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Bibliography for "Holy Comics, Batman! Graphic Novels as History, Entertainment, & Area of Study: A Survey of Graphic Novels from Our Collection"

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Holy Comics, Batman! Graphic Novels as History, Entertainment, & Area of Study: A Survey of Graphic Novels from Our Collection

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Display text for the Leatherby Libraries exhibit:

Holy Comics, Batman! Graphic Novels as History, Entertainment, & Area of Study:

A Survey of Graphic Novels from Our Collection

For the first several decades of their life in the English-speaking world, the majority of comic books were either collections of standalone strips, stories for children, or superhero tales. It was not until the 1970s that the term "graphic novel" came into existence, and not until the 1980s when many artists such as Alan Moore, Art Spiegelman, and Frank Miller began tackling darker, grittier, and in some ways, more realistic subject matter than the term, and graphic novels themselves, really became popular. Graphic novels also diverged from the more popular comics form in that they were not intended to be indefinitely ongoing series. Rather, they were conceived as stories with an overarching plot and discrete endings, often distributed in one or two larger volumes.

While superhero stories and tales for children are still popular in the graphic novels world, they only encompass a portion of the graphic literature being published today. Modern graphic novelists draw their inspiration from many sources.

Some draw their stories purely from their imaginations, such as Frank Miller (*The Dark Knight Rises*, *Sin City*), Alan Moore (*Watchmen*, *V for Vendetta*), Stan Sakai (*Usagi Yojimbo*), Jamie Hewlett and Alan Martin (*Tank Girl*), Bryan Lee O'Malley (*Scott Pilgrim*), Bryan K. Vaughan (*Y: The Last Man*), Neil Gaiman (*Sandman*), and Robert Kirkman (*The Walking Dead*).

Others are inspired by history: Nick Abadzis (*Laika*), Tetsu Saiwai (*The 14th Dalai Lama: A Manga Biography*), and Andrew Helfer and Randy DuBurke (*Malcom X: A Graphic Biography*) have all created graphic novels based on actual historical events and people. Many artists use their own or their families' history to shape their stories: Art Spiegelman (*Maus*), Craig Thompson (*Blankets*), Judd Winick (*Pedro & Me*), Gene Luen Yang (*American Born Chinese*), and Marjane Satrapi (*Persepolis*).

Still others create graphic adaptations of existing literature, or draw on mythology to inform their worlds: Bill Willingham (*Fables*), Chuck Dixon (*The Hobbit*), Steven Grant (*The Island of Dr. Moreau*), Denise Mina (*The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*), Tom Pomplun and Lance Took (African-American Classics), Joann Sfar (*Le Petit Prince*), and John McDonald (*Henry V*).

Today, graphic novels continue to gain popularity and respect, with rising sales and increased academic study. They are fun, they are serious, and their role vis-à-vis printed literature is still controversial, but one thing is clear: they are here to stay.

History of the Graphic Novel

1837 - *The Adventures of Obadiah Oldbuck*, a translation of the Swiss *Histoire de M. Vieux Bois*, is published. Not a graphic novel by today's standards, as it was a collection of various shorter comic strips rather than a standalone story, it is widely accepted as setting important foundations for the future of the graphic novel

1901 - Another precursor to the modern graphic novel is released in the form of *The Blackberries*, recognised as the first full-colour comic book

1939 - The now famous character Batman appears in *Detective Comics #27*, becoming so popular that in 1940 the first issue of Batman is published

1969 - The author John Updike speaks to the Bristol Literary Society on the death of the novel, declaring that in the future graphic novels will be recognised as masterpieces on the same level as more traditional literary works

1976 - The popular use of the term 'graphic novel' spreads, and begins to appear on the cover of several works. *Bloodstar*, by Richard Corben and Robert E. Howard, is recognised by many as the first self-proclaimed graphic novel, although other works to feature the moniker include *Beyond Time and Again* by George Metzger, and *Chandler: Red Tide* by Jim Steranko

