
COMIC BOOKS IN AMERICAN CULTURE



Comic Books in American Culture

Teacher: **dr Wojciech Lewandowski**

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Academic Year: 2013/2014

Winter term: 30 h

COMIC BOOKS IN AMERICAN CULTURE

DURATION

Days and hours: **Tuesdays, 12:30-14:00**

Place: **American Studies Center, University of Warsaw, room 317**

Office hours: Tuesdays 16.45-18.15 (Institute of European Studies, Nowy Świat 69, room 32)

EVALUATION

- **test at the end of the term** (30 points);
- **2000 words essay** (15 points), word limit including footnotes, excluding bibliography;
- **take-home quiz** (15 points);
- **class participation** (20 points).

COURSE OUTLINE

The course focuses on the reconstruction of comic books' role in American culture. Comics as well as graphic novels are often seen as purely American medium and thus it is important to discuss its uniqueness and well as its place among other art-forms.

The definition of comic book as a specific form of art will be the starting point. During the first part of the course several schools of American comic books in historical perspective will be analysed from the popular superhero stories to underground ones. Our attention will be directed to the analysis of the evolution of the medium and its main genres.

During the second part of the course selected important comics and graphic novel will be thoroughly analysed. Special attention will be devoted to European, especially British authors who created their main works in US and became the force that revolutionised the medium (Alan Moore, Neil Gaiman, and Garth Ennis)

COURSE SCHEDULE

I-II. COMICS AS AN ART FORM. HISTORY OF COMIC BOOKS IN AMERICA (AN OUTLINE)

- basic terminology;
- understanding of comics as a media form;
- visual and narrative aspects of comic books;
- genres and subgenres of comic books;
- from comic strips to comic books – the evolution of the medium;
- early comic strips and their influence on development of the comic book business;
- stages and milestones in the development of the medium in America

Required Readings:

Eisner Will, *Comics and Sequential Art*, W. W, Norton & Company, New York, London 2008.

McCloud Scott, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, Harper Perennial, Northampton 1994.

Rhoades Shirrel, *A Complete History of American Comic Books*, Peter Land Publishing, New York 2008, p. 1-19.

Further Readings:

Chute Hillary, *Decoding Comics*, “MFS Modern Fiction Studies” 2006, Vol. 52, No. 4, p. 1014-1026.

Faust Wolfgang Max, Shuman R. Baird (tech. assist.), *Comics and How to Read Them*, “The Journal of Popular Culture” 1971, Vol. 5, No. 1, s. 195-202.

Groensteen Thierry, *The System of Comics*, trans. Bart Beaty, Nick Nguyen, University Press of Mississippi, Jackson 2007. (Ebrary)

Harvey Robert C., *The Art of the Funnies. An Aesthetic History*, University Press of Mississippi 1994, chap. 1.

Lacassin Francis, *The Comic Strip and Film Language*, “Film Quarterly” 1972, Vol. 26, No. 1, p. 11-23.

Saraceni Mario, *The Language of Comics*, Routledge, New York 2003. (Ebrary).

III. GOLDEN AGE COMICS. SUPERHEROES AND THE CREATION OF AMERICAN MYTH

- Superman and Batman– the birth of the superhero genre;
- the construction of the masked hero and his neverending story;
- superheroes as modern mythology.

Required Readings:

A selection of the Golden Age comics (or stories) on Course Material CD/DVD.

COMIC BOOKS IN AMERICAN CULTURE

Barrier Michael, Williams Martin (eds.), *A Smithsonian Book of Comic-Book Comics*, Smithsonian Institution, 1981, p. 9-40 (Superman, Batman – first stories), p. 63-114 (Plastic Man, Captain Marvel and Sub-Mariner stories), p. 269-294 (Spirit stories). (ASC Library)

Wright Bradford W., *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 2003, chap. 1.

Reynolds Richard, *Super Heroes: A Modern Mythology*, University Press of Mississippi, Jackson 1992, p. 7-52 and 60-74.

Further Readings:

Engle Gary, *What Makes Superman So Darned American?*, http://cc.ysu.edu/~satin-gle/gary_engle.htm.

Lopes Paul, *Demanding Respect. The Evolution of the American Comic Book*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia 2009. (Ebrary)

Superheroes and Philosophy. Truth, Justice, and the Socratic Way, eds. Tom Morris, Matt Morris, Open Court, Chicago and La Salle 2008. (Ebrary).

IV. COMICS, WAR AND PROPAGANDA

- comic books and politics – complicated relationship;
- comics as a medium of propaganda – the case of the World War II comics;
- Captain America as a symbol of the nation's strength and vitality;
- Golden Age superheroes in the Cold War reality.

