Classroom Comics: Children's Medium and the New Literacy

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Intensive writing, or what was once called remediation, is filled with college students who are uncomfortable with texts. They don't want to read them and they don't want to write them because they haven't been successful with the written word. So when students arrive to class with a graphic novel in hand, they think, "This class is going to be easy." And that is my goal. If students believe intensive reading and writing is going to be fairly painless, they will relax long enough to think critically about what is going on in the comic panels. Instead of parroting back written text, they'll have to interpret the panels and add to the conversation already taking place within the pages of a graphic novel. But readers of comics must not only peruse speech bubbles, they must also decode images, creating a rich interpretative source in a textually deficient medium. Students must dig deep for responsive ideas and they must become comfortable interpreting the visual/textual blend presented on the comic's page, the twentieth century precursor of twenty-first century mediums where visuals are dominant, a medium that can be interpreted and analyzed like any other text.

When beginners start perusing comics, they tend to skip the visuals and track text from speech bubble to thought bubble to narration box. This seems a logical sequence, since, as Jacques Derrida points out, speech is privileged over the written word because of our presence in the conversation.[1] But sometimes the written word is all that is left to a reader—we cannot talk to Shakespeare, Plato, or Castiglione. In comics, speech is cued using bubbles, so when we starting reading comics our western inclination towards speech turns

toward our academic predisposition towards text and sets us on the track of the written word, especially the favored words of speech while ignoring the what's going on *outside the bubble.*

So how do visuals fit into this privileged sequence? Brian Boyd in *The Evolutionary Review* describes how comics "appeal to evolved cognitive preferences . . . especially to our dominant sense, vision."[2] Like Derrida, Boyd favors presence, citing storytellers who, in an earlier age, communicated social values and behaviors. But artists are storytellers and "the art of pictorial narrative is, in fact, the original art form. Painting, sculpture and their analogous crafts are all offspring of the narrative work."[3] Evolutionists and those who study cognitive cultural studies, as well as artists, struggle with the primacy of language. "Language, especially in written form, suffers from a lack of sensory immediacy our minds have mostly evolved for. A visual form of narrative would solve this by telling stories in non-serial, sensorially rich, and durable forms."[4]

For linguists, Derrida's *difference* strikes at the heart of the matter. But if difference is taken out of the equation then why does the word *horse* signify a barnyard animal? Why not *car* or *bike*? For artists, a horse is a four-legged animal running across a pasture—the depicted object is the signifier. As Will Eisner points out, "In text alone the process of reading involves word-to-image conversion. Comics accelerate that by providing the image".[5] In other words, when art and language are blended it sets up an evolutionary response.

> Comics tap deep-rooted cognitive capacities and appeal to deep-rooted cognitive preferences as [people] discover a whole series of ways to lower comprehension costs and raise the benefits of even a moment of reading time . . . . inspir[ing] us with culture's power to extend the problem solving that evolution implanted in us all.[6]

But this is not to say comics are just a dumb-downed medium designed to appeal to the masses. "Visual literacy, the ability to understand pictorial information, became one of the basic skills required for communication in the latter half of the twentieth century"[7] and comics are at the axis of this new literacy.

For instructors (and students), anything that can be done with written texts in the English college classroom, from remedial comprehension to upper division analysis, can be accomplished using visual texts. With comics students can explore literary theory and do close readings with a textually deficient medium and since there is no text to copy and paste students are forced to

look for answers beyond the page. As *American Splendor's* Harvey Pekar says, "You can do anything you want with words and pictures."[8]

So how can instructors use comics to advance critical thinking and literary criticism? In this essay, literary theory begins with a feminist critique of the women found in the dark panels of Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' *Watchmen.* New Historicism and American social justice are analyzed in the beautifully rendered, yet disturbing, graphic novel of America's depression-era south, *Bayou,* a book written and drawn by Jeremy Love. Finally, Freud's structure of the mind is investigated in the braided trilogy of Gene Luen Yang's *American Born Chinese.* Each graphic text offers students a new and different way to explore or reinforce concepts, theories, and values being taught in today's college classrooms.