1982 - The series *V for Vendetta*, by Alan Moore...and David Lloyd is first published. The film adaptation later grossed \$132.5m, and popularised the Guy Fawkes mask adopted by anticapitalist activists during recent protests

1986 - *The Dark Knight Returns*, a collection of Frank Miller's works chronicling the later life of Batman, is published. It would later be named as one of Time magazine's 10 best English graphic novels ever

1991 - *MAUS*, by Art Spiegelman, is completed. A groundbreaking work characterising his father's experiences as a Holocaust survivor, it is hailed as a postmodern masterpiece. In 1992 it becomes the first graphic novel to win a Pulitzer Prize

2005 - Time magazine features *Watchmen* by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons as the only graphic novel in its 100 greatest novels of all time

2011 - *Action Comics No. 1* sells for £1.4m. Published in 1938, it was the first issue to feature Superman.

This list is borrowed from the following article:

Malvern, J. (2012, November 22). I'd be drawn to graphic novels, says Booker judge. *The Times* (United Kingdom), p.4.

Art Spiegelman's MAUS: The Pulitzer-Winning Saga of Life in the Holocaust and Beyond

Continuing the trend of darker, grittier, and more realistic subject matter that began in the 1980s, and also breaking from it by not centering on superheroes, *Maus* is Art Spiegelman's graphic novel about his father's experience in the Holocaust. Casting Jews as mice, Germans as cats, and Poles as pigs, it is widely regarded as a postmodern masterpiece that combines elements of memoir, metastory, and history with themes of generational memory, guilt, and race. The story also speaks of its own creation, showing how Spiegelman agonized over which portions of his father's story to include and whether to draw his wife, a French woman who converted to Judaism, as a frog or a mouse. *Maus* was also the first graphic novel to win a Pulitzer Prize in 1992, increasing the respect afforded to graphic novels and propelling them further into the public eye.

Maus tells two stories. The first concerns Spiegelman's strained relationship with his father ten years after the suicide of his mother, as he seeks to interview his father about his parents' experiences in the Holocaust. The second is his father's story, beginning in the mid-1930s and detailing his hiding from the Gestapo and the loss of his first son through his forced separation from his wife in Auschwitz until the end of the war in 1945.

Originally published chapter-by-chapter in *Raw* magazine, the first six chapters were collected in 1986 into a volume titled *Maus: A Survivor's tale: My Father Bleeds History*. It was one of the first to be marketed as a "graphic novel", a term with which Spiegelman was initially uncomfortable due to his perception that it was a needless attempt to validate comics in the public eye. Nevertheless, *Maus*, *Watchmen*, and *The Dark Knight Returns* came to be considered the triumvirate of book-form comics of the mid-1980s that changed public perception of what comics could achieve, when before they were only associated with children's stories and superheroes in the English-speaking world. The last five chapters were collected into a second volume, subtitled *And Here My Troubles Began*, in 1991. Today it is one of the most widely-studied graphic novels in academia, both for its artistic and historical merits.

Graphic Novels Outside the U.S.

Graphic novels have a long and celebrated history in many areas outside of the United States.

Japan: *Manga*

"Manga" means "whimsical sketches", but in popular usage, it has come to identify Japan's long-standing tradition of storytelling through pictures and text, tracing back to long before World War II and possibly even to the *kibyoshi* (picture books) of the late 18th century. Nevertheless, it was after World War II that the comics known as manga really gained popularity, with the publication of early titles such as Osamu Tezuka's *Astro Boy* and Machiko Hasegawa's *Sazae-san*. Since then, manga has been produced for both genders, with stories like *Akira* (featured), *Doraemon*, *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, *Bleach*, *Rurouni Kenshin*, *Death Note*, *Full Metal Alchemist*, and *Attack on Titan* being typically aimed at boys, and stories like *The Rose of Versailles*, *X*, *Magic Knight Rayearth*, *Kare Kano*, *Peach Girl*, *Fruits Basket*, *Fushigi Yugi*, and *Sailor Moon* being traditionally marketed toward girls. Of course, over time, members of both genders have come to read many of the same stories regardless of the original intended audience, especially as fewer stories force their characters to cling to traditional gender roles. Manga is produced for all ages as well, so while many stories are still produced for children, it is not unusual to see ordinary men and women reading manga, whether in the form of a *tankobon* of several chapters or in weekly or monthly magazines that publish one chapter each of several popular stories. Manga's popularity has spread beyond Japan, finding large audiences in the rest of Asia, Europe, and the Americas.

