

Course Syllabus

CENS 308 - 001: Graphic Novels in Central, Eastern and Northern Europe

Our class meets: Tuesdays & Thursdays 3:30-4:50 in Buchanan D217

Office hours are W/F from 10:00-11:30 in [Buchanan Tower 906](#). (As you leave the ninth-floor elevators, turn left, then right, then right again.)

I am open to making exceptional ZOOM appointments if needed.

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Course Description

CENS 308 is an interdisciplinary course that will address topics and themes in literature, cultural studies, visual art, film, history and society including: genre history and debate, comics between popular entertainment and fine art, reflecting also upon topics of politics, culture and gender. We will engage with historical and contemporary social, political and cultural issues in Central, Eastern and Northern Europe as these are represented in graphic novels.

Learning Objectives

Upon successful completion of the course (i.e., with active attendance and participation, completion of reading and writing assignments, and any exams) students will be able to methodically understand and explain European comics as a serious art form with a rich history, relating it to literature and visual art. Students will also appreciate why the graphic novel is increasingly regarded as an outstanding medium for individual expression in contemporary society. Students will develop critical awareness of the shaping factors, culturally and socially, of the comics genre in continental Europe, by means of class discussions, individual written assignments, and a conclusive plenum module focused on general and regional perspectives.

Required Materials (available in bookstore unless indicated with *)

- Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics* (Harper: 1993)
- Norma Krug, *Belonging (aka Heimat)* (Penguin: 2019)
- Liv Strömquist, *Fruit of Knowledge* (Fantagraphics: 2018)
- Igort (Igor Tuveri): *Life and Death under Soviet Rule* (Simon & Shuster: 2016)
- Ulli Lust: *Today Is the Last Day of the Rest of Your Life* (Fantagraphics: 2013)
- Aleksandar Zograf: *Regards from Serbia* (Top Shelf: 2007)
- *Victoria Lomasko, *Other Russias (n+1: 2016 / Penguin: 2017)* (I will provide access)
- *UBC Canvas - You know where to find this, I think :)

Evaluation

- 10% Attendance and In-class Participation (I will take daily attendance beginning after the add/drop deadline)
- 40% Homework Assignments (three quizzes plus five sets of two or three questions spread out over the course of the semester, responses of 300-500 words each per **set** of questions)
- 20% Midterm Exam
- 30% Essay (1200-1500 words, double-spaced, 12-point font)

10%: Attendance and In-class Participation

Attendance is mandatory, and active participation is encouraged and appreciated. Participation grades will be based on the instructor's assessment of students' involvement in class discussion (in both full group and small group situations), familiarity with course material when called on, and on-task engagement in group work. Unexcused absences accumulate after the first two and will negatively affect the course grade at a rate of .5% per additional absence. Repeated lateness will also negatively affect this portion of the course grade (with each two instances of unexcused lateness equaling one absence). Absences will be excused at the instructor's discretion, based on UBC and departmental policy. Written documentation is required for UBC-sponsored activities.

40%: Quizzes and Homework Assignments (Canvas)

Students will complete three multiple choice quizzes within Canvas related to course readings on comics history and theory. Students will also complete five homework assignments over the course of the semester that will involve responding to two or three questions and/or prompts (expected length 300-500 words per assignment). The homework assignments are intended as a lower-stakes way to engage with core course ideas and texts. In most cases questions/prompts will be posted on selected Fridays and due before the first class of the following week.

I will apply the following, basic rubric to your homework assignments:

2/10: Did it but it shows little to no thought and/or effort

4/10: Did it but it shows little thought and/or effort

6/10: Doesn't show enough thought and/or effort

8/10: Shows effort and some thought

10/10: Shows effort, is thoughtful and thought-provoking

20%: Midterm Exam

The midterm exam will be written in-class during an 80-minute block at roughly the 2/3 point of the term, and will consist of concept definitions (choose eight of ten, 40%), and paragraph answer questions (choose six of ten, 60%). You will be provided with a list of possible questions two weeks in advance.

