Women’s Graphic Memoirs

WGS 192-001, Fall 2017

Instructor
Casey O’Brien

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Class email: wgs-192@uwm.edu
Office: Engelmann B50
Office hours: T/Th 3:30-4:30
And by appointment

Required Course Texts

Books available through ecampus.com

Barry, Lynda. One Hundred Demons (2005)
Bechdel, Alison. Fun Home (2007)
Katin, Miriam. We are on Our Own (2006)
Readings posted on D2L

Course Description

What does it mean to narrate a life by both writing and drawing? What do visual images—specifically hand-drawn images—add to women’s life stories? The twenty-first century has seen a wellspring of autobiographical comic texts with women’s lives as the subject. This course will ask why: Why now? Why these stories? Examining recently published graphic memoirs by women, as well as recent feminist critical work on the graphic memoir as archive, this course will examine how women remember, (re)create, draw, and narrate their lives.

The diverse memoirs selected for this Women’s and Gender studies course are well suited for creatively and critically exploring concepts of remembering, knowing, and identity at the intersections of gender, sexuality, race, and culture. Through the process of examining the genre of memoir told through the comics medium, students will develop visual and critical literacy skills required to read and construct knowledge in new ways.
Goals and Outcomes

- Identify, examine, question, and analyze the genre of memoir, as well as the medium of comic writing, as they pertain to representing women’s lives

- Effectively express ideas, developed in relation to course content, through class discussion and class presentations

- Effectively express ideas, developed in relation to course content, through regular reading analysis papers and the final course project

- Learn how to use print and electronic resources to examine women’s graphic narratives as part of developing college-level information literacy

- Critically examine and interrogate the category “woman,” along with who and what defines “woman” and whose stories get told

- Develop a graphic memoir that implements writing and reading strategies developed through class to illustrate, examine, and produce a critical interpretation of those events in one’s own life

- Question and assess the cultural significance of women’s graphic memoirs, including how these life stories give shape and expression to women’s experiences

- Examine how gender and power relations are illustrated and critiqued in graphic forms

- Demonstrate a critical awareness of the histories and contexts surrounding women’s graphic memoirs

Work Involved

This course introduces students to the concepts, terminology, and analytical practices that will be useful in their examination of women’s graphic memoirs. Along with the memoirs themselves, we will examine scholarly essays published on the topic, learn foundational concepts for feminist critical analysis, and engage in writing/drawing techniques observed in our course texts. Additionally, students will write/draw a mini graphic memoir that represents and examines an event in their own lives.

Grading Rubric

- Participation (10%)
- Attendance (10%)
- Course Assignments (20%)
- Four Reading Response Papers (25%)
- Mini Graphic Memoir Final Project (15%)
- Graphic Memoir Presentation (10%)
- Final Reflection (10%)
Attendance and Participation (20%)

Class discussions are essential to the learning you and your classmates will experience in this course; therefore, it is important to attend all class meetings. Participation need not require speaking in every class discussion, but does require being ready and able to participate in any discussion. If you do not participate verbally the entire term, it will be noticed and taken into account in your final grade. If you are concerned about this portion of your grade, please speak to me personally.

The reason I count participation and attendance as such a large percentage of your grade is, in part, because learning is very much a social process: we learn from our interactions with others, the questions we ask, the responses we hear, the conversations we have. For this reason, discussions in the course will be student-generated. By that, I mean you and your classmates will be responsible for a large part of determining the discussions and what you find important or noteworthy.

Students missing more than four class periods will be dropped a letter grade for each missed class succeeding four absences. Being present for a class means being there for the entire class period. Three late arrivals or early exits (1-19 minutes) will count as one absence.

Please keep an open mind and be respectful of your classmates when they are speaking. Also, silence and put away devices during class, unless we are using them for an activity. If there is an outstanding circumstance, and it is imperative for you to be contacted by phone, please notify me. Unpermitted use of devices in class will result in a lowered participation score.

