

able addition to a growing field of scholarship. The work carefully constructs an analysis of aging masculinity within contemporary American literature that is informed by a robust theoretical framework. In conclusion, the text skillfully moves across sociological data and statistics as well as artistic works from the fields of contemporary literature, television, music, and film to produce a comprehensive examination of how the intersection of gender and age deeply impacts American male identity.

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Kunka, Andrew. *Autobiographical Comics*, Bloomsbury Academic, 2017. ISBN 978-1-47-422784-1, 304 pp. \$26.96 (paper).

Texts that comprise the Bloomsbury Comics Studies Series work as introductions to different topics in Comics Studies; books in the series include titles that discuss the “power of comics,” superhero comics, webcomics, children’s and young adult comics, and, with Andrew Kunka’s new volume, autobiographical comics. Series editor Derek Parker Royal notes that the series is conceived of as presenting a “democratic approach” to the study of comics: envisioned as “an exploratory bridge between specialist and student,” the content of each book “is structured to include an historical overview of its subject matter, a survey of its key texts, a discussion of the topic’s social and cultural impact, recommendations for critical and classroom uses, a list of resources for further study, and a glossary reflecting the text’s specific focus.” It is important to note, then, that both the audience and the organization of Kunka’s *Autobiographical Comics* are prescriptive and that, in addition to tackling an ever-expanding and complex field, he strives to present this information to an audience of specialists and nonspecialists alike. As such, at the end of the first chapter, Kunka provides a section titled “This Book and How to Use It,” explaining that he hopes readers can draw on the book in different ways, perhaps looking solely at one section or another for specific information or reading the book through and thereby moving from the general to the particular. That said, and as he notes, the sections are purposefully repetitive and extensively cross-referenced.

*Autobiographical Comics* is ambitious in its scope. It condenses scholarship and primary sources about 1) the history of graphic narrative (including many early and proto-autobiographical works as well as a comprehensive discussion of underground comix); 2) the crucial role of autobiography in comics—especially in the United States; 3) the negotiation of critical issues in autobiographical graphic narrative (including sections on trauma, adolescence, the confessional, gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, graphic medicine, censorship and controversy, and web comics); 4) an in-depth discussion of key texts in the

field; 5) appendices which provide primary documents that serve to bolster his observations throughout; 6) a glossary; 7) a section on primary resources; and 8) a section on critical resources. The four appendices include a 2012 panel discussion on comics and autobiography with Justin Green, Aline Kominsky-Crumb, and Carol Tyler, moderated by Deborah Nelson; Derek Parker Royal's interview with Jennifer Hayden, author of *The Story of My Tits* (2015), a breast cancer narrative which was originally released on the *Comics Alternative* podcast in 2015; and two excerpts from graphic narratives that show the authors explicitly negotiate issues of representation and self-representation.

The key texts Kunka details include those that comprise what many consider canonical works in the form: Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1986, 1991) and *In the Shadow of No Towers* (2004); Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis (Story of a Childhood [2004], Story of a Return [2005], and Complete Persepolis [2007])*; and Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* (2006). Unsurprisingly, it is this trio to which he returns again and again, citing their popularity both in classrooms and in academic scholarship. In this section, he also includes discussions of some early influential works, like Justin Green's *Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary* (1972); profiles of Robert Crumb and Aline Kominsky-Crumb, Harvey Pekar's *American Splendor* (1976–1991); and Keiji Nakazawa's *Barefoot Gen: A Cartoon Story of Hiroshima* (original manga series: 1972–1985). Finally, he provides analyses of more contemporary works by Phoebe Gloeckner, (*A Child's Life* [1998] and *The Diary of a Teenage Girl* [2002]); Joe Matt, Chester Brown, Seth, Lynda Barry (*One Hundred Demons* [2002]); and Craig Thompson (*Blankets* [2003]), including details about the works' publication and briefly characterizing the critical conversation about each. Kunka is keenly interested in the production of many of these texts, not solely in their reception and analysis, but also in their creation and marketing, which distinguishes his book from others that consider the relationship between life writing and graphic narrative.

