

Studies in Literature and Culture: The Graphic Novel**• REQUIRED TEXTS:**

Chynna Clugston-Major, *Blue Monday: Absolute Beginners* (Oni Press)
Will Eisner, *A Contract with God and Other Tenement Stories* (DC Comics)
Mike Gold (Ed.), *The Greatest 1950s Stories Ever Told* (DC Comics)
Harold Gray, *Little Orphan Annie: The Sentence* (Pacific Comics Club)
Jason Lutes, *Jar of Fools* (Drawn & Quarterly)
Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics* (Harper-Perennial)
Frank Miller and David Mazzuchelli, *Batman: Year One* (DC Comics)
Art Spiegelman, *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* (Vol. I) (Pantheon)
James Sturm, *The Revival* (Bear Bones Press)

You will also need the following:

- A *notebook*. I would like you to keep track of major points which come up in my lectures and also in our class discussions.
- A *folder or binder* for reserve readings and class handouts. I would suggest you make copies of the reserve readings available at the library. I will also give you a number of photocopied handouts which include directed-reading questions and material which supplements the primary readings for the course.

• GRADES

- Attendance and class participation (including short response papers and reading quizzes): 25%
- Writing Assignment/Mini-comic project: 25%
- Midterm exam: 25%
- Final exam: 25%

* Your papers must be turned in on time! *I will deduct a full grade for each day a paper is late.* If you have any questions about your papers or the assigned paper topics, please see me during my office hours or by appointment. I will be glad to talk with you about our readings and about your essays.

• ACADEMIC HONESTY/ATTENDANCE POLICY

The American Heritage Dictionary defines plagiarism as the act of stealing and using “the ideas or writings of another as one’s own.” Be sure to cite carefully any outside sources you may use for your paper in proper MLA (Modern Language Association) format. Plagiarism in your essays or cheating on exams will not be tolerated and will result in an automatic F for the paper, an F for the course, and possible further disciplinary action.

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Our in-class discussions serve as the foundation for this course. Tardiness and excessive, unexcused absences are not acceptable and will have a negative effect on your class participation grade.

• COURSE OBJECTIVES AND INTRODUCTION

In the introduction to his groundbreaking graphic novel *A Contract with God and Other Tenement Stories*, Will Eisner explains the artistic and cultural significance of the comic book medium:

With hindsight, I realize I was really only working around one core concept—that the medium, the arrangement of words and pictures in a sequence—was an art form in itself. Unique, with a structure and gestalt all its own, this medium could deal with meaningful themes. Certainly there was more for the cartoonist working in this technique to deal with than superheroes who were preventing the destruction of Earth by supervillains.

The comic book medium is one of the most culturally significant but least understood art forms of the twentieth century. In this course, we will study the history of the medium from its origin in turn-of-the-century newspaper comic strips to the development of graphic novels and what Eisner refers to as “sequential art”—the medium of words and pictures—at the dawn of the twenty-first century. Along the way we will study several examples of the form ranging from the newspaper strips of Harold Gray to the Pulitzer Prize-winning work of Art Spiegelman. We will examine the early adventures of cultural icons like Superman and Batman and discuss how these characters have served to reflect the values and aspirations of their readers. In contrast to the stories of these larger-than-life heroes, we will read the more personal work of innovators such as Jason Lutes, James Sturm, and Grass Green, while also exploring the impact of Japanese comics (or “*manga*”) in the work of Chynna Clugston-Major. In this class, we will ask some fundamental questions: how do comics work? What unique effects can be produced as a result of the combination of words and static images? How have comics as a medium responded to and reflected the sweeping changes in American society of the twentieth century? In reading these texts, we will be studying what cultural critic Greil Marcus might call a “secret history” of the twentieth century. We will also have a lot of fun.

• WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Please note: This schedule is subject to change. I will inform you of any changes to the syllabus at least two weeks ahead of time. Any modifications which do take place will be minor. All readings are to be completed by the class period where they are listed and will be discussed on that date. Reserve readings are available at the library or online at the UConn library website.

