More perfectly than any other fairy-tale, Snow White expresses melancholy. The pure image of this mood is the queen looking out into the snow through her window and wishing for her daughter, after the lifelessly living beauty of the flakes, the black mourning of the window-frame, the stab of bleeding; and then dying in childbirth. The happy end takes away nothing of this....And how inadequate happiness sounds: ‘Snow White felt kindly towards him and went with him.’ How it is revoked by the wicked triumph over wickedness. So, when we are hoping for rescue, a voice tells us that hope is in vain, yet it is powerless hope alone that allows us to draw a single breath.


A concept that exploded on the scene in Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno’s 1947 book *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, “the culture industry” now has more devoutly dismissive critics than most celebrity pariahs. We’ll approach the work of this dastardly duo sideways, by reading neither the original chapter, “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,” nor any commentary on it. Instead, you’ll familiarize yourself with a tiny corner of twentieth-century North American history, the mass-market romance, which will serve as the raw material with which you will autonomously and collectively build your own version of the concept. It is my contention that your version will have more in common with the original than it does the work of critics.

In this seminar, students will employ and evaluate different schools of textual analysis – liberal, realist, feminist, Marxist, postmodern and combinations thereof – commonly found lurking the halls of cultural history. How were romance-related products created, distributed, and consumed? How did these narratives work (if they worked), and how was meaning created (if it was)?

**Class Schedule**

**Week 1, Sept 9th**      *Introduction*

Before class, read Donald Horton’s short article, “The Dialogue of Courtship in Popular Songs,” *American Journal of Sociology* 62:6 (May 1957), 569-578 (OWL). In the final hour, we will view Laura Kipnis’s 1985 video, *Ecstasy Unlimited: The Interpenetrations of Sex and Capital*.

**Week 2, Sept 16th**      *Identity, Subculture, Discourse: The ‘Homosexual’ as a Historical Category*


Week 3, Sept 23rd  Pulp Beginnings: Looking At and Reading of White Women in Peril

The Product  We will discuss Margaret Brundage’s Depression-era paintings, commissioned as cover art for Weird Tales, in Stephen D. Korshak and J. David Spurlock, *The Alluring Art of Margaret Brundage, Queen of Pulp Pin-Up Art* (Coral Gables, FL: Vanguard, 2012).


Week 4, Sept 30th  The Mass Production of the Reading Housewife & Mother 1: We Built This


Week 5, Oct 7th  The Reading Housewife & Mother 2: “There’s No Success Like Failure”

Reading  Radway, *Reading the Romance*, Chapters 4-6.


Week 6, Oct 14th  Thanksgiving – No Class

Week 7, Oct 21st  “Indissoluble Girl Clusters”/A Dartmouth Girl Makes Good: Pre-Code Hollywood

The Product  We will discuss four films from Hollywood’s Pre-Code era:

*Skyscraper Souls*, directed by Edgar Selwyn, 1932;
*Baby Face*, directed by Alfred E. Green, 1933;
*Female*, directed by Michael Curtiz, 1933;
*Gold Diggers of 1933*, directed by Mervyn LeRoy, 1933.

Also, the photographs of the “Tiller Girls,” [http://www.vintag.es/2011/10/tiller-girls.html](http://www.vintag.es/2011/10/tiller-girls.html)


Merrill Schleier, “Icons of Exploitation: Gender and Class Disharmony in the Depression-Era Skyscraper Office,” in *Skyscraper Cinema: Architecture and Gender in American Film* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 59-118. (Reader)
Week 8, Oct 28th  The Punishment of Tony Benson and Denazification: Romance Comics 1

The Product  We will discuss the 1940s and 50s romance comics of pioneers Joe Simon and Jack Kirby, collected in Young Romance: The Best of Simon & Kirby's Romance Comics (Seattle: Fantagraphics Books, 2012).


Week 9, Nov 4th  The Private Hell of Mary Robin, R.N.: Romance Comics 2


Week 10, Nov 11th  Remembrance Day – No Class

Week 11, Nov 18th  Another Mary Sacrificed: The Male Psychopath

The Product  We will discuss Robert Bloch’s 1959 pulp novel Psycho and Alfred Hitchcock’s 1960 film adaptation.


Week 12, Nov 25th  Bad Girls and Twisted Sisters: Romance Comi(x) 3

The Product  We will discuss Diane Noomin’s underground comix of the 1960s and 70s, collected in Glitz-2-Go (Seattle: Fantagraphics Books, 2012).


The Culture Industry, Or, Romance as ?: Finalizing the Concept

My weekly regular office hours in the Fall term will be on Mondays from 12:00-1:00 pm, and Wednesdays, 1:30-3:00 pm. In November, I will add extra hours.

Due to my obligations with administrative committees, I may have to cancel regular office hours from time to time. In order to guarantee my accessibility, I will hold weekly virtual office hours Sundays from 10:00 am-12:00 pm, and Wednesdays from 7:00-9:00 pm. During these times, I will be available for video chatting via thedamagedlife@gmail.com and on twitter, @thebeforetime.

Texts

The folks at Strange Adventures, 5110 Prince St., offer a 20% discount on the following:

The folks at Venus Envy, 1598 Barrington St., have stocked the following titles:

The folks at Video Difference, 6086 Quinpool Road, have designated a section for this class with the following films:
1. Gold Diggers of 1933, d. Mervyn LeRoy, 1933
2. Psycho, directed by Alfred Hitchcock, 1960

The folks at Julia’s Photcopy, 1525 Lemarchant St., carry the course reader. The remainder will be distributed via the OWL site or by Professor McCallum.

