

ENG 280— Introduction to Comics Studies**TR: 4-5:20****Office Hours: TR: 1:30--3****Email: Contact through Canvas Inbox****Dr. O'Kelly****185 LIL****Office: 206 PLC****Course Description:**

This class provides an introduction to the academic discipline of Comics Studies. You will be exposed to a spectrum of comic-art forms (the newspaper strip, the comic book, the graphic novel) and a variety of modes and genres. You will also be asked to read several examples of contemporary comics scholarship.

Required Texts (in reading order):

Scott McCloud:	<i>Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art</i>
Lemire and Smallwood:	<i>Moon Knight: Lunatic</i>
George Herriman:	<i>Krazy and Ignatz, 1937-1938</i>
Charles Schulz:	<i>The Complete Peanuts, 1957-1958</i>
Various Creators:	<i>The Best of Archie</i>
Brubaker and Phillips:	<i>Criminal: Last of the Innocent</i>
Rucka and Scott:	<i>Black Magick Vol. 1</i>
Gilbert Hernandez:	<i>Heartbreak Soup</i>

All these texts will be available at the Duck Store. **EC Comics (for week 7) and supplementary essays will be available as PDFs on Canvas.** You may use electronic versions of texts—many of the assigned readings are currently available with a subscription to Comixology Unlimited—but I do suggest that you read physical copies of at least a few books (Herriman, in particular, should be read in a physical edition). Electronic texts must be brought to class on a dedicated reading device (phones are not dedicated reading devices).

Please be aware that due to the production costs associated with graphic novels your textbook bill will be higher than for a typical English class. You should not enroll in this course if you are unable or unwilling to meet this expense. **Students who attend class without a copy of the required text will be counted as absent and sanctioned accordingly.**

Method of Assessment

Grades will be based on **three written assignments**, worth 30%, 30%, and 40% of your final grade, respectively. **See below for descriptions, details, and due dates.** Extra-credit will be awarded for distinguished class participation. (Please note: **This does not mean that you get points merely for talking.** But students who regularly demonstrate familiarity with the readings, who advance our discussions by asking pertinent questions, and who ground their observations in specific details from the texts will be rewarded for their contributions.) I will also administer the occasional pop-quiz. Students who get fewer than half the questions correct on these quizzes will have their final grades lowered by a third of a letter grade. **No further warnings will be given about these quizzes.**

Anticipated Learning Outcomes

You should expect to put **at least** 10 hours per week into this course (on top of time spent in class), with that number rising to **at least** 12-14 hours during weeks when assignments are due. Assuming you are able to devote yourself fully to the readings and assignments, by the end of the class you will have acquired a deeper knowledge of the origins and historical developments of American comics; the specific achievements of key comic strip and comic book creators; the economic and material conditions of comic book production; the range of comic forms (from newspaper strip to graphic novel). In addition, you will have gained experience and proficiency in the following activities:

- Reading both comics and academic critical texts with a view to better understanding their conventions.
- Drawing on relevant information to situate these texts within their cultural, political, and historical contexts.
- Performing formal analyses of a narrative medium that combines visual and verbal elements in a unique way.
- Writing focused analytical essays in clear, grammatical prose.
- Employing creativity and interpretive skills to produce original, persuasive arguments.
- Employing a diversity of primary and secondary sources, with proper acknowledgment and citation, to generate a persuasive written argument.

Course Policies

- **Late papers will not be accepted** without a valid medical excuse.
- **Attendance is mandatory.** Unexcused absences will result in a **lowered grade** at the rate of 1/3 of a letter grade (e.g. from A to A-) for every unexcused absence. **No further warnings will be given.**
- **In the event of illness, a family emergency, or approved University business certain absences may be considered "excused."** Please let me know, either before or (in the event of an emergency) as soon as is reasonable after the class in question if you think your absence should be excused. Bear in mind that in most cases I will require some form of official documentation (for example, a doctor's note, a letter from a university representative, and so on). **If you do not contact me about an absence then I will assume it falls under the category of "unexcused" and lower your grade accordingly.**
- **There will be no "do-overs" or second-chances on written assignments.** You need to make it your best work the first time around. If you are concerned that you will underperform on a particular assignment **you need to come and see me beforehand.** Afterwards is too late.
- **Except for dedicated reading of electronic texts, electronic devices are to be turned off and put away at the start of class.** You may not use your phone as a reading device in class. You must take notes with a pen and paper and you must refrain from checking personal messages of all kinds for the duration of our meetings. **Students who violate these rules will be marked as absent and sanctioned accordingly.**
- **If you miss a quiz, you miss a quiz.** There will be no "make-up" assignments, except in the case of an excused absence.
- **Always bring the text to class. Students without the text will be marked as absent.** You can't even pretend to be interested if you don't have the book in front of you.
- Comics we will read this term deal with **adult themes** and subjects. Some contain **violent and disturbing images**; others explore the full range of **human sexuality**. Some treat **political and religious** issues unconventionally. Be ready to meet the intellectual challenges of this material with an open mind if you choose to take this course.