Women in *The Watchmen*

Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' *Watchmen* is one of the most commonly found graphic novels in the college classroom and one of the things that attracts academics to its panels is its complicated literary format. *The Watchmen* isn't just a graphic novel. Its pages are rife with literary genres from autobiographical tell-alls, to scholarly essays, ornithological journal articles, corporate correspondence, personal notes and letters, newspaper articles, arrest and accompanying psychological records, interviews, and marketing materials. These fictional materials make the members of the Watchmen three-dimensional and complicated characters.

The Watchmen is also rife with symbolism and theme, from a bloody smiley face button that resembles the doomsday clock to the *Black Freighter* comic within a comic, a pirate story that often parallels, yet just as often foreshadows, or follows the main action. *The Watchmen's* diegetic, a Nixonian 1980s created after the United States wins the Vietnam War, is a society that has finally tired of masked vigilantes and asks, "Who's watching the Watchmen?" Teachers often assign *Watchmen* alongside other dystopic works such as Orwell's *1984* or Huxley's *Brave New World.* Historicists teach students about Vietnam, the Cold War, and/or the Manhattan project in order to provide a context, not only in the *Watchmen's* alternative society, but also for our own. Cultural critics often explore family dynamics in the novel; the original Silk Spectre is a single mother in post-World War II America, whose relationship with her daughter is strained; their relationship is mimicked in homes all across America today. Queer theorists study *Watchmen* with its overt lesbian relationships and masked homosexuality. But two decades after *The Watchmen's* publication, perhaps we should ask, "Who is watching *The Watchmen*'s women?"

The two Silk Spectres (mother and daughter) are not the skinny waifs folded easily between the pages of *Vogue*; instead, these are Wagner's Valkyries—substantially built women who perform their heroics wearing sexually explicit costumes. Perhaps it's the costumes that cue the perception that these are unchaste women, or perhaps it's their masculine behavior, or maybe it is just a sign of a society stuck in the free-love 1960s. Sally Jupiter (the original Silk Spectre) excitedly shows her daughter, Laurie, her debut in a *Tijuana Bible* calling it "a little eight-page porno comic they did in the '30s and '40s . . . they did 'em about newspaper funnies, characters like Blondie, even real people like Mae West."[9] In the mid-twentieth century, these crude eight-page comics "depicted—in graphic detail—celebrities, political figures, or fictional characters using obscene language and enjoying a wide variety of sex acts, most of which were illegal at the time."[10] While Laurie finds it demeaning, her mother feels honored.

In the *Watchmen* "the sexual imagery is obvious," yet tempered, just the way the hyper-intelligent Oxymandias wants it. "The woman adjusting her stocking being overtly erotic, yet layered with enough romantic ambiance to avoid offense"[11] seems to be the motto for many of today's comics. Modern comics capitalize on a selective catalogue of society's stereotypical traits of feminine beauty; women have large breasts, pretty faces, tiny waists, and well-proportioned legs. Visions of beauty express a male-dominated industry, and an industry fascinated with sex and violence.

Early on readers learn that one of the Watchmen, known as the Comedian, murdered his pregnant Vietnamese concubine when she confronted him about his parental responsibility. He has also brutally battered Sally Jupiter, the original Silk Spectre, in an attempted rape. Jupiter did "not press charges against the Comedian for the good of the group's image"[12] and she believes, "that I was somehow as much to blame"[13]—a familiar trope often repeated by rape victims. In the closing pages of *Watchmen,* we learn that Sally Jupiter has had a consensual relationship with the Comedian, who fathered Laurie, the new Silk Spectre. Even superwomen have violent relationships based on a blame-the-victim mentality, where domestic violence is part of the everyday routine.

In *The Watchmen,* lesbianism is taboo. Josephine, a butch taxi driver, loves a younger woman, but when they break up Josephine says she wishes she were "straight" and "dead,"[14] a self-loathing that leads her to viciously batter her ex-partner. The Watchmen group's heroine, Silhouette, "was living with another woman in a lesbian relationship,"[15] apparently the only monogamous relationship in this superhero fraternity. And while there are whispers of a gay relationship between Hooded Justice and Captain Metropolis, it is the female

homosexual character that is outed, ostracized, and "murdered, along with her lover, by one of her former enemies."[16] After Silhouette's murder, not a single brother in the adventuring fraternity feels her death is worth avenging. Her lesbianism is deserving of death, while the entire premise of *The Watchmen* revolves around discovering who killed the violent Comedian, a murdering, raping misogynist.

