

Spring 2017

St. Jerome's University, University of Waterloo
English Department
The Superhero
ENGL 108A, section 001
M 6:30-9:20-pm, SJ1 2009

Instructor: Dr. Sylvia Terzian

Office: SH 2044

Office Hours: Mondays, 5:00pm - 6:00pm (and by appointment)

Email: sterzian@uwaterloo.ca

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In both its classical and modern contexts, the hero is considered the model of humanity. This course will trace how the concept of the hero and its myths have evolved over time and has influenced the popularization of the figure of the superhero in contemporary culture. Through various generic forms, including fiction, poetry, film, comic books, and graphic novels, as well as various media forms, students will assess various models of superhero from the vantage of literature, religion, psychology, politics, gender and sexuality, as well as ethnicity and race. We will consider how such perspectives provide a window to our understanding of the prominence and power of the superhero as a cultural symbol. Our central concern in this course is both with the “super” skills and “heroic” qualities of character. What makes these figures so compelling and enduring? We also examine the Superhero genre (comic and graphic novel) as more than just “kiddie fare,” in terms of its complexities and cultural relevance. How does this particular art form reflect the fears, anxieties, desires, and fantasies of a specific cultural moment, and to what extent does it offer the potential for socio-cultural and political critique? This course will consider these questions through an examination of such iconic masked heroes as Superman and Batman, alongside their counterparts, the anti-hero and supervillain.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Azzarello, Brian, Cliff Chang, and Tony Akins. *Wonder Woman Vol.1: Blood*. DC Comics, 2012.

The Epic of Gilgamesh. Trans. N.K. Sandars. London: Penguin, 1972.

Claremont, Chris and Brent Anderson. *X-Men: God Loves, Man Kills*. New York: Marvel, 2011.

Hesiod. *Theogony and Works and Days*. Trans. M.L. West. New York: Oxford UP, 2008.

Miller, Frank. *The Dark Night Returns*. New York: DC Comics, 1997.

Moore, Alan, J.H. Williams III and Mick Gray. *Promethea*. Collected Edition Book 1.

La Jolla: America's Best Comics, 2000.

Moore, Alan, Dave Gibbons, and John Higgins. *Watchmen*. New York: DC Comics, 1987.

Morrison, Grant. *All-Star Superman*. New York: DC Comics, 2011.

Wilson, G. and Adrian Alphona. *Ms. Marvel: No Normal*. New York: Marvel, 2014.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Campbell, Joseph. "The Monomyth," *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 1-42. (course reserves)
Moore, Alan, and Brian Bolland. *The Killing Joke*. New York: DC Comics, 2008.

COURSE EVALUATION

Visual Analysis	(2 pages)	10%
Reading Quizzes	(5@ 3% each)	15%
Hero Analysis Project		20%
Formal Essay	(5-6 pages)	30%
Final Exam		25%

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To demonstrate an understanding of the unique conventions, themes, and techniques of the graphic narrative.
2. To become familiar with representative works of graphic storytelling.
3. To demonstrate an understanding of the role of the superhero in contemporary American culture.
4. To identify, compare, and contrast characteristics of various models of heroism.
5. To provide students with knowledge of the historical and classical literary sources and influences of the modern superhero.
6. To enhance student ability to read these works through various and intersecting critical perspectives (historical, psychological, philosophical social, cultural, literary).
7. To create a critical course vocabulary to ground students' readings of the texts.
8. To foster an understanding of the ways in which the superhero embodies the fears, desires, values, ideologies, and anxieties of the cultural moment.
9. To enhance students' analytical, critical, and written skills.

DESCRIPTION OF ASSIGNMENTS AND VALUE

Visual Analysis (10%): Due June 12

You may complete this assignment individually or in partners, in which you are required to write **ONE** exploratory "visual analysis." For this piece, you will be asked to produce an informal, two-page, typed, double-spaced, analysis of a one or two page layout of **ONE** of the following comic books: *All-Star Superman*; *The Killing Joke*; *Watchmen*; *Promethea*

Please turn in a photocopy of your page(s) of choice along with your hardcopy submission (in colour or black & white). This assignment will be collected at the beginning of the class on the due date. Remember that you must choose one text from the four options and you must choose the page(s) layout. Your analysis should do the following:

- i. Close reading of the visual elements working on the page; what strategies are being used and what choices are being made to create meaning? Why are they significant?
- ii. Address any concepts, strategies, or stylistic methods you deem relevant to your reflection.

