

The Art of Storytelling: A Peek Into the Graphic Literary World

Literary world has never been only black and white. The characters we love to read about have never been only good and bad. Let us peek into the world where graphics and colours play as important role as the words and letters written on the page. Let us explore the world of contemporary comic books and graphic novels, learn about their characteristics and specifics and meet the authors who are considered to be the superheroes of this rediscovered literary genre.

Someone might think that *comics* and *graphic novels* are just for children and young adults. But that would be a mistake! Look at a few examples of graphic novels which may blow your mind and teach you about real world!

Graphic novel VERSUS Comic Book

Before talking about particular representatives of contemporary graphic literature, learn a bit about the basics of the genre. Do you know the *terminology*? Can you *define* the following terms, pointing at *possible differences* between them?

- *comic book* -
- *graphic novel* -

A brief historical overview

- combination of words and pictures stretches back into antiquity (ancient Egyptian wall paintings)
- current vocabulary shaped with the rise of the comic strip
- popularized in newspapers at the start of the 20th century
- introduction of the fundamentals of the comics language — (balloons, panel to panel narrative progression)
- **Winsor McCay, George Herriman, E.C. Segar, and Frank Kin**
- the **1920s** and **30s** saw a revival in **the woodcut narrative tradition** in the work of **Franz Masereel, Lynd Ward, and Milt Gross** - “silent” 1930 comic *He Done Her Wrong*
- many national variations
- **American** - the **late 1930s** - introduction of *Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, Captain America*, and others
- cheap, thrilling entertainment that appealed to youngsters and soldiers alike
- integral part of the **entertainment culture**, a wide variety of genres including romance, horror, crime, science fiction, war, humor, and adventure
- boom in sales after World War II
- the **mid-fifties**, the medium suffered a **setback** - the anti-comic book hysteria - **Frederic Wertham**’s book, *Seduction of the Innocent*
- Senate hearings on Comics and Juvenile Delinquency **X** publishers - self-regulatory body, **the Comics Code Authority** - prohibited depictions of gore, sexuality, and excessive violence, as well as scenes with vampires, werewolves, ghouls or zombies
- mandated that authority figures were never to be ridiculed or presented disrespectfully, and that good must always win



- rebounded by the **early 1960s** - **DC Comics** reinvigorating its classic heroes for young audiences, and **Marvel Comics** capturing adolescent and college-age imaginations with a new brand of comics storytelling
- the **late sixties** - **Underground Comix** – counterculture, dealt with the social issues of the day, attitudes about sex, race, war, and drugs - **R. Crumb, Art Spiegelman, Gilbert Shelton, and Harvey Pekar**
- term “**graphic novel**” popularized by **Will Eisner**’s 1978 short story collection, *A Contract With God* - serious literary effect, rise of graphic novels
- **1986** publication of three critically acclaimed, bestselling books:
 - *Maus*, **Art Spiegelman**’s Pulitzer Prize–winning novel about the Holocaust;
 - *Watchmen*, **Alan Moore** and **Dave Gibbons**’ political deconstruction of the superhero genre;
 - *The Dark Knight Returns*, **Frank Miller**’s social commentary on media and politics in the Reagan era (with Batman and Superman as allegorical touchstones)
- the **late nineties** - influx of **manga**
- **Chris Ware**’s *Jimmy Corrigan* (2000), **Marjane Satrapi**’s *Persepolis* (2003)
- success of comics-based movies such as *X-Men* and *Spider-Man*, *Ghost World* and *American Splendor* – public interest
- today, graphic novels cover every conceivable genre, including fiction, biography, history, journalism, education, crime, horror, fantasy, romance, adventure, memoir, humor, politics, and much more

(Source: <http://ncac.org/resource/graphic-novels-suggestions-for-librarians/>)

Art Spiegelman - *Maus*

Maus is a cartoon story about the Holocaust in which Jews and Germans are portrayed as mice and cats. At first it sounds like a joke in poor taste*. Yet Art Spiegelman’s cartoon story, based on his father’s experience of the Holocaust, is very moving.

A STORY OF SURVIVAL

The child-like appearance (= look) of the comic makes the horrors all the more devastating. The moral crisis of the time is evident despite the simple graphic style. Spiegelman shows his father in a way which, while not always pleasant, is deeply human.

Spiegelman doesn’t avoid¹ reality. A famous scene from the comic shows him wearing a mouse mask, sitting on a pile of bodies of victims of the Holocaust. It’s powerful because the image acknowledges² Spiegelman’s debt to these people who never lived to tell their stories.



Marjane Satrapi - *Persepolis*

- Rasht and Tehran, a middle-class Iranian family
- well-to-do and highly educated, parents - politically active, supported Marxist causes against the monarchy of the last Shah
- the Iranian Revolution - dismayed and intimidated by the Muslim fundamentalists
- youth, Marjane - exposed to the growing brutalities of the various regimes
- uncle, Anoosh, political prisoner and in exile for a time, executed
- a young teen acted out, getting into trouble with the police for breaking modesty codes
- sent to study abroad - in 1983 in Vienna, Austria
- after returned to Iran, studied visual communication, a master's degree from Islamic Azad University in Tehran
- married Reza, a veteran of the Iran-Iraq War, divorced shortly after and moved to Strasbourg, France
- now married to Mattias Ripa, a Swedish national and lives in Paris
- speaks Persian, French, English, Swedish, German, and Italian

