



# ST. JEROME'S UNIVERSITY

## St. Jerome's University in the University of Waterloo

Department of English  
ENGL108A Winter 2023  
The Superhero  
SJ2 2003

### INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Instructor: Bruce Wyse  
Office: SH 2110  
Skype "phone" extension: 28344  
Office Hours: Wednesdays 2:30-3:30 (or by appointment)  
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### COURSE DESCRIPTION

An examination of hero figures, ranging broadly from ancient characters such as Gilgamesh to the modern comic book superhero. Literary as well as non-literary materials (e.g., film, comics) will be considered.

While the modern superhero may come into being with the appearance of Superman in 1938, heroes with extraordinary abilities, powers, and status have played a central role in myths, legends, epics, and other works of imagination for millennia. This course will consider several ancient, classical, and Romantic forerunners of the modern superhero before exploring aspects of the familiar type of the 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> century American superhero as it appears in comics, graphic novels, and films. We will conclude with two texts that, in different ways, play with the possibilities of combining the more traditionally "literary" with the genre of superhero narrative.

Over the course of the term, we will reflect on the popularity, resonances, and cultural significance of superhero narratives, more specifically the ways in which they encode cultural concerns and anxieties, or give expression to our collective fantasies and fears. We will explore the ideological significance of particular superheroes and narratives. We will also discuss the relations between the superheroes and the communities they represent and defend, between the exceptional status and experience of the superhero and the concerns, conditions, and experiences of ordinary human beings, and between the superhero and his/her adversary or antagonist, whether monster, villain, or even institution. And we will consider some of the psychological, sociological, moral or ethical, existential, spiritual, and more loosely philosophical questions generated by superhero narratives.

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

- To become familiar with the conventions and recurrent motifs, themes, and characteristics of superhero narratives
- To develop an appreciation of the parallels between contemporary superheroes and the mythic and literary precursors of the type
- To acquire a more critical perspective on the figure of the superhero and superhero narratives and to become more attentive to the broader cultural significance of these cultural phenomena
- To cultivate critical insight into aspects of narrative form and technique in a variety of forms and media
- To hone critical skills in the reading, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation of texts
- To develop skills in the analysis of visual storytelling/graphic narrative
- To enhance written and oral communication skills
- To engage in purposeful, constructive, academic discussions with your peers

## REQUIRED TEXTS

Available through the bookstore:

*Beowulf*. Translated by Seamus Heaney. Norton.

\*An e-text of this translation is also available online through the U of W library:

<https://www.proquest.com/docview/2147693322/EFC44EA1287480EPQ/1?accountid=14906>

John Gardner. *Grendel*. Vintage.

Austin Grossman. *Soon I Will Be Invincible*. Pantheon.

Available through Kindle & comiXology (amazon.ca):

*Superman #1* (1939)

\*Also available in a print edition

*Wonder Woman, The Golden Age, Vol. 1, #1-3, 7-8* (1942)

*The Incredible Hulk, #1* (1962)

*Mighty Marvel Masterworks: The Amazing Spider-Man, Vol. 1: With Great Power* (2022: containing Nos. 1-10)

\*Also available in a print edition

*Who is the Black Panther?* (2016): containing *Black Panther, #1-6* (2005) & *Fantastic Four, #52-53* (1961)

\*Also available in a print edition

*X-Men: God Loves, Man Kills* (1982; 2002)

Alan Moore & Kevin O'Neill, *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen, Vol. 1*

\**The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen Omnibus* (containing Volumes 1 & 2) available in a print edition

Available through LEARN:

Excerpts from *Gilgamesh* (translations of the entire text are available online)

“The Book of Judges,” Chapters 13-16

Excerpt from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*

Byron, *Manfred*

Excerpts from Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

Excerpts from Shelley, *Frankenstein*

Excerpt from Wylie, *Gladiator*

\*I may post some additional and supplementary (and short) readings on LEARN over the course of the term.

### COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND ASSESSMENT

Two short reading quizzes:	10%
1 <sup>st</sup> quiz: Feb. 13	
2 <sup>nd</sup> quiz: Mar. 27	
Analysis/close reading assignment:	20%
Feb. 15	
Essay:	30%
Mar. 22	
Optional extension: Mar. 29	
Take-home Test:	25%
Posted: Apr. 5	
Due: Apr. 13	
Class participation:	15%

### COURSE SCHEDULE

JAN. 9	Organization
JAN. 11	Introduction; excerpt from Plato, <i>The Republic</i> (“The Ring of Gyges”)
JAN. 16	Excerpts from <i>Gilgamesh</i> [LEARN]; the story of Samson, “The Book of Judges” [LEARN]
JAN. 18	Heracles/Hercules, excerpt from Ovid’s <i>Metamorphoses</i> [LEARN]; <i>Beowulf</i> (975-1025)
JAN. 23	<i>Beowulf</i> (975-1025)
JAN. 25	<i>Beowulf</i> (975-1025)
JAN. 30	Gardner, <i>Grendel</i> (1971)
FEB. 1	<i>Grendel</i> (1971)

