

THE UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG

GENG-7820

Topics in Visual Cultures: Graphic Biography

Term: Fall 2014
Time: Tues. 2:30-5:15
Room: 3M58

Professor: Dr. Candida Rifkind
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Office Hours: Wed 4:00-5:00pm & Thurs 12:30-1:30pm or by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course explores two kinds of cultural production that remain under-studied despite their widespread popularity: biography and comic books. While much of the attention in both life writing studies and comics studies has been to autobiographical comics, in this course we will study graphic biographies, or comic book narratives in which the protagonist is different from the author. Biography merges fact and fiction, while comics hybridize words and pictures. We will explore how various cartoonists harness these states of flux to represent a series of aesthetic, narrative, and philosophical tensions, from words/images to history/fiction to individual/collective to self/other.

The graphic biographies we will study range from narratives of famous lives to everyday people, from individuals to families, and from the early twentieth century to now. As well, since graphic biographies often tell stories of professional achievement, we will consider how comics offer unique possibilities for the representation of other arts (performance art, vaudeville), sports (boxing, wrestling), political movements (Métis resistance, feminism), and science (atomic research). We will also read graphic biographies of individuals often defined by their status as outsiders, criminals, or 'deviants'.

Throughout, we will analyze how these texts engage with a series of theoretical problems: how can we know the life of an other? to what extent can an individual life be extracted from its historical, cultural, familial, and social time-space? where does biography fall between fact and fiction? whose lives count? how can comics visualize a life narrative?

Students do not need any prior familiarity with comics or graphic narratives to take this course, but they do need to bring a willingness to explore the visual-verbal form of comics and a curiosity about the (sometimes comic, sometimes tragic) life narratives they can convey.

REQUIRED TEXTS (in order of reading)

1. Brown, Chester. *Louis Riel: Tenth Anniversary Edition*. Montreal: Drawn & Quarterly, 2014. Print.
2. Geary, Rick. *The Borden Tragedy: Treasury of Victorian Murder*. New York: NBM, 1997.
3. Bagge, Peter. *Woman Rebel: The Margaret Sanger Story*. Montreal: Drawn & Quarterly, 2013. Print.
4. Fleming, Ann-Marie. *The Magical Life of Long Tack Sam*. Toronto: Riverhead, 2007.
5. Chantler, Scott. *Two Generals*. Toronto: Emblem Editions, 2011.
6. Ottaviani, Jim, et al. *Fallout: J. Robert Oppenheimer, Leo Szilard, and the Political Science of the Atomic Bomb*. Ann Arbor, MI: G.T. Labs, 2001. Print.
7. Kleist, Reinhold. *The Boxer: The True Story of Holocaust Survivor Harry Haft*. New York: SelfMadeHero, 2014.
8. Brown, Box. *André the Giant: Life and Legend*. New York: First Second, 2014.
9. Redfern, Christine and Caro Caron. *Who is Ana Mendieta?* New York: Feminist Press, 2011.
10. Delany, Samuel. *Bread & Wine: An Erotic Tale of New York*. New York: Powerhouse, 1999.

RECOMMENDED TEXTS

1. A number of books have been placed on Library Reserve for this course to assist students with their presentations and assignments. Check the Library website.
2. Assignments must be submitted in the MLA style. Students unfamiliar with this academic style may find these websites helpful:

- a) The Online Writing Lab (OWL) at Purdue University: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/sitemap.html>
- b) The Concordia University guide on using the MLA style to cite and document sources in a research paper: <http://library.concordia.ca/help/howto/mla.php>
- c) Students may also wish to consult Allen Eliss's "Comic Art in Scholarly Writing A Citation Guide" at: <http://www.comicsresearch.org/CAC/cite.html>

ASSIGNMENTS (more information will be provided well in advance of due dates)

Short Essay (1500 words) due at the beginning of class on Sep. 30th 20%

Research Essay 35%

- Proposal Due on Nov. 8th (250 words + bibliography, worth 5%)
- Symposium Presentation on Nov. 27th (15-20 mins, worth 10%)
- Written Essay Due before 4pm on Dec. 8th (5000 words, worth 20%)

Seminar Presentation (guided discussion for 45 mins, students select presentation week in consultation with instructor) 20%

Critical Responses (500 words each – see p.7) 15%
(one posted to Nexus no later than 24 hours before class in each of Sep., Oct., Nov., worth 5% each. Students select submission weeks independently.)

