



Oct. 9, 2017

Literary festival to celebrate new modes of storytelling

PLATTEVILLE, Wis. – The University of Wisconsin-Platteville Department of Humanities will host a literary festival, “Let’s Get Graphic: The New Visual Storytelling,” on Monday, Oct. 30 in the Nohr Gallery from 3-7 p.m. The event is free; all are welcome.

The purpose of the festival is to celebrate the many ways that visual and graphic narrative is being used in contemporary storytelling and to highlight the ways people engage in the production of narrative in their daily lives with new media. The festival will explore how people have embraced and revised older forms of non-print narratives and will include discussions on 19th century slave narratives, Native American art traditions, comic books, news websites and more.

Dr. Pip Gordon, assistant professor of English at UW-Platteville and festival organizer, said that narrative and storytelling is fundamental to all lives.

“It is important for us to understand that ‘literature’ is not a dead thing that only exists in old books,” said Gordon. “We all take part in narrative and storytelling, and our contributions align with developments in literature. A Snapchat story may not seem like a big deal, but it is a contemporary, if ephemeral, form of autobiography not unlike graphic novel retellings of 19th century slave narratives. The visual addition makes the old story new and accessible to a broader audience.”

The festival will include an open mic session, student and faculty presentations and a guest lecturer – Dr. Katharine Burnett, assistant professor of English at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee.

Burnett, whose research focuses on 19th-century American literature and literature of the United States South, will present “Sequencing Stories: Graphic Novels and Comic Narrative in Kyle Baker’s “Confessions of Nat Turner.”

Burnett will discuss how graphic novels and sequential art represent serious topics – in this case, slavery. Burnett hopes to address a basic question: what can literature, and specifically graphic narratives, do that other forms of literature and art cannot?

“When we normally think of comics and graphic novels, they tend to be dismissed as ‘kids’ stuff’ or sci-fi and fantasy,” said Burnett. “But the popularity of comics in recent years and the increased number of graphic narratives that address realistic topics (‘Maus’ being the prime and most popular example) demonstrates that graphic narrative extends beyond the stereotype of superhero or kids’ comics.”

Using Baker's graphic adaptation of Nat Turner’s “Confessions” (1831), which details a slave rebellion led by Turner in the 19th century, she will discuss sequential art form and how it narrates events, the role of reader interaction in graphic narratives and how this functions in a representation of slavery.

“Storytelling is how different peoples in different times and places bridge the gaps that separate us,” said Gordon. “The discussions we have at the festival will show how we are already participating in a broader world. We just don’t always realize it. Hopefully, participants will leave with a new appreciation of how actions in our everyday lives are part of a larger cultural tradition of storytelling.”

Festival schedule:

3-4 p.m.: Open mic session and trivia, sponsored by Sigma Tau Delta, the English Honor Society.

4-5 p.m.: Student presentations

Mackenna Moralez, a senior English-professional writing major, will present on the role of social media as a tool for marketing, from daily workplace examples to

how these tools are used in the Exponent. Wesley Wingert, a senior English education major, will present on a history of Batman, his evolution in the comics, and his transition to other media.

5-6 p.m.: Department of Humanities faculty presentations

Dr. David Gillota, assistant professor of English, will present “History and Trauma in Art Spiegelman’s ‘Maus,’” which will explore how this seminal graphic novel represented the experience of the Holocaust and of Holocaust survivors through the visual medium of a comic book.

Dr. Enrique Reynoso, assistant professor of English writing, will present “Narratives of (O)ther Visualizations,” which will focus on how state entities use data visualization to track and narrativize the activities of minorities, but which needs proper contextualization, analysis and comparisons to be understood.

Dr. Terry Burns, professor of English, will present “New Zuni Murals, ‘Anasazi’ Artwork: A Library of Stone,” which will discuss how the murals of artists Ken and Alex Seowtewa serve as a visual library and calendar of Zuni Ceremony and present alternate narratives of Spanish conquest and colonization.

6-7 p.m.: Guest lecturer

Dr. Katharine Burnett, assistant professor English at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, will present “Sequencing Stories: Graphic Novels and Comic Narrative in Kyle Baker’s ‘Confessions of Nat Turner.’”

Gordon said the festival will help students develop critical thinking skills as well as a global perspective. “Fundamentally, these talks are literary analyses, disguised as informal talks at a festival,” said Gordon. “Critical thinking is not just the purview of exam questions and term papers. This festival will encourage students to think critically about literary traditions and graphic/visual narratives but in a non-classroom environment.”

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