The Importance of Comics

This course discusses comics as a visual art form born around the same time as motion pictures (1895), with early manifestations going back to 1830 (Rodolphe Töpffer). It examines the sequential language of comics in relation to other narrative art forms; the ability of comics to depict history and society, race and gender, war and trauma, dream and reality, politics and ideology. The readings will include comics and graphic novels from both sides of the Atlantic, in equal proportions and in a fruitful dialogue: the American tradition and the Franco-Belgian corpus (read in translation). We will discuss the history of comic art; its place among other visual and narrative arts; its connection with newspapers and publishing outlets; the representation of history, class, gender, politics, and race in comic art; humor, and a whole lot of other topics. We will examine comics from the early 20th century to the early 21st century (from Winsor McKay and George Herriman to Joann Sfar and Chris Ware). Some superheroes may be involved, but less than expected.