The Francophone World: *Bandes dessinées*

In the French-speaking world, comics and graphic novels are referred to as *bandes dessinées*, or "drawn strips". They are so popular that they are often referred to by just their initials, so it is not uncommon to hear someone say they like "les BDs". They are so well-respected that they are referred to as the "ninth art" in France, and like in the U.S. and Japan, they cover both humorous and serious subject matter for all ages.

Perhaps the most famous of *bandes dessinées* to come out of the Francophone world is *The Adventures of Tintin*, by the Belgian writer/artist Hergé. The first Tintin story was published in 1929, and new stories are being published today, taking Tintin and his beloved dog Milou (Snowy in the English translations) across the world on daring adventures. Tintin has over its long history often been a subject of controversy due to outdated racial stereotypes.

Featured: *The Adventures of Tintin: Tintin in America*.

Bandes dessinées are also written in the French diaspora. *Persepolis* is written by the Iranian-French author Marjane Satrapi and tells the story of her early life in Iran during and after the Islamic Revolution in the late 1970s, her high-school education in Vienna, and her college years, marriage, and divorce back in Iran before she immigrated to France.

Aya, by Marguerite Abouet and Clément Oubrerie, is inspired by Abouet's middle-class life in 1970s Côte D'Ivoire and is regarded as an important work of postcolonial African fiction. It tells the lives of many characters, all connected through the central character of Aya, as they question incidences of infidelity, the role of women, and notions of family and community.

Graphic Novels and Scholarship

As graphic novels have gained greater readership and respect, they have become a regular topic of scholarship and academic research. Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* is a seminal work in the field. It explores the history and development of comics, their technical lingo and intrinsic vocabulary, theory about comics as a medium for communication and art form, the relationship between comics and readers, and the relationships between word and image. It was a finalist for the 1994 Hugo Award (the highest award for science fiction) for Best Non-Fiction Book.

Bart H. Beaty and Stephen Weiner's *Critical Survey of Graphic Novels: History, Theme, and Technique* includes 65 essays with the goal of making graphic novels a topic of important academic consideration. It covers the history of graphic novels, their social impact, influences, and industry insights, focusing on their theory, form, and function. Matthew J. Smith and Randy Duncan's *Critical Approaches to Comics: Theories and Methods* continues that analysis by introducing key theories and critical methods by which readers can analyze graphic novels. Each chapter showcases a different approach, focusing on everything from genre to intertextuality, fandom, gender, narrative, formalism, visual culture, and so on.

Other scholars choose to study specific aspects of graphic novels, as Ben Saunders does in *Do the Gods Wear Capes? Spirituality, Fantasy, and Superheroes*. Saunders analyzes the concept of the superhero through metaphysical, spiritual, and religious lenses. He explores complex theological and philosophical issues, such as the existence of evil, the will to power, love, and mortality. As a result of this increasing scholarship, colleges have also begun offering classes about comics and graphic novels. Graphic novels are occasionally being used to replace textbooks, and more libraries are collecting graphic novels in greater numbers than ever before.

Graphic Novels for a Young Audience

Although graphic novels are becoming a respected genre for serious literary themes, many graphic novels are still written for children. These span the gamut from books for the earliest readers to those intended for a teen audience. Being able to read a graphic novel or comic is a sophisticated form of literacy in its own right, and those made for the youngest readers are often simplified by limited dialogue and movement within panels. *Owly* is an adorable series by Andy Runton whose main character is a kindhearted owl. The uplifting stories appeal to young children and adults alike, and can be read even by children who can't yet read text. On the other end of the spectrum is a spooky tale like *Coraline*, adapted to the graphic novel format by P. Craig Russell from the book by award-winning writer and graphic novelist Neil Gaiman. Fantastical and compelling, this graphic novel is suited to a young-adult audience with its complex text and movement along with slightly disturbing images.