Hero Analysis Project (20%): sign up on first day of class

Each group, made up of five students, will select a literary or comic book super/hero or heroine from the course (including filmic heroes on the course), and create and deliver an oral presentation that includes a slideshow and also a written component. Your group's presentation should analyze a specific topic and attempt to argue a specific claim about your chosen hero. I will provide the topics; students may present on a hero & text that is not on the course, but **MUST** receive approval from me first. Failure to seek my approval on a topic that is not included on the sign-up sheet will result in a zero grade. I will provide detailed instructions, guidelines, and a rubric.

Quizzes (15%)

You will be required to write a quiz at the end of each main unit (5 units=5 quizzes), each worth 3% of your final grade. These quizzes are very brief and designed to test your reading of the primary texts. They may be multiple choice, short answer, or fill-in-the-blank, or a combination of all three. **All quizzes will be written on-line** (via class site on LEARN on the final class of each unit (see dates and readings below and on schedule).

Quiz 1	May 15	Theogony & Gilgamesh
Quiz 2	May 29	All-Star Superman
Quiz 3	June 19	The Dark Night Returns & Watchmen
Quiz 4	July 10	Wonder Woman Vol 1: Blood & Promethea
Quiz 5	July 24	X-Men: God Loves, Man Kills & Ms. Marvel: No Normal

Essay (30%): Due July 17

Your essay will be 5-6 pages in length, double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12-point font. You are required to use 2-4 secondary sources. Sources must be cited in the essay (in-text citations) and documented on a Works Cited list according to MLA guidelines. You will be required to choose a topic from a selected list (to be provided by the instructor). If you choose to construct your own topic, you **MUST** get my approval **TWO WEEKS** prior to the due date. Essays handed in on time (i.e., before or on the due date) will be given a grade and full written commentary. Essays handed in after the due date without medical or official

documentation will receive a grade with very limited commentary and late penalties of 2% per day (including weekends) will apply. I will provide topics and guidelines and will post them on LEARN.

Final Exam (25%)

This exam is invigilated. TBA

COURSE POLICIES

Contact Policy

Please feel open and comfortable to make contact with me during my office hours, by appointment, or via email. Please reserve emails to quick concerns or questions. I will try to respond to all emails within 24 hours. If you use email to connect with me, don't forget to include our course code as well as a specific subject in the email subject line (i.e., request for extension).

Classroom Etiquette:

I trust that you will show respect and consideration towards your instructor and classmates. Respect and consideration involves not talking while others are talking, actively listening, and not using any electronic devices (excluding lap-tops for note-taking) during class time. So, please be courteous by silencing your cell-phones, and refraining from text-messaging, internet browsing, and social networking until class is over.

The use of any electronic devices or any type of behaviour that is distracting or disrespectful to others (i.e., chatting, writing, notes, texting, social networking, etc.,) will be noted. If you are caught using electronic devices in any of these ways, you may be asked to leave the classroom, or it may result in confiscation/ban.

ASSIGNMENT POLICIES & GUIDELINES:

Assignment Submission

All assignments are to be handed in to me in class or my essay box by the end of day on the due date **in hard copy form**. I will provide a rubric for each assignment in advance.

- **Note 1:** I will not mark emailed assignments, only hard copies.
- **Note 2:** Please make sure to keep an extra hard copy of your assignments and retain the graded copy of your assignment until after the term's end.

Late Policy

All late assignments are subject to late penalties of 2% per day including weekends unless proper documentation is provided. I will grant assignment extensions in the case of

extenuating circumstances or with the provision of official documentation—please try to arrange extensions with me as early as possible.

Form and Presentation

All typewritten assignments must be stapled in the upper-left corner and must have page numbers in the upper-right corner (this includes page numbers for works cited). Each page must have one-inch margins all around, be double-spaced throughout, using 12-point font, and an appropriate font (i.e., Times New Roman, Arial, etc.). Your title page is the first, unnumbered page, of your document (must include your name, the course code, the date, the instructor's name, and your essay's title). Please see MLA guidelines for title page formatting.

