

## Syllabus

### Honors College 185G, Graphic Novels and Narrative Theory

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Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:30-5:00 p.m., and by appointment

#### Overview

In the course of this seminar, we will read seven graphic novels in order to explore a few key questions: Why is story-telling central to human life? Why do we value story-telling so highly, and how does each of the graphic novels we read fulfill the criteria of value we have identified? What is the use of theorizing about narratives, and what is the value and power of applying systematic and rigorous analytic terms to the study of narrative? What distinctive qualities distinguish narratives delivered through sequential art—usually combining graphics with text—from strictly textual narratives? And what must we do to supplement the formal, structural study of narratives in order to honor the specificity of historical, economic, social, political, cultural, anthropological, and philosophical contexts essential for understanding the works.

#### Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course you should be able to:

- Read long-form graphic narratives with a sophisticated understanding of their formal properties;
- Apply the theoretical tools developed by theorists of narrative and comics in order to understand how the texts work and how they create meaning;
- Elucidate the interplay between images and language in graphic novels;
- Develop and apply research skills to understand the themes and concepts deployed in our primary texts and the historical, economic, social, political, cultural, anthropological, and philosophical contexts essential for understanding them;
- Write with increasing pleasure and authority as a mode of inquiry.

#### Course Methodology: Inquiry on Many Fronts

Everything we do together in reading, writing, listening, and making presentations to each other will be part of a process of inquiry for developing provisional answers to key questions while refining the resources in our toolkits for framing and addressing productive and provocative questions. To that end, we will devote time in and out of class to a variety of forms of writing

and discussion, all conceived as modes of inquiry. There will be a few short papers in the first eight weeks of the course, each addressing current readings. The major project for the course will require each participant in the seminar to lay the groundwork for a critical edition of one of our seven primary texts by preparing footnotes for a portion of the text and by writing a critical introduction. Participation very broadly defined (including class discussion and presentations and a variety of informal writing exercises such as journal entries and responses to study questions) will constitute the third major component of work in the course. **Plagiarism, the unacknowledged use of anyone else's ideas, whether verbatim or in paraphrase, will not be tolerated. Cell phones and other wireless devices must be silenced during class meetings.**

### **Required Texts (students should always have copies of the texts under discussion in class)**

Abbott, H. Porter. *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 2<sup>nd</sup>. ed. (Cambridge UP, 2008), ISBN 978-0521171517

Bechdel, Alison. *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (Mariner Books, 2006), ISBN 978-0618871711

\_\_\_\_\_. *Are You My Mother* (Mariner Books, 2012), ISBN 978-0544002234

Lutes, Jason. *Berlin: City of Stones: Book One* (Drawn and Quarterly, 2001), ISBN 978-1896597294

\_\_\_\_\_. *Berlin: City of Smoke: Book Two* (Drawn and Quarterly, 2001), ISBN 978-1896597294

McCloud, Scott. *Making Comics: Storytelling Secrets of Comics, Manga and Graphic Novel* (Harper, 2006), ISBN 978-0060780944.

Spiegelman, Art. *Maus I: A Survivor's Tale: My Father Bleeds History* (Pantheon, 1986), ISBN 978-0394747231

\_\_\_\_\_. *Maus II: A Survivor's Tale: My Father Bleeds History* (Pantheon, 1986), ISBN 978-0394747231

Sturm, James. *Market Day* (Drawn and Quarterly, 2010), ISBN 978-1897299975

### **Class Policies and Requirements**

In order to pass the course, every student must fulfill each of the following requirements:

- Finish all reading assignments for the day they are listed as DUE on the syllabus.
- Attend class regularly and participate actively. One unexcused absence is allowed, no questions asked.
- Complete several short papers on instructor-assigned topics tied to current readings (assigned lengths will vary from 250 to 400 words and assignments will always be made at least one week in advance).
- Submit six journal entries in the course of the semester of at least 250 but no more than 400 words (single entries are due by Friday at 4:00 p.m. on weeks where the date of the Thursday class meeting on the course schedule below is marked with a 📖) in which you record thoughts, observations, and questions about readings and class discussion. While they will

not be graded individually—journal entries are meant to be, with respect to grades, a low-stakes opportunity to “think out loud” by writing—my assessment of the depth of your engagement in thinking and writing about course readings and issues as disclosed in your journals will be a key factor in the class participation portion of the final course grade. Additional journal entries will be welcome but are by no means required.

