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### ENG 5061Z-601: Topics in Literature and Literary Theory

Woody Skinner

*Eastern Illinois University*

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**ENG 5061**  
**The Contemporary American Comic Novel**  
**Spring 2021**

**Instructor**

Dr. Woody Skinner

wwskinner@eiu.edu

Office: Coleman Hall 3040

**Digital Office Hours**

Mondays & Wednesdays: 4:00 p.m.-5:30 p.m.

Fridays: 2:00 p.m.-3:00 p.m.

**Required Texts and Materials**

- *The New Me*, Halle Butler
- *Hunts in Dreams*, Tom Drury
- *Heart of Junk*, Luke Geddes
- *Less*, Andrew Sean Greer
- *Made for Love*, Alissa Nutting
- *Such a Fun Age*, Kiley Reid
- *Why Did I Ever*, Mary Robison
- *Zone One*, Colson Whitehead

**Course Description**

This special topics course will focus on funny—we'll read and discuss recent comedic works that explore a range of subjects and styles. We'll examine comedy as a vehicle for critiquing American life, and we'll investigate comedy's complex relationship with genre. Along the way, we'll consider the particulars of comic craft and analyze the influence of other media (film, sitcoms, standup, etc.) on the novel form.

**Objectives**

By the end of this course, students will be able to do the following:

- Discuss the complex cultural position of the comic novel
- Describe the interplay between American comedy and the novel form
- Summarize the key characteristics of comic genres (picaresque, parody, satire, spoof, etc.)
- Identify generic (or genre-related) influences in contemporary comic texts

- Occasionally laugh at some of the silly things in these books
- Draw intertextual connections between comic novels and other comedic media
- Explain the relationship between comedy and “serious subjects”
- Analyze the different strategies writers use to create comedy
- Analyze the relationship between a text’s comic elements and its themes
- Apply research strategies to expand the scope of your ideas and interests
- Synthesize research and original ideas in a conference-length piece of scholarly writing

## **Course Policies**

### **Technical Requirements**

To take this course, you must be able to do the following:

- Regularly access the Internet, using a laptop or desktop computer
- Download and upload email attachments
- Use Microsoft Word and PowerPoint
- Use Collaborate Ultra and Kaltura for audio/video communications
- Use Adobe Reader (free download) or Preview (for Mac) to read PDF files
- Install software
- Use a webcam and microphone

### **Digital Decorum, or ‘Netiquette’**

Constructive university learning environments require professors and students to respect differences—of background, thought, opinion, and belief. This notion holds special significance in our online literature course, where you will be asked to routinely engage with your classmates’ perspectives, experiences, and ideas. Therefore, respect will serve as the guiding principle and bedrock expectation of our work together this semester.

Here are some best practices for communicating in our online classroom:

- Healthy discourse provides room for differences of opinion; however, disagreements should, without exception, be respectfully expressed.
- Keep in mind that sarcasm is more difficult to understand without tonal cues and body language.
- When you’re replying to a discussion board post, please summarize the portion of the original post that has inspired your response.
- Avoid unnecessary repetition. Privilege concision and rely on the substance of your ideas to meet suggested word counts.

- Since our discussions will draw extensively from primary and secondary sources, be sure to clearly indicate direct quotes and, when possible, provide page numbers.
- In the case of digital texts with unclear or ambiguous pagination, please clearly indicate the chapter to which you're referring.

The following content will not be permitted and will, furthermore, be referred for disciplinary action:

- Illegal materials
- Harassing or threatening comments
- Harmful, abusive, or sexually explicit statements

### **Submitting Assignments**

Dropbox assignments should use reader-friendly, 12-point fonts and should be submitted as Word or PDF files.

### **Instructor Response Time**

I will check the course daily Monday through Friday and periodically during weekends. You can expect an email response from me within 48 hours of your message, and you can expect to receive grades on all assignments within one week of the submission deadline.

### **Learner Interaction and Participation**

Your engagement in this course will be measured, more than any other way, by the quality and quantity of your discussion board posts, which account for **40 percent of your final grade**. Discussion board prompts and expectations will vary throughout the term; however, each discussion module will require you to post original threads and provide thorough, thoughtful responses to your classmates.

In addition to the discussion board, your participation will be evaluated based on the regularity and depth of your engagement with course materials, your participation in digital conferences/meetings, and your D2L activity. These behaviors account for **5 percent of your final grade**.

### **Late Work and Make-Up Work**

All work should be turned in on the designated dates, at the specified times. I do not accept late work unless qualifying circumstances are discussed with me beforehand; I will grant extensions only when provided with at least 48-hours notice. I do not allow make-up work for previously missed assignments.

## Policy on Plagiarism

Here is the English department's plagiarism policy: "Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism—"The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one's own original work' (*Random House Dictionary of the English Language*)—has the right and responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignments of a grade of F for the assigned essay and a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office. Respect for the work of others should encompass all formats, including print, electronic, and oral sources."

## Academic Integrity

Students are expected to maintain principles of academic integrity and conduct as defined in EIU's Code of Conduct (<http://www.eiu.edu/judicial/studentconductcode.php>). Violations will be reported to the Office of Student Standards.

## Students with Disabilities

If you are a student with a documented disability in need of accommodations to fully participate in this class, please contact the Office of Student Disability Services (OSDS). All accommodations must be approved through OSDS. Please stop by McAfee Hall, Room 1210, or call 217-581-6583 to make an appointment.

## Technical Support

If you need assistance with D2L, call D2L Support toll free at 1-877-325-7778. Support is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Email and Chat options are also available on the "My Home" page after logging in to D2L. Other D2L Resources, including a D2L Orientation course for students, are available on the "My Home" page. If you are experiencing less than optimal D2L Brightspace performance, review the D2L Brightspace Performance Checklist to assess the issue.

