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 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)
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:

Further Readings:

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.


**Further Readings:**


**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:**


**Further Readings:**


**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.

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.

Further Readings:
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:

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.

Further Readings:
SOCIETY AND POLITICS IN POPULAR CULTURE


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:**


Di Liddo Annalisa, *Alan Moore: Comics as Performance, Fiction as Scalpel*, University Press of Mississippi, Jackson 2009, chap. 1.(Ebrary)


**Further Readings:**


Paik Peter Y., *From Utopia to Apocalypse: Science Fiction and the Politics of Catastrophe*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2010, p. 23-70. (Ebrary)


**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:**


**Further Readings:**


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:**


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:**


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:**


**Further Readings:**


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:**


**Further Readings:**


SOCIETY AND POLITICS IN POPULAR CULTURE

SOCIETY AND POLITICS IN POPULAR CULTURE

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


