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 scholarly 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, work in Eli Review, 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)


**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 all writing, reviewing, and revising tasks as assigned, including at least three short papers and the final project. We will be using Eli Review, a proprietary program in which seminar participants will regularly write, review each other’s writing, and revise in response to comments from other participants. **YOU WILL BE INFORMED IN ADVANCE ABOUT DAYS WHEN YOU NEED TO BRING A DEVICE (preferably a laptop or tablet, though a smart phone will also do) IN ORDER TO WORK WITH ELI REVIEW IN CLASS.** We will be using Eli Review for a variety of projects, from short essays to the development of the final project.
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 a final project entailing an essay introductory to, and footnotes for an assigned portion of, Jason Lutes’ Berlin. The assignment for this project is provided at the end of the syllabus. With instructor permission, students may substitute another one of our primary texts for Berlin.

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 timely participation in all activities on Eli Review—writing, reviewing other’s work, and revising—and completion of study questions and journal entries as well as participation in discussions); and the final project. 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)
Final Project Assignment

Overview

This project imagines a scholarly edition of Jason Lutes’ *Berlin I: City of Stones* and *Berlin II: City of Smoke* created as a collective project by the members of the class, but with each class member individually responsible for his or her contributions to the edition. Each class member will contribute two parts of the edition: 1) annotations on an assigned portion of *Berlin* and 2) a subsection of the Introduction to the edition. With instructor approval, students may substitute another one of our primary texts for *Berlin*; a written proposal to do so, due no later than September 13, should include one or more possible topics for the introductory essay and the identification of a specific set of pages (a minimum of 24 pages) to be annotated.

Goals

As the capstone activity in our course, the scholarly edition project is focused on the development of analytic, rhetorical, and research skills, including close, interpretative reading of a graphic novel; effective, audience-specific writing; and such research skills as the ability to access and work effectively and ethically with print and digital sources, to evaluate sources for relevance, currency, authority, and bias; to integrate and synthesize information and viewpoints from multiple sources; and to manage and appropriately document information sources.
What Is a Scholarly Edition?

Scholarly editions differ from popular editions of texts in a variety of ways. A popular edition of a novel—let’s say, for example, Nathaniel Hawthorne’s novel The Scarlet Letter—would in all likelihood simply reprint Hawthorne’s novel. It would identify Hawthorne as author but would probably not identify an editor of the text. If it had an introduction, it would be very brief and would be aimed at casual, general readers. By contrast, a scholarly edition would be the work of an editor or editors with expertise in the field. The editor would be named on the title page. The text of The Scarlet Letter in the scholarly edition would be one established through an intensive process of comparing all versions of the novel known from Hawthorne’s lifetime: manuscripts and printers’ proof sheets (if any survive) and all editions published in the author’s lifetime that may contain variants and in which he may have had a hand (think, for instance, to shift to another author for a moment, of the substantial variants an editor must choose among between quarto and folio versions of some of Shakespeare’s plays). The editor would present a text that she believes on the basis of her research best represents Hawthorne’s intentions. In footnotes, or in an appendix, all textual variants would be provided, and the editor would discuss the rationale for the particular reading text offered in her edition, either in the introduction or in a separate textual note. The introduction would be extensive and would cover numerous topics, often in titled subsections (on, for example, the author’s life, the place of The Scarlet Letter in Hawthorne’s whole body of work, the history of the novel’s composition and publication, an account of its contemporary reception and of subsequently scholarly debates about all aspects of the text, etc.). An introduction of a Shakespeare play in a scholarly edition might include a subsection on the performance history of the play, including discussion of where the play was first staged. A scholarly edition would also include annotations, usually in the form of footnotes that explicate the text for readers, explaining unfamiliar terms, translating any foreign words or phrases, and perhaps offering interpretive glosses of difficult passages, sometimes with reference to competing perspectives offered by different scholars. In short, a scholarly edition will have offer a great deal of apparatus—an extensive, authoritative introduction, footnotes, bibliography, etc.—that would be absent from a popular edition.

Audience

The purpose of the Berlin scholarly edition is to make Berlin (or another approved text) as readable and as enjoyable as possible for contemporary English-speaking readers by providing essential background and contexts for understanding the world of Weimar Berlin in which Lutes sets his story and by providing helpful factual and interpretative annotations. We would expect readers who chose our scholarly edition over the slimmer and less expensive standard edition to be serious readers of the graphic novel and to come to it with more than usual intellectual sophistication and curiosity. They will probably be college-educated, and many of them may well be undergraduate and graduate students engaged in formal study of the text. Thus, the audience we are addressing should be imagined as interested in, and as capable of appreciating (and critically interrogating), our best critical and scholarly efforts.

The Annotations

Each member of the class is responsible for annotating approximately twenty-four assigned pages of Berlin. Each annotator is to treat her assigned pages as self-contained, writing annotations wherever they seem called for even though identical or similar annotations might conceivably be
prepared by class members annotating other passages. (We will assume that when the Berlin scholarly edition is assembled as a whole any duplicate annotations will be merged into the earliest instance in the text, with later instances cross-referenced as appropriate to the earliest instance).

Items to be annotated will be of two kinds: first, factual annotations providing glosses on proper nouns (persons, places, things) with which the contemporary reader is unlikely to be familiar, on historical figures who appear in the novel but who are not identified by name, on esoteric vocabulary, including foreign words and phrases, and on references, allusions, and quotations that the reader is unlikely to recognize on her own (for example, identification of the song the lyrics of which appear in the cabaret scene from I.50.8 to I.52.12); and, second, explanatory annotations to help readers with cruxes and other difficult passages that present interpretive challenges. Factual annotations may include letting the reader know when a character who might be assumed to be historical is actually fictional. Explanatory annotations on cruxes in the text may suggest to the reader a range of possible interpretations rather than a single reading.