Participation (contribution to weekly discussions) 10%

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 MA 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 theoretical and critical readings are also required: you should complete them before each class and endeavor to use them in your contributions, even if we do not set aside specific time for them.

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 this 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. For full information on Academic Misconduct, including plagiarism, and Appeals, students are advised to read Section 8 of the Faculty of Graduate Studies Policies and Guidelines (<http://www.uwinnipeg.ca/graduate-studies/current-student/docs/policies-and-guidelines.pdf>) and the pertinent pages of the current course calendar. Concerning plagiarism, please note that, as a general rule, an F in the course will be the penalty recommended by the Cultural Studies Graduate Program Committee to the Senate Committee on Academic Misconduct for plagiarism on major assignments.
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 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. Thursday, October 23, 2014 is the final date to withdraw without academic penalty from courses that begin in September 2014 and end in November 2014 in the 2014 Fall term. **PLEASE NOTE:** Graduate students who withdraw from a course need to ensure that they can take an alternative course within the time designated for completion of their program. Students must complete a Graduate Studies Withdrawal/Course Change Form, seek the signature of their Program Advisor, and return the form to the Graduate Studies Registrar by the relevant VW date. Students should ensure that they develop a revised plan for completing their program with their advisor when withdrawing from a course.
10. **Late Assignment Penalties:** Late assignments will not be accepted without medical or other official documentation. Assignments are due in hard copy at the beginning of class. Students who miss a scheduled presentation may only make it up if they provide a medical or legal note explaining their absence. Critical Responses submitted less than 24 hours before the relevant class will be considered late and assigned 0/5. Students who do not submit a Critical Response in a given month may not submit more than one in subsequent months.
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>
16. Students who plan to conduct research interview, focus groups, surveys, or any other method of collecting data from any person, even a family member, must obtain the approval of the UHREB before commencing data collection. Exceptions are research activities in class as a learning exercise. See <http://www.uwinnipeg.ca/index/research-human-ethics> for submission requirements and deadlines.
17. All students, faculty and staff have the right to participate, learn and work in an environment that is free of harassment and discrimination. The UW Respectful Working and Learning Environment Policy may be found online at www.uwinnipeg.ca/respect

INSTRUCTOR'S EXTRA NOTES

EMAIL: I only respond to students' emails during regular work hours (Mon.-Fri. 9am-5pm) and I may take up to 24 hours to respond. Due to the high volume of junk mail I receive, I prefer to respond to emails sent from UW or Nexus student accounts. Please observe professional email etiquette and do not add me to any mailing lists.

MOBILE DEVICES AND LAPTOPS: Absolutely no texting in class. Bag texting is still texting. All mobile devices must be turned off and put away once class begins and remain off until it is over. **Laptop or iPad use requires the instructor's permission.** You may not record lectures without my prior permission.

FOOD: Please do not eat meals in class.

Class Schedule (subject to changes announced in class)

N = reading is posted to Nexus. Otherwise, use the UW Library electronic databases indicated in parentheses. Print off critical readings or have them ready to consult electronically.

