Lit 61F: Introduction to a Literary Topic – Graphic Novels & Comics
Natural Sciences Annex 2, room 102, Tuesday & Thursday, 9 a.m. to 12 p.m
Instructor: Cathy Thomas, ctthomas@ucsc.edu, Office: Hum 1, Room 115A, Tues. 1-2:30 p.m and by appt.
TA: Alex Cargol, acargol@ucsc.edu, Office: Global Village Café (McHenry Library), Thurs. 12:45-1:45 p.m.

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—for the people, by the people. Graphic novels and comics combine text and image in a synthesis where we can observe the hybridization of social, ethnic, gender, and racial ideas. The beauty of comics is in their ambivalent images that are at once and altogether confrontational, dark, humorous, confusing, and clear. The study of these realistic and non-realistic images provides new perspectives to our scholarly inquiries. This course will be especially interested engaging new perspectives of a classic villain, girls growing up too soon, lab animals on the run, egoistic alter egos, and a pansexual mechanic.

This course, like other Literature courses, attempts to provide perspectives on the following: How are art and history, public and private lives, and wants and desires synthesized on the page? What works of literary culture offer significant insight to a broader understanding of popular culture...and vice versa? Most importantly, can you still enjoy a text after deconstructing it with critical engagements with theories? Through careful evaluation and unbridled enjoyment of comics, we can attempt to define notions of identity, subjectivities, intertextuality, art, and caricature through historical referential themes and literary analysis.

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 graphia¹. 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 non-normative narratives move from the margins to the center of literary acclaim because of protagonists. Finally, this course explores the current trend of comics criticism and what it means to dissect genres written for pleasure, catharsis or commerce. This Literature course is reading and writing intensive. And, you will have the opportunity to do both creative and critical writing.

"Judgment Day" by story by Al Feldstein, art by Joe Orlando from Weird Fantasy #18, EC Comics, The controversial last panel of a 1953 comic that portrayed a Black man as an astronaut.

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

We will be reading across modes: in print, on the web, in the comic book store and through trading. Excerpts and Supplemental reading will be provided on eCommons>Resources or as a handout.

You will need to purchase 5 print books and 2 web editions. Print editions are available at the Baytree Bookstore on campus or Amazon.com. Web editions of Bayou are available though Comixology.com.

- **WE3.** Grant Morrison, 144pp (PRINT/reserve: ISBN 978-1401243029)
- **Bayou** (issues #1,2,3) Jeremy Love. (Comixology.com issue #1 FREE, other issues cost .99 cents ea.)

*Understanding Comics* will be on reserve at McHenry but you are encouraged to purchase a copy or borrow a copy using the library’s reserve, interloan or the Santa Cruz public library; there are very many copies circulating if you choose not to buy this book.

Please plan ahead: figure out how and where you will obtain your texts.

I will provide you with PDFs of the other class readings that are short excerpts from longer novels or series. You do not need to purchase these but are welcome to do so if you want.

- **Love & Rockets: No.1,** Jamie and Gilbert Hernandez, Fantagraphics, 1982. (WEB: eCommons)
- **Bitch Planet,** Kelly Sue Connick and Valentino De Landro issue #1 (Comixology or WEB: eCommons)

Comic Book Store

We will also read comics as single issues we will schedule a visit to Atlantis Fantasyworld on Locust Ave. The comic title(s) or interest and date of our trip to Atlantis will be arranged in class.

Trading

On the first day of class I will give you each a comic book, issue #1 in most cases. At their height of popularity, comics were accused of being the “ten cent plague” and reading comics was often part of the early tradition of trading comic books. The hope is that you will read and trade as often as you can with your classmates.
Attendance: Regular attendance in lecture is REQUIRED. You are strongly encouraged to take advantage of office hours to get one-on-one feedback on your writing and essay arguments. You get ONE unexcused absence. With the SECOND unexcused absence, a portion of your class attendance & participation grade—worth 20% of your total grade—is an “F”. With a THIRD unexcused absence you will not be able to pass the course. 2 Tardies = 1 Absence; 10 or more minutes late is LATE. Speak to me in advance of extenuating circumstances. On the last day of class, you can make-up any unexcused absence by dressing up in full cosplay (costume play of a comic, sf, or pop culture character).

We’ll have a 15-minute midpoint break. Our class is old school: Please, no in-class technology unless an assignment requires it. I will post Powerpoint slides of all lectures. 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 4 with either Alex 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 Alex the class prior.

Reading: First and foremost, read all comics. Next, read and return to your handout as needed. Secondary reading (essays) are all relatively short. With the PDF chapters from the Routledge SF Encyclopedia, please read the first 3-4 paragraphs (intro) and the last 2 (conclusion) while skimming through the middle. You will eventually go back and read the critical material most relevant to your paper projects or interests. Read with post-its and pencils.

