

Comics and Contemporary America

English 425 | Spring 2021 | UVic

An online course for 40 students

Meetings: Monday, 11:30am-12:50pm

Office Hours: Monday, 1-2pm + 3:30-4:30pm

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With Faith Ryan (she / her / hers), TA

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Contents:

- [Territory Acknowledgement](#)
 - [Description](#)
 - [Aims](#)
 - [About Us](#)
 - [Assignments](#)
 - [Meetings](#)
 - [Workload](#)
 - [Comics](#)
 - [Schedule](#)
 - [Policies](#)
 - [Prompts](#)
-

Territory Acknowledgement

As researchers and instructors who have the privilege to live and work as guests on these lands, we acknowledge with respect that the University of Victoria is located on the unceded territory of the Lekwungen peoples and the Songhees, Esquimalt, and WSÁNEĆ First Nations, whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

Description

Comics are integral to the study of America and American fiction today. They experiment with representation, play with genre, speak truth to power, and prompt important conversations about art and culture. We'll discuss these topics and more by engaging the politics and aesthetics of 21st-century comics and sampling various critical approaches to

them. You'll learn how comics work, why they matter, and how to write about them for popular and academic audiences.

Aims

You'll have the opportunity to:

1. Demonstrate various strategies for approaching comics. You'll develop a vocabulary for talking about them, too.
2. Interpret comics in the context of fiction and contemporary America (2000 to the present) while attending to some histories of comics and their genres.
3. Identify techniques people use to make comics and explain why the aesthetics of comics matter today.
4. Articulate the relationship between comics and power, including the subversive and normative elements of comics.
5. Communicate critically *about* comics and *with* them. This means you'll treat comics as not only evidence or examples (communicating *about* comics) but also ways of experiencing and understanding the world (communicating *with* comics).

We will assume you've no previous experience studying comics in an academic setting.

About Us

My name is Jentery Sayers (he / him / his; jentery@uvic.ca). I'm a settler scholar and associate professor of English and Cultural, Social, and Political Thought (CSPT) at UVic. I also direct the [Praxis Studio](#) for Comparative Media Studies. I did my MA and PhD in English at the University of Washington in Seattle, and I grew up in Richmond, Virginia, where I got my BA and BS at Virginia Commonwealth University. I've been at UVic since 2011, and I teach courses on American fiction, media and cultural studies, and experimental prototyping. This is the 35th class I've taught here, but only my third online. I'll be learning a bit as we go. Thanks for your patience.

And my name is Faith Ryan (she / her / hers). I'm a settler on unceded Lekwungen and WSÁNEĆ lands, and I am grateful for the years I've been able to study here. I'm a graduate student in English at UVic, and I did my BA at UVic as well. I'm originally from Ogden, Utah, but I spent most of my high school years in the lower mainland BC. I like contemporary Canadian and American fiction and approaching culture, in all its forms, from a disability studies perspective. Feel free to reach out over the term, even if you're unsure whether it's something I can assist you with. If it isn't, then I can point you in the right direction. I hope you enjoy the course!

Assignments

We are asking you to respond to four [prompts](#) this term, and we'll invite you to revise one of those responses. Each response will constitute 25% of your final grade.

There are no quizzes, exams, discussion forums, or student presentations in this course. There is no participation mark, either. Both of us will mark your responses to the prompts and provide feedback on your work.

All the [prompts](#) are included in this outline, and due dates are provided in the [schedule](#). Please submit each of your responses via Brightspace. (See submission links in the [schedule](#).) We cannot accept submissions by email.

Please note that each [prompt](#) affords two ways to respond to it, and not all responses are academic essays. You should pick *one* of the two options in the prompt and then consider your audience as well as the assignment's aims (mentioned in the prompt) as you respond. We'll use the aims as guides to mark your responses.

Meetings

We will meet on *Mondays from 11:30am to 12:50pm*. Please check your email and/or Brightspace for the Zoom URL, which will remain the same throughout the entire term.

Meetings will combine lecture with group discussion and the occasional breakout room. They will also involve exercises (or experiments) in communicating critically *with* comics (see the [schedule](#) for details). Please come to each session prepared to discuss the assigned material and participate in the exercises. We will invite you to comment on the [comics](#) we're reading, talk about them with other people in the class, and share what you cook up during the exercises. Your contributions during a given meeting may be communicated through text, audio, and/or video in Zoom.

A video recording of each meeting will be circulated, with your permission, via Brightspace.

Workload

One of the most important things to know about this course is that *we'll opt for care in every instance*. If the workload becomes too much, or we're juggling more than we should, then we'll cut materials, including assignments, as we go. We've planned for the maximum in advance, under the assumption that we won't get to everything. And that's totally fine.

We suggest dedicating an average of 3 to 5 hours of study each week to this course, plus 1.5 hours for the weekly [meetings](#). To frame expectations and decrease overwork, we assign in the [schedule](#) a number of recommended hours to each week of the course, and we communicate progress in terms of weekly steps (0-14) toward completing the course, partly because online learning makes time weird for us all, and focusing on anything is a struggle during a pandemic.

Of course, 3 to 5 hours per week is only a guideline. You may find that you need (or want) more or less time depending on the activity, your preferences, what you can manage during a given week of life and online learning, and your own familiarity with the comics and concepts involved.

Comics

Here's a list of the comics we'll read this term. They're available at the [UVic Bookstore](#). You are also welcome to read them as ebooks on a tablet or in your browser, if you'd prefer. You should spend no more than \$117 (before taxes) on these books. Purchasing used copies or ebooks, or relying on subscription services, will save you money. (Ebooks may total as little as \$47 for this course, saving you up to \$70 before taxes.)

- *Ms. Marvel*, Vol. 1: *No Normal* (2014), by G. Willow Wilson, Adrian Alphona, and Jake Wyatt
- Victor LaValle's *Destroyer* (2017), by Victor LaValle and Dietrich Smith
- *Monstress*, Vol. 1: *Awakening* (2016), by Marjorie Liu and Sana Takeda
- *Daytripper* (2010), by Fábio Moon and Gabriel Bá
- *Special Exits* (2010), by Joyce Farmer

You may want to pick up Hillary Chute's *Why Comics? From Underground to Everywhere* (2017) and/or Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (1993), too. We'll refer to both throughout the term, but having your own copies won't be necessary.

We will also share examples of work by some (or perhaps all) of the following people during our meetings: Weshoyot Alvitre, Rosaire Appel, Kyle Baker, Lynda Barry, Alison Bechdel, Joyce Brabner, Charles Burns, Emily Carroll, Ezra Clayton Daniels, Eleanor Davis, Kelly Sue DeConnick, Will Eisner, Sigrid Ellis, Emil Ferris, Matt Fraction, Neil Gaiman, Dave Gibbons, Kieron Gillen, Phoebe Gloeckner, Roberta Gregory, Joy Harjo, the Hernandez brothers, John Jennings, Stephen Graham Jones, Tom King, Jack Kirby, Stan Lee, Jeff Lemire, Sloane Leong, Erik Loyer, David Mazzuchelli, Scott McCloud, Jamie McKelvie, Carla Speed McNeil, Mike Mignola, Alan Moore, Robert Morales, Brennan Lee Mulligan, Molly Ostertag, Harvey Pekar, Ed Piskor, Greg Rucka, Gail Simone, Nick Sousanis, Art Spiegelman, Frank Stack, Fiona Staples, Brian K. Vaughan, Tillie Walden, Chris Ware, Bill Watterson, Delicia Williams, and Gene Luen Yang.

Finally, near the end of the term, we'll read Raymond Williams's "The Analysis of Culture" (1961), available via Brightspace in PDF; in March, we'll watch Erik Loyer's ["Timeframing: Temporal Aesthetics in Digital Comics"](#) (2020); and, in February, we hope to screen, ["White Scripts and Black Supermen: Black Masculinities in Comic Books"](#) (2010), which was produced, written, and directed by Jonathan Gayles. In early February, we will draw lecture material from Stuart Hall's "Notes on Deconstructing 'The Popular'" (1981) and ["Dr. Julian Chambliss on the Comic Book Industry"](#) (2014). We will make a PDF of Hall's essay available to you, and Dr. Chambliss's video is already available on YouTube. Please also note that Dr. Chambliss is now at Michigan State University.

Schedule

Here's our schedule for the term. We've designed it to scaffold the learning process by presenting the course as a series of 15 steps (0-14), each with instructions and (where applicable) assigned readings, accompanied by a number of recommended hours to spend on the tasks at hand. The final step corresponds with the completion of the course (during UVic's exam period).

We will use a Brightspace announcement to notify you of any changes to the schedule.