Writing Guidelines: Papers must be double spaced and in 12 point standard font with one inch margins and minimal, single spaced headers (i.e. name, date, course title or number). Essays must be focused and in clear, grammatically correct prose. Proofread your essays several times before submission. Citations should follow MLA format. Submit all writing assignments to Canvas in DOCX format. Canvas does not process Pages or ODT files. It is your responsibility to ensure that your essay has been uploaded correctly before the deadline. If you submit an essay in an incorrect format, you will not receive feedback on it.

Academic Integrity: All work must adhere to standards of academic honesty outlined in the Student Handbook. Do not turn in work prepared for other classes. Document all sources consulted, including websites and other Internet content. Plagiarism will result in failure for the course and additional sanctions as determined by the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards: <http://uodos.uoregon.edu/StudentConductandCommunityStandards.aspx>

Accommodations for students with disabilities: In compliance with UO policy and equal access laws, I am available to discuss appropriate academic accommodations that may be required for student with disabilities. Requests for academic accommodations are to be made during the first two weeks of the quarter, except for unusual circumstances, so arrangements can be made. Students are encouraged to register with the Accessible Education Center (<http://aec.uoregon.edu> to verify their eligibility for appropriate accommodations).

Email: To ensure receipt and a quicker response, please contact me through Canvas message ("Inbox"), rather than through e-mail. I am happy to respond to questions, etc. through Canvas. It may, however, take me at least 24 hours to respond to you during the school week. Response time will be longer on the weekend.

Writing Associates: Writing Associates are available to help students with any aspect of their writing for this course. They are peer tutors who can work with you one-on-one on your writing assignments. They are advanced English majors who have been trained to tutor writing. They can help you understand the process of writing about literature and criticism and show you how to make your written work for this class more clear, correct, and effective. To make an appointment with a Writing Associate, go to <http://english.uoregon.edu/writingassociates/>

Tentative Class Schedule

Week I: Questions of History and Definition

- Sept. 26 Lecture: Towards A History of Comics
 Reading: Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics* (first five chapters)
- Sept. 28 Discussion: Understanding McCloud
 Reading: Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics* (chapter six to end)

Week II: Questions of Reception and Form

- Oct. 3 Discussion: Are Comics Art, Literature, Both, or Neither — And Why Does It Matter?
 Reading: Beaty, Chapter Two, *Comics vs. Art* (PDF)
 Pizzino, Chapters Two and Three, *Arresting Development* (PDF)
- Oct. 5 Discussion: Form and/as Content
 Reading: Lemire and Smallwood, *Moon Knight: Lunatic*
 Excerpts from Groensteen, *Comics And Narrative* (PDF)
 Hatfield, "An Art Of Tensions," *The Comics Studies Reader* (PDF)

Week III: The Crazy Modern World

- Oct. 10 Lecture: Comics and/as Modernity
 Reading: Herriman, *Krazy & Ignatz, 1937-38*, up to pp. 16.
 Essay by Ian Gordon (PDF)
- Oct. 12 Discussion: It's A Crazy World
 Reading: Herriman, *Krazy & Ignatz, 1937-1938*, pp. 17-63
 Essays by Robert Harvey (PDF)
- Oct. 13 First Assignment Due

Week IV: Mad Love

- Oct. 17 Discussion: Herriman's Passing
 Reading: Herriman, *Krazy & Ignatz, 1937-1938*, pp. 64-end
 Essay by Jeet Heer (PDF)
- Oct. 19 Discussion: Herriman's Poetics
 Reading: Choose one favorite *Krazy* comic that we haven't discussed
 Essay by Peter Sattler (PDF)

Week V: Peanuts and the Eternal Comic Strip

- Oct. 24 Lecture: Re-Introducing *Peanuts*
 Reading: Schulz, *The Complete Peanuts, 1957-58*
 Essay by Hatfield (PDF)
- Oct. 26 Discussion: Sex, Gender, Peanuts
 Reading: Schulz, *The Complete Peanuts, 1957-58*
 Essay by Saunders (PDF)
- Oct. 27 Second Assignment Due.