Reading this volume, I was surprised that most of the theory and scholarship Kunka includes about autobiographical genres and modes of self-representation came from comics scholars, rather than also including important and relevant work by life writing scholars. While comics scholars unquestionably have a great deal to say about self-representational texts, so do scholars of memoir and autobiography: people highly interested and invested in the intersections of comics and life writing. Confining his research to those almost exclusively devoted to comics itself divide these fields more than, I think, is useful—especially in the sections of his book specifically on autobiography and autobiographical writing. For example, Kunka provides an excellent and fascinating discussion of graphic medicine and graphic body studies, a burgeoning area of analysis that, according to the *Graphic Medicine Manifesto* (2015), “combines the principles of narrative medicine with an exploration of the visual systems of comic art, interrogating the representation of physical and emotional signs and symptoms within the medium” (qtd in Kunka 121). Kunka's incorporation of such a recent and important element of graphic narrative is laudable and the

list of comics Kunka provides that can fall under such an analysis is extensive, easily convincing a reader of the subgenre's significance. Notably absent from this discussion, though, is the work life writing scholars have done on self-representation and medicine or ability more generally. Contributions by G. Thomas Couser, Susanna Koven, Theresa Tensuan, and Susannah B. Mintz, for example, would bolster and complicate Kunka's moving discussion of graphic medicine, uniting the "autobiographical" and the "comics" of Kunka's title, and raising the stakes for more thoughtful work in these fields.

Similarly, I was struck by the *very* recent nature of Kunka's sources. One telling example is Marianne Hirsch's foundationally important theorization of postmemory, which she first posits in connection to Art Spiegelman's *Maus* in an essay published in the 1992–1993 issue of *Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture*. Not incidentally, her work has spawned a great deal of thought on the subject. Kunka includes a discussion of Hirsch in his section on *Maus* in the "Key Texts" of *Autobiographical Comics*: "Miriam [sic] Hirsch (2011) uses the term 'postmemory' to describe the way in which the memories of a previous generation can impact later generations; it is, in a sense, the child's memory of his or her parent's memories" (177). Hirsch does include an essay in Michael Chaney's *Graphic Subjects: Critical Essays on Autobiography and Graphic Novels* (2011), which is where Kunka finds her essay "Mourning and Postmemory." The way in which her work is presented, though, suggests that it was not until that 2011 publication that she—or anyone—had been working with the notion of postmemory. In fact, she posited this idea nearly twenty years ago and has published extensively on postmemory in the decades since (including in her book, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* [1997]). Further, her theorization of postmemory has been central to a great deal of interdisciplinary scholarship and thought on second generation and traumatic memory. This serves as but one example of the unfortunately limited scholarship Kunka considers regarding self-representation; while current, contemporary scholarship is excellent, in a text that attempts to establish the foundations of the field, a more complete sense of relevant works would be very useful for the kinds of audiences he has in mind.

Kunka's interest clearly lies in the "comics" part of "autobiographical comics," which gives the book a great deal of momentum. The history he provides, along with the critical questions he considers and the social and cultural impacts he explores, all allow readers the opportunity to learn a great deal about the position of graphic narrative in (primarily) American culture and letters. As someone who reads, writes about, and regularly teaches graphic memoir, I appreciate the immensity of Kunka's project. In many ways, in fact, given the scale of this project, it seems as though Kunka could make good use of more space or additional volumes; the breadth of texts he covers is remarkable and the complexity of issues notable. As I read *Autobiographical Comics*, I was reminded about how endlessly rich, fascinating, and frankly, fun graphic self-representation is and can be. For students, in particular, the comprehensive nature of his text

could be useful as a primer to the form; the book is easy to navigate, uses clear language, and provides a good deal of information that would be valuable to those looking for an introduction to how self-representation manifests in comics and how comics artists write autobiographically.

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