Please note: we'll conduct an exercise during most of our meetings. Although these exercises will encourage you to communicate about and with comics (by drawing or doodling, for instance), we by no means expect you to produce something detailed or refined. This is not an art class. Stick figures, simple shapes, and outlines are welcome, and please feel free to use whatever is easiest for you (pencil and paper, software, mouse and screen) when participating.

Please also note: throughout the schedule and this syllabus, we treat "comics" in the plural, where comics are works or publications. People often treat "comics" in the singular, too, as a medium: "Comics is the practice of . . ." If you prefer to speak of comics as a medium (singular), then feel free.

Step 0 (Jan. 11): Hello!

This week's step should consume no more than *two hours* of your time outside our weekly meeting.

Before or just after our first meeting on Monday, January 11th, please:

1. Take a moment to read the entire course outline, including all the [policies](#) and each of the [prompts](#), as well as the steps (0-14) outlined in this schedule. No worries if you don't quite grasp what's happening in the prompts. We'll elaborate on each them later in the term.
2. Email us any questions or concerns you have about the course. You are also welcome to make an appointment.
3. Purchase or acquire the [comics](#) for this course. There should be five books: *Ms. Marvel* (Vol. 1), Victor LaValle's *Destroyer*, *Monstress* (Vol. 1), *Daytripper*, and *Special Exits*.

During our meeting, we'll:

1. Introduce ourselves.
2. Review the course outline.
3. "Stage" the course material with a brief discussion of why we're reading comics in the context of contemporary American fiction and culture.

Step 1 (Jan. 18): Terms, Techniques, and Histories

This week's step should consume no more than *two hours* of your time outside our weekly meeting.

Before our meeting on Monday, January 18th, please:

1. Skim the five **comics** we're studying this term. There's no need to read them quite yet, but please familiarize yourself with the authors, illustrators, publishers, and book descriptions (the "metadata," if you will, for each comic).
2. Identify a comic or two not on our **list** but with which you're familiar. Maybe you've read only an issue or strip of it. Or perhaps you're familiar with it in a more general sense: as something iconic or popular beyond a particular work. Come prepared to talk, if only briefly, about it during our meeting on the 18th. Ideally, it's published in America, written by someone in America, or illustrated by someone in America. (The industry's division of labour is worth noting here. The lone "auteur" model of artistic control and influence rarely, if ever, applies to mainstream comics, which are made by many people. Sometimes, however, an underground or independent comic is produced by one person. We'll get to that later in the term.)

During our meeting, we'll talk about:

1. Terms (such as grid, panel, gutter, and caption as well as strip, book, webcomic, and graphic novel) used to craft and study comics.
2. Some histories of comics (starting with Hogarth's 18th-century engravings and Töpffer's 19th-century comic strips).
3. Some techniques (like scripts, thumbnails, roughs, inking, and lettering) used to make comics.
4. Our working assumptions about comics and contemporary America.
5. How we might define comics (no small task!).

Our exercise for this step (conducted during our meeting on the 18th): Determine, by way of examples, when words and images (or only images?) become a comic. What's especially tricky about defining comics? (Inspired by James Sturm.)

Step 2 (Jan. 25): Superhumans and Dual Identities

This week's step should consume no more than *three hours* of your time outside our weekly meeting.

Before our meeting on Monday, January 25th, please:

1. Read *Ms. Marvel*, Vol. 1: *No Normal*. Take notes as you go, with attention to how the comic communicates dual identities as well as various aspects of the superhuman, including the depiction of superheroines and superheroes. What makes them "super"?
2. Come prepared to our meeting to talk about the superhuman, dual identities, and *Ms. Marvel*.

During our meeting, we'll talk about:

1. The superhuman as a genre ("superhero comics" and, for instance, Superman's debut in *Action Comics* #1 in 1938).
2. The superhuman's relation to norms and power (such as its relation to the state, magic, technology, and "ordinary" abilities).
3. What *Ms. Marvel* is doing politically and aesthetically as a comic in the 21st century.
4. How *Ms. Marvel* re-imagines "superhero comics" and experiments with them.

Our exercise for this step (conducted during our meeting on the 25th): Use amplification by way of simplification to render a comic book character even more cartoonish. How does amplification engage the "ordinary" or superhuman? (Inspired by Charles Sanders Peirce and Scott McCloud.)

Content warnings for *Ms. Marvel*: physical violence, racism, sexism, Islamophobia, identity jokes

Step 3 (Feb. 1): Popular Media, Fiction, and Culture

Please note: *Your response to Prompt 1 is due by 11:30am on Monday, February 1st.*

This week's step should consume no more than *five hours* of your time outside our weekly meeting.

Before our meeting on Monday, February 1st, please:

1. Respond to [Prompt 1](#) and submit your response via Brightspace (link coming soon).
2. Email us any questions or concerns you have you about [Prompt 1](#), especially if you would like us to clarify something in the prompt.
3. Come prepared to our meeting to talk about what the "popular" in popular media, fiction, or culture means to you.

During our meeting, we'll talk about:

1. How to critically approach popular media, fiction, and culture in the context of comics, from pulps and mainstream entertainment to underground, independent, and alternative comics / "comix," including minicomics and webcomics. We'll touch on the notions of "hegemony" and fandom here, too, as well as Stuart Hall's "Notes on Deconstructing 'The Popular'" (1981).
2. Examples of how the norms of popular formats and contemporary America are rehearsed, subverted, parodied, and rewritten in comics. We'll survey work by Kyle Baker, Charles Burns, the Hernandez brothers (Gilbert, Jamie, and Mario Hernandez), Sigrid Ellis, Roberta Gregory, Stephen Graham Jones, Tom King, Jack Kirby, Stan Lee, Carla Speed McNeil, Mike Mignola, Robert Morales, Brennan Lee Mulligan, Molly Ostertag, Ed Piskor, Greg Rucka, and Gail Simone.
3. The Comics Code Authority ("Comics Code") of 1954 and its role in interpreting American culture and comics today.
4. The video, ["Dr. Julian Chambliss on the Comic Book Industry."](#)

Our exercise for this step (conducted during our meeting on the 1st): Doodle a comic book character from memory. How does the popular persist through images, including mental ones? (Inspired by Lynda Barry and Ivan Brunetti.)

Step 4 (Feb. 8): Adaptation, Race, and Gender

This week's step should consume no more than *three hours* of your time outside our weekly meeting.

Before our meeting on Monday, February 8th, please:

1. Read Victor LaValle's *Destroyer* and take notes as you go. Attend to how the comic adapts Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (or, if you've not read it, then rely on your impressions of Shelley's novel and/or accounts of Frankenstein's creature in popular culture). Also note how race and gender operate in the novel and its commentary on contemporary America. You may want to recall how *Ms. Marvel* engages race and gender, too.
2. Come prepared to talk about adaptation, gender, and race in LaValle's *Destroyer* during our February 8th meeting.

During our meeting, we'll talk about:

1. How comics adapt other media and formats, and vice versa (novel-to-comic and comic-to-film, for instance).
2. The "medium specificity" of comics, such as how they are drawn and rely on grids and "still" panels.
3. The intersections of adaptation with race and gender, including histories of stereotypes, racism, and heteropatriarchy in comics. We'll look at John Jennings's work here.
4. What Victor LaValle's *Destroyer* is doing politically and aesthetically with adaptation and comics in the 21st century. (We'll touch on *Ms. Marvel*, too, if we have time.)
5. The particulars of *Destroyer*'s relationship with *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*.

During this week, we would also like to screen Gayles's [White Scripts and Black Supermen: Black Masculinities in Comic Books](#). (Details about this potential screening are coming soon. It will happen outside our regular Monday meeting time.)

Our exercise for this step (conducted during our meeting on the 8th): Add a transition to a comic by sketching a new panel next to an existing one. Types of transitions in comics include moment-to-moment, action-to-action, subject-to-subject, scene-to-scene, aspect-to-aspect, and non-sequitur (see McCloud's *Understanding Comics*, pages 70-74). What is *not* shown or communicated in the transition between panels, and what are readers left to imagine? (Inspired by Hillary Chute and Scott McCloud.)

Content warnings for Victor LaValle's *Destroyer*: racism, sexism, police brutality, physical violence, gore

Step 5 (Feb. 15): Take a Break

We do not meet this week. It's reading break. Enjoy it!

Step 6 (Feb. 22): Art and Literature

Please note: *Your response to Prompt 2 is due by 5pm on Monday, February 22nd.*

This week's step should consume no more than *five hours* of your time outside our weekly meeting.

