Lit 61F: Introduction to a Literary Topic – Graphic Novels & Comics

**Instructor:** Cathy Thomas, cttomas@ucsc.edu  
**TA:** Matthew Landry, maplandr@ucsc.edu

**Office:** Hum 1, Room 115A, Wed. 2-4 PM; and by appt.  
**Office:** _________ Cafe, Thu. 4:30-5:30 PM; and by appt.

**GRAPHIC NOVELS & COMICS**

The Syllabus

Visual storytelling is part of our human origin story. From prehistoric cave drawings to computer generated avatars living a SecondLife™, representation has been a pluralistic act. Graphic novels and comics are texts where we can observe the hybridization of ethnic, gender, and racial ideas; the study of them provides new perspectives to our scholarly inquiries. But there are those who still consider the medium low brow. Who then has the power to determine what is worth “reading” as the most representative or central work for a period or people? To answer this, we will explore Chris Ware’s ergodic graphic novel, Jeremy Love’s dark allegory, Brian Vaughn’s & Fiona Staples’s miscegenation space opera and selected works of other creators.

This course, like other Literature courses, attempts to provide another perspective on the following: How are art and history, public and private lives, and want and desire synthesized on the page? What works of American literary culture offer significant insight to a broader sense of American culture? What is considered literary and what is not? Most importantly, what makes a graphic novel canon? Through careful evaluation and unbridled enjoyment of graphic novels, we can attempt to define notions of identity, character interaction, intertextuality, comic art, caricature through historical referential themes and literary analysis. And, like other Literature courses, this course is reading and writing intensive. As such, you will have the opportunity to do both creative and critical writing.

*Reading Graphic Novels* has four goals. First, it invests time in understanding how to close read the comics page and how certain elements relate to literary tropes, specifically **metaphor and metonymy** in *graphia*. Second, it reasons that as comics have developed alongside human material and intellectual progress its comics’ content will reflect this synthesis. Third, it examines how writers depict modernity and alienation in the cities, suburbs, small towns or alien solar systems. Finally, this course explores the current trend of comics criticism and what it means to dissect something written for pleasure, cathartic or commercial ends.

*Building Stories* by Chris Ware

4-time 2013 Eisner Award Winner: Best Lettering, Best Publication, Best Writer/Artist and Best Graphic Album

*New York Times* Book Review, Top 10 Books of the Year

*Time Magazine*, Top Ten Fiction Books of the Year

*Publishers Weekly*, Best Book of the Year

*Kirkus Reviews*, Top 10 Fiction of 2012

*Newsday*, Top 10 Books of 2012

*Entertainment Weekly*, Gift Guide, A+

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1 *Graphia*- books (cartoons, comics, graphic novels) that make symbolic connections between overtly unrelated points of narrative continuity in order to create figural meaning and to uncover trope: modes of expression.
**Required texts, mature audience:**

*Building Stories.* Chris Ware (Pantheon 2012, ISBN# 978-0375424335) PRINT  
*Bayou Vol. 1* Jeremy Love. (comixology.com) WEB  
Excerpts and Supplemental reading to be provided on eCommons>Resources

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**Attendance:** Regular attendance in lecture (& one 1-hr TA review session) is REQUIRED. You must attend ONE TA review session (schedule tba). You get ONE unexcused absence. With the SECOND unexcused absence your class participation grade—worth 15% of your total grade—is an “F”. With a THIRD unexcused absence you will not be able to pass the course. Weddings, planes, trains & automobiles are not excused absences. 2 Tardies = 1 Absence; 10 or more minutes late is LATE. Speak to me in advance of extenuating circumstances. **We’ll have a 15-minute midpoint break.** Our class is old school: **Please, no in-class technology unless an assignment requires it.** Your class participation grades will be affected if you are caught using your technology for purposes unrelated to this course.

**Office Visits:** It is simply impossible to give most work the attention it needs during class time, so you may need to meet with me privately to talk about the course material, your work and workload in general. **I encourage at least one** 10-minute office visit by Week 3 with either Matthew or I.

**Requirements and Grading:** Grades are primarily determined by your writing and participation. **Late assignments will not be accepted unless I approve it.** If you anticipate missing class, you may deliver work to me or to Matthew the class prior.

**Assignments & Grades**  
THREE substantive eCommons responses 15% total (5% each)  
ONE Creative assignment: create a comic page 15%  
ONE Critical assignment: 2-3 pages close reading a comic page 15%  
ONE Final paper 5-6 page essay 40%  
Attendance & participation\(^2\) 15%

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\(^2\) Participation decoded: course preparedness, being awake & on-time, not texting. Opportunities for ‘discussion’ accommodate the shy people.
RESOURCES:
Comixology.com (for Bayou Vol 1.)
Bayou Vol 1. is out of print. You may find used copies online ranging from $1.50 to $83. Yes eighty-three bucks. You may purchase the webcomic version on Comixology.com; it will be issues #1 through #8. Issue #1 is FREE and subsequent issues are only .99 cents each. Used print copies of Bayou Vol 1. often pop-up on Amazon.com. I recommend the print version for Bayou Vol. 2. Note that used books may take longer to ship.

