

THE UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG

ENGL-4740(6)-001

Topics in Comparative Literature: Graphic Lives

Term: Fall/Winter 2013-14  
Time: Friday 2:30-5:15pm  
Room: 2C06

Professor: Dr. Candida Rifkind  
Office: 2A38  
Phone: (204) 786-9198  
Email: c.rifkind@uwinnipeg.ca

Office Hours: TTh 10:00-11:00am or by appointment

\*I will usually be available on Fridays before class for pre-arranged appointments.

---

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

"Life-writing involves, and goes beyond, biography. It encompasses everything from the complete life to the day-in-the-life, from the fictional to the factional. It embraces the lives of objects and institutions as well as the lives of individuals, families and groups.

Life-writing includes autobiography, memoirs, letters, diaries, journals (written and documentary), anthropological data, oral testimony, and eye-witness accounts. It is not only a literary or historical specialism, but is relevant across the arts and sciences, and can involve philosophers, psychologists, sociologists, ethnographers and anthropologists."

"What is Life-Writing." *Oxford Centre for Life Writing*. Wolfson College, University of Oxford. 2013. Web. 14 Aug. 2013.

This course focuses on graphic life narratives published as "alternative" comic books (vs. serial, mass market, super hero, or web comics), including some in translation. Since this is a course on life writing in comic book form, the texts belong to what is normally considered non-fiction: diary, letters, auto/biography, individual and collective biographies, collaborative auto/biography, testimonials, confession, reportage, and travel writing. However, a number of the artists and the theorists we will read challenge the line between fiction and non-fiction in life writing.

The Fall term will introduce the "classics" of graphic life narratives, with a focus on autobiography. The Winter term will focus on recent books, with an emphasis on graphic biography and its relationship to fiction, photography, and film. Students should expect to study serious topics (war, genocide, trauma, family dysfunction) in a seemingly lightweight medium. We will investigate the tensions between such serious topics and the visual pleasures of the comics page. Other topics might include gender and comics, film adaptations of comics, collaborative practices in comics, comics and "high" art, comics and translation, and various national traditions in comics.

The course takes a cultural studies approach and will include critical and theoretical readings from both life writing studies and comics studies. Students need no prior experience in reading comics, and indeed ardent comics fans may find their precepts challenged by the readings for this course. As part of our work, we will develop a critical vocabulary and protocols for writing academic essays about comic books. This is a seminar course based in student participation and it both encourages and expects active student engagement.

**REQUIRED TEXTS (available through the UW Bookstore; in order of reading)**

**Fall**

Nakazawa, Keiji. *Barefoot Gen: A Cartoon Story of Hiroshima, Vol. 1*. Trans. Project Gen. San Francisco: Last Gasp, 2004.

Spiegelman, Art. *The Complete Maus: A Survivor's Tale*. New York: Pantheon, 1996.

Barry, Lynda. *One! Hundred! Demons!* Seattle: Sasquatch, 2005.

Doucet, Julie. *My New York Diary*. Montreal: Drawn and Quarterly, 2011.

Satrapi, Marjane. *The Complete Persepolis*. New York: Pantheon, 2007.

Sacco, Joe. *Palestine Collection*. Seattle: Fantagraphics, 2001.

## Winter

Bechdel, Alison. *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2007.  
Patil, Amruta. *Kari*. Noida, UP: HarperCollins India, 2008.  
Weaver, Lisa Quintero. *Darkroom: A Memoir in Black and White*. Tuscaloosa, AL: U of Alabama P, 2012.  
Backdorf, Derf. *My Friend Dahmer*. New York: Abrams ComicArts, 2012.  
Van Sciver, Noah. *The Hypo: The Melancholic Young Lincoln*. Seattle: Fantagraphics, 2012.  
Baker, Kyle. *Nat Turner*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2008.  
Guibert, Emmanuel, Didier Lefèvre, and Frédéric Lemerrier. *The Photographer: Into War-Torn Afghanistan with Doctors Without Borders*. Trans. Alexis Siegel. New York: FirstSecond, 2009.  
Abouet, Marguerite and Clément Oubrière. *Aya: Life in Yop City*. Montreal: Drawn & Quarterly, 2012.  
Seth. *George Sprott (1894-1975)*. Montreal: Drawn and Quarterly, 2009.

**Additional material, including scholarly articles and critical theory, will be placed on Nexus. See the attached Reading Schedule and be prepared to download and print off these required texts for class.**

### RECOMMENDED TEXTS

Ellis, Allan. "Comic Art in Scholarly Writing: A Citation Guide." *University of Florida Comics Studies*. 15 Feb. 1999. Web. 1 Aug. 2011. <<http://www.english.ufl.edu/comics/scholars/guide.html>>

*MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. 7<sup>th</sup> Ed. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2009.