Required Readings:

Wright Bradford W., *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 2003, chap. 2-3, 5.

Scott Cord, *Written in Red, White, and Blue: A Comparison of Comic Book Propaganda from World War II and September 11*, "The Journal of Popular Culture" 2007, Vol. 40, No. 2, p. 325-343.

Further Readings:

Strömberg Frederick, *Comic Art Propaganda. A Graphic History*, ILEX, Lewes 2010.

V. HORRORS OF THE CENSORSHIP. STRANGE CASE OF THE COMICS CODE

- comic books after the World War II: dangerous new genres – crime and horror comics;
- Frederick Wertham's crusade against comic books;
- comic books and juvenile delinquency – Senate investigation;
- Entertainment Comics (EC) – a victim of the witch-hunt;
- creation of the Comics Code as a remedy for comic book business.

Required Readings:

A selection of crime stories and EC horror stories on Course Material CD/DVD.

Barrier Michael, Williams Martin (eds.), *A Smithsonian Book of Comic-Book Comics*, Smithsonian Institution, 1981, p. 296-333 (EC Comics) (ASC Library).

COMIC BOOKS IN AMERICAN CULTURE

Comic Book Code of 1954, http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Comic_book_code_of_1954.

Wright Bradford W., *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 2003, chap. 4, 6.

Further Readings:

Adler-Kassner Linda, “Why Won’t You Just Read It? ”: *Comic Books and Community in the 1950s*, Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Washington DC August 9-12, 1995.

Beaty Bart, *Frederic Wertham and the Critique of Mass Culture*, University of Mississippi Press, Jackson 2005. (Ebrary)

Lopes Paul, *Demanding Respect. The Evolution of the American Comic Book*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia 2009. (Ebrary)

Nolan Michelle, *The Case against Crime Comics!*, <http://www.crimeboss.com/history01-1.html>.

VI. SILVER AGE. NEW HEROES FOR THE NEW TIMES

- the evolution of the superheroes and their meaning;
- Spiderman, Fantastic Four, Incredible Hulk, X-Men – new superheroes for the new times;
- superheroes during the Cold War.

Required Readings:

Dark Phoenix Saga on Course Material CD/DVD.

A selection of the Silver Age comics and stories on Course Material CD/DVD.

Genter Robert, “With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility”: *Cold War Culture and the Birth of Marvel Comics*, “The Journal of Popular Culture” 2007, Vol. 40, No. 6, p. 953-978.

Reynolds Richard, *Super Heroes: A Modern Mythology*, University Press of Mississippi, Jackson 1992, p. 84-95.

Wright Bradford W., *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 2003, chap. 7-8.

Further Readings:

Courdileone K. A., “Politics in an Age of Anxiety”: *Cold War Political Culture and the Crisis in American Masculinity, 1949-1960*, “The Journal of American History” 2000, Vol. 87, No. 2, p. 515-545.

Lopes Paul, *Demanding Respect. The Evolution of the American Comic Book*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia 2009. (Ebrary)

MacDonald Andrew, MacDonald Virginia, *Sold American: The Metamorphosis of Captain America*, “The Journal of Popular Culture” 1976, Vol. 10, No. 1, p. 249-258.

Mondello Salvatore, *Spider-Man: Superhero in the Liberal Tradition*, “The Journal of Popular Culture” 1976, Vol. 10, No. 1, p. 232-238.

Richardson Niall, *The Gospel According to Spider-Man*, “The Journal of Popular Culture” 2004, Vol. 37, No. 4, p. 694-703.

Superheroes and Philosophy. Truth, Justice, and the Socratic Way, eds. Tom Morris, Matt Morris, Open Court, Chicago and La Salle 2008. (Ebrary)

VII. AGAINST THE MAINSTREAM. UNDERGROUND COMIX

- the Heritage of 1960s cultural revolution in American Comic Books;
- aesthetics of the underground comix and its meaning;
- Sexual Revolution in the underground comix;
- Robert Crumb and his works;
- The Sixties in the contemporary comic books.

Required Readings:

A selection of the underground comics on Course Material CD/DVD.

Further Readings:

Holm D. K., *Robert Crumb*, Pocket Essentials 2005.

Lopes Paul, *Demanding Respect. The Evolution of the American Comic Book*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia 2009. (Ebrary)

Rifas Leonard, *Racial Imagery, Racism, Individualism, and Underground Comix*, "ImageText: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies" 2004, Vol. 1, No. 1, http://www.eng-lish.ufl.edu/image-text/archives/v1_1/rifas/print.shtml.