- FEB. 6 Byron, *Manfred* (1817) [LEARN]  
 FEB. 8 Byron, *Manfred* (1817) [LEARN]; excerpts from Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-85) [LEARN]; excerpts from Shelley, *Frankenstein* (1818) [LEARN]
- FEB. 13 *Superman #1* (1939); optional reading: excerpt from Wylie, *Gladiator* (1930) [LEARN]  
 \*1<sup>st</sup> Short Reading Quiz
- FEB. 15 *Wonder Woman, The Golden Age, Vol. 1, #1-3, 7-8* (1942)  
 \*Close Reading Assignment due
- FEB. 20 – 24 Reading Week: no classes
- FEB. 27 *The Incredible Hulk, #1* (1962); *Amazing Fantasy, #15* (1962), *The Amazing Spiderman, #1, 3, 4* (1963)
- MAR. 1 *Who is the Black Panther?* (2016): containing *Black Panther, #1-6* (2005) & *Fantastic Four, #52-53* (1961)
- MAR. 6 *X-Men: God Loves, Man Kills* (1982; 2002)  
 MAR. 8 *X-Men: God Loves, Man Kills* (1982; 2002)
- MAR. 13 Christopher Nolan (dir.), *The Dark Knight* (2008): screening  
 MAR. 15 Christopher Nolan (dir.), *The Dark Knight* (2008): screening
- MAR. 20 Batman  
 MAR. 22 Batman  
 \*Essay due (see note below on optional extension)
- MAR. 27 Alan Moore & Kevin O’Neill, *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen, Vol. 1* (2000)  
 \*2<sup>nd</sup> Short Reading Quiz
- MAR. 29 Alan Moore & Kevin O’Neill, *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen, Vol. 1* (2000)
- APR. 3 Austin Grossman, *Soon I Will Be Invincible* (2007)  
 APR. 5 Austin Grossman, *Soon I Will Be Invincible* (2007)  
 \*Take-home Test distributed/posted on LEARN
- APR. 13 \*Take-home Test due (before midnight)

**IMPORTANT DATES TO REMEMBER**

Feb. 13: 1<sup>st</sup> (in-class) quiz  
Feb. 15: Analysis/close reading assignment due  
Mar. 22: Essay due  
Mar. 27: 2<sup>nd</sup> (in-class) quiz  
Mar. 29: Optional extension for essay  
Apr. 5: Take-home final test distributed/posted  
Apr. 13: Take-home final test due (before midnight)

**CLASS PARTICIPATION**

Students are expected to attend class regularly (with the relevant text[s] in hand) and to be adequately prepared for each class; students should be willing to demonstrate their familiarity with the works/readings by responding to questions, and thoughtfully and constructively engaging in discussions of the texts.

Class activities may include short writing exercises, surveys, and informal (“pop” quizzes). Please have some paper and a pen with you for every class.

A central component of the class (and an important element of the class participation grade) will be group discussions and in-class activities. The class will be divided into groups of around six students. Although these will be established at the beginning of the term, they may be subject to change (for example, to adjust for students who have joined the class or dropped the class). Typically, the group discussions will respond to a question or set of questions (on PowerPoint or in print). (This may also involve a very short reading.) The more fully elaborated sets of question will provide direction and structure to the discussions. Spokespersons from each group *may* be asked to present their conclusions to the class to stimulate a wider discussion. Each group will submit collaboratively written responses to these questions at the end of the class. I will keep track of your participation in these discussions, exercises, and activities.

**ATTENDANCE POLICY**

As noted above, you should attend class regularly. Your participation grade is built on the foundation of your attendance in class. Missing too many classes will have a significantly adverse effect on your participation grade.

Do not miss the two classes on February 13 and March 27. These are the dates for the two in-class quizzes. If you are unable to make it to class on either of these days due to illness, please let me know by email *beforehand*. In that case, you will have the opportunity to write a make-up quiz *outside* of class time. Ordinarily, this would take place the following week. There will be no alternative assignment or redistribution of marks in the case of missed quizzes.

## MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS: CLOSE READING & ESSAY

Details about the Close Reading Assignment and the Essay will be provided later in the term.

### OPTIONAL ESSAY EXTENSION

While the “official” due date for the essay is March 22, I will accept essays up to March 29 without any late penalty. However, essays submitted after March 22 may not receive extensive written comments. Essays received after March 29 will be subject to a late penalty (see below).

\*If you genuinely feel that you need an additional, slight extension (beyond March 29), please contact me *well in advance* of the due date to discuss the possibility.

### POLICY ON LATE WORK, MISSED ASSIGNMENTS, AND MAKE-UP TESTS

Two (2) marks per day will be deducted from close reading assignments and essays that are late (e.g., 74% - 2 = 72%). Exceptions to this policy will be made in cases of reported illness and may also be made in exceptional circumstances. [See the note about additional extensions for the essay above.]