Week VI: Archie: Comics, Supermarkets, America

- Oct. 31 Discussion: What Can We Learn From *Archie*?
 Reading: Various Creators, *The Best of Archie*
- Nov. 2 Discussion: Archie, The Dissertation
 Reading: Various Creators, *The Best of Archie*
 Excerpts from Beaty, *Twelve Cent Archie* (PDF)

Week VII: EC Crime Comics

- Nov. 7 Discussion: Crime and Art
 Reading: *EC Comics* on Canvas (PDF)
 Excerpts from John Scaggs, *Crime Fiction* (PDF)
 Borde and Chaumeton, *Towards a Definition of Film Noir* (PDF)
- Nov. 9 Discussion: Doubles and Doppelgangers
 Reading: *EC Comics* on Canvas (PDF)
 Schrader, "Notes on Film Noir" (PDF)

Week VIII: Genre-Busting — With Greg Rucka!

- Nov. 14 Discussion: When Good Comics Go Bad
 Reading: Brubaker and Phillips, *Criminal: Last of the Innocent*
- Nov. 16 Discussion: *Black Magick*
 Reading: Rucka and Scott, *Black Magick*

Week IX: Comic Book Magical Realism

- Nov. 21 Discussion: Introducing Gilbert Hernandez
 Reading: Gilbert Hernandez, *Heartbreak Soup*
- Nov. 23 No Class - - Thanksgiving

Week X: Love and Rockets

- Nov. 28 Reading: *Heartbreak Soup*
 Essay by Hatfield
- Nov. 30 Class Wrap-up
- Dec. 1 Third Assignment Due.

**ENGLISH 280: INTRODUCTION TO COMICS STUDIES
FALL 2017
WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS**

I: A Formal Analysis of Jeff Lemire and Doug Smallwood's *Moon Knight*.

Length: 4 pages (minimum)

Due date: 5 p.m. Friday, October 12, Canvas Submission in DOC or DOCX format only.

Making use of the terminology, theories, and examples laid out in Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* perform a close formal analysis of between one and three pages from Lemire and Smallwood's *Moon Knight: Lunatic*. As the name suggests, a formal analysis **gives priority to the form of an artwork** (how it is made, composed, and designed) and considers the ways in which those formal elements shape our perception of the content (the plot, themes, or subject of the work).

Before you begin writing your essay you should look through the entire text for pages that strike you as formally interesting. (Your chosen pages may be separate or part of a sequence — either is fine.) Study these pages carefully for an extended period of time. Take some notes while looking at them, **paying attention to every possible formal detail**. Consider the effects of the page layout; the panel size; the different points-of-view or perspectives taken on the panel contents; the relation of elements in the panel to one another; the panel-to-panel transitions; the use of the gutter; the effects of word balloon size and shape; lettering techniques; color palette, etc. Ask yourself: How do these various elements work to generate meaning and shape my experience as a reader?

For example: How does the page layout affect your perception of the kinetic or temporal aspects of the scene? Do the transitions suggest a rapid sequence or the slow passage of time? How does the perspective of each panel place you in relation to the characters or objects you are seeing? When (and how) are you encouraged to view things dispassionately, to reflect upon them philosophically, or to see them in an unfamiliar way? When (and how) are you encouraged to react viscerally or emotionally? How are you led to identify with a particular viewpoint, or character? Does your chosen sequence make use of any visual symbols? Etc.

In this context, you should also consider Smallwoods's specific artistic style. For example: what words best describe his drawing techniques? How would you characterize his line work, or his approach to the human figure? Does his style change at different times or is it essentially consistent? What are his individual artistic mannerisms? How might an artist's style itself function meaningfully to influence the way you see the objects and people rendered? What about color symbolism? Etc.

Refer back to McCloud's various accounts of these formal issues while you are making your notes. Can McCloud help us to understand Lemire and Smallwood achievements as formalists? Do Lemire and Smallwood come up with any story-telling or layout techniques that McCloud fails to consider? Does McCloud help us think about issues of style, and if so how?