ComicLife™ software in SocSci 1 MacLab, Room 135
You may purchase/download this from plasq.com. Also, there is a FREE 30-day trial available.

Plagiarism: Bad.
"...knowledge without integrity is dangerous and dreadful" - Samuel Johnson
There will be weekly writing assignments therefore your work will be subject the rules and penalties of the university. Cheating in any part of the course may lead to failing the course and suspension or dismissal from the university. If in doubt, please consult me or visit the UC Santa Cruz Academic Integrity web pages at http://www.ucsc.edu/academics/academic_integrity/undergraduate_students/resources.html

Religious Observance: It is the official policy of the University of California, Santa Cruz, to accommodate, without penalty, requests for alternate examination times in cases where the scheduled time for the examination violates a student’s religious creed. Requests for accommodation for religious observance must be made directly to the faculty member in charge of the course within the first two weeks of the term or as soon as possible after an examination date is announced.

Conduct & Classroom Behavior: Intelligent discussion can be heated discussion—from Marvel vs. DC to race in comics. I expect everyone to conduct themselves in a manner respectful of their peers, instructors, guest speakers, and of the community at-large. The UC Code of Conduct is found online at: http://deanofstudents.ucsc.edu/student-conduct/student-handbook.html

Writing Assistance: If you are having problems with an assignment, please make an appointment with the instructor or TA for one-on-one assistance.

Accommodations: Students with disabilities who require accommodations are requested to contact me during the first week of the quarter via email, before or after class, during office hours, or by appointment. The Disability Resource Center serves students with both permanent disabilities and some temporary medical conditions (e.g. a broken arm). For more information, please visit the DRC website at http://drc.ucsc.edu/index.html, 146 Hahn Student Services, 831-459-2089, drc@ucsc.edu.
This syllabus is subject to change to meet time constraints of the 5-week summer session

**Week 1 – Welcome**

*July 29*
Welcome to the course: resources overview & introductions  
What is a comic? What is a comics canon? Who is a critic? Who is a fan? What’s the difference?  
Comics terminology and brief history.  
In-class: excerpt from *Graphic Canon Vol 2, The Spirit* cover art  
**At-home:** *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (chap. 1-4); “Drawing Blood” Spiegelman; TWO Will Eisner interview excerpts; “Rodolphe Topffer” (MQC); “How to Read Nancy”, “Introduction” (Chris Ware in MQC), the comic book gifted to you today  
**Assignment** Read Syllabus. Explore eCommons and upload sample document (TBA) to DropBox. Post a class intro under “Welcome” in eCommons Forum.

*July 31*
Genre, Tropes and Medium  
In-class: *Understanding Comics, Krazy Kat, Avengers*  
**Trip to Soc Sci 1 MacLab for ComicLife™ demonstration (1:30-3:00 PM)**  
**At-home:** *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (chap. 5-7); *Building Stories* (This will be your first read through); excerpts (pages tbd) from *Chris Ware: A Way of Thinking* “Gentrification, and the Lives of/in Houses” (Godbey), “Past Imperfect...” (Sattler), “Representing Disability” (Berman)  
**Key terms review**  
Optional: *Punch* excerpts, 1954 Comic Code of Authority criteria, “Charles Shulz’s Preliminary Drawings” (MCQ), George Herriman letter; Gilbert Seldes on Herriman.  
**Assignment** *eCommons Forum response #1* on caricature: What are the implications of visual caricature?  
Post due by 11:55pm Aug 3.

**Week 2 – Intertextuality: Building Stories with art, history, memory, & trauma**

*August 5*  
Metaphor and Metonymy, part 1  
**In-Class:** *Building Stories* (Chris Ware)  
**At-home:** *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (chap. 8); re-read a section of *Building Stories* in comparison to *Hawkeye* excerpt; complete Pre-Writing exercise  
**Assignment** Pre-Writing #1 a worksheet to be provided on Tuesday, started in-class and reviewed on Thursday, CHOOSE ONE:  
• Close-reading of one-page of *Building Stories*.  
• Close-reading of one-page from *Krazy Kat* strips  
• Close-reading of one-page of *Hawkeye*.