Assignments & Grades
THREE blogs\(^2\) (conversations) 15% total (5% each)
ONE Creative assignment: create a comic page 20%
ONE Critical assignment: 2-3 page close reading 15%
ONE Final paper 5-6 page close reading essay 20%
Attendance & participation\(^3\) 30% (10% contributing to weekly in-class discussion)

\(^{2}\) Basecamp. I will post all 5 conversations at one time. Due dates are on syllabus. You may respond more than once to a particular conversation. Alex and I will spend time toward the end of lecture to bring your posts into discussion.

\(^{3}\) Participation decoded: course preparedness, being awake & on-time, not texting. Weekly Basecamp input is a great opportunity for ‘discussion’ to accommodate the shy people.

RESOURCES:
eCommons
Basecamp (for class posts)
Comixology.com (an Amazon subsidiary)
Comicvine.com (a free database- get your learn on!)
Pixton.com (making comics)
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 or just need help honing down or talking through your argument, 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.

Mental health resources: UCSC Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) provides a wide range of short-term and long-term mental health services. Counseling services are confidential and free of charge to all UCSC students. For more information, contact CAPS at 831-459-2628 or visit http://caps.ucsc.edu/

Academic Advising
Academic advising is offered all summer; hours will vary by college. Students can contact their colleges to find out when advising is being offered or visiting advising.ucsc.edu.

Session 2 Drop Deadline - Aug 3  
Session 2 Withdraw Deadline - Aug 14
This syllabus is subject to change to meet time constraints of the 5-week summer session

Week 1 – Welcome

Tu, July 28  Welcome to the course: resources overview & introductions. Comic exchange begins!
What is a comic? What is at stake in comics? Who is a critic? Who is a fan? What’s the difference? Textualities or how do comics speak back to and across each other? How do they speak back to the self and the world? Comics terminology and brief history.
In-class: Syllabus. EC Comics cover art; “How to Read Nancy”
EC Comics Weird Adventure #18 “Judgment Day” (7pp)

At-home: Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art (chap. 1-2);
Green Lantern #76 (22pp, eCommons), 1954 Comics Code (2pp, eCommons), “What Parents don’t know about comic books” Frederic Wertham (first 4 pages then skim, eCommons), “Rodolphe Topffer” and “Introduction to MCQ by Chris Ware (10pp, eCommons)


Assignment Explore eCommons, Pixton.com and Comixology.com. Post a class intro under “Welcome” in BaseCamp, please upload a selfie as your icon. Please do this by August 1st

Th, July 30  Genre, Tropes, and Caricature
In-class: Discuss Comics Code of Authority & Frederic Wertham, Understanding Comics,
Mini-groups: close reading time and space in black & white, Herriman, Bechdel, Ware, Sacco, Speigelman, Ormes, and others.

At-home: The Killing Joke (Moore, 64pp); Vladimir Propp excerpt on carnival and comic laughter. Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art (chap. 3-4, 8), “Drawing Blood” Spiegelman, Will Eisner interview excerpts; from Routledge Companion to Science Fiction “Silver Age Comics” (Kawa)

Skim ahead across you other texts to pre-plan for the pre-essay assignment due in Week 3

Optional: George Herriman letter; Gilbert Seldes on Herriman.

Conversation #1 Choose a page from any discussed comic. Using any particular terminology introduced by Scott McCloud or Charles Hatfield, explain the composition as well as events of the panel in context of the page and narrative? Single out the panel on that page and answer: what is gained or lost in visual representation? What is gained or lost in textual representation? Post due by 11:55pm Saturday, Aug 1.
**Week 2 – Trigger Happy: history, memory, & trauma...laughter**

**Tu, August 4  Origins**

**In-Class:** *The Killing Joke*

**In-Class exercise:** Writing exercise started in class on Tuesday and we’ll return to it on Thursday. This is just a practical exercise and need not be your final paper. CHOOSE ONE: *Krazy Kat*, *Patty Jo n Ginger*, *Fun Home*, *Maus*, *Palestine*.

**At-home:** *Bayou* chapters 1, 2, and 3; from *Routledge Companion to Science Fiction* “Cultural History” (Yaszek) and “Critical Race Theory” (Lavender).

**Optional:** “Of Slaves and other Swamp Things” Quiana J. Whitted which ties together Alan Moore’s “Saga of the Swamp Thing”, Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, and *Bayou*

**TBA: Trip to Soc Sci 1 MacLab for ComicLife™ and Pixton demonstration (9AM).**

**Th, August 6  Metaphor and Metonym, Puns that create powerful imagery**

**In-Class:** *The Killing Joke* (Moore), *Bayou* (Love). Class and heroism/villainy

**In-Class Exercise:** Review writing exercise in small groups. From that one page, focus in on a panel, single image or leitmotif

**In-class viewing:** the Joker and Batman through the ages and through genres. What does good and evil look like, sound like?


