

**Professor V. Aarons**  
**English 3473**  
**The Jewish Graphic Novel**  
**Spring 2017**

Office hours: MWF 12:30-1:30 & by appointment  
379A NH; extension 7574

**Course Description:**

This course will examine representations of Jewish history, culture, community, and identity as depicted through the genre of the graphic novel. We will focus on graphic novels written by and about Jews and the Jewish experience in order to better understand the developing history of the graphic novel and the effects of the visual as such patterns and structures direct the unfolding of narratives.

The art of comics is deeply rooted in the longstanding tradition of Jewish literature. Throughout both liturgical and secular Jewish writing, the relation between the text – the word – and the image has been foundational in the expression of Jewish thought. This course will introduce selected works by Jewish graphic artists in order to situate major trends, developments, and innovative perspectives that define the Jewish graphic novel. In doing so, we will consider the graphic novel in the context of both American and global Jewish culture of the twentieth and early decades of the twenty-first centuries, focusing on the following: the historical and aesthetic development of comic art and the graphic novel; the ways in which Jewish graphic novelists bring a rich tradition of Jewish storytelling to this hybrid literary and artistic form; the range of narrative possibilities developed by Jewish graphic novelists to explore Jewish identity and the Jewish historical experience. We will concentrate on such diverse topics as immigration; the intersection of history and popular culture; the Holocaust and its aftermath; religious life; sexuality; Israeli politics and European Jewish life; American Jewish life and culture; the introduction of Jewish graphic novelists from countries other than the United States; the generational impact of Jewish visual narratives; and the variety of scholarly approaches generated in response to this developing genre.

Some of the questions we will address include the following: How do we approach the graphic novel? How do graphic novels create the conditions for the development of character, intertextuality, comic art, and self-referential forms of expression? What is the relation and interplay of the literary and the visual? What kinds of literary tropes lend themselves to visual narratives (such as metaphor, metonymy, and understatement)? In what ways do graphic novels become a genre of economy? How do Jewish graphic novels explore issues of identity, marginalization, assimilation, history, and tradition? How do Jewish graphic novels draw from and integrate diverse genres, such as biography, auto-biography, fiction, comic strips, and memoir? In what way is the graphic narrative an expression of the anxieties and preoccupations of Jewish experience?

**Course Goals:**

- To introduce students to the genre of the graphic novel and explore its development
- To distinguish among the forms and genres of written and oral/visual expression
- To conceptualize graphic storytelling as a cultural and artistic process that is productive of complex meanings
- To read some of the most critically acclaimed graphic novels of the latter half of the twentieth and early decades of the twenty-first centuries
- To explore the ways in which Jewish culture is represented in graphic novels
- To develop students' critical vocabulary and analytical skills of texts and images
- To focus on students' ability to write discursively and speak effectively about literary and visual texts
- To develop students' ability to create presentations that involve persuasive oral and visual components

This course meets the criteria for the Oral and Visual Communication (OVC) Core Capacity.

**Learning Outcomes:**

Upon successful completion of this course in fulfillment of the Oral and Visual Communication (OVC) Core Capacity requirements, students will have demonstrated the ability to

1. identify and use the elements of effective oral and visual communication;
2. create and deliver effectively structured oral presentations using language correctly and appropriately;
3. use visual media that are effective, appropriate, and well integrated into the presentation;
4. analyze and critique oral and visual components of presentations;
5. respond effectively to questions and comments from audience members

**Requirements:** Three analytical papers of approximately 5-7 pp. each. Additionally, each student will be required to “open” and shape discussion of a particular text by presenting on a graphic novel that we have not read and discussed in class. (You may choose one of the texts on the recommended list or you may select one of your own; if you choose a text that is not on the recommended list, please check with me first). Drawing upon the tools and ideas introduced in the course, you will put together a presentation on the graphic novel you have selected and its author/illustrator, introducing the text to the class, showing how it relates to some of the issues and structures we have discussed, and arguing for an approach to the graphic novel as well as providing an original reading of it. Your discussion should be accompanied by a power-point presentation or any other medium that will emphasize the relation between visual and textual media. On the day of your presentation, you will submit a written outline guiding your remarks, including the argument you present. **Your grade for this presentation will be based on a combination of the oral and written components of the project.** You may draw upon class discussions and lectures as well as secondary source materials to develop the questions that will guide your thinking about the texts and your writing of the essays as well as your presentation. In all cases, if you use secondary source material, make sure that you document appropriately and carefully.

All readings and papers are due at the beginning of class on the assigned dates and must be completed in order to pass the course. **Please take note:** no late papers will be accepted and all work must be the writer's own invention; read very carefully Trinity University's policy on academic integrity. Attendance and intelligent class participation are mandatory and will be considered in the final course grade.

