

Fall 8-15-2011

# ENG 4300-4390-002-098: Senior Seminar: The Graphic Bildungsroman

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## Recommended Citation

Engles, Tim, "ENG 4300-4390-002-098: Senior Seminar: The Graphic Bildungsroman" (2011). *Fall 2011*. 114.  
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## Senior Seminar The Graphic Bildungsroman

Fall, 2011

Coleman 3159 \* \o/\* 12:30 - 1:45, T/R

Instructor: Tim Engles

Phone: 581-6316 (it's usually easier to reach me by e-mail: tdengles@eiu.edu)

Office Hours: 2:00 - 3:00, T/R

Course listserv: 4300f11@lists.eiu.edu

### TRS Texts

*Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (1993), Scott McCloud  
*Maus: A Survivor's Tale* (volumes 1 [1986] & 2 [1991]), Art Spiegelman  
*Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* (2000), Marjane Satrapi  
*ONE! HUNDRED! DEHTONS!* (2002), Lynda Barry  
*Blankets* (2003), Craig Thompson  
*Jimmy Corrigan* (2003), Chris Ware  
*Fun Home* (2006), Alison Bechdel  
*American Born Chinese* (2006), Gene Luen Yang  
*Shortcomings* (2007), Adrian Tomine

### Course Description

*Bildungsroman: A novel that recounts the development (psychological and sometimes spiritual) of an individual from childhood to maturity, to the point at which the protagonist recognizes his or her place in the world.*

—Ross Murfin

As the graphic-narrative scholar Hillary Chute has recently written, "Comics—a form once considered junk—is sparking interest in literary studies." Ignited by this spark, our seminar will address formal, thematic, and other sorts of questions raised by this medium, such as: How and why have certain kinds of "comics" ascended to the lofty-sounding status of "graphic narrative"? How do the many that tell "coming of age" stories do so differently from narratives confined to printed words? How do the visual and verbal tracks of graphic narratives work together to create meaning? How does the medium's anti-elitist tradition mesh with (and mess with) highbrow literary traditions? What have literary and other scholars had to say about the recent explosion of graphic narratives, and how have their studies contributed to that explosion?

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Our course will be conducted as an inquiring conversation on these matters, with your active participation central to our work. Because the success of our conversations will depend so heavily on everyone's participation, it's crucial that you keep up with the reading, and that you do so with careful attention. In fact, we will begin many of our sessions with a reading quiz, primarily intended to insure that you do maintain attentive reading habits. Also, the rule regarding attendance is: be here. If you have more than three absences this semester, your course grade will drop a full letter grade for each absence beyond three. Your tasks will include regular quizzes, two formal essays, a presentation, and a final exam; you'll also be reading comics a lot more slowly than you usually do.

## Course Requirements

5-7 page critical essay (20%): This paper will focus on any one of our syllabus readings from the first half or so of the semester. Focus your close interpretation of the work in any way you choose, taking your reader beyond what most are likely to realize when first reading the text. You are welcome to incorporate points and insights raised during class discussion, but if you do so, do your best to add further insight. Like the longer essay, this one will follow traditional conventions for academic essays (e.g., unity, coherence, proper formatting and MLA-style documentation, and so on). You are welcome to use any secondary sources, but they are not required for this paper.

10-12 page research essay (25%): This paper will focus on one of the *other* graphic texts on our syllabus (in other words, you may not write about the same text in both essays), and another work not on our syllabus. The topic is coming-of-age graphic narratives, however you choose to approach it. A 250-400 word proposal will be required beforehand. The essay must reflect your close attention to and understanding of insights and interpretive concepts that will have arisen throughout the semester, and of course, it must be an entirely new essay (not something you wrote for a previous nor another current course).

A bit more about essays: All writing assignments are due at the beginning of the class period on the day they are due, whether the student is in class or not. Late-paper penalty: fifteen points each day late, beginning one hour after the end of class.

Presentation of final project (15%): Summarize your final project for the class in engaging ways. Distribute a helpful one-page written handout; more pages that present imagery from your chosen texts are possible, as is limited use of presented online or with PowerPoint. Briefly familiarize yourself with the "outside" text, which your classmates may not have read. The handout should end with at least two questions whose answers could provide, as you see it, keys to understanding the texts analyzed in your project discussion. Be succinct and focused—don't plan to speak for more than fifteen minutes.

Active, thoughtful class participation and good reading-quiz grades (15%): I will not deliver lectures in this class; therefore, because we are a relatively small group, we must all contribute to a positive, challenging, interesting learning environment. Doing so will call for your careful

concentration before class on each assigned reading, and your willingness to share your thoughts, questions, and feelings with others about what you read and hear.