By 5pm on Monday, February 22nd, please:

1. Respond to [Prompt 2](#) and submit your response via Brightspace (link coming soon).
2. Email us any questions or concerns you have you about [Prompt 2](#), especially if you would like us to clarify something in the prompt.
3. Come prepared to our meeting to talk about your impressions of how comics intersect with art and literature.

During our meeting, we'll talk about: 1. Material from previous steps that we've failed to address due to the pressures of time and online learning. 2. How comics encourage us to engage, or even rethink, the notions of art and literature. Here, we'll touch on terms such as sequential art, graphic art, graphic novels, and graphic narrative. 3. Examples of art comics and literary comics, such as *RAW* (1980-92), Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* (2006), *Watchmen* (1986-87), Weshoyot Alvitre and Joy Harjo's "Deer Dancer" (1990, 2018), Eleanor Davis's *How to be Happy* (2014), and abstract comics by Rosaire Appel. 4. How the course is going, what's working, and what we may need to change.

Our exercise for this step (conducted during our meeting on the 22nd): Change the word-image relation within a panel of a comic. When and why are particular word-image relationships deemed to be literary or artistic? How are the "verbal" and "visual" tracks of the panel interpreted together and independently? (Inspired by Hillary Chute, Christian Hill, and Scott McCloud.)

Step 7 (Mar. 1): Horror and Fantasy

This week's step should consume no more than *three hours* of your time outside our weekly meeting.

Before our meeting on Monday, March 1st, please:

1. Read *Monstress*, Vol. 1: *Awakening*. Take notes as you go. Recall our discussions of race, gender, the superhuman, and popular culture while also attending to the comic's horror and fantasy elements. How would you describe the comic as either horror or fantasy? You may also want to recall the horror and science fiction elements of LaValle's *Destroyer*.
2. Come prepared to our meeting to talk about horror and fantasy in the comic.

During our meeting, we'll talk about:

1. Horror as a genre of comics, including its depictions of monstrosity and relationship to dread. We may touch on LaValle's *Destroyer* here.
2. Fantasy as a genre of comics, including its use of worldbuilding and conjecture. We may touch on Tillie Walden's *On a Sunbeam* here as well as Sloane Leong's *Prism Stalker*.
3. What *Monstress*, its matriarchy, and its alternate history (1900s Asia) are doing politically and aesthetically in the context of genre and American culture.
4. How *Monstress* also draws from manga, Westerns, and war comics.

Our exercise for this step (conducted during our meeting on the 1st): Change the "shot" (perspective or camera) of a panel by "zooming" in on it and also "zooming" out on it. This should result in two new panels, both of which change the framing of the original panel. How does zooming shape feelings of horror or a sense of fantasy? (Inspired by Eric Hayot and Patrick Welch.)

Content warnings for *Monstress*: death, gore, torture, ableism, racism, physical violence, sexual violence

Step 8 (Mar. 8): Meta Time

This week's step should consume no more than *four hours* of your time outside our weekly meeting.

Before our meeting on Monday, March 8th, please:

1. Read *Daytripper* and take notes on its treatment of time, including when it feels "meta" (how it comments or reflects on its status as a comic, for instance). You may also want to recall our recent discussion of fantasy and, earlier in the term, our conversations about magic and technology in superhero comics. What about this comic strikes you as magical or fantastical?
2. Watch Erik Loyer's "[Timeframing: Temporal Aesthetics in Digital Comics](#)" and take notes on his remarks about time in digital and print comics.
3. Come prepared to our meeting to talk about Loyer's video as well as time in *Daytripper* and its meta elements.

During our meeting, we'll talk about:

1. The meta elements of comics (such as formal experimentation and authorial or reader awareness) as well as metacomics as a genre, including work by Emil Ferris and Chris Ware.
2. How *Daytripper* approaches time and mortality as both themes and devices, with attention to some terms (chronology, extra-diegetic, non-diegetic, duration, sequence, parallel, and serialization, for instance) often used to talk about time in comics. (Note that *Daytripper* was published serially as ten issues or "chapters.") We'll look to Loyer's work here, too, and draw some examples from webcomics and motion comics.

3. Why a Brazilian work (Moon and Bá are from São Paulo) matters for conversations about American culture and comics, including other comics in this course. (If we have time, then we might touch on comics as "world literature.")

Our exercise for this step (conducted during our meeting on the 8th): Pick a serialized comic that does not unfold chronologically. Now describe or sketch the plot in chronological order. You might even create a timeline for the series, if you wish. What is lost and gained when rendering it chronological? What are the comic's key moments? (Inspired by Patrick Welch.)

Content warnings for *Daytripper*: death, alcohol, partial nudity

Step 9 (Mar. 15): Lettering and Colour

Please note: *Your response to Prompt 3 is due by 11:30am on Monday, March 15th.*

This week's step should consume no more than *five hours* of your time outside our weekly meeting.

Before our meeting on March 15th, please:

1. Respond to [Prompt 3](#) and submit your response via Brightspace (link coming soon).
2. Email us any questions or concerns you have about [Prompt 3](#), especially if you would like us to clarify something in the prompt.
3. Come prepared to our meeting to talk about your impressions of lettering and colour in comics.

During our meeting, we'll talk about:

1. Material from previous steps that we've failed to address due to the pressures of time and online learning.
2. The important roles that lettering and colour play in interpreting comics as fiction, with examples drawn from works such as *Asterios Polyp*, *The Wicked + the Divine*, and *Saga*.
3. What lettering and colour have to do with studies of American culture.

Our exercise for this step (conducted during our meeting on the 15th): Change the lettering of a panel to purposefully alter how it would be interpreted. Try a style or approach that's believable, rather than one that's unlikely or absurd. How is text also an image? (Inspired by Will Eisner and Hassan Otsmane-Elhaou.)

Step 10 (Mar. 22): Graphic Memoir

This week's step should consume no more than *four hours* of your time.

Before our meeting on Monday, March 22nd, please:

1. Read *Special Exits* and take notes. Based on this comic, what might be some elements or conventions of graphic memoir?

2. Come to our meeting prepared to talk about graphic memoir and *Special Exits*.

During our meeting, we'll talk about:

1. Graphic memoir as a genre, including examples such as Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*, Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, Gene Luen Yang's *Dragon Hoops*, and Craig Thompson's *Blankets*.
2. The relationship between graphic memoir, history (including recordings and evidence), and fiction. Here, we'll also return to our conversation about time as a theme and a device.
3. What *Special Exits* is doing politically and aesthetically with graphic memoir in the 21st century. Here, we might compare it with works such as *Our Cancer Year*, by Harvey Pekar, Joyce Brabner, and Frank Stack; *Diary of a Teenage Girl*, by Phoebe Gloeckner; and *Upgrade Soul*, by Ezra Clayton Daniels.

Our exercise for this step (conducted during our meeting on the 22nd): Describe or sketch yourself as a character in a graphic memoir. Then, in a sentence or two, tell readers what the memoir is about. Whose account is it, for instance, and of what? How does imagining yourself in a memoir shape your take on graphic memoir in general? (Inspired by Alison Bechdel.)

Content warnings for *Special Exits*: death, illness, nudity, difficult conversations with parents

Step 11 (Mar. 29): Comics and/as American Culture

This week's step should consume no more than *four hours* of your time.

Before our meeting on Monday, March 29th, please:

1. Review all the comics we read this term. What about them (or at least one of them) sticks with you? What have you learned most from them about comics and contemporary America?
2. Read "The Analysis of Culture" (1961), by Raymond Williams (link coming soon). Take notes on how Williams categorizes culture and then engages those categories. Note, too, his remarks about "selection" and "interpretation."

During our meeting, we'll talk about comics and culture as:

1. Ideals and values.
2. Records and evidence.
3. Communities, practices, and ways of living.

We'll then consider the five comics we read this term in the context of contemporary America. What values do they rehearse or trouble? What do they record or document? How are they associated with particular groups, practices, or communities?

Our exercise for this step (conducted during our meeting on the 29th): Select what you consider to be an important panel or page from a comic you read. Describe it in a sentence

or two. Then explain how your selection and description are also acts of interpretation (claims for significance, for instance).

Step 12 (Apr. 5th): Recap and Revise

Please note: *Your revised response to a previous prompt (1, 2, or 3) is due by 11:30am on Monday, April 5th. This assignment is optional.*

This week's step should consume no more than *four hours* of your time *if* you decide to revise one of your previous responses.

Before our meeting on Monday, April 5th, you are welcome to:

1. Revise your response to [Prompt 1](#), [Prompt 2](#), or [Prompt 3](#) and submit that revised response via Brightspace (link coming soon). This is optional, and you can revise only one response. If you do revise, then we recommend reviewing the prompt as well as the feedback we provided on your initial response.
2. Email us any questions or concerns you have you about the revision process.