Electronic Devices: The use of laptops and cellphones and the like (iPads, Kindle, tablets, etc.) is strictly prohibited throughout the entire class period.

### Required Texts:

Corman, Leela. *Unterzakhn*

Croci, Pascal. *Auschwitz*

Eisner, Will. *The Contract with God*

Folman, Ari and David Polonsky. *Waltz with Bashir*

Glidden, Sarah. *How to Understand Israel in 60 Days or Less*

Hanuka, Asaf. *The Realist*

Katin, Miriam. *We Are On Our Own*

Kleid, Neil. *The Big Kahn*

Kubert, Joe. *Yossel*

Lemelman, Martin. *Mendel's Daughter*

McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*

Modan, Rutu. *The Property*

Pak, Greg and Carmine Di Giandomenico. *X-Men: Magneto Testament*

Pekar, Harvey and JT Waldman. *Not the Israel My Parents Promised Me*

Sfar, Joann. *The Rabbi's Cat I and II*

Spiegelman, Art. *MAUS I and II*

Sturm, James. *The Golem's Mighty Swing*

Waldman, J. T. *Megillat Esther*

Yakin, Boaz. *Jerusalem*

### Syllabus:

#### Week 1: An Introduction to the Jewish Graphic Novel

W	1/11	Introduction to the course
F	1/13	The graphic form; matters of reading and a language of interpretation Reading assignment from McCloud, <i>Understanding Comics</i> : Chapters 1-3

#### Weeks 2 & 3 Biblical Midrash

M	1/16	Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
W	1/18	The covenant tradition & the Hebrew bible as graphic representation Eisner, Will. <i>The Contract with God</i> McCloud, <i>Understanding Comics</i> : Chapters 4-5
F	1/20	<i>The Contract with God</i> , continued

- M 1/23 The Scroll of Esther & midrashic interpretation  
Waldman, J. T. *Megillat Esther*
- W 1/25 *Megillat Esther*, continued  
McCloud, *Understanding Comics*: Chapters 6-7
- F 1/27 Guest lecture: David Liss, novelist and author of comic books

#### **Weeks 4 & 5: The Jewish American Experience**

- M 1/30 Immigrant life, assimilation, acculturation, identity, and otherness  
Corman, Leela. *Unterzakhn*
- W 2/1 *Unterzakhn*, continued  
McCloud, *Understanding Comics*: Chapters 8-9
- F 2/3 Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_  
Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_
- M 2/6 The legend of the golem and its place in popular culture  
Sturm, James. *The Golem's Mighty Swing*
- W 2/8 *The Golem's Mighty Swing*, continued
- F 2/10 Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_  
Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Weeks 6-9: The Graphic Representation of the Holocaust & Post-Holocaust Memory**

- M 2/13 **Paper due**  
Pak, Greg and Carmine Di Giandomenico. *X-Men: Magneto Testament*
- W 2/15 Kubert, Joe. *Yossel*
- F 2/17 Croci, Pascal. *Auschwitz*
- M 2/20 Lemelman, Martin. *Mendel's Daughter*
- W 2/22 *Mendel's Daughter*, continued
- F 2/24 Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_  
Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_
- M 2/27 Katin, Miriam. *We Are On Our Own*
- W 3/1 *We Are On Our Own*, continued
- F 3/3 Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_  
Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_
- M 3/6 Spiegelman, Art. *MAUS I*
- W 3/8 Spiegelman, Art. *MAUS II*
- F 3/10 Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_  
Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_

**Week 10: Spring Break**  
3/13-17

**Weeks 11-14: Israel & Related Matters**

- M 3/20 Yakin, Boaz. *Jerusalem*  
 W 3/22 *Jerusalem*, continued  
 F 3/24 Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_
- M 3/27 **Paper due**  
 Class cancelled  
 W 3/29 Class cancelled  
 F 3/31 Glidden, Sarah. *How to Understand Israel in 60 Days or Less*
- M 4/3 Pekar, Harvey and JT Waldman. *Not the Israel My Parents Promised Me*  
 W 4/5 Hanuka, Asaf. *The Realist*  
 F 4/7 Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_
- M 4/10 Folman, Ari and David Polonsky: *Waltz with Bashir*  
 W 4/12 Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_  
 F 4/14 Class recess

**Weeks 15-16: Other Voices, Other Places**

- M 4/17 Modan, Rutu. *The Property*  
 W 4/19 Class cancelled  
 F 4/21 Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_
- M 4/24 Sfar, Joann. *The Rabbi's Cat I*  
 W 4/26 Sfar, Joann. *The Rabbi's Cat II*
- F 4/28 **Identity Matters**  
 Kleid, Neil. *The Big Kahn*
- M 5/1 Reading day
- M 5/8 **Final paper due**, English Department Office, 5 pm.