Like Wagner's daughters of Odin, the Silk Spectres are no match for their male superhero counterparts. Except for Dr. Manhattan, the male Minutemen lack traditional superhero abilities, but the Comedian and Rorschach fight like pro-wrestlers, and the Nite Owl and Ozymandias have super IQs. On the other hand, the newest Silk Spectre seems to be a super-stewardess helping shepherd people from burning buildings into the Nite Owl's airship where she offers them coffee. She's also capable of leaping from airships in stilettos and pumping gas in her tiny skirt. Like a noir June Cleaver, Laurie always wears an apron over her pink coveralls as she putters around Nite Owl's garage, and, like any All-American female, she is just as adept in the bedroom as she is in the lab.

While Watchwomen can take on your average mugger, whenever the female Minutemen get in a scuffle with supervillains (or superheroes), they lose. After learning of her mother's brush with rape, the best a drunken Laurie can muster is throwing a scotch in the Comedian's face. "Somebody get her boyfriend," a male onlooker responds.[17] When Laurie shoots the evil Ozymandias at close range, he somehow catches the bullet and then violently kicks her before the Nite Owl comes to her rescue. While one could say *The Watchmen* exploits violence of every kind, the men in *The Watchmen* are never sodomized, and give as good as they get, while the women are raped and beaten. *The Watchmen's* misogynist violence dished out by a male dominated society is an all too familiar theme in today's commercial mediums.

In this parallel universe, anti-Vietnam war rallies are nonexistent, meaning the *Other* movements never catalyzed into civil rights marches, feminist uprisings, or gay pride. In this dark *Leave it to Beaver* universe, big-breasted women wear dresses and pearls, aprons and spandex. There are no female role models in a male dominated society where Nixon, Haig, and Kissinger run things. This is a patriarchal society that goes far beyond associating men with society or humanity in general. They are the power brokers who batter women with impunity while annihilating those who veer too far from the consigned path. Simone de Beauvoir sums up *The Watchmen's* attitude when she says, "women should give up all personal transcendence and confine herself to furthering that of her male."[18] The women of *Watchmen,* the women who have dared create their own personalities, are little more than outlawed vigilantes

while the women outside the Minutemen group are little more than prostitutes—with one exception.

Janey Slater is a physicist working at Gila Flats, an atomic test site where Dr. Jon Osterman is a physicist. The two begin a relationship, but when he is accidentally turned into Dr. Manhattan, he dumps Dr. Slater and falls for the younger Silk Spectre, because Janey's "aging more noticeably every day . . . ."[19] Women must be beautiful first, while intelligence doesn't even seem to be an added bonus. As the authors of *The Power of Comics* put it, "Left unchallenged, these images may be accepted as legitimate, and thus the issue of representation becomes central to the practice of ideological critique of the media."[20] But if women refuse to participate in the patriarchal discourse splashed across the comic's page, they risk remaining marginalized, and if they do participate they run the risk of counter-stereotypes that fail to engage, and thereby challenge, the patriarchy and/or represent true heroines in our society. In *Watchmen* Everyman is represented as a newsvendor who peruses the world's track towards destruction through the daily headlines, while Every(wo)man is absent.

An Historic View of Social Justice in the American South

American social justice is a theme often studied in the literary classroom and the graphic novel *Bayou* by Jeremy Love presents a venue for theorists studying new historicism. With a graphic novel, each panel, or frame, is open for exploration just like any sentence or paragraph of a non-visual text. When perusing the opening page of *Bayou* readers see an idyllic sharecropper's cabin surrounded by a field of ripe cotton, but when they turn the page they are confronted with the horror of a lynching.[21]

Bayou's beautifully drawn injustice frames America's disturbing history in pre-World War II Dixie. The imagery is whimsical—it is not the shadowy panorama of *Batman* or the solid lines and primary colors of *Watchmen.* The panels are light and fanciful yet they clearly tell the dark story of the American South, a region soaked in the blood of slaves and sharecroppers, or in this case a lynching in the rural (and mythical) town of Charon, Mississippi. The first panel contains a sign located just outside this Depression-era Mississippi town that reads "Welcome" emblazoned over a Confederate flag, a welcome meant for white southerners, but a warning to its black inhabitants.