During our meeting, we'll talk about:

1. Material from previous steps that we've failed to address due to the pressures of time and online learning.
2. What we've studied, discussed, and learned this term. We'll do our best to distill it all.

Our exercise for this step (conducted during our meeting on the 5th): Identify what you consider to be the most important thing you learned about comics and contemporary America this term. Then identify something you still want to learn or learn more about.

Step 13 (Apr. 12th): Share a Comic

This week's step should consume no more than *four hours* of your time.

Before our meeting on Monday, April 12th, please:

1. Identify a comic you'd like to share with other people in this class. It can, but does *not* need to be, from the 21st century or somehow relevant to contemporary America. Although it should not be one of the five assigned comics, it may be something we've mentioned in class, including anything mentioned (but not assigned) in the steps above.
2. Access that comic. Perhaps you already own it, a friend has a copy you can borrow, or you can get it from a library, subscription service, or bookstore. Prepare to bring it to our meeting on the 12th.
3. Reread or skim the comic and then write a sentence about it. On the 12th, we'll ask you to share the comic and your sentence with the class. How is the comic relevant to this course and what we've discussed this term? Or, why should people read it (or not read it)?

During our meeting, we'll share comics, talk about them, and discuss what they bring to the table of "Comics and Contemporary America." We'll also complete course experience surveys.

Step 14 (Apr. 19th): Series Finale

Please note: *Your response to Prompt 4 is due by 5pm on Monday, April 19th. Extensions until Thursday, April 22nd at 5pm will be available upon request by email.*

It's the examination period at UVic, so we don't have a meeting this week.

For your final in this course, please:

1. Respond to [Prompt 4](#) and submit your response via Brightspace (link coming soon) by *Monday, April 19th at 5pm.*
2. Email us any questions or concerns you have you about [Prompt 4](#), especially if you would like us to clarify something in the prompt.

This week's step (the final) should consume no more than *seven hours* of your time.

Thank you! We hope you enjoy your summer.

Policies

Here are the policies for English 425, "Comics and Contemporary America."

Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites for this 400-level English course.

Brightspace

We will rely as little as possible on Brightspace for this course. We will not use it for discussions, surveys, or polls, and you won't need it to write or produce any of your assignments. You should be able to find most of what you need here, in this syllabus, which—for the sake of access—we copied into Brightspace. This way, you can rely entirely on Brightspace, if you prefer it.

But we will only use Brightspace for the following, most of which may arrive as emails in your inbox (see your Brightspace settings):

1. Class announcements (one each week).
2. Circulating video recordings of Zoom meetings (as part of the weekly class announcement).
3. Accessing your responses to the four [prompts](#). Links to submit those four assignments are available in the [schedule](#). This means you'll need to log into Brightspace at least four times (once per submission) this term.
4. Returning feedback and your marks.

If you cannot access the course Brightspace, then please let us know.

Assessment

Responses to two of the four prompts are required to pass this course. Failure to complete these two assignments will result in a failing N grade (calculated as a 0 for your GPA).

We will use UVic's [official grading system](#) to assess your four responses. We do not post marks publicly or outside our offices, and we do not use plagiarism detection software.

Late Submissions and Extensions

If you need to request an extension or you're concerned about the possibility of a late submission, then please email us. We understand that extensions may be necessary for numerous reasons, especially right now.

Communications

The best way to communicate with us is by email (jentery@uvic.ca), during weekly meetings (Mondays, 11:30am - 12:50pm) and office hours (Mondays, 1-2pm and 3:30-4:30pm), and by appointment (phone or Zoom).

We respond to work email between 9am and 5pm, Monday through Friday, excluding holidays.

Feedback

We will provide feedback via Brightspace on each of the four assignments.

Throughout the term, we'll request feedback from you on how the course is going. We'll also ask you to complete Course Experience Surveys at the end of term.

Attendance and Participation

Please attend the weekly Zoom meetings (Mondays, 11:30am - 12:50pm) and participate in those discussions via text, video, and/or audio. Video recordings of these meetings will be circulated via Brightspace.

There is no participation mark for this course.

Learning Climate

The University of Victoria is committed to promoting, providing, and protecting a positive, supportive, and safe working and learning environment for all its members. We are expected to adhere to [UVic's equity and human rights policies](#). You should alert me immediately if you have any questions about these policies and their application, or if you have concerns about course proceedings or participants.

Academic Integrity

We are expected to adhere to [UVic's academic integrity policy](#) and be aware of the policies for the evaluation of student course work. Violations of the integrity policy will result in a failing grade for the given assignment and may additionally result in a failing grade for the course. By taking this course, you agree that all submitted assignments may be subject to an originality review. We do not use software to detect plagiarism in essays or any other assignments.

Copyright

All course materials are made available for educational purposes and for the exclusive use of students in this course. The material is protected under copyright law, even if not marked as such. The syllabus itself is licensed [CC BY-NC 4.0](#). Any further use or distribution of materials to others requires our written permission, except under fair dealing or another exception in the Copyright Act. Violations may result in disciplinary action under the Resolution of Non-Academic Misconduct Allegations policy (AC1300).

Accessibility and Accommodation

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. If you have a disability or health consideration that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach us and/or the [Centre for Accessible Learning \(CAL\)](#) as soon as possible. CAL staff are available by appointment to assess specific needs, provide referrals, and arrange appropriate accommodations. The sooner you let us know your needs, the quicker we can assist you in achieving your learning goals.

Diversity and Inclusion

We want to create a learning environment that supports a diversity of thoughts, perspectives, and experiences, and also honours your identities across race, gender, class, sexuality, religion, and ability. Integrating diverse and different experiences is important for any critical approach to comics and fiction. We (like many people) are still in the process of learning about diverse perspectives and identities. If something is said in class (by anyone, including one of us) that makes you feel uncomfortable, don't hesitate to talk with us. If you have a name and/or set of pronouns that differ from those that appear in your University records, please let us know. If you feel like your performance in the class is being impeded by your experiences outside class, please don't hesitate to talk with us. We want to be a resource for you. You can also submit anonymous feedback, which, with your permission, we may use to make a general announcement to the course. If you prefer to speak with someone outside the course, Michael Nowlin (Chair, Department of English), is an excellent resource. Finally, please contact us or submit anonymous feedback if you have any suggestions to improve the quality of the course.

(Language for this policy was drawn from the Harriet W. Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning at Brown University, and from the work of Monica Linden, in particular.)

Online Conduct

The University of Victoria is committed to promoting critical academic discourse while providing a respectful and supportive learning environment. All members of the University community have the right to this experience and the responsibility to help create such an environment. The University will not tolerate racism, sexualized violence, or any form of discrimination, bullying, or harassment.

Please be advised that, by logging into UVic's learning systems and interacting with online resources, you are engaging in a University activity. All interactions within this environment are subject to University expectations and policies. Any concerns about student conduct may be reviewed and responded to in accordance with the appropriate University policy. To report concerns about online student conduct, email onlineconduct@uvic.ca.

Basic Needs

We want you to thrive in this course and everywhere else. Please let us know as early as possible if you have any concerns or if you require any assistance to succeed. We'll do our best to help.

If you need to cover gaps in care, then please don't hesitate to bring your children to class meetings. Babies who are nursing are always welcome, as we do not want you to choose between feeding your child and continuing your education.

UVic takes student mental health very seriously, with a [website](#) full of resources. We offer services such as assistance and referral to address students' personal, social, career, and academic concerns. Services for students also include crisis and emergency mental health consultation and confidential assessment, counselling services (individual and small group), and referrals. Many of these programs are connected with Health Services, which you may contact by phone.

The [Student Services website](#) lists several policies that you might want to know about and may make your life at UVic safer and easier. Only some of them are directly related to this course, but all of them are still important.

(Language for this policy was drawn from the work of Richard Pickard at UVic.)

Prompts

Here are the four prompts for this course. Please note that each prompt has two options for a response. You should select *one* of the two options.

Prompt 1

A response to this prompt is due via Brightspace (link coming soon) by 11:30am on Monday, February 1st.

At this point in the course, you have read *Ms. Marvel*, Vol. 1: *No Normal*, done your best to define "comics," studied superhero comics as a genre, and experimented with amplification to craft a cartoon. Now it's time to share some of what you've learned with other students.

Prompt 1, Option 1: Annotate Ms. Marvel for Grade 12 Students

Select a page (and only one page) of *Ms. Marvel* and then scan, photocopy, photograph, or somehow capture it for the purposes of annotation. You can annotate a copy on paper or screen. Your choice. But you should annotate it with the following scenario in mind . . .