From Serious to Whimsical: A Versatile Medium

The term “graphic novel” often brings to mind stories of superheroes, but in fact, the graphic novel is a versatile combination of art and literature that can communicate every aspect of the human experience, from the serious to the whimsical.

Sin City: The Hard Goodbye is the first of Frank Miller's neo-noir series, and presents a gritty fictional town through the eyes of criminals, cartel lords, prostitutes, and corrupt paramilitary police. The series is famous for its stark black and white artwork, heavy themes, and extremely dark tones.

Pedro & Me: Friendship, Loss, and What I Learned by Judd Winick is a powerful autobiographical tale dealing on a personal level with HIV and AIDS, written after Winick's appearance on *The Real World: San Francisco*, where he met AIDS educator Pedro Zamora. Nick Abadzis' *Laika* is based on thorough research of the USSR's Sputnik program and relates the story of the beloved dog, Laika, the stray dog who was found and trained to be one of the first animals in space; she was the first to orbit Earth, though she died within a few hours on *Sputnik 2*. Both of these graphic novels relate important factual information through compelling, emotional narratives.

Flight, on the other hand, is a graphic novel series that features many whimsical, uplifting, and lighthearted tales by young and innovative comic artists. Unlike many graphic novels, it is actually a collection of short, one-shot graphic stories, penned by different authors and edited by Kazu Kibuishi (*Amulet*). Though it is not a themed anthology, many of the stories do feature the concept of flight, in either a literal or a figurative sense. The stories are often deep, poetic, and inspiring, and range from science fiction to fantasy to fable, and because each is created by a different author/artist, the art style and tone encompass a wide range, showing the myriad things of which graphic novels are capable.

Superheroes

The most direct antecedents of the popular superhero are the costumed crimefighters of textual fiction, such as Zorro, Robin Hood, Tarzan, and John Carter of Mars. Add to that the superhuman powers often attributed to mythological figures, or at least the technological know-how to mimic those kinds of powers, and you have the modern-day superhero, a larger-than-life force for good contained in a human-looking shell but not limited to human abilities.

The Golden Age of superheroes in the 1930s and 1940s popularized iconic figures such as Superman and Batman, and inspired the eventual creation of Spiderman, Wonder Woman, the X-Men, The Fantastic Four, the Avengers, and more. Their stories were often published in serialized comic strips or monthly magazines.

However, in the 1970s and 1980s, one superhero trend in particular helped solidify the reach and appeal of graphic novels: deconstructionism. Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' 1986-1987 work *Watchmen* depicts an alternate history where superheroes, once responsible for winning the Vietnam War, have been outlawed; the story deconstructs their psyches and asks powerful questions about nihilism, mortality, and oversight of authority, culminating in the idea that perhaps we'd be better off without heroes.

Frank Miller's *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (1986) redefined Batman, showing an older, darker version of the hero returning from retirement as an obsessed vigilante, so at odds with the government that he eventually does battle with Superman, portrayed as a secret weapon/agent of the U.S. government. Moore and Brian Bolland's *Batman: The Killing Joke* (1988), though set in a different continuity, also took the Batman franchise down a darker path, with the Joker paralyzing one long-time character and effectively suggesting that Batman might be just as crazy as he is.

By the 1990s, anti-heroes had become more popular than traditional, All-American superheroes. Mark Waid and Alex Ross' *Kingdom Come* (1996) tells the story of a world set between two factions of superheroes: the classics like Batman, Superman, Wonder Woman, and the Justice League, and their irresponsible, amoral vigilante offspring. Their war nearly brings about the apocalypse and casts the traditional superheroes in questionable light, showing them killing other superheroes and making morally reckless choices.

By the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century, though, more graphic novelists had again begun portraying superheroes in more positive light, often while still giving them an edgy backstory and internal struggle. This balance between light and dark has created a number of compelling stories and kept the superhero genre popular, both in print and in the increasing number of movie and TV adaptations being made from their stories.