VIII. FROM BRONZE AGE TO POSTMODERN COMICS. DARK SIDE OF THE COMIC BOOK HEROES

- dark knights – superheroes at the end of the Twentieth Century;
- psychoanalysis of a superhero – Batman and Superman on the couch;
- problem of vigilantism and its consequences in the comic books;
- superheroes and 9/11 – the death of a dream.

Required Readings:

Miller Frank (writer and artist), *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, DC Comics, New York 2002.

Miller Frank (writer), Mazzucchelli (artist), *Batman. Year One*, DC Comics, New York 2005.

Murray Chris, *Signals from Airstrip One: The British Invasion of Mainstream American Comics*, in: *The Rise of the American Comic Artist: Creators and Contexts*, eds. Williams Paul, Lyons James, The University Press of Mississippi, Jackson 2010, p. 31-45. (Ebrary)

Reynolds Richard, *Super Heroes: A Modern Mythology*, University Press of Mississippi, Jackson 1992., p. 95-105.

Wright Bradford W., *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 2003, chap. 9, *Epilogue* and *Spider-Man at Ground Zero*.

Further Readings:

Dace Peregrine, *Nietzsche contra Superman: An Examination of the Work of Frank Miller*, "South African Journal of Philosophy" 2007, Vol. 26, No. 1, p. 98-106.

Dittmer Jason, *Captain America's Empire: Reflections on Identity, Popular Culture, and Post-9/11 Geopolitics*, „Annals of the Association of American Geographers" 2005, Vol. 95, No. 3, p. 626-43.

SOCIETY AND POLITICS IN POPULAR CULTURE

- Dubose Mike S., *Holding Out for a Hero: Reaganism, Comic Book Vigilantes, and Captain America*, "The Journal of Popular Culture" 2007, Vol. 40, No. 6, p. 915-935.
- Lang Jeffrey S., Trimble Patrick, *Whatever Happened to the Men of Tomorrow? An Examination of the American Monomyth and the Comic Book Superhero*, "The Journal of Popular Culture" 1988, Vol. 22, No. 3, p. 157-173.
- Lopes Paul, *Demanding Respect. The Evolution of the American Comic Book*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia 2009. (Ebrary)
- Schmitt Ronald, *Deconstructive Comics*, "The Journal of Popular Culture" 1992, Vol. 25, No. 4, p. 153-161.
- Superheroes and Philosophy. Truth, Justice, and the Socratic Way*, eds. Tom Morris, Matt Morris, Open Court, Chicago and La Salle 2008. (Ebrary)
- Taylor Aaron, "He's Gotta Be Strong, and He's Gotta Be Fast, and He's Gotta Be Larger Than Life": *Investigating the Engendered Superhero Body*, "The Journal of Popular Culture" 2007, Vol. 40, No. 2, p. 344-360.
- Tipton Nathan G., *Gender Trouble: Frank Miller's Revision of Robin in the Batman: Dark Knight Series*, "The Journal of Popular Culture" 2008, Vol. 41, No. 2, p. 321-336.

IX. MAJOR CONTEMPORARY COMICS PART I: WATCHMEN

- *Watchmen* and the reinterpretation of the superhero comic books;
- utopia and the American mind – the case of Ozymandias;
- critical interpretation of American myths and beliefs.

Required Readings:

- Moore Alan (writer), Gibbons Dave (artist), *Watchmen*, DC Comics, New York 1995.
- Di Liddo Annalisa, *Alan Moore: Comics as Performance, Fiction as Scalpel*, University Press of Mississippi, Jackson 2009, chap. 1.(Ebrary)
- Hugh Jamie A., 'Who Watches the Watchmen?': *Ideology and 'Real World' Superheroes*, "The Journal of Popular Culture" 2006, Vol. 39, No. 4, p. 546-557.
- Prince Michael J., *Alan Moore's America: The Liberal Individual and American Identities in «Watchmen»*, "The Journal of Popular Culture" 2011, Vol. 44, No. 4, p. 815-830.
- Reynolds Richard, *Super Heroes: A Modern Mythology*, University Press of Mississippi, Jackson 1992., p. 105-118.

Further Readings:

- Fishbaugh Brent, *Moore and Gibbon's 'Watchmen': Exact Personifications of Science, "Extrapolation"* 1998, Vol. 39, No. 3, p. 189-198.
- Paik Peter Y., *From Utopia to Apocalypse: Science Fiction and the Politics of Catastrophe*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2010, p. 23-70. (Ebrary)
- Parkin Lance, *Alan Moore...*, Pocket Essentials 2001.
- Rehak Bob, *Adapting Watchmen after 9/11*, "Cinema Journal" 2011, Fall, Vol. 51, No. 1, p. 154-159.