*August 7*  
Metaphor and Metonymy, part 2  
**In-Class:** *Building Stories* (Chris Ware); Pre-writing #1 review  
**At-home:** *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (chap. 9); re-read one section of *Building Stories* (your choice). “The Limits of Realism: Alternative Comics and Middlebrow Aesthetics in Anthologies of Chris Ware”, **Key terms review**


Assignment  **eCommons Forum response #2** on terminology: Choose a page from the novel. Using any particular terminology introduced by Scott McCloud, explain the composition as well as events of the panel in context of the page and narrative? Single out the panel on that page of Ware’s storytelling that best captures modernity and alienation. What is gained or lost in visual representation? Post due by 11:55pm Aug 10

**Week 3 – Critique and the Close Read**

**August 12**  Graphia – the figural meaning is seen  
_In-Class:_ Building Stories (Chris Ware), Shortcomings excerpt  
_At-home:_ Bayou Vol. 1 or webcomics #1-#8; Routledge excerpts on critical theory terms

Assignment  **Pre-Writing #2** a worksheet to be provided on Tuesday and reviewed in-class on Thursday,  
CHOOSE ONE:  
- Close-reading of one-page of Building Stories.  
- Close-reading of one-page from Bayou Vol. 1

**August 14**  Poetics – the figural meaning is read  
_In-Class:_ Bayou (Vol. 1); Pre-writing #2 review  
_At-home:_ Bayou (Vol. 2); excerpt “Of Slaves and other Swamp Things” Quiana J. Whitted.; excerpt from Alan Moore’s “Saga of the Swamp Thing”; short excerpt from Beloved, _Key terms review_

Assignment  **Final paper proposal – guideline handout to be provided. Due Tuesday, August 19th**

Assignment  **Critical Writing 2-3 pages, Due Tuesday, August 19th** Hard copy in-class and electronic version  
_to eCommons DropBox CHOOSE ONE:_  
- Close-reading of one-page of Building Stories  
- Close-reading of one-page of Bayou Vol. 1

**Week 4 – Extrapolation**

**August 19**  Politics, Passion and Posthumanism  
**DUE: Close Reading #1 of 2-3pp,** hard copy with backup to eCommons DropBox  
_In-Class:_ Bayou (Vol. 2), WATCH: part of Episode 1 of Joss Whedon’s Firefly and Dollhouse  
_Final Paper proposals (turn this in at the end of class AND post to eCommons DropBox)_  
_At-home:_ Saga (Vol. 1); “Introduction” _Wesleyan Anthology of Science Fiction_, excerpt from _Race in American Science Fiction_ (Lavender)  
(consider intertextuality with A Night Time Smoke and posthumanism in Robot Prince IV)

Assignment  _Create a Comic page: Group 1 to go on Thursday August 21st_  
**eCommons Forum response #3:** post the close-reading for your selected peer’s comic page. This post should be 300-500 words; you will share an informal version of this in-class (5 minutes). _Post due by 11:55pm Aug 20_

**August 21**  Review & Essay workshop (MLA citation)  
_In-Class:_ Saga (Vol. 1); _guest lecture: Matthew Landry_  
_Class comics (group 1 creative assignment)_  
_At-home:_ Saga Vol 2. Excerpt (chapter 7) to be provided, selections: _Shutter_ #1, _Fun Home_, _Patty-Jo n Ginger_; re-read “Introduction” to MQC 13 by Chris Ware, _key terms review_
Assignment  Create a Comic page: Group 2 to go on Tuesday August 26th

eCommons Forum response #3: post the close-reading for your selected peer’s comic page. This post should be 300-500 words; you will share an informal version of this in-class (5 minutes). Post due by 11:55pm Aug 25

Week 5 – Writing pictures, Drawing words

August 26  The agon: Art vs Criticism, The Fan vs the Scholar, Comic Con vs. the Mall
In-class: *To be confirmed: SKYPE with one or two of our course comics creators

Class comics (group 2 creative assignment)

At-home: re-read Comics Code of Authority criteria; “Judgment Day” (7pp, EC Comics), excerpt from Ten-Cent Plague, selections: underground comix and zines.

Assignment Create a Comic page: Group 3 to go on Thursday August 28th

eCommons response #3: post the close-reading for your selected peer’s comic page. This post should be 300-500 words; you will share an informal version of this in-class (5 minutes). Post due by 11:55pm Aug 27

August 28

DUE Final paper, 5-6pp. Hard copy in-class and electronic version to eCommons DropBox

In-class: Comics Code of Authority, Dr. Wertham and “Judgment Day”

Class comics (group 3 creative assignment)

Dirty White Elephant game (bring nothing but your anticipation)

August 29

EXTENDED deadline for final paper: Friday, August 29th 4PM

TA Review Sessions:
Matthew will schedule weekly review sessions. Time, location and the topic of each review will be posted on eCommons. You are only REQUIRED to attend one.

Images:
Building Stories. Chris Ware (2012)
Acme Novelty 1. Chris Ware (1992)
Xkcd.com
Krazy Kat. George Herriman (1934)