- Complete in the last five weeks of the course a major project entailing an essay introductory to, and footnotes for a defined portion of, one of our seven primary texts. The assignment for this project will be available at our first class meeting.
- Compile all work completed for the course, including drafts and final graded versions of essays and Study Questions, in a course portfolio for submission with the final project on December 8.
- There will be no examinations or quizzes in this course, but study questions—sometimes completed in class and sometimes out of class—will at times require quick retrieval of details from current readings and will constitute an important component of the participation grade.

### Grading:

You will receive letter grades for each of the main requirements: the short papers; participation (which includes completion of study questions and journal entries as well as participation in discussions); and the final paper. The average of the grades on the short papers will make up 25% of the course grade. The average of the grades on all elements of participation will make up 35% of the final grade. And your final project will be the last 40% of the course grade (25% for the essay, and 15% for the annotations). While your course grade will be based on the weighted average of these course components, I will take overall improvement into account in figuring individual cases.

### Extension Policy:

I take assigned deadlines on written work seriously, but I am willing to be flexible about arranging extensions on essays if you anticipate conflicts with other obligations. If you speak to me at least two days before the due date of a short paper or at least one week before the deadline for each of the three phases of the final paper, I will be glad to grant you an extension. Please do not ask for extensions on a last-minute basis; the only exceptions will be in cases of illness or similar circumstances beyond your control.

Study questions are a part (though only a part) of the participation grade, and I cannot grant extensions on study questions directly and immediately tied to current readings and discussions. For example, I cannot grant extensions when study questions are distributed, answered, and returned to me in the course of a single class meeting. If you know you will be absent on any particular day for which study questions have been distributed in advance, you may turn in your responses before the class meeting via email, or give them to a classmate to bring to class.

## Participation:

*Here are the guidelines I will follow in assigning participation grades—*

*Excellent (A range):* You are an enthusiastic leader in participation. You are always present and have prepared for class, which is evidenced in your reading notes and your leadership in discussions. You are often able to respond substantively to other students' comments or to alter the direction of the conversation in constructive and interesting ways. You often refer to specific passages in the text to substantiate your interpretation or to challenge the thinking of others (including the professor).

*Good (B range):* You are always present for the discussion with no more than the allowed absences. You usually make at least one contribution to the discussion that shows familiarity with the text and shows that you have read carefully and thoughtfully. Your comments often refer to specific passages in the text to substantiate your interpretation. Your contributions to discussions are valuable. You are an active contributor.

*Average (C range):* You have missed a few more classes than the allowed number; you sometimes speak up in class, but not consistently; you show a general familiarity with the assigned reading.

*Below average (D range):* You may be chronically absent. You sometimes make comments that show some comprehension of the assigned reading and the overall direction of the discussion, but you rarely make specific references to the readings. You often do not speak up in class at all. Your lack of preparation detracts from your ability to participate.

*Failing (F):* You may be chronically absent. You usually do not participate and are not prepared for class.


Students whose shyness means they are hesitant to speak up in class have two options: come to class with something you have prepared to say and *make* yourself talk, even when you don't feel like it, or improve your overall grade by earning excellent scores on responses you write for the journal and on study questions. I will assign participation grades at midterm, so you will know how you are doing; I will be happy to meet individually with anyone who would like suggestions for improving his or her participation.

## Attendance (Religious Holidays):

I follow the University's policy regarding religious holidays: Students have the right to practice the religion of their choice. Each semester students should submit in writing to their instructors by the end of the second full week of classes their documented religious holiday schedule for the semester. Faculty must permit students who miss work for the purpose of religious observance to make up this work.