Pastoral bunnies rest under the welcome sign, a hint at the rustic idealism to be found in the rural land of pick-up trucks. The next panel contains a carrion crow sitting atop a "Colored Entrance" sign betraying Jim Crow's presence in 1933 Mississippi. Jim Crow laws separated blacks from whites

wherever they ate, worked, rode a bus, went to the movies, or did any other social activity. But Jim Crow was more than just statutes and regulations; it was a way of life supported by the belief that whites were superior to blacks in every way, and white supremacy would be secured at any cost. In panel three, the viewer sees only flies swarming around the rotting feet of a black corpse, a corpse hanging next to the "Colored Entrance." Did the murdered African American commit some deviation from Jim Crow? The next frame within a frame depicts a crow as it sits staring into the panel of the lynching, eyeing its next meal.

This graphic text slams pastoral beauty into the ugly reality of lynching and challenges readers to stare into the faces of anonymous white Americans in the background. Are they observers or perpetrators? In 1933 Mississippi, the white men certainly represent the powerful. The dead man's bare feet and tattered britches display a poverty not experienced by the whites. One of the white men wears a cream-colored suit typical of the southern gentleman, while others wear button-down shirts, trousers, and vests typical of townspeople, and another sports a blue work shirt. None of them look away from the dead man, including a young boy who sits on his father's shoulders eyeing the rotting corpse.

Public lynchings served as a warning to African Americans to keep their behavior in check or risk death. In this work, death is a white civic spectacle of semi-public unsanctioned executions devoid of judge and jury. This was white (in)justice delivered at the hands of supremacist vigilantes. In the depression era south, there is no longer any need to *repay* owners for destroyed property—black sharecroppers are disposable people, inferior people, people subjected to complex forces over which they had very little control. The illustrations set a mood of what to expect from this Southern Gothic tale, namely injustice in the segregated south that is beautifully drawn, yet deadly.

Bayou is a mythical story of the American South that juxtaposes Mississippi's rustic beauty with the terror of social injustice. Love describes his whimsical tale of horror as "a southern fried odyssey, inspired by African-American folktales, African mythologies, the *Uncle Remus* stories recorded by Joel Chandler Harris and Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland.*"[22] an odyssey that beautifully records the worst chapter of American history.

The Transformation of Egos of *American Born Chinese*

In *American Born Chinese (ABC),* Gene Luen Yang uses a braided trilogy to explore racism in the ethnic identities of a hyphenated society where American pop culture is juxtaposed with Chinese mythology and teenage angst. Yang

creates an American work, not a hyphenated Chinese-American piece of literature or another piece of manga, but a purely American story of Horatio Alger proportions. *ABC* begins when the main character's penniless parents arrive in the United States, get an education, and work their way up to the American Dream; the mother becoming a librarian, the father an engineer. The family's odyssey culminates in the ultimate American success story of suburban home ownership in which the main character, Jin Wang, experiences American public school.

On the back cover of this Printz award winner, the School Library Journal, says, in part, *American Born Chinese* "explores the impact of the American Dream on those outside the dominant culture in a finely wrought story." But Yang knows he's treading close to the line when it comes to ethnic stereotypes. He tells his readers, "Cousin Chin-Kee isn't meant to be funny. He's meant to come off the page and slap you in the face. If you're laughing at him, I want you to do so with a knot in your stomach and a dry throat."[23] But for Yang, Chin-Kee is more than just a representative racist stereotype—he's part of the main character's psyche.

American Born Chinese is also a cautionary tale with some subtle and not-so-subtle themes. Eastern roots bump into Western ideals, creating an intersection in the character of Jin Wang that leads to unsatisfied wishes. As Freud puts it "every single fantasy is the fulfillment of a wish, a correction of unsatisfying reality . . . [and] a piece of creative writing, like a daydream, is a continuation of, and a substitute for, what was once the play of childhood."[24] In this case *ABC* displays the conscious and unconscious childhood confusion brought about by blending the dichotomous realities in the classrooms of American public schools. As readers, we take pleasure in what Freud describes as writer's "personal daydreams . . . [as they blend into a] . . . confluence of many sources [where] the essential *ars poetica* lies in the technique of overcoming the feeling of repulsion in us which is undoubtedly connected with the barriers that rise between each single ego and the others."[25]