Once you have taken some detailed notes on your chosen pages write them up in the form of an essay (a minimum of 4 pages in length). **There is no need to provide an introduction or conclusion; just state which pages you have chosen to discuss, and then analyze them, panel by panel.** The process of analysis should generate sufficient interest without you needing to construct a larger argument at this stage.

When you have proofread and corrected your work, attach a copy of your chosen page or pages (a black and white photocopy is fine) and hand it in at my office by the due date above. (If I am not there, just slip it under the door.)

II. *Krazy* or *Peanuts*

Length: 6 pages (minimum)

Due date: 5 p.m. Friday, October 27, Canvas Submission in DOC or DOCX format only.

For your second paper, you are required to write about **either** Charles Schulz's *Peanuts* **or** George Herriman's *Krazy Kat*.

You may consider a variety of questions and approaches. For example:

- Building on the previous assignment, **write an analysis of the formal aspects of either Schulz or Herriman's work.** The specific formal conventions of a newspaper strip are in some ways quite different from those of a monthly comic-book or graphic novel, and you should spend a portion of your paper thinking about the creative possibilities and limitations that arise from those differences. What can a formal analysis teach us about the way either *Krazy Kat* or *Peanuts* work their magic?
- You have two years worth of strips in your collections, and the entire fifty years of the *Peanuts* strip can be searched by date at <http://www.gocomics.com/peanuts/1950/10/02>. **Write an essay exploring how Schulz makes use of the calendar and the changes of the seasons to develop themes or to repeat certain gags and storylines over several years.**
- Like Schulz, Herriman is a master of nuanced variations on a repeated theme (Ignatz's beaning of *Krazy* with a brick). **Write an essay describing how Herriman generates, frustrates, and/or satisfies his readers' expectations, and the different emotional effects he creates in the process.**
- Compare particular dates (E.G. February 14th) or repeated storylines (E.G. "Lucy-with-the-Football" or "The Great Pumpkin") across multiple years of the *Peanuts* strip. **There are more volumes of *Peanuts* in the Library that can be used for this purpose, and many more strips are available for comparison online.** (<http://www.gocomics.com/peanuts/1950/10/02>.)
- Consider how certain strips by either cartoonist reflect a particular historical or political context (e.g. The Cold War, the Civil Rights Movement, the history and the landscape of the South West, the Native American experience, a past Presidential election, or other "real world" event). **Then write an essay that deepens our understanding of the cartoonist in question by drawing upon historical resources to place his work in a more detailed context.** (Be careful to avoid over-generalized historical claims if you take this approach, and **be sure you are always illuminating the cartoons** at hand and not simply reciting historical facts.)
- We have read several essays on both Schulz and Herriman. **Write a paper that engages in critical dialogue with one of these essays, using your own readings to develop, extend, complicate, or qualify their key points.**
- **Write an essay that explores the political ideology of either strip.** While both creators generally avoided making explicitly political statements, their work (like all works of art) inevitably expresses and embodies certain social and political assumptions. So, for example, ask yourself: Does it make sense to describe *Peanuts* or *Krazy Kat* as either a conservative comic strip or a radical one? Why might someone see them in one way or the other? **And if neither of those terms — "conservative" or "radical" — seems adequate to you, what *can* you say about the ideology of these comics?**
- **Remember, you can combine a couple of these ideas into a single essay.** In fact, **the best essays will probably involve some combination of the above.** (Note: "combine" does not mean "take on each of these prompts one-at-a-time.")
- **Come up with your own essay topic, in consultation with me.**

Whatever your topic, your essay should offer **some formal analysis** — **a close reading of at least one strip** — in the context of your broader discussion, claim, or argument about either *Krazy Kat* or *Peanuts*.

III: Open Topic Essay

Length: 8-10 pages (minimum)

Due date: 5 p.m. Friday, December 1st, Canvas Submission in DOC or DOCX format only.

For your final paper, you may write about any of the texts we have studied this term. **Choose a topic that you wish we could have spent more time discussing in class and use this essay as an opportunity to find out more about it, and write your best thoughts about it.** You are encouraged to consult additional critical resources (academic essays, online discussions, creator-interviews, etc.) to supplement your work, as long as they are properly cited (according to MLA or Chicago methods of academic citation).

Once again, these essays should combine formal analysis with a larger claim or argument.

I am more than willing to discuss your ideas for this final paper during office hours; but please do some thinking about your chosen subject first. It is much easier for me to be helpful if you have already considered a few ideas **before** you come to me.