### ASSIGNMENTS

More information will be provided in class, well in advance of the due dates.

If any of these dates fall on a religious holiday not officially recognized by UW, please let me know well in advance.

**Scholarly literature review** **10%**  
(on Spiegelman's *Maus*, 1500-1800 words, due on October 11<sup>th</sup>)

**Seminar presentations each term** **2x10% each** **20%\***  
(max. 20 minutes each, one-page outline distributed to class)

**Textual analysis essay (2000-2500 words, due on December 13<sup>th</sup>)** **15%**

**Major Research Essay OR Graphic Life Comic + Artist's Statement** **25% (total)**

- Informal 5 min. class presentation on work in progress Feb. 14<sup>th</sup>  
(assessed as part of participation mark)
- Essay/Comic Proposal and Annotated Bibliography due Feb. 28<sup>th</sup> (5%)
- Essay/Comic + Artist's Statement due April 15<sup>th</sup> (20%)

**Class participation\*** **10%**

**Final Exam (3 hours on April 9, 2012, at 9:00am)** **20%**

\*Participation: This is a course in a relatively new field of critical study, and so we will be working collaboratively, combining our shared intellectual experiences and interdisciplinary backgrounds, to build new knowledge. Since this is a discussion-based class, attendance and participation is crucial. Any absence could impact on your performance since regular oral participation is expected and all sorts of ideas can emerge unexpectedly. As students in an Honours course, you should come prepared each week with either comments or questions to make about the assigned reading. We will often begin the discussion with a roundtable to hear each other's initial responses, reflections, and queries about the texts.

It should be obvious that mere attendance is ineffectual if you haven't done the readings. We are reading some challenging texts and so, even if the number of pages seems light for some weeks,

remember that all the texts are visual-verbal hybrids that demand slow and rigorous attention as well as recursive reading. You need to schedule sufficient time to really work through the material in order to have something to contribute in class. The participation grade is based on productive contributions to class, which includes listening and responding to each other as much as introducing your own ideas. Try not to miss more than one class a term. Please let me know in advance about any session you can't attend.

### **GRADING SCALE**

A+	90 - 100%	GPA 4.50	C+	65 - 69%	GPA 2.5
A	85 - 89%	GPA 4.25	C	60 - 64%	GPA 2.0
A-	80 - 84%	GPA 4.0	D	50 - 59%	GPA 1.0
B+	75 - 79%	GPA 3.5	F	Below 50%	GPA 0
B	70 - 74%	GPA 3.0			

### **NOTES**

1. This course outline should be considered a guideline only. Time constraints and other unforeseen factors may require that some of the above topics be omitted or covered in less detail than indicated.
2. Work submitted for evaluation must be either typed or text processed.
3. Cellular phones and other electronic devices **MUST** be turned off during classes.
4. It is the student's responsibility to retain a photocopy or digitized copy of **ALL** assignments submitted for grading; in the event of loss or theft, a duplicate copy is required.
5. Students are advised to read the pertinent pages of the current course calendar for the rules regarding Registration, Voluntary Withdrawals, Academic Misconduct including plagiarism, and Appeals. **Concerning plagiarism, please note** that as a general rule, an F in the course will be the penalty, recommended by the English Departmental Review Committee to the Senate Committee on Academic Misconduct, for plagiarism on major assignments in English Department courses.
6. Accessibility Services:  
Students with documented disabilities, temporary or chronic medical conditions, requiring academic accommodations for tests/exams (e.g., private space) or during lectures/laboratories (e.g., access to volunteer note-takers) are encouraged to contact Accessibility Services (AS) at 786-9771 or email [accessibilityservices@uwinnipeg.ca](mailto:accessibilityservices@uwinnipeg.ca) to discuss appropriate options. Specific information about AS is available on-line at <http://www.uwinnipeg.ca/accessibility>. All information about a student's disability or medical condition remains confidential.
7. The University of Winnipeg promotes a scent-free environment. Please be respectful of the needs of fellow classmates and the instructor by avoiding the use of scented products while attending lectures. Exposures to perfumes and other scented products (such as lotion) can trigger serious health reactions in persons with asthma, allergies, migraines or chemical sensitivities.
8. Please note that registering in this course commits you to the date and time of the course final examination. If you are aware of possible conflicts with that date, please see me immediately during the first week of the course, in case you need to register in another course to accommodate the conflict. For appeals for deferred exams, please see the Calendar.
9. **Tuesday, January 21<sup>nd</sup>, 2014** is the final date to withdraw without academic penalty from courses that begin in September 2013 and end in April 2014 of the 2013-14 academic year.
10. Late Assignment Penalties: I encourage you to speak with me (in person, not over email) in advance if you anticipate handing an assignment in late due to extenuating circumstances, such as illness or a personal/family emergency. **Note that having a lot of work to do for your other courses is not a reasonable excuse for a late assignment in this course.** Unless

prior arrangements have been made or you present a medical/legal note explaining why your assignment has been handed in late, the penalty for a late assignment is: 10% off immediately when it is not submitted on the due date and 2% off each extra weekday it is late. No unexplained late assignments will be accepted after they are 7 weekdays late.