So while individual egos bump into each other in *ABC's* fictional classroom, the individual egos are also bumping into each other across the different threads, or storylines, of *American Born Chinese.* The superego, according to Freud, "reflects societal beliefs, behaviors, and even pressures, it almost seems to be outside of the self, making moral judgments and telling us to make sacrifices even when such sacrifices may not be in our best interest."[26] In *ABC* the superego stuffs his feet into the shoes of the Monkey King, shoes that should guarantee his deity, but they don't. Instead they lead to heartbreak, confusion, and anger. Eventually, those shoes are abandoned when the Monkey King decides to give up his transformative identity as the The Great

Sage Equal of Heaven in order to accept his ego and accompany "Wong Lai-Tsao on his journey to the west."[27] This western journey appears to reconcile both the story of the Monkey King and eastern beliefs with western Christianity.

"The renowned Chinese folktale 'Monkey King's Journey to the West' is based on a real pilgrimage that was undertaken in the early seventh century by a monk called Xuanzang, who went to India in search of Buddhist scriptures."[28] In *American Born Chinese* the story is transformed creating the space for Yang to fulfill his wish to smooth out competing moral and/or religious beliefs of the east and the west: "With the Monkey King portions of my book, I replaced the Buddhist elements with Christian ones. I wanted it to be an Asian-American expression of the story, so I wanted to combine Eastern and Western mythologies (though as a Catholic I believe that the Christian story is more than a mythology)."[29] To put it another way, Yang creates an American born Chinese superego where "myths . . . are distorted vestiges of the wishful fantasies of whole nations, the *secular* dreams of youthful humanity."[30]

In *ABC,* superegos abound as The Great Sage Equal of Heaven (the identity the Monkey King has adopted) battles with the other deities for heavenly dominance before finally engaging in an Oedipal battle with Tze-Yo-Tzuh (the eastern creator god). The Monkey King ends up buried under a rock mountain where he is discovered by the monk, Wong-Lao-Tsu, who is traveling westward towards a bright star reminiscent of the one crowning the birthplace of Jesus. The Monkey King decides to accompany Tsu and discovers the shoes he thought would guarantee his deity are unnecessary; he just needs to be himself. As the superego, the Monkey King eventually gives up his Oedipal desires to replace the parent, or in this case, the gods. But while the Monkey King accepts his identity, his story is not over as he returns in the separate television story of Chin-kee. This character is the representative id who is a mixture of the worst Chinese stereotypes. He embarrasses his cousin, Danny,
the white alter-ego of the main character who represents the ego, Jin Wang.

Chin-kee fulfills the role of Freud's "passionate, irrational, unknown and unconscious part of the psyche", the id: "the source of our instinctual (especially libidinal) desires."[31] Fantasies in young men are "egoistic and ambitious wishes [that] come to the fore clearly enough alongside of erotic ones."[32] In *American Born Chinese* when the id, Chin-kee, arrives at his cousin's house, Danny is studying with Melanie, a girl that tugs on Danny's own id. But when Chin Kee sees Melanie he breaks the barrier between the conscious and subconscious exclaiming, "Confucius say 'Hubba-Hubba!."[33]

Chin-kee's storyline is one of the id unleashed. He is obnoxious, overbearing, misogynistic, and sexually driven. He personifies all the worst Asian stereotypes, wearing historic Chinese clothes (*a la* Hop Sing on the old television series *Bonanza*), has yellow-skin, buck teeth, and eats cats, while making lewd comments in heavily accented English. The representative id occupies the fantasy world of television, starring on a show called, "Everyone Ruvs Chin-Kee," a show complete with drawn in applause and laugh tracks cueing readers/viewers when it is appropriate to applause or laugh. Stereotypes run rampant on the show. Chin-Kee, the id personified, hounds his cousin Danny, a typical white suburban American teenager. Eventually, Danny battles this id in order to become Freud's definitive ego as represented by Jin Wang, a young American born Chinese struggling to find his own identity in the corridors of white suburban public schools.