Ordinarily, I do not accept late take-home final tests—except in cases of documented illness or other exceptional circumstances.

### SUBMITTING ASSIGNMENTS

**Close Reading assignment and essay: *paper copies*** of these two assignments are required. These two assignments should be submitted to me at the beginning or end of class or during my office hours. If, however, unforeseen or unavoidable circumstances prevent you from submitting your work to me in the preferred manner, you should send me the assignment in an email attachment on the due date to confirm that it was completed on time—**and then** submit your paper copy to me in the next class. St. Jerome’s also has an Essay/Assignment box that you can use to submit your paper copy. Once again, if you drop your work off in the box, you must also send me the assignment in an email attachment. Failure to confirm the date of the submission in this manner may result in a late penalty based on the date on which I check the box for assignments. Please note, however, that I will not accept email submissions of these assignments *alone*. I will only mark these (two) assignments once I receive the paper copies.

**Take-home final test:** this should be submitted using the designated **Dropbox folder** in LEARN. Please note that I do not, as a rule, put comments on final exams/tests.

### ELECTRONIC DEVICE POLICY

Mobile devices, specifically laptops and tablets, may be used in this course for educational purposes only (i.e., learning directly related to the course). No non-academic use of electronic devices is allowed. Phones must be turned off at the beginning of each class and may not be used for the duration of the class (this includes texting). At times I may ask you to close your laptops or turn off your tablets to focus your attention on other course related tasks. Failure to comply may result in you being asked to leave your device in your bag or at the front of the room for all or part of the class/course, or being asked to leave the classroom.

## **COPYRIGHT STATEMENT**

The educational materials developed for this course, including, but not limited to, lecture notes and slides, handout materials, examinations and assignments, and any materials posted to LEARN, are the intellectual property of the course instructor. These materials have been developed for student use only and they are not intended for wider dissemination and/or communication outside of the course. Posting or providing unauthorized audio, video, or textual material of lecture content to third-party websites violates an instructor's intellectual property rights, and the Canadian Copyright Act. Recording lectures in any way is prohibited in this course.

## **CORRESPONDENCE**

Your primary way of corresponding with me outside of class time and office hours should be by email. Please use [bwyse@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:bwyse@uwaterloo.ca). You may also use [bwyse@wlu.ca](mailto:bwyse@wlu.ca), but if you do, please reference this course (ENGL108A) in the subject line.

## **OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION**

**Academic Integrity:** In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo community are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. Check [www.uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/](http://www.uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/) for more information.

**Grievance:** A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of their university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read the St. Jerome's University Policy on [Student Petitions and Grievances](#). When in doubt, please be certain to contact the St. Jerome's Advising Specialist, Student Affairs Office, who will provide further assistance.

**Discipline:** A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing an academic offence, and to take responsibility for their actions. Check [www.uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/](http://www.uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/) for more information. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about "rules" for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course instructor, academic advisor, or the Associate Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under the St. Jerome's University Policy on [Student Discipline](#). For information on categories of offences and types of penalties, students should refer to University of Waterloo [Policy 71, Student Discipline](#). For typical penalties, check the [Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties](#).

\*If you are at all uncertain about what constitutes plagiarism, please discuss this with me in advance of the submission of your work.

**Appeals:** A decision made or penalty imposed under the St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Petitions and Grievances (other than a petition) or the St. Jerome's University Policy on

Student Discipline may be appealed if there is a ground. A student who believes they have a ground for an appeal should refer to the St. Jerome's University Policy on [Student Appeals](#).

**Note for students with disabilities:** [AccessAbility Services](#), located in Needles Hall (Room 1401) at the University of Waterloo, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with AccessAbility Services at the beginning of each academic term.

### **COVID CONTINGENCY PLAN**

In the light of current public health circumstances, instructors have been asked to provide a plan for course/class delivery if (a) the instructor is unable to be present in class due to illness/self-isolation or (b) in-person classes are no longer taking place.

If I am self-isolating for a week, I will post my notes, PowerPoints, and class exercises on LEARN. Any student work which might have been done in class will be submitted through Dropbox folders.

In the, hopefully, unlikely circumstance that in-person classes are no longer possible, we will shift to a combination of online synchronous classes using Teams, recorded (asynchronous) lectures, and posts and discussions on LEARN.

If you are self-isolating because of Covid, please let me know. I will certainly factor that into the class participation component of your mark. If you have to miss one of the quizzes because of self-isolation, you will have the opportunity to write a make-up quiz (ideally, the following week).

### **MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES**

All of us need a support system. The SJU faculty and staff encourage students to seek out mental health support if they are needed.

On Campus:

- Counselling Services: [counselling.services@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:counselling.services@uwaterloo.ca) / 519-888-4567 x32655
- [MATES](#): one-to-one peer support program offered by Federation of Students (FEDS) and Counselling Services
- Health Services Emergency service: located across the creek from Student Life Centre