

# Cunningham

In my paper, I would like to explore the attempt of graphic novels to carve out a unique literary space. Like during the fledgling stages of film, graphic novels seem self-aware of their own status as narratives in a nascent genre. On one hand, many comics create a new mythology befitting this new medium. Superhero comics, for example, created an original narrative economy with unique motifs, story patterns, and style. By dreaming up a mythology all its own, such comics attempt to establish a narrative space independent of other fictional mediums, particularly film and the traditional novel. Some more recent comics seem interested in creating a new, but more serious mythology. The *Sandman* series (the only other graphic novel I've ever read!) consciously attempts to invent a new literary space that is more akin to Shakespeare and Lovecraft than Spiderman and X-Men.

Rather than trying to invent a new mythology, other comic books seem to struggle with their relationship to other mediums. Deep in allusion, these novels question what comic books are supposed to accomplish. *Watchmen* seems to probe such tensions: a work rife in philosophical airiness, it is weighed down by the violence and shorthand of other superhero comics. I think that *Jimmy Corrigan* exhibits the same uncertainty. Combining serious drama with the absurd, it seems to undermine the pretensions of a medium that uses drawn figures and speech bubbles. *Fun Home* also struggles with comics' relationship with other narratives. Annoyingly dense in allusions, it seems to ask whether comics can be lifted to the heights of such canonical writers as Joyce, Proust, and Fitzgerald. Its story, a complex, ambiguous coming-of-age, seems like a self-aware aspiration to "literary" literature.

I hope that the subsequent comics we will read in this class will fit this concern I've outlined. I think they will (and if not, I'll force them in!). I was actually drawn to this topic because of the critical praise on the graphic novels we've read so far. Often, the praise seems more hyperbolic than usual, littered with phrases like "the serious coming of a genre," "Time 100 Books Novels", etc. Ware mocks this practice, combining such hyperbolic praise with trenchant criticism. I hope to use such praise as evidence of comics' self-consciousness about creating a literary space distinct from traditional novels and film.

One other thing I'd like to do is analyze specific techniques, unique to comics, that are emblematic of this attempt to create a self-standing medium. What can the interaction between word and image accomplish that film and traditional fiction can't? What perspective can graphic novels bring that is lacking in other mediums? I need to think more about this formal aspect, and I will probably look back to McCloud for some help. I would appreciate any insight that my other readers might have, particularly other comic books that I could use to justify this somewhat broad claim. Please let me know if you think of any other comics that would fit this framework---I'm particularly ignorant of the superhero fandom I alluded to.