SOCIETY AND POLITICS IN POPULAR CULTURE

Wolf-Meyer Matthew, *The World Ozymandias Made: Utopias in the Superhero Comic, Subculture, and the Conservation of Difference*, "The Journal of Popular Culture" 2003, Vol. 36, No. 3, p. 497-517.

X. MAJOR CONTEMPORARY COMICS PART II: *V FOR VENDETTA*

- comics as a source of political ideology – fascism vs anarchism in *V for Vendetta*;
- from civil disobedience to violence – forms of political opposition;
- intertextuality as a tool of building ideological messages.

Required Readings:

Moore Alan (writer), Lloyd David (artist), *V for Vendetta*, DC Comics, New York 2008.

Di Liddo Annalisa, *Alan Moore: Comics as Performance, Fiction as Scalpel*, University Press of Mississippi, Jackson 2009, p. 111-125. (Ebrary)

Keller James R., *V for Vendetta as Cultural Pastiche. A Critical Study of the Graphic Novel and Film*, McFarland & Company, Inc., Jefferson, NC, London 2008, chap. 1-2.

Further Readings:

Gray Maggie, 'A Fistful of Dead Roses...': *Comics as Cultural Resistance: Alan Moore and David Lloyd's «V for Vendetta»*, "Journal of Graphic Novels & Comics" 2010, Vol. 1, No. 1, s. 31-49.

Kellner Douglas, *Cinema Wars: Hollywood Film and Politics in the Bush-Cheney Era*, Wiley-Blackwell, Chichester 2010, p. 183-198. (Ebrary)

Paik Peter Y., *From Utopia to Apocalypse: Science Fiction and the Politics of Catastrophe*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2010, p 123-182. (Ebrary)

XI. MAJOR CONTEMPORARY COMICS PART III: *PREACHER*

- the "American Way" – Ennis' interpretation of American values;
- from Puritanism to religious market – America's search for God in *Preacher*;
- American culture, myths and legends in the graphic novel;
- Preacher's intertextuality.

Required Readings:

Ennis Garth (writer), Dillon Steve (artist), *Preacher*, Vols. 1-9, Vertigo, DC Comics, New York, 1996-2001.

Labarre Nicholas, *Meat Fiction and Burning Western Light. The South in Garth Ennis and Steve Dillon's «Preacher»*, in: *Comics and the U.S. South*, eds. Brannon Costello, Qiana J. Whitted, University Press of Mississippi, Jackson, MA, p. 242-265. (Ebrary)

Further Readings:

Jonsson Kjartan Fossberg, *Garth Ennis' «Preacher» and the Western*, B.A. Essay, University of Iceland, School of Humanities, Department of English, January 2010.

Kitson Niall, *Rebel Yells: Genre Hybridity and Irishness in Garth Ennis & Steve Dillon's «Preacher»*, "The Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies" 2007, No. 1, <http://irishgothichorrorjournal.homestead.com/PreacherEnnisDillon.html>.

XII. MAJOR CONTEMPORARY COMICS PART IV: *THE SANDMAN*

- dreams of England and America in Gaiman's *The Sandman*;
- postmodern games and intertextuality in Gaiman's graphic novel;
- critical interpretation of American myths and beliefs.

Required Readings:

Gaiman Neil (writer), Various Artists, *The Sandman*, Vols. 1-10, Vertigo, DC Comics, New York 1993-1997.

Sharkey Rodney, 'Being' Decentered in *Sandman: History, Dreams, Gender, and the 'Prince of Metaphor and Allusion'*, "ImageText: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies" 2008, Vol. 4, No. 1, http://www.english.ufl.edu/imagetext/archives/v4_1/sharkey/.

Further Readings:

Cetiner-Oktem Zuleyha, *The Sandman as a Neomedieval Text. Neomedievalism and the Graphic Novel*, "ImageText: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies" 2008, Vol. 4, No. 1, http://www.english.ufl.edu/imagetext/archives/v4_1/cetiner-oktem/.

Long Everitt, *Reading, Writing, and Rendering the World in Neil Gaiman's «The Sandman»*, M.A. Thesis, The University of Western Ontario, Department of English, October 1997.