Imagine you are in Victoria, teaching students in [Literary Studies 12](#) (English Language Arts) about depictions of the superhuman in comics. You've decided to rely on *Ms. Marvel* for examples, and—to start with everyone on the same page—you assume the students have never studied (or even read) comics, including superhero comics. The students will read *Ms. Marvel*, Vol. 1: *No Normal* prior to discussing it with you.

Now please annotate a page of *Ms. Marvel* to:

1. Point to particular aspects of the superhuman in *Ms. Marvel*. Here, you might want to recall our conversations on January 25th.
2. Help Literary Studies 12 students to understand superhero comics as a genre. Again, you might want to recall our conversations on January 25th.
3. Encourage Literary Studies 12 students to enjoy and understand but also question what they are reading (i.e., *Ms. Marvel* in particular and superhero comics in general).

If you have never annotated a comic, then check out [these wonderful examples](#) from Nick Sousanis's comics courses. Note, for instance, how many of the examples rely on colour coding to convey meaning and significance, and also how the comics are placed on either a larger canvas (in software) or a sheet of paper (print) to make room for the annotations.

Once you've annotated a page of *Ms. Marvel*, please convert it into an image file (digitize it, if need be) and include it alongside 100 or so words detailing why you annotated the page the way you did, and how you considered your audience (students in Literary Studies 12) along the way. Ensure your image file is relatively easy to read on a screen.

To submit your response, please attach your annotations and 100-word description as files to the "Prompt 1" assignment in Brightspace (link coming soon). Feel free to attach PDF, DOCX, RTF, HTML, JPG, and/or PNG files for your images and text.

We will use the following criteria and [UVic's official grading system](#) to assess your annotations and 100-word description:

1. The annotations are aware of their context (English Language Arts in Victoria) and audience (Literary Studies 12 students who have never studied comics, including superhero comics). They introduce terms using language the students (who may be new to the material) could understand, they rely on details and point students to particular aspects of *Ms. Marvel*, and they highlight how superhero comics are a genre

(that is, they are written or constructed to follow certain conventions and engage specific reader expectations).

2. The 100-word description demonstrates you are aware of the choices you made while annotating *Ms. Marvel* for Literary Studies 12 students. It communicates concisely why you annotated the page the way you did and how you considered your audience in the process. It may even mention what you decided to exclude or avoid while annotating. After all, your annotations of a single page can't say everything there is to say about *Ms. Marvel* or superhero comics.
3. The annotations encourage Literary Studies 12 students to enjoy and understand but also question what they are reading (*Ms. Marvel* in particular and the superhero genre in general). They are clear, descriptive, and grounded in details and examples, yet they prompt critical discussion, too.
4. The annotations and description demonstrate you read and studied *Ms. Marvel*, Vol. 1, and they apply what you learned from class lectures, discussions, and exercises on January 18th and 25th.

You should *not* circulate your annotated comics publicly or online (beyond the course Brightspace).

Submit your response now (link coming soon).

Prompt 1, Option 2: Use Ms. Marvel to Define "Comics" with Grade 12 Students

Select at least three panels from *Ms. Marvel* that demonstrate what makes comics (or at least *this* comic) interesting or unique. You may want to scan, photocopy, photograph, or somehow capture each of them as an image file. Now approach your selection with the following scenario in mind . . .

Imagine you are in Victoria, teaching students in [Literary Studies 12](#) (English Language Arts) about comics and, more specifically, how to define them. You have decided to rely on *Ms. Marvel* for examples, and—to start with everyone on the same page—you assume the students have never studied (or even read) comics, including superhero comics. The students will read *Ms. Marvel*, Vol. 1: *No Normal* prior to discussing it with you.

Now write a short plan (500 words plus at least three panels from *Ms. Marvel*) for a 30-minute workshop to engage Literary Studies 12 students in:

1. Trying to define "comics" by way of specific panels from *Ms. Marvel*. Here, you might want to recall our conversations on January 18th.
2. Grasping some key elements of comics and how they work. Again, our conversations on January 18th might be relevant here.
3. Enjoying or appreciating the comic they are reading.
4. Understanding how comics are defined while also questioning the notion of a single, all-encompassing (or unifying) definition of them.

Your plan should be written for a 30-minute workshop, as if you are teaching and communicating with Literary Studies 12 students. It is not a speech or a script you'd read aloud. It is instead a blueprint or sketch for a 30-minute activity and discussion. Perhaps your examples from *Ms. Marvel* are treated as slides, projections, or handouts, and maybe you include specific questions you'd ask students, giving them time to respond verbally or in writing. If, for the sake of learning and instruction, you wish to manipulate the examples (for instance, remove text or images from a panel of *Ms. Marvel*), and you know how, then you are welcome to do so. We also recommend practicing or role-playing your plan (if only by yourself) before you submit it. One key thing for any workshop plan is to leave room for flexibility and engagement. Another is to ensure the goals or aims are clear. This particular plan can assume whatever shape or format you prefer (an outline, a series of paragraphs, or slides with notes for the instructor, for instance); however, it should address the three learning goals listed above, and it should be written for an audience of Grade 12 students.

Once you've selected your examples (again, at least three panels) from *Ms. Marvel* and written your plan (500 words) for a 30-minute workshop, please submit them as attachments to the "Prompt 1" assignment in Brightspace (link coming soon). Feel free to attach PDF, DOCX, RTF, HTML, PPTX, GSLIDES, JPG, and/or PNG files for your images and text.

We will use the following criteria and [UVic's official grading system](#) to assess your workshop plan:

1. The plan and its examples are aware of their context (English Language Arts in Victoria) and audience (Literary Studies 12 students who have never studied comics, including superhero comics). They introduce terms using language the students (who may be new to the material) could understand, they rely on details and point students to particular aspects of *Ms. Marvel*, and they communicate or demonstrate how comics are defined. They may even highlight what makes comics interesting or unique.
2. The plan and its examples demonstrate you are aware of the choices you made while helping Literary Studies 12 students to define comics. The selection of examples appears to be deliberate (not whimsical), and it attends to some key elements of comics. The plan also helps students to begin developing a vocabulary for talking about comics, and to enjoy or appreciate the comic they are reading.
3. The plan and its examples encourage Literary Studies 12 students to understand but also question the very notion of defining comics. The plan may, for instance, acknowledge the limitations of using one comic as an example to define all comics.
4. The plan and its examples demonstrate you read and studied *Ms. Marvel*, Vol. 1, and they apply what you learned from class lectures, discussions, and exercises on January 18th and 25th.

You should *not* circulate your workshop plan publicly or online (beyond the course Brightspace).

Submit your response now (link coming soon).

Prompt 2

A response to this prompt is due via Brightspace (link coming soon) by 5pm on Monday, February 22nd. Note that 5pm is *after* our meeting. We're giving you a bit more time than usual because you're returning to class this week from reading break.

Since responding to the first prompt, you've read Victor LaValle's *Destroyer*, drawn a character from memory, experimented with transitions between panels, discussed what's implied by the "popular" in popular culture, and studied adaptation, race, and gender in comics. This prompt asks you to spend some time writing about LaValle's *Destroyer* in particular and to connect it with some of the conversations we've had since January.

Prompt 2, Option 1: Write a Letter about the Last Page of Destroyer

On the final page of LaValle's *Destroyer*, Akai says, "All I want to do is watch these kids play." The final page is also a full-page panel (a common decision in comics). How, then, might you interpret its significance not only as a closing gesture but also in relation to other parts of the book? Please address this question with this scenario in mind . . .

Having conversations with other people outside your core bubble may be somewhat rare while learning online and social distancing during a pandemic. Here, we're hoping to keep things social by asking you to write us (Faith and Jentery) a letter. We imagine most other letters you write, or most other conversations you have, are not about comics. But perhaps Victor LaValle's *Destroyer* is fascinating enough to spark an exception to the rule.

Your letter should be 500-750 words, follow the conventions of a letter (including a date, salutation, body, closing, and your name or signature; maybe even a post-script), and assume we, too, have read *Destroyer* (that means we won't need much context or description). Your letter can be less formal than an academic essay yet more formal than a message to a friend or family member. Feel free to address us by our first names, use second person ("you"), refer to class discussions, and ask us questions whenever you're curious or unsure about something. Our pronouns are she / her (Faith) and he / him (Jentery). For some fun, let's imagine you're sending your letter to us by post. (No stamp required.)

Now, use the letter to help us put the final page of *Destroyer* into conversation with another page in the book. Before you start writing, you should select that other page—one that yields interesting connections or interpretations when placed next to the final one. Copying, photographing, or somehow capturing images of the two pages may render this process easier than flipping back and forth between moments in the book.

