

Carleton University
Fall 2025 – Winter 2026 Preliminary Course Outline
Department of English

FYSM 1004C: Literature, Genre, Context
Topic: Identity and the Monster

Prerequisite: Normally restricted to students entering the first year of a B.A. program
Preclusions: Precludes additional credit for [ENGL 1000](#)



Instructor: Prof. S. J. Murray
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Figure 1: Nick Drnaso, from Sabrina

“It has become appallingly obvious that our technology has exceeded our humanity.”
—Albert Einstein

Calendar description: Introduction to active literary reading skills, focusing on at least three literary genres including poetry, prose, and drama, with attention to literary, social, historical, and political contexts. This course is writing attentive. Strongly recommended for English majors. Consult English Department website for annual topics.

Detailed course description: This course explores how literary and visual media shape our understanding of identity in a world saturated by social media, political rhetoric, and rapidly evolving technologies. We’ll read across genres—memoir, graphic novel, fiction, film, poetry—to ask how literature not only expresses who we are, but also participates in constructing identity itself. Alongside illness narratives and stories about race, gender, sexuality, and embodiment, we’ll explore what happens when identity is cast as monstrous—when people or bodies are deemed abnormal, dangerous, or “other.”

Are literary works merely tools of self-expression, or are they technologies that govern how we think, feel, and relate to the world? What role does rhetoric play in cancel culture or in the ways society and medicine define what’s “normal”? From the intimate to the institutional, we’ll consider how culture teaches us who belongs—and who doesn’t.

Keywords: Monstrosity, identity, illness narratives, rhetoric, visual culture, literary media, social media, embodiment, technology, gender, race, abnormality, cancel culture, biopolitics.

Learning Outcomes:

- Understand and analyze how narrative and visual texts contribute to the formation and representation of selfhood, identity, and otherness.
- Critically examine the intersections of identity, monstrosity, technology, and culture across diverse literary and media forms.
- Reflect on the cultural and ethical implications of “technologies of the self,” including the distinctions between artificial and emotional intelligence.
- Explore how authors use narrative techniques, metaphor, and multimodal storytelling to express embodied experiences of illness, race, gender, and marginalization.
- Engage with a range of genres—including memoir, poetry, fiction, film, and graphic novels—to consider how form shapes meaning in identity narratives.
- Develop critical reading, writing, speaking, and analytical skills through close engagement with texts and sustained classroom discussion.

Texts to Purchase (Carleton Bookstore, Amazon.ca prices offered for comparison):

Carson, Anne. *Autobiography of Red: A Novel in Verse*. McClelland and Stewart, 2016.

\$19.95 [Amazon link](#)

Dick, Philip K. *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* Penguin Random House, 1996. \$24.95. [Amazon link](#)

Drnaso, Nick. *Sabrina*. Drawn & Quarterly, 2018. \$32.95. [Amazon link](#)

Durand, Élodie. *Parenthesis*. [2010]. Edited by Chris Stares. Translated by Edward Gauvin. Top Shelf Productions, 2021. \$25.99. [Amazon link](#)

Ng, Celeste. *Our Missing Hearts*. Penguin Canada, 2023. \$23.00. [Amazon link](#)

Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein: The Original 1818 Text*, 3rd Ed. Edited by D.L. MacDonald and Kathleen Scherf. Broadview Press, 2012. \$15.50 [Amazon link](#)

Winterson, Jeanette. *Frankissstein: A Love Story*. Vintage Canada, 2020. \$18.60 [Amazon link](#)

E-books are permissible! However, for the graphic novels this might not be the best interface.

Other course materials will be made available digitally through Brightspace. Please bring a laptop or tablet to class for in-class access to these texts and in-class assignments and discussion.

Tentative Grading Scheme:

Fall 2025	Diagnostic Essay (0%)
	Short “Freudian” Critical Reader Response (7.5%)
	In-class Midterm Exam (10%)
	Critical Close Reading of selected comics panel(s) (7.5%)
	Final Term Essay (20%)
	Attendance and Participation (5%)
Winter 2026	Winter Short Essay 1 (10%)
	Winter Short Essay 2 (10%)
	Final Term Research Essay (25%)
	Attendance and Participation (5%)

The penalty for *unaccommodated / unexcused* late assignments is 2% per day. That said, I’m lenient with extensions: please just ask!

N.B. Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.