Assignment #2: Expectations and Guidelines

Due Date: Drafts due Sept. 16th, 5:00 PM in the Moodle Assignment #2 Drafts Dropbox (Microsoft Word .doc or .docx file); Revisions due Sept. 23rd, 5:00 PM in the Revisions Dropbox

**please title your document appropriately and send a copy to our WA, Audrey Schaefer: schaefau@dickinson.edu; she will be in touch shortly to schedule small-group writing workshops to discuss our drafts**

Length and Format: 3 substantive paragraphs (500-1000 words total) Times New Roman 12 pt. font, double spaced, standard margins. Please scan your selected panels into your document.

Grading: Assignment #2 will count as 10% of your total grade in this class and letter grades will be awarded per the “Grading Guidelines” of the English department. Drafts are worth 40% of this total, revisions 60%. Late work will receive a failing grade.

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One of the challenges of learning to talk critically about comics is developing a vocabulary to begin to describe them. Rather than simply pass a vocabulary list out at the beginning of the semester, we’re going to build a glossary as a class that defines the major terms and concepts needed to analyze graphic narratives. Your assignment is to choose any three terms you feel are the most important for our understanding of comics, define them in simple, concise, and graceful language, and demonstrate their importance through a close reading (see the handout: “Close Reading”) of a single panel of your choosing in Best American Comics 2008. The expectation is three entries of 4-8 sentences; please scan the panels you’re discussing directly into your assignment.

Here’s an example entry:

Palette: The term palette is used to describe an artist’s color scheme, and by extension their use of color to produce emotional effects or convey ideas. At times this use of color can be very direct, for example the use of bright primary colors to signify excitement or action in conventional superhero comics, but at other times the effects generated can be subtle or understated. For example, Chris Ware’s series “Thanksgiving” uses a palette of deep purples, grays, and yellows, producing a sepia-like quality that offers a nostalgic and somber tone to the entire composition. He disrupts this significantly in specific panels, like the one above, using a bright pink background to signal the pigeon Penrod’s anxiety and distress at being asked to forage for food by his wife on what he perceives to be a dangerous day for all birdkind. The conventional association of pink with femininity (the color is also used on the wife’s body and in the female protagonist’s dyed hair) also signals the wife’s dominance over her
hen-pecked (or pigeon-pecked) husband, generating sympathy for Penrod if at the same time confirming gender stereotypes.

Please note that a successful entry doesn’t simply define and illustrate a critical term, but demonstrates how critical attention to these details changes the way we can read the comics you’ve selected. You’re free to choose whatever terms you wish from our course reading and discussion—from formal devices like “panels,” “gutters,” and “bleeds,” (etc.) to literary techniques like “metaphor,” “tone,” and “allusion,” (etc.) to art historical terms like “composition,” “line,” and “perspective” (etc.)—and you can illustrate them with any selections from the 2008 Best American Comics collection. You might look carefully through Scott McCloud for inspiration, or take a look at the glossary of art historical (“The Language of Art”) and literary critical (“Reading Poems”) vocabularies provided under the “Week 3” tab of the course Moodle site. You can also explicate terms you’ve overheard in class discussions or propose a term that the class has yet to encounter. You’ll be evaluated not on what you choose, but on how well you define and illustrate your chosen terms, as well as the strength of your close readings of the individual panels you select. While we’ll be exploring a shared vocabulary, I expect the words you use to describe your entries to be your own (i.e. don’t plagiarize the resources provided, fashion your own way of describing these vocabulary terms).

Good luck and happy writing, db