The letter should:

1. Touch upon the *verbal* and *visual* significance of *Destroyer*'s final page: what is said (by Akai) and what is shown on this page alone.

2. Touch upon the *verbal* and *visual* significance of another page of *Destroyer*: what is said and what is shown on that page alone. Feel free to choose any other page in the book.
3. Communicate and unpack the *narrative* significance of reading the two pages together: what meaning is produced when you place them side-by-side (parallel or juxtaposed) and then transition from reading one to the next (serial, closure, or connection). Here, you may want to recall the types of transitions we studied in early February. What is *not* shown or communicated in the transition from page to page, and what are readers left to imagine? How do they fill the gaps between the two pages to produce meaning?
4. Following the first three points, also communicate the *thematic* significance of Akai saying, "All I want to do is watch these kids play": how it pertains to a central message in *Destroyer* and what we're to make of it. Here, you might want to recall our discussions of race, gender, and adaptation in early February, but don't try to address *everything* we've discussed in a single letter. Pick something in particular to avoid "scope creep" (i.e., trying to address too much in a single project).
5. Ask us any questions you have about *Destroyer* and comics in general and also share any other perspectives you have on the comic at hand.

This letter is *not* an essay. You don't need an introduction, thesis, or conclusion, and you don't need to follow the usual five-paragraph structure. You can jump right into the conversation with us and walk us through your take on *Destroyer*'s last page as it relates to another moment in the book. You are welcome to include page images in your letter or to simply point us to parts of the book via page numbers or ebook locations.

Once you've written your letter to us (500-750 words), please submit it and any images you wish to include as an attachment to the "Prompt 2" assignment in Brightspace (link coming soon). Feel free to attach PDF, DOCX, RTF, HTML, JPG, and/or PNG files for your images and text.

We will use the following criteria and [UVic's official grading system](#) to assess your letter:

1. The letter is supported by examples from LaValle's *Destroyer* and is grounded in details related to their verbal and visual significance. It points the reader to the end of the comic as well as to an earlier page, to then put these two moments into conversation by juxtaposing them and transitioning from reading one to the next. It explains to us the narrative significance of this transition.
2. The letter clearly, concisely, and convincingly conveys the thematic significance of Akai's closing gesture, "All I want to do is watch these kids play," including how it pertains to a central message in *Destroyer*. It tells us what that central message is.
3. The letter is aware of its audience (Faith and Jentery), who have also read LaValle's *Destroyer*. It is less formal than an academic essay yet more formal than a message to a friend or family member. It follows the conventions of a letter.
4. The letter demonstrates you read and studied Victor LaValle's *Destroyer*, and it applies what you learned from class lectures, discussions, and exercises on February 1st and 8th.

You should *not* circulate your letter publicly or online (beyond the course Brightspace).

Submit your response now (link coming soon).

Prompt 2, Option 2: Write a Letter about Destroyer and Popular Culture

Victor LaValle's *Destroyer* adapts aspects of Shelley's canonical *Frankenstein*; or, *The Modern Prometheus* into a comic and takes Shelley's story in various new directions. It also experiments with comics, power, and representation in the process. How, then, would you describe its relation to popular culture? What's "popular" (or not) about *Destroyer*? Please address these questions with this scenario in mind . . .

Having conversations with other people outside your core bubble may be somewhat rare while learning online and social distancing during a pandemic. Here, we're hoping to keep things social by asking you to write us (Faith and Jentery) a letter. We imagine most other letters you write, or most other conversations you have, are not about comics. But perhaps Victor LaValle's *Destroyer* is fascinating enough to spark an exception to the rule.

Your letter should be 500-750 words, follow the conventions of a letter (including a date, salutation, body, closing, and your name or signature; maybe even a post-script), and assume we, too, have read *Destroyer* (that means we won't need much context or description). Your letter can be less formal than an academic essay yet more formal than a message to a friend or family member. Feel free to address us by our first names, use second person ("you"), refer to class discussions, and ask us questions whenever you're curious or unsure about something. Our pronouns are she / her (Faith) and he / him (Jentery). For some fun, let's imagine you're sending your letter to us by post. (No stamp required.)

Now, use the letter to help us better understand *Destroyer*'s relation to popular culture. Again, what's "popular" (or not) about *Destroyer*? Before you start writing, you might want to identify some key moments, or panels, in the comic. Also, you don't need to worry about referring to Shelley's *Frankenstein*. We're not assuming you've read it.

The letter should:

1. Touch upon the *cultural* significance of LaValle's *Destroyer*: for whom and by whom it was written, and under what assumptions. Be as specific as possible when considering its intended audience(s).
2. Touch upon the *aesthetic* significance of *Destroyer*: what it does with comics as a format and experience, and to what effects on people's perceptions of comics. Again, be as specific as possible.
3. Touch upon the *critical* significance of *Destroyer*: for instance, a norm it addresses, subverts, or rewrites, and to what effects on comics or culture. Here, you might want to recall our discussions of race, gender, and adaptation in early February, but don't try to address *everything* we've discussed in a single letter. Pick something in particular to avoid "scope creep" (i.e., trying to address too much in a single project).
4. Following the first three points, communicate and unpack what's "popular" (or not) about *Destroyer*: where or when, for example, it consents to a norm or rejects it, and

how. Here, you might want to recall our discussions of popular media, fiction, and culture in early February. But again, don't try to address *everything* we've discussed.

5. Ask us any questions you have about *Destroyer* and comics in general and also share any other perspectives you have on the comic at hand.

This letter is *not* an essay. You don't need an introduction, thesis, or conclusion, and you don't need to follow the usual five-paragraph structure. You can jump right into the conversation with us and walk us through your take on *Destroyer's* relation to popular culture. You are welcome to include page images in your letter or to simply point us to parts of the book via page numbers or ebook locations.

Once you've written your letter to us (500-750 words), please submit it and any images you wish to include as an attachment to the "Prompt 2" assignment in Brightspace (link coming soon). Feel free to attach PDF, DOCX, RTF, HTML, JPG, and/or PNG files for your images and text.

We will use the following criteria and [UVic's official grading system](#) to assess your letter:

1. The letter is grounded in details from *Destroyer* and tells us about the comic's cultural, aesthetic, and critical significance, from the assumptions under which it was written to its effects on people's perceptions of comics to a norm it addresses, subverts, or rewrites.
2. The letter clearly, concisely, and convincingly conveys what's "popular" (or not) about *Destroyer* and supports that observation with evidence from the comic.
3. The letter is aware of its audience (Faith and Jentry), who have also read LaValle's *Destroyer*. It is less formal than an academic essay yet more formal than a message to a friend or family member. It follows the conventions of a letter.
4. The letter demonstrates you read and studied Victor LaValle's *Destroyer*, and it applies what you learned from class lectures, discussions, and exercises on February 1st and 8th.

You should *not* circulate your letter publicly or online (beyond the course Brightspace).

Submit your response now (link coming soon).

Prompt 3

A response to this prompt is due via Brightspace (link coming soon) by 11:30am on Monday, March 15th.

Since responding to the second prompt, you've read the first volume of *Monstress*, changed the word-image relation in a panel, also changed the "shot" of a panel, studied the genres of horror and fantasy comics, and considered the relationship between art, literature, and comics. This prompt asks you to spend some time writing about *Monstress* in particular and to connect it with some of the conversations we've had since January.

Prompt 3, Option 1: Review Monstress for an Online Publication

Reviews are a very important genre of writing when it comes to contemporary fiction. They affect how works, including comics, are received, and they perform a kind of critical engagement that may address not only fandom and leisure but also comics studies in and around the academy. This prompt provides you with an opportunity to review *Monstress*, with this scenario in mind . . .

Imagine you write occasionally for an online Canadian publication about comics and comics culture. It's June 2017, and one of the venue's editors has asked you to review *Awakening*, the first volume of *Monstress*. It's a relatively short review. They've given you no more than 750 words. They are also a bit behind on this one. *Awakening* was published in July 2016, and it collects issues 1-6 of *Monstress*, which was first published in late 2015. But you take the gig.

Here are a few more important details about your audience and the venue: Your readers care about comics, know a lot about them, and probably check the publication's website at least once a week. Your venue (again, a Canadian website) publishes news, features, interviews, and reviews related to comics, including comics written, illustrated, and/or published in North America. The venue wants to have its cake and eat it, too: to engage fans of comics as well as critics in comics studies. (After all, fans may be professional critics, too.) Its editors do *not* want you tell their readers whether they should buy the first volume of *Monstress*, and the venue does *not* rate comics (on a scale of 1-10, or with thumbs up or down) on its site. The editors want you to focus instead on what exactly *Monstress* contributes to contemporary comics, including what makes it unique, compelling, generic, and/or culturally relevant.

