

Huron University College
Department of English
English 2824G: Heroes and Superheroes
Dr. Adrian Mioc

Class: Mon. 3:30-5:30 PM Wed. 2:30-3:30 PM HC-V208

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General Course Description

This course aims to explore the figure of the hero and superhero as it evolves and is depicted in contemporary comic books as well as in other forms of popular culture such as movies and TV series. Methodologically, it will combine the study of literature with contemporary popular culture while incorporating a theoretical component as well.

Antirequisite(s): None.

Prerequisite(s): At least 60% in 1.0 of any 1000-level English course, or permission of the Department.

Specific Focus

In the beginning, we will briefly explore myths that are relevant and will help us understand the figure of the modern day superhero. After a quick historical exploration, which will offer a substantial foundation for the study of the 20th and 21st-century manifestation of the superheroes, the main focus of this course will be placed on the problematic of this figure.

Besides well-known characters (Superman, Batman and Spiderman), we will tackle less-spoken-about figures such as Jessica Jones or Harley Quinn. We will examine the inner transformation and evolution of the superhero from the twentieth-century comic book to today's tent-pole blockbusters and Netflix's exclusive streaming series. Costumes, masks, weapons and other apparel will play an important role in our analysis. The course will also chart the way in which comic book universes have responded to the development of identity politics of all kinds: we will

look at how superheroes deal with issues related to gender, race and sexuality. Has the modern female superhero become something other than an object of an object of masculine desire – of the male gaze? We will engage in questions about femininity through close readings of such characters as Supergirl and Agent Peggy Carter. A course on such extraordinary heroes would not be wide-ranging without a discussion about the Japanese manga series, especially Dragon Ball and at its main character, Goku, a modern avatar of the Monkey King.

The students will walk away with a much more effective understanding of how the hero/superhero functions in our own culture and why such figures have been at the center of so many mythologies.

Successful students who complete the course will:

- Develop an understanding of the idea of the Hero in some of its most characteristic figures throughout literary and cultural history
- Develop an understanding of the idea of the Superhero as it is depicted in contemporary comic book culture
- Conceive of the ways in which Heroes and Superheroes relate to each other, in theory and in the practices of cultural production
- Become familiar with theoretical concepts such as those that are associated with the study of myth or of gender and race, all of which theories will become instrumental in developing a better understanding of the contemporary superhero phenomenon and in placing it on a higher level of generality.
- Develop an appreciation for the creative production of superhero images and their combination into different kinds of mythological narrative

Description of Class Methods

Classes will consist of lectures on, and discussions of, various theoretical ideas like theories of myth and other related critical themes. Besides these theoretical aspects, there will also be discussions on weekly readings and viewings. Students can expect some improvised group work on 1) specific passages in the readings, 2) scenes in the viewing, or 3) handouts on critical and theoretical perspectives. Thus, they should come to class with their readings in print or digital media, having read the work scheduled for that day, and prepared to participate in lectures and discussions.

Reading List

Gods, Heroes, and Monsters: A Sourcebook of Greek, Roman, and Near Eastern myths. trans. ed. Carolina López-Ruiz. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014

The Elder Edda: A Selection; trans. Paul B. Taylor and W. H. Auden, introd. Peter H. Salus, London: Faber & Faber, 1969.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Thomas Common. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Paul Ruditis, Robert Kirkman, Frank Darabont. *The Walking Dead Chronicles The Official Companion Book* (2011)

Mark D. White, William Irwin. *Watchmen and Philosophy_ A Rorschach Test* (The Blackwell Philosophy and Pop Culture Series) (2009, Wiley)

All readings, both comic books and theoretical readings will be provided in electronic form via the OWL website.

Assignment	Due	Weight
Character Analysis (500 words)	Feb. 27	15%
Presentation (15 min.)	individual dates	15%
Essay (1000 words, argument and 4 secondary sources)	March 27	25%
Final Exam	Scheduled by Registrar	35%
Attendance & Participation	Ongoing	10%

Late Policy

All assignments are due by the end of class on the due date and should be handed to the instructor personally. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that the instructor receives the essay.