For technical questions related to other software, hardware, network issues, EIU NetID/password, or Panthermail, contact the ITS Helpdesk at 217-581-4357 during regular business hours, or submit a help ticket at <https://techsupport.eiu.edu/>. If you have a question related to course content, please contact your instructor.

## Grading

Assignment	Grade	Total Points
Discussion Board Activity	40%	400
Intertextual Essay	15%	150

Writing Group Participation (discussion leadership,, project proposal, annotated bibliography, small-group workshop)	10%	100
Digital Presentation	5%	50
Participation (includes D2L activity, content engagement, digital conference attendance)	5%	50
Final Essay	25%	250
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1000</b>

<b>Final Grade</b>	<b>Total Points/Percentage Grade</b>
<b>A</b>	895-1000 (90-100%)
<b>B</b>	795-894 (80-89%)
<b>C</b>	695-794 (70-79%)
<b>D</b>	595-694 (60-69%)
<b>F</b>	0-594 (0-59%)

**A-level work** engages deeply with texts to illuminate their previously unseen qualities; this level of work exhibits original insights and, thus, advances the discourse surrounding a given text (or set of texts). In addition to demonstrating a command of primary and secondary texts, A-level work uses elegant sentences and sound organization to achieve a compelling style. A-level work is uncommon and should, therefore, be celebrated.

**B-level work** is a lot like A-level work in that it displays grammatical, organizational, and rhetorical fluency while also demonstrating considerable knowledge of primary and

secondary texts. This level of work, however, lacks the depth of engagement and originality of insight that characterize A-level work. B-level work does not significantly advance the conversation about the text(s) at hand.

**C-level work** punctually and perfunctorily meets the requirements of the assignment. C-level of work superficially engages with primary and secondary sources; consequently, work at this level is neither incisive nor rhetorically forceful.

**D-level work** partially satisfies the demands of the assignment. Work at this level is underdeveloped, demonstrating significant deficiencies that might include—but are not limited to—the following: incomplete citations, absent sources, missing pages, and organizational/rhetorical incoherence.

**F-level work** fails, typically in more than one way, to meet the requirements of the assignment.

## **Additional Support**

### **Office Hours**

I will hold regular digital office hours at the times listed above, and I am always happy to speak with you—whether you have questions, want to brainstorm together, or simply would like to discuss one of our books. If the demands of your schedule prevent you from meeting during office hours, please contact me to make other arrangements—we will find a time that works well for both of us.

### **The Writing Center**

I encourage you to use EIU's Writing Center located at 3110 Coleman Hall. This free service provides one-to-one conferences with writing center consultants who can help you with brainstorming, organizing, developing support, documenting your papers, and working with sentence-level concerns. The writing center is open to help any student from any major at any stage of his or her writing process, and its system of one-to-one conferences demonstrates value and respect for individual writers, all of whom can benefit from feedback about their works in progress.

To schedule an appointment, you can drop by the center (3110 Coleman Hall) or you can call 581-5929. The writing center is open Monday through Thursday, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., and 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. On Friday hours of operation are 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

### **The Student Success Center**

Students who are having difficulty achieving their academic goals are encouraged to contact the Student Success Center ([www.eiu.edu/~success](http://www.eiu.edu/~success)) for assistance with time

management, text taking, note taking, avoiding procrastination, setting goals, and other skills to support academic achievement. The Student Success Center provides individualized consultations. To make an appointment, call 217-581-6696, or go to McAfee Hall, Room 1301.

### Schedule

The dates below are tentative; I reserve the right to make adjustments for the benefit of the class.

<b>Module</b>	<b>Key Subjects &amp; Craft Concepts</b>	<b>Materials &amp; Major Assignments</b>
1: January 11th-24th	--Defining the Comic Novel  --The History of Comic Literature  --The Picaresque  --Comic Craft: Setting	-- <i>Less</i> by Andrew Sean Greer  --D2L readings & activities
2: January 25th-February 7th	--Satire  --The Office Novel  --Comic Craft: Point of View	-- <i>The New Me</i> by Halle Butler  --D2L readings & activities
3: February 8th-21st	--Subverting Romance  --Obscenity  --Postmodern Irony  --Comic Craft: One-liners	-- <i>Made for Love</i> by Alissa Nutting  --D2L readings & activities



4: February 22nd-March 7th	--Parody --Subverting Zombie/Horror Narratives  --Comic Craft: Conceits	-- <i>Zone One</i> by Colson Whitehead  --D2L readings & activities  -- <b>Intertextual Essay due</b>
5: March 8th-March 21st	--Subverting Crime & Mystery  --Hyperbole  --Comic Craft: Characterization	-- <i>Heart of Junk</i> by Luke Geddes  --D2L readings & activities  -- <b>Brief Project Proposal Due</b>
6: March 22nd-April 4th	--Subverting Romance  --Comedy of Manners  --Social/Political Critique  --Comic Craft: Narrative Summary	-- <i>Such a Fun Age</i> by Kiley Reid  --D2L readings & activities  -- <b>Annotated Bibliography Due</b>
7: April 5th-April 18th	--Contemporary Regionalism  --Subtlety  --Comic Craft: Dialogue	-- <i>Hunts in Dreams</i> by Tom Drury  --D2L readings & activities  -- <b>First Five Pages Due</b>

8: April 19th-May 2nd	--Formal Comedy --Brevity --Comic Craft: Structuring Humor	-- <i>Why Did I Ever</i> by Mary Robison --D2L readings & activities -- <b>Digital Presentation Due</b>
Finals Week		<b>Final Essay Due by 5:00 p.m. on May 7th</b>