

Comics and Graphic Novels by Women
Barbara Postema

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

1: Autobiography

Barry, Lynda. *One Hundred Demons*. Seattle: Sasquatch, 2002.

This colorful book contains short stories based on Barry's childhood experiences. The seemingly childlike art helps evoke the innocence of youth. The title pages for each story are decorated with collages and ink drawings that Barry explains in the opening essay as a part of the process of exorcizing one's demons. My favorite stories include "Dancing," "Common Scents," and "Resilience." Hardcover.

---. "The Most Obvious Question." *Raw* 2.3 (1991): 206-15.

A short story in black and white, in the art comics magazine *Raw*, a series edited by Art Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly in the late eighties and early nineties. The anthology usually included work by one or two women artists, but their work was always vastly outnumbered by that of men. One can speculate whether the inclusion of work by women is partly due to the influence of Mouly as an editor, and I am also tempted to point out her French background, since France has such a flourishing comics culture (although again rather a male-dominated one).

---. *Activity Book*. Montreal: Drawn and Quarterly, 2007.

This is a pamphlet handed out for Free Comic Book Day 2007. It is a kind of tortured and very personal "how to draw comics" manual, blending comics, collage and calligraphy. The fact this entire Drawn & Quarterly pamphlet is devoted to Barry's work alone attests to her success in the comics world.

Coe, Sue and Judy Brody. "W.O.M.D." *Blab* 14 (2003): 81-88.

This graphic combination of poetry and image links humanity's treatment of animals with man's inhumanity towards man, touching on AIDS and the death penalty on the way. This work is more a visual and verbal exploration than a comic, showing that the lines in comic art can be blurry. *Blab* is a graphic magazine published by Fantagraphics and includes comics as well as other forms of visual art. The cover of this issue is by Camille Rose Garcia, an artist who also contributed some pages in the magazine: "Pharmaceuticools," pp. 25-28.

Bechdel, Alison. *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2006.

Bechdel has produced the serial *Dykes to Watch Out For* for many years. This memoir is her first work in long form. It tells the story of her childhood, culminating in her father's suicide and her own coming out. It is beautifully drawn and rich in literary reference and rewards repeated reading. Hardcover with dust jacket.

Doucet, Julie. *My Most Secret Desire*. Montreal: Drawn and Quarterly, 2006.

The stories in this graphic novel are collected from Doucet's dream journal. Drawn in her characteristic "messy" style, the stories are often as disturbing as they are hilarious, as they show Doucet imagining herself as a man or giving birth to kittens. Hardcover with dust jacket.

---. *My New York Diary*. Montreal: Drawn and Quarterly, 2004.

Three autobiographical stories with (no-good) boyfriends as the common theme.

Kominsky-Crumb, Aline. *Need More Love: A Graphic Memoir*. New York: MQP, 2007.

A collection of comix, essays and graphic art by Kominsky-Crumb, reminding readers that she is not just the wife of famous underground comix artist R. Crumb (and frequent character in his work), but also a creator of autobiographical comix in her own right. Hardcover with dust jacket.

Satrapı, Marjane. *Persepolis Vol. 1: The Story of a Childhood*. New York: Pantheon, 2003.

Translated from the French, this is a very impressive personal account of Satrapı's childhood in Iran, as daily life for her and her family becomes overshadowed by the Islamic revolution. The stark black and white drawings are sometimes very funny and always supply a clear view on the complicated issues of religion and ideology. This graphic novel was exceptionally successful, introducing many new readers to comics and perhaps to women cartoonists. It has recently been turned into an animated film. Hardcover with dust jacket.

2: Fiction

Abel, Jessica. *La Perdida Parts 1-5*. Seattle: Fantagraphics, 2001-2005.

The story of Carla's year living in Mexico City, where she tries to find her own cultural roots but discovers she will always be an outsider. Beautifully drawn and quite a thriller in the last few installments. The five soft cover booklets have since been collected into a graphic novel, but I like the booklets because they each have beautifully colored covers that don't appear in the collected version.

---. *Soundtrack: Short Stories 1989-1996*. Seattle: Fantagraphics, 2001.

Collected works by Abel, including cover art and T-shirt designs. It is interesting to see Abel experiment with genres such as comics journalism and Funnies.

---. *Mirror, Window*. Seattle: Fantagraphics, 2000.

A collection of short stories from Abel's zine *Artbabe*. Her style ranges from stark pen and ink drawings to softer and more shaded pencil work. All the stories are reproduced in black and white. It would be nice to see how Abel's work looks in color.

Carré, Lilly. *Tales of Woodsman Pete*. Marietta: Top Shelf, 2006.

