

ENGLISH 288: Literature and Popular Culture
(Winter 2010)

INSTRUCTOR: Raj Mehta

TELEPHONE: 370-3328

E-MAIL: mehta@camosun.bc.ca

OFFICE: Paul 318

OFFICE HOURS: TBA

Lady GaGa is good, but she's a new artist, Britney Spears is a legend. They are two different artists, two forms of entertainment but very different, is like comparing Picasso to Dali. (Lily Allen, December 28, 2009)

God is really only another artist. He invented the giraffe, the elephant and the cat. He has no real style. He just goes on trying other things. (Picasso)

What is a television apparatus to man, who has only to shut his eyes to see the most inaccessible regions of the seen and the never seen, who has only to imagine in order to pierce through walls and cause all the planetary Baghdads of his dreams to rise from the dust. (Dali)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course introduces a range of approaches to cultural studies by exploring the intersection between everyday life, mass media, and broader political and historical contexts. We will consider some theoretical readings and approaches to studying culture, and examine such topics as how cultures make meaning through representational systems, what constitutes challenges to hierarchies of cultural value, and explore the theoretical foundations of cultural studies with some focus on social movements like feminism, critical race studies, postmodernism and gender studies. Using these theoretical tools, we will examine a range of popular media and sites of cultural expression – the graphic novel, music, film, performance, orature, cyber media and more. This is the first run of this course, so we'll need to improvise along the way no doubt.

Students will be able to:

- 1. Analyse the theoretical positions of a range of different texts.*
- 2. Demonstrate how the processes of reading and interpretation are contested and debated.*
- 3. Identify important themes in popular culture and literary texts.*
- 4. Compare and contrast various texts, authors, and theories within the field of popular culture.*
- 5. Evaluate a range of methodologies available for interpreting literature and culture.*
- 6. Write and orally communicate arguments effectively.*
- 7. Support written work and oral presentations with relevant evidence and support.*
- 8. Document source material with current MLA conventions.*

REQUIRED TEXTS

Pride of Baghdad – by Brian K. Vaughan & illustrated by Niko Henrichon.

Popping Culture – edited by Murray Pomerance & John Sakeris.

EVALUATION SCHEME

A+ = 90-100%	A = 85-89	A- = 80-84
B+ = 77-79	B = 73-76	B- = 70-72%
C+ = 65-69	C = 60-64	D = 50-59%
F = Below 50%	IN = Incomplete	

EVALUATION & ASSIGNMENTS

Fashion Analysis (2 pages) 10%

Write an analysis of yourself in view of your clothing/dress/fashion. What political, social or cultural symbolic values are implied? What cultural ideas, beliefs, values, and the like, are suggested?

Case Study (4-5 pages) 20%

Provide a case study on reading public spaces - mall culture, public art in Victoria, something on campus, etc. The formal format of the case study will be outlined in class. Note the written submission requires the use of visual elements. Students who share similar interests (ex. malls) can work on a group assignment.

Tests 2X15% (30%)

You will write two in-class tests over the term – these will focus on the readings/class lectures/in-class discussions. It is presumed that you are present and have good notes – especially on the assigned readings. The test will also cover the films we view in class. Each test is worth 15%.

Music Video Presentation 15%

1. Introduction

- Present the music video. Who is the artist/ group and what is the name of the song. Which album is the song part of and when was it released? Who directed the video?
- What is the song about? Read the lyrics and give a brief summary.

2. A closer look at the video

- Briefly describe the content of the video.
- Describe the video from beginning to end. Is there a plot or does the video contain of fragments?

- Is it a concert video, a narrative video, a lyrical video (fragments) or a combination of these? Explain.
- Is there an obvious connection between the video and the lyrics of the song? Describe the (lack of) connection.
- Who do you think is the target audience of this video?
- Describe how the camera is used in the video, the angles, the editing etc.
- What people do we meet in the video? Does the video focus on the artist or group or are other characters in focus?
- Where does the video take place? In a forest, a desert, a city? Inside/ outside?
- What is the atmosphere of the video? Does the video put you in a certain mood?
- Are there clear connections between lyrics, images and music? Explain.
- What in particular draws your attention towards this video?

3. Summary and conclusion

- Try to say something about the time, atmosphere, culture, religion or other cultural context of the video?

Final Essay (6-8 pages) 25%

A graphic novel provides addendums to a narrative – use of color or ‘sound’ to highlight things about mood or setting say, full page focus or double page focus to highlight a moment or scene, and other nonverbal elements to heighten the experience of the story. This essay also allows you to draw from the material we’ve covered all term. You should provide a well-defined argument here – how does the ‘art’ of novel accentuate the textual meaning?

COURSE POLICY

Participation:

- Regular and prompt attendance is required. You are responsible for material you miss if you are absent. I do not respond to “what did I miss” queries via email.

Assignments:

-Assignments are mandatory and due according to the dates & times specified. Late work will not be accepted (except under extraordinary circumstances) and will receive a grade of 0 (zero).

-Do not e-mail assignments.

-Please keep a copy of all work - including material you hand in - until final marks have been posted.

Email Policy:

While I make every effort to check email regularly, I might in some cases take a few days to respond to queries.

Academic Honesty:

- Plagiarism is a serious offence. All offences will be reported and will result in a failing grade for the course. **Students are assumed to be familiar with the “Academic Policies and Procedures” in the Camosun Calendar.**