Essays should be well-written, thoughtful, concise, and well-argued. Above all, please make it evident that you have taken some “care” of your work prior to submission. That is to say, take time to proofread and edit your essay for obvious typos, misspellings, and basic errors in grammar and punctuation. Adherence to formatting guidelines constitutes part of the grade for each assignment.

Plagiarism & Intellectual Honesty

Plagiarism is a serious intellectual offense. To present someone else's ideas or work (either a published author's book or article, a friend's essay, a classmate's notes, or Internet materials) as your own is plagiarizing, and it is detrimental to your academic career. Please see the University of Waterloo Academic Integrity Webpage (<https://uwaterloo.ca/academic-integrity/>) for more information and UW Policy sections on “Academic Integrity” and “Discipline” below

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Academic Integrity: To maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo and its Affiliated and Federated Institutions of Waterloo (AFIW) are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. See the [UWaterloo Academic Integrity webpage and the Arts 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 their 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 Associate Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under the [St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Discipline](#). For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to [University of Waterloo 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 their university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. [Read the St. Jerome's University](#)

[Policy on Student Petitions and Grievances.](#)

Appeals: A decision made or penalty imposed under the St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Petitions and Grievances (other than a petition) or the St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Discipline may be appealed if there is a ground. A student who believes they have a ground for an appeal should refer to the [St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Appeals](#).

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.

READING SCHEDULE

UNIT ONE: Heroic Forefathers

Week 1: May 1	Hero Myth Review syllabus; course policies; Complete & discuss questionnaire Joseph Campbell's Monomyth: The Heroic Journey
Week 2: May 8	First Hero Archetypes, Myths, & Society Reading: <i>The Epic of Gilgamesh</i>
Week 3: May 15	Classical Hero; Greek Myth Reading: Hesiod's <i>Theogony</i> and <i>Works and Days</i> Quiz 1

UNIT TWO: The Rise of the Comic Book Superhero

Week 4: May 22	Origins of the Superhero Genre—Superhero Archetype Victoria Day Holiday—NO CLASS
May 23 (makeup class)	Reading: <i>All-Star Superman</i> PBS Documentary Film: <i>Superheroes: A Never-Ending Battle</i>
Week 5: May 29	Guest Lecture: Interpreting Sequential Art Reading: <i>The Dark Night Returns</i> Quiz 2

UNIT THREE: Superheroes: Dark & Deconstructed

- Week 6:**
June 5 **Superheroes & Psychology**
The Dark Night Returns; Film Clips: Nolan's *Batman Begins*
- Week 7:**
June 12 **Supervillains: The Joker**
Film Preview: Nolan's, *The Dark Knight*
Recommended Reading: *The Killing Joke*
DUE: Visual Analysis
- Week 8:**
June 19 **Revisionist Superhero Fantasy: Fallen Heroes**
Reading: *Watchmen*
<http://scalar.usc.edu/works/who-revises-the-revisionists-defining-post-watchmen-comics/watchmen-deconstructionist-or-revisionist-fantasy>
Quiz 3

UNIT FOUR: Girl Power: Feminism and Heroism

- Week 9:**
June 26 **Female Superhero Icon**
Reading: *Wonder Woman Vol 1: Blood*
Gain Simone: "Women in Refrigerators"
<http://lby3.com/wir/>
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_in_Refrigerators
- Week 10:**
July 3 Canada Day Holiday—NO CLASS
- Week 11:**
July 10 **Magic, Mysticism, and the Female Imaginary**
Reading: *Promethea* Book 1
Quiz 4

UNIT FIVE: Margins of Heroism: Freaks, Geeks, and Minorities in the Superhero Tradition

- Week 12:**
July 17 **The Geek Hero**
Reading: *Ms. Marvel: No Normal*
Recommended Film: Sam Raimi's *Spider-Man*
DUE: Major Essay
- Week 13:**
July 24 **Race, Ethnicity, and The Anti-Hero**
Reading: *X-Men: God Loves, Man Kills*
Quiz 5

