

**ENG 385: Graphic Narratives and Cultural Theory: Life-Writing**  
**Professor Helen Southworth**  
**Winter 2021**

**Office Hours: Mon/Wed 11:30-1:00**  
**helen@uoregon.edu**

This course offers an introduction to the graphic narrative form with a focus on life-writing and coming of age narratives. Themes will include: the process of life-writing; time; representing bodies/disability; “comic’s long history of ‘powerful marginality’” (El Refaie, 7); reader response; fiction vs non-fiction; “verbo-visual strategies,” “cross-discursive form[s]” (Chute, *GW* 2); trauma; feminism; experiment; texture; race and more.

We’ll start with Art Spiegelman’s now iconic *Maus*. Spiegelman’s autobiographical comic about his parents’ Holocaust experience marks the beginning of a boom in the graphic narrative form. Then we’ll move to the “feminist, unflinching and dark” work of the very talented Lynda Barry (Chute 98). From Barry we’ll turn to Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis* (translated from the French), the story of a childhood in Iran and Austria and Alison Bechdel’s *Fun Home*, which documents her relationship with her father, before moving to three very recent works: Guy Delisle’s *Hostage*, about the captivity of an aid worker in Chechnya, UO alum Joe Sacco’s latest work of reportage about native communities in Canada, *Paying the Land*, and Emil Ferris’ murder mystery/family drama *My Favorite Thing is Monsters*.

### **Required Reading List:**

Art Spiegelman, *Maus* (serialized from 1980 to 1991 Raw/Pantheon Books)  
Lynda Barry, *One Hundred Demons* (Sasquatch 2001)  
Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis* (in French Association Paris 2003/translation Pantheon 2004)  
Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home* (Harcourt 2006)  
Guy Delisle, *Hostage*. (2016 in French, 2017 in English/Cape)  
Joe Sacco, *Paying the Land* (Cape 2020)  
Emil Ferris, *My Favorite Thing is Monsters* (Fantagraphics 2016)

We’ll also be reading selections from the following theoretical texts. A number of these are available at the library as ebooks. Extracts will be on Canvas where indicated.

Scott McCloud. *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (William Morrow 1994).  
Hillary Chute. *Graphic Women* (Columbia UP, 2010) (available as an ebook at the library).  
----- *Why Comics?* (Harper, 2017)  
Elisabeth El Refaie. *Autobiographical Comics: Life Writing in Pictures*. (UP of Mississippi, 2012)  
Barbara Postema. *Narrative Structure in Comics* (RIT, 2012)  
Charles Hatfield. “The Art of Tensions,” a version of which is included in:  
*Alternative Comics*. (available as an ebook at the library).  
Mary Karr. *The Art of Memoir*. (HarperCollins 2015)  
Hermione Lee *A Very Short Introduction to Biography*. (Oxford, 2009)  
Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson. *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (available as an ebook at the library).

## **Course Objectives:**

1. Improve research and writing skills. Get to know the library!
2. Learn about the history and critical reception of graphic narratives.
3. Consider forms of life-writing/memoir/biography/autobiography.
4. Develop strategies for interpreting the verbo-visual/visual and textual combination.
5. Develop self-direction and initiative.
6. Nourish creativity.

## **Course Requirements:**

The goal of this class is the conception and completion of 2 short papers that could ideally be linked to create a single longer final research project (paper or digital; approx. 7-8 pages total). Topics might range from close readings of individual texts to a more literary historical focus on, for example, the marketing of comics/graphic narratives or the history of certain types of comics. Formal, cultural, sociological, historical approaches are welcome. My goal is to introduce you to a handful of primary and secondary materials from where you'll identify and pursue a research question. I'll provide you with a lot of material, but I'd also like to see you identify sources of your own. Creativity and curiosity will be rewarded! Topics should be discussed with me in advance. Please make an appointment with me to discuss ideas.

All papers must be titled. You should proofread carefully; spelling, punctuation, and grammar count. As an alternative to the conventional paper, you will create a digital exhibit based on course materials, conceived in discussion with me. The digital exhibit will be accompanied by a three-page analytical statement of purpose.

Late papers/projects lose 1 step per day (A to A-, B+ to B, C to C-, etc.) including weekends/holidays. After a week, late papers will not be accepted; they will count as missed assignments (F).

## **Grade Breakdown:**

Midterm first draft (due week 6): 25%

Presentation of final project (week 9/10): 10%

Final Project: 50 %

Participation: 15 %

**Attendance is required:** PLEASE COME TO CLASS WITH AT LEAST TWO QUESTIONS FOR EACH READING. IT'S A GOOD IDEA TO HAVE CHOSEN PARTICULAR PANELS OR SETS OF PAGES FROM THE WORKS THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO SPEND TIME ANALYZING.

I will also set up discussions on Canvas for all of the primary texts. I'd like to see all students participate online as well as in class.

**Daily Reading Assignments:** Read each assignment before class. Read all texts slowly and carefully.

**Writing Associates:** The Writing Associates Program offers free, one-on-one peer tutoring for students in 100-and 200-level English and Composition classes. Writing Associate tutors are advanced English majors who have been trained to tutor writing. They are available to help students with any aspect of their writing for this course, from learning how to write about literature and media to crafting clearer and more effective arguments. To make an appointment with a Writing Associate, go to <https://writingassociates.uoregon.edu>.

## Reading Schedule:

### Week One:

*Monday:*

Class introductions and reading the syllabus.

