Superheroes and the Modern(ist) Age," *What is a Superhero?* ed., Robin S. Rosenberg and Peter Coogan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 43-49. ARES.

Thurs, May 26

Secret Identities

Primary Reading

Baroness Emma Orczy, *The Scarlett Pimpernel* (New York: Modern Library, 2002).

Further Reading

Judith Wilt, "Exotic romance: the doubled hero in *The Scarlet Pimpernel* and *The Sheik*," in *Women Writers and the Hero of Romance* (London: Palgrave, 2014), 87-123. ARES. (Just read the section that focuses on *The Scarlet Pimpernel*.)

Chris Gavaler, "The Well-Born Superhero," *The Journal of American Culture* 37.2 (June 2014): 182-97. ARES.

Greg M. Smith, "The Superhero as Labor," in *The Contemporary Comic Book Superhero*, ed. Angela Ndaljian (New York: Routledge, 2009), 126-43. ARES.

Tues, May 31

Gender and Disability

Primary Readings

Alan Moore and Brian Bolland, *The Killing Joke* (New York: DC Comics, 1988). [Comixology]

Birds of Prey (Issues TBA)

Batgirl (2011-) #1 [Comixology]

Batgirl (2011-) #34 [Comixology]

Further Reading

Cocca, Carolyn. "Re-booting Barbara Gordon: Oracle, Batgirl, and Feminist Disability Theories." *ImageText* 7.4 (2014), n. pag. ARES.

Doise, Eric. "Two Lunatics: Sanity and Insanity in *The Killing Joke*." *ImageText* 8.1 (2015), n. pag. ARES.

Jennifer Stuller, "Love Will Bring You to Your Gift," *Ink-Stained Amazons and Cinematic Warriors: Superwomen in Modern Mythology* (J. B. Tauris, 2010): 87-104.

TBA on Superheroes and Disability

Thurs, June 2

1986: Superheroes, "Deconstructed"

Primary Reading

Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, *Watchmen* (New York: DC Comics), 1987.

Further Reading

Iain Thomson, "Deconstructing the Hero," *Comics as Philosophy*, ed. Jeff McLaughlin (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 100-129. ARES.

Erin M. Keating, "The Female Link: Citation and Continuity in *Watchmen*," *Journal of Popular Culture* 45.6 (2012), 1266-88. ARES.

Tues, June 7 – Independent Project due in class (except for projects on Chabon or Basu)
Superhero Fiction and the History of the Comic Books

Primary Reading

Michael Chabon, *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* (Parts 1-3)

Further Reading

Walter J. Ong, "The Comics and the Super State," *Arizona Quarterly* 1.3 (Autumn 1945), 34-48. ARES.

Fredric Wertham, "What Parents Don't Know About Comic Books," *Ladies Home Journal* (November 1953), 50-53, 214-220. ARES.

Mordecai Richler, "The Great Comic Book Heroes," *Encounter* (May 1967): 46-51. ARES.

Jonathan Lethem, "The Return of the King, or, Identifying With Your Parents," in *Give Our Regards To the Atom-Smashers: Writers on Comics*, ed., Sean Howe (New York: Pantheon, 2004), 2-22. ARES.

John Leonard, "Welcome to New Dork," *The New York Review of Books* April 7, 2005. ARES.

Thurs, June 9

Superhero Fiction and the History of the Comic Books

Primary Reading

Michael Chabon, *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* (Parts 4-6)

Further Reading

Charles Hatfield, "How Kirby Changed the Superhero," *Hand of Fire: The Comics Art of Jack Kirby* (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2011), 108-143.

Punday, Daniel. "Kavalier & Clay, the Comic-Book Novel, and Authorship in a Corporate World," *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*: 49.3 (2008 Spring), 291-302.

Tues, June 14

Superheroes and Globalization

Primary Reading

Samit Basu, *Turbulence*

Further Reading

Chris Rumford, "The Cosmopolitan Stranger: A Thesis," in *The Globalization of Strangeness* (London: Palgrave, 2013), 101-36. ARES.