11. The English Department wishes to ensure your right to privacy regarding handing in and getting back assignments is protected. Most assignments will be handed in and handed back in class or at the Instructor's office. If assignments are to be handled in another way and you are concerned about others having access to your work, you should attach to your assignment a self-addressed envelope that can be sealed. If this is not done, it is assumed that you have waived your concerns in this area.
12. Students will not be asked for identification when writing a test or examination.
13. Students are advised that the UW Bookstore may run out of textbooks early in the term. Also, the bookstore always ships textbooks back to the publisher if they are not purchased within the first few weeks of term. Students are responsible for communicating directly with the bookstore if they need to order texts or ask for texts to be held for them.
14. No unauthorized material or equipment may be brought with you to the final exam.
15. For more information regarding the English Department, please refer to our website at <http://english.uwinnipeg.ca>
15. **IMPORTANT NOTE ON EMAIL:** I only respond to students' emails during regular work hours (M-F 9am-5pm) and I may take up to 24 hours to respond. Due to the high volume of junk mail I receive, do not email me from hotmail, yahoo, gmail, or other non-UW accounts. You can use the Nexus website to contact me. Please observe professional email etiquette and do not add me to any mailing lists.
16. **IMPORTANT NOTE ON MOBILE DEVICES AND LAPTOPS:** Absolutely no texting in class. Bag texting is still texting. All mobile devices must be turned off once class begins and remain off until it is over. **Laptop use requires the instructor's permission.**
17. Please do not eat during class. There will be a sufficient break mid-afternoon for you to refuel.

## FALL TERM READING SCHEDULE

(subject to changes announced in class; N = available on Nexus; R = available on Library Reserve)

Date	<u>Required Readings</u>	Assignments and other info
Sep. 6	Introductions	
Sep.13	Comics Studies/Life Writing: Critical Foundations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Chute, "Comics as Literature?" <i>PMLA</i> 123.2 (2008): 452-65. (N)</li> <li>▪ Smith and Watson, Ch. 1 of <i>Reading Autobiography</i> (R)</li> <li>▪ McCloud, Scott. Chapter 3 of <i>Understanding Comics</i>. (N)</li> <li>▪ Hatfield, "An Art of Tensions" (N)</li> </ul>	
Sep.20	Nakazawa, Keiji. <i>Barefoot Gen: A Cartoon Story of Hiroshima</i> , Vol. 1. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Rommens, Aarnoud. "Manga story-telling/showing." <i>Image &amp; Narrative</i> 1.1 (2000). Web.</li> <li>▪ Hong, Christine. "Flashforward Democracy: American Exceptionalism and the Atomic Bomb in <i>Barefoot Gen</i>." <i>Comparative Literature Studies</i> 46.1 (2009): 125-55. Project Muse.</li> </ul>	
Sep.27	Spiegelman, Art. <i>Maus</i> . <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Hatfield, Chs. 4 and 5 of <i>Alternative Comics</i>. (R)</li> <li>▪ Smith and Watson, Ch. 2 of <i>Reading Autobiography</i>. (R)</li> </ul>	
Oct.4	Spiegelman, Art. <i>Maus</i> . <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Caruth, Cathy. "Introduction." <i>American Imago</i> 48.1 (1991): 1-12. (N)</li> <li>▪ Hirsch, "Mourning and Postmemory" in Chaney, <i>Graphic Subjects</i>. (R)</li> </ul>	
Oct.11	Excerpts from Pekar, Harvey. <i>Best of American Splendor</i> (N) and in-class screening of <i>American Splendor</i> (2003). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Bredehoft, Thomas. "Style, Voice, and Authorship in Harvey Pekar's (Auto) (Bio)Graphical Comics." <i>College Literature</i> 38.3 (2011): 97-100. Project Muse.</li> </ul>	<b><u>Scholarly Literature Review Due</u></b>
Oct.18	Barry, Lynda. <i>One Hundred Demons</i> . <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Chute, "Materializing Memory" in Chaney. (R)</li> </ul>	
Oct. 25	<b>Tour of WAG exhibit of German Expressionist Art</b> (meet at Memorial Blvd. entrance to the WAG)	<b>WAG tour = \$4.50</b>
Nov.1	Doucet, Julie. <i>My New York Diary</i> . <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Frank, Marcie. "'How Did I Get So Anal?': Queer Self-Authorization at the Margins." (N)</li> </ul>	
Nov.8	Satrap, Marjane. <i>The Complete Persepolis</i> . <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Whitlock, Gillian. "Autographics: The Seeing 'I' of the Comics." <i>Modern Fiction Studies</i> 52.4 (2006): 965-79. Project Muse.</li> <li>▪ Gilmore, "Witnessing <i>Persepolis</i>" in Chaney. (R)</li> </ul>	
Nov.15	Satrap, Marjane. <i>The Complete Persepolis</i> . <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Chute, Ch. 4 of <i>Graphic Women</i>. (R)</li> </ul>	
Nov.22	Sacco, Joe. <i>Palestine</i> . <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Walker, Tristram. "Graphic Wounds: The Comics Journalism of Joe Sacco." (N)</li> </ul>	