Late assignments will be penalized at the rate of 2 marks per calendar day until the instructor receives the essay. Normally, late assignments will receive a grade but no detailed commentary. After 7 days, the assignment will not be accepted and a mark of 0/F will be awarded.

Students must pass both term work and the final examination in order to pass the course. Students who fail the term work are not allowed to take the final examination. Students who fail the final examination (regardless of their term work) automatically fail the course.

Schedule of Readings and Lectures:

Week 1

Jan. 7: Introduction

Jan 9: Greece and Rome – Gods: Zeus and Prometheus (*Gods Heroes and Monsters* p. 94-99)
(Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, ch. *The Structure of Myth*)

Week 2 Greece and the Old Norse

Jan 14: Heroes, Heroines: Hercules (*Gods Heroes and Monsters* p. 257-275) Amazons (cont. *The Structure of Myth*) (movie clips from *Hercules* and *Wonderwoman*)

Jan. 16: Norse Sagas –Thor the God of Thunder (other examples: Odin, Loki, the Valkyries)
(Edith Hamilton, *Mythology*, ch. *The Mythology of Norsemen*)

Week 3

Jan. 21: *Thor Ragnarok* (2017)

Jan. 23: Nietzsche *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (topics: Superman/Übermensch a superhero?)
(readings: Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, ch. *Overman and Eternal Recurrence*)

Week 4 Comic Books and its Superheroes

Jan. 28: Comic Book Superheroes: the comic book as a genre, the physics of the superhero universe: time and space, superpowers, different categories of superheroes; gods, meta-humans, humans. (readings: James Kakalios: *The Physics of Superheroes* and/or Christopher Knowles, *Our Gods Wear Spandex*)

Jan. 30: Godlike Superheroes: Superman - The Death of Superman (1993) (or other possible examples for presentation: Thor, Silver Surfer) (topics: archetypes, collective imaginary)
(theoretical reading: Carl Gustav Jung, *On the Concept of the Archetype*)

Week 5

Feb. 4: Godlike Superheroines: Supergirl, Dark Phoenix, Power Girl (or Wonderwoman, Storm)
(topics: more powerful than male superheroes?) (reading: Lillian Robinson *Wonder Women – Feminisms and Superheroes*)

Feb. 6: *Watchmen* (2009)

Week 6

Feb. 11: Transformed Human Superheroes: Hulk # 013 (2015) (other examples for presentation: Captain America, Flash, Spider Man, Swamp Thing) (topics: accidents in a dangerous world or becoming who one is) (additional reading: Mark D. White, William Irwin. *Watchmen and*

Philosophy_ A Rorschach Test The Blackwell Philosophy and Pop Culture Series (2009, Wiley)
(scenes from *Logan*)

Feb. 13: Transformed Human Superheroines: Invisible Girl in *Fantastic Four Visionaries* – John Byrne, Volume 1 (2001) (other examples: Catwoman, Hawkgirl) (topics: the science of superheroes) (cont: *Classics and Comics*) Watchmen #5 (reading: Marc DiPaolo, *War, Politics and Superheroes*)

Week 7

Reading Week

Week 10 All Too Human?

Feb. 25: Human Superheroes: Hawkeye, Green Arrow - Salvation Storyline # 8 (additional examples for your presentation: Batman, Daredevil, Iron Man, The Punisher) (topics: still “all too human”?) (reading: E. Herrigel *Zen in the Art of Archery*)

Feb. 27: Human Superheroines: Black Canary in *Green Arrow-Black Canary Wedding Special* (001) (2007) (other examples: Elektra, Black Widow) (topics: de-objectifying women in comics, changing the canon in the new mythology: the death of the Black Canary in *Arrow*) (additional reading: Michel Foucault *Subject and Power*) (death scene from *Arrow*)