**Key Terms Review**

**Optional:** view season 1/episode 1 of Joss Whedon’s *Firefly* (Hulu, Amazon Prime)

**Conversation #2** What are the implications of visual caricature? OR How is caricature and metaphor key to world-building in sf? Please post an example of an image to explain your answer; for what audience; for what affect and effect. **Post due by 11:55pm Saturday, Aug 15.**

**Assignment** Pre-Essay: 2-3 pages that explore critique from any of the secondary readings and any ONE of these 6 primary texts. It is highly recommended that you choose a primary text you’ll use for your final essay so skim ahead:

- Close-reading of one-page of *The Killing Joke*.
- Close-reading of one-page from *WE3*
- Close-reading of one-page from *Love & Rockets*
- Close-reading of one-page from *Bayou*
- Close-reading of one-page from *Are You My Mother?*
- Close-reading of one-page from *Bitch Planet*
Week 3 – Critique and the Close Read

Tu, Aug 11  Superhero and everyday life
In-Class: Saga.

GUEST LECTURER: Ariane Helou, superheroes and Greek myths
In-class Exercise: “Magical Negro” by Nnedi Okorfor-Mbachu
DUE: a hardcopy of your 2-3 page close reading, notes in one week
At-home: Bitch Planet issue 1 & 2 including back material, L+R,
("Mechanic-X" 9pp, “Locas Tambien” 5pp); from Your Brain on Latino
Comics (Aldama, eCommons) “Rereading Race and Ethnicity” pp 101-104
and “Conversation with the Creators” pp 171-201; intro Cosmos Latinos
(4pp); Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art (chap. 5)

Conversation #3 Share your intro paragraph on Basecamp along with the image to
which it speaks. OR, share your “Magical Negro”/ “Taco Bell...”comic with a brief reading of your
interpretation. Post due by 11:55pm Saturday, Aug 15.

August 13  Bitches be like...
In-Class: L +R (Hernandez), Saga (Vaughn, Staples), Bitch Planet (Connick, De Landro)
In-class exercise: Say Yes to the Process - Script, pencil, edit, ink, color
At-home: Are you my Mother? (290 pp); highlighted portions from Routledge Companion to Science
Fiction “Queer Theory” (Gaye), “Feminisms” (Donawerth), “Psychoanalysis” (Butler)
Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art (chap. 6)
Key terms review

TBA: Visit to Atlantis Fantasyworld next week.
Assignment Create a Comic page: Group 1 to share a 5-minute close reading/observation of peer’s work on
Tuesday August 18.

Conversation #4 Intertextuality. Post due by 11:55pm Saturday, Aug 22.

Week 4 – Graphic Women

August 18  Gender, Sexuality and Age and other graphic assemblages
In-Class: Are you my Mother? and intertextuality
Mini-meetings: to discuss your secondary text selection. (in-class and after class 5-min appt.)

Returned: your 2-3 page close reading assignment
At-home: Are you my Mother? Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art (pp. 178-184), “Animating the
Archive” pp 175-178, 218-17, and images (Chute).
Class comics (group 1 creative assignment)

Conversation #5 Post the close reading for your selected peer’s comic page. This post should be 200-300 words; you’ll
share an informal version of this in-class (5 min). Post due by 11:55pm Saturday, Aug 29.

August 20  CLASS MEETS @ ATLANTIS FANTASYWORLD, 1020 Cedar St, Santa Cruz 95060
10 am-12pm: Joe Ferrera will talk to the class for 30-40 minutes, then for the better part of an hour
you’ll participate in a scavenger hunt that ties in key terms and past lectures.
At-home: WE3 (Morrison, 115pp); highlighted portions from *Routledge Companion to Science Fiction* “Animal Studies” (Gordon), “Ethics and Alterity” (Easterbrook), Digital Games” (Kryzwinska & MacCallum Stewart)

**Key Terms Review**

**Assignment** Create a Comic page: *Group 2* to go on Tuesday August 25

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**Week 5 – The Fantastic Mundane**

**August 25**  
Class and the racialized body (final discussion of Bechdel and the female protagonist in comics)  
*Are you my Mother?* discussion of the female protagonists (Bechdel, Ormes, Staples/Vaughn, Moore, Love); continue discussion of children protagonists; satire and dark humor; MLA or CMS

Ethics and Alterity

In-class: WE3, and the “animals” of *Saga, L+R, Bayou*; the ethics of a brick in *Krazy Kat*

**GUEST LECTURER:** Alex Cargol, *Adventure Time*

**Class comics (group 2 creative assignment)**

At-home: re-read the primary text on which you will be writing; re-read the secondary text that you use to support your final paper; highlighted portions from *Routledge Companion to Science Fiction* “Fan Studies” (Reid)

**Assignment** Create a Comic page: *Group 3* to go on Thursday August 27

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**August 27**  
The staying and *saying* power of comics

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

In-class: How are the comics read over this course in conversation with each other or other media, social discourses, or ideas?  

**Class comics (group 3 creative assignment)**

Jeopardy course review & *Dirty* White Elephant game (bring nothing but your anticipation)

At-home: “Is...is where?” “Is home.”

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**August 28**

EXTENDED deadline for final paper: Friday, Aug 29 at 5PM at The Abbey Coffee Shop

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**Images:**
Green Lantern, Love and Rockets, Xkcd.com, Saga, Krazy Kat. George Herriman (1934)