Before you begin, you may want to give this hypothetical venue a name and, if you wish, a URL (without, of course, purchasing an actual domain). Just make sure neither is taken.

Your review (750 words) should:

1. Describe the story or plot of *Monstress*, Vol. 1. Please note that your editor asked you to avoid spoilers, where possible.
2. Describe the style and composition of *Monstress*: how, for instance, it frames images and communicates a story through words and images (or verbal and visual tracks). Here, you might recall our conversations on February 22nd.
3. Describe what *Monstress* is doing with the genre of fantasy or horror. Which expectations does it meet? Which does it subvert, resist, or reject? Here, you might recall our conversations on February 1st, February 8th, and March 1st. Consider, for instance, that *Monstress* is set in the 1900s in an alternate matriarchal Asia.
4. Note how the first volume of *Monstress* has been received to date (June 2017). Here, you might point to reviews in other venues as well as commentary on social media, including Goodreads, StoryGraph, and the usual platforms. Just make sure they were published before July 2017.
5. Communicate what exactly *Monstress* contributes to contemporary comics, including what makes it unique, compelling, generic, and/or culturally relevant.

You are welcome to include an image or two of *Monstress* in your review, if you wish.

Once you've written your review (750 words), please submit it and any images you wish to include as an attachment to the "Prompt 3" assignment in Brightspace (link coming soon). Feel free to attach PDF, DOCX, RTF, HTML, JPG, and/or PNG files for your images and text.

We will use the following criteria and [UVic's official grading system](#) to assess your review:

1. The review is grounded in details from *Monstress* and tells readers about its story, style, composition, and reception to date.
2. The review clearly, concisely, and convincingly conveys what *Monstress* is doing with the genre of fantasy or horror, including where it meets reader expectations and subverts, resists, or rejects them.
3. The review clearly, concisely, and convincingly conveys what exactly *Monstress* contributes to contemporary comics, including what makes it unique, compelling, generic, and/or culturally relevant.
4. The review is aware of its audience and venue. It is written for an online Canadian publication read regularly by fans and critics, and it refrains from rating the comic or recommending it.
5. The review demonstrates you read and studied *Monstress*, Vol. 1: *Awakening*, and it applies what you learned from class lectures, discussions, and exercises on February 22nd and March 1st in particular.

You should *not* circulate your review publicly or online (beyond the course Brightspace).

Submit your response now (link coming soon).

Prompt 3, Option 2: Review Monstress for a Podcast or Video Channel

Reviews are a very important genre of communication when it comes to contemporary fiction. They affect how works, including comics, are received, and they perform a kind of critical engagement that may address not only fandom and leisure but also comics studies in and around the academy. This prompt provides you with an opportunity to review *Monstress*, with this scenario in mind . . .

Imagine you occasionally produce audio and video content for an online Canadian publication about comics and comics culture. It's June 2017, and one of the venue's editors has asked you to review *Awakening*, the first volume of *Monstress*. It's a relatively short review. They've given you no more than five minutes. They are also a bit behind on this one. *Awakening* was published in July 2016, and it collects issues 1-6 of *Monstress*, which was first published in late 2015. But you take the gig.

Here are a few more important details about your audience and the venue: Your listeners and viewers care about comics, know a lot about them, and probably check the publication's feeds at least once a week. Your venue (again, a Canadian website) publishes podcasts and videos with news, features, interviews, and reviews related to comics, including comics written, illustrated, and/or published in North America. The venue wants

to have its cake and eat it, too: to engage fans of comics as well as critics in comics studies. (After all, fans may be professional critics, too.) Its editors do *not* want you tell their readers whether they should buy the first volume of *Monstress*, and the venue does *not* rate comics (on a scale of 1-10, or with thumbs up or down) in its video or audio. The editors want you to focus instead on what exactly *Monstress* contributes to contemporary comics, including what makes it unique, compelling, generic, and/or culturally relevant.

Before you begin, you may want to give this hypothetical venue a name and, if you wish, a URL (without, of course, purchasing an actual domain). Just make sure neither is taken. Equally important, you should decide whether you wish to produce a video or audio review for this prompt. You should consider the conventions for each as well. In your video or audio, you will probably want to introduce yourself, identify the venue (the podcast or channel), and include an intro and outro of sorts. Feel free to address your listeners or viewers directly, too, if you'd like.

Your review (five minutes) should:

1. Describe the story or plot of *Monstress*, Vol. 1. Please note that your editor asked you to avoid spoilers, where possible.
2. Describe the style and composition of *Monstress*: how, for instance, it frames images and communicates a story through words and images (or verbal and visual tracks). Here, you might recall our conversations on February 22nd.
3. Describe what *Monstress* is doing with the genre of fantasy or horror. Which expectations does it meet? Which does it subvert or reject? Here, you might recall our conversations on February 1st, February 8th, and March 1st. Consider, for instance, that *Monstress* is set in the 1900s in an alternate matriarchal Asia.
4. Note how the first volume of *Monstress* has been received to date (June 2017). Here, you might point to reviews in other venues, podcasts, and channels as well as commentary on social media, including Goodreads, StoryGraph, and the usual platforms. Just make sure they were published before July 2017.
5. Communicate what exactly *Monstress* contributes to contemporary comics, including what makes it unique, compelling, generic, and/or culturally relevant.

You are welcome to include panels and pages of *Monstress* in your video, if you wish.

Once you've produced your audio or video review (five minutes), please submit it as an attachment to the "Prompt 3" assignment in Brightspace (link coming soon). MP3, WAV, MP4, MOV, and AVI formats are fine. If you relied on a script or notes for your audio or video review, then you may attach those as well in a PDF, DOCX, RTF, HTML, JPG, or PNG file.

We will use the following criteria and [UVic's official grading system](#) to assess your review:

1. The review is grounded in details from *Monstress* and tells readers about its story, style, composition, and reception to date.

2. The review clearly, concisely, and convincingly conveys what *Monstress* is doing with the genre of fantasy or horror, including where it meets reader expectations and subverts, resists, or rejects them.
3. The review clearly, concisely, and convincingly conveys what exactly *Monstress* contributes to contemporary comics, including what makes it unique, compelling, generic, and/or culturally relevant.
4. The review is aware of its audience and venue. It is written for an online Canadian publication read regularly by fans and critics, and it refrains from rating the comic or recommending it.
5. The review demonstrates you read and studied *Monstress*, Vol. 1: *Awakening*, and it applies what you learned from class lectures, discussions, and exercises on February 22nd and March 1st in particular.

You should *not* circulate your review publicly or online (beyond the course Brightspace).

Submit your response now (link coming soon).

Prompt 4

A response to this prompt is due via Brightspace (link coming soon) by 5pm on Monday, April 19th. Extensions until Thursday, April 22nd at 5pm will be available upon request by email.

Since responding to the third prompt, you've read *Daytripper* and *Special Exits*, studied time as both a theme and device in comics, surveyed graphic memoirs and metacomics, changed the lettering of a panel, sketched yourself as a character, and analyzed the various meanings or dimensions of culture in the context of comics and contemporary America. You also selected and shared a comic with the class. This final prompt asks you to either conduct a comparative analysis of *Daytripper* and *Special Exits* or argue for the inclusion of another comic in this syllabus.

Prompt 4, Option 1: Analyze Time in Daytripper and Special Exits

We talked a lot about time in this course, especially in March. Time's been a *theme* related to memory, aging, records, productivity, and calendars, for instance. It's also been a *device*: serialization, transitions, duration, the pace and rhythm of reading, figurative time, literal time, and time's expression on the space of the page and panel. How, then, are these two treatments of time (i.e., theme and device) related in comics, and why should people care? This prompt is an opportunity for you to address these very questions via a comparative analysis of *Daytripper* and *Special Exits*. It's thus also a chance to put two comics into conversation, something you've not yet done in a prompt for this course. So, imagine this scenario . . .

A Canadian undergraduate journal in literary studies just invited submissions for a special issue on comics in the 21st century. They welcome research essays (1500-3000 words) as

well as shorter critical analyses (750-1000 words). Intrigued, you decide to submit to the journal a comparative analysis of time in *Daytripper* and *Special Exits*. The journal's readers are mostly other undergraduate students in the Humanities, but include as well some faculty members across Canada in departments such as English, Visual Arts, Writing, Communication, and Film and Media Studies. For the purposes of this prompt, you can assume the journal's readers are familiar with either *Daytripper* and *Secret Exits* in particular or comics in general. They will know terms commonly used in the composition and study of comics, including terminology related to time.