Week 8 The Bad and the Ugly

March 4: Supervillains Male: Doctor Doom, Magneto, Thanos, Loki, Galactus, Ultron, Kingpin (topics: Is evil eternal? The Arch-nemesis or -enemy of the superhero? Does the villain complete the superhero?) (Alan Moore *The Killing Joke*) (additional reading: Lois H. Gresh, *The Science of Supervillains*) (Joker scenes *The Dark Knight* and *Suicide Squad*)

March 6: Female: Mystique (in *X-Men Legends*, Volume 2 – The Dark Phoenix Saga (2003) (or Harley Quinn, Talia al Ghul) (topics: worse than masculine evil? stronger sex appeal?) (reading: Chris Gavalier, *The Origin of Superheroes*, ch. *The Superhero Guide to Love and Sex*)

Week 9 Race and Gender

March 11: Gay, Lesbian, Transsexual Superheroes: Xena - Warrior Princess (1997) (or Northstar, Apollo and Midnighter, Shatterstar and Rictor, Danielle Bapryste) (topics: gender politics in superhero comics, superheroes and sexuality) (Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* ch. *Identity Sex and the Metaphysics of Substance*)

March 13: Black Superheroes/heroines: Black Panther – The Man Without Fear # 518 (or Luke Cage, War Machine, Patriot, Nick Fury) (topics: race and superpowers) (reading: Jeffrey A. Brown, *Black Superheroes, Milestone Comics and their Fans* ch. *Reading Race and Gender*)

Week 10

March 18, 20: *Hancock* (2008) and discussion

Week 11 A Trip in the Orient

March 25: Asian Superheroes/heroines: Kamala Khan (Ms. Marvel) (in Captain Marvel vol. 7 #14) (other examples: David Kim, Ryan Choi, Jubilation Lee, Cindy Moon, Rina Patel) (topics: superheroes and multiculturalism, post-colonialism in superhero comic books) (reading: Edward Said *Orientalism* ch. *Knowing the Oriental*)

March 27: Oriental Superheroes: Manga and its Superheroes/heroines: Sun Goku (topics: tradition and innovation) (reading: Ben Krefta, *The Art of Drawing Manga*) (movie: *Dragon Ball Z: Battle of Gods*)

Week 12

April 1: Sidekicks: Bucky Barnes (Captain America vol. 5, #11 (Nov. 2005) (other examples: Robin, Kid Flash, Jimmy Olsen, Speedy, Wonder Girl, Terra) (topics: subordination towards the main character? is the second best the best? saving the savior?) (reading: B.J. Oropeza, *The Gospel According to Superheroes*)

April 3: What is Comic in the Comics? The Odd Superhero - Harvey Birdman, Attorney at Law ep. "Back to the Present" (also *The Tick*)

Week 13

April 8: The Politics of Comic-Con, Cosplay (readings: *It Happened at Comic-Con* ed. Ben Bolling)



Appendix to Course Outlines

Prerequisite and Antirequisite Information

Students are responsible for ensuring that they have successfully completed all course prerequisites and that they have not completed any course antirequisites. Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enrol in it without them, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. If you enrol in this course despite having already taken an antirequisite you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. Removals for these reasons may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites or for having already

taken the antirequisites.

Conduct of Students in Classes, Lectures, and Seminars

Membership in the community of Huron University College and the University of Western Ontario implies acceptance by every student of the principle of respect for the rights, responsibilities, dignity and well-being of others and a readiness to support an environment conducive to the intellectual and personal growth of all who study, work and live within it. Upon registration, students assume the responsibilities that such registration entails. The academic and social privileges granted to each student are conditional upon the fulfillment of these responsibilities.

In the classroom, students are expected to behave in a manner that supports the learning environment of others. Students can avoid any unnecessary disruption of the class by arriving in sufficient time to be seated and ready for the start of the class, by remaining silent while the professor is speaking or another student has the floor, and by taking care of personal needs prior to the start of class. If a student is late, or knows that he/she will have to leave class early, be courteous: sit in an aisle seat and enter and leave quietly.