Whimsical short stories about Pete, with special appearances by Paul Bunyan and Babe. The stories are full of dark humor but are also rather sad: Paul Bunyan can't find a suitable mate and Pete spends his time by himself in the woods, although he appears to have had a wife at some point. Carré has a polished cartoony style and I look forward to seeing her do longer, more narrative work.

Corman, Leela. *Queen's Day*. Self published, 1999.

Three stories that shift from magical realism in the first one to realism in the last, but that all share a sense of melancholy. I partly like this book because the last story takes place in Amsterdam, on Koninginnedag—Queen's Day.

Dart, Rebecca. *Rabbit Head*. Gainesville: Alternative Comics, 2004.

This narrative is very striking from a formal point of view: it starts with a single strip of panels and then starts splitting, until in the middle of the book there are seven narrative strips running parallel to each other. Then they collapse back into one another until in the end there is one strip again, that ends where the story started. An interesting exercise in structure.

Drechsler, Debbie. *Summer of Love*. Montreal: Drawn and Quarterly, 2003.

The art in this graphic novel is done in brown and green only, asking for extra effort to read it. This effort is rewarded by a sweetly sad story about teenager Lily, who struggles with her first sexual experiences, mean girlfriends and getting to know her sister.

Feuchtenberger, Anke. "The King of the Bees." *Honey Talks: Comics Inspired by Painted Beehive Panels*. Ljubljana: Stripburger, 2006.

One little book in a series of nine, each of which is created to refer to an Eastern European beehive panel. These panels were a folk art and were decorated with unique paintings representing fables, local legends etc. Each hive had its own painted panel so

bees would recognize their own hive. Feuchtenberger's story is a surreal one about a man who tricks a strange bee woman into helping him.

Flight, Volume 1. Berkeley: Image Comics, 2005.

Flight is an anthology of work by mostly very young cartoonists who are just coming out of art school. This anthology is striking for the ratio of women to men it represents: a third of the 21 artists is female, which is a much better representation than we saw in *Raw* for example, and this may be indicative of the growing presence of women in comics culture, as well as perhaps of the influence of manga, which is one form of comics that is very popular with (young) women. Influence from Japanese manga can certainly be seen in the style of many of the comics in *Flight*, in the work of men and women both. Female artists in this collection include Vera Brosgol, Catia Chien, Clio Chiang, Hope Larson, Erika Moen, and Jen Wang.

French, René. *Micrographica*. Marietta: Top Shelf, 2007.

This book started out as a webcomic, with each ballpoint-drawn panel being about one centimeter square. For publication the panels were enlarged to about four times their original size. The story follows several tiny rodents in their search for "crapballs."

---. *The Ticking*. Marietta: Top Shelf, 2005.

The drawings in *The Ticking* are completely different from French's work in *Micrographica*. In *The Ticking* she uses softly textured pencil drawings, with lots of shading and gray tones. The story is about the difficulty of looking and being different from other people, but thankfully it has a happy ending. Hardcover.

Ghermandi, Francesca. *Grenuord Parts 1-3*. Seattle: Fantagraphics, 2005-6.

These three volumes are part of the continuing story of George Henderson, a walking corpse who refuses to accept his own death. The images and the story are strange and noire-ish. Ghermandi is an Italian comics artist, but her work is influenced by American culture, especially movies.

---. *The Wipeout*. Seattle: Fantagraphics, 2003.

This is a bizarre story of pill-popping pills and gumby men, in a world where women are either nagging wives or innocents in need of rescue. The book teeters on the line between being a comic and an illustrated narrative.

Gloeckner, Phoebe. *The Diary of a Teenage Girl*. Berkeley: Frog Ltd, 2002.

This novel combines long sections of prose with illustrations and passages in comics form. The book offers the diary of Minnie Goetze, a fifteen-year-old in 1970s San Francisco. She wants to become an artist and is exploring life, including sex. Things get

messy when her mother's boyfriend starts sleeping with her. This book is hard to categorize: the images of the main character look uncannily like Phoebe Gloeckner, but she states emphatically that it is not autobiographical. Also, it is hard to decide whether the text is a comic or a novel, since it employs both forms.

Johnston, Lynn. *The Lives Behind the Lines: 20 Years of For Better or For Worse*. Kansas City: Andrews McMeel, 1999.

This anniversary collection of Lynn Johnston's daily newspaper strip *For Better or For Worse* fills in the narrative of the Patterson family that Johnston has been developing over the years. However, the book, a combination of reprints of strips and narrative by the artist, also throws some light on the thin line between fiction and autobiography that Johnston walks.