**Course Schedule** (subject to adjustment in the light of how classes unfold over the course of the semester)


- Tues, 8/30 Introduction to the course and to *Market Day*; Abbott, chapter 1 (pp. 1-12)
- Thur, 9/1 *Market Day*; McCloud, Introduction and first part of chapter 1 (pp. 1-18)
- Tues, 9/6 *Berlin I*, chapters *Berlin I*, chapter 1-2 (pp. 5-54); Abbott, chapter 2 (pp. 13-27)
- Thur, 9/8📖 *Berlin I*, chapters 3-4 (pp. 57-106); McCloud, continuing chapter 1 (pp. 19-25)
- Tues, 9/13 *Berlin I*, chapters 5-6 (109-158); Abbott, chapter 3 (pp. 28-39)
- Thur, 9/15 *Berlin I*, chapters 7-8 (pp. 161-211); McCloud, continuing chapter 1 (pp. 26-36)
- Tues, 9/20 *Berlin II*, chapter 1-2 (pp. 5-54); Abbott, chapter 4 (pp. 40-54)
- Thur, 9/22📖 *Berlin II*, chapters 3-4 (pp. 57-106); McCloud, continuing chapter 1 (pp. 37-53)
- Tues, 9/27 *Berlin II*, chapters 5-6 (pp. 109-158); Abbott, chapter 5 (pp. 53-66)
- Thur, 9/29 *Berlin II*, chapters 7-8 (pp. 161-210); McCloud, chapter 2 (pp. 58-79)
- Tues, 10/4 *Maus I*, Introduction and chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 5-41); Abbott, chapter 6 (pp. 67-82)
- Thur, 10/6 *Maus I*, chapter 3 (pp. 41-69); McCloud, continuing chapter 2 (pp. 80-101)
- Tues, 10/11 *Maus I*, chapter 4-5 (pp. 71-127); Abbott, chapter 7 (pp. 83-99); **final project proposal and annotation notes due (see the final project assignment)**
- Thur, 10/13📖 *Maus I*, chapter 6 (pp. 129-159); McCloud, continuing chapter 2 (pp. 102-121)
- Tues, 10/18 *Maus II*, chapter 1 (pp. 9-37); Abbott, chapter 8 (pp. 100-111)
- Thur, 10/20 *Maus II*, chapter 2 (pp. 39-74); McCloud, continuing chapter 3 (pp. 128-153)
- Tues, 10/25 *Maus II*, chapter 3 (pp. 75-100); Abbott, chapter 10 (pp. 130-144)
- Thur, 10/27📖 *Maus II*, chapters 4-5 (pp. 100-136); McCloud, chapter 4 (pp. 158-179)
- Tues, 11/1 *Fun Home*, chapters 1-2 (pp. 1-54); Abbott, chapter 11 (pp. 145-159)
- Thur, 11/3 *Fun Home*, chapters 3-4 (pp. 55-120); McCloud, chapter 6 (pp. 213-223)
- Tues, 11/8 *Fun Home*, chapter 5 (pp. 121-150); Abbott, chapter 13 (pp. 175-183); **final project drafts due (see the final project assignment)**

Thur, 11/10  *Fun Home*, chapter 6 (pp. 151-186); McCloud, continuing chapter 6 (pp. 224-228)

Tues, 11/15 *Fun Home*, chapter 7 (pp. 187-229); McCloud, continuing chapter 6 (pp. 229-239)

Thur, 11/17 *Are You My Mother?*, chapters 1-2 (pp. 1-75); Abbott, continuing chapter 13 (pp. 183-192).

Tues, 11/29 *Are You My Mother?*, chapter 3 (pp. 77-117); Abbott, chapter 14 (pp. 193-205)

Thur, 12/1  *Are You My Mother?*, chapter 4 (pp. 119-159); Abbott, continuing chapter 14 (pp. 205-213)

Tues, 12/6 *Are You My Mother?*, chapter 5-6 (pp. 161-245)

Thur, 12/8 *Are You My Mother?*, chapter 7 (pp. 245-289); **final projects and portfolios due.**