

**THE UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG**  
**GENG-7820 (052)**  
**Topics in Visual Culture: Graphic Biography**

Term: Winter 2017  
Time: Wed. 6:00-9:00pm  
Room: 3M50  
Email: c.rifkind@uwinnipeg.ca

Professor: Dr. Candida Rifkind  
Office: 2A38  
Phone: 204-786-9198 (emergencies only)  
Office Hours: Tu/Th 12:30-1:30, by appointment

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This seminar course explores how contemporary alternative cartoonists are using comics to depict the complex interplay of history, power, celebrity, notoriety, and personality that shapes the art of biography. We will read a range of graphic biographies about figures whose life narratives are variously contested and controversial, including Abraham Lincoln, Nat Turner, Margaret Sanger, Marie Curie, Johnny Cash, Ana Mendieta, Chanie Wenjack, and Alan Turing. We will take a cultural studies approach to explore the texts in relation to other media (film, music, television, photography) and recent theoretical developments in comics and life writing studies.

The forms and styles of the graphic biographies vary widely, from sketchy black-and-white to vibrant colour, and from realism to expressionism. In addition to undertaking aesthetic and formal analysis of each text, we will investigate how lives and life narratives are shaped by race, religion, gender, sexuality, and citizenship. We will draw on comics theory and biography theory to consider how each of the texts deals with the biomythologies of their subjects. Throughout, we will frame our discussions with a set of theoretical problems: whose lives enter collective memory and how? what are the 'facts' of a life? how can comics construct and deconstruct biography's promise of intimate knowledge of the subject? how can we get a feel for the person and what they felt?

Students need no prior experience reading comics, nor any familiarity with the relevant theories, just an intellectual curiosity about this surprisingly complex area of popular culture and a willingness to participate in the collaborative environment of the seminar.

**REQUIRED TEXTS** (in order of reading, students may use either print or legally purchased ebooks)

Seth. *George Sprott (1894-1975)*. Drawn & Quarterly, 2009.  
Van Sciver, Noah. *The Hypo: The Melancholic Young Lincoln*. Fantagraphics, 2012.  
Baker, Kyle. *Nat Turner*. Harry N. Abrams, 2008.  
Bagge, Peter. *Woman Rebel: The Margaret Sanger Story*. Drawn & Quarterly, 2013.  
Jones, Sabrina. *Our Lady of Birth Control: A Cartoonist's Encounter with Margaret Sanger*. Soft Skull, 2016.  
Redniss, Lauren. *Radioactive: Marie and Pierre Curie: A Tale of Love and Fallout*. Dey Street, 2015.  
Kleist, Reinhard. *Johnny Cash: I See a Darkness*. Harry N. Abrams, 2009.  
Redfern, Christine and Caro Caron. *Who Is Ana Mendieta?* Feminist Press, 2011.  
Downie, Gord and Jeff Lemire. *Secret Path*. Simon & Shuster, 2016.  
Boyden, Joseph. *Wenjack*. Hamish Hamilton, 2016.  
Ottaviani, Jim and Leland Purvis. *The Imitation Game: Alan Turing Decoded*. Harry N. Abrams, 2016.

## **ASSIGNMENTS (further information will be provided in class)**

<b>Jan. 25 Nat Turner criticism workshop</b> (10 min. presentation + 1 page handout)	<b>10%</b>
<b>Feb. 8 Comics studies book review</b> (10 min. presentation & 1 page handout +1000 words submitted on Feb. 15)	<b>10%</b>
<b>Mar. 1 Essay proposal</b> (300 words + 5 annotated sources)	<b>10%</b>
<b>Mar. 29 Symposium presentation and slide show (20 mins)</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Apr. 18 Final essay (2200-2500 words)</b>	<b>30%</b>
<b>TBA Seminar presentation</b> (20 min. presentation + 1 page handout and Works Cited)	<b>20%</b>

## **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			

## **MA IN CULTURAL STUDIES 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](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. Students facing a charge of academic or non-academic misconduct may choose to contact the University of Winnipeg Students' Association (UWSA) where a student advocate will be available to answer any questions about the process, help with building a case, and ensuring students have access to support. For more information or to schedule an appointment, visit our website at [www.theuwsa.ca/academic-advocacy](http://www.theuwsa.ca/academic-advocacy) or call 204-786-9780.
6. 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.
7. **Wednesday, March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017** is the final date to withdraw without academic penalty from courses that begin in January 2017 and end in April 2017 of the 2017 Winter 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.
8. **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 7 days.
9. 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.

10. Students will not be asked for identification when writing a test or examination.
11. 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.
12. No unauthorized material or equipment may be brought with you to the final exam.
13. For more information regarding the English Department, please refer to our website at <http://english.uwinnipeg.ca>
14. 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.
15. 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](http://www.uwinnipeg.ca/respect)
16. Students may choose not to attend classes or write examinations on holy days of their religion, but they must notify their instructors at least two weeks in advance. Instructors will then provide opportunity for students to make up work examinations without penalty. A list of religious holidays can be found at <http://uwinnipeg.ca/academics/calendar/docs/important-notes.pdf>
17. Reading Week is **February 20<sup>th</sup> – February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2014**

### **INSTRUCTOR'S NOTES**

1. **BEING ON TIME, PRESENT, AND STAYING FOCUSED:** Class starts promptly at 6pm and ends at 9pm, with a 20 minute break approximately half way through. Students who arrive late or start packing up their things early disrupt the class and make it hard for the rest of us to stay focused. If you have a legitimate reason for arriving late or leaving early on specific days, I would appreciate you letting me know in advance.
2. **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 can only respond to emails sent from UW accounts. **Please do not email me through Nexus,** hotmail, yahoo, gmail, or other non-UW accounts. Please observe professional email etiquette and do not add me or your classmates to any mailing lists.
3. **FOOD:** Please do not eat meals in class.

