

EN 4103 G2: **The Graphic Novel, or Comics as Serious Literature**

Tentative Outline—Fall 2009

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This exciting new course examines the transformation of “comics” into “graphic novels,” a term broadly used to include a wide variety of original works combining narrative text and simple or highly complex drawings. To this end, we shall read the diverse graphic works listed below: personal memoirs, histories, journalism, and war documentaries. As the term “novel” generally refers to a work of fiction, the term “graphic novel” is perhaps a misnomer; none of the works that we shall examine are fiction (in the strict sense of the term), though all, to varying degrees, contain fictional elements. As Danny Fingeroth thoughtfully asks,

But just what is a graphic novel? Let’s start with what it is not—or not always. First, the word “graphic” does not mean these books are graphically violent or sexually explicit—though some are. The “graphic” part of the term just means that the books involve graphics—or, more precisely, that they consist of sequential art (i.e. comics) of any style (*The Rough Guide to Graphic Novels*. New York: Rough Guides, 2008, p. 3).

Quotable Quotes on the Graphic Novel

- A graphic novel is “a perfect synthesis of artwork and literature” (cited by Bob Thompson in “Drawing Power,” *Washington Post*).
- “Graphic novels . . . are book-length comic books that are meant to be read as one story” (Stephen Weiner, *Faster than a Speeding Bullet: The Rise of the Graphic Novel*).
- “Graphic novels are on the cusp of critical and public acceptance as a distinct art form” (*The Wall Street Journal*).
- “Comics are . . . enjoying a renaissance and a newfound respectability right now... There is something like a critical mass of artists, young and old, uncovering new possibilities in this once-marginal form” (Charles McGrath, *New York Times Magazine*).
- “Move over Harold Pinter: graphic novelists are being welcomed as artistic heavyweights” (Alice O’Keeffe, “Strip Lit is joining the Literary Elite”).
- “A graphic novel is a comic book that you need a bookmark for” (Art Spiegelman).
- “Graphic novel signifies a movement rather than a form. The goal of the graphic novelist is to take the form of the comic book . . . and raise it to a more ambitious and meaningful level” (Eddie Campbell).
- “Comics. Got. Better.” (*Understanding Comics*, Scott McCloud).

Required Textbooks

1. Ari Folman and David Polonsky. *Waltz with Bashir, A Lebanon War Story*. New York: Metropolitan Books/ Henry Holt and Company. 2009.
2. Joe Sacco. *Safe Area Gorazde: The War in Eastern Bosnia, 1992-95* (2000)
3. Art Spiegelman. *Maus, A Survivor's Tale*. Two-Volume Boxed Set. New York: Pantheon, 1993. [Winner, 1992 Pulitzer Prize]
Volume 1, *My Father Bleeds History* (1986).
Volume 2, *And Here My Troubles Began* (1991).
4. Marjane Satrapi. *Persepolis, The Story of a Childhood* (2003). Toronto: Random House / Pantheon, 2003.
5. Chester Brown. *Louis Riel, A Comic-Strip Biography*. Montreal: Drawn and Quarterly, 2003.
6. Jason Lutes. *Berlin, City of Stones*. Montreal: Drawn and Quarterly, 2004.

EN 4103 G2 READING LIST Fall 2009.

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| 1. <i>Waltz with Bashir</i> | September 9-14-16-21 |
| 2. <i>Safe Area Gorazde</i> . | Sept. 23-28-30-October 5 |
| 3. <i>Maus</i> | October 7-14-19-21 |
| 4. <i>Persepolis, The Story of a Childhood</i> . | October 26-28-November 2-4 |
| 5. <i>Louis Riel</i> . | November 9-16-18-23 |
| 6. <i>Berlin, City of Stones</i> | November 25-30-December 2-7 |

- EN 4103 G2 consists of about 13 weeks of classes extending from Wednesday, September 9 to Monday, December 7, 2009.

Evaluation

Due Dates

Take-Home

Wednesday, September 30.

A brief Take-Home writing assignment will be distributed September 23.

Minimum length: 500 words (about 2 typed pages).

Weighting: **10%** of the course grade.

1st Major Essay

Wednesday, October 14

Weighting: **30%** of the course grade.

2000-2500 word paper (about 8-10 typed pages)

2nd Major Essay

Monday, November 30.

Weighting: **30%** of the course grade.

2000-2500 word essay (about 8-10 typed pages)

Group Oral Presentation

Wednesday, December 2

Weighting: **20%** of the course grade.

[5-6 students per group, depending on class size].

Oral Participation

Twice Weekly

Weighting: **10%** of the course grade.