Kryttre, Krystine. "Social Butterfly." *Raw* 2.1 (1989): 83-5.

This darkly humorous story appears in the comics magazine *Raw*. Its scratchy style is very energetic, while the story, about an emotionally needy cat who keeps driving his/her friends to suicide is funny and depressing at the same time.

McClintock, Barbara. "Runaway Shadow." *Little Lit: Strange Stories for Strange Kids*. Ed. Art Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly. New York: HarperCollins/Raw, 2001. 13-15.

In the *Little Lit* series Spiegelman and Mouly collect stories for children by serious and seriously famous comics artists. McClintock's story is about a girl called Annie and her shadow. The shadow escapes but finds herself lonely without Annie. This volume of *Little Lit* also includes a story written and drawn by Posy Simmonds, a British comics artist. Her story "Mr. Frost" appears on pages 31-36.

---. "The Princess and the Pea." *Little Lit: Folklore and Fairytale Funnies*. Ed. Art Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly. New York: HarperCollins/Raw, 2000. 62-3.

McClintock's version of the well-known fairytale is populated by animals instead of humans, and is beautifully drawn and colored. The crab in an Elizabethan dress is especially funny.

Medley, Linda. *Castle Waiting*. Seattle: Fantagraphics, 2006.

Medley creates a magical world inhabited by humans, talking animals and other fairytale creatures. While the story rambles a little bit (perhaps due to its origin as a serial publication) the common threads are the theme of sanctuary for women and the beautiful line drawings. Hardcover.

Modan, Rutu. "The Hunter's Daughter." *Honey Talks: Comics Inspired by Painted Beehive Panels*. Ljubljana: Stripburger, 2006.

Another of the *Honey Talks* books. Modan's first panel is a close copy of the beehive panel she was assigned for inspiration. She adds the caption "Amos had considered the animals his friends," and spins a yarn from there. The story weaves in references to Modan's Jewish background and touches lightly on the woman's position within this faith.

---. *Bygone*. [*Flipper 2*]. Tel-Aviv: Actus Tragicus, 2000.

Actus Tragicus is an Israeli collective of five comics artists (three women, two men). Rutu Modan has achieved most international fame of the five, mostly due to her recent graphic novel *Exit Wounds*. *Bygone* is a short story about a young girl who lives in the hotel where her older sister works, but who finds out a lot about her family and about life when a photographer comes to stay for a while. *Flipper 2* contains three stories. The color story in the middle of the book is also by a woman: Batia Kolton created "Losers of Dollyland."

Project Telstar. Richmond: AdHouse, 2003.

Another anthology, this time with space and robots as its unifying theme. This collection includes short works by four women among its 27 contributors: Sam Hester, Simone Lia, Ellen Lindner, and Laurenn McCubbin. I especially like Hester's story about a woman's long-distance relationship with Gravityman, "Planet Waves," and "Click," a story about a female robot by Laurenn McCubbin. The anthology is printed in black and white with a metallic blue as the only contrast color.

Varon, Sara. *Robot Dreams*. New York: First Second, 2007.

This is a graphic novel without speech balloons, but it is eloquent in its rendition of the difficulty of making friends, especially in a big city. This is a children's book that also speaks to adults.

---. *Chicken and Cat*. New York: Scholastic, 2006.

This children's picture / comic book shows how Chicken and Cat (and perhaps people in general) are able to make their environment a better place to live: they plant a garden in a vacant lot. Hardcover with dust jacket.

---. *Sweater Weather*. Gainesville: Alternative Comics, 2003.

A collection of mostly wordless short stories, some of which feature Sara herself, as well as numerous dogs, cats, a raccoon and a snowman. At the back the comic includes a set of stamps designed by the author and three postcards in color. I bought this book at the Small Press Expo in Bethesda in 2003. It is signed by the author.

3: Minicomix / Self-published

Baumann, Suzanne. *My Mind's Made Up!* 2006.

---. *The Beasts of Ball Point.* 2005.

---. *You, Only You.* 2002.

Baumann works as an artist through Fridge Magnet Concoctions out of Hamtramck. Her minicomix *My Mind's Made Up* and *You, Only You* are a blend of nostalgic and sardonic, with an early 20th-century style and an early 21st-century attitude. *The Beasts of Ball Point* is a collection of doodled animals, each with a funny name. I also own some of her fridge magnets.

Chapman, Robyn. *Sour Pussy* / Kelli Nelson. *When I was Brave.* 2003

This is a joint mini by Chapman and Nelson, with one short story by each, at opposing ends of the book. Both stories are autobiographical. This is copy 190, and it is signed by Kelli Nelson.