Jin Wang's dream as a young boy is to become a transformer, those toys that change from robots into trucks. He relates his dream to the mystical Chinese Herbalist's wife, who responds "It's so easy to become anything you wish . . . so long as you're willing to forfeit your soul."[34] The next day Jin Wang awakes to find himself transformed into a typical European American teenager, Danny, the star of "Everyone Ruvs Chin-Kee", the sitcom thread of the *ABC* trilogy. Jin Wang is the hero (or ego) of *ABC* and throughout the book he struggles to belong to the dominant white American culture. He speaks Mandarin at home, but never in public, and cannot read Chinese texts. He is constantly telling his best friend, the Taiwanese Wei-Chen, "You're in America. Speak English."[35] Being a typical teen Jin Wang is embarrassed by his "f.o.b." classmate, but when Jin discovers Wei Chen also has a transformer toy, one that changes from a robot into a monkey, they become best friends.

Each component of Freud's psyche (the id, ego and superego) has its own storyline in *American Born Chinese* and in the separate story of the ego, the Taiwanese Wei-Chen is Jin Wang's personified id. Readers discover later Wei-Chen is actually the son of the Monkey King, a son sent to earth to test his virtue. But when Jin Wang asks Wei Chen, aka the deity, to compromise his morals by lying so Jin Wang can date the white Amelia, Wei-Chen abandons both his best friend and the gods who serve humanity to take up life on earth as a hedonistic young Asian who sports a top-knot, wears *bling*, and drives a *rice-rocket*.

Clicking back to the television show, "Everyone Ruvs Chin-Kee"(the story of the id), Jin Wang's western ego, Danny, has had enough of his Chinese cousin and battles his id. The battles causes Chin-Kee to transform into the superego, Monkey King, which then triggers Danny's transformation into his true form as *ABC's* ego, Jin Wang. Readers see that the story of the ego, the

story of the main character Jin Wang, is being balanced between the id of Wei Chen (the Monkey King's son) and the superego Monkey King. Jin Wang is stuck not only between the id and superego, but he's also stuck between an Oedipal battle as Wei Chen rejects his father and all humanity.

When the stories fuse and the stereotyped Asian, Chin-Kee, reveals himself as the disguised Monkey King, he tells Jin Wang he "came to serve as [Jin's] conscience." He does not mean Chin-Kee (aka The Monkey King) *was* Jin's conscience, but that Chin-Kee's outrageous behavior served "as a signpost to [Jin Wang's] soul"[36] and a warning for his subconscious. "The ego must constantly mediate between the often competing demands of the id and the superego . . . it must choose between (or balance) liberation and self-gratification on the one hand and censorship and conformity on the other hand."[37] Danny's final transformation into Jin Wang creates an American-born Chinese, an American comfortable with his heritage and his American homeland, even when he has to deal with being pigeonholed into a white society.

In the closing pages of *ABC* Jin resumes his friendship with Wei-Chen. Readers now know he is the Monkey King's son, a son who has rejected his father. He is no longer the embarrassing and geeky "f.o.b." kid with the transformer toy; instead he has decided to "spend the remainder of [his] days in the mortal world using it for [his] pleasure."[38] Has he become the id to his father's superego? Not quite. While he has transformed into one of the subcultures of Asian American teenagers, driving a high performance Japanese sports car that blasts loud music while he smokes cigarettes, his reacquaintance with Jin Wang seems to mark the boundary of a teenager's bad boy experiment. In the final panel, Jin Wang and Wei-Chen order pearl milk tea, a Taiwanese delicacy, as they sit inside an Asian American bakery, laughing, their friendship tentatively resumed.

Gene Luen Yang attempts to explode stereotypes through character transformations in *American Born Chinese* only to discover that you can't change who you are. As the Monkey King says, "I would have saved myself from five hundred years' imprisonment beneath a mountain of rock had I only realized how good it is to be a monkey."[39]

American Born Chinese			
	ID	EGO	SUPEREGO
Narrative Thread	Everyone Ruvs Chin-Kee	Jin-Wang	The Monkey King of Flower Fruit Mountain
ID	Chin-Kee	Wei-Chen (Monkey King's son)	Great Sage Equal of Heaven
EGO	Danny Transforms ----->	Jin Wang	Enlightened Monkey King (patron saint for Asian Americans)
SUPEREGO	Monkey King disguised Chin-Kee transforms into ----->	Monkey King	Tze Yo Tzuh (east meets west creator god)