*Wednesday:*

Start reading Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (to end of chapter 2).

Read Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* Chapters 1-3. (Canvas)

Read appendices A and B at the end of Postema (beginning pp.129/37 Canvas).

*Friday:*

Continue reading *Maus* (to the end of chapter 4)

We'll watch extracts from Art Spiegelman's lecture (please complete in your own time):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ietzZBf3OD4>

### Week Two:

*Mon:* Complete *Maus I*

Read Charles Hatfield's "An Art of Tensions" (Canvas)

*Wed:* Complete *Maus II*

Read Chute's "Why Disaster?" from *Why Comics* (Canvas)

*Fri:* Read El Refaie (Canvas)

Read Chute's "Comics as Literature" (Canvas)

Read Smith and Watson's tool kit for reading autobiography (Canvas).

### Week Three:

*Mon:* MLK Day

*Wed:* Read Lynda Barry's *One Hundred Demons* (All)

*Fri:* We'll watch extracts from Barry's lecture (please complete in your own time):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x5QsOg-7B6w>

Read Chute's chapter on Barry (Canvas); Lee "The Biography Channel" (Canvas); Karr p.1-27 (Canvas)

### Week Four:

*Mon:* Read Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (up to p.153/end of part one)

*Wed:* Complete *Persepolis* (up to p.343/all of part two)

*Fri:* Read Chute's article on *Persepolis* (Canvas)

Read Postema (Canvas).

We'll watch extracts from interview with Sartrapi and Spiegelman (please finish in your own time):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rUmSAq5uNLY>

Recommended: *Persepolis* movie.

### **Week Five:**

*Mon:* Read Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*. (pp.1-86)

*Wed:* Bechdel (pp. 88-150)

*Fri:* Complete Bechdel

Read Chute's chapter on Bechdel (Canvas).

We'll watch extracts of Bechdel reading and lecturing (please complete in your own time)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P1PV2F-mRHw&t=241s>

and [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J\\_xQdGhM\\_JM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J_xQdGhM_JM)

### **Week Six:**

*Mon:* **First short paper due**

*Wed:* Read Delisle's *Hostage* (pp.1-142)

*Friday:* Delisle (pp.143-280)

### **Week Seven:**

*Mon:* Complete Delisle.

We'll watch extracts from Chute's interview with Delisle (please complete in your own time):

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z6IG\\_1yCo-A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z6IG_1yCo-A)

*Wed:* Sacco's *Paying the Land* Chapters I-II

*Fri:* Sacco Chapters III-IV

### **Week Eight:**

*Mon:* Complete Sacco Chapters V-VI

Spiegelman and Sacco: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2wcFkcOPGHM>

OPB interview: <https://www.opb.org/article/2020/11/16/graphic-journalist-joe-saccos-new-book-depicts-indigenous-life-in-the-north/>

(Interview in French) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bm9yRtikPI>

Read: <https://slate.com/culture/2020/10/joe-sacco-paying-the-land-comics-journalism.html>

*Wed:* Ferris's *My Favorite Thing is Monsters* (page numbers tba)

*Fri:* Ferris

### **Week Nine:**

*Mon:* Complete Ferris

*Wed:* **Workshops.** We'll visit the library (virtually) and revisit some of the earlier theoretical work this week.

*Fri:* ditto . . .

### **Week Ten: Workshops/Presentations.**

*Mon-Fri:* Presentations.

FINAL PAPER IS DUE FRIDAY OF FINALS WEEK

**Incomplete Policy:** Undergraduate students have one calendar year to make up an incomplete mark assigned by a UO faculty member. Failure to make up the incomplete at the end of one calendar year will result in the mark of "I" automatically changing to a grade of "F" or "N." No incompletes will be granted, except in case of medical or personal emergency.

**Students Needing Accommodation:** UO strives to create inclusive learning environments. If you have a documented disability and anticipate needing accommodations, please notify me and the Accessible Education Center (164 Oregon Hall; <http://aec.uoregon.edu>), so we can make appropriate arrangements.

**Use of Electronic Devices:** Laptops and tablets for taking notes are permitted, but cell-phone use during class is forbidden. Texting or surfing the web during class time is distracting and disrespectful to your instructor and classmates. Students who violate this policy will be asked to leave class and marked as "absent (unexcused)"; final grades will be impacted negatively.

**Academic Integrity:** Academic dishonesty is not tolerated in this course or at this university. All work submitted must be your own and written for this course. The use of sources—ideas, quotations, paraphrases; from papers, articles, books, or websites—must be properly acknowledged and documented. If you have any doubts or questions about plagiarism or the

University's policy on it, go to: <http://policies.uoregon.edu/vol-3-administration-student-affairs/ch-1-conduct/student-conduct-code>. In accordance with English Department policy, cases of clearly established plagiarism or cheating will result in a final course grade of "F," and all incidents will be reported to the Office of Student Conduct. In cases of a second offense, plagiarism or cheating can result in dismissal from the University.

**Inclement Weather:** In the event of inclement weather, a banner will appear on the UO homepage displaying information about delay, cancellation or closure decisions for the Eugene campus. The latest updates and bulletins will be here: <https://alerts.uoregon.edu/>. Local television and radio stations will also broadcast delay and cancellation information. I will use canvas to communicate information specific to the course. For more information on UO inclement weather policies go to: <https://hr.uoregon.edu/about-hr/campus-notifications/inclement-weather>