

## **EAAS Intra-European Travel Grant 2013: Final Report**

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As a PhD student pursuing my dissertation at the University of Bern, Switzerland, under the supervision of Professor Gabriele Rippl, Chair of Literatures in English, I recently had the pleasure and privilege of being supported by an Intra-European Travel Grant from the European Association for American Studies (EAAS) in order to conduct research at the University of Oxford, Bodleian Libraries.

My PhD project engages in case studies of serially published works by Art Spiegelman, Jason Lutes, Alison Bechdel, and Chris Ware, all of whom are regularly counted among contemporary creators of so-called alternative (as opposed to “mainstream”) comics (Hatfield 2005; Singer 2010; Williams and Lyons 2010; Beaty 2012). It is my goal to analyze the ways in which these works prompt moments of recognition of a particular artistic style, and the ways in which this style is expressed through serial markers. Such markers include particularities and/or changes in drawing styles; idiosyncratic strategies of playing with comics’ intermedial nature (text and image); meta-reflection on the visual recognizability of characters; direct addresses to the readership (e.g., “Stay tuned!”); the insertion of a series’ logo; and the use (or parody) of ostensibly promotional superlatives (e.g., “The Smartest Kid on Earth”).

The Bodleian Libraries – especially the Vere Harmsworth Library – provided the majority of scholarly literature relevant for the topics I worked on during my stay in Oxford, which included popular seriality and several particular serially published comics; cognitive literary studies; reception theory; and the notion of style in art history. With an array of English-language secondary literature at hand, I was able to write an extended chapter draft that sheds light on the connections between the concept of popular seriality on the one hand, and that of alternative comics, i.e., contemporary works and series beyond the realm of so-called mainstream comics publishers, on the other. The “alternative” aspect proved

increasingly important during this writing and research process, given that the series in my corpus – autobiographical or not – propel forward the image of the single author-artist, thus contrasting with the potential for participation through reader response and fan art as it is to be found in the publication processes of, for instance, mainstream superhero comic book series.

In addition to developing said ideas in the form of a longer chapter, meeting with Karin Kukkonen, a Balzan Postdoctoral Research Fellow at St John's College of the University of Oxford and an established specialist in the field of comics studies, provided valuable new insight into several aspects of my project. The principal reason for applying for the Intra-European Grant had been the restricted availability of Anglophone literature pertinent to my research in Switzerland. Given that the majority of these publications – especially those required for the completion of the afore-mentioned chapter – were at my disposal in Oxford, my dissertation profited immensely from this research stay at the Bodleian Libraries. I would like to express my gratitude towards the EAAS as an institution as well as all those involved in the grant allocation process.

References:

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- Williams, Paul, and James Lyons, eds. *The Rise of the American Comics Artist*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2010. Print.
- Beaty, Bart. *Comics Versus Art*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2012. Print.