30%: Essay

Students will digitally submit (on Canvas) a formal essay (1200-1600 words in length, double-spaced, 12-point font) no later than Friday December 16th at midnight. Essay topics will be released as early as possible and no later than a month in advance of the submission deadline (on Canvas).

The essay must be formal in character, and must contain a descriptive title, a clear thesis statement, and be argumentative and substantive; and it must include a Works Cited if you use any secondary sources. (I am fine with any of the major style formats (MLA, APA, Chicago), providing you are consistent.) To learn about my essay expectations, see the [Essay Grading Rubric](#) and [Tips for good Academic Writing](#).

Excellent essays will have a relevant introduction that concludes with a compelling thesis (i.e., one that is clear, succinct and persuasive); respond to the chosen prompt logically and coherently throughout; will synthesize individual ideas with primary and secondary textual support as appropriate; and will incorporate this support elegantly.

Note regarding late assignments: As a rule, I expect assignments to be submitted on-time. I will consider extension requests, but am far more likely to approve a request if it is made well in advance.

Outline (this outline is just a guide and is subject to change with notice)

NOTE: Apologies for not giving you exact page number reading expectations. I find I need some flexibility early in the semester. I will add more specific expectations ASAP.

September

6: No Class: Imagine Day

8: Introduction / Why comics?

13: Comics history & theory - *Understanding Comics*, chapters 1-4

15: *Understanding Comics*, finish 1-4, *begin* chapters 5-9 – **First & Second Quizzes Due Before Next Class**

20. Understanding Comics, chapters 5-9 – **Third Quiz Due Before Next Class**

22: Other ways of understanding comics – **Fourth Quiz Due Before Next Class**

27: Comics as life writing - *Today Is the Last Day of the Rest of Your Life*

29: *Today Is the Last Day of the Rest of Your Life*

October

4: *Today Is the Last Day of the Rest of Your Life* – **Homework Assignment 1 Due before Next Class**

6: *Belonging* (aka *Heimat*)

11: *Belonging* (aka *Heimat*)

13: *Belonging* (aka *Heimat*)

18: *Fruit of Knowledge* – **Homework Assignment 2 Due before Next Class**

20: *Fruit of Knowledge*

25: *Fruit of Knowledge*

27: *Regards from Serbia*

November

1: *Regards from Serbia* – **Homework Assignment 3 Due before Next Class**

3: *Regards from Serbia*

8: **Midterm Exam / Essay Questions Released – Homework Assignment 4 Due before Next Class**

10: No Class – Midterm Break

15: *Life and Death under Soviet Rule*

17: *Life and Death under Soviet Rule*

22: *Life and Death under Soviet Rule*

24: *Other Russias* – **Homework Assignment 5 Due before Next Class**

29: Other Russias

December

1: Other Russias

6: Overview Class

16: Essay Due

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Essay grading will be informed by the following **rubric**. It offers a guide for what “A” papers, “B” papers, etc. might exhibit. Note that the questions and statements below are not exhaustive for what may occur in each category. They are only intended as a guide and an aid.

	A	B	C	D	Fail
1. How effective is the paper’s title? (How well does it imply or communicate the main argument?)	Highly effective. Explicitly prepares reader for argument.	Effective. Suggests argument to come.	Not wholly unrelated to what’s coming, but not nearly explicit enough.	Has a title, but how it relates to the argument isn’t clear.	Either no title or non-sensical.
2. How compelling is the thesis? (How original, clear, succinct, persuasive is it?)	Compelling. Original, clear, succinct and persuasive.	Interesting but lacking somewhat in originality and/or clarity and/or succinctness and/or persuasiveness.	Not very interesting and/or seriously lacking in originality and/or clarity and/or succinctness and/or persuasiveness.	Thesis is too vague and/or is unclear.	No thesis or non-sensical.
3. How well supported is the thesis?	Thesis supported clearly and convincingly (i.e., with relevant, substantive points) throughout rest of paper.	Support breaks down occasionally – while most paragraphs support clearly and convincingly, one or two do so weakly or not at all.	Support breaks down too often – while some paragraphs support the thesis well, several do so weakly or not at all.	The majority of supporting paragraphs support the thesis too weakly or not at all.	The thesis goes unsupported.
4. How well organized is the paper overall?	The paper shows excellent organization – with good balance and	The paper shows good organization. Papers suffers from occasional	The paper needs better organization. It lacks sufficient balance and is	The paper is generally disorganized. It lacks balance. Its transitions	A total mess.