The Rhetorical Value of Comics

A feminist reading of *The Watchmen,* a new historic review of *Bayou,* and a Freudian interpretation of *American Born Chinese* provide just a short survey of rhetorical approaches to graphic novels. Hopefully, it reveals the depth and breadth of scholarly analysis possible within the comic medium. Comics are a medium that can be treated academically, and a medium that is no longer just for children, but also a part of the new literacy of the twenty-first century. Graphic novels have been accepted by mainstream reviewers and are now routinely tracked on bestseller lists. *Time Magazine's* list of the 100 best English-Language novels from 1923 to the present now includes ten graphic novels.[40]

Most people don't even realize how much they already depend on this new literacy. Anyone who has flown on a plane and bothered to examine the emergency card in the seat pocket in front of them, or bought a boxed piece of Ikea® furniture, is perusing this new medium of text coupled with graphics. In *Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative,* Will Eisner puts it this way:

> The latter half of the twentieth century experienced an alteration in the definition of literacy. The proliferation of the use of images as a communicant was propelled by the growth

of technology that required less in text-reading skills. From road signs to mechanical use instructions, imagery aided words, and at times even supplanted them. Indeed, visual literacy has entered the panoply of skills required for communication. Comics are at the center of this phenomenon.[41]

Notes

[1] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1998), 7.
[2] Brian Boyd, "On the Origins of Comics: New York Double-take," *The Evolutionary Review: Art, Science & Culture* 1 no. 1 (March 2010): 1-16, June 11, 2010, http://aliceandrews.tumblr.com/, 2.
[3] Jim Steranko quoted in Randy Duncan and Matthew J. Smith, *The Power of Comics: History, Form and Culuture* (New York: Continuum, 2009), 14.
[4] Boyd, 2.
[5] Will Eisner, *Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative: Principles and Practices from the Legendary Cartoonist* (New York: Norton, 2008), xvii.
[6] Boyd, "On the Origins," 10, 14.
[7] Duncan and Smith, *Power of Comics,* 14.
[8] Harvey Pekar quoted in Duncan and Smith, *Power of Comics,* 16.
[9] Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, *The Watchmen* (New York: DC Comics, 2005), 2.4.
[10] Duncan and Smith, *Power of Comics*, 50.
[11] Moore and Gibbons, *Watchmen*, 10.31.
[12] Ibid., 3.10
[13] Ibid., 9.22.
[14] Ibid., 11.95
[15] Ibid., 3.10.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid., 9.21.
[18]Simone DeBeauvoir, "Myths: Of Women in Five Authors," *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends,* Ed. David H. Richter, (New York: Bedford, 1989): 1087-1088.
[19] Ibid., 4.17.
[20] Duncan and Smith, *Power of Comics,* 256.
[21] Jeremy Love, *Bayou: volume one* (New York: DC Comics, 2009).
[22] Jeremy Love, Interview, "Born on the Bayou." June 10, 2010, http://forum.newsarama.com/showthread.php?t=134214.
[23] Gene Luen Yang, *First Second Books*, "Doodles and Dailies," (May 2007), July 21, 2011, http://firstsecondbooks.typepad.com/mainblog/2007/05/index.html.
[24] Sigmund Freud, "Creative Writers and Daydreaming," *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends,* Ed. David H. Richter, (New York: Bedford, 1989): 650-56, 652-655.

[25] Ibid., 655.
[26] Ross Murfin and Supryia M. Ray, "Psychological criticism and psychoanalytic criticism," *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms* (New York: Bedford, 1998), 311.
[27] Gene Luen Yang, *American Born Chinese* (New York: First Second, 2006), 160.
[28] Irene Chen, "Monkey King's Journey to the West Transmission of a Chinese Folktale to Anglophone Children," *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature* 47 no. 1 (2009): 25-33, 25.
[29] Gene Luen Yang was interviewed at http://comicsandbox.blogspot.com/, June 12, 2012.
[30] Freud, *Creative Writers*, 655.
[31] Murfin, "Psychological criticism," 311.
[32] Freud , *Creative Writers,* 653.
[33] Yang, *ABC,* 50.
[34] Ibid., 28-29.
[35] Ibid., 37.
[36] Ibid., 221.
[37] Murfin, "Psychological criticism," 312.
[38] Ibid., 220.
[39] Ibid., 223.
[40] Lev Grossman and Richard Lacayo, *Time Magazine*'s "All Time 100 Novels," February 17, 2011.
http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/completelist/0,29569,1951793,00.html
[41] Eisner, *Graphic Storytelling,* xv.

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