Davis, Eleanor. *How We Sleep.* 2006.

This minicomic was created for Valentine's Day. It is only signed "To Drew From Eleanor," but Davis's drawing style is distinctive enough to recognize this as her art. Not really narrative, this comic shows seven different ways the couple sleep (several including cats). The comic is hand-stitched together with red thread.

Keech, Gemma Amendola. *The Clay Shaper.* 2006.

---. *Unearthed: The Clay Shaper II.* 2007.

These two full-color pamphlets tell two mythical stories in a vaguely Celtic style. The two stories are connected by a clay rat, a mythical creature who protects those who serve him. The two pamphlets came with a poster of an alphabet the artists designed for her story, and which she called Waarheid, the Dutch word for truth. Since I am Dutch, her choice of name for her alphabet quite appealed to me. Like her comics, the poster blends the aesthetics of Medieval illumination with runic sensibilities.

Kitley, Corey Marie. *Life's So Rad: Super Special Freebie Book.* Comic Con 2003.

I picked this minicomic up at SPX 2003. It is a taster for the more-or-less autobiographical webcomic about Corey and her friends. The comic is not available online at the moment.

Laframboise, Michèle. *Ruego*. 2007.

A short science-fiction comic based on a story by Jean-Louis Trudel. Black and white with a color cover. Made out to me, with a personalized drawing and signature by the author. I bought this comic after an event where Laframboise was one of the speakers. She discussed the difficulty she has had as a woman cartoonist getting her work published. The handout for her talk gives some more information about her work.

Lewis, Pat. *Prowl*. 2005.

I bought this minicomic from the author at SPX 2006. The cover is hand-colored and the author signed the book. This is the story of a girl who is abducted by aliens but is able to escape because she turns out to be a werewolf.

Novgorodoff, Danica. *A Late Freeze*. 2006.

This is a full-color publication, which is uncommon for self-published comics. It is an environmentally conscious story about the love between a robot and a bear.

Omand, Jennifer. *Squarecat Comics Samples #3*. 2006.

Self-published sampler (stapled photocopies) of the webcomic. I also own a small print by this artist, depicting Squarecat as "Stevesie" (or Steve Zissou from *The Life Aquatic*).

Telgemeier, Raina. *Take Out*, Issue #6. 2003.

Five short stories from different times in Telgemeier's childhood. Drawn in a cartoony style but with lots of detail.

4: Secondary

Abel, Jessica and Matt Madden. *Drawing Words and Writing Pictures*. New York: First Second, 2008.

The cover describes this book as "A definitive course from concept to comic in 15 lessons," and it indeed covers the process of creating a comic quite comprehensively, including information about choice of tools, as well as about creating characters and narrative. The book offers examples from all kinds of comics but also includes many illustrations that are recognizably Abel's style. This book should be very encouraging for women wanting to take up comics, especially since most previous books on the subject (notably by Will Eisner and Scott McCloud) was done by men.

Hill, C. "Marjane Satrapi Interviewed, August 24, 2003." *International Journal of Comic Art* 8.2 (2006): 6-33.

This interview with Satrapi was done before her breakthrough in the U.S. The conversation covers her influences as an artist and her membership in L'Association, a French co-op of comics artists.

Inness, Sherrie A, ed. *Action Chicks: New Images of Tough Women in Popular Culture*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

This book is not about comics by women per se, but some of the essays do discuss the relation between women and the comics industry, both as artists and as subject in comics.

Kannenberg Jr, Gene. *500 Essential Graphic Novels: The Ultimate Guide*. New York: Collins Design, 2008.

In order to be considered as entries in this guide, the comics had to be currently available, in English. This disqualified many important but not readily available comics, especially those from Europe. However, as a reference work this book is still very useful. Leafing through it, it is once again very visible how many fewer comics there are by women than by men. However, the book also led me to discover new women artists I was not previously familiar with.

Lent, John A, ed. "Women and Cartooning: A Global Symposium." *International Journal of Comic Art* 10.2 (2008): 5-241.

The Symposium includes thirteen essays and an introduction by Lent, with topics ranging from women in underground comix to manga for girls and female cartoonists in Uruguay. Taken together this is a useful introduction to most of the issues that are relevant to the topic of women and comics.

Postema, Barbara. "Men's Comics are from Mars, Women's Comics are from Venus: A Visual Exploration." *Interplanetary Journal of Comic Art: A Festschrift in Honor of John Lent* 1.1 (2007): 41-6.