Wetmore Kevin, Hulbert Jennifer, York Robert, *Shakespeare and Youth Culture*, Palgrave Macmillan, Gordonsville, VA 2006. (chap. 5: "The Amazing Adventures of Superbard": *Shakespeare in Comics and Graphic Novels*) (Ebrary).

XIII. MAJOR CONTEMPORARY COMICS PART V: WAR AND BIOGRAPHY

- Art Spiegelman's *Maus* as the tale of the survivor;
- Vietnam war as an unhealed wound;
- war in Iraq in American comic books.

Required Readings:

Spiegelman Art, *Maus*, Vol. 1-2 or Complete Edition.

Vaughan Brian K. (writer), Henrichon Niko (artist), *Pride of Baghdad*, Vertigo, DC Comics, New York 2008.

Eisner Will, *Last Day in Vietnam*, Dark Horse, Milwaukie, OR 2000.

Behlman Lee, *The Escapist: Fantasy, Folklore, and the Pleasures of the Comic Book in Recent Jewish American Holocaust Fiction*, "Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies" 2004, Vol. 22, No. 3, p. 56-71.

Further Readings:

Baron Lawrence, *X-Men as J-Men: The Jewish Subtext of a Comic Book Movie*, "Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies" 2003, Vol. 22, No. 1, p. 44-52.

Buhle Paul, *History and Comics*, "Reviews in American History" 2007, Vol. 35, p. 315-323.

Chute Hilary, *Temporality and Seriality in Spiegelman's 'In the Shadow of No Towers'*, "American Periodicals", Vol. 17, No. 2, 2007, p. 228-244.

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Laurie Ross, Masculinities and War Comics, "Journal of Australian Studies", 1999, p. 114+.
Sanchez Julian, The Revolt of the Comic Books, "The American Prospect", Nov 2007, p. 43-47..

TEACHER

Wojciech Lewandowski, Ph. D. – Assistant Professor at the Institute of European Studies at the Faculty of Journalism and Political Science at the University of Warsaw. Co-founder and coordinator of British Socio-Political Studies Research Group BRITANNIA. Guest Lecturer at American Studies Center, Warsaw University. Host of a music radio show “Art.Rock Universe”.

Scientific interests

- Cultural interpretations of social and political processes;
- British and American culture (special focus: graphic novels and comic books, counterculture of the 60's, progressive rock, horror literature);
- History of Political Thought: American transcendentalism, anarchism; ethics and politics;
- Transatlantic relations (especially cultural and political relations).

Selected publications

Kultura brytyjska [British Culture], in: *System polityczny Zjednoczonego Królestwa* [Political System of the United Kingdom], eds. Przemysław Biskup, Małgorzata Kaczorowska, Oficyna Wydawnicza ASPRA-JR, Warszawa 2012, p. 109-129.

Wolność i samotność. Myśl społeczno-polityczna amerykańskiego transcendentalizmu [Freedom and Loneliness. Social and Political Thought of American Transcendentalism], Wydawnictwo Wydziału Dziennikarstwa i Nauk Politycznych UW, Warszawa 2011.

editor: *Polityka brytyjska po wyborach parlamentarnych 2010. Analiza wybranych problemów* [British Politics after the General Election 2010: Analysis of Selected Problems], with Franciszek Gołębski, Przemysław Biskup, Małgorzata Kaczorowska, Oficyna Wydawnicza ASPRA- JR, Warszawa 2011.

Pudel, mąż agentki i niedoszły zbawca Brytanii. Obraz Tony'ego Blaira w wybranych tekstach kultury popularnej [Poodle, Agent's Husband and Would-Be Saviour of Britain: Tony Blair's Depiction in Selected Texts of Popular Culture], in: *Era Blaira i Browna. Wybrane problemy polityczne rządów Partii Pracy w Zjednoczonym Królestwie 1997-2010* [Blair's and Brown's Era. Select Political Problems of Labour Government in the United Kingdom 1997–2010], eds. Franciszek Gołębski, Przemysław Biskup, Małgorzata Kaczorowska, Oficyna Wydawnicza ASPRA-JR, Warszawa 2010, p. 67-79.

Poleganie na sobie i obywatelskie nieposłuszeństwo jako formy odpowiedzialności w myśli politycznej amerykańskiego transcendentalizmu [Self-Reliance and Civil Disobedience as Forms of Social Responsibility in the Political Thought of American Transcendentalism], „Civitas Hominibus. Rocznik filozoficzno- polityczny” 2009, Vol. 1 (4), p. 17-30.

The Dark Side of Walden, „The Americanist. Warsaw Journal for the Study of United States” 2007/2008, Vol. XXIV: American Popular Culture as Import and Export, p. 117-132.