Graphic novels

- **David Beauchard**, a French comics artist - her mentor and teacher
- critically acclaimed autobiographical graphic novels, originally published in French in four parts in 2000–2003 and in English translation in two parts in 2003 and 2004 - *Persepolis* and *Persepolis 2*,
- describes her childhood in Iran and her adolescence in Europe
- *Embroideries* (Broderies)
- *Chicken with Plums* (Poulet aux prunes)
- the Op-Ed section of *The New York Times*
- *Persepolis* adapted into an animated film debuted at the 2007 Cannes Film Festival
- focus on very intimate rites-of-passage, and quite ambivalently recounted coming-of-age moments
- film *Gang of the Jotas* (film) (2012) (director)
- film *The Voices* (2014) (director)



(Source:
http://www.nytimes.com/imagepages/2005/05/28/opinion/20050529_satrapi.htm

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John Lewis - *March* trilogy

MARCH

BOOK ONE

JOHN LEWIS
ANDREW AYDIN NATE POWELL



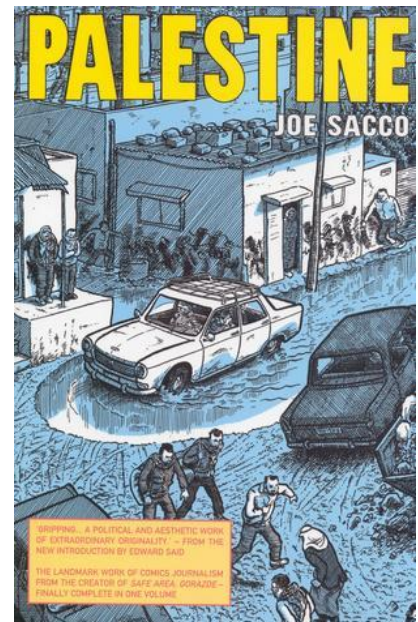
*It is rare for an engaging work of graphic history to be told from the perspective of a central figure in that history itself—yet that is precisely the case with John Lewis’s personal account of the U.S. civil rights movement. As such, the autobiographical trilogy *March* provides a unique opportunity for exploring an eyewitness report of important events while simultaneously studying the memoir form: it represents “literacy across the disciplines” of the most authentic sort. In addition, its main idea—how to overcome violence and injustice through nonviolence—remains vitally resonant today.*

Joe Sacco - *Palestine*


Prior to *Safe Area Gorazde: The War In Eastern Bosnia 1992-1995*—Joe Sacco’s breakthrough novel of graphic journalism—the acclaimed author was best known for *Palestine*, a two-volume graphic novel that won an American Book Award in 1996.

Based on several months of research and an extended visit to the West Bank and Gaza Strip in the early 1990s (where he conducted over 100 interviews with Palestinians and Jews), *Palestine* was the first major comics work of political and historical nonfiction by Sacco, whose name has since become synonymous with this graphic form of New Journalism. Like *Safe Area Gorazde*, *Palestine* has been favourably compared to Art Spiegelman’s Pulitzer Prize-winning *Maus* for its ability to brilliantly navigate such socially and politically sensitive subject matter within the confines of the comic book medium.

Sacco has often been called the first comic book journalist, and he is certainly the best. This edition of *Palestine* also features an introduction from renowned author, critic, and historian Edward Said (*Peace and Its Discontents* and *The Question of Palestine*), one of the world’s most respected authorities on the Middle Eastern conflict.



Dave Gibbons - Watchman

- self-taught artist
 - early 20s a building surveyor and lettering mostly humor books for IPC
 - illustration work at DC Thomson - adventure and sci-fi strips
 - by 1975, together with Brian Bolland, Dave worked on “Powerman,” a book designed and illustrated by both, for the Nigerian marketplace
 - “2000 AD” - growing reputation and professionalism- Marvel UK - Doctor Who
 - USA - DC recruited him in 1982 - **Green Lantern**
 - DC universe - covers and stories for almost every DC character, from Batman and Wonder Woman
 - **For the Man Who Has Everything**, a quintessential Superman story written by Alan Moore
 - **Watchmen** was the twelve-part maxi-series
 - published by DC Comics in 1986 and 1987, and collected in 1987
 - to reflect contemporary anxieties and to critique the superhero concept
 - It depicts an alternate history where superheroes emerged in the 1940s and 1960s, helping the United States to win the Vietnam War. The country is edging towards a nuclear war with the Soviet Union, freelance costumed vigilantes have been outlawed and most former superheroes are in retirement or working for the government. The story focuses on the personal development and struggles of the protagonists as an investigation into the murder of a government sponsored superhero pulls them out of retirement.
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- supplemental fictional documents and the narrative is intertwined with that of another story, a fictional pirate comic titled **Tales of the Black Freighter**, which one of the characters reads
 - a nonlinear narrative, the story skips through space, time and plot.
 - **World's Finest** (with artist Steve Rude), **Captain America** (with artist Lee Weeks), and **Batman versus Predator** (with artist Andy Kubert). And on the art front he has continued to collaborate with the finest writers in the field like Frank Miller (on the **Martha Washington** series), Stan Lee (on DC's **Just Imagine: Green Lantern**) and Harvey Kurtzman (on **Strange Adventures**).

(Source: <http://www.comicbookresources.com/?page=article&id=18407>)

Try your knowledge of some of the most popular comic books in the following quiz:

<http://www.kidzworld.com/quiz/4555-quiz-test-your-superhero-know-how>

Ok, your turn! Use your imagination as well as your extraordinary skills and create your own comic strip.