Please see the *Code of Student Conduct* at:

<https://huronuc.on.ca/sites/default/files/pdfs/Code%20of%20Student%20Conduct.pdf>

Technology

It is not appropriate to use technology (such as, but not limited to, laptops, cell phones) in the classroom for non-classroom activities. Such activity is disruptive and is distracting to other students and to the instructor, and can inhibit learning. Students are expected to respect the classroom environment and to refrain from inappropriate use of technology and other electronic devices in class.

Academic Accommodation for Medical/Non-Medical Grounds

Students who require special accommodation for tests and/or other course components must make the appropriate arrangements with the Student Development Centre (SDC). Further details concerning policies and procedures may be found at:

http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/ssd/?requesting_acc

(a) Medical Grounds for assignments worth 10% or more of final grade: Go Directly to Academic Advising

University Senate policy, which can be found at

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf,

requires that all student requests for accommodation on medical grounds for assignments worth 10% or more of the final grade be made directly to the academic advising office of the home faculty (for Huron students, the “home faculty” is Huron), with supporting documentation in the form (minimally) of the Senate-approved Student Medical Certificate found at:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform_15JUN.pdf.

The documentation is submitted in confidence and will not be shown to instructors. The advisors will contact the instructor when the medical documentation is received, and will outline the severity and duration of the medical challenge as expressed on the Student Medical Certificate and in any other supporting documentation. The student will be informed that the instructor has been notified of the presence of medical documentation, and will be instructed to work as quickly as possible with the instructor on an agreement for accommodation. The instructor will not normally deny accommodation where appropriate medical documentation is in place and where the duration it describes aligns with the

due date(s) of assignment(s). Before denying a request for accommodation on medical grounds, the instructor will consult with the Dean. The instructor's decision is appealable to the Dean.

**(b) Accommodation on Medical Grounds for assignments worth less than 10% of final grade:
Consult Instructor Directly**

When seeking accommodation on medical grounds for assignments worth less than 10% of the final course grade, the student should contact the instructor directly. The student need only share broad outlines of the medical situation. The instructor **may** require the student to submit documentation to the academic advisors, in which case she or he will advise the student and inform the academic advisors to expect documentation. The instructor may not collect medical documentation. The advisors will contact the instructor when the medical documentation is received, and will outline the severity and duration of the medical challenge as expressed on the Student Medical Certificate and in any other supporting documentation. The student will be informed that the instructor has been notified of the presence of medical documentation, and will be instructed to work as quickly as possible with the instructor on an agreement for accommodation. The instructor will not normally deny accommodation where appropriate medical documentation is in place and where the duration it describes aligns with the due date(s) of assignment(s). Before denying a request for accommodation on medical grounds, the instructor will consult with the Dean. The instructor's decision is appealable to the Dean.

(c) Non-medical Grounds: Consult Instructor Directly

Where the grounds for seeking accommodation are not medical, the student should contact the instructor directly. Late penalties may apply at the discretion of the instructor. Apart from the exception noted below, academic advisors will not be involved in the process of accommodation for non-medical reasons.

Where a student seeks accommodation on non-medical grounds where confidentiality is a concern, the student should approach an academic advisor with any documentation available. The advisors will contact the instructor after the student's request is received, and will outline the severity and duration of the challenge without breaching confidence. The student will be informed that the instructor has been notified that significant circumstances are affecting or have affected the student's ability to complete work, and the student will be instructed to work as quickly as possible with the instructor on an agreement for accommodation. Before denying a request for accommodation where documentation has been submitted to an academic advisor, the instructor will consult with the Dean. The instructor's decision is appealable to the Dean.

Statement on Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:
http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Statement on Academic Integrity

The International Centre for Academic Integrity defines academic integrity as "a commitment, even in the face of adversity, to five fundamental values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. From these values flow principles of behaviour that enable academic communities to translate ideals to action." (CAI Fundamental Values Project, 1999).