Grading Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100-94</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>90-93.9</td>
<td>A-</td>
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<tr>
<td>87-89.9</td>
<td>B+</td>
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<tr>
<td>84-86.9</td>
<td>B</td>
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<tr>
<td>80-83.9</td>
<td>B-</td>
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<tr>
<td>77-79.9</td>
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Weekly Workload

<table>
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<th>Activity</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Readings</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-class time</td>
<td>2.5 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading responses</td>
<td>1.5 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignments</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Weekly Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>8 hours</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Administrative Drop:

In accordance with UWM registration policy, I will drop, without notification, any student who misses the first full week of class to allow others to add.
Course Assignments (20%)

Throughout the term, I will assign various in-class and take-home assignments. You are responsible for completing and turning in all assignments on time. You are also responsible for finding out what work you missed when you are absent, including any announcements that were made, changes to the schedule, in-class assignments, and assigned homework. Additionally, you are responsible for submitting copies of any written assignments that are due when you are absent. I will drop the lowest score from your assignment grade, which essentially gives you one free “oops.”

Barring provable extenuating circumstances, no late assignment will be accepted, and assignments not submitted on time will receive a zero. If you know you’re going to be absent, you may either turn in your assignment early or make arrangements to drop off your assignment on the day it is due. If for some reason you must miss class, it is expected you will make arrangements to keep up with class work. You may pick up homework assignments and in-class activities on our D2L site.

Graphic Memoir Final Project (15%)

After examining strategies other authors have used to tell their life stories in graphic form, you will have the opportunity to create your own. Throughout the semester, you will work on writing and drawing your own mini graphic memoir. You may hand draw, paint, use collage, online software, or any combination of mediums in order to create your own memoir using the comics medium. You need not be a practiced artist to complete this assignment. A separate assignment sheet will follow.

Graphic Memoir Presentation (10%)

You will have an opportunity to present your mini graphic memoir during that last two weeks of class. Using the digital doc cam in our class, you will have 20 minutes to read through your memoir, discuss your creative choices, and respond to questions from the class.

Final Reflection (10%)

This part of your final project involves writing an essay in which you explain the writing strategies you’ve used in your graphic memoir, your experiences composing, and reflections on what you’ve learned from completing this project. You should further explain why you chose the memory you did and how you understand this experience differently now that you’ve written and drawn about it. This essay should be about 3 typed, double-spaced pages in a 12-point font with 1-inch margins.

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Reading Response Papers (25%)

Reading analyses of the assigned memoirs are due on the last day we discuss the text. Due dates are listed on the class schedule. These analyses should be about 1-2 pages and should provide you with the space to contemplate compelling ideas presented in the text. Further, it should be a place for you to try out key terms and concepts we’ve discussed and make connections and pose questions that we can use as a discussion starter in class. From time to time, I will ask you to share your analyses aloud. A separate assignment sheet for each analysis will be provided. I will drop the lowest score to allow one free “oops.”

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Campus Resources

Women’s and Gender Studies Offices: Curtin, 535
uwm.edu/lets/womensstudies/

UWM’s Women’s Resource Center: Union, WG93
uwm.edu/wrc

UWM’s LGBT Resource Center: Union, WG89
uwm.edu/lgbtrc/

UWM’s Inclusive Excellence Center: Union, W198
uwm.edu/inclusiveexcellence

Academic Resource Center (ARC): Mitchell, 112
uwm.edu/arc

Norris Health Center: 229-4716
uwm.edu/norris

Panther Academic Success Services (PASS): Library East
uwm.edu/pass

Student Success Center: Bolton 120
uwm.edu/studentsuccess

University Policies: To find links to university policies pertaining to religious observances, students with disabilities, students called to active military duty, academic misconduct, etc., please visit:

Other Recommended Graphic Memoirs

Bechdel, Alison. Are you My Mother?
Chast, Roz. Can We Talk About Something More Pleasant?
Forney, Ellen, Marbles: Mania, Depression, Michelangelo, and Me
Frakes, Colleen. Prison Island: A Graphic Memoir
Georges, Nicole. Calling Dr Laura
Knisley, Lucy. Relish: My Life in the Kitchen
Sandell, Laurie. The Imposter’s Daughter
Satrapi, Marjane. Persepolis 2
Schrag, Ariel. Awkward, Definition, Potential
Small, David. Stitches
Spiegelman, Art. Maus
Summers, A. K. Pregnant Butch
Thompson, Craig. Blankets
Weaver, Lila Quintero. Darkroom: A Memoir in Black and White
Wertz, Julie. The Infinite Wait and Other Stories
Yang, Belle. Forget Sorrow: An Ancestral Tale