**Textual Analysis Essay Due before 5pm on Dec. 13**  
**NO MIDTERM EXAM**

### WINTER TERM READING SCHEDULE

(subject to changes announced in class; N = available on Nexus; R = available on Library Reserve)

Date	Required Readings	Assignments and other info
Jan.10	Bechdel, Alison. <i>Fun Home</i> ▪ Watson, "Autobiographical Disclosures" in Chaney. (R)	
Jan.17	Bechdel, Alison. <i>Fun Home</i> ▪ Warhol, Robyn. "The Space Between: A Narrative Approach to Alison Bechdel's <i>Fun Home</i> ." <i>College Literature</i> 38.3 (2011): 1-20. Project Muse. ▪ Rohy, Valerie. "In the Queer Archive: <i>Fun Home</i> ." <i>GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies</i> 16.3 (2010): 341-361. Project Muse.	
Jan.24	Patil, Amruta. <i>Kari</i> . ▪ Mehta, Suhaan. "Wondrous Capers: The Graphic Novel in India" in <i>Multicultural Comics</i> . (N)	
Jan. 31	Weaver, Lisa Quintero. <i>Darkroom</i> . ▪ Excerpt from Susan Sontag, <i>On Photography</i> . (N) ▪ Schwarz, Bill. "'Our Unadmitted Sorrow': the Rhetorics of Civil Rights Photography." <i>History Workshop Journal</i> 72 (2011): 138-55. Project Muse.	
Feb.7	Backdorf, Derf. <i>My Friend Dahmer</i> . ▪ Federman, Cary et al. "Deconstructing the Psychopath: A Critical Discursive Analysis." <i>Cultural Critique</i> 72 (2009): 36-65. Project Muse.	
Feb.14	Van Scivener, Noah. <i>The Hypo</i> . ▪ Woolf, Virginia. "The Art of Biography." (N) ▪ Excerpt from Hermione Lee, <i>Biography: A Short Introduction</i> (N)	<b>Work-in-progress reports on major research essays (5 mins. max)</b>
Feb.28	Baker, Kyle. <i>Nat Turner</i> ▪ Chaney, Michael. "Slave Memory Without Words in Kyle Baker's <i>Nat Turner</i> ." <i>Callaloo</i> 36.2 (2013): 279-97. Project Muse.	<b><u>Proposals and Annotated Bibliographies Due</u></b>
Mar.7	Guibert, Emmanuel et al. <i>The Photographer</i> . ▪ Hedges, Chris. "What War Looks Like." <i>New York Times Book Review</i> 24 May 2009: 5. Web. (N)	
Mar.14	Guibert, Emmanuel et al. <i>The Photographer</i> . ▪ Ashuri, Tamar and Amit Pinchevski. "Witnessing as a Field." in <i>Media Witnessing: Testimony in the Age of Mass Communication</i> . (N)	
Mar.21	Abouet and Oubriere. <i>Aya: Life in Yop City</i> . ▪ Repetti, Massimo. "African Wave: Specificity and Cosmopolitanism in African Comics." <i>African Arts</i> 40.2 (2007): 16-35. ProQuest Research Library.	
Mar.28	Seth. <i>George Sprott</i> .	
Apr.4	Wrap-up and Exam Review	<b><u>Major Research Essay Due April 15<sup>th</sup> before 5pm.</u></b>

**FINAL EXAM IS ON THURSDAY, APRIL 9<sup>TH</sup> FROM 9:00-12:00pm**