Week	Graphic Biography	Critical Readings	Presentations/Assignments
Sep. 9	Introductions		
Sep. 16	Chester Brown, <i>Louis Riel</i>	1. McCloud, Scott. Chapter 3 of <i>Understanding Comics</i> . (N) 2. Hatfield, Charles. "An Art of Tensions" from <i>Alternative Comics</i> (N) 3. Lander, Ben. "Graphic Novels as History: Representing and Reliving the Past." <i>Left History</i> 10.2 (2005): 113-126. (N)	Come prepared to discuss one of the concepts in comics studies from the critical readings in relation to Brown's <i>Louis Riel</i>
Sep. 23	Richard Geary, <i>The Borden Tragedy</i>	1. Lee, Hermione. Ch. 1 of <i>Biography: A Short Introduction</i> . (N) 2. Schofield, Ann. "Lizzie Borden Took an Axe: History, Feminism and American Culture." <i>American Studies</i> 34.1 (1993): 91-103. (JStor)	Students are invited to join ENGL 3980 on a tour of the Louis Riel exhibit at St. Boniface Museum (494 Taché Ave.) on <u>Wednesday, Sep. 24th</u> at 6:15pm. You can take the 5:55pm #50 bus from UW to Provencher & Taché or it's about a 30 min. walk from campus.
Sep. 30	Peter Bagge, <i>Woman Rebel</i>	1. Woolf, Virginia. "The Art of Biography." (N) 2. Sanger, Alexander. "Eugenics, Race, and Margaret Sanger Revisited: Reproductive Freedom for All?" <i>Hypatia</i> 22.2 (2007): 210-17. (Project Muse)	Short Essay Due
Oct. 7	Fleming, <i>The Magical Life of Long Tack Sam</i>	1. Davis, Rocio G. "Locating Family..." <i>Journal of Canadian Studies</i> 42.1 (2008): 1-22 (Project Muse) 2. Schweiger, Hannes. "Global Subjects: The Transnationalisation of Biography." <i>Life Writing</i> 9.3 (2012): 249-58. (Routledge)	_____
Oct. 14	Scott Chantler, <i>Two Generals</i>	1. Bourdieu, Pierre. "The Biographical Illusion" in <i>Identities</i> (N) 2. Baetens, Jan. "From Black & White to Color and Back..." <i>College Literature</i> 38.2 (2011): 111-128. (Project Muse)	_____
Oct. 21	Ottaviani et al, <i>Fallout</i>	Banco, Lindsay M. "The Biographies of J. Robert Oppenheimer: Desert Saint or Destroyer of Worlds." <i>Biography</i> 35.3 (2012): 492-515. (Project Muse)	_____
Oct. 28	Kleist, <i>The Boxer</i>	1. Caruth, Cathy. Introduction. <i>American Imago</i> 48.1 (1991): 1-12. (N) 2. Hirsch, Marianne and Leo Spitzer, "The Witness in the Archive: Holocaust Studies/Memory Studies." <i>Memory Studies</i> 2.2 (2009): 151-170. (SAGE)	_____
Nov. 4	Brown, <i>André the Giant</i>	Barthes, "The World of Wrestling" (N)	Proposals Due *NO CLASS NEXT WEEK DUE TO REMEMBRANCE DAY

Week	Graphic Biography	Critical Readings	Presentations/Assignments
Nov. 18	Redfern and Caron, <i>Who is Ana Mendieta?</i>	1. Epstein, William H. "(Post)Modern Lives: Abducting the Biographical Subject" (N) 2. Cruz, Carlos A. "Ana Mendieta's Life: A Journey Through Her Art" in <i>Latina Legacies</i> (N)	_____
Nov. 25	Delany, <i>Bread and Wine</i>	1. Eakin, Paul John. "Relational Selves, Relational Lives: The Story of the Story" (N) 2. Berlant, Lauren and Michael Warner, "Sex in Public" <i>Critical Inquiry</i> 24.2 (1998): 547-66. (JStor)	_____
Nov. 27 (Make-Up Day)	Symposium		Student presentations of Research Essay works-in-progress

Research Essays are due by 4pm on December 8th in 2A38 or the English Office.

Critical Responses

3x 500 words each, worth 15%

Once each month of this course (September, October, November), you should prepare a 500 word Critical Response to the graphic biography we are reading and upload it to the Nexus Discussion Folder – Critical Responses at least 24 hours before the class (so by 2:30pm on the Monday before).

The objective is to spend a bit of time organizing and developing your preliminary response to the text. You do not need to undertake research, but you may refer to other course readings. If you choose to refer to readings that are not part of the course, you must provide a citation (and remember that it is not a shared reading so any specific terms or theories will need explaining).

The objective is to provoke some ideas, responses, and feedback from the rest of the group to help advance our class discussion. You may choose to write a general response to the text's content or style, but I recommend that you refer to at least one specific image, sequence, character, icon, etc. to ground your response in the text (provide page numbers). Alternately, your entire response may be a focused discussion of one element, trope, theme, etc.

Consider this a “discussion starter”: keep the tone academic but jargon-free; feel free to use the first person but maintain a critical perspective on the text. This is not about how the text made you feel, it is about what the text made you think.

You may select the week you submit your Critical Response, but you must submit one in each of September, October, and November. You are responsible for ensuring that you do so and I will not be sending out reminders (see the Note on Late Penalties). You may not submit a Critical Response in the week of your Presentation. You may use your Critical Response as the basis for the Research Essay. If you draw on other students' Critical Responses in your Research Essay, you must ask their permission and cite them appropriately as unpublished research, following the MLA rules.

Expect to be asked to read some or all of your Critical Response in class. Each Critical Response will be marked out of 5 within a week of posting. The evaluation criteria are based on: direct engagement with course concepts; references to specific examples in the text; clarity of expression; originality or synthesis of ideas.

All students must check the Nexus Discussion Folder – Critical Responses in the 24 hours before each class. If there is an uploaded item in the folder, then you should read it, think about your response to it, print it out or download it, and bring it to class.