T 8/26: Class introduction

- Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, selections from *Superman* (class handout)

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- selections from *Gasoline Alley*, *Krazy Kat*, and *Peanuts* (class handouts)

Th 8/28: The Comic Strip and the “Golden Age” of Comics

- McCloud, *Understanding Comics* Chapters 1–2 (pgs. 1–59)

T 9/2

- Harold Gray, *Little Orphan Annie: The Sentence* (pgs. 1–45)
- McCloud, *Understanding Comics* Chapter 3
- SHORT WRITING ASSIGNMENT DUE

Th 9/4:

- Harold Gray, *Little Orphan Annie: The Sentence* (pgs. 46–86)

T 9/9: The 1950s and the “Silver Age” of Comics

- Selections from *The Greatest 1950s Stories Ever Told*:
Introduction (1–14); “Martian Manhunter: Escape to the Stars” (37); “Tomahawk: The Black Cougar” (27); “Congo Bill: Gorilla City” (67); “Superboy: Superboy and the Sleeping Beauty” (116); “Shining Knight: Knight of the Future” (159); “Tommy Tomorrow: Marooned in the Fourth Dimension” (171); “Johnny Thunder: The Unmasking of Johnny Thunder” (171); “The Flash: The Coldest Man on Earth” (189); Endnotes (283–287)
- McCloud, *Understanding Comics* Chapter 4

Th 9/11:

- Selections from *The Greatest 1950s Stories Ever Told*:
“Sugar and Spike: Lobsters Away” (43); “Lois Lane: The Girl in Superman’s Past” (47); “The Fox and the Crow: Three Hundred Dollars” (110); “Viking Prince: The Hammer of Thor” (126); “Phantom Stranger: When Dead Men Walk” 165); “Romance Story: Castoff Love” (201); “Sgt. Rock: Calling Easy Company” (235)
- READING QUIZ #1

T 9/16: Underground Comix/Sequential Art, Pt. 1

- selections from Basil Wolverton and Robert Crumb (class handouts)
- Will Eisner, *A Contract with God and Other Tenement Stories*: “A Contract with God”
- McCloud, *Understanding Comics* Chapter 5

Th 9/18:

- Will Eisner, “The Street Singer,” “The Super,” “Cookalein”

T 9/23:

- James Sturm, *The Revival*

Th 9/25:

- James Sturm, *The Revival*

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T 9/30: Mid-Term Exam!

Th 10/2:

- Art Spiegelman, *Maus* Chapters 1 and 2

T 10/7:

- Spiegelman, *Maus* Chapters 3 and 4

Th 10/9:

- Art Spiegelman, *Maus* Chapter 5 (including “Prisoner on the Hell Planet”)

T 10/14:

- Art Spiegelman, *Maus* Chapter 6
- READING QUIZ #2

Th 10/16: Underground Comix, Pt. 2

- Grass Green, selections (class handouts)
- Guest Speaker: Professor William H. Foster on Representations of African Americans in Pulp Fiction, Comic Strips, and Comic Books

T 10/21: The World’s Greatest Superheroes!

- Selections from *The Greatest 1950s Stories Ever Told*:
“Superman and Batman: The Super Bat-Man” (15); “Green Arrow Parts 1 & 2” (47, 55);
“Aquaman: Sorcerer of the Sea” (134); “Green Lantern: Summons from Space” (221);
“Captain Comet: Devil’s Island in Space” (75); “Blackhawk” (100)
- McCloud, *Understanding Comics* Chapter 7

Th 10/23:

- selections from *The Greatest 1950s Stories Ever Told*:
“Batman: Two-Face Strikes Again” (149); “Jimmy Olsen: The Jimmy Olsen from Jupiter” (248); “Challengers of the Unknown: The Secrets of the Sorcerer’s Box” (259)

T 10/28: The Comics “Renaissance” of the 1980s

- Frank Miller and David Mazzuchelli, *Batman: Year One* Chapters 1 and 2
- Bob Kane, *Detective Comics* #27 (class handout)

Th 10/30:

- Frank Miller and David Mazzuchelli, *Batman: Year One* Chapters 3 and 4
- McCloud, *Understanding Comics* Chapter 8
- READING QUIZ #3

T 11/4: Punk and Do-It-Yourself Comics

- Matt Levin, *Walking Man Comics* (class hand out)

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Th 11/6:

- Chynna Clugston-Major, *Blue Monday: Absolute Beginners* Chapter 1
- ROUGH DRAFT OF FINAL PAPER/PROJECTS DUE

T 11/11:

- Chynna Clugston-Major, *Blue Monday: Absolute Beginners* Chapters 2 and 3

Th 11/13

- Chynna Clugston-Major, *Blue Monday: Absolute Beginners* Chapter 4
- READING QUIZ #4

T 11/18

- Jason Lutes, *Jar of Fools*

Th 11/20

- Jason Lutes, *Jar of Fools*

THANKSGIVING RECESS

T 12/2:

- FINAL PAPERS/PROJECTS DUE
- McCloud, *Understanding Comics* Chapter 9

Th 12/4:

- Course Conclusion/Final Exam review (Final Exam Date To Be Announced)