Before you begin writing, you may want to identify a specific approach to time in comics that most interests you, or at least piques your interest. You may also want to jot down the various ways that time is a theme in *Daytripper* and *Special Exits* and highlight the productive overlaps. (This exercise will make it easier to write about them both.) And you might try the same with how Moon, Bá, and Farmer craft time and frame it in their comics. Again, what are some productive overlaps? Can you, for instance, identify one shared theme and one shared device across the two comics? Once you have such overlaps in mind, you can attend to the productive differences: how *Daytripper* and *Special Exits* present readers with distinct stories and messages, for instance. Next comes the argument for why their treatment of time matters today.

Your argument (750-1000 words) should:

- Describe how both *Daytripper* and *Special Exits* approach time as a theme as well as a device. Here, you may want to recall our conversations on March 8th and 22nd.
- Draw the reader's attention to specific panels in each comic. These panels may be included as figures in the analysis.
- Engage *one* scholarly publication in comics studies. We recommend selecting a journal article, book chapter, or recorded conference talk that we already discussed this term. (This way, you don't need to do extra research if you're overwhelmed or pressed for time.) Here, you may want to recall our discussions of work by Julian Chambliss, Hillary Chute, Erik Loyer, and Scott McCloud, for example.
- Make a convincing argument for why people (or least people who study comics) should care about how *Daytripper* and *Special Exits* treat time as both a theme and a device. The argument should be contestable (people should be able to disagree with it), grounded in detail (evidence-based), interpretive (not merely descriptive), and relevant to the study of comics today. A convincing argument answers the "so what?" (or "why does this matter?") question common in literary and cultural criticism, and it sparks discussion rather than foreclosing it. It usually builds on existing scholarship, too: "While Sayers argues X, he assumes Y and tends to ignore Z. This analysis addresses that gap by refraining from Y and attending to Z." As you make your argument, you might want to recall our conversations on March 29th.
- Use MLA style (8th edition) and follow the conventions of an academic argument.

Once you've written your argument (750-1000 words), please submit it and any images you wish to include as an attachment to the "Prompt 4" assignment in Brightspace (link

coming soon). Feel free to attach PDF, DOCX, RTF, HTML, JPG, and/or PNG files for your images and text.

We will use the following criteria and [UVic's official grading system](#) to assess your argument:

1. The analysis is grounded in details, including specific panels from *Daytripper* and *Special Exits*. It also draws from one scholarly publication in comics studies, one which we may have discussed in class.
2. The analysis compares and contrasts the treatment of time as a theme as well as a device in *Daytripper* and *Special Exits*.
3. The analysis communicates a clear, concise, and convincing argument for why people (or at least people who study comics) should care about how *Daytripper* and *Special Exits* treat time as both a theme and a device. The argument is contestable, grounded in detail, interpretative, and relevant to the study of comics today. It should answer the "so what?" (or "why does this matter?") question of criticism.
4. The analysis is aware of its audience and venue. It is written for a Canadian undergraduate journal in literary studies, whose readers are mostly students and faculty in the Humanities. It follows the conventions of an academic argument and uses MLA style, and it assumes its readers are familiar with either *Daytripper* and *Secret Exits* in particular or comics in general. It does not assume we (Faith and Jentery) are the only members of its audience.
5. The analysis demonstrates you read and studied *Daytripper* and *Special Exits*, and it applies what you learned from class lectures, discussions, and exercises on March 8th, 15th, 22nd, and 29th.

You should *not* circulate your argument publicly or online (beyond the course Brightspace).

Submit your response now (link coming soon).

Prompt 4, Option 2: Add a Comic to this Syllabus

There are a lot of comics to read, and maybe you want to write about one of them for this course—say, the comic you shared with us on April 12th. This prompt is an opportunity for you to do so. After all, we could've easily studied five other works in this course. Imagine this scenario . . .

The [Canadian Society for the Study of Comics](#) invites papers on comics in the post-secondary classroom. They are looking for focused arguments (750-1000 words), informed by classroom experiences, for particular comics that should be taught and studied in the 2020s. These papers will be collected and published on the Society's website. There may also be a conference panel on the topic. Intrigued, you decide to submit a paper.

Before you proceed, you should pick a comic you believe should be taught in the post-secondary classroom of the 2020s. (Again, perhaps it's the comic you shared with us on April 12th.) Since the Society invites arguments from previous classroom learning

experiences, you may want to conduct something like a "gap analysis" of this syllabus. Where's the bias? What's taken for granted? Who and what are missing? Who and what should be included? Under what assumptions should they be included, and to what potential effects? Addressing such questions should make for a compelling argument for the comic you select. Also, for the purposes of this prompt, you can assume readers of the Society's website are students and faculty members who are familiar with comics. They will know terms commonly used in the composition and study of comics, and they may be familiar with the comic you select. You do not, by the way, need to select a comic published in America, written by someone in America, or illustrated by someone in America. We are, however, asking you to review what you learned in 425 before making your argument for another comic. Thank you for understanding.

Your argument (750-1000 words) should:

- Review your experiences learning about comics in English 425 and describe, if only briefly, what *each* of the five assigned comics contributed to your learning. The five comics are *Ms. Marvel*, *Destroyer*, *Monstress*, *Daytripper*, and *Special Exits*, and your descriptions of the contributions should be concise and specific. Here, you may want to review the syllabus and recall our conversations on March 29th.
- Based on these experiences, make a convincing argument for why a comic of your choice should be taught and studied in the post-secondary classroom of the 2020s. The argument should be contestable (people should be able to disagree with it), grounded in detail (evidence-based), interpretive (not merely descriptive), and relevant to the study of comics today. A convincing argument answers the "so what?" (or "why does this matter?") question common in literary and cultural criticism, and it sparks discussion rather than foreclosing it. It usually builds on existing scholarship, too: "While Sayers argues X, he assumes Y and tends to ignore Z. This analysis addresses that gap by refraining from Y and attending to Z." As you make your argument, you might want to recall our conversations on March 29th.
- Draw the reader's attention to specific panels in the comic you selected. These panels may be included as figures in the analysis.
- Engage *one* scholarly publication in comics studies. We recommend selecting a journal article, book chapter, or recorded conference talk that we already discussed this term. (This way, you don't need to do extra research if you're overwhelmed or pressed for time.) Here, you may want to recall our discussions of work by Julian Chambliss, Hillary Chute, Erik Loyer, and Scott McCloud, for example.
- Use MLA style (8th edition) and follow the conventions of an academic argument.

Once you've written your argument (750-1000 words), please submit it and any images you wish to include as an attachment to the "Prompt 4" assignment in Brightspace (link coming soon). Feel free to attach PDF, DOCX, RTF, HTML, JPG, and/or PNG files for your images and text.

We will use the following criteria and [UVic's official grading system](#) to assess your argument:

1. The analysis is grounded in details, including specific panels from the comic you selected. It also draws from one scholarly publication in comics studies, one which we may have discussed in class.
2. The analysis draws from your own classroom learning experiences in 425 and describes concisely what *each* of the five comics assigned in this course contributed to your learning about comics and contemporary America.
3. The analysis communicates a clear, concise, and convincing argument for why a comic of your choice should be taught and studied in the post-secondary classroom of the 2020s. The argument is contestable, grounded in detail, interpretative, and relevant to the study of comics today. It should answer the "so what?" (or "why does this matter?") question of criticism.
4. The analysis is aware of its audience and venue. It is written for the Canadian Society for the Study of Comics, whose readers are mostly students and faculty in the Humanities. It follows the conventions of an academic argument and uses MLA style, and it assumes its readers are familiar with the study and craft of comics. It does not assume we (Faith and Jentery) are the only members of its audience.
5. The analysis demonstrates you read and studied *Ms. Marvel*, *Destroyer*, *Monstress*, *Daytripper*, and *Special Exits*, and it applies what you learned from class lectures, discussions, and exercises on March 8th, 15th, 22nd, and 29th as well as April 12th.

You should *not* circulate your argument publicly or online (beyond the course Brightspace). If, based on your argument, we (Faith and Jentery) decide to adopt the comic you selected for teaching comics in the future, then we will credit you in our course materials and/or syllabus.

Submit your response now (link coming soon).

Thanks and hugs to Curtis Hisayasu (University of Washington) for all of his suggestions and advice. Thanks as well to everyone, including Samuel Adesubokan, Tracey El Hajj, Julie M. Funk, and Stefan Higgins, in the Praxis Studio for their feedback along the way.

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