Rather than creating a verbal argument, this "essay" shows the difference between mainstream comics by men and comics by women in a visual way: I created two collages, one made up of images from superhero comics, and one made up of images from comics by women. The difference is striking.

Robbins, Trina. *From Girls to Grrrlz: A History of ♀ Comics from Teens to Zines*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1999.

This is a richly illustrated historical overview of women in comics. It shows how early particular genres of comics were created for a female readership by men, such as romance comics. Many later female artists reacted explicitly against these stereotypical genres, especially in the undergrounds. Since then, women cartoonists have begun to

come into their own. Robbins' work is especially useful for information about feminist comics, which is often left out of historical overviews.

Rosenberg, Meisha. "Multimodality in Phoebe Gloeckner's *Diary of a Teenage Girl*." *International Journal of Comic Art* 9.2 (2007): 396-412.

Rosenberg traces the importance of intertextuality and "quoted" comics in Gloeckner's graphic novel. The *Diary* presents letters and comics the author was sent by R. Crumb and Aline Kominsky-Crumb, once again blurring the distinction between the author and Minnie, the main character. Rosenberg argues that the artists, especially Kominsky-Crumb, are role models for Minnie and the author as they find their own artistic voice.

Sabin, Roger. *Comics, Comix and Graphic Novels*. New York: Phaidon, 1996.

This book gives an illustrated history of the comics form, starting with newspaper strips and ending with graphic novels. The book is very useful to get a general sense of the development of the art form and some of the important artists. As such the book also shows how marginalized women have been in that history.

Samancı, Özge. "Lynda Barry's Humor: At the Juncture of Private and Public, Invitation and Dissemination, Childish and Professional." *International Journal of Comic Art* 8.2 (2006): 181-99.

Samancı addresses the common stereotype that women have no sense of humor. This idea has relegated women's humor to a separate subsection of humor in general, and perhaps partly explains why women's comics are almost a subgenre of comics in general. She pays special attention to the contradictions that Barry sets up in her work, and that are often the source of her humor.

5: Websites

Friends of Lulu. 2002. 12 Jan. 2009 <<http://www.friends-lulu.org/>>.

Friends of Lulu is a national nonprofit organization whose purpose is to promote and encourage female readership and participation in the comic book industry. The site is an extremely useful source of links to other sites relating to women and comics and also offers reading suggestions.

Girl-Wonder.org. 16 Jan. 2009 <<http://girl-wonder.org/index.php>>.

In their own words: "Girl-Wonder.org is a collection of sites dedicated to female characters and creators in mainstream comics. Our goals are to foster an attentive, empowered audience community and to encourage respect and high-quality character depiction within the industry." The site is mainly focused on issues related to superhero comics (which is what "mainstream comics" mainly is) but has some other useful information as well.

Guerrilla Girls. 15 Jan. 2009 <<http://www.guerrillagirls.com/>>.

“The official site of the Guerrilla Girls. Fighting discrimination with facts, humor and fake fur!” This group takes on the discrimination of the art world and visual culture with their own visual onslaught. Comics is not at all their main beef, but the issues as similar.

The Ormes Society. 16 Jan. 2009 <<http://theormessociety.com/>>.

From their website: “The Ormes Society, named after the legendary pioneering cartoonist of color Jackie Ormes, is an organization dedicated to supporting black female comic creators and promoting the inclusion of black women in the comics industry as creators, characters and consumers.”

Sequential Tart: A Comics Industry Web Zine. 1998. 15 Jan. 2009 <<http://www.sequentialtart.com/>>.

From the website’s own definition: “a publication dedicated to providing exclusive interviews, in-depth articles and news, while working towards raising the awareness of women’s influence in the comics industry and other realms.” All the contributors to the website are women.

When Fangirls Attack. 16 Jan. 2009 <<http://womenincomics.blogspot.com/>>.

In their own words: “A Compilation of Articles on Gender in Comics and Comics Fandom. The opinions expressed by the links and materials gathered (even directly posted on this site) are not intended as an expression of our own opinions.”

Women’s Cartoon Index. 1999. Ed. Julie Sigwart. 15 Jan. 2009 <<http://www.happychaos.com/wci/>>.

As the site announces: “The goal of the Women’s Cartoon Index is to promote and recognize women cartoonists worldwide.”

One Hundred Demons. by Lynda Barry. Joe calls his work "comics journalism". Lynda Barry calls hers "autobifictionalography". Which I think is brilliant and hilarious. So on the table of contents page, which is this beautiful, dense, colourful collage, she draws two check boxes after the question: "Are these stories true or false?" She ticks both. Our most recommended books. On Liberty by John Stuart Mill.