Again, because your careful preparation for class is so crucial, I will begin some sessions with a reading quiz. I know that because you are advanced students I can trust most of you to keep up with our heavy reading load, but past experience has demonstrated that frequent reading quizzes are the best way to ensure that everyone is prepared to participate in class discussion. Questions on the quiz can also function at times as a good lead-in to class discussion. Because the answers to unannounced quizzes tend to arise during class, and because one purpose of the quizzes is to encourage punctual class attendance, these quizzes cannot be made up (even if you come to class late). These quizzes also function as a reward for those who attend class regularly and on time. On the other hand, I recognize that students must miss class at times and therefore might miss a quiz through no fault of their own, so at the end of the semester I will drop your lowest quiz grade before calculating the average. Be aware that many of our class sessions will call for the reading of many pages, and schedule your study time accordingly.

Final exam: (25%): Take home—details will be provided later in the semester.

## Other Matters

E-mail Activity: Enrollment in this class requires an e-mail account, and you must check it frequently for messages pertaining to the course (that is, several times per week, at least). You already have an EIU account; you're welcome to use another type of account, but just be sure you use one for this course that you tend to check frequently, and be sure that messages pertaining to this course do not end up in your "Junk Mail" folder, which can happen more frequently with free email accounts. We will use our course listserv (or "e-mail discussion list") for announcements and for occasional extension of in-class discussion. E-mail is also the quickest, easiest way to reach me if I am not in my office; I welcome any and all e-mailed questions and comments.

Using e-mail is crucial for this course—if you do not send me an e-mail message (tdengles@eiu.edu) by Friday, August 26 at 3:00 p.m., I will assume that you have chosen against fully participating in the course, and I will therefore drop you. In that message, (1) tell me which course you're in (English 4300); (2) describe yourself in whatever way you choose, including your career aspirations; (3) write a statement to the effect that you have read and agree to (or perhaps in part disagree with, which is fine, if you explain why) these course policies and requirements; and (4) as with all emails you send to instructors, "sign" it by adding your name at the end of the message. Sending me this message will also constitute your "signature" of our course contract, that is, these policies and procedures that you're currently reading. I will then use your email address to subscribe you to our class listserv (you don't have to subscribe to it yourself).

Academic honesty: Just a reminder—I expect you to act honestly and do your own work in this class, and so does Eastern Illinois University. It is your responsibility (once again) to familiarize

yourself with the English Department's policy on plagiarism: "Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism—"The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one's original work" (*Random House Dictionary of the English Language*)—has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office."

## DAILY SCHEDULE

This schedule may be subject to change;  
any changes will be announced well in advance.

Complete each reading for class on the day it's listed.

- T Aug 23 Introduction to the course and to each other; in-class reading: "Comics as a Form of Reading" (from *Comics & Sequential Art*, Will Eisner)
- R Aug 25 *Understanding Comics*, "Setting the Record Straight"
- F Aug 26 3 p.m. Deadline for sending Dr. Engles (tdengleseiu.edu) the e-mail that's described above (under "E-mail Activity")
- T Aug 30 *Understanding Comics*, "The Vocabulary of Comics" and begin *Maus*
- R Sep 1 *Maus*
- T Sep 6 *Maus*
- R Sep 8 *Maus*
- T Sep 13 "Comics as Literature? Reading Graphic Narrative," Hillary Chute
- R Sep 15 *Understanding Comics*, "Closure"
- T Sep 20 *Persepolis*

- R Sep 22 *Persepolis*
- T Sep 27 *Understanding Comics*, "Time Frames"
- R Sep 29 *Jimmy Corrigan*
- M Oct 3 *Jimmy Corrigan* and *Understanding Comics*, "A Word about Color"
- T Oct 4 *Jimmy Corrigan*
- R Oct 6 "Confronting the Intersections of Race, Immigration, and Representation in Chris Ware's Comics," Joanna Davis-McElligatt
- T Oct 11 *Understanding Comics*, "Living in Line"; Paper 1 Due
- (W OCT 12 Midpoint of the semester)
- R OCT 13 *Blankets*
- T Oct 18 *Blankets*
- R Oct 20 *Blankets*
- T Oct 25 *Understanding Comics*, "Show and Tell"
- R Oct 27 *Fun Home*
- T Nov 1 *Fun Home*
- R Nov 3 *Fun Home*
- T Nov 8 *Understanding Comics*, "The Six Steps"; discussion of final project and presentation
- R Nov 10 Jinqi Ling, "Identity Crisis and Gender Politics: Reappropriating Asian American Masculinity" (excerpts; handout); *Shortcomings*
- T Nov 15 *Shortcomings*
- R Nov 17 *Shortcomings* and *Understanding Comics*, "Putting It All Together"



Nov 21 25 — Thanksgiving Break!

T Nov 29 No class—Dr. Engles will be in his office (CH 3831) during our class period to meet with students who would like to discuss their final projects and/or presentations

R Dec 1 Project Presentations; final project due at the beginning of class

T Dec 6 Project Presentations

R Dec 8 Project Presentations; distribution of take-home final exam

Our final exam period  Monday, December 12, 12:30 to 2:30 p.m.