	effective transitions throughout.	imbalance and/or weak transitions.	too often awkward in transition.	are generally poor.	
5. How well organized are the paper's individual paragraphs?	All paragraphs have clear topic statements which go supported clearly and sufficiently throughout.	Occasional paragraphs lack clarity and/or sufficient support.	Several paragraphs lack clarity and/or sufficient support.	The majority of paragraphs lack a clear topic statement and/or show insufficient support.	Hard to make sense of the majority of the paper's paragraphs.
6. How effective is the paper's conclusion?	An excellent conclusion – elegant and efficient. It also does more than simply summarize.	A good conclusion. It summarizes the paper's argument elegantly and efficiently.	An average conclusion. Doesn't summarize paper's argument well enough. Could be too short, too long and/or fails to mention an important aspect of the argument and/or mentions the unimportant.	A poor conclusion. Lacks clarity and/or doesn't work with the argument that preceded it.	Either no conclusion or nonsense.
7. How well written is the paper mechanically (i.e., in terms of grammar, spelling, typos and word choice)?	Paper is mechanically clean – no (or next to no) grammar errors or spelling mistakes. Accurate and concise word choice throughout.	The very occasional grammatical error, typo, or spelling mistake and/or word choice occasionally needs to be more accurate and/or concise. Errors, however, never affect sense.	Paper is too sloppy. It suffers from more than occasional mechanical mistakes and/or word choice is too often inaccurate and/or wordy. Errors sometimes affect sense.	Littered with errors and/or many errors affect sense.	So many errors as to make understanding the argument impossible.
8. Does the paper pay attention to both narrative (plot, story, development) and formal (layout, visual style etc.) qualities in its analysis?	Yes. Paper effectively analyzes both narrative and formal qualities. (The very best papers will argue how plot and form function	Yes, but discussion of one (usually narrative) receives too great a focus and/or the analysis of one (usually form) isn't	Paper fails to address one of either narrative or formal qualities. That being said, what is discussed is analyzed (i.e. not summarized or described.)	No, and what the paper focusses on tends to be described or summarized rather than analyzed.	Insufficient attention paid to either.

	together and/or in tension with each other.)	sophisticated enough.			
9. How well does the paper employ appropriate conceptual vocabulary in its analysis?	Shows sophisticated understanding and effective application of appropriate conceptual vocabulary, and does so to an appropriate extent.	Employs appropriate conceptual vocabulary but could use more and/or could show more understanding and/or sophistication in its use.	Employs little appropriate conceptual vocabulary and/or does so in a manner that lacks understanding.	Employs very little appropriate conceptual vocabulary and/or does so in a manner that lacks understanding.	Doesn't employ any.
10. How effectively does the paper employ sociohistorical, political, cultural contexts (as appropriate) in its analysis?	Employs context very effectively, i.e., in a manner that shows nuanced understanding and explains relevance very convincingly.	Employs context effectively, i.e., in a manner that shows understanding and explains relevance convincingly.	Employs context in a manner that shows incomplete or unsure understanding and/or fails to explain relevance convincingly.	Employs context where it is inappropriate and/or in a manner that shows a lack of understanding and/or fails to explain relevance.	Fails to employ context when it is crucially needed for the argument.

Papers submitted late will lose 10% per day up to a maximum of 30% (after which a paper will no longer be accepted).