Given the subject matter, there exists a seemingly inexhaustible amount of relevant content on the internet. With the assistance of three recent graduates – I think of them as “retired students/underpaid minions” – links to relevant content have been posted at www.twitter.com/thebeforetime & http://thebeforetime.tumblr.com/. Jasmine Hare, Mary Cameron and Rebecca Riordan have graciously agreed to act as informal out-of-town consultants concerning the present-day scene, since my contemporary pop culture knowledge stops with Dawson’s Creek and The O.C. They’ve arranged the twitter and tumblr sites to link to commentary about gender and sexual politics. Obviously, this being the internet, some of the material may be considered objectionable, and the nature of hashtags allow for anyone to join any conversation. We have posted trigger warnings for sensitive material, and I encourage students to speak to me about any material they find questionable.
Participation

Topics in Modern History is a seminar course with an above-average amount of reading. You are expected to evaluate the arguments in the readings before coming to class, and to have your own ideas and questions about the material for others to consider – discussion is the heart of any seminar course. No marks are earned for attendance. Instead, your participation grade will be earned based on the quantity and quality of your contributions to class discussions. A portion of this mark will be earned by providing written answers to questions in class.

Assignment One – Reading a Romance

Janice Radway’s Reading the Romance combines analysis of the conventions of the romance genre with reader-response criticism. Using the texts examined in Weeks 1-5, provide a detailed analysis (8-10 pages) of Janet Dailey’s No Quarter Asked, the first American-authored book published under the auspices of Harlequin’s new product line in 1974. From the advertising copy on the back cover:

Stacy needed time to adjust. Stacy’s world collapsed with the death of her father. She had to sort herself out; decide what she wanted to do with her life. The secluded cabin in a Texas valley seemed a perfect place to think. But when Stacy met the arrogant rancher, Cord Harris, all her hopes of peace and serenity vanished. Especially when Cord said, “Go back to the city, where you belong.” It was exactly the wrong thing to say to Stacy. It made her fighting mad – and determined to stay!

Would Smithton readers have considered Dailey’s book to be an ideal or a failed romance? What aspects of Dailey’s narrative support Radway’s claims about the realist form? Of the other concepts we have encountered, which ones should be used to understand No Quarter Asked in its historical context?

You must submit 2 copies of this essay by 3 pm, October 18th. There are no penalties for submitting a late essay.

Assignment Two – Research Essay

For the major assignment, students will complete a research essay (approx. 15-18 pages) that combines primary and secondary forms of research. The topic, which must be related to the themes of the course, will be chosen by the student in consultation with the instructor. All essays are expected to conform to the policies set out in the History Style Guide, found online at http://history.dal.ca

Research Essay Proposal

With a minimum of 500 words, explain the subject and scope of your research, including a clearly defined thesis statement. In a separate bibliography, list at least 7 secondary sources that will figure prominently in your paper. Your bibliography should also contain a list of your primary sources, with brief descriptions of each.

You must submit 2 copies of the proposal by 3 pm, November 6th. There are no extensions, save for documented medical and family emergencies.
Research essays are built with the following components:

1. An introduction that conveys the significance of the subject as well as your research questions and answers.
2. A clear and concise thesis statement, in the form of an argument that can be proven by marshalling evidence.
3. A historiographical section that describes and evaluates the major schools of thought about your subject.
4. The so-called ‘body’ of the paper, which combines evidence and analysis in order to demonstrate the validity of your thesis.
5. A conclusion that restates the arguments.

All essays are expected to conform to the policies set out in the History Style Guide, found online at http://history.dal.ca

You must submit 2 copies of the research essay by 3 pm, December 16th. There are no extensions, save for documented medical and family emergencies.

Accommodation Statement:

Students may request accommodation as a result of barriers related to disability, religious obligation, or any characteristic under the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act. Students who require academic accommodation for either classroom participation or the writing of tests and exams should make their request to the Advising and Access Services Center (AASC) prior to or at the outset of the regular academic year. Please visit www.dal.ca/access for more information and to obtain the Request for Accommodation – Form A.

A note taker may be required as part of a student’s accommodation. There is an honorarium of $75/course/term (with some exceptions). If you are interested, please contact AASC at 494-2836 for more information.

Please note that your classroom may contain specialized accessible furniture and equipment. It is important that these items remain in the classroom, untouched, so that students who require their usage will be able to participate in the class.

Academic Integrity Statement:

All students in this course are to read and understand the policies on academic integrity and plagiarism referenced in the Policies and Student Resources sections of the academicintegrity.dal.ca website. Ignorance of such policies is no excuse for violations.

Any paper submitted by a student at Dalhousie University may be checked for originality to confirm that the student has not plagiarized from other sources. Plagiarism is considered a serious academic offence which may lead to loss of credit, suspension or expulsion from the University, or even to the revocation of a degree. It is essential that there be correct attribution of authorities from which facts and opinions have been derived. At Dalhousie there are University Regulations which deal with plagiarism and, prior to submitting any paper in a course, students should read the Policy on Intellectual Honesty contained in the Calendar or on the Online Dalhousie website. The Senate has affirmed the right of any instructor to require that student papers be submitted in both written and computer-readable format, and to submit any paper to be checked electronically for originality. As a student in this class, you are to keep an electronic copy of any paper you submit, and the course instructor may require you to submit that electronic copy on demand.