A lack of academic integrity is indicated by such behaviours as the following:

Cheating on tests;

Fraudulent submissions online;
Plagiarism in papers submitted (including failure to cite and piecing together unattributed sources);
Unauthorized resubmission of course work to a different course;
Helping someone else cheat;
Unauthorized collaboration;
Fabrication of results or sources;
Purchasing work and representing it as one's own.

Academic Integrity: Importance and Impact

Being at university means engaging with a variety of communities in the pursuit and sharing of knowledge and understanding in ways that are clear, respectful, efficient, and productive. University communities have established norms of academic integrity to ensure responsible, honest, and ethical behavior in the academic work of the university, which is best done when sources of ideas are properly and fully acknowledged and when responsibility for ideas is fully and accurately represented.

In the academic sphere, unacknowledged use of another's work or ideas is not only an offence against the community of scholars and an obstacle to academic productivity. It may also be understood as fraud and may constitute an infringement of legal copyright.

A university is a place for fulfilling one's potential and challenging oneself, and this means rising to challenges rather than finding ways around them. The achievements in an individual's university studies can only be fairly evaluated quantitatively through true and honest representation of the actual learning done by the student. Equity in assessment for all students is ensured through fair representation of the efforts by each.

Acting with integrity at university constitutes a good set of practices for maintaining integrity in later life. Offences against academic integrity are therefore taken very seriously as part of the university's work in preparing students to serve, lead, and innovate in the world at large.

A university degree is a significant investment of an individual's, and the public's, time, energies, and resources in the future, and habits of academic integrity protect that investment by preserving the university's reputation and ensuring public confidence in higher education.

Students found guilty of plagiarism will suffer consequences ranging from a grade reduction to failure in the course to expulsion from the university. In addition, a formal letter documenting the offence will be filed in the Dean's Office, and this record of the offence will be retained in the Dean's Office for the duration of the student's academic career at Huron University College.

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com.

Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and/or exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating.

Personal Response Systems ("clickers") may be used in some classes. If clickers are to be used in a class, it is the responsibility of the student to ensure that the device is activated and functional. Students must

see their instructor if they have any concerns about whether the clicker is malfunctioning. Students must use only their own clicker. If clicker records are used to compute a portion of the course grade:

- the use of somebody else's clicker in class constitutes a scholastic offence,
- the possession of a clicker belonging to another student will be interpreted as an attempt to commit a scholastic offence.

Policy on Special Needs

Students who require special accommodation for tests and/or other course components must make the appropriate arrangements with the Student Development Centre (SDC). Further details concerning policies and procedures may be found at:

http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/ssd/?requesting_acc

Attendance Regulations for Examinations

A student is entitled to be examined in courses in which registration is maintained, subject to the following limitations:

- 1) A student may be debarred from writing the final examination for failure to maintain satisfactory academic standing throughout the year.
- 2) Any student who, in the opinion of the instructor, is absent too frequently from class or laboratory periods in any course will be reported to the Dean of the Faculty offering the course (after due warning has been given). On the recommendation of the Department concerned, and with the permission of the Dean of that Faculty, the student will be debarred from taking the regular examination in the course. The Dean of the Faculty offering the course will communicate that decision to the Dean of the Faculty of registration.

Class Cancellations

In the event of a cancellation of class, every effort will be made to post that information on the Huron website, <https://huronuc.on.ca/about/accessibility> ("Cancellations and Closures").

Mental Health @ Western

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health @ Western <http://www.uwo.ca/uwo.com/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Academic Advising

For advice on course selections, degree requirements, and for assistance with requests for medical accommodation [see above], students should contact an Academic Advisor in Huron's Student Support Services (huronsss@uwo.ca). An outline of the range of services offered is found on the Huron website at: <https://huronuc.ca/student-life-campus/student-services/academic-advising>

Department Chairs and Program Directors and Coordinators are also able to answer questions about their individual programs. Their contact information can be found on the Huron website at:

<https://huronuc.ca/student-life-campus/art-social-science>