**READING SCHEDULE** (subject to changes announced in class)

**N = Nexus**

**R = Library Reserve**

Date	Reading	GENG 7820 presentations	Other Information
Jan.4	<b>Introductions: How do we read comics?</b>		
Jan.11	<b>Seth, <i>George Sprott</i></b>  1. Virginia Woolf, "The Art of Biography" (N) 2. Christian Klein, "Biography as a Concept of Thought" (N) 3. Baetens, <i>The Graphic Novel</i> Ch.5 "Understanding Panel and Page Layouts" (R)		
Jan.18	<b>Noah Van Sciver, <i>The Hypo: The Melancholic Young Lincoln</i></b>  1. Bourdieu, Pierre. "The Biographical Illusion" (N) 2. Bingham, "Introduction: A Respectable Genre of Low Repute" in <i>Whose Lives Are They Anyway?</i> (UW ebook)	Szasz, "The 1958/59 Comic Book Biographies of Abraham Lincoln" (N)	
Jan.25	<b>Kyle Baker, <i>Nat Turner</i></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bruno, "Nat Turner After 9/11"</li> <li>• Chaney, "Slave Memory Without Words in Kyle Baker's <i>Nat Turner</i>"</li> <li>• Francis, "Drawing the Unspeakable"</li> <li>• Kunka, "Intertextuality and the Historical Graphic Narrative: Kyle Baker's <i>Nat Turner</i> and the Styron Controversy"</li> <li>• Whitted, 'And the Negro thinks in hieroglyphics': comics, visual metonymy, and the spectacle of blackness"</li> </ul>		<b>Comics Criticism Workshop:</b> Students will be assigned one of the scholarly articles on Nat Turner listed here to discuss in a 10 minute presentation. Links or full text posted to Nexus.
Feb.1	<b>Peter Bagge, <i>Margaret Sanger</i></b> <b>Sabrina Jones, <i>Our Lady of Birth Control</i></b>  Baetens, <i>The Graphic Novel</i> Ch.6 "Drawing and Style, Word and Image" (R)	Sanger, Alexander. "Eugenics, Race, and Margaret Sanger Revisited: Reproductive Freedom for All?" (Project Muse)	

Feb.8	<b>Landmarks in Comics Studies</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beaty, <i>Unpopular Culture</i></li> <li>• Chute, <i>Disaster Drawn</i></li> <li>• Hatfield, <i>Alternative Comics</i></li> <li>• Gardner, <i>Projections</i></li> <li>• Groensteen, <i>The System of Comics</i></li> <li>• Versaci, <i>This Book Contains Graphic Language</i></li> </ul> Recommended reading: Hatfield, "Indiscipline, or The Condition of Comics Studies" (N)		<b>Book review presentations:</b> Students will select one landmark work in comics studies from this list (books on Reserve) for a 10 minute presentation
Feb.15	<b>Lauren Redniss, <i>Radioactive</i></b>  Eakin, Paul John. "Relational Selves, Relational Lives: The Story of the Story" (N)	Bingham, "Prologue" to Book Two of <i>Whose Lives Are They Anyway?</i> (pp.213-222; UW ebook)	
<b>Feb.22</b>	<b>NO CLASSES – WINTER READING WEEK</b>		
Mar.1	<b>Reinhard Kleist, <i>I See a Darkness</i></b>  Edwards, Introduction to <i>Johnny Cash and the Paradox of American Identity</i> (UW ebook)		Guest Lecturer: Dr. Paul Malone
Mar.8	Redfern and Caron, <i>Who Is Ana Mendieta?</i>  Ní Dhúill, "Towards an Antibio-graphical Archive: Mediations Between Life Writing and Metabiography" (Taylor and Francis)	Cruz, Carlos A. "Ana Mendieta's Life: A Journey Through Her Art" (N)	
Mar.15	Downie and Lemire, <i>Secret Path</i> & Boyden, <i>Wenjack</i>  Sean Carleton, "Confronting the <i>Secret Path</i> and the Legacy of Residential Schools" <i>activehistory.ca</i>  Chelsea Vowel, <i>Indigenous Writes</i> (Reserve – excerpts to be decided in class)	Henzi, Sarah. "'A Necessary Antidote': Graphic Novels, Comics, and Indigenous Writing." (N)	
Mar.22	<b>Ottaviani and Purvis, <i>The Imitation Game: Alan Turing Decoded</i></b>	"It is a Beautiful Experiment: Queer(y)ing The Work of Alan Turing" (N)	
Mar.29	<b>Graphic Biography Symposium</b>		Students will be organized into panels to present papers; open to the public