Annotations should be in the following format: volume number, page, panel number (volume in Roman and page and panel in Arabic numerals, all in bold type), followed by a period, then (if the annotation is not to the graphic image but to text) the word or words being annotated, followed by a dash (two typed hyphens—which Word will convert to an em dash, as it has here between hyphens and which), and the annotation. Thus, an annotation might look like this:

II.52.9. Wir haben ein Gesetz,/Und nach dem Gesetz soll er sterben—Martin Luther’s translation into German of the Gospel of John 19:7, translated in the King James Bible as “We have a law, and by our law he ought to die.” [Note, this annotation is not on anything in Berlin; Anthony Hecht uses Luther’s translation of this verse from the Christian Bible as the epigraph to his Holocaust poem “The Book of Yolek”].

Or like this:

I.67.7-8. The triumphal arch in the background of these panels is the Brandenburg Gate, one of the signature landmarks of Germany, a neoclassical construction commissioned by King Frederick Wilhelm of Germany and built between 1788 and 1791.

The first page of your annotations should have your name in the top left-hand corner and a heading in the following format, centered on the page, and providing only volume and page numbers covered in your annotations (you don’t need the panel numbers here since you will be assigned whole pages to annotate):

Annotations to Berlin I.52-68

Annotations should be double-spaced in 12-point Times New Roman on pages with one-inch margins on all sides. Each annotation should begin at the left-hand margin of your page. End each annotation with a hard return and begin the next annotation at the left-hand margin again.

After your last annotation, leave a blank line and write a concise single paragraph identifying the sources on which you have drawn for your annotations. While I do not expect you to wholly
avoid open-source online materials—for example, Google Images—an-notations that do not draw in significant measure on authoritative scholarly resources will not receive full credit. For such scholarly resources, please refer to the Web site for our course provided by Professor Mardeusz on the Baily/Howe Web site, including the Weimar Bibliography and the tabs on finding books, articles, and authoritative online materials (for any online citation, please provide the complete URL). Thus, your paragraph on sources might begin like this:


The Introduction

After researching the topic of your subsection of the Introduction (drawing on the same resources discussed above), you should write a self-contained essay on that topic of no more than 3,000 words (double-spaced with one-inch margins in 12 point Times Roman). Place your name in the top left-hand corner of the first page of your Introduction subsection, and title your essay with the topic as assigned, centered above your opening paragraph.

Your subsection should begin with observations about the relevance of your topic for reading and understanding Berlin and should reference particular chapters or passages in Berlin for which the background you are providing might be especially helpful to readers. While your commentary may widen its focus to address the broad parameters of your topic (e.g., “The Origins and Rise of the Nazi Party” will go back in time at least a decade before Berlin opens in September of 1928), it should begin and end with the focus on Lutes’ graphic novel. Throughout your subsection of the Introduction, you should write first and foremost in the reader’s interest and as the reader’s friend (see the note, above, on the audience for the scholarly edition).

All sources drawn on in your Introduction subsection must be cited briefly in the text in parenthetical citations with full bibliographical information in a Works Cited section at the end of your paper, following MLA Style. Citations to Berlin itself in your essay should be parenthetical citations to volume page and panel number only. For example:

The Nazi Party makes its appearance at the very beginning of Berlin with Lutes’ depiction of the sleeping Brownshirt (a member of the Nazi paramilitary Sturmabteilung or Storm Detachment), who shares a train compartment with Marthe Müller (I.5.5).

Due Date

A 250-word proposal for your Introduction subsection will be due on October 4 (and will be counted as one of your short papers), along with notes on panels and questions that seem to you to invite annotation. A draft of both your Introduction subsection and your annotations will be due on November 1. The final versions of both your annotations and your Introduction subsection will be due in hard copy and electronically, in Microsoft Word, at our final class session on December 8. The hard copy should be included in the complete portfolio of your work for the
course, which will also be due on December 8.

**Topics to Choose From for Your Five-Page Subsection of the Introduction to a Scholarly Edition of Berlin**

Overview: The Importance of Jason Lutes’ *Berlin*

Jason Lutes: About the Author and His Work

Reading *Berlin* through Narrative Theory

The Politics of Weimar Germany:

The Fall of the Monarchy and the Establishment of a Parliamentary Republic (the German Empire, or Deutsches Reich, or, colloquially, Weimar, after the city where the constitutional assembly met from February to August, 1919)

The Treaty of Versailles

The Economic Situation of Germany After the War and Hyperinflation

The Landscape of Political parties and interests in Weimar in 1928-29

The Origins and Rise of the Nazi Party

Major Current Events Pertinent to *Berlin* I and II

Jewish Weimar (Jewish Life in Weimar, with the focus on Berlin)

The Class Structure and Relationships Among the Classes in Weimar

Big Business and the Weimar Republic

Culture in Weimar Germany

Literature

Fine Arts (painting, sculpture, etc.); possible subheading, Art Schools in Weimar, notably the Bauhaus

Music, cabaret, and jazz

Theater

Film

Modernism in Weimar Germany

Fashion in Weimar
Culture Wars in the Weimar Republic
Sex, Gender, and Sexual Politics in Weimar